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The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust in the Effect of Organizational Support on Workplace Loneliness in Virtual Organizations

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Abstract: Virtual organizations have become increasingly common as digitalization reduces time and space constraints. While virtual work offers flexibility and efficiency, it may also increase socio-psychological risks such as miscommunication, cultural dissonance, and workplace loneliness. Drawing on social exchange theory, this study examines the relationship between perceived organizational support and workplace loneliness in virtual organizations, with a particular focus on the mediating role of organizational trust.

Survey data were collected from 202 employees working in two international virtual organizations headquartered in Türkiye. Validated scales were used to measure perceived organizational support, organizational trust, and workplace loneliness, conceptualized through emotional deprivation and social friendship. Reliability, factor, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were conducted.

The findings indicate that perceived organizational support reduces emotional deprivation and enhances social friendship. Organizational trust shows similar effects and fully mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and both dimensions of workplace loneliness. Additional analyses reveal that male employees and managers report higher levels of support, trust, and social friendship. The study highlights the importance of fostering organizational support and trust to sustain virtual work structures and protect employee well-being.

Keywords: *Virtual organizations, Perceived organizational support, Organizational trust, Workplace loneliness, Employee well-being, Social exchange theory*

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Introduction

Rapid advances in information and communication technologies have led to new forms of organizing work. One of the most prominent forms is the virtual organization, in which employees collaborate and perform their tasks without sharing a common physical workspace. Instead, teams rely heavily on digital tools to coordinate, communicate, and deliver results. Compared with traditional organizations, virtual organizations offer substantial advantages in terms of flexibility, cost efficiency, and access to a geographically dispersed talent pool.

However, virtual work also creates socio-psychological challenges. The lack of face-to-face interaction, reduced informal encounters, and limited opportunities for spontaneous social contact may weaken employees' sense of belonging and increase the risk of workplace loneliness. Miscommunication, cultural differences among dispersed team members, and difficulties in building a shared organizational culture further contribute to feelings of isolation and emotional distance. In the long run, such dynamics may threaten both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness in virtual settings.

In this context, perceived organizational support and organizational trust are two key mechanisms that may protect employees from loneliness in virtual organizations. Perceived organizational support reflects employees' beliefs that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. When employees feel supported, they are more likely to identify with the organization and to invest effort in their roles. Organizational trust, in turn, captures employees' confidence that the organization and its members behave fairly, reliably, and with integrity. High levels of trust can reduce uncertainty in virtual environments and foster stronger social ties among colleagues and between employees and managers.

Although prior studies have shown that perceived organizational support can reduce workplace loneliness and that organizational support is positively related to trust, there is limited empirical evidence on how these constructs jointly operate in virtual organizations, where the risk of loneliness is particularly salient. In particular, few studies have examined whether organizational trust functions as a mediating mechanism through which perceived organizational support influences employees' experiences of loneliness at work, and even fewer have focused on fully virtual or strongly virtual organizations.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing on employees of two international virtual organizations headquartered in Türkiye. Specifically, it investigates (1) the relationships between perceived organizational support, organizational trust, and workplace loneliness in virtual organizations, and the mediating role of organizational trust in the relationship between perceived organizational support and workplace loneliness. Workplace loneliness is conceptualized as a two-dimensional construct comprising emotional deprivation (a negative, isolating state) and social friendship (a positive sense of social connection and companionship at work).

The study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it extends research on virtual organizations by examining workplace loneliness as a multidimensional construct in a fully digital work context. Second, it integrates perceived organizational support and organizational trust into a single mediation model, showing how support is translated into lower loneliness through enhanced trust. Third, it provides empirical evidence from a non-Western, emerging-market context, thereby broadening the geographical scope of research on virtual work.

Literature Review

Virtual organizations rely extensively on digital technologies to coordinate work across time and space. Employees may rarely, if ever, meet face-to-face, and communication is largely mediated by online platforms. This structure offers flexibility, reduced physical infrastructure costs, and access to global markets and talent. At the same time, it complicates managerial control, performance evaluation, and the maintenance of a cohesive organizational culture.

