Paper submission to the 6th Asia Academy of Management Conference, Taipei, Taiwan 2008

Title of paper: PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: LINKING SELECTED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES WITH AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTION

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Track: Organizational Behavior

PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: LINKING SELECTED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES WITH AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper will provide an overview of the social exchange theory and the organizational support theory which forms the theoretical background of this study in the context of creating a team of committed academics working with the private higher education institutions in Malaysia. This paper will highlight the lack of studies that examined the effects of human resource management (HRM) practices on affective commitment via the social exchange perspective of commitment in private universities that have adopted the managerial identity. Based on a review of past research on perceived organizational support (POS) and related constructs, this paper will discuss the development of hypotheses linking four supportive HRM practices, namely, pay level satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-family support and leader-member exchange (LMX) to POS. This will be followed by the development of two hypotheses linking POS with two important employee attitudes and behaviors, which is affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. Next, the development of several hypotheses to test the possible partial mediating effects of felt obligation, trust in management and professional commitment through which POS influences the two important employee attitudes and behaviors which is affective organizational commitment and turnover intention will be discussed. The major theoretical and practical contributions of this study will also be highlighted and discussed. In sum, this paper gives an overview of the problems of past research and to what extent this study aims to address these problems.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that the exchange relationship between two parties often goes beyond economic exchange and includes social exchange. Hence, organizational studies argue that employer and employee exchange not only impersonal resources such as money, but also socioemotional resources such as approval, respect, recognition and support (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). In organizational researches, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and the concept of perceived organizational support have been applied to describe the psychological process underlying the employee attitudes and behaviours (Setton, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). The concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which refers the extent to which the organization values their employees' contributions and cares about their well-being have been used to describe the social exchange relationship between the employer and the employee (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). Based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), employees who perceive high levels of POS are more likely to reciprocate the organization with positive attitudes such as higher levels of affective commitment and favorable work behaviours such as commitment to organizational goals and lower intention to leave (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). The arguments above based on the social exchange theory, the concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which is the commitment of the organization to the employee and the norm of reciprocity is further developed into the organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Mainly drawing on the social exchange theory and the organizational support theory, the concept of perceived organizational support (POS) which is the commitment of the organization to the employee, the norm of reciprocity as well as the other relevant literature in the human resource

management and organizational behaviour research, this paper examines the antecedents and outcomes of perceived organizational support (POS).

Since the seminal work on POS by Eisenberger and colleagues (Eisenberger, et al., 1986), many researchers have investigated the effects of POS on important work outcomes such as affective commitment and turnover intention (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Setton et al., 1996; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). Although the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) suggests that employees are likely to develop higher levels of POS and reciprocate the organization with positive attitudes and behaviours when they perceive the organization cares about their well-being and values their contribution, little research has been conducted to examine factors that contribute to POS. Although HRM practices have been argued to play a key role to develop and maintain the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997), empirical research offers little insight on how appropriate HRM practices can be chosen and implemented to help build high levels of POS, which in turn, contribute to positive work attitudes and behaviours.

Social exchange theory and organizational support theory also suggests that the resources received from the organization are more highly valued if they are based on discretionary choice versus a requirement. Discretionary choice implies an investment, whereas legislated or required actions are considered purely costs rather than investments. Thus, HR practices which are intended to enhance the organization's human capital (such as career development opportunities and providing good supervision) are an optional investment and discretionary, and should contribute to POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Besides, Meyer and Allen (1997) indicated that a common theme

linking antecedents to commitment is the extent to which the antecedents signal that the organization is supportive of the employee, consistent with the view that they operate via POS.   In short, the underpinning social exchange theory predicts that the exchange of favorable treatment could be prolonged if the receipt of resources from another party is highly in need and valuable and the actions are discretionary (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1997)

Hence, social exchange may be a more important determinant of employee behavior than economic exchange to encourage behavior that supports the goals of the organization and social exchange was consistently associated with all the measures of performance, including overall performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, relative absence and lateness (Shore et. al., 2006). This is consistent with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and past empirical research (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993).   Moreover, higher levels of social exchange were associated with higher levels of affective commitment (Shore et. al., 2006).   These results is consistent with Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) thesis that commitment is a two way street, ie. before employees can develop an affective attachment to their employer, they must first believe that their employer are committed to them.   Mutual affective commitment between the employer and employee signals to the employee that a social exchange relationship is present.

Social exchange theory provides the conceptual framework for empirical evidence that shows employees have greater affective commitment to organizations that support and care about them (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Allen et al., 2003). Besides, Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) also suggest that being treated with dignity and respect helps employees see the organization as caring about their well being and valuing their contributions and this fulfill the socio-emotional needs of the employees, thereby causing them to incorporate organizational membership into their social

identity and enhance their affective commitment to the organization. In short, organizational support theory maintains that mutual commitment between employee and employer starts with the organization providing a supportive and caring atmosphere for employees and employees reciprocate by feeling attached and acting to achieve organizational goals.

Recently, Lavelle et. al (2007) highlighted   the multi-foci perspective of social exchange whereby references are   made to either the organization such as organizational commitment and POS, organizational trust or to the supervisor such as LMX, supervisory trust and perceived supervisor support.   This notion is well illustrated through Reichers's (1985) work on multi-foci work commitment. Employee commitment could be more precisely understood as "a collection of multiple commitments to various groups that comprise the organization" (Reichers, 1985:469) such as supervisors, top management, unions, customers, professions and the org. itself.

In the HRM literature, researchers argue that the implementation of progressive HR practices that affect employees   skills and motivation can create strategic advantage for the organization (e.g. Snell & Dean, 1992; Becker & Gerhert, 1996; Delery & Doty, 1996; Delaney and Huselid, 1996). This is mainly due to the strategic value of HR to create organizational culture and social relationships that cannot be readily replicated by other organizations. However, there are very few past studies that have established the linkage between the implementation of   appropriate discretionary HRM practices based on established motivation theories and the development of positive perceived organizational support.

One of the aims of this study is to address this gap in the literature by examining the role of HRM practices based on the Alderfer's (1972) ERG theory of motivation to influence the employees'

perception of high perceived organizational support (POS) to meet the need for a more relationship based HRM approach compared to the control approach especially for academics who are professionals in their disciplines.

In sum, review of both the POS and HR literature suggest the importance of research on the relationship between supportive HR practices and POS.   Thus, this dissertation aims to address this important issue by examining the influence of employee perceptions of several important HR practices, namely, pay level satisfaction, career development opportunities,   work-family support and leader-member exchange (LMX) on their evaluations of POS.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

A survey conducted by an international research firm Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) among 600 urban adults showed that job hopping is a phenomenon employers have to contend with (Anonymous, 2005). The report showed that 58% of currently employed adults Malaysians have worked for up to three companies in the past five years with 23% indicating they intend to change employers within the next years. Meanwhile, 74% of the younger employees have changed employers over the past five years while 39% will change employers within the next two years.   This report implies that organizations need to be more assertive to strengthen employees' job commitment.

In the context of the higher education industry, Malaysia aims to be an international hub for world class education in its bid to be a big player in the attractive regional education scene and targets about 100,000 foreign students by 2010.   It has 17 public universities, four foreign branch campuses of foreign universities, 21 private universities and 500 private colleges (Uda Nagu, 2007). The private institutions of higher learning is playing an equally important role with the

public universities to offer quality higher education and attract foreign students to Malaysia who contribute some RM50 million in direct earnings to Malaysia annually (Uda Nagu, 2007). This trend of globalization, liberalization and reforms to the educational system to improve the ranking of the universities brings many challenges on developing ways to improve staff commitment to universities. One primary criteria for world class universities is the ability to attract and retain excellent and experienced academics. This is because each faculty member is an important part of the institution. He interacts, facilitate and motivate students to achieve greater heights and his work makes a difference towards the academic reputation of the institution apart from other factors such as excellence in facilities, size and location.

Based on 'The Academic Reputation Survey' conducted by a team led by the Malaysian Qualifications Board (MQA), no public university in Malaysia were rated in the six-star "Outstanding" category while Universiti Sains Malaysia was the only one rated in the 5-star "Excellent" category (Ramachandran & Foo, 2007). Thus, to improve the ratings of Malaysian universities, it is important to develop a pool of excellent and experienced academics as they play strategic roles to improve ratings in key areas such as research quality, academic reputation of faculty, academic programs quality, research contribution to society, preparation of tomorrow's leaders and quality of graduates.

Over the past decades, local universities continue to face the problem of academic staff turnover or "brain drain" (Khoo, 1981). This voluntary turnover of academic staffs particularly the desirable ones, will not only have a detrimental effect on the institution both in replacement costs and work disruption, but also jeopardize the nation's aim to produce quality human capital and workforce. It is obvious that the institutions cannot get a return from their investment on faculty members'

promotion, training and sabbatical leave. Therefore, understanding the factors that precede organizational commitment can enhance better administrative decisions for the financial support program of faculty members and also the ability to attract and retain good academics.

