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The Role of Supervisory Social Support and the Empowerment of Employees

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With the presence of Western multinational enterprises throughout South East Asia operating in high-tech and service-based industries, questions of how to effectively manage a South East Asian workforce are extremely pertinent. Winning the 'hearts and minds' of employees is often regarded as an important contributing factor in organizational effectiveness. Despite the proliferation of cross-cultural research in South East Asia on topics such as management style, leadership and cultural management, little research has been undertaken regarding the role of supervisory social support and its impact on employee empowerment, organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

The role of supervisory social support and employee empowerment is not, of course, specific to South East Asian countries. In almost all industrialized countries there have been intensive efforts to improve employee performance. Increased competitive pressures have forced many companies to reappraise existing practices and experiment with new organizational practices in an effort to increase employee performance. One important organizational practice is psychological empowerment (Walton 1985; Wright and McMahon 1992; Huselid 1995). Empowerment can be defined as increased task motivation resulting from an individual's positive orientation to his or her work role (Spreitzer 1995). A fundamental part of empowering employees has been the importance placed on the style of leadership (for example, charismatic, transformational and degree of supervisory social support) (House 1977; Lawler 1986; Spreitzer 1995). Empirical research focussing on a leadership style that emphasizes social support, and its role in facilitating feelings of empowerment among employees, is extremely sparse. The empowerment of employees however, has begun to emerge as a critical topic in management studies (for example Conger and Kanungo 1988; Spreitzer 1995; Kirkman and Rosen 1999; Herrenkohl, Judson and Heffner 1999).

The importance of investigating the relationship between the concept of psychological empowerment and supervisory social support has its

conceptual heritage in expectancy theory and the seminal work of Bandura (1977) concerning self-efficacy. Empowerment techniques that provide emotional support for subordinates and create a supportive atmosphere can be more effective in strengthening self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1986). Early research indicates that adequate supervisory social support may have a number of beneficial outcomes for both employees and the organization, particularly in 'high involvement management' (Lawler 1986) and 'commitment'- based models (Walton 1985). Disparate streams of research have indicated that supervisory social support is associated with reduced stress levels (House *et al.* 1979; House 1981), increased job satisfaction (Michaels and Spector 1982; Mueller *et al.* 1994; Price and Mueller 1981), increased task motivation (Lawler 1986), improved self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1977; Deci and Ryan 1985), and increased organizational commitment (Deery and Iverson 1995).

Despite the growth of interest in psychological empowerment, there has been little scholarly attention to the study of this construct within South East Asia. Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) suggest that scholars should further develop social interactions within management research. This point is extrapolated by the fact that empowerment researchers have devoted their attention to the construct of empowerment and its consequences within a Western context (Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1997). This study is unique as it sets out to investigate the relationship between supervisory social support and the cognitions of psychological empowerment. We intend also to investigate the consequences of empowerment and supervisory social support such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction and the role of contingent-based rewards. Although we have adopted the psychological definition of empowerment, our approach is interactional. We test our hypotheses using a sample of 171 employees of an American information technology subsidiary operating in Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.

In this chapter, we investigate the direct influence of supervisory social support on Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of psychological empowerment. We further argue that supervisory social support may also have consequences for organizational commitment, and that empowerment may influence levels of organizational commitment, and that organizational commitment and empowerment may influence feelings of job satisfaction. Based on theory, we suggest that contingent-based rewards can play an important role in building organizational commitment. Through the use of Partial Least Squares analysis, we attempt to contribute to a greater understanding of employee empowerment at the South East Asian workplace.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

There is growing interest in empowering employees to take initiative, embrace risk, stimulate innovation and cope with their uncertainty in the face of increasing international competition (McDuffie 1995; Walton 1985; Huselid, Jackson and Schuler 1977). The concept of empowerment is embraced under the guise of the movement away from 'control' towards a proactive and strategic 'commitment' style of management (Walton 1985).

Contemporary research on psychological empowerment has focused on articulating the empowerment process and the psychological underpinnings of the construct in terms of self-efficacy and autonomy (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Spreizer 1995; 1997; Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spector 1986). To conceptualize empowerment in motivational terms, Bandura's (1986) notion of self-efficacy is advanced. Empowerment refers to a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced (Conger and Kanungo 1988). In accordance with expectancy theory, an individual's motivation to increase his or her effort in a given task will depend on expectations concerning effort leading to the desired performance and that that performance will lead to desired outcomes. Empowerment as an enabling process affects both initiation and persistence of subordinates' task behaviour (Bandura 1977). Empowerment research has been extended also to self-managed teams and the consequences of the empowerment of employees at the workplace (Kirkman and Rosen 1999; Spreizer 1995; Herrenkohl, Judson and Heffner 1999).