When employees work remotely and asynchronously, it may be more difficult to build trust, share tacit knowledge, and feel part of a team, which in turn can increase feelings of loneliness and disconnection from the organization.

Advantages of Virtual Organizations

There are plenty of advantages of virtual organizations. The most prominent of these advantages is maximizing efficiency without the necessity of physical presence, thanks to the transparency of time and space concepts. As a result, customer satisfaction increases significantly. Following this, there are several factors that contribute to increasing employee productivity. While the flexibility present in the work structure of the virtual organizations supports more efficient performance for individuals and groups, the absence of environment pressure and distracting factors enables better concentration. As a result, higher-quality work is produced (Afgün, 2006). The freedom of choosing the workplace according to your preferences is considered a good fortune for the employees and it is a motivational factor. Working home enables employees maintain a balance between their professional and personal lives. Working in an environment they enjoy can increase individuals' motivation. The home office work culture can reduce the life stress since it offers significant time savings by eliminating the daily commute. This situation provides flexibility and agility to the businesses (Donlon, 1997).

Virtual Organizations tend to specialize. The timeless working approach of the virtual organizations leads to an intense workflow, and this workflow directs employees toward specialization in a specific area. Thanks to this tendency, effectiveness and productivity increase. This intense workflow can only be managed with the rapid capabilities provided by technology. By this means, employees can exercise the technology efficiently and can utilize these developments to improve their lives. Since the individuals specialize in their fields thanks to this working approach, hierarchy is decreased in the organization, and this has a motivation influence on the employees (Breu & Hemingway, 2004).

The working methods of virtual organizations contribute to cost reduction which results in lower expenditures. This provides a competitive advantage for organizations. The culture of virtual organization prevents such cases of medical leave, negatively affecting one another, and work disruption (Kim, 2009). Since the organizations transition from traditional methods to technological methods, speed and efficiency increase. Renewal in the organizations provides advantages in noticing deficiencies and correcting the errors. With the adoption of technology, communication tools have become predominantly computer-based. In virtual organizations, thanks to the use of written communication methods, misunderstandings and incomplete information sharing is reduced significantly among members. The speed provided by technology benefits organizations not only internally but also strategically. Organizations that stand out in competition find opportunities more quickly in the global market. Virtual organizations not only achieve success in the global market but also provide job opportunities for people living in rural areas (Yalçinkaya, 2011).

Thanks to the virtual organization working approach, gas emission is reduced and the nature is protected. Energy consume is decreased. This working approach offers ecological advantages to the world (Hook, Court, & Sovacool, 2020).

Disadvantages of Virtual Organizations

Afgün (2006) discussed that the extent transition costs for businesses adopting to virtual organization structures constitute a disadvantage. Since the transition from the traditional organizational structure to virtual structure requires utilization of informational technologies, it could become an expensive process. There are also disadvantages that virtual organizations face when using information technologies. For instance, since processes need to be shared with other stakeholders, the company's strategies may become exposed, posing a potential risk.

There are studies suggesting that virtual work weakens the control mechanisms (Afgün, 2006). Since there is a perception that staying in a fixed environment decreases employee productivity. Therefore, virtual organizations have the tendency to seek out the best employee and they always take action regarding this. As previously mentioned, virtual organizations bring flexibility along with it. Working in this flexibility might be quite challenging when it comes to monitoring both employees and work processes.

For an individual working in a traditional organizational system, transitioning to a virtual organization may bring about issues related to trust and communication. Trust plays a significant role in the virtual organizational structures. Trust is a critical determinant in increasing organizational efficiency and overall performance. Likewise, communication factor is also a critical determinant in increasing organizational efficiency and overall performance. Virtual organizations usually consist of people from diverse cultures and geographic regions working together. This combination also has a negative impact on communication, as individuals may experience conflicts due to cultural differences. Due to limited communication and the lack of face-to-face interaction among employees, it becomes difficult to create a sense of team spirit, which may in turn lead to a tendency toward individual work. Therefore, the level of mutual support among employees may decrease. Such issues may eventually lead to losing the organizational culture over time (Akkirman, 2002).