Academics can be considered the operational core of the universities and their performance determines, to a large extent, the quality of the student's higher education experience and thereby on the contribution that such institutions make to the society (Capellaras, 2005). Academic staff who are well motivated and committed to their institution can build a national and international reputation for themselves and the institution and the universities can attract high caliber students, research funds and consultancy contracts (Rowley, 1996). Limited empirical studies conducted among academic staff have suggested several antecedents of academic staffs' affective commitment to the university such as extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction (Mohd. Nasurdin, Ramayah, Abdullah, Hemdi and Seow, 2003), economic compensation and support and recognition (Capellaras, 2005), supervision, training opportunities and distributive justice (Chungtai and Zafar, 2006), perceived external prestige of the university (Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey and Relyea, 2006) as well as procedural and distributive justice (Yusof and Shamsuri, 2006). However, these studies have not examined the possible mediating effect of perceived organizational support (POS) on the influence of human resource management (HRM) practices on affective organizational commitment and turnover intention of the academic staffs as suggested by the organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Furthermore, creating a team of committed and high quality academic staff who are committed to improve teaching and learning methods, strengthening research and innovation, strengthening Malaysia's institutions of high learning to world class standards and enhancing internationalization

to turn Malaysia into a leading education hub is an important step towards the creation of apex universities in Malaysia as outlined in National Higher Education Strategic Plan (Atan, 2007).   In Sarawak, the importance of the higher education sector is also emphasized through one of the strategy unveiled by the State Government ie.   to develop human capital and research and development (R & D) capability which is necessary to propel the State to achieve all objectives of the Ninth Malaysian Plan or 9MP (Anonymous, 2006).

This is because a team of committed academics at the private higher education institutions play complimentary roles with their counterparts in the public higher education institutions to assist the government to develop the human capital who are smart, well-educated and have a first class mentality required to achieve Vision 2020. Meanwhile, the PHEI has to justify whether their HR practices will influence the academics' desirable attitudes and behaviours due to budget constraints.

The importance of supportive HR practices that develop quality human capital in the context of higher education is also highlighted by some past researches. For example, Garavan, Morley, Gunnigle and Collins (2001) suggested that HRM practices are likely to contribute to human capital accumulation and employees place value on the investments that organization's make in their human capital enhancement. Hence, organizations should view investment in human capital as important as human competencies are one of the resources available to organizations.   More specifically,   Kumar and Idris (2006) suggested that management commitment to activities typically associated to the characteristics of learning organizations (institutions of higher learning) such as management commitment to teaching and learning, research and development and professional service will influence the extent that academic staff are willing to share their

knowledge within the organization. This may reflect pathways for the development of continuous learning opportunities for staff members and suggests that it is advantageous for universities to establish learning culture as learning organizations are more productive and staff will be more satisfied because they have opportunities to learn and continuously develop professionally.

Hislop (2003) extended the ideas of Garavan et al. (2001) and Kumar and Idris (2006) and proposed a model that considers how the knowledge workers motivation to share their knowledge may be shaped by HRM practices that leads to perceptions of support, trust and delivery of the psychological contract deals. These will create the attitudinal consequences of commitment and willingness to share knowledge. Hence, they suggest the links between knowledge management, HRM and commitment literatures and suggest that the success of universities as centers of knowledge excellence is predicated on the employees level of perceived organizational support, affective commitment to the organization and willingness to share their knowledge.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The higher education industry is very worthy for research as it is now an important sector playing a key role in improving productivity and occupational skills, engaging many academics and students and has numerous links with industrial and community activities as well as enhance the nation's ability to compete in a volatile global knowledge economy (Tight, 2003; Humphreys & Hoque, 2007).

In order for private institutions of higher learning to contribute significantly towards the establishment of apex universities in Malaysia as outlined in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, they must be able to attract qualified academics who will stay with the universities

and perform at high levels. Research indicates that employees who are committed to the organization are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that are beneficial to organizations such as better performance at work, attendance and retention in their positions (Meyer & Allen, 1997). HRM practices which signal that the organization is supportive of the employee, are one way that organizations can build commitment in their employees (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

While committed academics are the key towards the successful private universities in Malaysia (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007) and since academics have a high need for support and recognition , there is very little empirical studies thus far which have been conducted to examine the role of perceived organizational support (POS) to enhance the level of affective commitment of academics using the academics working with the private institutions of higher learning (Rowley, 1996; Capelleras, 2005; Joiner and Bakalis, 2006). Moreover, academics perceived that they have 'lost their voice' as the management of private universities had become increasingly reluctant to listen to them, had lost respect for their knowledge and expertise, had increased their teaching loads and the administrative burden had become, unmanageable (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007).

Limited empirical studies conducted among academic staff have suggested several direct antecedents of academic staffs' affective commitment to the university such as extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction (Mohd. Nasurdin et al. 2003), economic compensation and support and recognition (Capellaras, 2005), supervision, training opportunities and distributive justice (Chungtai and Zafar, 2006), perceived external prestige of the university (Fuller et al. 2006) as well as procedural and distributive justice (Yusof and Shamsuri, 2006).

Only one study by Fuller et al. (2006) has found that POS was strongly related to academics' affective commitment to the university. Moreover, aspects of managerialism has swept private universities and promote the use of private sector management techniques such as human resource management, total quality management, effectiveness, efficiency in resource use, financial returns, competition between universities and faculties and standards of performance (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007). These values may not mix well with the academics' values of freedom of expression and acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Hence, different bundles of human resource management (HRM) practices need to be adopted for universities with different academic identities (Delery and Doty, 1996; Smeenk, Eisinga, Teelken, and Doorewaard, 2006).

Taken together, it is important and urgent for research to be undertaken to examine how private universities in Malaysia can foster the desirable employee commitment through designing specific HRM practices which signal organizational care and support as suggested by the social exchange perspective of affective commitment. This is because academics will not be committed to the corporate sector driven managerial identity without their universities extending support to them, recognize their knowledge and expertise and care for their well-being (Humphreys & Hoque, 2007). Hence, appropriate HRM practices is necessary to realize the shift from professional to managerial values among university academics. Besides, understanding the nature of academic work in greater depth is crucial as academics are the key to the higher education process to teach and supervise students as well as carry out and disseminate academic research (Tight, 2003; Humphreys & Hoque, 2007).

In other words, studies that examined the effects of HRM practices on affective commitment via the social exchange perspective of commitment in private universities that have adopted the

managerial or hegemonist identity is limited (Smeenk et al. 2006) especially in current times of reducing expenditures and expanding universities, academic employees have an increased teaching load which often expanded at the expense of research time.

Limited empirical studies such as Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006) conducted thus far centered around the important role of academics to create excellence learning experience and build national and international reputation for themselves and their institutions in the research, publishing and professional areas and such profile may have a significance impact on the ability of the institution to attract high caliber students, research funds and consultancy contracts. However, such achievements depend on exceptionally high level of affective commitment of the academics to their institutions.

This study aims to answer the call from recent studies about the affective commitment level of academics such as Rowley (1996), Capelleras (2005) and Joiner and Bakalis (2006) for more studies to be conducted to examine the role of perceived organizational support (POS) towards enhancing the level of affective commitment for academics working outside the western countries. This study aims to provide an unique contribution to the commitment literature in the private higher education industry by examining the possible mediating effect of POS on the relationship of four key HRM practices namely, pay level satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-family support and leader-member exchange (LMX) on the academics' level of affective commitment and also turnover intention using academics working with the private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia as respondents to this study.

Affective organizational commitment is among the most researched topics in the area of organizational behaviour and education because of their impact on behaviour at work such as compliance with directives, effective performance in their jobs or lower turnover, absenteeism and other desirable organizational outcomes (Testa, 2001). However, literature search has found no previous studies that have investigated the mediating process to explain the relationship between the human resource management (HRM) practices and employee commitment for academic staff working with private higher education institutions in Malaysia, especially in Sarawak. Theoretically, Meyer and Smith (2001) suggested that the influence of HRM practices (performance appraisal, benefits, training and career development) on affective and normative commitment were largely mediated by organizational support and to a lesser extent by procedural justice, hence, HRM effect on commitment are neither direct nor unconditional. Practically, the Malaysian Government and the Sarawak State Government have always emphasized the importance of motivated academics to drive the Malaysian knowledge economy by producing quality human capital. Thus, this study addresses an important strategic national objective of producing quality human capital and most importantly, this study aims to address the gaps in the literature for more empirical studies on the mediating mechanisms as suggested by Meyer and Smith (2001) to better explain how the implementation of appropriate HRM practices can help to build high levels of POS, which in turn, will contribute to desirable work attitudes and organizational behaviours such as organizational commitment and turnover intention.

In other words, the study will contribute significantly towards the 'second wave of development' as advocated by the State Government which is based on development of the human capital (the sum of the skills, knowledge and general attribute of the people). This is because academics are the ones who produce the future human capital of the state. Hence, this study will also set the research

agenda towards understanding the process of creating a pool of committed academic staff of private universities in Malaysia who will contribute towards developing the human capital needed by the nation through creating educated individuals who possessed strong mentality with sharp minds who can spearhead the planning and implementation of projects under the 9MP.

On the other hand, existing commitment literature for the higher education industry has overlooked the importance of investigating the affective commitment of the academics from the multi-foci perspective as suggested by earlier researchers such as Morrow (1983) and Reichers (1985). This is because individuals experience multiple attachments to multiple constituencies in the organization and beyond the organization.

Specifically, factors influencing professional commitment are gaining more importance partly due to the changing patterns of management with increasing mergers, downsizing and layoffs. Individuals become unable to depend on a single organization for their careers and commitment to one's career or profession accordingly becomes an important source of occupational meaning (Chang, 1999). However, the possible influence of POS on professional commitment remains to be explored as no previous studies have examined this relationship.

As Lee, Carswell and Allen (2000) argued, it is important to investigate the role of professional commitment influencing the employees' organizational commitment as professions are important in the lives of many people and the potential link between professional commitment and important work outcomes such as turnover intention and job performance. However, existing empirical research on the relationship between professional commitment and organizational commitment remains inconsistent and need to be further explored. Some studies found there was conflict

between the values related to one's psychological link to his occupation and those related to one's organization such as Coombs & Gomez-Mejia (1999) while other researchers argue that one's commitment to the values and norms of the profession is not necessarily inconsistent or conflicting with those of the organization (for example, Bartol, 1979; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Wallace, 1993; Lee at al., 2000; Cetin, 2006).