The term 'empowerment' evokes a wide range of concepts. Herrenkohl, Judson and Heffner (1999) review some of the current uses of the phrase: a redistribution of power and authority (Block 1993); maximising employee contribution to the success of the firm (Peters and Waterman 1982; Walton 1985); full participation of workers in decision making (Walton 1985); shared vision between employees and management (Senge 1990); and self-motivation (Tracey 1990).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as the motivational concept of self-efficacy. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) argued that empowerment is a multi-faceted construct. They defined empowerment more broadly as increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to the work role: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. For a complete discussion of the terms see Spreitzer (1995) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990).

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SUPERVISORY SOCIAL SUPPORT

A great deal of research has been conducted on the role of social support within the work setting (House 1981; Cohen and Wills 1985). Most academic interest in the social support construct is concerned with the role of social support (that is work supervisors, co-workers, spouses and a combined category of friends and relatives) in the mitigation of stress and health-enhancement at work (Cobb and Kasl 1977; House *et al.* 1979). However, very little research exists concerning the relationship between supervisory social support and psychological empowerment and organizational commitment.

Kahn and Antonucci (1980) define social support as 'interpersonal transactions that include one or more of the following key elements: affect, affirmation and aid'. Affect is defined as 'expressions of liking, admiration, respect or love'. Affirmation refers to 'expressions of agreement and acknowledgement of the appropriateness or rightness of some act or statement of another person'. Aid refers to 'transactions in which direct aid or assistance is given, including things, money, information, time and entitlements'. A number of definitions of social support have been developed, however authors tend to add on to the variety of definitions of support and its component elements (House 1981).

SUPERVISORY SOCIAL SUPPORT AND EMPOWERMENT

Researchers have recognized the role of managerial and supervisory social support in the empowerment of employees (Lawler 1986; Bowen and Lawler 1992; Spreizer 1995; Ramus and Steger 2000). Researchers however, have not expressly linked supervisory social support and Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of psychological empowerment. According to Bowen and Lawler (1992), employees in an environment of increased job involvement require greater management development to deal with the added complexity. 'Supervisors now have fewer shots to call, need to be re-orientated toward supporting the front line, rather than directing it' (Bowen and Lawler 1992, p. 37). Supervisory support is regarded as a critical antecedent of employee creativity, more so than autonomy, resources, challenging work and workload pressures (Amabile 1993).

In accordance with Lawler (1986, p. 212), 'good leadership can be felt at all levels in an organization. It gives people direction, energy and a sense of competence – in other words, "empowerment".' Leaders should value subordinates' learning, growing, developing and exercising com-

petence-based power. The role of social support is crucial in high-involve-
ment management – the supervisor listening to subordinates and engag-
ing in meaningful dialogue, minimising subordinates' feeling left out and
being mistreated (Lawler 1986; House and Howell 1992; Conger and
Kanungo 1988). According to Bandura (1986, p. 400), 'people who are
persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given
tasks are likely to mobilize greater sustained effort than if they harbour
self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arise.'
Empowerment techniques that provide emotional support for subordi-
nates and create a supportive atmosphere can be more effective in
strengthening self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1977; Deci and Ryan 1985).
Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisory social support will be positively related to
psychological empowerment.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

In the present analysis, organizational commitment is defined in terms of
'the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a
particular organization' (Porter *et al.* 1974). Organizational commitment
can be generally characterized by at least three factors: a strong belief in
and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to
exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and a definite
desire to maintain organizational membership (Porter *et al.* 1974). Organi-
zational commitment represents an active relationship with the organiza-
tion such as that individuals are willing to give up something of them-
selves in order to contribute to the organization's well-being (Mowday,
Steers and Porter 1979).

