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**UNLOCKING THE BENEFITS OF WORKPLACE
RELATIONSHIPS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES:
THE IMPACT OF SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS ON
EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Workplace relationships are beneficial to organizations, but not all relationships are equally significant for enhancing performance. The study investigated the impact of supervisory relationships on employee performance through positive psychological characteristics comprising perceptions of organizational support, emotional intelligence, thriving at work, and employee resilience.
Methodology	Data were gathered using snowball sampling in a cross-sectional study of 395 entry-level employees at commercial banks in southern Nigeria and analyzed using partial least squares modeling to test hypotheses.
Contribution	The study presents a research model guided by social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, which clarifies how supportive supervisory relationships enhance entry-level employee performance in Nigeria.
Findings	Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance were positively related, and this effect was mediated by perceptions of organizational support,

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thriving at work, and employee resilience. The mediation of emotional intelligence was insignificant. Additionally, perceptions of organizational support, employee resilience, and emotional intelligence enhanced thriving at work, forming a sequence in which these relationships positively affect employee performance. Although the mediating role of emotional intelligence was not supported, it may facilitate other psychological responses, such as thriving at work, that are significant predictors of employee performance.

Recommendations for Practitioners	Nigerian organizations, particularly commercial banks, should adopt a task- and employee-centered supervisory approach to support the performance improvement of entry-level employees. Organizations should revise policy documents to reflect supportive behaviors that foster goal-oriented workplace relationships throughout the organization. Training should be provided to supervisors and employees to develop behaviors that build productive workplace relationships. Training modules should emphasize supportive leadership, employee support, resilience-building, thriving at work, and emotional intelligence. Management should also recognize the centrality of these employees' psychological qualities, especially thriving at work, given their interrelatedness and strong correlation with superior performance. Periodic psychometric assessment can be conducted to gauge the mental state and development of entry-level employees. This can help supervisors balance the diverse needs, resources, and expectations related to tasks and employees, and ensure that employees feel comfortable expressing a variety of psychological qualities. Recruiting individuals with active-learning abilities and enthusiasm to work can have a profound effect on performance amid evolving work demands and expectations.
Recommendations for Researchers	Researchers can explore additional psychological dimensions and their mediating relationships. Examining the distinct effect of task- and employee-based relationships can provide more insights into the relationships among the concepts.
Impact on Society	The research framework shapes the development and performance of entry-level employees by informing strategic changes in supervisory practices within Nigerian organizations. Reframing these practices enhances employees' psychological well-being and improves organizational performance in dynamic, competitive environments.
Future Research	Future research should focus on the individual effects of task- and employee-centered workplace relationships and use longitudinal data to provide more detailed insight into causal relationships.
Keywords	supervisory relationship, emotional intelligence, employee performance, organizational support, resilience, thriving, entry-level employees

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the challenges faced by new employees are distinct, numerous, highly variable, and often overwhelming. These evolving challenges affect their emotional and cognitive functioning, sometimes leading to disengagement and poor performance, particularly when they lack the necessary support and protective resources (Ononye, 2023a; Sabir et al., 2022). The pressure to meet employers' expectations is unending. The training programs for new employees cannot anticipate all situations that may cause them difficulties in adapting to new circumstances. Organizations must create an environment that provides essential direction and support to help less-experienced employees consistently handle complex work demands (McIlroy et al., 2021). Employee performance, a key indica-

tor of organizational effectiveness, measures employees' ability to complete work-related tasks successfully amid changing work conditions. Understanding what factors enhance employee performance is vital for developing effective strategies. This study contends that supportive supervisory relationships and positive psychological characteristics could serve as antecedents of employee performance. Such relationships involve meaningful interactions and exchanges with supervisors, fostering social connection and positive mental states that enhance engagement (Zeb et al., 2025). Employees' psychological states are complex, and their interplay with workplace relationships may explain variations in performance.

According to social exchange theory (SET), cultivating high-quality workplace relationships provides opportunities that meet employees' needs for development and growth. These signals serve as incentives, demonstrating that the organization respects and values them, thereby triggering a variety of positive mental states that can enhance performance. The conservation of resources (COR) theory posits that employees in supportive environments are better able to orchestrate resource gain or make better use of other resources (Sonntag & Meier, 2024). As such, reciprocity triggers employees to secure additional resources, leading to better job performance in challenging work situations. The integration of these frameworks guides the investigation of how supportive relationships influence performance. However, not all relationships are equally significant for enhancing performance. Some relationships may be task-oriented, employee-oriented, or a combination of both, with support and resources provided accordingly (Ononye, 2023b). Although the study primarily examines work relationships that combine both orientations, considerable variations in employee outcomes may arise depending on the relational orientation involved.

