



# The Role of Social Support Systems in Promoting Employee Resilience in the Workplace

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## Abstract

This study investigates the role of social support systems in promoting employee resilience within the contemporary workplace. Employee well-being and performance are increasingly recognized as vital components of organizational success, and the study explores how social support systems contribute to enhancing resilience among employees. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with 8 employees from diverse industries in the corporate sector. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurrent patterns and themes, and it was analyzed using the QDA Miner, a qualitative analyzing software.

The study uncovers a range of supportive mechanisms that employees rely on, including emotional support from colleagues, instrumental support from supervisors, and informational support from both internal and external sources. It highlights the significance of reciprocal support exchanges and emphasizes the dynamic nature of these interactions in fostering employee resilience.

**Keywords:** Coping Strategies, Employee Resilience, Potential Barriers, Social Support, Workplace

## **Introduction**

The modern-day workplace can be a demanding and challenging environment, with employees often facing multiple stressors that can affect their well-being and productivity. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of resilience in the workplace, which refers to an individual's ability to adapt and cope with stress and adversity. Social support is a key factor in promoting resilience, which can provide employees with emotional, informational, and practical resources to help them navigate workplace challenges.

Social support can take many forms, including formal support provided by the organization, such as employee assistance programs, and informal support from colleagues, friends, and family. The role of social support systems in promoting employee resilience is an area of increasing interest in organizational research, as employers seek to promote employee well-being and engagement.

This study aims to explore the role of social support systems in promoting employee resilience in the workplace. Specifically, this study will investigate the types of social support that employees perceive to be most helpful, as well as the factors that influence the effectiveness of social support in promoting resilience.

By understanding the role of social support in promoting employee resilience, organizations can develop strategies to support their employees and promote a positive work environment. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on workplace resilience and social support and to inform organizational policies and practices to support employee well-being and productivity.

## **Literature Review**

Resilience has become an increasingly important concept in the field of organizational psychology, as organizations seek to support employees in managing workplace stress and challenges. Social support has been identified as a key factor in promoting resilience, with numerous studies highlighting the positive impact of social support on employee well-being and engagement. Social support can take many forms, including emotional support, such as listening and empathy, informational support, such as advice and guidance, and practical support, such as assistance with tasks and responsibilities. Research has shown that all forms of social support can contribute to employee resilience. However, the specific types of support that are most effective

may vary depending on the individual and the context. This literature review aims to synthesize the research on the role of social support in promoting employee resilience in the workplace.

According to Masten and Obradovic's *Competence and Resilience in Development* (2008), resilience is the ability to adapt and cope with adversity, and social support is a crucial factor that contributes to resilience. Social support can come from different sources, including family, friends, colleagues, and supervisors. Research shows that social support from supervisors and colleagues is particularly crucial for employee resilience (Schreurs, et al., 2012). Social support can help employees to cope with stress, and feel valued, and supported, which, in turn, can promote resilience in the workplace. "Social Support and Employee Well-being: The Conditioning Effect of Perceived Patterns of Supportive Exchange" by Nahum-Shani, Bamberger, and Bacharach (2011) investigates the role of perceived patterns of support exchange in employee well-being. The study reveals that mutual support exchanges, characterized by reciprocity, have a positive impact on well-being, while one-sided and low-support patterns are associated with lower well-being. The article offers valuable insights into the quality and reciprocity of support interactions in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of these factors in promoting employee well-being.

Research suggests that different types of social support can impact employee resilience differently. For example, emotional support, such as listening and empathizing with an employee's problems, can be more effective in promoting employee resilience than instrumental support, such as providing practical assistance (Perry & Pescosolido, 2015). Similarly, informational support, such as providing guidance and advice, can be more effective in promoting resilience than appraisal support, which involves providing feedback on an employee's performance.

While social support can promote employee resilience, there may be barriers to accessing social support in the workplace. For example, employees may feel hesitant to seek social support from their supervisors or colleagues due to fear of appearing vulnerable or weak (Schreurs, et al., 2012). Moreover, employees in certain work cultures may perceive seeking social support as a sign of incompetence or inability to handle work-related stress (Perry & Pescosolido, 2015). Therefore, creating a culture that promotes social support and reduces the stigma around seeking support can help overcome these barriers.