Meyer and Allen (1997) noted that a central theme in commitment
research involves the extent to which employees are made to feel that they
make valuable contributions to their organization. As Meyer and Allen
(1997, p. 48) note, 'for some employees, the importance of their contribu-
tions is communicated through the trust the organization appears to place
in their work-related judgements. Consistent with this point, affective
commitment has been positively related to participation in decision mak-
ing (Rhodes and Steers 1981), latitude or discretion over activities (DeCotiis
and Summers 1987; Gregersen and Black 1992), task autonomy (Dunham
Grube and Castaneda 1994), receptiveness of management to employee
ideas (Allen and Meyer 1990), and job scope (Marsh and Mannari 1977;
Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer Allen and Gellatly 1990).

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that supervisory supportiveness plays an important function in the development of affective commitment (Mottaz 1988). This research emphasizes the importance placed on supervisors supporting employees and treating them fairly, and recognising their contributions (Meyer and Allen 1997). The role of supervisory social support as a determinant of organizational commitment has its conceptual heritage in the exchange perspective, which suggests that organizational commitment is largely a function of work rewards and values (Kalleberg 1977). As Mottaz (1988, p. 470) notes, 'Social rewards refer to those extrinsic rewards from interacting with the job. They are based on the quality of interpersonal relationships and include such factors as friendly, helpful and supportive co-workers and supervisors.'

Abraham (1999, p. 445) argues that 'organizational commitment is the culmination of a series of social exchange relationships through which the organization demonstrates its support to reward increased work efforts and meet demands for approval and affirmation'. Strong support leads to personification with the organization (Abraham 1999). Abraham (1998) suggests that social support may moderate the relationship between emotional dissonance and organizational commitment. However, Abraham (1999) did not find a significant correlation between social support and organizational commitment. In the South East Asian context however, we postulate that things might be different. Accordingly our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Supervisory social support will be positively related to organizational commitment.

Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Commitment

Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000, p. 410) argue that 'empowerment may contribute to a sense of commitment to the organization through a process of reciprocation'. Reciprocity occurs when one person treats another well, the norm of reciprocity obliges the return of favourable treatment (Gouldner 1960). The reciprocity norm may oblige employees to recompense advantageous treatment they receive from their work organization (Rousseau 1989; Eisenberger *et al.* 2001). Intuitively, organizations that provide jobs that encourage self-determination ensure that employees build competence, encourage employees to impact the organization and create roles for employees that are meaningful should encourage greater identification with the goals of management, loyalty and attachment to the organization (Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe 2000).

Carson *et al.* (1999) investigate four commitment profiles and their relationship to empowerment, service recovery and work attitudes. The authors suggest that levels of empowerment – from highest to lowest will be: dually committed; organizationists; careerists and uncommitted. Carson *et al.* (1999) argue that empowerment is an outcome of organizational commitment. Moreover, Laschinger, Finegan and Shamian (2001) investigate the impact of workplace empowerment, organizational trust on staff nurses' work satisfaction and organizational commitment. The organizational structures relevant to empowering workers include having access to information, receiving support, having access to the necessary resources to do the job and having an opportunity to learn and grow. As predicted, empowerment has a direct effect on affective commitment.

In terms of the individual psychological empowerment cognitions, scholars have suggested that autonomy and organizational commitment may be positively related. Deci and Ryan (1987, p. 1025) suggest that 'autonomy connotes an inner endorsement of one's actions, the sense that they emanate from oneself and are one's own'. Hackman and Lawler (1975) argue that job characteristics which emphasize skill variety, task identity, task significance and feedback should invariably be associated with greater meaningfulness of work, knowledge of results of work activities and employee growth. These critical psychological states should lead to personal and work outcomes such as high internal work motivation and organizational commitment. Empirical research by Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found a small positive correlation between autonomy and organizational commitment.

Herman and Gioia (1998) argue that for work to be meaningful, the work needs to be a valued part of the organization, employees need to know not only how the work they do affects others and the organization's strategic goals, but also how they – individuals – can make an impact. Responsibility for outcomes, measurement of results and meaningful rewards are also important components of increasing the meaningfulness of work. Mottaz (1988) found that task significance is positively associated with organizational commitment. There is limited research concerning the relationship between meaningfulness and impact and organizational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac 1990).

Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) meta-analysis revealed that perceived competence exhibited a large positive correlation with commitment across five samples. Morris and Sherman (1981) interpreted this finding as indicating that self-referent processes may serve as a means of linking an individual to an organization. That is, individuals will become committed to an organization, so long as it satisfies their growth and achievement needs. This interpretation is tentative due to the lim-

ited research in the area. Morris and Sherman (1981) reported that sense of competence emerged as a significant predictor of organizational commitment. It seems that non-extrinsic factors are important influences on commitment – especially to the extent that they influence self-referent processes that may themselves be components by which the individual links his or her identity to the organization (Morris and Sherman 1981).

In the most comprehensive study linking Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of empowerment and affective commitment, Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) found that two of the four cognitions of empowerment (namely, meaning and impact) were significant predictors of affective commitment. At the team level of analysis, using a version of Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization adapted for the team level, Kirkman and Rosen (1999) found a direct positive relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment. Based on the above research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: The four cognitions of psychological empowerment are positively related to organizational commitment.

PERFORMANCE-CONTINGENT REWARDS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Extensive research exists in the area of rewards, motivation and job performance (Lawler 1986). There is little research, however concerning the relationship between performance-contingent rewards and organizational commitment. The small amount of work linking extrinsic rewards and commitment has yielded important results. In a survey of nursing home employees, Williams Podsakoff and Huber (1992) found a significant positive relationship between the use of performance-contingent rewards and affective commitment. In accounting research, two studies have examined the relationship between reward systems and commitment. Ferris (1981) found a positive relationship between utility for rewards and commitment, while Quirin, Donnelly and O'Brien (2000) found a significant positive relationship between budget-based compensation, and affective commitment. Furthermore, individuals who perceive a lack of procedural justice and equity concerning the reward system are more likely to exhibit feelings of dissatisfaction, denigration of the norms of reciprocity, thereby reducing organizational commitment, particularly feelings of loyalty to the organization (Rousseau 1989). Oliver (1990) found that organizational commitment

and organizational rewards were positively related. Work rewards are key determinants of organizational commitment (Angle 1983). Mottaz (1988) found a positive association between organizational commitment and pay equity and promotional opportunities. Based on these findings we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: Performance-contingent rewards will be positively associated with organizational commitment.

Performance contingent Rewards and Job Satisfaction

A great deal of research exists concerning the relationship between performance contingent rewards and job satisfaction (Locke 1976). Lawler (1971) contrasts 'discrepancy' theory – the view that pay satisfaction depends upon the difference between obtained pay and valued pay – and 'equity' theory – the view that pay satisfaction is a function of obtained pay in relation to the individual's perceived inputs and outputs in relation to other people holding similar jobs. It is clear that those individuals who believe they are inequitably paid are dissatisfied with their pay. Discrepancy theory predicts a linear function relating pay with satisfaction. Locke (1976) argues that ten satisfying and ten dissatisfying categories influence the extent to which individuals feel satisfied with their jobs. It is suggested that 'money: received a monetary raise or bonus or tip; made a profit; got money for overtime work; promise of a raise; getting a contract' may cause an employee to feel satisfied (Locke 1976, p. 1311).

Research is mixed concerning the relationship between extrinsic rewards and job satisfaction (Locke 1976; Poulin 1995). Poulin (1995) reported that supervisors who were more satisfied with salary/benefits expressed greater job satisfaction. Hackman and Lawler (1975) also found significant and positive association between job satisfaction and pay. Miceli *et al.* (1991) found that executives preferred rewards based on performance, but this was not the case for managers. Orpen and Bonnici (1990) reported inconsistent results when studying university teachers in Australia – they found that those more satisfied with their pay were, in fact, those who felt they received more pay. Yet neither job demands nor job input decreased satisfaction with pay when expectations for more pay were not met. These findings are developed in our next hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Performance-contingent rewards will be positively associated with job satisfaction.

JOB SATISFACTION, ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

A strong relationship between commitment and satisfaction is well established (Bateman and Strasser 1984; Conlon and Gallagher 1987; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Becker 1992). Porter *et al.* (1974) suggest that it is not unlikely that organizational commitment is rationalized by subsequent attitudes of job satisfaction. The cumulative effect of job satisfaction may lead to overwhelming and relatively stable feelings of organizational commitment (Hackman and Lawler 1971). For a more complete discussion of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment see Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979).

