



The Effect of EAP on Job Performance Based on Psychological Contract and Perceived Organizational Support

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Abstract

In order to study whether employee assistance programs have a significant impact on job performance, whether psychological contract and perceived organizational support play a mediating role in job performance, and thus provide practical operational strategies for relevant enterprises to propose human resource management suggestions to promote job performance, the implementation of employee assistance programs has been the subject of practical research. The findings indicate that addressing issues related to high turnover, job burnout, and absences cannot be separated from the importance of the psychological contract, perceived organizational support, and employee performance in organizational change. By applying structural equation modeling (SEM) to the data from front-line employees of several units in China, this research tested the relationships among employee assistance programs, psychological contracts, perceived organizational support, and job performance using SPSS and AMOS. The results indicate that employee assistance programs positively affect job performance; psychological contracts and perceived organizational support play a mediating role between employee assistance programs and employee job performance (JOP). Our research suggests that an employee assistance program can optimize frontline employee assistance work, build a mechanism to stimulate frontline employees' psychological contracts, and create an organizational environment full of perceived organizational support. This study innovatively uses the structural equation model for quantitative research. In addition, most previous studies on EPA were based on a single variable, psychological contract, and POS were used as the main intermediary variables to explore the mechanism of their impact on job performance so as to enhance the explanatory power of employee job performance.

Keywords:

Employee Assistance Program;
Psychological Contract;
Perceived Organizational Support;
Job Performance;
Front-line Employees.

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1- Introduction

The employee assistance plan originated in the United States in the 1920s. Enterprises have found that employees have problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and drug abuse [1]. In the 1960s, the United States was full of turbulence and noise, and employees had some new problems, such as domestic violence, divorce, work pressure, etc. Under this background, the content of the employee assistance plan continued to enrich and expand, and enterprises tried to help employees solve these psychological problems through employee assistance programs. At the end of the 20th century, especially since China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the influx of foreign enterprises into China, an employee assistance program (EAP) has also been implemented in China. China's early employee assistance plan was introduced by the top 500 multinational companies.

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Currently, China is under a market economic reform system with continuous social changes and deepening enterprise reform. The talent competition situation is becoming increasingly severe. Enterprise employees are constantly facing new challenges and severe career progress [2]. While bearing the pressure of occupational competition, they also have to bear the pressure of the profession itself. These include the following: pressure of work performance, pressure of work assessment, pressure of competition and elimination, pressure of safety regulations, etc. In addition, unreasonable salary distribution, backward management mode, unscientific system, hidden danger of work safety, worrying prospects of work development, work-life balance, and difficulty in taking care of family work are all sources of employee pressure [3]. These problems will have a negative impact on the mental health of employees. In particular, the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic has aggravated this phenomenon [4].

Long & Cooke (2023) [5] suggested that employee assistance programs can help improve the work performance of employees and strengthen the innovative development and team training of organizations. Early intervention and treatment help employees solve psychological problems at the embryonic stage rather than conducting intervention treatment when psychological problems develop to a relatively serious stage [6].

According to the relevant data of the World Health Organization, mental diseases were ranked first among the related diseases in China, and mental disease problems have become a concern of society. Front-line employees in enterprises have repeat work content, highly concentrated attention, long duration, high labor intensity, and frequent use overtime, resulting in insufficient sleep, which has effects on their physical and mental health. Many practices of employee assistance programs at home and abroad have affected humanistic assistance, the organizational atmosphere, and employee morale. From the perspective of employees, these active changes in the soft organizational environment will also have a positive effect on the establishment and consolidation of psychological contracts. The ultimate goal of an employee assistance program is to improve the productivity of the workplace, which must be achieved on the premise that the psychological contract between employees and the organization is reasonably formed, consolidated, and well managed. At present, in the Chinese context, there are few studies on the psychological state of enterprise employees and few on professional institutions, so it is impossible to evaluate the psychological state of enterprise employees through professional evaluation and guidance from professional institutions.

Therefore, the significance of this study is as follows. First, previous studies on the EAP have focused mainly on a single variable, and relatively few studies have investigated the EAP as the independent variable. Adding intermediate variables to explore the relationships between variables has theoretical significance and provides a new research perspective for further studying the influencing mechanism of employee performance. Second, it expands the relevant research on psychological contracts and organizational support, explores the influencing mechanism of psychological contracts and organizational support on EAP and employee performance, and enriches the relevant research model. Third, it promotes the deepening and improvement of human resource management theory. There are two aspects of this topic. First, the second-order variable of EAP is helpful for exploring the impact of second-order variables on psychological contracts, POS, and work performance. On the other hand, the mediating variables of psychological contracts and organizational support are studied and analyzed, and the mediating effect, as well as the organic combination and interaction of each variable, are tested. A relevant mechanism for improving employee performance is formed, which provides a new reference for future research and the expansion of human resource management theory.