Hence, more studies regarding employee's attitude toward his profession are required to better understand the behaviour or attitude of the private universities' academics.   Furthermore, it is theoretically fruitful to examine the relationships between different forms of commitment as academics will form some type of commitment to the values and standards of his or her chosen profession as well as to the organization in which the professional practice is practiced.   On this note, this study will address this gap by reexamining the relationship between professional commitment and organizational commitment in the context of private higher education. Besides, it will also explore the possible relationship that academics who perceive higher POS in terms of private universities providing more support for scholarly activities, will be more committed to the academic profession (professional commitment) by being more involved in the activities of his profession such as producing more publishable research papers and engaging in quality teaching.

In summary, this study attempts to contribute to the commitment literature by addressing the important research problem of whether perceived organizational support (POS) mediates the influence of human resource management practices (HRM) on the academics' affective organizational commitment to the universities and their turnover intention.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to identify the research problem and the research questions to be addressed in this research, discuss its potential contributions and significance of the study in terms of theory, practice and policy making and provide an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

The hypothesized model for this study is depicted in Figure 1 below.

General Purpose Statement

The purpose of this survey study will be to test the organizational support theory that relates the influence of four (4) supportive human resource management practices, namely pay satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-life balance and leader-member exchange (LMX) on two (2) important employee attitudes and behaviours, namely affective organizational commitment and turnover intention, through the mediating effect of perceived organizational support and controlling for demographic variables such as tenure status, total years of teaching experience, salary level, number of years employed at the current institution and academic rank.

General Objectives

The general objectives of this study are three- fold:

1. The study will examine whether the human resource management practices of the private higher education institutions (PHEI) in Malaysia will influence the academics' level of affective commitment to the organization and their turnover intention through perceived organizational support (POS).

This study aims to address the gaps in the literature for more empirical studies on the mediating mechanisms as suggested by Meyer and Smith (2001) to better explain how the implementation of supportive HRM practices can help to build high levels of POS, which in turn, will contribute to desirable work attitudes and organizational behaviours such as organizational commitment and turnover intention.

2. The study will examine the two important mediating factors in the relationship of POS to the academics' level of commitment to the organization and their turnover intention. These mediating factors are felt obligation and trust in management.

This study aims to contribute to more empirical studies investigating the mediating mechanisms through which POS influences important employee behaviors and attitudes such as affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. This is because to date, only one (1) study by Eisenberger et al. (2001), has examined reciprocation's role in the relationships of POS on affective organizational commitment. Besides, this study will also contribute towards the limited past studies except by Whitener (1997) which has examined another important mediator in the relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment, namely trust in management.

3. The study will test the mediating role of professional commitment in the relationship of POS to the academics' level of affective commitment to the organization and their turnover intention.

This study aims to be the first study to examine the possible influence of POS on the academics' commitment to his/her academic profession as it is theoretically fruitful to examine the antecedents of professional commitment from the social exchange perspective and also to reexamine the inconsistent literature evidence thus far regarding the relationships between the academics' commitment to his/her academic profession and the university. The incorporation of professional commitment into this study will contribute further understanding to the application of the organizational support theory into the private higher education industry by applying the multi-foci perspective of commitment as suggested by earlier researchers such as Morrow (1983) and Reichers (1985).

The study is intended to determine what effect selected HRM practices, as perceived by employees, have on employee organizational commitment and perceived organizational support. It emphasizes on the importance of employees' perception to describe the process of the influence of supportive HR practices on employee attitudes and behaviors. This is because many studies (for example, Ogilvie, 1986; Iles, Mabley and Robertson, 1990; Kinicki, Carson and Bohlander, 1992; Whitener, 2001; Agarwala, 2003) have suggested that HRM practices to foster commitment should consider the importance of the employees' perception compared to reality. This may be due to that unexpected outcomes might have resulted from the fact that employees' perception were influenced in ways that were quite different from what was intended and that HRM practices signals organizational care and trust to the employees such as fairness of promotion practices and merit system accuracy (procedural justice). Other examples include, participation in the stress counseling might have made employees aware that the organization was a major contributor to the stress they are experiencing or participation in

the developmental awareness centers might have increased the employees' awareness that they are in the wrong path.

This suggests that perceptions of high commitment HRM practices will influence the readiness with which managers identified with the goals of the company and felt that their efforts and investments were reciprocated by the organization. Organizational efforts to demonstrate continued concern for employees with long service records can help employees to develop active rather than passive or trapped commitment (Ogilvie, 1986).   Attributions employees make for an organization's actions including practicing the particular HRM practices will also influence their commitment level. Employees are more likely to respond in the desired direction (with increased commitment) to a policy or practice if they believe that the organization was responsible for its introduction and considered employees' interests rather than compliance with legal requirements or a desire to increase productivity (Koys, 1988, 1991; Meyer and Allen, 1997) A recent study by Edgar and Geare (2005) also suggest that high levels of employee commitment is related to "appropriate" HRM practice and results from investing in HRM practices which benefit employees (not the number of HRM practices implemented) and whether they are being treated fairly.

In a recent study, Agarwala (2003) suggested that the perceived extent of introduction of innovative human resource practices (IHRPs) by the organizations was the most significant predictor of organizational commitment. This view is consistent with Meyer and Allen (1991) observation that commitment develops as a result of different experiences in the organization and has different implications on the job behaviour.   Hence, people orientation in the organization increased employee commitment.

Figure 1 The hypothesized model
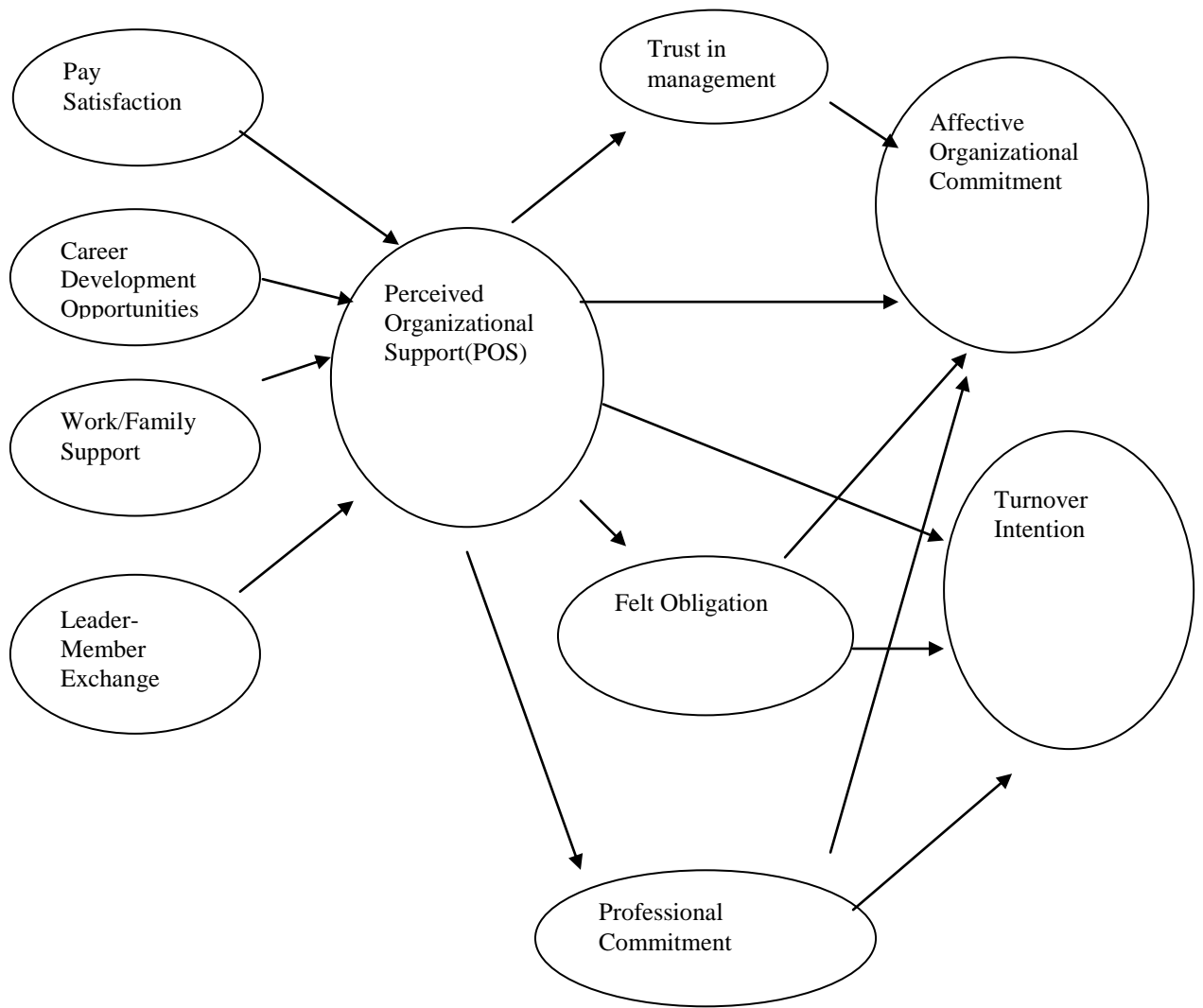
POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study has the potential to contribute to the literature in at least the following aspects. First and most important, by incorporating HR practices as antecedents of POS, this research links the HR and organizational behaviour (OB) literature. Although HR and OB are highly interrelated, research in these areas are often not integrated in a single study and hence, more integration is necessary. For example, despite the fact that implementation of supportive HR practices such as pay satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-life balance and leader-member exchange

(LMX) often communicate the degree to which the organization cares about its employees and values their contribution to the organization, POS is often examined as an OB topic. For example, Wayne et al. (1997) suggest that when organizations invest in and provide recognition for employees, they are encouraging the development of POS. The limited studies in this area of study suggests that POS provides an explanation for the process by which HR practices impact employee outcomes, and that HR practices are an important source of employee perceptions of organizational support.