The absence of a traditional organizational culture may affect employees' lifestyles due to their established habits. Some employees may prefer working in an office environment due to their personal disposition. The ability of information technologies to enable work anytime and anywhere can have negative effects on employees, potentially leading to outcomes such as workaholism or overload due to excessive workloads (Akkirman, 2002).

The primary disadvantages of virtual organizations are that this organizational model is unfamiliar to many managers, and it is challenging and difficult to apply. These disadvantages can be summarized as difficulties in control, conflict management, performance evaluation, resistance to change, operational challenges, and issues related to trust (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support has been regarded as a central concept in organizational behavior since the 1980s and is considered an important motivational factor. It is defined as employees' beliefs that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Tokgöz, 2011). In this sense, organizational support reflects the extent to which employees psychologically perceive themselves as a valued part of the organization and feel that their happiness, needs, and contributions are taken into account (İplik & Efeoğlu, 2014; Tamer & Bük, 2020). When employees feel respected, accepted, and appreciated, the emotional relationship between the individual and the organization is strengthened, which in turn supports the development of self-confidence, social identity, and professional identity.

Eisenberger explains organizational support through Peter Blau's social exchange theory, which is based on the expectation that individuals engage in social interactions with the aim of gaining mutual benefits and increasing these benefits over time. Within this framework, the relationship between employees and the organization is not limited to institutional resources such as salary, information, or working conditions, but also includes the satisfaction of socio-emotional needs such as respect, esteem, support, self-confidence, and a sense of being accepted. When employees believe that the organization genuinely values both their work and their well-being, they tend to reciprocate with greater effort, stronger organizational commitment, higher performance, and more positive work attitudes (Eisenberger, 1986; Tamer & Bük, 2020). Conversely, when emotional needs are not met, employees may redirect their

energy toward dealing with internal tensions and conflicts rather than contributing productively to organizational goals, which can reduce overall effectiveness (Atılgan & Geçikli, 2020).

In line with this perspective, organizational support that makes employees feel that “the organization stands behind them” contributes to the development of trust toward the organization. Employees who perceive that they work in a safe environment and that their contributions are recognized and valued are more likely to display creativity, take initiative, and engage more fully in their roles (Tamer & Bük, 2020). Positive relationships within the organization also help employees feel comfortable and use their energy more efficiently in the work environment (İplik & Efeoğlu, 2011).

In virtual organizations, where direct supervision, face-to-face interaction, and in-person recognition are structurally limited, perceived organizational support becomes even more critical. Physical distance and technology-mediated communication can intensify feelings of isolation and weaken informal social bonds, thereby increasing the risk of workplace loneliness. In such contexts, visible and consistent support practices – such as fair workload distribution, responsiveness to employee needs, regular and meaningful communication, and recognition of achievements – play a key role in signaling that the organization values its employees and cares about their well-being. When employees in virtual settings believe that the organization supports them in this way, this perception can mitigate feelings of isolation, strengthen trust, and reduce workplace loneliness. Therefore, the concept of organizational support provides an important explanatory framework for understanding how organizational practices can protect employees from loneliness in virtual work environments and enhance overall organizational effectiveness.

Organizational Trust

Trust can broadly be described as a state of confidence and belief rather than doubt, and it plays an essential role in many aspects of human life. It is a fundamental element in the formation of social and economic bonds and in the establishment of relationships with groups and institutions, and it often functions as a guiding principle in social relations (Erdem & İşbaşı, 2000). In this context, several core characteristics of trust have been identified. First, trust necessarily involves at least two parties who are mutually engaged in a relationship. Second, the attitudes and behaviours of these parties create a certain level of mutual dependence. Third, for trust to be sustained, the relationship is expected to provide benefits for both sides (Hosmer, 1995).