The innovation of this study is as follows. First, in terms of the definition of EAP, previous studies focused more on the work and life of employees, while this paper focused on the impact on performance. Second, in terms of research methods, previous studies tend to include literature research, questionnaire surveys, and descriptive analysis. In addition to the above research methods, this study combined literature and empirical research, established a second-order structure, and analyzed a structural equation model. Compared with previous studies, this study can enrich the perspective of empirical research. In the past, the number of qualitative studies was far greater than that of quantitative studies. At the same time, a large number of quantitative studies have focused on multiple regression, while the number of structural equation models is relatively small; therefore, this study uses structural equation models for quantitative research. Third, in terms of research variables, most of the previous studies on EPA are based on a single variable, so this study uses psychological contract and POS as the main mediating variables to explore their impact mechanism on work performance to improve the explanatory power of employee work performance.

According to BALEAP statistics and articles on EAP from 1975 to 2019 [7], in practical research on the application of employee assistance programs, it has been found that, no matter how to solve the problems of absence and a high demission rate or job burnout, as well as the need for stable development in organizational change, it is inseparable from several key variables—psychological contracts, perceived organizational support, and employee performance. Therefore, for these reasons, this paper conducts relevant research to evaluate the mental health of enterprise employees by using psychological evaluation tools and investigates the correlation between performance and enterprise employees' mental health to investigate the influence mechanism of employee assistance programs (EAPs), psychological contracts (PSCs), perceived organizational support (POS), and job performance (JOP).

Combined with the analysis of the research status at home and abroad, we can see that the job performance of employees is affected by psychological contracts, perceived organizational support, and employee assistance programs, while psychological contracts are also affected by perceived organizational support and employee assistance programs. Therefore, based on the actual situation of the enterprise, the research model is built as shown in Figure 1.

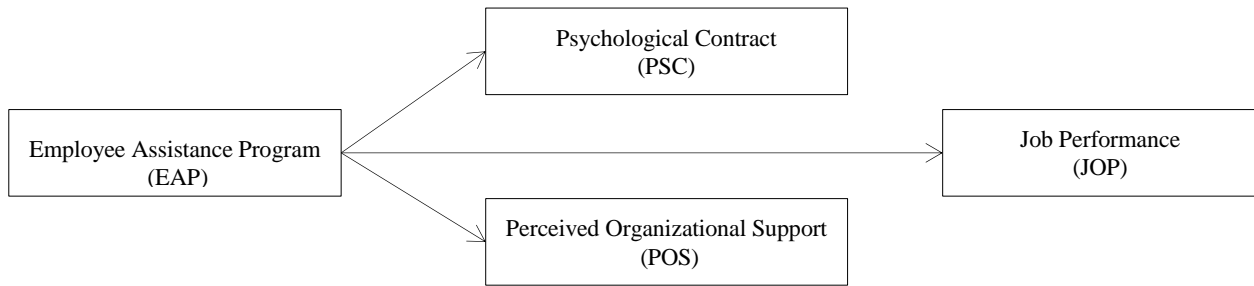


Figure 1. Conceptual research model

2- Theoretical Framework

EAP was originally used to solve the psychological problems caused by alcoholism, drug abuse, and adverse drug effects in employees. With the development of the times, EAP has been given increasingly more functions, and different people have given it many definitions. Lee & Swales (2006) [8] pointed out that an employee assistance program is a benefit provided by organizational managers, which mainly helps to solve various problems that interfere with employees' work, such as helping to deal with emotional aspects, interpersonal relationships, work stress, marriage and family, financial law, alcohol addiction, and other problems. Wang & Han (2018) [9] noted that an employee assistance program is a welfare plan, and the organization and implementation of an employee assistance program mainly aim to improve the working atmosphere, improve the mental health of employees, and improve employee performance and management efficiency. Romão et al. (2022) [10] believed that an employee assistance program is a long-term systematic service project provided by professionals and institutions, mainly serving employees and their immediate family members, which can help solve employee problems, improve the organizational atmosphere, and improve employee efficiency. According to the definitions of employee assistance programs by domestic and foreign scholars listed above, although the specific definitions of employee assistance programs used by scholars differ, the following common points can be extracted:

- 1) The EAP is a consulting service for organizations and employees.
- 2) The employee assistance program serves management, employees, family members, and relevant people.
- 3) The fundamental purpose of implementing an employee assistance program is to solve the social, psychological, financial, physical, and other problems that the organization and its employees are concerned about, achieve the goal of improving employees' work efficiency and job satisfaction, reduce life pressure, and make the best use of welfare expenses.
- 4) The implementation of an employee assistance program is a long-term and dynamic process in which professional or nonprofessional personnel provide guidance and consultation on the organization, such as research, planning, intervention, and training, with the aim of preventing problems.

The International EAP Organization recommends that EAPs include psychological counseling, health training, crisis intervention counseling, negative emotion management, and family care services related to employee interests [11]. The FGI classified services from the perspectives of psychology, work, and life. Psychological services mainly address employees' personal psychological problems, work-family conflict adaptation problems, and employee misbehavior [12]; work-related services mainly involve employee professional ability training, manager work skills improvement, crisis intervention, office sexual harassment, and other issues that affect work efficiency; and life-related services mainly address issues such as employee family care, medical care, finance, and legal information [13]. Therefore, the definition of an employee assistance program is a long-term and dynamic service provided by the organization through professional or nonprofessional personnel for management, employees, family members, and related groups. Through a series of guidance and consultations, such as planning, research, intervention, training, and evaluation, the social, psychological, financial, physical health, and other problems that the organization and employees care about can be solved to improve the work performance of employees.