Little research has examined the antecedents of POS from the HR perspective. The aspects of HR practices studied include growth opportunities (Allen et al., 2003), development opportunities (Wayne et al., 1997) and inclusion in decision making (Wayne et al., 2002; Allen et al., 2003). These studies represent a limited and somewhat narrow perspective as they examined only one particular HR practice in each study. Thus, this study will contribute further to knowledge about the antecedents of POS from the HR perspective by examining the influence of four HR practices which are pay level satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-family support and leader-member exchange (LMX) on POS. Further, those studies that investigated the relationship between HR practice and POS are often not guided by any motivational theory. On the other hand, although the behavioral perspective of the HR literature argue that the purpose of various HR practices is to influence employee attitudes and behaviors, HR literature has focused only on the relationship between HR practices and firm performance (for example, Delery and Doty, 1996; Huselid, 1995), and has rarely examined the effects of the implementation of supportive HR practices on employee attitudes and behaviors. Hence, this study attempts to contribute further to the literature by examining the influence of supportive HRM practices as suggested by Alderfer's (1972) ERG theory of motivation namely, pay satisfaction, career development opportunities,

work-life balance and leader-member exchange (LMX) that are used in private higher education institutions in Malaysia on important employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization such as perceived organizational support, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. In addition, this study differs from previous studies as it investigates the influence of both work and non-work related HR practices on POS and the choice of HR practices is theoretically justified (Pare & Tremblay, 2007). Besides, this study will be able to provide insights on which HR practices are more strongly related to POS.

Following the suggestions by Delery (1998), Mohamed et al. (2006) and Pare & Tremblay (2007) that studies that examine the mechanisms through which HR practices affect organizational outcomes is still at an embryonic stage and remain to be fully understood, this study aims to contribute to the literature by examining whether the employees' perception of supportive HR practices will influence their perceptions of organizational support, which in turn, will contribute to employee attitudes and behaviors beneficial to the organization. This study is consistent with the view that HR plays an indirect role in enhancing affective commitment (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Whitener, 2001) and these relationships are not necessarily direct or unconditional and POS is an important mediator (Meyer & Smith, 2000).

In other words, this study attempts to provide further empirical evidence to address the gap that supportive HR practices may not only signal the extent to which organizations value and care for employees and signal the managers' desire to engage in social exchange relationships with employees (Eisenberger et al. 1996; Allen et al., 2003) but also lead to desirable organizational outcomes such as affective commitment to the organization and reduced turnover intention (Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger, 1986, 1990).

Second, this study will provide further empirical evidence and validates the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and specifically in the aspect of the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) in the employer-employee relationship, by investigating the possible mediating role of felt obligation in the POS- work outcomes relationship.

Tansky & Cohen (2001) has identified perceived organizational support to build organizational commitment among employees. In addition, the empirical findings of Meyer and Smith (2001) identified perceived organizational support as a factor that partially mediate the relationships between HRM practices and organizational commitment. Other studies that have link POS and turnover intentions include Rhoades et al. (2001) and Eisenberger et al. (2002) which linked POS with actual turnover using rewards, procedural justice and supervisory support while Allen at al. (2003) suggests that POS mediates supportive HR on turnover via organizational commitment.

In a more recent study, Lee and Peccei (2007) mentioned that studies that examined the processes that underlie the relationship of POS and affective commitment is still limited and suggested future studies to investigate other mechanisms through which POS influences affective commitment such as felt obligation.

Hence, following the findings of Tansky & Cohen (2001), Meyer and Smith (2001), Rhoades et al. (2001) and Eisenberger et al. (2002) and Allen at al. (2003), this study will extend knowledge regarding the mediating process through which POS influences employee attitudes and behaviors,

and demonstrate why organizations need to implement supportive HRM practices to improve affective organizational commitment and reduce turnover intention.

This study examines the relationship between POS and a variety of important work outcomes to provide further insights into the effects of POS. Specifically, this study answers the call by Tan (2008) for more studies to address the gap on the influence of POS between organizational actions and turnover intention for knowledge workers in Malaysia by examining the possible mediating effects of trust in management, felt obligation and also professional commitment on the influence of POS on affective organizational commitment and turnover intention.

It is also to be noted that this study examines the influence of LMX on POS and whether professional commitment mediates the influence of POS on affective organizational commitment. This is consistent with Reicher's (1985) multiple foci commitments perspective and follows the suggestion of Lavelle et.al. (2007) that past studies offer empirical support that employees demonstrate commitment toward a variety of foci and that examining commitment to these various foci can improve our understanding of key employee behaviours. Specifically, this study will improve understanding about the multi-foci perspective of social exchange relationships in organizations as it examines the interrelationships between variables reflecting social exchange of the employees with the organization which is POS and affective organizational commitment, with the supervisor which is LMX as well as with the profession which is professional commitment. Furthermore, taking a multi-foci perspective of the employees' experience at work is likely to become increasingly important (Lavelle et.al., 2007).

In sum, this study contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the psychological processes underlying the formation of organizational commitment through the perspectives of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In particular, Oliver (1990) has likened the study of organizational commitment to a "black box" in which various individual and organizational factors determine commitment levels and in turn affect certain behaviors, with scant attention to what happens "in between".

Third, using a sample of academics working for private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) as the context of study will offer interesting insights on the management of knowledge workers. This context warrants urgent investigation as private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) are playing important role to support Malaysia's mission to be the important educational hub. Moreover, knowledge workers are the key source of competitive advantage for the knowledge economy (Drucker, 1999) and most importantly, committed academics will assist the State Government to develop the quality human capital required to achieve the objectives of the 'second wave of development' as advocated by the Sarawak State Government which is based on development of the human capital, which in turn will ensure the success of Vision 2020 and the National Mission in general. Hence, highly skilled professionals should not be managed as disposable productive resources but rather should be considered as human beings with specific needs and interests (Pare & Tremblay, 2007). Managers need to bolster their sense of self-worth by treating them as intellectual assets, not as operating costs, and by trusting them, supporting their career experiences and fulfill their needs in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage by keeping their employees' skills and experience within the organization rather than outside it (Tan, 2008).

However, managing knowledge workers such as the academics is not a simple task as they are known to have higher expectations from their working life, and they may be more committed to their profession than their organization (Coombs & Gomez-Mejia, 1999). As suggested by Coombs & Gomez-Mejia (1999) and Drucker (1999), this study examines whether supportive HR practices will influence employee perceptions of POS and its direct and indirect influence on important work outcomes. Besides, this study also investigates the mediating role of professional commitment in this process as academics may join private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) for further advancement in their profession rather than committed to their organization. Thus, this study has important practical implications for the management of knowledge workers in the context of academics working for private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) in Sarawak in particular and Malaysia in general. It will enhance knowledge on the role of social exchange relationships in private universities, especially relating to management practice and worker response which lacks empirical investigation.

Specifically, this study will provide important empirical evidence to the management of private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) in Malaysia on the influence of supportive HR practices on important employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization such as affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. This important research gap is also suggested by Pare & Tremblay (2007) and Tan (2008) on the need to examine turnover intentions in a variety of organizational and cultural contexts for various professional groups in Asia. The exploration of the antecedents and consequences of POS have been widely observed in the Western context and hence, Tan (2008) have mentioned that findings for Asian collective culture such as Malaysian employees is still in the preliminary stages. Besides, Shore et.al. (2006) also suggest that the type of job may be important for understanding exchange relationships.

Since private institutions of higher learning (PHEIs) have limited financial resources and these institutions need to be accountable to their shareholders in terms of their financial performance, this study will also provide useful insights on the importance of implementing supportive HR practices to elicit important employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization such as perceived organizational support, affective organizational commitment and turnover intention.

Fourth, the study supports the suggestions by Meyer (2006) that encourages both quantitative and qualitative methods to be employed in management research as currently the dominant and more popular methods of enquiry is quantitative rather than qualitative. Specifically, this study also respond to Swailes (2002) critique that current studies on organizational commitment focuses on the reasons or the 'why' employees are committed, rather investigating the 'what' of commitment which is a force that binds employee to an action which is relevant to the target of commitment which can be actions or entities.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS OF THE STUDY

Key variables are defined according to the research objectives of this study to provide an understanding and measurement of concepts. The respective concepts will first be defined conceptually and then operationally.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

POS is a key concept of the organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which posits that "employees believe that the organization has a general positive or negative orientation toward them that encompasses both the

recognition of their contributions and concern for their welfare" (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002, p. 565). POS represents an integral part to describe the social exchange relationship between the employer and the employee because it implies what the organization has done for them, at least in the employees' belief.

Following Eisenberger and colleagues' seminal work on POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986), perceived organizational support (POS), is defined in this study as the extent to which the employees perceive that organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being.

Affective Organizational Commitment

Earlier studies have conceptualized employee commitment as the employees' commitment to their organization. Organizational commitment has attracted researchers interested in behaviours of individuals in organizations and it is also a relatively stable attitude over time compared to job satisfaction (Porter et al., 1974).

The concept of organizational commitment has been defined in many ways. Steers (1977) is among the first to view organizational commitment as an employee attitude and as a set of behavioral intentions; the willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organization.

Then, Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979; 1982) provides an operational definition for the concept of organizational commitment and characterized the concept by three factors: (a) a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organization's goals and values, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a strong desire to remain in the organization. The researchers

defined organizational commitment as the strength of an individual's identification with the goals of an organization's multiple constituencies and it is about positive involvement, which is integral to developing shared goals and objectives in a particular organization. In short, organizational commitment can be considered to be affective responses or attitudes which links or attaches an employee to the organization.

