

The Impact of Self-Efficacy and Perceived Organizational Support on the Impostor Phenomenon

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An individual's perceptions concerning their validity in the workplace, whether realistic or not, become the reality for the individual, and can have important consequences on the resulting organizational behavior of that individual. This paper examines the self-perceptions of an individual and analyzes the relationship of self-efficacy and perceived organizational support with the impostor phenomenon in the workplace. The results of the study of 588 employees at a southeastern university indicated an inverse relationship that does exist between the impostor phenomenon and self-efficacy as well as the impostor phenomenon and perceived organizational support. Implications and future research suggestions are also recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Individual perceptions concerning the workplace as well as that individual's perceived fit within the workplace can be very important and have been the attention of a great deal of research (Hershcovis, Turner, Barling, Arnold, Dupre, Inness, LeBlanc & Sivanathan, 2007; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). These perceptions, either of self or the organization, become the reality that these individuals live with (Zinko, Ferris, Blass & Laird, 2007). Researchers have utilized several theories to explain these issues such as equity theory (Adams, 1963) which examines our inputs and outputs against a referent other, and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) that states that we judge ourselves based on another. Regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, they lead to both positive and negative outcomes (Suls & Wills, 1991). This paper explores these perceptions through the lens of the impostor phenomenon and perceived organizational support.

Impostor Phenomenon

The impostor phenomenon, as a construct, has been researched for over 35 years and was initially used to help explain why highly successful people felt like they were imposters with feelings of phoniness at work (Clance & Imes, 1978). The initial sample studied involved high achieving women but the idea of the impostor phenomenon has since been studied as it relates to depression (McGregor, Gee & Posey,

2008) fear of success and failure (Fried-Buchalter, 1997) Perfectionism (Henning, Ey, & Shaw, 1998) the Big Five personality dimensions (Bernard, Dollinger & Ramaniah, 2002) self-perceptions (Leary, Patton, Orlando & Funk, 2000) and other topics relating to the self.

The imposter phenomenon, while related to other constructs regarding the perceptions one has of the self relating to doubt, has been shown to differ in at least six different characteristics. These six characteristics include: 1) feelings of intellectual phoniness; 2) a belief that one's success is attributed to luck or hard work and not ability; 3) a lack of confidence in one's ability to repeat past achievements; 4) a fear of being evaluated by others and failure; 5) the inability to derive pleasure from past achievements and 6) a fear that one's incompetence will be discovered by others (Clance & Imes, 1978).

As discussed by Grubb and McDowell (2012), these feelings of phoniness and concern are experienced across gender, race and other demographic variables. Traditionally, the concept of the imposter phenomenon has been used as an independent variable to explain, in part, how the imposter phenomenon can impact personality, perceptions of the self, depression, academic performance, eating disorder recovery and other different outcomes. The purpose of this paper is in response to the call from Grubb and McDowell (2012) to explore the relationship between the imposter phenomenon and different management related constructs. In their 2012 paper they discussed the impact of the imposter phenomenon on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and employee commitment. Their research showed that the imposter phenomenon has a negative effect on both OCBs and employee commitment. In order to increase our understanding of how the relationship between the imposter phenomenon and other management related topics, we have chosen to investigate the impact that self-efficacy and perceived organizational support have on the imposter phenomenon. Our thoughts as we proceeded with the investigation involved the desire to investigate the two factors as they both relate to constructs needed to support one's ability to perform in the workplace.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy and perceived organizational support are two of many elements associated with productivity and positive employee related outcomes. These separate constructs were chosen because they, in part, represent global aspects of one's self perception and one's relationship with the organization. While previous research reported a relationship between organizational commitment and the imposter phenomenon (Grubb & McDowell, 2012) the current study investigates the relationship between the employee and organization from the notion that not only does the employee need to feel like they are efficacious and capable of performing well, they need to feel like the organization supports them and is concerned with them as well.

Self-efficacy and perceived organizational support are both well researched constructs that have significantly contributed to our understanding of human behavior in the workplace. Self-efficacy was first discussed by Bandura (1977). It differed from the notion of one's self-esteem. Self-efficacy is described as one's belief in one's ability to succeed and attain a given level of performance (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy has been shown to be significantly related to a myriad of different outcomes such as sales performance (Gupta, Ganster & Kepes, 2013); interviewing performance (Shantz & Latham, 2012); exam performance (Gaylon, Blondin, Yaw, Nalls & Williams, 2012); customer service (Raub & Liao, 2012); job satisfaction and performance (Judge & Bono, 2001) and a host of other topics related to one's health. The research generally shows that self-efficacy is a significant self-construct that is positively related to productivity and the successful accomplishment of work related tasks.