Therefore, the following assumptions are made regarding EAP and job performance:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *An EAP positively affects job performance (JOP).*

Psychological contracts were proposed in the 1960s. Argyris & Kelsey (1960) [14] first proposed the concept of the psychological contract, believing that the psychological contract is the expectation of both organizations and employees for the responsibilities and obligations between each other. Schein defined the psychological contract as a set of unwritten expectations that exist between members of an organization at all times. He divides the psychological contract into two levels, the individual level and the organizational level, and emphasizes that although the psychological contract is not explicitly written, it is an important determinant of behavior in the organization [15]. In a narrow sense, Rousseau proposed the definition of a psychological contract, which is an individual's understanding or belief about the mutual obligations of both employers and employees in the context of an employment relationship [16]. Recently, a study has been conducted on how talent management practices in family hotels promote the fulfillment of employees' psychological contracts. The findings suggest that motivating employees to honor their psychological contract with B&Bs brings some benefits [17].

Based on the views of the above parties, this paper proposes that psychological contracts exist between employees and organizations and are formed based on the mutual needs of both parties. This is a relatively subjective potential agreement. In the daily activities of the organization, employees and the organization interact with each other and have a certain restrictive relationship. In daily work, employees and organizations constantly blend in with each other and form psychological contracts according to each other's needs. Therefore, the psychological contract can be understood as follows: the psychological contract is a subtle psychological suggestion gradually formed by the organization and employees in their daily work and life according to the needs of both parties and the obligations of both parties and is a subjective agreement based on mutual understanding and run-in. Nankervis et al. (2022) [18] proposed the strategy of managing psychological contracts; that is, human resource management practices include psychological early warning systems, career planning, and other clear content in the implementation of employee assistance programs.

The psychological contract forms an unwritten contract between employees and employers. If a contract is artificially broken, it may directly lead to low employee efficiency and even organizational collapse [19]. The emergence of COVID-19 has greatly changed the views of leaders and followers on the safety of the work field and has also affected the psychological contract to varying degrees [20]. In recent years, with the progress of society and the development of management systems, the content and concept of psychological contracts have gradually changed. In the past, the core content of the psychological contract referred only to the loyalty of employees to the organization, and the organization also provided compensation and protection to employees accordingly. This original concept has been influenced by new ideas. According to the new content, the work environment, the realization of employees' self-worth and other content are in key positions. In terms of specific performance, the loyalty of knowledgeable employees in the organization has decreased, and the turnover of personnel has increased. Empirical evidence shows that the rupture of psychological contracts can lead to negative work behaviors, including voluntary behaviors such as suppressing employee voice behaviors [21]. Research generally shows that psychological contract violation is negatively correlated with employee task performance and plays a mediating role between EAP and employee performance. The following hypothesis can be made:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *A psychological contract (PSC) plays a mediating role between an employee assistance program (EAP) and employee job performance (JOP).*

Social exchange theory proposes that the commitment between employers and employees is two-way. It is not only the employee's unilateral responsibility to the employer but also the employer's responsibility to the employee. This sense of responsibility to treat others is based on the individual's belief that in the long run, they will also be treated fairly and friendly by others. Therefore, when employees feel the organization's material and psychological support, such as the satisfaction of salary and treatment, the recognition of value, the appreciation of superiors, and the reasonable space for career development, especially when the organization is willing to help employees rather than forced, employees will have a stronger sense of gratitude to the organization, and the sense of organizational support will also increase [22]. Perceived organizational support is the overall feeling of employees in an organization about how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their welfare [23]. Perceived organizational support helps employees find a balance between themselves and organizational support, which helps them correctly understand the relationship between themselves and the organization and adjust their intimacy with the organization through perceived organizational support [24]. The sense of organizational support is divided into intimate support, respect support, and instrumental support. If employees have only emotional support but no work support at work, they will face difficulties in completing their work. In this case, the role of emotional support will also be weakened [25].

For the research on organizational support, although domestic scholars started relatively late, the research on organizational support is also relatively rich because relevant Chinese enterprises pay more attention to human resource management. Based on the local characteristics of China, Ye et al. (2017) [26] defined the sense of organizational support as the perceived support of the organization for its work, the concern for its interests, and the recognition of its value, and divided the sense of organizational support of employees in Chinese enterprises into three dimensions: the organization's help and convenience for employees' work, the recognition and attention of the superior to employees' value, and the satisfaction of employees' material needs.

Based on previous studies, this study found that organizational support represents an emotional appeal of employees to the enterprise and is also the commitment attitude given by the organization based on the perspective of employees. It is important psychological support for employees. Organizational support is the care and support behavior that employees can feel from the organization in daily work, personal life and emotional aspects, which is also the willingness of employees to actively contribute to the organization and is an important reason for hard work.