During the last decade, it has become clear that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct that involves three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative. This conceptualization of organizational commitment is commonly known as the Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three-Component Model of OC. This study adopts Meyer and Allen's (1991) definition that affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to the organization. Employees with strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to do so.

This study has chosen affective organizational commitment as one of the desired employee attitudes to be examined as most studies of organizational commitment have focused on affective organizational commitment because it is the strongest and most robust predictor of organizationally desired outcomes such as employee retention and social exchange relationships (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2001; Allen et al. 2003; Lavelle et. al., 2007).

Professional Commitment

In the literature, professional commitment is often conceptualized as career commitment. Professional commitment is defined as "the relative strength of identification with and involvement in one's profession and it has also been numerous terms used to refer to professional commitment

such as career and occupational commitment (Blau, 1985, p.278). Professional commitment is also defined as the psychological link between a person and his or her profession that represents the degree to which he is or she is dedicated to, care about, and is proud to be a member of that profession (Lee at al., 2000; Wallace, 1995). The concept has gained growing importance since a career provides a significant source of occupational meaning and continuity (Chang, 1999).

In sum, professional commitment is operationalized in this study as the extent to which someone identifies with and values his or her profession or vocation and the amount of time and effort spent in activities related to his/her profession such as teaching and learning as well as research and development.

Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices

Human Resource Management Practices can be classified as "control" or "commitment" practices. The control approach aims to increase efficiency and rely on strict rules and rewards are based on outputs while the commitment approach aims to increase effectiveness and rely on conditions that encourage employees to identify with the goals of the organization and work hard to accomplish those goals. High commitment human resource strategies work well synergistically, reflective of a general commitment strategy by forging psychological links between organization and employee goals by developing committed workforce who can be trusted to use their discretion to carry out job tasks in ways that are consistent with organization goals (Whitener, 2001; Meyer and Allen, 1997).

In the HR literature, the term "HR practices" is rarely explicitly defined. Most research has focused on the role of HR practices in enhancing human capital. For example, Snell and Dean

(1992) noted that "HRM practices are the primary means for firms to invest in their employees" (p.473). Delaney and Huselid (1996) further suggested that progressive HR practices should include those practices that affect employee skills and ability, motivation and structure of work. Huselid (1995) used the term "high-performance work practices" to refer to what are usually considered HR practices, and suggested that these practices can improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of a firm's current and potential employees, increase their motivation, and enhance retention of quality employees while encouraging non-performers to leave the firm" (p. 635).

The HR practices are operationalized in this study as the employees' perceptions of their satisfaction with these practices in terms of pay satisfaction and the level of support and care that they receive from their organizations in terms of career development opportunities, work-family support, leader-member exchange.

ANTECEDENTS OF POS

There are multiple mechanisms that the organization can employ to create employee beliefs that the organization value their contributions and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). HRM practices might serve as one means by organizations to show their care and support or commitment to the employees and in turn, foster affective commitment and reciprocal attachment by employees. Specifically, employees may refer the supportive HRM practices as discretionary behavior of the organizational agents to determine how greatly the organization values them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In addition, HR practices serve as signals to employees about the extent to which the organization values and cares about them as individuals (Wayne et al., 1997). This findings suggest that HRM practices might only contribute to employees' affective commitment if they are viewed by employees as evidence of the

organization's commitment to them. Further, Pare & Tremblay (2007) suggest that non-monetary and competency developments practices significantly and positively related to affective commitment because such practices make the professionals feel important, responsible and free to optimally channel their creativity and competencies, besides signaling that the organization is supportive of the employees and is willing to establish or maintain a social exchange relationship with them (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Meyer & Smith, 2000). Thus, the relationship between HRM and POS is implied and suggested by these studies. In short, bundles of HR practices play a positive role in the development of an employee's attachment to the organization (Gould-Williams, 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000) because HR practices are likely to be perceived as a concrete signal of a company's support, trust and commitment towards its employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986).   Thus, this study focuses on the employees' perceptions of a set of important HR practices as major antecedents of POS.

In the HR literature, the term "HR practices" is rarely explicitly defined. Most research has focused on the role of HR practices in enhancing human capital. For example, Snell and Dean (1992) noted that "HRM practices are the primary means for firms to invest in their employees" (p.473). Delaney and Huselid (1996) further suggested that progressive HR practices should include those practices that affect employee skills and ability, motivation and structure of work. Huselid (1995) used the term "high-performance work practices" to refer to what are usually considered HR practices, and suggested that these practices "can improve the knowledge, skills and abilities of a firm's current and potential employees, increase their motivation, and enhance retention of quality employees while encouraging non-performers to leave the firm" (p. 635).

Meanwhile, Burt (1997) suggested the importance of the relational aspects of HR practices, and argued that the way the individuals interact within the organizations through interpersonal relationships comprises the social capital, and the contribution of the employees' human capital to firm performance depends on social capital.

Pfeffer (1998) suggested that soft or high commitment human resource management practices are those that generate trust in employees and these practices include giving employees empowerment and involvement in decision making; extensive communication about functioning and performance of the employees' service; designing training for skills and personal development of employees; selective hiring; team-working where idea are pooled and creative solutions are encouraged; rewards system that commensurate with effort; reduction of status between the management and staff and all workers are valued regardless of their role. These prescribed bundle of HR practices results in greater employee commitment and committed employees are more likely to exert themselves on behalf of the organization. Further, the most fundamental process to influence affective commitment is an employee's personal fulfillment based on met needs and positive work experiences (Meyer and Allen, 1997). High commitment human resource management practices shapes employee behaviours and attitudes (job satisfaction and commitment) by developing psychological links between the organization and employee goals (Gould-Williams, 2003; Chew, Girardi and Entrekin, 2005; Edgar and Geare, 2005). This is supported by Williams (2004) that eight out of ten high commitment practices examined such as training, team working, reduced status, communication and involving employees in decision making had significant effects on worker attitudes based on the logic of normative theories of HRM. Meanwhile, Edgar and Geare (2005) suggested that only when employee reports of strength of HRM practices were used to measure HRM as compared to additive measures of numbers of HRM practice (employers indicate

yes/no which HRM practices from a list currently operate in their organization) and employer reports, statistically significant results were obtained between HRM practice and employee attitudes. The researchers suggested that it is the quality of the HR practice that counts and not the quantity.

However, Marchington and Grugulis (2000) criticized Pfeffer's work idea of 'best practice' HRM practices of putting people first which suggest that particular bundle of HR practices can increase profits via commitment irrespective of organizational, industrial, or national context. They justify that these practices may not be so beneficial to workers, there is a decline of mutual commitment between the organization and the employees and employees' perceptions of work are what really matter. This is probably due to similar HR techniques may be perceived in dissimilar ways by employees in different situations. In other words, HR practices designed to promote 'high' exchange relationships may in fact lead to adverse working conditions such as reduced quality of working life and work-related pressure.

A recent study by Gould-Williams (2007) supports the view that 'soft' or high commitment HRM practices signal to workers the initiation of positive exchange relationships when managers provide evidence that they are concerned with the needs of individual workers (Guest, 1999; Allen et al., 2003) and the findings did not support the views of the critical writers such as Marchington and Grugulis (2000) that 'soft' HR practices may produce negative outcomes as well.

Based on these arguments, this study use a working definition of HR practices that incorporates an emphasis on human capital, social capital and emotional bonding between the employee and the organization through developing their knowledge and skills, fostering effective social interactions

and shaping employee behaviours and attitudes (perceived organizational support) and affective organizational commitment.

This study utilizes the Alderfer's (1972) theory of motivation and past research in the POS literature (eg. Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997) to select the relevant HR practices to be examined as antecedents of POS. Alderfer's (1972) theory of motivation received more research support than Maslow hierarchy of needs (Hitt et al, 2006). Alderfer's theory refines Maslow's needs hierarchy theory (Maslow, 1954) and conceptualizes three elements of human needs that are relevant to organizational settings and may be active progressively or simultaneously. The theory holds that individuals attempt to satisfy three levels of needs in organizations which are first, needs that are based on human existence, which are mainly physiological and material wellbeing needs necessary for the existence of human being(*existence*); second, needs that are based on interpersonal relationships in the workplace that would meet one's desire to be accepted, valued, and loved by others (*relatedness*); and third, needs that are related to one's need for continued growth and development for the development of human potential and capabilities (*growth*). Hence, meeting each of these needs is important for high work motivation and organizations should satisfy these employees' needs in order for the employees to develop their belief of high levels of POS. This is consistent with Eisenberger et al. (1997) suggestion that higher levels of POS would meet individuals' needs for approval, esteem, social identity, recognition and rewards.

Therefore, four (4) HR practices are chosen to be investigated that would meet the employees' need for existence, relatedness and growth. First, pay satisfaction is to meet employees' physiological and material wellbeing needs. Second, career development opportunities is to meet

employees' growth needs that help employees extend their human potential. Third, HR practices that provide social support such as good supervisory support through developing positive leader-member exchange (LMX) can satisfy employees' need for interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Fourth, the provision of good work-family support is also useful to maintain good work and family relationships and contribute to positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace. The LMX is included as one of the antecedents of POS based on several reasons such as leaders decides the discretionary rewards and other support by the organization that the employees receive (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Wayne et al., 1997); LMX is an important predictor of POS (Eisenberger et al. ,1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Wayne et al., 1997); and high quality relationship with supervisors and the leaders meets the employee's needs for relatedness in the workplace (Alderfer, 1972).