Building on this general understanding, organizational trust can be defined as employees’ belief that managers and organizational decision makers will act honestly, keep their promises, and fulfil the commitments they have made (Gilbert & Tang, 1998). It arises in relationships where respectful and courteous attitudes and behaviours are shown mutually by employees and employers with the aim of protecting and promoting employees’ well-being (Demircan & Ceylan, 2003). Organizational trust also reflects the belief that individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole are open, honest, caring, and reliable, and that employees will be informed about the organization’s core goals, norms and values, cultural structure, and communication practices (Mishra, 1996). In this sense, organizational trust encompasses employees’ expectations that leaders will be accurate, transparent, and truthful, that they will honour their commitments, and that the opportunities and resources provided within the organization will be fair and meaningful (Börü et al., 2007). Similarly, it has been suggested that employees who trust their organization believe that it will strive to act for their benefit, be responsive to their needs, or at least refrain from harming them (Tan & Tan, as cited in Erdem, 2003). Another perspective emphasizes the belief that managers will focus on the organization’s long-term core objectives and will not act against the legitimate interests of others (Mishra & Morrissey, 1990).

Taken together, these definitions indicate that organizational trust encompasses employees' confidence that the organization and its representatives will act fairly, transparently, and in their best interests. It includes trust in managers, colleagues, and the organization as a whole, and it is closely tied to perceptions of honesty, reliability, benevolence, and consistency in organizational practices. When employees trust their organization, they are more willing to assume vulnerability in relationships, to cooperate with others, to share knowledge, and to engage in constructive conflict management. Organizational trust thus supports psychological safety, a sense of being respected and valued, and a stronger feeling of belonging within the workplace.

In virtual organizations, where employees often rely on electronic communication and have limited opportunities to verify intentions through face-to-face interaction or informal encounters, organizational trust becomes particularly critical. Physical distance and mediated communication can weaken informal social cues and make it more difficult to interpret others' behaviours and motives, thereby increasing uncertainty. In such environments, high levels of trust can compensate for the lack of direct contact by reassuring employees that decisions and actions will still be fair, consistent, and considerate of their well-being. This sense of confidence may help employees feel more psychologically safe and socially integrated, thereby reducing the risk of isolation and workplace loneliness in virtual work settings.

Workplace Loneliness

Loneliness is a phenomenon that has existed for as long as human life and is likely to persist as long as humanity exists. The common characteristic of living beings is the desire to live together; in this sense, loneliness is not inherent to the natural way of life of social organisms. Sociological and psychological findings generally indicate that lonely individuals tend to lead less healthy and more distressing lives (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). As social beings, people have a fundamental need for meaningful and healthy relationships throughout their lives. However, processes such as increasing individualization and the growing complexity of social relationships may lead individuals to experience loneliness both at the individual and societal levels.

In a narrow sense, loneliness can be defined as an emotional state arising from a perceived lack or insufficiency of social relationships (Wright et al., 2006). More broadly, it refers to a situation in which the individual is unable to adapt to their environment, feels isolated, perceives themselves as misunderstood and unsupported, and experiences marked difficulties in adjustment and unhappiness. This condition often brings along negative consequences such as a reduction in the number and quality of social relationships and an increase in stress levels (Yılmaz & Aslan, 2013).

The specific focus of this study is workplace loneliness, that is, loneliness considered from an organizational perspective. Loneliness in this context differs from the general notion of being alone. Organizationally based loneliness refers not merely to an inner feeling of emotional isolation, but to a state of being socially isolated or left alone within the workplace. It is primarily associated with deficiencies in the social environment and in communication patterns. For example, not being part of the group that participates in jointly planned activities and meetings can create a sense of being excluded from the social network. Importantly, this kind of loneliness is seen as a condition that can be alleviated if the individual gains access to an appropriate social network within the organization (Yurcu & Koçakula, 2015). In a similar vein, Wright et al. (2006) define workplace loneliness as a state of being alone that stems from social deficiency or inadequacy within the organization and from interpersonal relationships not being at the desired level.