Results of a longitudinal analysis of the antecedents of organizational commitment reveal commitment as a cause of satisfaction. Using a time-lagged multiple regression model with job satisfaction as the dependent variable, Bateman and Strasser (1984) concluded that satisfaction is not a cause of commitment but rather a result of it. Perhaps employees become committed to the organization before attitudes of satisfaction can meaningfully emerge. In contrast, Marsh and Mannari (1977) and Porter *et al.* (1974) view that organizational commitment is a time-lagged outcome of employee satisfaction. Partial correlations between each organizational commitment and intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction found that both types of satisfaction and organizational commitment were positive and significant (Conlon and Gallagher 1987).

There is evidence to suggest that empowered individuals tend to have higher job satisfaction. The meaning dimension of empowerment was found to be significantly related to work satisfaction (Spreitzer 1997). Individuals should derive a sense of satisfaction with the work itself when they feel that they have been directly involved in outcomes that affect the organization. Hackman and Lawler (1971) suggest that individuals who are capable of higher order satisfaction will experience satisfaction when they learn that they have, as a result of their own efforts, accomplished something that they personally believe is meaningful. In a similar vein, greater autonomy and the sense of self-determination may also be satisfying because any accomplishments can be attributed to oneself. In terms of self-efficacy, individuals who have confidence in their ability to succeed are happier with their work than those who think that they may fail (Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe 2000). Our final two hypotheses deal with the matter of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 6: Psychological empowerment will be positively associated with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7: Organizational commitment will be positively associated with job satisfaction.

METHOD

The research site for this study is a large American multinational organization operating in the information technology industry. Worldwide, the organization has more than 9000 clients in 44 countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, the organization has operations in 13 countries and employs more than 11 000 workers. Specifically for this study, three South East Asian subsidiaries located in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines were surveyed.

All of the workers surveyed in this study are front-line white-collar professional workers, who tend to work in teams with minimal supervision by management (for example supervisory, clerical and professional employees). 304 questionnaires were distributed to the three South East Asian subsidiaries in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. Surveys were distributed by a researcher to all the employees of the subsidiaries along with reply-paid envelopes. Respondents were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. A total of 176 questionnaires (57.9 per cent response rate) were returned via mail – 101 from the Singaporean operation, 54 from the Malaysian operation and 21 from the Philippine operation. Of these questionnaires, five were deemed unusable due to large amounts of missing data, giving a useable sample of 171[1].

Preliminary analysis of the data did not reveal significant differences between the Malaysian, Singaporean and Philippine employees on the psychological constructs presented in this paper. All of the participants were full-time employees. The sample consisted of 56.1 per cent male and 43.9 per cent female respondents. The mean age of the respondents was approximately 31 years. Moreover, the majority of respondents held a bachelor degree, with the second largest proportion of employees holding a GCE 'A' level or Polytechnic Diploma. The mean response for dependents was 1.20.

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[1] A small amount of missing data was observed in the remaining sample of 171. Mean substitution was used to impute values

EMPOWERMENT

Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item measure of psychological empowerment was used. The scale contains three items for each of the four dimensions of empowerment. Employees indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a five-point Likert-type scale. Each set of items was summed to form the four dimensions of empowerment: meaning (mean=12.2, s.d=1.59, alpha=.58); impact (mean=10.98, s.d=1.86, alpha=.63); competence (mean=11.2, s.d=1.66, alpha=.56); and autonomy (mean=11.10, s.d=1.86, alpha=.60). The meaning item was adopted from Tymon (1988). The competence scale was taken from Jones (1986). Hackman and Oldham's (1985) autonomy scale was used to create the measurement of self-determination and the impact scale was adopted from Ashforth's (1989) helplessness scale.

JOB SATISFACTION

A six-item job satisfaction scale was adapted from the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall and Hulin 1969). An example item is 'I generally consider my job to be a waste of time', rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We summed responses to form an index of job satisfaction (mean=21.61, s.d=3.43, alpha=.82).

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

An abridged five-item version of the Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) measure was used to assess organizational commitment (mean = 18.53, s.d = 3.24, alpha = .87). A sample item is, 'I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar', rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

EXTRINSIC REWARDS

A three-item measure of pay for performance was adapted from Spreitzer (1995). The items asked the extent to which individual pay depended on how well an individual performed, specifically whether pay level and pay raises were dependent on performance. An example

item is, 'My pay level rises with performance', on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were summed to form a composite measure (mean=10.60, s.d=2.56, alpha=.88).