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Mohamed et al., 2006) also suggest two types of human resource practices that are related to POS. First, discretionary practices which the organization is not obligated to offer that imply organizational caring and commitment towards the well being of the employees but not made compulsory by company policy, union contract or laws of the country (for example, career development opportunities and work/family support) and second, organizational recognition for the employee's contribution (for example, pay satisfaction and high quality LMX). Hence, employees view a particular HR practice as indicating positive evaluations of themselves by the organization and benefits available to all employees regardless of performance (for example, retirement benefits) would not be associated to POS.

In other words, organizational support theory posits that discretionary actions on the part of the employer that result in more favorable job conditions should be viewed more positively by employees than required actions.

Thus, in this study, pay level satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-family support and leader-member exchange (LMX) are proposed to be the antecedents of POS. Each of these HR practices are discussed below:-

Pay level satisfaction

Organizational support theory suggests that favorable rewards indicate that the organization values the employees' contribution to the organization, which is a dimension of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1996; Eisenberger, Rhoades, & Cameron, 1999). Organizational rewards represent investment by the organization in the employee and are interpreted by the employee as indication of organizational recognition and appreciation, which in turn contributes to the development of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Knowledge workers are used to work long hours and often need to solve complicated problems and hence, they should be rewarded accordingly. Monetary rewards in Malaysia might also have not been as attractive as other knowledge intensive industries in other countries like Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea, exacerbating the turnover rates in Malaysia (Tan, 2008).

As the contributions of knowledge workers are influential on the long term performance of an organization, they are often recruited using a more attractive form of remuneration package compared to other professions and organizational behavioral researchers (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2001) argue that organizational rewards reflect appreciation and recognition of

individual performance. As pay increases with tenure, skills and experience, satisfaction with rewards implies willingness of both parties to invest time and effort in the continuation of the employment relationship.

Many empirical studies have found evidence that organizational rewards positively influences POS. For example, Shore and Tetrick (1991) found that POS has a positive relationship with employee satisfaction with pay. Similarly, Meyer & Smith (2000) , Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armerli (2001) , Allen et al. (2003) and Tan (2008) also found that employee evaluations of favorable organizational rewards and procedural justice were antecedents of POS. Although different indicators of organizational rewards have been used in these studies, these research findings suggest that rewards is an important predictor of POS and equitable rewards had consistent effects on positive worker attitudes and behaviours (Gould- Williams, 2007). Since rewards portray a feeling of competence and value by knowledge workers, the examination of the relationship between the academics' satisfaction with the entire structure of rewards package and POS is necessary.

Hence, it is hypothesized that the degree that the employee is satisfied with their pay is likely to have a positive impact on POS.

Hypothesis 1: Employees' pay satisfaction will positively influence the level of POS.

Career Development Opportunities

Employees have a desire to extend their potential and capabilities in the organizations, to satisfy their need for growth (Alderfer, 1972; Maslow, 1954). Hence, organizations need to provide employees with career development opportunities that would meet their need for personal growth in order to create employee beliefs in higher POS.

Organizations that provide career development opportunities such as recognition, training and promotion indicates that the organizations are concerned for their employees and recognize their contributions to the organization, which contributes to POS (Eisenberger et al., 1999; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Further, these HR practices are often viewed as discretionary treatment by the organization as it goes beyond normal company policies or any labour laws of the country, which suggests that organizational caring and support (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Some researchers have suggested that HR practices such as extensive training would create a sense of organizational support (Koys, 1991; Meyer & Allen, 1997; McElroy, 2001). In addition, past empirical research has also provided some evidence that career development opportunities offered by organizations may enhance POS (for example, Wayne et al. 1997; Meyer & Smith, 2001; Tan, 2008). Besides, according to Tan (2008), career development practices explains 51.7% variance of POS, suggesting these practices could heighten employees' confidence with their employer and also the growth and self-esteem of the employees for them to utilize their skills and knowledge. Consistent with previous studies, career development practices through organizational discretion that provides coaching, personal worth and perceived competence could meet the socio-emotional needs of employees and hence lead to a favorable behavioral outcome (Eisenberger et al., 1996, 1997 ; Wayne et al., 1997, Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Generally, career development practices reflect basic organizational philosophy in prolonging the mutually beneficial employment relationship and signals organizational care and support in developing the capabilities and skills of the employees. Career development practices may be

the most explicit support from the organization to foster employees' career path. The often changing business environment and employment relationship has caused the employees to recognize the importance of lifelong learning opportunities for personal growth throughout their career. HRM practices that enhance personal growth and motivate would secure a durable employer-employee relationship via social exchange process, which brings a win-win situation that benefits both parties in the long run.

Following these arguments, this study proposed that the extent that an employee believes that the organization provides opportunities for career development will positively influence the level of POS.

Hypothesis 2: Employees' perceived career development opportunities will positively influence the level of POS.

Work-family support

Another HR practice that can meet employee needs, and thus, increase POS is work-family support. As Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Lynch (1998) suggested, POS may be related to organizational actions that strengthen employee beliefs that the organization would provide sympathetic understanding and material aid to deal with stressful situations at work or home. These factors would help meet the employees' need for relatedness in terms of emotional support and interpersonal relationships, which in turn contributes to POS. This is because if the organization provides a high level of work-family support, the employees will consider the organization to care for their well-being, which is a dimension of POS.

However, very little research has been conducted to examine the influence of work-family support on POS and this study aims to provide empirical evidence to address this gap. For example, Kossek and Nichol (1992) found that greater use of child care led to more favorable employee work attitudes and POS was found to be positively related to perceived family-oriented actions among a group of expatriate managers and prison officers respectively (Armeli at al., 1998; Mohamed et al., 2006). These findings suggest that the provision of work-family support may lead to perception of higher POS and hence, the contribution of work-family support on POS is examined.

Hypothesis 3: Employees' perceived work-family support from the organization will positively influence the level of POS.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Social exchange theory provides the dominant basis for the influence LMX on POS (Sparrow & Liden, 1997). Leader member exchange theory suggests that an interpersonal relationship evolves between supervisors and subordinates against the background of a formal organization and "each party must offer something the other party sees as valuable and each party must see the exchange as reasonably equitable or fair" (Scandura & Graen, 1984). LMX relationships may wary in terms of the amount of material resources, information and support exchanged between the two parties and the greater the perceived value of the tangible and intangible commodities exchanged, the higher the quality of the LMX relationships (Wayne et al. 1997).

Eisenberger et al. (1986) conceptualized that supervisors often acts as agents of the organization to direct discretionary rewards such as additional resources, responsibility and support that go beyond what is indicated by the organization. The supervisor is often the source of discretionary rewards

provided by the organization and instrumental in determining salary increases, bonuses as well as in providing career advice, training opportunities, emotional support and information. This will signal that the organization recognizes the contribution of the employees and the treatment an employee receives from their supervisors tends to contribute to the employee perceptions of support from the organization (Wayne et al., 1997).

Besides, positive relationship between LMX or supervisor support to POS has been found in many past researches (for example, Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The positive causal influence of LMX on POS is further confirmed by Eisenberger et al. (2002) who conducted a study to examine the relationship of temporal changes between supervisor support and POS, using a panel design. Hence, these past studies is consistent with the organizational support theory that a better relationship with the supervisor contributes to higher levels of POS.

The importance of the LMX concept in fostering employees' perception of organizational support is also highlighted in the POS literature. Organizations is often perceived as too abstract and distal to the employees (Reichers, 1985), and hence POS is developed through the process of "personification" (Wayne et al., 1997). That is, employees will "personalize" the organization to evaluate the level of organizational support by reflecting their experiences over time of the rewards that they received from more powerful organizational members such as their supervisors (Wayne et al., 1997). Since employees' immediate supervisors are influential to determine and allocate discretionary rewards, support and resources, high quality LMX plays an important role in influencing employee POS (Setton et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

In addition, high quality LMX is essential to satisfy employees' need for relatedness as suggested by the Alderfer's (1972) theory of motivation. If the employees enjoys good working relationships with their supervisor, they would perceive that the organization has met his need for relatedness, which contributes to his belief that the organization cares for his well-being. Further, high quality LMX involves supportive relationship between the supervisor and his subordinate in which the supervisor provides the subordinate with additional resources, responsibility, trust, influence and support that go beyond what is indicated by the organization (Wayne et al., 1997).

Since supervisors are mainly involved in performance evaluations, feedback and career development programs, their favorable and unfavorable treatment reflect their organization's view and decisions on the employees. Beneficial treatment from a supervisor could increase POS to the extent that the treatment is discretionary, fair and attributed to the organization's policies and procedures (Rhoades et. al., 2001, Eisenberger et. al., 2002).   In particular, the Malaysian workers, with their multicultural conformity, tend to have strong relationships in the workplace and they seek career success by building harmonious relationship with colleagues and supervisors, forming an "in-group" with trust and loyalty (Tan, 2008).

Interpersonal relationships with supervisors are crucial in recognizing the personification of an organization. This is especially emphasized in Asian culture as social relationships are more durable than economic/calculative exchange in the long run. In Malaysia, relationships among subordinates and supervisors are relatively important and a caring organization that appreciates its employees has to be conveyed through agents.

In short, the inclusion of   leader-member exchange (LMX) which is about the working relationship between the employee and his or her direct supervisor as a potential HR practices that will influence the employees' perception of   organizational support (POS)   should not be neglected. Hence, following the organizational support theory, POS literature and ERG theory, this study hypothesizes that the better the exchange relationship between the employees and their supervisor, the higher the level of POS.

Hypothesis 4: Employee perceptions of LMX will positively influence the level of POS.