Additionally, the underlying mechanisms through which different workplace relationships yield these effects may vary (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). The inconsistent empirical evidence on the relationship between supervisory relationships and employee performance supports this argument (Astawa et al., 2023; Wagner & Koob, 2022). Internal psychological factors such as perceived organizational support, thriving, resilience, and emotional intelligence are significant for consistent, productive work behaviors, yet little research examines how workplace relationships develop and sustain these resources, especially among entry-level employees in Nigerian organizations. Ultimately, new employees require not only strong psychological resources but also a variety of them to foster productive work engagement (Zeb et al., 2025).

This study is significant because entry-level employees often struggle with newness, making them less effective than more experienced staff (Ngobeni et al., 2026). This initial phase presents specific challenges, particularly due to limited experience, which affects their ability to adapt to shifting work requirements and manage their mental state under pressure (Ngobeni et al., 2026). Entry-level employees typically begin new positions with specific work expectations, and the extent to which these expectations are met serves as a key indicator of successful organizational socialization (Ślebarska & Soucek, 2020). Building strong workplace relationships and psychological resources could help decrease the likelihood of underperformance relative to organizational expectations. Therefore, the study aims to assess how supportive supervisory relationships influence entry-level employee performance, emphasizing the mediating roles of multiple psychological qualities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entry-level employees are expected to build and maintain positive relationships due to their limited prior work experience (Tran et al., 2018). Upon completing tertiary education, many are inadequately prepared and lack essential competencies required in the world of work. Relational processes foster constructive interactions that facilitate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and skills. These processes support the development of relevant competencies through active learning and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, relational processes reduce uncertainty and self-doubt associated with limited practical knowledge, enabling entry-level employees to establish a sense of mastery in dynamic work

settings (Ngobeni et al., 2026). Workplace relationships are two-way, interactive processes that facilitate the exchange of important information and resources among individuals at similar or different organizational levels. By actively engaging in these ongoing interactions, individuals can build bonds, support networks, complete tasks, and pursue other important goals (e.g., education) to advance their professional growth. These relationships can be horizontal (employee-employee) or vertical (supervisor-employee) (Gerlach, 2019; Tran et al., 2018). The study focuses on the latter, as entry-level employees tend to receive more practical benefits from their supervisors, who possess both formal authority and greater experience than their colleagues (Bono & Yoon, 2012). Supervisors can offer insights into challenges or problems that entry-level employees have not yet encountered and provide mentoring opportunities for career development. Such relationships are often bidirectional, allowing supervisors to learn and improve through ongoing interactions and feedback. Supervisory relationships set the tone for how co-workers interact, leading to changes in communication patterns and outcomes.

A key challenge for managers in modern organizations is helping new employees adapt quickly to the work environment. They have high expectations for entry-level employees to quickly learn job requirements and contribute to performance improvements across various metrics in fast-paced, competitive environments (Astawa et al., 2023). Supervisory practices in many developing countries are frequently suboptimal, often described as demotivating, unsupportive, and irregular (Avortri et al., 2019). This suggests that not all supervisors are willing to provide employees with supportive resources. Supervisors may exhibit authoritative and transactional behaviors, particularly within bureaucratized environments characterized by limited workplace interactions, relationships, and collaborations (Mao et al., 2009; Zhu et al., 2024). Such constrained supervisory support and exchanges tend to elicit negative reciprocity under restrictive conditions, thereby reducing effective employee engagement. Distal and minimally interactive supervisor-employee relationships further hinder employees' ability to adapt to evolving work demands and impede the development of role mastery (Sekhar & Patwardhan, 2023). Therefore, managing relational conditions to foster collegiality remains a critical concern for managers, as effective workplace relationships are essential for facilitating knowledge sharing. Furthermore, less experienced employees often need guidance and advice to harness their full potential. However, this may be impeded when supervisory relationships are task-centered, ignoring the diversity of employees' expectations and needs within a specific career. This narrow focus on task proficiency limits other development opportunities for entry-level employees. Backhaus and Vogel (2022) stressed that supervisors should exercise caution when using controlling forms of supervision.

McIlroy et al. (2021) found that when supervisors do not respond to employees' requests for support, employees' psychological need satisfaction is reduced, which, in turn, influences how they feel, behave, and connect with others. In this context, supervisor-employee relationships may be ineffective, unsupportive, and unproductive, with little or no sustained impact on learning, teamwork, and performance. Furthermore, the supervisor-employee relationship is complex and multifaceted, with supervisors and employees having distinct needs and expectations of one another. This variation makes finding the right balance, one that satisfies both parties, challenging. The supervisor is responsible for facilitating employees' career development, so it is important to identify the types of relationships and support that align with employees' needs and expectations. Such sensitivity and flexibility help prevent under- or over-supervision. According to Thompson et al. (2025), entry-level workers tend to excel under a structured, directive, and supportive style, which provides clear guidance, support, and feedback to help them carry out their responsibilities. By aligning relationships with employees' maturity and experience levels, supervisors can foster development and improve performance. However, as the span of control widens, supervisor involvement generally has a limited impact on performance because employees may compete with one another and miss out on the benefits of regular meetings, open discussions, encouragement, and timely feedback. According to SET, when supervisors rarely contact employees, show limited interpersonal sensitivity, and provide minimal direction and supportive actions, employees are more likely to respond with unproductive behaviors.