Social support can also impact employee resilience by promoting work-life balance. Research shows that employees who perceive higher levels of social support from their supervisors and colleagues are likelier to report better work-life balance (Brough, P., & Frame, R. 2004). Work-life balance, in turn, can promote resilience by reducing work-related stress and improving overall well-being.

### **Research Objective**

- To identify the different types of social support that employees perceive and experience within the workplace environment.
- To understand the significance of the sources of social support in building employee resilience.
- To discover potential barriers and limitations in accessing and receiving social support within the workplace.
- To explore how social support systems influence employees' ability to cope with and recover from workplace challenges and setbacks.

### **Research Question**

- What is the influence of social support systems on employee resilience in the workplace?
- How do employees perceive the effectiveness of these systems in promoting their well-being and work performance?

## Research Methodology

### *Conceptual Definition*

**Social Support:** Social support refers to the emotional, instrumental, or informational assistance, encouragement, and resources provided by individuals, such as friends, family members, colleagues, or supervisors, to help individuals cope with challenges, stressors, or adversities in their personal or professional lives. Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985)

**Employee Resilience:** Promoting resilience involves the deliberate efforts, strategies, or interventions aimed at enhancing an individual's capacity to adapt, recover, and maintain psychological and emotional well-being in the face of adversity, setbacks, or stressful situations. Masten, A. S. (2001)

**Workplace:** The workplace refers to the physical or virtual environment in which an individual carries out their employment-related activities, including interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and the organization as a whole, as well as the context where work tasks are performed. Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006)

### *Operational Definition*

The role of social support systems in promoting employee resilience in the workplace refers to the study of how the social support networks of individuals within a workplace can impact their ability to cope with stressors and challenges. Social support systems can include various forms of support, such as emotional, informational, and instrumental support, provided by co-workers, supervisors, and the organization itself. Employee resilience, the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, is essential for maintaining productivity and overall well-being in the workplace. Therefore, understanding and promoting the role of social support systems can lead to better employee resilience and ultimately, a more positive work environment.

### *Research Design*

The research is a Descriptive Design.

### *Population of the study*

The population of this research will be based on people from outside who came to Bangalore to work. The study will be done on a minimum of 8 participants.

### *Sampling Technique*

A purposive sampling technique will be used for this study. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who have specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research question. In this case, participants will be selected based on their experience with social support systems in the workplace, and their ability to provide rich and detailed information about the topic.

### *Sampling Unit*

The sampling unit for this study would be individual employees. This is because the study aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of employees about social support systems and resilience in the workplace. Therefore, individual employees would be the appropriate unit of analysis for this topic.

### *Inclusion criteria for participants:*

1. Employees from outside of Bangalore.
2. Employees who are at the junior level or who have experience for less than 2 years.

### *Tools*

The tool is a self-made questionnaire. The interview questions will include topics such as their experience with social support, the types of social support they receive, how it affects promoting resilience in the workplace, barriers from seeking out social support, and their opinion on improving their social support.

### *Methods of data collection*

An In-depth one-on-one interview with an employee who has relevant experiences or perspectives on the topic being studied. The interview will be through face to face, a telephone call, or a video call.

### *Data Analysis*

The data are analysed using Thematic Analysis with QDA Miner, which involves importing text data, creating codes to represent themes, annotating segments for context, coding text using predefined categories, and exploring the data using tools like queries and visualizations.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Theme: Definition of social support**

The theme of "Definition of Social Support in the Workplace" emerged clearly from the gathered data, with all participants providing their perspectives on what social support within the workplace means to them. The common thread across all responses was the recognition of social support as a safety net or a network of people and resources that offer assistance, encouragement, and understanding, particularly during challenging or stressful times. As, *"Social support in the workplace is like having a safety net made up of your coworkers, supervisors, and the overall work environment"* (Participant 8). This definition captures the essence of social support in the workplace as a multifaceted concept, involving both individuals and the broader work environment.