In line with this literature, workplace loneliness in the present study is conceptualized as a subjective experience of insufficient or unsatisfying social relationships at work, reflecting a discrepancy between the social connections an individual desires and those they perceive

themselves to have within the organization. This construct is typically considered to comprise two dimensions (Wright et al., 2006). The first is emotional deprivation, which captures feelings of being emotionally distant from others, unsupported, or abandoned by colleagues. The second is social friendship, which reflects the presence (or absence) of positive social relationships, shared activities, and companionship in the workplace. High emotional deprivation and low social friendship together indicate a high level of workplace loneliness. It is anticipated that workplace loneliness may be more prevalent in virtual organizations, where remote work arrangements limit face-to-face interaction and spontaneous informal encounters. In such contexts, employees are more dependent on technology-mediated communication, which may make it harder to form or sustain satisfying social ties. Against this background, examining whether virtual organizations can reduce workplace loneliness by providing stronger organizational support and enhancing organizational trust is expected to contribute to the scientific literature and deepen our understanding of social experiences in virtual work environments.

Methodology

An ethics committee report was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee at Erzurum Technical University for this study. Furthermore, this study is based on the first author's master's thesis.

Research Model and Hypotheses

This study aims to examine the mediating role of organizational trust in the effect of organizational support on workplace loneliness in virtual organizations. In the research model, organizational support is treated as the independent variable, workplace loneliness (with its two dimensions: emotional deprivation and social friendship) as the dependent variable, and organizational trust as the mediating variable. The conceptual relationships between these variables are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Relations Between Variables Included in the Study



Previous empirical studies suggest that organizational support is negatively associated with workplace loneliness. Hasan and Anwar ul Haq (2021), in a survey conducted with 348 employees working in the banking and pharmaceutical sectors, found that organizational support has a decreasing effect on workplace loneliness. Similarly, Tian and Liu (2023), based on data from 332 full-time Chinese employees working in various sectors, concluded that organizational support reduces workplace loneliness. Drawing on these findings, it is expected that higher levels of organizational support in virtual organizations will be associated with lower workplace loneliness, reflected in lower emotional deprivation and higher social friendship. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: Organizational support in virtual organizations has a significant negative effect on workplace loneliness.

H_{1a}: Organizational support in virtual organizations has a significant negative effect on emotional deprivation.

H_{1b}: Organizational support in virtual organizations has a significant positive effect on social friendship.

Wright et al. (2006) define workplace loneliness as a state resulting from the lack or inadequacy of the social environment within the organization and from interpersonal relationships not reaching the desired level. In parallel, studies on leader–member relations emphasize that leaders may develop closer relationships with some employees, sharing power, information, and resources more effectively with them (Çekmecelioğlu & Ülker, 2014). Such high-quality relationships can foster a stronger sense of trust and, in turn, reduce feelings of organizational loneliness. In other words, when employees trust their organization and its representatives, they are less likely to experience emotional deprivation and more likely to perceive social friendship at work. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are developed:

H₂: Organizational trust in virtual organizations has a significant negative effect on workplace loneliness.

H_{2a}: Organizational trust in virtual organizations has a significant negative effect on emotional deprivation.

H_{2b}: Organizational trust in virtual organizations has a significant positive effect on social friendship.

The literature also indicates a positive association between organizational support and organizational trust. In the study conducted by Sarıkaya and Keskinçilic Kara (2020) with 497 teachers, organizational support was found to have a positive effect on organizational trust. Likewise, Stefano et al. (2018), in a survey carried out with approximately one thousand employees in a Sicilian hospital, concluded that organizational support positively influences organizational trust. They further argued that distinguishing levels of organizational trust and organizational support allows a better understanding of their relationships with organizational outcomes such as well-being, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Consistent with these findings, it is expected that organizational support in virtual organizations will strengthen employees' trust in the organization. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Organizational support in virtual organizations has a significant positive effect on organizational trust.

From a theoretical standpoint, and drawing on social exchange theory, organizational support can be seen as a signal that the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being. This signal is likely to be interpreted as trustworthy behaviour, thereby fostering confidence in the organization and its members. In turn, higher levels of organizational trust are expected to reduce workplace loneliness by decreasing emotional deprivation and enhancing social friendship. In this framework, organizational trust is assumed to mediate the relationship between organizational support and workplace loneliness. Accordingly, the following mediation hypotheses are formulated:

H₄: Organizational trust in virtual organizations mediates the relationship between organizational support and workplace loneliness.