The quality of these relationships often develops through a series of interactions grounded in respect, trust, guidance, support, responsibility, encouragement, friendship, feedback, and open communication. Initially, the employee-supervisor relationship occurs within the execution of formal roles; however, as it continues, they develop interest and exert effort beyond their assigned roles, evolving into a less transactional social exchange relationship (Choi et al., 2021). This relationship is likely self-reinforcing, with the exchange process continuing without explicit formalization or negotiation. Llorente-Alonso et al. (2024) suggest that the way support is provided within an organization may influence the psychological effects of different supervisory approaches.

Supportive supervisory practices, which enhance access to resources, guidance, and development opportunities, are a high-performance managerial empowerment practice that fosters a collaborative work environment that respects and values employees' roles and contributions. This supervisory approach motivates employees to participate actively in their work by fostering a sense of effectiveness, competence, and increased influence within the work environment (Jameel et al., 2025; Yasmin et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that nurturing good supervisory relationships is critical for performance, yet empirical studies continue to yield inconsistent evidence of significant (Astawa et al., 2023; Kurniawan & Sawitri, 2023; Sekhar & Patwardhan, 2023) and insignificant effects (Idowu & Ndidiamaka, 2018; Insan & Masmarulan, 2021; Wagner & Koob, 2022) between the two concepts. The variations in results underscore that supervisory relationships cannot reliably predict performance when employees do not feel supported or when interaction intensity is low (Ariani & Feriyanto, 2024). Because work behaviors can be predicted by the extent to which they cooperate and collaborate, improving the display of supportive supervisory behaviors influences employees' access to both tangible and intangible job resources. Therefore, the first hypothesis was proposed.

H1: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related.

In light of the mixed findings, it is important to examine the relationship between supervisory relationships and employee performance, accounting for contextual variables. This will help identify variables that consistently affect performance. Therefore, the originality of this study lies in demonstrating which psychological qualities are affected by supportive supervisory relationships and how they influence entry-level employee performance. The study selected four mediation variables for this investigation, given their established contextual and predictive value on employee performance. They include perceived organizational support, resilience, emotional intelligence, and thriving.

Perceived organizational support is a reference frame that represents employees' beliefs about how much the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions (Ononye, 2023a). This perception is based on reciprocity in social exchange, in which a positive view encourages employees to invest effort and resources to meet organizational goals. A strong employee-supervisor relationship helps both parties maximize benefits and minimize costs. Support builds trust with supervisors, enabling effective information exchange to complete tasks. Perceptions of support vary across supervisory relationships, with supportive exchanges being especially important for positive changes in perceptions of organizational support (Huang et al., 2021). Studies have demonstrated that high-quality exchange relationships affect employees' outcomes through perceived organizational support. For example, Taşova et al. (2023) found that perceptions of organizational support mediate the relationship between leader-member exchange and work engagement. Similarly, the mediation of this variable was confirmed in Sluss et al.'s (2008) study on relational exchange and organizational identity. While research has focused on antecedents of employee performance, it also shows that perceptions of organizational support influence employee performance (Sabir et al., 2022). Consequently, this study proposes that supportive supervisory relationships may influence employee performance through perceptions of organizational support, leading to the formulation of the second hypothesis.

H2: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through organizational support perceptions.

Resilience refers to the psychological capacity to anticipate, adapt to, and overcome stressful and challenging work situations in uncertain and complex environments (Ononye, 2022). This capacity enables employees to appraise their roles and adjust to meet evolving work demands and expectations. When change is inevitable, resilience allows employees to survive, thrive, and develop as they navigate new contexts. Furthermore, resilience strengthens other psychological resources, including hope, self-efficacy, and optimism, following setbacks or challenging experiences. According to Liang and Cao (2021), employees who fail to adapt often experience stress, and resilience reduces the negative effects of stress-inducing situations. Organizations can develop and support this ability through human resource interventions, such as fostering supportive workplace relationships. Ononye (2022) noted that appraising social support systems can have positive or negative effects on employee resilience, which, in turn, influences goal-directed behaviors in challenging work situations. This aligns with social cognitive theory, which suggests that social interactions shape employees' behavioral responses to stressful situations.