Social Support

A six-item measure of social support from one's supervisor drawn from House and Wells (1978) was used in this study. An example item is 'How much can your supervisor be relied on when things get tough at work?' on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were summed to form a composite measure (mean = 22.29, s.d = 4.25, alpha = .91). Studies of social support have most often asked people to rate how much emotional support they are receiving from others (for example the immediate supervisor). The resulting answers are usually termed subjective or perceived support.

Results
Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis

To test the data collected in this study, partial least squares (PLS) analysis using the program PLS-Graph version 3.0 was employed. PLS is a powerful regression-based technique that is appropriate for testing latent variable[2] models with small samples. PLS forms part of the family of techniques referred to by Fornell (1982) as 'the second generation of multivariate data analysis techniques.' PLS comprises the simultaneous analysis of both a measurement model, and a structural model. In a measurement model, the relationship between the observed items used to measure each construct, and the underlying latent variable these items represent is assessed. As Barclay Higgins and Thompson (1995) note, this is a necessary step in order to ensure the measures of each construct are reliable before going on to assess the relationships between latent variables in the model (that is, analyse the structural model). The measurement model was assessed by computing average variance extracted estimates for each construct.

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[2] A latent variable is a variable, which cannot be directly measured – instead, it can only be estimated using a series of indicators (observed or manifest variables) (Hair *et al.*, 1998)

## Average Variance Extracted Estimates

Variance extracted estimates are a complementary measure to Cronbach's alpha, in that they provide further information about a construct's reliability by calculating the overall amount of variance in the observed variables explained by the latent construct (Hair *et al.* 1998). Higher values occur when the indicators are truly representative of the latent construct, with guidelines suggesting that variance extracted values should exceed 0.50 for each construct used (Hair *et al.*, 1998). As can be seen from Table 1, all estimates in this study were in excess of the 0.50 cut-off, providing evidence of the reliability of each construct.

Table 11.1: **Average Variance Extracted Estimates (VEE)**

Variable	VEE
Commitment	0.6509
Job satisfaction	0.5357
Rewards	0.8105
Meaning	0.5495
Autonomy	0.5445
Impact	0.5816
Competence	0.5147
Social support	0.7008

After undertaking the measurement model analysis, the next step is to assess hypothesized relationships between structural parameters, which is the testing of the structural model. In this study, bootstrapping was used as a re-sampling procedure to examine the stability of estimates and to determine the level of significance of each path. Using this technique, 100 samples were created by sampling from the original data set, in order to obtain 100 estimates for each parameter. For more detail regarding bootstrapping within PLS, see Chin (1998), and Chin and Gopal (1995). The model is shown below in Figure 11.1.

Figure 11.1: **Proposed Model**
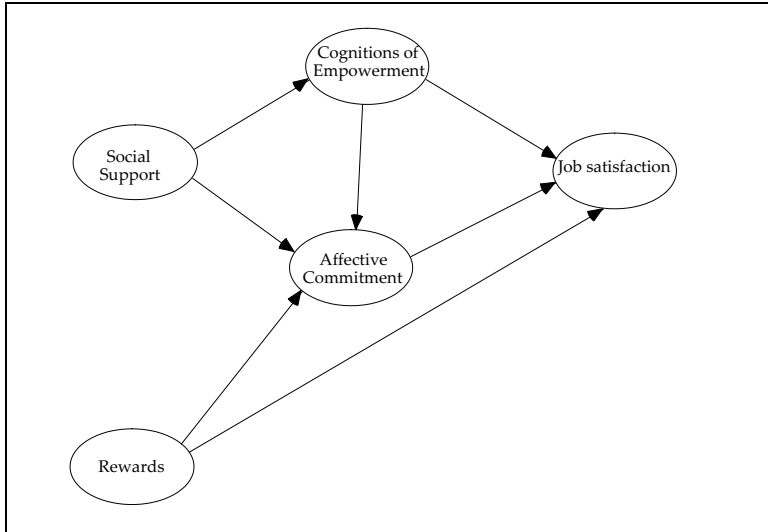
<div align="center">STRUCTURAL MODEL ANALYSIS</div>

Significant positive relationships between social support and each of the four cognitions of empowerment were observed (p<0.01).[3] Thus, Hypothesis 1, supervisory social support will be positively related to psychological empowerment, was supported. The results indicate that increased levels of social support provided by supervisors have beneficial outcomes for the organisation, in that they enhance feelings of psychological empowerment. Furthermore, a direct significant relationship between social support and affective commitment was obtained (p<0.05), supporting Hypothesis 2, that supervisory social support was positively related to organizational commitment.