In 2010, Ives, using a sample of graduate students (n=84) reported a negative correlation between the imposter phenomenon and self-efficacy ($r = -.42, p < .01$ for the pretest and $r = -.44, p < .01$ for the post test) regarding the use of an online orientation program. The negative relationship between self-efficacy and the imposter phenomenon is expected based on the notion that more efficacious people will have greater confidence in their abilities and will therefore have fewer feelings of phoniness and concerns of being found to be incapable of performing. We have the ability to study this relationship beyond Ives' research with our larger sample size and more generalizable sample.

Hypothesis One: Self-efficacy will be negatively related to the imposter phenomenon.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support is also a well researched construct that plays an important role in how employees feel in the workplace. Just as employers want to feel that the employees are committed to the organization, employees want to feel like the organization is committed to them. Perceived organizational support can be traced back to the original work done by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa (1986) as they discussed how employees form beliefs about the organization values their contributions and is concerned about their overall wellbeing. The initial study investigated the exchange relationship between the employee and employer and how the relationship impacts employee absenteeism. Since then, perceived organizational support has been linked to many different employee and organizational constructs.

In 2002, Rhodes and Eisenberger conducted a meta-analysis of perceived organizational support research to organize and consolidate the literature. Their study reviewed both the antecedents and consequences of perceived organizational support. The original antecedents of fairness, supervisor support and organizational rewards and job conditions (1986) were well supported as antecedents of perceived organizational support. Further, they noted several conclusions regarding the consequences of perceived organizational support. More specifically, they reported that perceived organizational support had a strong positive relationship with affective commitment, job satisfaction and was negatively related to turnover intentions. Though not as strong, there was still a significant negative relationship with job involvement, extra-role behavior and other forms of performance.

These findings also showed that perceived organizational support impacted the way that employees feel while on the job. "Employees with high POS generally find their job more pleasurable, are in a better mood at work, and suffer fewer strain symptoms such as fatigue, burnout, anxiety and headaches" (Eisenberger et al., 2002). It is our supposition that when employees experience low POS, the aforementioned negative consequences may lead to an increase in imposter like feelings. The anxiety, burnout, fatigue and headaches associated with feelings of a lack of organizational support may cause the employee to suspiciously look inward with feelings of paranoia and self-doubt.

Hypothesis Two: Perceived organizational support will be negatively related to the imposter phenomenon.

METHODS

Sample

An electronic survey was emailed to the staff of a large university in the southeastern United States. The respondents were not coerced to complete the survey, but they were given time and computer availability to take the survey at their convenience. Of the 588 usable surveys completed, 79% responded as white, 14% as black, 1% Asian and the rest indicated "other." In addition, 77% of the respondents were males and the average age was 45. The participants were also asked to indicate their number of years of work experience, which was 24, as well as their time with the university, which was 10 years. This data was obtained to help indicate the respondent's tendency to observe, accept, and adopt the values and norms of the organization (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).

Measures

Self-Efficacy was measured using the ten item general self-efficacy scale developed by Schwagerler & Jerusalem (1995) (previous $\alpha = .84$; Riggs & Knight, 1994). This scale included such items as "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough," "If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want," and "It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals." These items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from (1) "not true at all" to (5) "very true."

Perceived organizational support was examined using an eight items scale derived from the Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) scale. The eight item scale utilized is a shortened version of the original 36 item scale which has been found to have good reliability (previous $\alpha = .88$; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski & Rhoades, 2002). Items include statements such as “The organization values my contribution to its well-being,” “the organization really cares about my well-being,” and “The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.” These items were assessed on a five point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.”

The impostor phenomenon was examined using the 20 item scale develop by Clance (1985) (previous $\alpha = .92$; Chrisman, Pieper, Clance, Holland & Glickauf-Hughes, 1995) that included items such as “I can give the impression that I’m more competent than I really am,” “I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me,” and “I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.” The responses ranged from (1) “not at all true” to (5) “very true.”