Receiving help through discussions about work-related issues with others promotes resilience and improves individual performance (Hartmann et al., 2022). Nabawanuka and Ekmekcioglu's (2024) study revealed that employee resilience mediated the effect of supervisor support on employee engagement, a precursor to employee performance. Zeb et al. (2025) highlighted that psychological factors elucidate the relationship between supervisor support and job performance. However, Ojo et al. (2021) reported that supervisor support does not necessarily enhance resilience or mediate its impact on outcomes such as employee engagement. Despite these mixed findings, supervisors are still required to fulfill their managerial responsibilities by providing guidance and support, even in the absence of close interpersonal relationships (Ringo, 2025). Supervisor support is considered unidirectional, as supervisors provide resources to help complete assigned tasks. Relationships characterized by trust, open communication, mutual respect, support, and friendship enable both supervisors and employees to connect beyond formal roles and responsibilities. Given that employees frequently encounter challenges that may disrupt psychological functioning in the workplace, a strong supervisor-employee relationship enhances the effectiveness of support in achieving valued outcomes during such situations (Ringo, 2025). This argument prompted the formulation of the third hypothesis.

H3: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through employee resilience.

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to monitor, analyze, and understand both one's own and others' emotions to guide behaviors under varying work pressures and demands (Vrontis et al., 2021). It is a personal resource that facilitates the effective processing and use of discernible emotional insights to inform thinking and behavior, usually triggered by an employee's environmental appraisal. This is especially crucial for new employees facing numerous workplace challenges that can result in discontent, stress, isolation, emotional outbursts, exhaustion, or disengagement, particularly if not properly managed. Workplace interactions evoke a spectrum of emotions that can enhance or reduce individual performance (Doğru, 2022). Drawing on social learning theory, supervisory relationships can provide an environment in which entry-level employees can observe and learn to manage their emotions in ways that enhance their productivity at work (Yen, 2022). Such workplace relationships provide employees with more emotional resources to address diverse emotional needs and foster greater emotional stability. Studies have documented that emotional intelligence is inextricably linked to supportive relationships (Gara Bach Ouerdian et al., 2021; Yen, 2022) and individual performance (Khassawneh et al., 2022); however, its mediating role among the constructs remains to be fully understood. Yen (2022) utilizes social learning theory to propose that supportive leadership enhances emotional intelligence, thereby improving job performance. The validity of this proposition is yet to be tested empirically. Entry-level employees operate within a complex network of relationships, making it essential to develop skills for managing emotions and behavioral differences to collaborate effectively and achieve shared objectives. Based on these considerations, the study hypothesizes that:

H4: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through emotional intelligence.

Thriving at work, defined as a psychological state characterized by a combination of learning and vitality, is cultivated through workplace relationships (Kleine et al., 2019). Learning enhances employee competencies via knowledge sharing and application, while vitality reflects a sense of energy and enthusiasm for work. Both elements must be sufficiently present to experience thriving. Workplace relationships are crucial to this construct because they are socially embedded and develop through interactions that result in diverse exchanges (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Without social connection, thriving cannot occur, as supportive interactions are essential. Liu et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis revealed that a supportive climate and high-quality exchange relationships enable supervisors to pay attention to employees, thereby facilitating individual development and work performance by providing a variety of job resources. Such relationships promote agentic work behaviors by (i) enabling employees to concentrate on tasks with available support and resources, (ii) motivating exploration of new working methods, and (iii) encouraging collaboration to achieve shared goals (Spreitzer et al., 2005). These activities enable employees to learn and stay motivated, thereby promoting thriving. Kleine et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis research demonstrated that supportive leadership behaviors and collaborative relationships foster thriving, with employee performance as a key outcome. Similarly, Abid and Contreras (2022) revealed that supervisor support is an antecedent of thriving, with employee performance as a desirable individual outcome. Supervisor support is a critical and defining component of a supportive supervisory relationship. It is plausible that thriving at work links supportive workplace relationships directly to improved employee performance, which underpins the fifth hypothesis.

H5: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through thriving at work.

The study contends that these psychological characteristics are interrelated and mutually reinforce their effectiveness. Thriving is specifically enhanced by psychological resilience, perceived organizational support, and emotional intelligence, and it also mediates the effects of these personal and job resources on various outcome variables, such as work performance (Kleine et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). According to the socially embedded model of thriving, personal and job resources encourage employees to engage in agentic behaviors that promote learning and provide the energy necessary for productive work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, employees are motivated to acquire, develop, and protect valuable personal resources to cope with stressful situations. The development of these resources enables employees to acquire additional resources critical to improving work performance (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Sonnentag & Meier, 2024). Thriving at work represents an additional resource, cultivated and sustained through supportive supervisory relationships, which further enhances employee performance. Accordingly, three hypotheses were formulated.

H6: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through perceived organizational support and thriving at work.

H7: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through emotional intelligence and thriving at work.

H8: Supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related through employee resilience and thriving at work.