The results for the relationship between the four cognitions of empowerment and organizational commitment are mixed, indicating only partial support for Hypothesis 3, that the four cognitions of psychological empowerment are positively related to organizational commitment. Specifically, the relationships between meaning and affective commitment (p<0.05), and autonomy and affective commitment (p<0.01) are signifi-

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[3] One-tailed tests were used to determine the significance of each path analyzed in this study.

cant. However, the relationships between impact and commitment, and competence and commitment, are not significant. As discussed in an earlier section, Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000) also found a significant relationship between two of the four cognitions of empowerment, and affective commitment. In the case of Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe (2000), meaning and impact were the two significant predictors of organizational commitment. The result in this study reinforces meaning as a predictor of affective commitment, as well as supporting prior research linking autonomy and affective commitment.

A direct positive relationship between access to rewards and organizational commitment was observed ($p<0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 4, that performance-contingent rewards will be positively associated with organizational commitment. This result indicates that as the use of rewards increase, so too does the level of affective commitment experienced by the employee. Similarly, a direct positive relationship between access to rewards and job satisfaction was observed ($p<0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 5, that performance-contingent rewards will be positively associated with job satisfaction was supported, indicating that employees in the sample were more satisfied with their job when they were afforded access to performance-contingent rewards. The fact that Hypotheses 4 and 5 are both supported indicates that the provision of opportunities to obtain performance-based rewards leads to a more committed and satisfied workforce.

In examining the relationship between the four cognitions of empowerment and job satisfaction, only the path between meaning and job satisfaction was significant ($p<0.05$), indicating only partial support for Hypothesis 6, that psychological empowerment will be positively associated with job satisfaction. The fact that the relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction is not significant indicates that the relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction is indirect, through organizational commitment, rather than direct.

As expected, the relationship between affective commitment and job satisfaction was positive and significant ($p<0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 7, that organizational commitment will be positively associated with job satisfaction. This is consistent with a wealth of prior research that has consistently reported significant relationships between the two variables, indicating that more committed employees are likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with their job than less committed employees.

Squared multiple correlations (R^2) for each dependent variable are shown below in Table 11.2. Table 11.2 indicates that the model has very good explanatory power, explaining 37.7 per cent of the variance in organizational commitment, and 40.7 per cent of the variance in the ultimate outcome variable, job satisfaction.

Table 11.2: **Squared Multiple Correlations (R^2) for the Model**

Variable	R^2
Commitment	37.7%
Job satisfaction	40.7%
Competence	7.1%
Meaning	10.6%
Autonomy	13.0%
Impact	6.1%

DISCUSSION

As predicted, psychological empowerment provides an important mediating role between the constructs of supervisory social support, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The results of this study suggest that the relationship between supervisory social support, attitudes of employees towards work and work outcomes are complex. The results show that organizational commitment has an important mediating role between two of the cognitions of empowerment (that is autonomy and meaning) and job satisfaction. Therefore, as employees' affective commitment increases, perceived autonomy by the subordinates has an indirect relationship with job satisfaction. Among the direct effects, the link between supervisory social support and the four cognitions of empowerment may be one of the most important contributions of the paper. Several researchers have argued that the leader or supervisor has an important role in the empowerment of employees (House 1977; Lawler 1986). With the trend towards high-commitment and involvement-based models of management, the role of supervisory social support is critical in the empowerment of employees. Given that research has highlighted the beneficial outcomes of empowerment: creativity (Ramus and Steger 2000); innovation (Spreitzer 1995); and effectiveness (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Kirkman and Rosen 1999) these results have important managerial implications.

These findings suggest that within the South East Asian context, the role of supervisory social support is a factor in propagating feelings of empowerment amongst employees. Given the growing importance of high-tech and service industries in South East Asia, empowering employees will be critical to competing in the market place. Supervisors have to be more communication-minded, sensitive to the needs of subordinates, be willing and empathetic listeners and be approachable and understand-

ing. Traditional arguments (see Hofstede 1980) have suggested that South East Asian employees are less likely to value and seek greater autonomy. However, our findings suggest quite the contrary. The South East Asian employees in our sample that possessed feelings of autonomy and meaning had higher levels of affective commitment and consequently job satisfaction.