Some scholars have studied the relationship between perceived organizational support and job performance and believe that perceived organizational support has a positive impact on job performance [27]. Perceived organizational support positively promotes organizational trust and organization-based self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support has an intermediary effect on organizational commitment and role performance [28]. Junça Silva & Lopes (2023) [29] confirmed that emotional and instrumental perceived organizational support can promote three dimensions of job performance: task performance, interpersonal facilitation, and job dedication. Chiang & Hsieh (2012) [30] used job involvement and emotional commitment as mediating variables to prove the promoting effect of perceived organizational support on job performance. After comprehensive research on various factors, Newman et al. (2018) [31] concluded that perceived organizational support helps to improve employee innovation performance and reduce employee demission

intention. Sabir et al. (2022) [32] used organizational support, leader support, and colleague support in a narrow sense as the measurement dimensions, and empirical studies have shown that these three factors have significant positive effects on employee task performance and job dedication performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Perceived organizational support (POS) plays a mediating role between an employee assistance program (EAP) and employee job performance (JOP).*

3- Research Methods

3-1- Sample and Procedure

According to the research theme of this paper, front-line employees of several units are selected for investigation. The formal research objects of this paper mainly met the following requirements: they were regular employees of enterprises with certain work experience. To avoid common methodological bias, the questionnaire was completed anonymously.

The formal questionnaire was issued with the same requirements as the presurvey questionnaire, and front-line employees composed the sampling group. A total of 800 questionnaires were sent out, and 793 were recovered, for a recovery rate of 99.1%. After screening and excluding the questionnaires with obvious problems and loopholes and some evenly distributed questionnaires, 783 effective questionnaires were obtained, with an effective recovery ratio of 97.8%. At the same time, 177 effective documents of front-line employees in the presurvey were combined, with a total of 960 effective questionnaires and an effective recovery ratio of 96%. Table 1 lists the basic information about the research subjects.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Category	Classification	Number of cases	Proportion
Gender	Male	423	44.10%
	Female	537	55.90%
Education	Below high school	27	2.80%
	Junior college	331	34.50%
	Undergraduate	456	47.50%
	Master's degree or above	146	15.20%
Age	20-25	363	37.80%
	26-35	396	41.30%
	36-45	136	14.20%
	More than 46	65	6.80%
Total length of service	Less than 1 year	174	18.10%
	1-3 years	315	32.80%
	3-5 years	233	24.30%
	5- 10 years	92	9.60%
Length of service in current unit	More than 10 years	146	15.20%
	Less than 1 year	206	21.50%
	1-3 years	331	34.50%
	3-5 years	249	25.90%
	5- 10 years	130	13.50%
Department	More than 10 years	44	4.60%
	Technical department	130	13.50%
	Operation department	98	10.20%
	Sales department	553	57.60%
	Administrative department	87	9.10%
Position	Other	92	9.60%
	General staff	960	100.00%
	Grass-roots management	0	0.00%
	Middle management	0	0.00%
Employment contract	Top management	0	0.00%
	Fixed term	602	62.70%
	Open-ended term	358	37.30%
	Labor dispatch	0	0.00%

3-2- Measures

The EAP scale used in this study refers mainly to the research of Liu (2008) [33], supplemented by enterprise interviews and the research of Marković-Čekić et al. (2017) [34]. The employee assistance program scale developed by Liu (2008) [33] is based on a sample of 1936 employees of foreign-funded enterprises and uses a combination of enterprise interviews and developmental questionnaires. After a large sample test, the internal consistency reliability of the scale was greater than 0.8. Marković-Čekić et al. (2017) [34] crisis intervention scale for distance education included questions on the usefulness of the intervention and the ease of intervention, for a total of 6 questions. In addition, this study conducted in-depth interviews with knowledge staff in some enterprises, summarized the results of the interviews and added them to the scale as a useful supplement to the scale. After the questions were answered and further communication with experts and scholars in the field of employee assistance programs occurred, the contents of the scale were divided into crisis intervention and mental health. Cronbach's alpha is 0.741.

Rousseau et al. argued that although psychological contracts are highly individual and specific, they can be divided into two categories: transactional psychological contracts and relational psychological contracts. A transactional psychological contract means that employees pay more attention to contractual relationships based on economic exchange, which means that overtime and extra duty work require the organization to pay extra remuneration or promotion opportunities [16]. A relational psychological contract means that employees pay more attention to contractual relationships based on social feelings; that is, employees show loyalty to the organization and leaders, stable work and the adjustment of work content or position. The two-dimensional structure of psychological contracts emphasizes differences in concerns, time frames, stability, scope and clarity. The "transaction-relationship" model has become the basic paradigm of many psychological contract research issues due to its empirical verification. In this study, knowledge staff members' psychological contracts are divided into two dimensions: transactional psychological contracts and relational psychological contracts [16]. In this study, the scale of employee psychological contracts mainly refers to the research of Rousseau, which divides the psychological contracts of knowledge staff into transactional psychological contracts and relational psychological contracts (Cronbach's alpha is 0.835).