RESEARCH METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The quantitative study relied on cross-sectional data collected via a well-structured questionnaire administered to participants from commercial banks in Southern Nigeria. Although banks' bureaucratic

structures limit support beyond task-related commitments, they hold high expectations of their employees, given the industry's intense competition (Mao et al., 2009). This situation requires working under heightened pressure, uncertainty, and ambiguity, which often leads to demotivation, burnout, stress, and reduced performance. Nonetheless, the changing nature of their work environment highlights the need for better guidance and support, which are provided through workplace relationships as generative activities that produce valuable outcomes. Consequently, the study focused on permanent entry-level bankers. Using the Cochran's formula, a sample size of 385 is ideal when the population is undefined. The snowball sampling method, a non-probability technique, was used to recruit participants with 1 to 3 years of work experience. This sampling technique is appropriate when identifying a defined sample is challenging.

The study involved physically distributing questionnaires to readily accessible participants, who then shared the Google Forms survey link within their networks to recruit additional participants. The human resources departments of banks, mainly headquartered in southern Nigeria, were also contacted. After providing information about the research and obtaining approval, a standard link was sent to them. This approach aimed to utilize a wide range of referral sources to secure a sample that accurately represents entry-level bankers in the region. Ethically, participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary, that their responses would be confidential, with names and workplaces omitted to ensure anonymity, and that the data would not be shared with third parties. Additionally, filter questions were included to ensure the data aligned with the study's requirements. The survey was conducted over four months, from February to May, 2025, resulting in 395 responses. The demographic characteristics of the participants revealed that 188 were male and 207 were female, with a mean age of 25.7 years and a mean work experience of 1.9 years. The minimum academic degree was a bachelor's degree.

INSTRUMENTATION

Regarding instrumentation, the 12-item scale of supportive supervisory relationships, the independent variable, was taken from Liden and Maslyn (1998). A 3-item scale measuring employee performance, the dependent variable, was adapted from Pradhan and Jena (2017). This scale measures the extent to which entry-level employees are satisfied with their task, adaptive, and contextual performance. For the mediating variables, the 6-item scale measuring perceptions of organizational support was developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). Davies et al.'s (2010) brief emotional intelligence scale (BEIS-10), comprising 10 items, was used to measure emotional intelligence. An 8-item scale assessing thriving at work was drawn from Porath et al. (2012). An 8-item scale adopted from Ephrem et al. (2021) was used to measure resilience. This scale includes both proactive and reactive measures and has been used in behavioral research involving employees. The 47-item questionnaire was pilot-tested before its full implementation. Face validity was assessed by two management professors, who confirmed that the items were appropriate and clear. The questionnaire was tested with 15 respondents, conveniently sampled from commercial banks in Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria. The Cronbach alpha test, facilitated by SPSS 20.0, revealed that supportive supervisory relationships (0.739), employee performance (0.794), perceptions of organizational support (0.720), emotional intelligence (0.763), thriving at work (0.801), and resilience (0.755) exceeded the permissible limit of 0.70, suggesting satisfactory internal consistency among the constructs. The questionnaire was rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Partial least squares modeling (PLSM), a variance-based multivariate statistical method, was used to analyze the data in SmartPLS 4. It involves the simultaneous assessment of the measurement (or inner) model for reliability and validity and the structural (or outer) model for hypothesis testing. The PLSM is known to yield stable estimates with a modest sample size of 100. It is also useful when the aim is to predict and explain relationships with multiple mediators. Hair et al. (2021) provided the guidelines for interpreting the results.

RESULTS

Preliminary tests were conducted on the collected data to ensure that it is factorable and free of common method bias (CMB). The factor analysis performed in SPSS 20 showed that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values for supportive supervisory relationships (0.719), employee performance (0.630), perceptions of organizational support (0.693), emotional intelligence (0.656), thriving at work (0.748), and resilience (0.792) all exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.60. Significant Bartlett's test scores were reported for all the constructs at $p < 0.05$. Taken together, the sample was adequate and suitable for factor analysis. Because the data were collected from a single source, the study examined the problem of CMB by testing the full collinearity. Following Kock's (2015) recommendation, a variance inflation factor (VIF) below 3.3 suggests that CMB is not a concern in the model. The PLS analysis, as presented in Table 1, yielded VIF values below the cut-off, suggesting no serious CMB issues from the single-source data. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis, both of which fell within the acceptable limits of ± 2 , as suggested by Hahs-Vaughn and Lomax (2020).