The participants' shared understanding of social support in the workplace underscores the significance of interpersonal relationships and a supportive work environment. This consensus is a testament to the universal nature of this definition, emphasizing the fundamental role of social support in fostering resilience and well-being among employees. The workplace is not merely a space for performing job tasks; it is also a social environment where individuals spend a significant portion of their lives. Therefore, the quality of interactions

with colleagues, supervisors, and the overall work atmosphere can have a profound impact on an employee's ability to navigate challenges and stress.

### **Theme: Sources of Social Support**

#### **Sub-Theme: Supervisor, Mentors, Colleagues, Friends and Family**

*"Specific sources of social support I've received within my workplace are my manager, my group coordinator, and my seniors." (Participant 7)*

*"Mostly from my colleagues and supervisors as they have more knowledge about the work and they also help us understand what to do and what not within the workplace so that we can do our work efficiently and effectively. And from friends and family, I received emotional support. (Participant 3)*

The theme "Sources of Social Support" highlights the key figures within the workplace who serve as pillars of assistance and encouragement for employees. In this context, all participants unanimously identified colleagues, supervisors, and immediate friends and family as the primary sources of social support. This consistent identification underlines the critical role played by these individuals in fostering resilience and well-being in the workplace.

Participant 7 pointed out, "Specific sources of social support I've received within my workplace are my manager, my group coordinator, and my seniors". This acknowledgment highlights the significance of both peer and managerial relationships in providing social support. It is noteworthy that support is not limited to a single source but rather extends across different levels and areas of the organizational hierarchy.

The mention of colleagues as a source of social support emphasizes the importance of peer relationships in the workplace. These relationships often develop naturally as employees work closely together and share common experiences and challenges. Colleagues are more likely to understand the day-to-day struggles and can offer emotional support, as well as practical help when needed.



Supervisors also emerge as significant sources of social support, as they are often in a position to provide guidance, resources, and encouragement. Their experience and expertise make them valuable mentors and allies for employees facing work-related challenges.

Immediate team members, as identified by the participants, are crucial contributors to the support network. These individuals work closely together on projects and share a sense of unity and camaraderie. Their mutual involvement and shared goals make them a natural source of support, as they can offer both emotional reassurance and instrumental help.

The recognition of colleagues, supervisors, and immediate team members as the primary sources of social support underscores the collaborative nature of support systems in the workplace. This theme highlights the interconnectedness of individuals within the organization and their roles in promoting employee resilience and well-being.

### **Theme: Impact of Social Support on Resilience**

**Code:** Encouragement, Collaborative co-worker, Boosted confidence

*“Among these sources, my team members have had the most significant impact on my resilience”. (Participant 8)*

*“I would say my colleagues as we all face the same problems and situations within the workplace because as coworkers we discuss and shared the problems to get a solution which helps in staying resilient emotionally and physically while maintaining the positive attitude”. (Participant 3)*

The theme "Impact of Social Support on Resilience" underlines the profound influence that social support within the workplace has on individuals' ability to rebound from setbacks and enhance their overall resilience. In this context, participants unanimously recognized colleagues and team members as the most significant sources of support that contribute to their resilience. These individuals serve as essential pillars of strength, and the examples shared by participants illustrate the transformative effects of teamwork and mutual encouragement.

Participant 8 eloquently emphasized, "Among these sources, my team members have had the most significant impact on my resilience." This statement encapsulates the vital role played by colleagues and team members in boosting resilience. The collaborative efforts of a team can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a shared sense of purpose. When employees face adversity, the collective strength of their team can be a powerful motivator to bounce back.

The examples shared by participants that highlight how their teams rallied together to overcome setbacks are illuminating. Such instances underscore the importance of teamwork, as well as the role of emotional support provided by colleagues during challenging times.

Supervisors and managers, as identified by the participants, also play a pivotal role in guiding employees through challenges. With their experience and expertise, they offer valuable mentorship and support, often leading by example. Their guidance and reassurance can significantly contribute to employees' ability to handle workplace stress and adversity.