Data and Scale Analysis

The data were screened and prepared using Kline’s (1997) recommended procedures. After analysis, univariate normality was assessed by examining each item for skewness and kurtosis. The test showed a normal distribution. In addition, Cronbach’s alpha was used to establish the reliability of the scales (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Henson, 2001). The coefficient alpha’s for each scale was well above Nunnally and Bernstein’s (1994) suggested reliability coefficient of .70. These reliability estimates in addition to the overall means, standard deviations, and correlations of the latent variables can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, RELIABILITY ESTIMATES, AND CORRELATIONS

Item	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3
Impostor Phenomenon	2.198	.618	(.891)		
Self-Efficacy	4.157	.533	-.360**	(.887)	
Perceived Organizational Support	3.213	.950	-.101*	.005	(.915)

** $p < .001$

** $p < .05$

Cronbach’s Alphas on the Diagonals

RESULTS

This study examined the relationship of both self-efficacy and perceived organizational support with impostor phenomenon. Hypothesis one posited a negative relationship between self-efficacy and the impostor phenomenon. Similarly, hypothesis two posited a negative relationship between perceived organizational support and the impostor phenomenon. In order to test both of these hypotheses, regression analysis was used. The first step included entering the control variables of the number of years of work experience, the number of years working for this specific employer, and the age of the respondent. The second step included entering self-efficacy and perceived organizational support.

Model one, which consisted of only the control variables of years of work experience, years of work with this employer, and age resulted in an ANOVA with an F statistic of .423 that was not statistically significant ($p < .05$). The second model, which included the control variables with self-efficacy and perceived organizational support, was statistically significant with an F statistic of 18.555 ($p < .01$). These predictor variables improved the fit of the model with an R^2 of .144 and a ΔR^2 of .142 that was statistically significant ($p < .01$). Additionally, the relationship of self-efficacy and perceived organizational support with the impostor phenomenon was examined using standardized and

unstandardized coefficients, statistical significance, and confidence intervals. The results of the analysis indicate that both self-efficacy and perceived organizational support are both negatively statistically significantly related to the impostor phenomenon ($p < .01$), thus supporting both hypothesis one and two. Table 2 provides a summary of these results.

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PREDICTION OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	95% CI		VIF
				Lower	Upper	
<u>Step 1:</u>						
Years Work Experience	.001	.000	.002	.000	.000	1.014
Years Work at University	-.002	.004	-.029	-.009	.005	1.227
Age	-.002	.003	-.028	-.007	.004	1.222
<u>Step 2:</u>						
Years Work Experience	-.001	.000	-.001	-.000	.000	1.024
Years Work at University	-.003	.003	-.035	-.009	.004	1.237
Age	.000	.002	-.007	-.005	.004	1.233
Self-Efficacy	-.411	.045	-.358**	-.500	-.322	1.002
Perceived Organizational Support	-.077	.026	-.120*	-.127	-.027	1.021

Note. R^2 for first model = .002 R^2 for second model = .144 $\Delta R^2 = .142$
 ** $p < .001$ * $p < .01$ N = 588 Two-tailed Tests.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between self-efficacy and the impostor phenomenon was both negative and significant. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Ives (2010) but the relationship revealed in the current study was not as strong, $-.36, p < .01$ vs $-.42, p < .01$. While not entirely different, the sample in the Ives (2010) study consisted of students participating in an orientation for graduate studies. Our sample contained actual working adults who were employed in a myriad of different occupations ranging from blue collar to administrative. The results clearly show a consistent negative relationship between self-efficacy and the impostor phenomenon. Although these constructs may appear as opposing constructs, the moderate level of the negative correlation suggests that they are not.

The negative relationship is as expected where more efficacious respondents showed lower levels of impostor like feelings. Although the results are as we expected, we still have less of an understanding of why the impostor phenomenon exists to begin with. There are likely other factors aside from one's efficacy that contribute to one's impostor like feelings. To this point, our second hypothesis regarding perceived organizational support may provide some additional information.

A statistically significant, negative relationship between perceived organizational support and the impostor phenomenon was noted, $r = -.10, p < .01$. Although the strength of the negative relationship was not as strong as we suspected, it was reported as highly significant and consistent. This leads us to believe that the support one feels from the organization can impact one's impostor like feelings. Without felt support from the organization, employees may be left to conjure up reasons for the perceived lack of support on their own and these internally contrived reasons may play into the employee's own impostor suspicions. Although we did not investigate the relationship between perceived organizational support relative to the support given to other employees, we imagine that if an employee believes that other employees are more highly supported by the organization, the strength of the negative suspicions and impostor like feelings would increase.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research concerning individuals and the organizations in which they work is important to understanding organizational behavior. This research has operationalized the issue of the impostor phenomenon in the context of self-efficacy and perceived organizational support and found that there is an inverse relationship. Those that suffer from the impostor phenomenon will invariably exhibit lower levels of self-efficacy, which can create additional issues in the workplace, even though that individual is very capable with high ability. An important point in relationship to this is that those who perceive high organizational support tend to demonstrate lower levels of the impostor phenomenon. Thus, supportive organizations may alleviate some of the issues associated with lower self-efficacy by diminishing the effects of the impostor phenomenon.

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