Table 1. Measurement model estimates

Items	FL	CR	AVE	VIF	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SSR	0.770 – 0.869	0.805	0.644	1.800	0.802					
2. POS	0.745 – 0.822	0.751	0.780	1.945	0.271	0.883				
3. EI	0.769 – 0.809	0.788	0.691	1.806	0.304	0.239	0.831			
4. TAW	0.788 – 0.887	0.814	0.734	1.587	0.272	0.207	0.325	0.857		
5. RES	0.791 – 0.864	0.790	0.716	1.993	0.298	0.368	0.116	0.225	0.846	
6. EP	0.774 – 0.796	0.735	0.709	1.862	0.184	0.243	0.297	0.310	0.206	0.842

Note: SSR = supportive supervisory relationship, POS = perceptions of organizational support, EI = emotional intelligence, TAW = thriving at work, RES = resilience, EP = employee performance

As shown in Table 1, the measurement model was assessed to determine the validity and reliability of the latent constructs. The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using four quality criteria: item or indicator reliability, construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Item reliability was measured using factor loadings (FL), with values above 0.70 indicating acceptable correlations between items and their respective constructs. The FL values for all constructs met this requirement. Construct reliability was assessed using composite reliability (CR), with values above 0.70 indicating satisfactory construct reliability. The CR values for all constructs were within the satisfactory range. Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), with values greater than 0.50 indicating good convergent validity. The AVE values for all constructs were within the allowable limits. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with distinctiveness indicated when the construct's correlation exceeded that with other constructs. The results suggest adequate discriminant validity was attained. With acceptable psychometric properties achieved in the measurement model, the next step is to estimate the structural model.

In Table 2, the R^2 indicates that the paths linking supportive supervisory relationships to perceptions of organizational support, emotional intelligence, thriving at work, and resilience explain 58.1% of the variance in employee performance, suggesting a moderate predictive power. The model fit was confirmed using the normed fit index (NFI) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). An NFI close to 1 and an SRMR below 0.08 indicate an acceptable model fit.

Table 2. Coefficient of determination and model fit

Test	β	Remark
R^2	0.581	Moderate Predictive Power
NFI	0.877	Acceptable Model Fit
SRMR	0.072	Acceptable Model Fit

Additionally, as shown in Table 3, supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively related ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.05$), thereby validating H1. To examine the mediating role of psychological characteristics, the study initially assessed their associations with both the independent and dependent variables. As shown in Table 3, perceptions of organizational support, resilience, thriving at work, and emotional intelligence were positively related to both supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance. Subsequently, the bootstrap method with 5000 subsamples was employed to conduct the mediation analysis.

Table 3. Summary of results – direct effect

Paths	Std. β	p -value	Remark
SSR \rightarrow EP	0.116	0.012	Supported
POS \rightarrow EP	0.209	0.000	Positive and Significant
RES \rightarrow EP	0.318	0.000	Positive and Significant
TAW \rightarrow EP	0.366	0.000	Positive and Significant
EI \rightarrow EP	0.183	0.000	Positive and Significant
SSR \rightarrow POS	0.324	0.000	Positive and Significant
SSR \rightarrow RES	0.219	0.000	Positive and Significant
SSR \rightarrow TAW	0.433	0.000	Positive and Significant
SSR \rightarrow EI	0.102	0.048	Positive and Significant
POS \rightarrow TAW	0.255	0.000	Positive and Significant
RES \rightarrow TAW	0.402	0.000	Positive and Significant
EI \rightarrow TAW	0.370	0.000	Positive and Significant

Note: $p < 0.05$, SSR = supportive supervisory relationship, POS = perceptions of organizational support, EI = emotional intelligence, TAW = thriving at work, RES = resilience, EP = employee performance

In Table 4, supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively and significantly related through perceptions of organizational support ($\beta = 0.107$, $p < 0.05$), employee resilience ($\beta = 0.115$, $p < 0.05$), and thriving at work ($\beta = 0.124$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H2, H3, and H5. In contrast, the relationship was not significantly related through emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.069$, $p > 0.05$). The mediating role of emotional intelligence was not confirmed, resulting in the rejection of H4.

Table 4. Summary of results – specific indirect effect

Paths	Std. β	p -value	Remark
SSR \rightarrow POS \rightarrow EP	0.107	0.002	Supported
SSR \rightarrow RES \rightarrow EP	0.115	0.000	Supported
SSR \rightarrow EI \rightarrow EP	0.069	0.133	Not Supported
SSR \rightarrow TAW \rightarrow EP	0.124	0.000	Supported
SSR \rightarrow POS \rightarrow TAW \rightarrow EP	0.097	0.014	Supported
SSR \rightarrow RES \rightarrow TAW \rightarrow EP	0.105	0.000	Supported
SSR \rightarrow EI \rightarrow TAW \rightarrow EP	0.077	0.042	Supported

Note: $p < 0.05$, SSR = supportive supervisory relationship, POS = perceptions of organizational support, EI = emotional intelligence, TAW = thriving at work, RES = resilience, EP = employee performance

The results indicate that supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance are positively and significantly associated through three serial mediation pathways: perceptions of organizational support and thriving at work ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < 0.05$), employee resilience and thriving at work (β

= 0.105, $p < 0.05$), and emotional intelligence and thriving at work ($\beta = 0.077$, $p < 0.05$). These findings support the acceptance of hypotheses H6, H7, and H8. Figure 1 illustrates the findings: the plain line represents the direct effect, the dashed lines represent the simple mediation effect, and the bolded dashed lines represent the sequential mediation effect in the relationship between supportive supervisory relationships and employee performance.