OUTCOMES OF POS

A key concept associated with POS is the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). According to organizational support theory, employees who perceive high levels of POS are more likely to reciprocate the organization with positive attitudes such as higher levels of affective commitment and favorable work behaviours such as commitment to organizational goals and lower intention to leave because POS creates a sense of obligation within the individuals to repay the organization (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger, et al., 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). According to studies on POS, this sense of obligation manifests itself in outcomes including withdrawal behavior and work attendance (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; 1990; 2001; Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), turnover and intentions to quit (Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades et al., 2001; Eisenberger, et al., 2002), performance (Eisenberger, et al., 1990; 2001; Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and job satisfaction (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli & Lynch, 1997; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003).

This study focuses on two important outcomes of POS which are turnover intention and affective organizational commitment and the proposed hypotheses will be discussed next.

Organizational Commitment

An important organizational outcome of POS is affective commitment to the organization. As suggested by the organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Tsui et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), POS, which indicates the organization's commitment to the employee, creates an obligation from the employees to care for the organization's well being and reciprocate with commitment and loyalty. In addition, employees tend to reciprocate the organization's support with higher commitment, to help maintain their self-image, to reciprocate organizational caring and support, and also encourage future favorable treatment from the organization.

Many empirical support has been found to support the positive relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment (e.g. Eisenberger et al., 1990; Shore & Tetrik, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Setton et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001; Mohamed et al., 2006; Shore et.al., 2006; Lee & Peccei, 2007; Maertz et al. 2007). Specifically, Eisenberger et al. (1990) used longitudinal data and found that POS predicted commitment over time, while the reverse is not true.

Thus, consistent with organizational support theory and previous research, this study hypothesizes that employees will reciprocate higher POS with higher affective organizational commitment.

Hypothesis 5: Higher employee perception of POS will positively influence the level of affective organizational commitment.

Turnover Intention

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) suggest that employees who perceive high levels of support from their organization are inclined to repay the organization. One of the ways to repay the organization is by maintaining membership in the organization, which means they have less desire to leave the organization (Wayne et al., 1997; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003).

Empirical research have also proven the above theoretical proposition. For example, negative relationship between POS and turnover intention has been found in some previous researches (Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Mohamed et al., 2006; Tan, 2008). Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) in their literature of POS also concluded that the desire to remain with the organization had a large, positive relationship with POS.

Based on these empirical findings and theoretical justification, a negative relationship between POS and turnover intention is hypothesized.

Hypothesis 6: Higher employee perception of POS will negatively influence the levels of turnover intention.

The mediating role of felt obligation

Very few studies have investigated the mediating mechanisms through which POS influences employee behaviors and attitudes except for Eisenberger et al. (2001), which examined reciprocation's role in the relationships of POS on employee commitment and job performance. Hence, future studies on the POS-outcome relationship should examine the role of felt obligation, which refers to an employee's belief regarding whether he or she should assist the organization to

obtain its goals (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Further, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) also suggest that the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) applies to the employer-employee relationship. Consistent with these researches, this study further validates the role of felt obligation to explain the mediating mechanism for the relationship between POS and important organizational outcomes such as affective organizational commitment.

Although POS is likely to induce employee affective commitment to organization, this effect may function through a sense of felt obligation to repay the organizational caring for their wellbeing and recognition for their contribution (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001). Specifically, Eisenberger et al. (2001) found a partial mediating effect of felt obligation on the influence of POS on affective organizational commitment and explained that since POS fulfils the employees' needs for relatedness and affiliation (Armeli et al., 1998; Alderfer, 1972), POS may increase the employees' identification and involvement with the organization, which is an important dimension of affective organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).

Hence, this study hypothesize that POS may influence affective organizational commitment directly or indirectly via the sense of felt obligation.

Hypothesis 7: The positive influence of POS on affective organizational commitment will be partially mediated by felt obligation.

Many empirical research have proven the negative relationship between POS and turnover intention (for example, Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2001). Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) in their literature of POS also concluded that the desire to remain with the organization had

a large, positive relationship with POS. However, the influence of POS and turnover intention may function through a sense of felt obligation to repay the organizational caring for their wellbeing and recognition for their contribution (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001). There are no studies which have investigated the possible mediating effect of felt obligation on the influence of POS on turnover intention. However, Maertz et al. (2007) suggests that the effects of POS on turnover are not always fully mediated through affective commitment, as has been found in past POS studies (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades et al., 2001) and POS may influence turnover intention through other mechanisms such as felt obligations to reciprocate the organizational caring for their wellbeing and recognition for their contribution through remaining with the organization. Further, POS may increase the employees' strong desire to remain in the organization, which is an important dimension of affective organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979).

Hence, this study hypothesize that POS may influence turnover intention directly or indirectly via the sense of felt obligation.

Hypothesis 8 : The negative influence of POS on turnover intention will be partially mediated by felt obligation.

Mediating role of trust in management

The study of trust in organizations has remained problematic because of problems with the definition of the construct itself. The most common definition of trust is given by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995), ie. 'the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party'. (p. 712). Besides,

Rousseau et al. (1998, p, 395) defined trust as "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another. It reflects employee faith in corporate goal attainment and organizational leaders and the belief that organizational actions will prove beneficial for employees. Hence, trust is a social phenomenon and the exchange theory looks at trust as an essential tool for achieving a stable social relationship (Blau ,1964). Trust develops through a social exchange process in which employees interpret the actions of management and reciprocate in kind (Blau, 1964). Blau (1964) and Whitener (1997) suggested that trust is a critical component in developing social exchange relationship as the act of initiating social exchange relationships requires the originator to trust that the recipient will respond in kind. Elements of uncertainty and vulnerability is present in social exchange relationships.

Blau (1964) argued that social exchange engendered feelings of personal obligation, gratitude and trust that pure economic exchange does not. Hence, the social exchange theory suggest that trust in management is an important mediating concept that should not be ignored in researches about the influence of POS on employee attitudes and behaviors. Many empirical studies have also suggested that the relationship between HRM practices and employee commitment may not be direct, but mediated by psychological factors such as perceived organizational support and trust in management. Studies such as Whitener (1997) and Gould-Williams (2003, 2007) suggested that HR practices are powerful predictors of employees' trust in the organization's systems and decision makers and interpersonal relationship with trust in organization's systems positively predicting changes in employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Consistent with social exchange theory, trust was found to be an significant intervening variable explaining how HR practices impact on employee attitudes (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). This relationship

between HR practices and trust may be due to the logic that supportive HRM practices communicates to employees the extent to which organization trust them and also send very 'tangible' signs to the workforce of the extent to which the organization cares/trust about them (Iles et al., 1990; Whitener, 1997; Pfeffer , 1998).   While the influence of supportive HR practices on POS (for example, Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armerli, 2001; Meyer & Smith, 2001) and the mediating effect of trust in management on the relationship between HRM on affective organizational commitment (for example, Whitener, 1997; Wong, Ngo and Wong, 2002; Gould-Williams, 2003) have attracted some research attention, very few researches have investigated the possible mediating effect of trust in management on the relationship between POS and employees' affective organizational commitment. One exception is the study by Whitener (1997) who found out that trust in management partially mediates the relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment.

Employees are likely to perceive well designed, developmental performance appraisal and internally equitable and externally competitive compensation systems as indicative of the organization support and commitment to them and they will in turn reciprocate their perceptions with their own commitment and trust to the organization and they form general perceptions about the intentions and attitudes of the organization towards them from HRM practices, attributing human –like attributes to their employer on the basis of the treatment they receive (Whitener, 2001)   . Employees interpret supportive HRM practices and trustworthiness of management (Eisenberger et al 1990) as indicative of the personified organization's commitment and support to them.   Thus, trust enacts the principles of the social exchange theory by providing the link between POS and affective organizational commitment. In other words, POS which indicates the extent that the organization is caring and values the contribution of their employees will

contributes towards the employees' trust in their organization to take care of their well being in the future. As a result they will feel the need to reciprocate their perceptions of POS with their affective commitment to the organization. This is important especially for universities as academics can choose which universities to dedicate their expertise and commitment to.

The findings are consistent with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which implies that when workers perceive that they are valued and received fair rewards that commensurate with their contributions, they will be committed to the organizations. However, the role of trust in the management of organizations which is an important component of the social exchange process in order to elicit positive exchanges as a result of reciprocal individual exchanges has not been extensively investigated (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005).

One recent study by Stinglhamber, Cremer and Mercken (2006) suggested that perceived organizational support partially mediated the effect of procedural justice on trust in organizations. It is plausible that such a fair treatment enhances feelings of trust in the organization because it elicits among employees a feeling of being cared about and supported by the organization. Human resources practices that facilitate the fair treatment (procedural justice) of employees thus not only engender their perceived organizational support but also directly influence their trust in the organization.   The employment relationship is a function of employees' exchanges with the organization as a whole. This reflects that social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) is a dominant theoretical framework used to examine the employment relationship in the organizational psychology literature and trust should play a central role as a mechanism through which POS affects employees' affective organizational commitment.   However, to date, very few research

except Whitener (1997) have examined and found that trust in management partially mediates the relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment.

Hence, this study aims to further contribute to the empirical literature by testing the hypothesis that POS may influence affective organizational commitment directly or indirectly through trust in management.

Hypothesis 9: The positive influence of POS on affective organizational commitment will be partially mediated by trust in management.

The mediating role of professional commitment

In the literature, professional commitment is often conceptualized as career commitment. Professional commitment is defined as "the relative strength of identification with and involvement in one's profession and there are numerous terms used to refer to professional commitment such as career and occupational commitment (Blau, 1985, p.278). Professional commitment is also defined as the psychological link between a person and his or her profession that represents the degree to which he is or she is dedicated to, care about, and is proud to be a member of that profession (Wallace, 1995; Lee at al., 2000). Common to these two terms of career commitment and professional commitment is the critical notion that being committed to one's career or profession and involve groups of people who have mastery over specific occupational tasks (Blau, 1988). Career commitment involves the development of personal career goals and an identification with and involvement in those goals and individuals willing to exert energy and be persistent in pursuing personal career goals may be considered to have high levels of career commitment (Goulet and Singh, 2002). Blau's (1985) operationalization has been found to have discriminant validity and generalizability (Blau, 1985) and Morrow (1993) mentioned that it is

recommended for future use as it appears to be the cleanest conceptualization with the best psychometric properties.