Because the research object of this paper is mainly Chinese employees and because of the large amount of localized research on perceived organizational support, this study has strong theoretical value. Therefore, this study adopts the research of Chen & Chen (2008) [35], which divides *perceived organizational support* into four dimensions: emotional organizational support, instrumental organizational support, leader support and colleague support. Additionally, the study refers to the research of Ling Wenyan et al. and enterprise interviews (Cronbach's alpha is 0.729) [36].

The performance model used in this study divides *job performance* into task performance, job dedication and interpersonal facilitation, in which job dedication and interpersonal facilitation are expressed as contextual performance. The task performance scale of Williams & Anderson (1991) [37] and the contextual performance scale of Van Scotter & Motowidlo (1996) [38]. These items were used in the job performance scale. In the existing field of psychological research, the popularity of this scale is very high. Guo et al. (2016) [39] also noted that the scale is more suitable for application in the era of collective and relationship emphasis in China, and the validity and reliability of the scale are relatively high. The original scale consists of three dimensions—job dedication, interpersonal facilitation and task performance—and consists of 22 items. Cronbach's alpha is 0.941.

4- Results and Discussion

4-1- Measurement Tests

Validity can reflect the accuracy and rationality of a questionnaire item design. A simple explanation is to analyze the degree to which the questionnaire items can explain the corresponding variables. KMO and Bartlett sphere tests were performed to determine whether the sample could undergo factor analysis. The KMO value is 0.826, which is greater than 0.7, and the significance probability of Bartlett's sphere test is 0.000. Factor analysis was conducted using principal component analysis, and the maximum variation method was used for the direct rotation axis. When the common factor variance extracted from a certain question item is less than 0.2 or the factor load of each question variable is less than 0.5, it is necessary to consider whether to delete the question item. The data show that after the extraction of the principal components, the common factor variance for all the items is greater than 0.2, and all the items are retained. A common factor was extracted from each level, the factor loading of each variable was greater than 0.5, the factor variance interpretation rate of each level was greater than 50%, and the validity passed the test (see Table 2).

Table 2. Validity test results of the scale

Variables	Dimensions	Common factor variance	Factor load	Variance Interpretation Rate	
EAP	Crisis Intervention - EAP Manager	0.596	0.772	67.19%	
		0.694	0.833		
		0.67	0.819		
	Crisis Intervention- EAP Provider	0.749	0.865	70.42%	
		0.719	0.848		
		0.768	0.876		
	Mental Health-EAP Provider	0.694	0.833	62.11%	
		0.667	0.817		
		0.465	0.682		
	Mental Health- EAP Managers	0.621	0.788	62.16%	
		0.698	0.835		
		0.566	0.752		
	Psychological Contract	Transactional Psychological Contract	0.573	0.757	62.31%
			0.582	0.763	
			0.726	0.852	
0.654			0.809		
0.769			0.877		
0.774			0.88		
0.702			0.838		
0.673			0.82		
0.507			0.712		
0.655			0.813		
0.67			0.819		
0.617			0.786		
0.724			0.851		
0.654			0.809		
0.782			0.884		
0.762	0.873				
0.691	0.831				
0.696	0.834				
0.717	0.847				
0.768	0.874				
0.694	0.831				
0.665	0.816				
0.463	0.682				
0.62	0.788				

		0.697	0.834	
		0.565	0.751	
		0.571	0.756	
		0.58	0.762	
		0.726	0.85	
		0.653	0.808	
		0.767	0.875	
	Relational Psychological Contract	0.773	0.88	69.01%
		0.7	0.837	
		0.672	0.82	
		0.505	0.71	
		0.654	0.809	
		0.669	0.818	
		0.615	0.785	
		0.724	0.85	
		0.653	0.808	
		0.781	0.884	
		0.761	0.873	
		0.689	0.829	
	Emotional Organizational Support	0.694	0.833	71.04%
		0.716	0.846	
		0.766	0.873	
		0.692	0.83	
		0.666	0.816	
		0.464	0.683	
Perceived Organizational Support		0.622	0.788	
	Instrumental Organizational Support	0.698	0.836	67.20%
		0.566	0.751	
		0.571	0.758	
	Leader Support	0.581	0.764	67.14%
		0.726	0.851	
		0.653	0.809	
	Colleague Support	0.768	0.877	69.63%
		0.775	0.881	
		0.701	0.838	
	Task Performance	0.674	0.822	67.55%
		0.507	0.71	
		0.655	0.809	
		0.669	0.818	
		0.617	0.785	
	Interpersonal Facilitation	0.724	0.851	67.77%
		0.655	0.808	
		0.783	0.885	
		0.763	0.874	
Job Performance		0.69	0.831	
		0.695	0.835	
	Job Dedication	0.716	0.847	70.02%
		0.767	0.874	
		0.693	0.831	
		0.668	0.817	

4-2- Hypotheses Test

Based on the verification results in Table 3, the Pearson coefficients among employee assistance program (EAP), psychological contract (PSC), perceived organizational support (POS), and job performance (JOP) are greater than 0.5. The correlation is significant and positive on both sides. These results indicate that there are correlations among the variables.