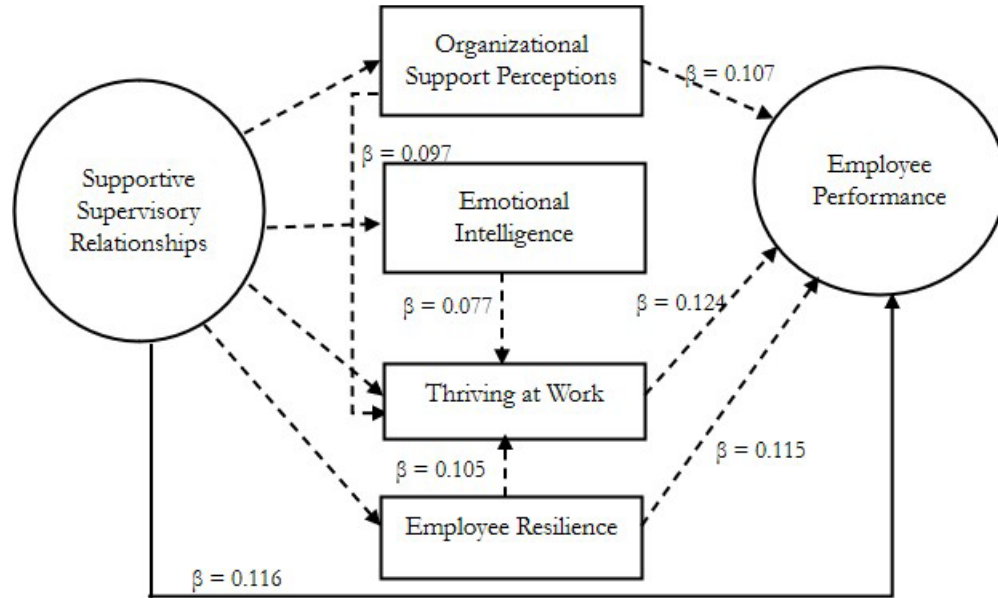


Figure 1. Research model

DISCUSSION

The study found that entry-level employees perform better when supervisory relationships prioritize both employee support and task completion. This combined approach ensures that expectations for both employees and tasks are met, thereby facilitating improved outcomes. The study aligns with recent research (Astawa et al., 2023; Kurniawan & Sawitri, 2023; Sekhar & Patwardhan, 2023) that reported a significant effect and disagrees with those (Idowu & Ndidiyama, 2018; Insan & Masmarulan, 2021; Wagner & Koob, 2022) that reported an insignificant effect between these concepts.

Second, supportive supervisory relationships significantly improved employee performance by fostering resilience. Such support enables entry-level employees to maintain psychological stability when confronted with unfamiliar workplace challenges that may impede their progress. The development of a stable and positive psychological state contributes to strong performance under stressful conditions. The finding echoes recent research (Nabawanuka & Ekmekcioglu, 2024; Ojo et al., 2021; Zeb et al., 2025), highlighting resilience's mediating role between supervisor support and employee outcomes.

Third, supportive supervisory relationships influence entry-level employees' perceptions of organizational support by fostering a sense of being valued and appreciated. This perception subsequently motivates improved performance. This finding concurs with studies (Sluss et al., 2008; Taşova et al., 2023) indicating that perceptions of organizational support significantly mediate relationships involving leader-member exchange and work performance antecedents – work engagement.

Fourth, supportive supervisory relationships did not enhance employee performance through emotional intelligence. One possible explanation is that, while emotional intelligence is related to both

constructs, it may operate through alternative mechanisms. Previous research suggests emotional intelligence may trigger additional psychological responses that significantly enhance performance (Kleine et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2024). The serial mediation finding involving emotional intelligence and thriving at work further supports this statement. However, this finding is somewhat inconsistent with Yen's (2022) proposition that supportive leadership enhances emotional intelligence to improve job performance.

Fifth, the positive relationship between a supportive supervisory relationship and employee performance is mediated by thriving at work. This finding suggests that building and maintaining such relationships helps entry-level employees learn new things and remain motivated, as the support enables them to perform their tasks well and develop themselves for productive engagements. The finding is consistent with Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) position that thriving at work relies on a supportive social environment to influence individual outcomes. It also corroborates the mediating role demonstrated in meta-analyses by Kleine et al. (2019), Liu et al. (2021), and Abid and Contreras (2022), which suggest that thriving may be associated with support mechanisms, practices, and systems, as well as with employee performance, and that it could provide a mediating context.