This theme highlights the remarkable role of colleagues, team members, supervisors, and managers in enhancing employee resilience. Their combined impact on individual and team-level resilience underscores the interconnectedness of social support, teamwork, and leadership within the workplace.

### **Theme: Types of Social Support Received**

#### **Sub-Theme: Emotional, Informational, Instrumental, Appraisal**

The theme "Types of Social Support Received" highlights the diverse forms of support that participants have experienced within their workplace. The recognition of emotional, instrumental, and informational support as crucial components of social support underscores the multi-faceted nature of assistance provided in the workplace.

*Emotional support involved encouragement and empathy during difficult times (Participant 1)*

Emotional support, as described by the participants, involves receiving encouragement and empathy during challenging or stressful times. This type of support not only boosts morale but also provides a sense of validation and understanding.

*Instrumental support has been crucial when team members or supervisors lend a hand with tasks or share their expertise to resolve work-related challenges (Participant 8)*

Instrumental support, another key facet of social support, serves to provide practical assistance and resources to address work-related challenges. Colleagues and team members who lend a hand with tasks and share their expertise contribute to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.

*Informational support provides guidance and knowledge to address specific work-related issues (Participant 8)*

Informational support is also recognized by participants as a valuable form of social support. It involves guidance and offering solutions to address specific work-related challenges. Colleagues and supervisors who freely exchange advice and insights contribute to enhanced problem-solving and overall adaptability.

*Have received appraisal in the form of a hike and promotion within a year of joining a company for exhibiting exceptional performance at work (Participant 5)*

Receiving an appraisal in the form of a hike and promotion within just a year of joining a company for exhibiting exceptional performance at work is a remarkable achievement. It signifies not only the individual's dedication and outstanding contributions but also the organization's recognition of talent and commitment. Such rapid career progression is a testament to the individual's skills, hard work, and ability to make a significant impact in a relatively short time frame. It also highlights the company's proactive approach in nurturing and rewarding talent, which can boost employee morale and motivation, fostering a culture of excellence and growth within the organization. This accomplishment serves as a motivating example for others and demonstrates the potential for rapid advancement in a company that values and rewards exceptional performance.

The multifaceted nature of social support within the workplace, encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational support, highlights the significance of a holistic approach to employee well-being and resilience.

## **Theme: Contribution of Social Support in Handling Challenges and Stress**

**Sub Theme:** Enhance Knowledge, Enhance Well-being

*“They also helped me with some of the tasks that I was struggling with and gave me positive feedback on my work. With the help of my team, I was able to overcome the setback and improve my relationship with the client. I learned how to be more assertive, confident, and professional in dealing with challenging situations. I also realized that I was not alone, and that I had a network of people who cared for me and supported me. This boosted my morale, motivation, and performance at work” (Participant 4)*

*“So, my senior group coordinator came to me and he said, it's okay, not an issue, tomorrow we'll try harder again. So, it's the end of the day. Sometimes it doesn't work out, but still, we have tomorrow, we can work again tomorrow” (Participant 7)*

The qualitative findings provided by Participant 4 and Participant 7 shed light on the significant impact of support and resilience in the workplace. Participant 4's experience highlights the positive effects of receiving assistance from their team when facing challenges. Additionally, the participant's mention of personal growth, increased assertiveness, and improved professional skills indicate the transformative potential of such experiences. Their realization of the supportive network around them, akin to the concept of a "social support network" is discussed by underscoring how it can boost morale, motivation, and performance.

Participant 7's remarks emphasize the importance of a constructive and optimistic perspective when dealing with setbacks. Participant 7's senior group coordinator's supportive response reflects effective leadership and mentoring, further underlining the role of a supportive workplace environment in bolstering resilience.

Together, these findings underscore the importance of social support, personal growth, and an optimistic perspective in promoting resilience and enhanced performance in the workplace. They highlight the value of both individual and organizational factors in fostering resilience among employees, ultimately contributing to their success and well-being.