Table 3. Correlations among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	-			
Psychological Contract (PSC)	0.557***	-		
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.544***	0.542***	-	
Job Performance (JOP)	0.523***	0.585***	0.598***	-

*** indicates a P value <0.001.

According to Table 4, in the adaptation test of the structural equation model in which psychological contract and perceived organizational support play mediating roles, the ratio of chi-square degrees of freedom is 1.922, the root mean square of approximation error reaches 0.045, and the adaptation indicators also reach 0.912, 0.903, 0.902, 0.943, and 0.909, all of which are greater than 0.9, reaching a high standard level. Therefore, the model fit of the structural equation model is very good.

Table 4. Model fit of the structural equation model.

Model fit	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	CFI	NFI	IFI	TLI
Structural equation model	1.922	0.045	0.912	0.903	0.902	0.943	0.909

Figure 2 shows that employee assistance programs directly affect job performance; the standard estimate is 0.644, and the significance (P value) is less than 0.001. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. In addition, employee assistance programs directly affect psychological contracts (std estimate is 0.644, and the P value is less than 0.001) and perceived organizational support (std estimate is 0.592, and the P value is less than 0.001). Psychological contract (std estimate is 0.641, and the P value is less than 0.001) and perceived organizational support (std estimate is 0.617, and the P value is less than 0.001) directly affect job performance.

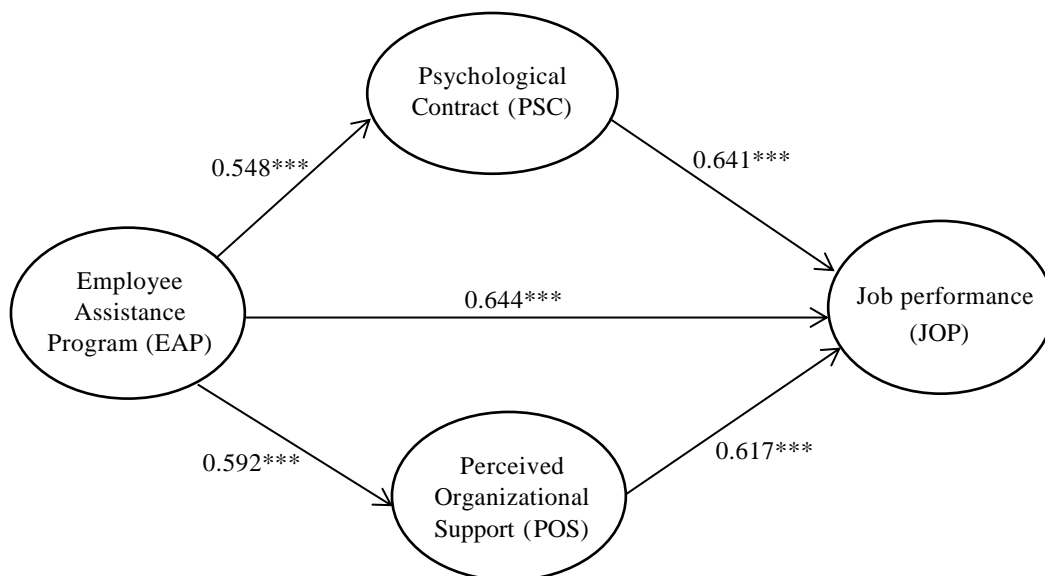


Figure 2. Relationships among variables

As shown in Table 5, employee assistance programs significantly affect psychological contracts and job performance. Moreover, psychological contracts play a mediating role between employee assistance programs and employee job performance (the std. estimate is 0.351, and the P value is less than 0.001). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. Employee assistance programs significantly affect perceived organizational support and then significantly affect job performance.

Moreover, perceived organizational support plays a mediating role between employee assistance programs and employee job performance (the estimated std. is 0.365, and the P value is less than 0.001). Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 5. Path analysis

Employee assistance program (EAP) → Psychological contract (PSC)	0.548	0.021	***
Psychological contract (PSC) → Job performance (JOP)	0.641	0.023	***
Employee assistance program (EAP) → Psychological contract (PSC) → Job performance (JOP)	0.351	0.022	***
Employee assistance program (EAP) → Perceived organizational support (POS)	0.592	0.019	***
Perceived organizational support (POS) → Job performance (JOP)	0.617	0.029	***
Employee assistance program (EAP) → Perceived organizational support (POS) → Job performance (JOP)	0.365	0.024	***
Employee assistance program (EAP) → Job performance (JOP)	0.644	0.016	***

5- Conclusions

5-1- Conclusion

Using Google Scholar to search for the two keywords EAP and job performance from 2000 to the present, there were a total of 19,200 articles. The author flipped through the first 30 pages, resulting in a total of more than 300 articles, and did not find any articles with either keyword in the title. Most of the articles described how to apply EAP, stress management, emotion management, mental health, and treatment. Similarly, a search for the four keywords “EAP job performance psychological contract perceived organizational support” did not reveal any articles about these four variables at the same time. It is speculated that this fills the academic gap in the simultaneous study of the four variables. Based on a description of the relevant domestic background and the search for research entry points, this study first summarizes the literature on variables such as EAP, psychological contracts, perceived organizational support, and job performance. Assuming strict definitions and logical analysis, hypotheses are made, and a hypothesis model is established. The questionnaire examines the basic information and scale information of front-line employees in different enterprises, performs descriptive statistical analysis, reliability and validity analysis and correlation analysis on the results of sample object data collection, and uses a structural equation model to carefully explore the internal correlation between variables, as well as the mesmeric effect of psychological contracts and perceived organizational support, which can be summarized as follows:

(1) The scale has a relatively high level of reliability and validity:

The scales used in this article, both the EAP scale and the standardized Psychological Contract, Perceived Organizational Support, and Job Performance scales, have shown relatively high levels of reliability and validity and have drawn conclusions about their applicability. In terms of measuring elements, the structure is clear and effective, and the scale is also mature and applicable, especially in the context of frontline employees in Chinese enterprises, which can still match and fit well.