Regarding the serial mediation, supportive supervisory relationships were found to enhance perceptions of organizational support, employee resilience, and emotional intelligence. Each of these factors is associated with greater thriving at work, which, in turn, leads to improved employee performance. Although this result demonstrates that thriving at work channels the performance benefits of other psychological variables (Kleine et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024), the utility of this construct within a serial mediation framework remains to be established. Additionally, the serial mediation highlights the complexity of improving employee performance by suggesting multiple pathways through which supportive supervisory relationships are effective. Nevertheless, the study supports an integrated argument based on social exchange theory and the conservation of resources (COR) theory, indicating that supportive supervisory relationships activate norms of reciprocity among entry-level employees by providing substantial support for their well-being and task performance. This process leads to positive changes in psychological resources. Because these resources are dynamic rather than stable, organizations must reinforce them continuously through supervisory support. Psychological resources, such as perceptions of organizational support, resilience, and emotional intelligence, enable employees to acquire additional resources – thriving – that can substantially improve their performance. Fostering thriving is essential, as it allows entry-level employees to learn and remain motivated to perform.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the relationship between supervisory relationships and employee performance through the lens of positive psychological characteristics. Eight hypotheses were developed, and data were collected from 395 entry-level employees in commercial banks located in southern Nigeria. Partial least squares was used to analyze the data. The analysis revealed that supportive supervisory relationships are positively related to employee performance, with this effect mediated by perceptions of organizational support, thriving at work, and employee resilience. The mediation of emotional intelligence was not statistically supported. However, perceptions of organizational support, employee resilience, and emotional intelligence each enhanced thriving at work, forming a serial mediation process whereby these relationships positively affect employee performance. Although the mediating role of emotional intelligence was not supported, it may facilitate other psychological responses, such as thriving at work, that are significant predictors of employee performance. The study concluded that supportive supervisory relationships function through multiple psychological paths to enhance entry-level employee performance.

Theoretically, the study advances social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory by demonstrating that supportive supervisory relationships improve entry-level employee performance

and offering insights into the psychological characteristics and mechanisms that underpin optimal influence. Empirical evidence on the relationship between supervisory relationships and employee performance has been inconsistent (Astawa et al., 2023; Wagner & Koob, 2022), supporting the need to identify intermediate factors. Given this, the study identified psychological factors – organizational support, employee resilience, and thriving at work – that effectuate a positive association between the two concepts. The findings further illustrate the extent to which organizational support perceptions, employee resilience, and emotional intelligence contribute to the acquisition and development of additional resources, particularly thriving at work, thereby amplifying the psychological effects of supervisory relationships on employee performance. Nevertheless, the study indicates that supervisory relationships that support employee development, well-being, and task performance directly and indirectly enhance employee performance. The novelty of this research was reinforced by its focus on entry-level employees in Nigerian organizations, specifically in commercial banks.

Accordingly, the study recommended that Nigerian organizations, particularly commercial banks, adopt a supervisory relational approach that is task-centered and employee-centered to support the performance improvement of entry-level employees. Organizations should consider revising policy documents to reflect supportive supervisory behaviors that foster goal-oriented workplace relationships throughout the organization. Training can also be provided to enable supervisors and employees to learn behaviors for building productive workplace relationships. Training modules should emphasize supportive leadership, employee support, resilience-building, thriving at work, and emotional intelligence. However, management should recognize the centrality of these employees' psychological qualities, especially thriving at work, given their interrelatedness and strong correlation with performance. Psychometric assessment can be conducted periodically to gauge the mental state and development of entry-level employees. This can help supervisors balance the diverse needs, resources, and expectations related to tasks and employees, and ensure that employees feel comfortable expressing a variety of psychological qualities. Recruiting individuals with active-learning abilities and enthusiasm to work can have a profound effect on performance amid evolving work demands and expectations.

Regarding the study's limitations, the research focused on supervisory relationships that are both task-centered and employee-centered, with no empirical evidence on the individual effects of these workplace relationships. Future research can be conducted to provide greater clarity in this regard. Second, the study used cross-sectional data collected through snowball sampling. Future research could conduct interviews to provide more context for the findings. Longitudinal data can also be used to draw concrete inferences about causal relationships. Future research should utilize multiple referral chains or limit the number of participants' referrals to reduce network homogeneity. Third, the data were collected from commercial banks in southern Nigeria. Future research should extend to other organizations and geographic areas to improve the generalizability of findings. Fourth, the study utilized four psychological mediators; future studies can examine whether they play moderating roles. Other contextual factors, such as psychological empowerment and psychological capital, can also be investigated.

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