**Theme: Promotion of Resilience through Social Support****Sub Theme:** Reassurance for the employee, Enhance Well-Being

*“One thing I learned from working is that everyone is different so what we contribute to our team is different meaning what I can do, other teammates cannot do having that mindset helps keep a positive attitude or helps me to be resilient” (participant 3)*

*“It's like having a group of people who genuinely care about your well-being and success. When you face adversity or a challenging situation, this support network is there to provide reassurance, share their experiences, and offer solutions” (Participant 6)*

The insights from Participant 3 highlight the significance of recognizing individual differences within a team and how this awareness can foster a positive attitude and resilience. Participant 6's remarks reflect the crucial role of a supportive network within the workplace. The findings underscore the importance of both recognizing and leveraging individual strengths and fostering supportive relationships within a team for enhanced resilience and overall success in the workplace.

**Theme: Barriers to Seeking or Receiving Social Support****Sub-Theme:** Fear of appearing weak or incompetent, Hierarchical Barriers

*“Yes, I've encountered barriers to seeking or receiving social support in the workplace. One significant barrier has been a fear of appearing incompetent or weak in front of colleagues or supervisors. This fear prevents me from reaching out for help when needed” (Participant 5)*

The theme "Barriers to Seeking or Receiving Social Support" sheds light on the challenges individuals may encounter when attempting to access the social support they need in the workplace. Participant 5 emphasized a significant barrier - the fear of appearing incompetent or weak.

The fear of appearing incompetent or weak is a common obstacle to seeking support, as it touches upon individuals' concerns about their professional image and how they are perceived by colleagues and supervisors.

Many employees worry that asking for help or acknowledging their struggles may be interpreted as an admission of inadequacy or inability to handle their responsibilities effectively.

This fear of appearing weak or incompetent is related to the concept of stigma within the workplace. Stigma arises when individuals perceive that seeking support or sharing their challenges may lead to negative judgments, stereotyping, or potential repercussions (Link & Phelan, 2006). Stigmatization can have a detrimental impact on individuals' willingness to reach out for support, potentially leading to increased stress and decreased well-being.

*Yes, occasionally, hierarchical barriers existed where seeking support from superiors felt intimidating (Participant 1)*

The presence of hierarchical barriers, as mentioned by Participant 1, underscores the challenges that can arise when seeking support from superiors within an organization. This finding resonates with the research by Hart et al. (2018), which highlights that hierarchical structures can create power differentials that make employees reluctant to approach superiors for assistance, as it may feel intimidating or even risky. This dynamic can hinder effective communication and support systems within the workplace. To address this issue, organizations should consider implementing strategies to promote open communication, trust, and approachability among superiors to mitigate these barriers and create a more supportive and collaborative work environment.

## **Theme: Coping Strategies**

**Sub Theme:** Build a strong relationship, seeking advice and information

*“One coping strategy I've developed is to build strong relationships with colleagues and mentors based on trust and mutual respect. By maintaining open communication channels, I can readily seek support when facing work-related challenges. I've also learned to balance my workload effectively to reduce the need for support during stressful periods” (Participant 8)*

The theme "Coping Strategies Related to Social Support" reflects the proactive approaches participants have developed to navigate workplace challenges effectively. Participant 8, in particular, emphasized the importance

of building strong relationships with colleagues and mentors based on trust and mutual respect as a coping strategy.

Building strong relationships within the workplace is a valuable strategy for seeking and providing support. When employees establish trust and mutual respect with their colleagues and mentors, it creates a foundation for open communication. These relationships can serve as a source of emotional support, providing encouragement and empathy during difficult times, as well as instrumental support in the form of practical assistance or resources. Open communication is a key component of these coping strategies. By maintaining transparent and supportive dialogues with colleagues and mentors, employees can readily seek assistance when facing work-related challenges.