H_{4a}: Organizational trust in virtual organizations mediates the negative effect of organizational support on emotional deprivation.

H_{4b}: Organizational trust in virtual organizations mediates the positive effect of organizational support on social friendship.

Population and Sample of the Study

The empirical data for this study were collected by means of a questionnaire administered to employees of two companies operating as virtual organizations. The total number of employees

in these organizations was 400, which constituted the population of the study. The minimum required sample size was calculated as 202, based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, using an online sample size calculator (www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm). In line with this requirement, 202 employees participated in the survey and provided usable responses. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the data obtained from the questionnaire would be used solely for the purposes of the research and would not be shared with any institution or organization, thereby ensuring confidentiality.

Data Collection Method and Instrument

In this study, a quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire. While preparing the questionnaire, a comprehensive literature review on organizational support, organizational trust, and workplace loneliness was conducted, and relevant measurement scales were identified on the basis of this review. The selected scales were adapted from previous studies in which they had demonstrated satisfactory levels of reliability and validity.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section included items regarding the demographic characteristics of the employees, such as gender, age, marital status, income level, education level, total work experience, and managerial position. The second section included a 10-item scale measuring employees' perceptions of organizational support. The third section included an 8-item scale measuring organizational trust. The fourth section included a 10-item scale measuring workplace loneliness. All items related to the main study variables were assessed using a five-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Detailed information on the scales used in the study is presented below.

Organizational Support Scale: Organizational support was measured using the 10-item Organizational Support Scale originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1998). The scale assesses the extent to which employees feel that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. The Turkish version of the scale used in the present study was adapted by Naktiyok (2015). The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Workplace Loneliness Scale: Workplace loneliness was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Wright et al. (2006). The scale is a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The Turkish adaptation, including validity and reliability analyses, was conducted by Doğan, Çetin, and Sungur (2009), and this version was used in the present study. The scale comprises two dimensions: emotional deprivation, which reflects a negative emotional state associated with feeling distant and unsupported, and social friendship, which reflects a positive state associated with the presence of friendly, supportive relationships and companionship in the workplace.

Organizational Trust Scale: Organizational trust was measured with an 8-item composite scale. The first four items (Items 1–4) were developed by Schoorman (1996) and colleagues (as cited in Koç & Yazıcıoğlu, 2011) to measure employees' trust in their managers. The remaining four items (Items 5–8) were developed by Nyhan and Marlow (1997) to measure organizational trust from both horizontal and vertical perspectives, as well as trust in the organizational system. Naktiyok and İşcan (2017) reported high reliability for this combined scale and treated it as a single-dimensional construct. In the present study, organizational trust was likewise evaluated as a single dimension. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Naktiyok (2015) and is a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

FINDINGS

Findings on Employee's Demographic Characteristics

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 54.9% of the survey participants are women. Regarding the age distribution of the participants, 7.9% are in the 18–25 age group, 35.1% are in the 26–33 age group, 24.8% are in the 34–41 age group, 10.4% are in the 42–49 age group, and 21.8% are in the 50 and above age group. When examining the distribution of participants by marital status, it is observed that 64.4% are married and 35.6% are single. When examining the distribution of participants by income level, it is observed that 7.9% have an income of 10,000 TL or less, 16.8% have an income between 10,001 TL and 20,000 TL, 25.7% have an income between 20,000 TL and 30,000 TL, 26.7% have an income between 30,001 TL and 40,000 TL, and 22.8% have an income of 40,001 TL or more. When examining the distribution of participants by education level, it is seen that 3% have a high school education, 7.9% have an associate degree, 50.5% have a bachelor's degree, 26.7% have a master's degree, and 11.9% have a doctoral degree. When examining the distribution of participants based on their length of employment, it is seen that 28.7% have been working for 0–5 years, 18.3% for 6–10 years, 12.9% for 11–15 years, 13.4% for 16–20 years, and 26.7% have been working for 21 years or more. When examining the ratios based on the participants' managerial roles, it is observed that 55.4% do not have a managerial role, while 44.6% do hold a managerial position.