(2) EAP was significantly positively correlated with job performance:

The higher the employee assistance program score of frontline employees is, the more accurate and punctual they are in completing tasks, interacting better with colleagues, and quickly adapting to the work environment. They usually work harder and more enthusiastically, and their work performance in all aspects will increase correspondingly. Due to the pandemic and changes in the overall environment of Chinese US relations, competition among enterprises has become particularly fierce in recent years. Enterprises undoubtedly pay great attention to job performance, especially the assessment of performance indicators.

(3) EAP Significantly Positive about Psychological Contracts:

The higher the employee assistance program score of frontline employees is, the more proactive and willing they are to form a psychological contract with the organization in their work. Specifically, frontline employees with high employee assistance programs are more willing to invest their emotions and ideals in the organization and are unwilling to resign easily. Frontline employees also have stronger beliefs about norms and can respond more actively to difficulties in the present.

(4) EAP is significantly positively correlated with POS:

Employee assistance programs play a role in all aspects of perceived organizational support for frontline employees. Specifically, providing perceived organizational support to frontline employees in enterprises can lead to a more

hardworking and proactive union of frontline employees, who are willing to contribute to the organization and have more harmonious interactions with colleagues, resulting in greater work performance.

(5) The mediating role of psychological contracts:

Employee assistance programs play a partial mediating role in various aspects of the work performance of frontline employees through psychological contracts. Specifically, the employee assistance program of frontline employees in a company is directly related to their feelings toward the company. When a company constructs a psychological contract with front-line employees, front-line employees will double their active involvement in their work and practice it for the development of the organization, resulting in an improvement in their performance.

(6) The mediating role of organizational support:

Employee assistance programs play a mediating role in various aspects of the work performance of frontline employees through organizational support. Specifically, the employee assistance programs of frontline employees in enterprises are largely directly related to their cognition and attitudes. When these frontline employees feel a sense of organizational support, they will double their active engagement in their work and take action for the development of the organization, and their performance will also improve.

With the improvement of employee assistance programs, frontline employees can not only achieve high performance but also enhance their own abilities, which inevitably requires enterprises to provide support for frontline employees. Moreover, a sound incentive mechanism is not only an effective way to retain frontline employees but also a means to stimulate their potential and improve their performance. When an organization provides sufficient learning, development, and growth opportunities for front-line employees and when front-line employees can perceive support from the organization, according to reciprocity theory, frontline employees will also engage in behaviors that are beneficial to the organization in return, such as improving personal work performance, which is highly important for the organization or enterprise to form stable and harmonious labor cooperative relationships with frontline employees.

5-2-Theoretical Implications and Practical Implications

This research has achieved certain results, which are innovative and have theoretical and practical significance. Based on the empirical conclusions of this article, the following suggestions are given for human resource development and enterprise management practices:

To optimize frontline employee assistance, when recruiting, enterprises should conduct scientific evaluations of the personalities of frontline employees based on the characteristics of industry positions and even use the employee assistance program level as an indicator of frontline employee management. When managing frontline employees, the personality traits, strengths, and job requirements of each frontline employee should be clarified, frontline employees should be assisted well, and corresponding management strategies should be selected based on the characteristics of frontline employees. When the characteristics of frontline employees are consistent with their assistance, their work performance will naturally improve. In these industries, frontline employees with a high employee assistance program can fully utilize themselves and achieve improved work performance. Therefore, enterprises should establish a sound and scientific performance evaluation and compensation system, integrate employee assistance programs into the daily management of frontline employees, make frontline employees feel valued by the enterprise, and willingly invest in their work.

At the same time, they should pay attention to the diverse needs of frontline employees; choose targeted measures; and provide timely and effective assistance, training, and other work resources for frontline employees. Enterprises focus on the career growth of frontline employees and develop diversified mechanisms for their career growth. Enterprises should establish a reasonable and flexible promotion system, break existing promotion restrictions, and achieve "upward and downward mobility". Provide vocational skills training opportunities to enable frontline employees to master skills and improve work performance. On the other hand, training can also help frontline employees develop a sense of identification with corporate culture, guide frontline employees to establish career goals that align with the enterprise, identify with enterprise development, and promote frontline employees' progress through goal motivation. A rotation mechanism should be implemented to increase opportunities for frontline employees to learn multiple skills and facilitate finding the most suitable position for each frontline employee. Adopting job expansion to provide more challenging work for frontline employees and stimulate their work enthusiasm. Adopting job enrichment, enhancing frontline employees' work autonomy and control, empowering them with more responsibility, directly and clearly understanding work results and receiving timely feedback, and making more effective decisions and arrangements for their work.