Blau (1985) used the term "career commitment" to refer to one's commitment to the profession or vacation. In the literature, to some extent, career commitment, occupational commitment and professional commitment have been used interchangeably to refer to one's commitment to the profession, occupation or career though there are slight differences between these terms. This study avoids the use of the term career commitment following Lee at al. (2000) and Meyer et al. (1993) suggestion that the term career is sometimes confusing, because career has been used by some researchers to refer to a series of jobs and other work-related activities from entry into the workforce to retirement, and by other researchers to refer to a particular job, occupation, or profession. While the occupational commitment seems to be more appropriate as it refers to a specific occupation, this study adopts the term professional commitment as academics who are the subjects of the study are professionals.

In sum, professional commitment may be conceptualized as the extent to which someone identifies with and values his or her profession or vocation and the amount of time and effort spent acquiring relevant knowledge. The concept has gained growing importance since a career provides a significant source of occupational meaning and continuity (Chang, 1999).

Individuals enter organizations with their own career plan and would be attracted to the current company if its practices satisfy their career needs (Chang, 1999). This implies that the individuals' level of career commitment will influence their level of organizational commitment because they are pursuing their career in their present company and they may consider leaving the organization when career growth opportunities in the organization are low (Whitener, 1997; Chang, 1999;

Goulet and Singh, 2002).   Further, Lee at al. (2000) argued that it is important to investigate the role of professional commitment influencing the employees' organizational commitment as professions are important in the lives of many people and the potential link between professional commitment and important work outcomes such as turnover intention and job performance.

Members of the workforce can be committed to various domains at work (Morrow, 1983; Reichers, 1985; Iles et al., 1990), and among them, commitment to the organization and the profession received the most attention. While it is likely that favorable treatment from the organization will create high levels of POS among the employees, which in turn, induce positive work attitudes and behaviors such as affective organizational commitment and turnover intention (Eisenberger, et al., 1986; Eisenberger, et al., 1990; Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002); POS may influence an employee's level of professional commitment, which in turn influences important work attitudes and behaviors.

Specifically, Iles et al. (1990) suggested that the relationship between HRM practices and employee commitment may not be straight forward and more complex and future studies should recognize that employee commitment consists of multifaceted nature which include commitment to job, organization and career. Further, HRM practices may affect career commitment. This is suggested by Chang (1999) who suggested that career commitment moderated the effect of employees' perception of supervisory support on affective commitment.   This implies that employees tend to be more affectively committed to their company when they perceived more supervisory support (providing information about career opportunities and feedback by supervisors through interviews), and the degree is higher for those who are committed to their careers.

Organizational research suggest that the degree to which the individuals are committed to their profession has an impact on a variety of important organizational outcomes such as affective organizational commitment and turnover (Meyer at al., 1993; Lee at al., 2000). However, the relationship between professional commitment and organizational commitment is not conclusive. Earlier researchers argued that there exists organizational-professional commitment conflict, due to the conflict that individuals face in choosing between complying to the goals and values of the organization and those of the profession (Sorenson & Sorenson, 1974; Brierley, 1998). However, these arguments have been challenged. For example, some researchers argue that one's commitment to the values and norms of the profession is not necessarily inconsistent or conflicting with those of the organization (eg. Bartol, 1979; Lee at al., 2000). Empirical researches have found positive relationship between professional commitment and organizational commitment (eg. Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Wallace, 1993; Cetin, 2006; Mohamed et al., 2006).

Besides, individuals enter organizations with their own career plan and would be attracted to the current company if its practices satisfy their career needs (Chang, 1999). This implies that the individuals' level of career commitment will influence their level of organizational commitment because they are pursuing their career in their present company and they may consider leaving the organization when career growth opportunities in the organization are low (Whitener, 1997; Chang, 1999).

The importance of organizational factors in affecting attitudes or behaviours of employees has been widely advocated (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen & Meyer, 1990). This is related to the psychological contract which indicates the employees' beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between their organization and themselves. Employees would be attracted to the current company

if the company's practices satisfy their career needs.   Individuals will be more attracted to the company if they possess stronger career desire. This is because they pursue their career in their present organization and because the current company does not have to be the only one that they will be working for in the future (Chang, 1999; Goulet and Singh, 2002). Highly career-committed individuals may be more motivated when their expectations are satisfied by the organization than those who are less committed to their career as they have higher levels of expectations from the organization they are currently serving.

However, the association between organizational commitment and professional commitment may be weak as knowledge workers try to reduce their dependency on the organization to build up and maintain their expertise status and demand for decentralized flexibility and autonomy from their organization (Tam, Korczynski and Frenkel, 2002). Academics classified as professionals are viewed as knowledge workers who exhibit strong levels of autonomy, expertise, and self-regulation (Blau, 1988). The positive but weak relationship between organizational commitment and professional commitment may be due to the dual dependent relationship between the organization and the knowledge workers whereby the organization depends on the knowledge workers for their theoretical and contextual knowledge while the knowledge workers depends on the organization for resources including contextual knowledge to create new knowledge, research funding and conference support amongst others (Tam et al., 2002).

While the positive relationship of professional commitment and affective organizational commitment has already been established in the literature,, there is no previous studies which have explored how organizational factors such as POS would influence one's level of professional commitment which in turn would influence his or her attitudes and behaviors in the organization.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the possible mediating role of professional commitment on the effect of POS on important outcome variables such as affective organizational commitment and turnover intention. It is possible that POS will influence the employees' commitment to the academic profession (professional commitment) which in turn will influence important outcome variables as mentioned earlier.

In the context of higher education, academics normally perceive the level of support that the universities are providing to them in terms of support that are provided for scholarly activities such as research and development purposes (for example, conference support, research funding and recognition for research output) or training and development (for example, support for continued professional education or higher degrees). These support provided by the organization will facilitate the realization of the academics' professional expectations. This perception of POS will influence the employees' commitment to the academic profession (professional commitment) by being more involved in the activities of his profession such as producing more publishable research papers and engaging in quality teaching.

However, for academic staff, they may be satisfied with the intrinsic aspects of their job and external support, which means they are satisfied with inner rewards, support from colleagues, recognition from disciplines, economic compensation and security. In order words, they may experience high level of self-efficacy in research and high professional commitment but at the same time may still demonstrate low level of organizational commitment (Capelleras, 2005). This recent study calls for more studies to better understand the relationship between professional commitment and affective organizational commitment especially in the context of academics working in private higher institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

The empirical past studies conducted on professional commitment and organizational commitment suggests that professional commitment affects individuals' behaviors including organizational commitment and thus, organizations need to ensure that employees are committed to both their careers and their organization as they are less likely to leave their organization. On the other hand, they may consider leaving the organization when career growth opportunities in the organization are low.

In instances where teaching is perceived as the major organizationally mandated activity, it might be hypothesized that professionally committed employees with low perceived organizational support would allow their teaching activities to suffer (less time spent with students or requests for reduced teaching load), while their professional commitment (research projects begun, articles published or conference presentations undertaken) would remain constant or increase.

Based on the results and suggestions of Wallace (1993) and Lachman and Aranya (1986), this study proposed that POS may be the barometer of the extent to which the expectations of professional employees are being fulfilled. Hence, employees who express high level of POS may also express high levels of both professional and organizational commitment with correspondingly high performance on tasks associated with both types of commitment. On the hand, the level of professional commitment of employees who perceived lower POS may remain high while their organizational commitment is low. The lack of POS felt by these individuals would indicate that work expectations were not met, which in turn adversely affecting their organizational commitment.

Thus, the influence of POS on affective organizational commitment may be direct or indirect through the effect of POS on professional commitment as mentioned above. In this study, the following hypothesis is tested:-

Hypothesis 10: The positive influence of POS on affective organizational commitment will be partially mediated by professional commitment.

As Lee at al. (2000) spelled out, it is important to integrate professional commitment into models of organizational turnover. In fact, empirical research has supported negative relationship between professional commitment and turnover intention and positive relationship between turnover intention and actual intention (for example, Bartol, 1979; Lachman and Aranya, 1986; Meyer et al. 1993; Lee at al., 2000). These findings suggest that employees who are committed to their profession are less likely to leave the employing organization.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, employees with higher POS are less likely to leave the organization (Wayne et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and that POS may influence perception of professional commitment. In a recent study, Maertz et al. (2007) suggests that the effects of POS on turnover are not always fully mediated through affective commitment, as has been found in past POS studies (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades et al., 2001) and POS may influence turnover intention through other mechanisms. Hence, this study investigates the direct and indirect influence of POS on turnover intention through professional commitment.

Hypothesis 11: The negative influence of POS on turnover intention will be partially mediated by professional commitment.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this paper presents an overview on the important contributions of this study, especially its aims of providing new empirical evidence using the social exchange theory and organizational support theory to predict the influence of the four(4) supportive HRM practices, namely pay satisfaction, career development opportunities, work-life balance and leader-member exchange (LMX) on two (2) important employee attitudes and behaviours, namely affective organizational commitment and turnover intention in the context of Malaysia's higher education industry. Besides, this paper also discusses the development of the relevant hypotheses as suggested by the social exchange and organizational support theories and past literatures. The hypotheses provide the mechanism to test whether the hypothesized model of this study fits the data to be collected. Through the discussion of the literature, the major contributions of this study to the body of knowledge on the antecedents and outcomes of POS according to the social exchange and organizational support theories are also highlighted.

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