Table 1: Distribution of Employees' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	111	55,0
	Male	91	45,0
Age	18-25	16	7,9
	26-33	71	35,1
	34-41	50	24,8
	42-49	21	10,4
	50 ve üzeri	44	21,8
Marital Status	Married	130	64,4
	Single	72	35,6
Level of Income	10.000 TL and less	16	7,9
	10.001 TL – 20.000 TL	34	16,8
	20.001 TL – 30.000 TL	52	25,8
	30.001 TL – 40.000 TL	54	26,7
	40.001 TL and more	46	22,8
Level of Education	High School	6	3,0
	Associate's Degree	16	7,9
	Bachelor's Degree	102	50,5
	Master's Degree	54	26,7
	Doctoral	24	11,9
Term of Employment	0-5 Years	58	28,7
	6-10 Years	36	17,8
	11-15 Years	26	12,9
	16-20 Years	28	13,9
	21 and more	54	26,7
Do you have a managerial position?	Yes	90	44,6
	No	112	55,4

Reliability of the Scales

According to the Table 2, the reliability analysis conducted to measure the organizational support and consists of 10 resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.940. It was concluded that the scale used for organizational support demonstrated high reliability. When an item is deleted on the Item-Total statistics table and when the values on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is examined, it is observed that removing any item from the scale would not increase the reliability of the factor; on the contrary, it would decrease it. Within this framework, it can be concluded that the existing 10 items successfully measure the intended construct. It was observed that the total mean was 30.59.

Table 2: Organizational Support Reliability Analysis

Item-Total Statistics				
Organizational Support Scale Question No	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient if Item Deleted
1	27,24	76,908	,784	,932
2	27,87	79,098	,756	,934
3	27,77	77,620	,803	,931
4	27,17	78,512	,774	,933
5	27,55	79,284	,673	,938
6	27,44	78,784	,699	,936
7	27,21	76,855	,803	,931
8	28,10	80,935	,681	,937
9	27,25	77,182	,774	,933
10	27,70	76,996	,810	,931

According to the Table 3, the reliability analysis conducted to measure the organizational trust and consists of 8 resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.958. It was concluded that the scale used for organizational trust demonstrated high reliability. When an item is deleted on the Item-Total statistics table and when the values on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is examined, it is observed that removing any item from the scale would not increase the reliability of the factor; on the contrary, it would decrease it. Within this framework, it can be concluded that the existing 8 items successfully measure the intended construct. It was observed that the total mean was 25,49.

Tablo 3: Organizational Trust Reliability Analysis

Item-Total Statistics				
Organizational Trust Scale Question No	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient if Item Deleted
1	22,53	58,101	,843	,952
2	22,27	58,199	,885	,949
3	22,34	58,246	,887	,949
4	22,30	58,250	,893	,949
5	22,45	59,0544	,853	,951
6	22,06	60,916	,744	,958

Item-Total Statistics				
Organizational Trust Scale Question No	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient if Item Deleted
1	22,53	58,101	,843	,952
2	22,27	58,199	,885	,949
3	22,34	58,246	,887	,949
4	22,30	58,250	,893	,949
5	22,45	59,0544	,853	,951
7	22,11	60,460	,783	,956

According to the Table 4, the reliability analysis conducted to measure the organizational trust and consists of 10 resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0,700. It was concluded that the scale used for workplace loneliness demonstrated high reliability. When an item is deleted on the Item-Total statistics table and when the values on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is examined, it is observed that removing any item from the scale would not increase the reliability of the factor; on the contrary, it would decrease it. Within this framework, it can be concluded that the existing 10 items successfully measure the intended construct. . It was observed that the total mean was 32,48.