*“When I face a problem or a challenge, I try to use active coping strategies that can help me solve it or cope with it. For example, I may seek information or advice from someone who has more knowledge or experience than me, or I may engage in problem-solving or planning” (Participant 4)*

The finding underscores the importance of active coping strategies when dealing with problems or challenges. Seeking information, and advice, engaging in problem-solving, and planning are valuable tactics that empower individuals to take control of their circumstances and work towards constructive solutions. These strategies align with established coping theory and highlight the effectiveness of a proactive, solution-oriented approach to managing life's difficulties. Recognizing and promoting these strategies can be valuable for individuals seeking to enhance their coping abilities and for professionals looking to provide support and guidance in challenging situations.

### **Theme: Additional Insights**

#### **Sub-Theme: Mutual Support, Continuous Encouragement**

*“I believe fostering a culture of mutual support and understanding in the workplace is crucial. When employees feel valued and supported, they are more resilient in the face of challenges” (Participant 1)*

The findings highlight a critical theme, emphasizing the significance of fostering a culture of support within the workplace for enhancing employee well-being and performance. This theme underscores the pivotal role

that organizations play in promoting a supportive work environment and, in turn, the positive impact it has on employees' abilities to handle challenges and maintain resilience.

The statement resonates with the fundamental belief that an organizational culture that values and encourages social support is a cornerstone of employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall success. It recognizes that the workplace is not just a space for tasks and responsibilities but also a social arena where interpersonal relationships and support networks significantly influence individual well-being.

*"Organizations that encourage and facilitate social support are more likely to have employees who can bounce back from setbacks, manage stress, and maintain resilience effectively" (Participant 4)*

Moreover, the assertion that "Organizations that encourage and facilitate social support are more likely to have employees who can bounce back from setbacks, manage stress, and maintain resilience effectively" reinforces the idea that organizational policies, practices, and leadership can significantly impact employee resilience. Organizations that actively promote and facilitate social support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, peer support groups, and open communication channels, create an environment where employees feel valued, acknowledged, and encouraged.

These results resonate with the broader literature on workplace psychology and organizational behavior. Research has consistently demonstrated that supportive work environments reduce burnout, increase job satisfaction, and lead to higher levels of engagement among employees. When employees feel connected to their colleagues and supervisors, they are more likely to cope with workplace challenges and stress effectively. The presence of a support network fosters a sense of belonging, which, in turn, enhances resilience.

The theme highlights the essential role of organizations in nurturing a culture of support and the tangible benefits that stem from such initiatives. Organizations that recognize the value of social support in promoting employee well-being and resilience are better positioned to cultivate a positive workplace culture that ultimately benefits both individual employees and the organization as a whole.



## Implication of the Research

1. Organizations should recognize the importance of social support systems in promoting employee resilience. They should foster a supportive work environment that encourages employees to seek social support from their colleagues and supervisors. This can be achieved by promoting positive relationships among employees, providing opportunities for social interaction, and offering counseling and support services.
2. Individuals should be encouraged to develop and maintain strong social support networks, both within and outside of the workplace. They should actively seek out social support when facing difficult situations, such as work-related stress or personal problems.

## Conclusion

The unanimous recognition of social support as a safety net within the workplace underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships and a supportive work environment. Participants highlighted colleagues, supervisors, and immediate team members as primary sources of emotional, instrumental, and informational support, underscoring the central role of peer and managerial relationships in providing social support. This support significantly contributed to resilience, with colleagues and team members playing a crucial role in mutual encouragement and teamwork, while supervisors and managers provided guidance and support. The diverse forms of support, including emotional, instrumental, and informational, played distinct roles in handling workplace challenges and promoting a positive mindset. Furthermore, social support emerged as a key factor in bouncing back from work-related setbacks and played a vital role in motivating individuals to overcome adversity and prepare for future challenges.

The discussions highlight the critical role of social support as a safety net providing emotional comfort, practical assistance, and valuable insights, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration. The recognition of potential barriers related to the fear of appearing incompetent or weak underscores the need for a workplace culture that values vulnerability and acknowledges the challenges faced by all employees. The coping strategies developed by participants, such as building strong relationships and open communication, contribute to a supportive workplace culture that not only enhances individual resilience but also promotes organizational

success. Overall, these findings emphasize that social support within the workplace is not merely a luxury but a necessity for both individual well-being and the achievement of broader organizational goals.

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