Building a mechanism to stimulate frontline employees' psychological contracts. While seeking development, enterprises should make good use of various methods to motivate frontline employees and stimulate their psychological contracts. Motivation in management is defined as motivating frontline employees to work hard and achieve the

company's task goals by adopting various effective methods while mobilizing their initiative and creativity. Mobilizing the initiative of frontline employees and stimulating their innovative spirit is the primary task of motivating work, and it is also the most crucial purpose of human resources work. Effective motivation can ignite the work enthusiasm of frontline employees, release their potential internal drive, generate high-level work motivation, and willingly contribute efforts and emotions to the enterprise. All human behavior is caused by motivation, which can be understood as a mental state that stimulates, drives, and strengthens individual behavior. As an enterprise, it is particularly important to create an atmosphere and mechanism that can stimulate the initiative of frontline employees: first, frontline employees should be actively encouraged to explore and innovate and create an active, free, and relaxed organizational atmosphere; second, a reasonable and effective evaluation and incentive mechanism should be established, combining incentives with performance evaluation and frontline employee evaluation, with clear rewards and punishments; once again, enterprises should be fair and open in assessing performance and paying salaries so that frontline employees are aware of their work behavior and the results they produce; and finally, the internal competition mechanism of the enterprise should be shaped, benign competition between departments and frontline employees should be encouraged, and comprehensive improvement of the individual and overall performance of frontline employees and the enterprise should be achieved through reasonable competition.

Creating an organizational environment full of perceived organizational support. Successful companies usually provide multifaceted care to frontline employees. When frontline employees accept and identify with a company in terms of emotions, their organizational commitment and work performance will inevitably increase accordingly. In the process of development, enterprises should strive to create a positive and humane organizational environment and, if necessary, carry out frontline employee care plans to provide diverse, ubiquitous, and personalized care for different frontline employees. In this atmosphere, frontline employees will feel a strong sense of work happiness and growth value, leading to organizational dependence. In the long-term work process, frontline employees' job satisfaction, identification, and other aspects often improve subtly, and this improvement is closely related to improvements in frontline employees' work experience, skill level, and competency. In response to this situation, enterprises should provide sufficient knowledge and skills training, such as on-the-job training, job rotation, and project participation, based on the specific needs of the enterprise and the actual situation of frontline employees and on a thorough evaluation of their quality level. Enterprises can also plan their career growth path together with frontline employees based on sufficient observation, understanding, communication and negotiation, which undoubtedly makes frontline employees more targeted and motivated in their work. By recognizing their current career growth status and establishing correct work values, frontline employees need clear career plans and progress toward goals. They should not only have ambitious career goals but also have the ability to do practical things down-to-earth and continuously improve their own quality. Enterprises can provide targeted and timely training opportunities for frontline employees, which not only meet their learning needs, improve their skills, and maintain their core competitiveness but also enable frontline employees to understand their own gaps and have a correct understanding of themselves.

5-3-Limitations and Outlook

This paper strictly follows scientific research methods and steps, selects and collects sample data with a scientific and rigorous attitude, and the empirical work has achieved good fitting results. The research has also achieved certain results, but for various reasons, such as conditions, time, and personal ability, there are still areas that need to be improved. Considering the limitations of the research, this article has the following conclusions:

Expand the supplementary sample population. This article focuses on front-line employees of enterprises, and samples are generally distributed among front-line sales employees in provincial cities. The span between departments, levels and regions is insufficient. To obtain more universal and representative conclusions, it is necessary to further refine the selection of inspection objects and spend more time and effort on broader data collection.

This study aimed to design and develop a scientifically stable questionnaire that is unique to China. This article adopts a scale developed by foreign scholars, which has been frequently used in a large number of related studies and has been further validated among many different cultural backgrounds and sample objects. However, whether these findings fit the cultural background of China still needs further research. In future research, it is important to focus on developing scientific scales that are unique to China and suitable for the Chinese context for further exploration.

The research model was improved, and other functional elements were introduced. This article draws on existing relevant research and, based on strict definitions and analysis, selects and establishes the correlation structure of variables. However, in reality, there are far more factors involved, such as organizational culture, team atmosphere, and various internal and external factors. Further research and exploration on these topics are also needed. Therefore, in future research, deeper thinking should be carried out based on the actual enterprise background, introducing other variables to improve the mechanism of the structural model, and further improving the scientific interpretation ability of the model.

6- Declarations

6-1-Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Y.C. and S.P.; methodology, Y.C. and S.P.; software, Y.C.; validation, Y.C. and S.P.; formal analysis, Y.C. and S.P.; investigation, Y.C. and S.P.; resources, Y.C.; data curation, Y.C.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.C. and S.P.; writing—review and editing, Y.C. and S.P.; visualization, S.P.; supervision, J.L.; project administration, S.P.; funding acquisition, Y.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

6-2-Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

6-3-Funding

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6-4-Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

6-5-Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

6-6-Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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