Managers, such as parent company nationals, need to consider the importance of social support given the cultural significance of paternalism and personalism throughout Pacific Asia (Pye 1985). Paternalism, for example serves to maintain sensitivity to hierarchy (Hofstede 1980) and the maintenance of social order via micro units of society such as families, rather than institutions such as universal law. Personalism involves emphasis on interpersonal trust, harmonious relations, avoidance of conflict and sensitivity to 'face'. To maintain a good face means to stay trustworthy and to honour obligations in one's social and economic transactions (Redding and Hsiao 1990). Chew and Lim (1995) have observed that enduring values such as loyalty, paternalistic authority, cohesion, and altruism have manifested themselves in the approach towards role relationships within work organizations in modern times.

Another important finding of this research suggests that creating feelings of autonomy and meaningfulness amongst employees may intensify affective commitment. Therefore, these two cognitions of empowerment may highlight some of the important determinants of high-commitment based models of management (Walton 1985). Within the context of South East Asian white-collar professionals, designing jobs that have the latitude for self-determination and are meaningful to the incumbent are important steps in building commitment-based management. These results have been echoed by a number of Western researchers (Hackman and Oldham 1975; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Mottaz 1988).

In terms of cultural and contextual idiosyncrasies, the results of the PLS model are generally supported by the disparate findings of a number of other studies that have been conducted in Western settings (Hackman and Oldham 1975; Spreizer 1995; Liden, Wayne and Sparrowe 2000). The congruent nature of these finding with those conducted within a Western setting are supported by the work of Hulin (1991). Evidence on item bias and item relevance obtained in cross-cultural studies of work affect and motivation from Western and non-Western cultures suggest that assumed cultural universality is at least a good starting point (Hulin 1991). Our results echo this observance. The central argument of Hulin (1991) is that job characteristics considered satisfying in one culture are generally regarded as satisfying across a variety of other cultures, often to the same degree based on results of instruments translated into the appropriate

languages. According to Hulin (1991, p. 457): 'significant differences in job satisfaction among a sample of job incumbents in terms of work role affect may be carried in the job characteristics, even cross-culturally; social information may merely reinforce positive and negative interpretations of events and characteristics already found to be satisfying or dissatisfying by job incumbents.'

The limitations of this study provide several suggestions for future research. First, this study uses cross-sectional data – which is merely a 'snapshot' at one point in time. Therefore, no statements about causation can be made. A longitudinal research design, investigating causality and the duration of psychological empowerment is clearly an important advance. A longitudinal research design would help in assessing the causality of the relationships identified in this paper (for example affective commitment may enhance a sense of psychological empowerment). Second, a number of important variables have been omitted in this study. Organizational commitment, for example, is a multi-dimensional construct (see Meyer and Allen 1997, for a review). Further research could focus on the relationship between the antecedents of commitment identified here, and other forms of organizational commitment, such as continuance, normative commitment and dual commitment. Third, future research directions should involve greater cross-cultural emphasis, as we recognize the inherent limitations of transferring organizational theories across cultures. Moreover, larger samples may have enabled us to compare across the three countries, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. As has been noted in recent management theory (for example Dorfman 1996), that what works in one country may not necessarily work in another culture. Future research should attempt to make comparisons between cultures concerning psychological empowerment and other management constructs (Spreitzer 1995). Fourth, given the specific context of this study, one organizational setting, the issue of generalizability is a further limitation. Further research should focus on exploring empowerment across different organizational contexts and organizational participants because respondents in this study may have been sensitized to empowerment issues. It is particularly important to examine empowerment across levels of the organizational hierarchy in more demographically diverse settings (for example not-for-profit organizations and the public sector) (Spreitzer 1995).

Understanding how supervisory social support may empower employees and lead to greater organizational commitment and job satisfaction is the central challenge of this research. Herein we suggest that the role of supervisory social support in the empowerment of employees has generally been neglected in the literature. We further suggest that, super-

visory social support may lead to workplaces that empower and satisfy committed employees. This research contributes to the management literature by providing a holistic model of previously disparate management research and empirically testing it with a sample from South East Asia using PLS. It is our hope that this exploratory study stimulates further research in empowerment in South East Asian workplaces.

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