Table 4: Workplace Loneliness Reliability Analysis

Item-Total Statistics				
Workplace Loneliness Scale Question No	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient if Item Deleted
1	30,14	29,941	,108	,715
2	30,36	29,544	,190	,696
3	30,08	28,485	,231	,692
4	30,11	28,101	,259	,687
5	28,50	27,326	,446	,656
6	28,73	26,100	,421	,656
7	28,57	26,236	,489	,646
8	28,57	25,450	,538	,635
9	28,67	26,720	,450	,653
10	28,55	26,577	,464	,650

Employee's Opinions on Organizational Support

The results of the exploratory factor analysis applied to the 10 items measuring organizational support are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Factor Analysis of Organizational Support

FACTORS	Factor Loadings	Explained Variance	Cronbach Alpha	KMO
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Factor : Organizational Support			65,160	,940	,934
1	My organization supports me when I encounter problems.	,833			
2	My organization makes my work as enjoyable as possible.	,808			
3	My organization really cares about my personal goals and values.	,848			
4	My organization takes my opinions into consideration.	,824			
5	My organization does not take advantage of me for its own benefit.	,732			
6	My organization is forgiving of acceptable mistakes when it comes to me.	,756			
7	When I personally need help, my organization is willing to assist me.	,845			
8	My organization is very concerned about me.	,739			
9	My organization is proud of my achievements at work.	,823			
10	My organization genuinely cares about my well-being.	,852			

The KMO measure for the 10 organizational support items is 0.934, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant. Therefore, the data is suitable for exploratory factor analysis. According to the table above, eight items load onto a single factor. This one factor explains 65.160% of the total variance.

Employee's Opinions on Organizational Trust

The results of the exploratory factor analysis applied to the 8 items measuring organizational trust are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Factor Analysis of Organizational Trust

	FACTORS	Factor Loadings	Explained Variance	Cronbach Alpha	KMO
Factor : Organizational Trust			77,422	,958	,922
1	In my organization, I have a say in my future, and I have a high level of trust in my manager.	,883			
2	In my organization, there is a high level of trust between employees and managers.	,915			
3	There is a high level of trust among my colleagues whom I work with.	,917			
4	In situations where I cannot track how my manager follows up on an issue or concern that is important to me, I still have a high level of trust in my manager.	,922			

5	I have a high level of trust in my manager when it comes to matters of supervision..	,890			
6	As employees in the organization, we have a high level of trust in one another.	,799			
7	I have a high level of trust in my manager when they have influence over matters that are important to me.	,831			
8	I have a high level of trust in my organization to treat me fairly.	,875			

The KMO measure for the eight organizational support items is 0.922, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant. Therefore, the data is suitable for exploratory factor analysis. According to the table above, eight items load onto a single factor. This one factor explains 77.422% of the total variance.

Employee's Opinions on Workplace Loneliness

The results of the exploratory factor analysis applied to the 10 items measuring workplace loneliness are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Factor Analysis of Workplace Loneliness

VARIABLE NO	Factors	Factor Loadings	Explained Variance	Cronbach Alpha (Total 0,700)	KMO
Factor: Emotional Deprivation			39,561	0,872	0,856
ED1- I feel abandoned by my colleagues when I am under pressure at work.		,781			
ED2- I often feel that my colleagues keep their distance from me.		824			
ED3- I feel that I keep a distance between myself and the people I work with.		,860			
ED4- I feel emotionally distant from my colleagues.		,907			
Factor: Social Friendship			29,386	0,897	
SF1- I have social relationships in the workplace.		,752			
SF2- I participate in social events at my workplace (such as picnics, parties, dinners, etc.).		,732			
SF3- At work, I have someone I can discuss my everyday job-related issues with when necessary.		,872			

SF4- During breaks at work, there is someone I can spend time with.		,857		
SF5- I feel like a part of the friend group in my work environment.		,843		
SF6- There are people at work who take the time to listen to me.		,772		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (p) = 0,000				Total Variance
				68,846

The KMO measure for the eight organizational support items is 0.856, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant. Therefore, the data is suitable for exploratory factor analysis. According to the table above, ten items load onto two factors. These factors explain 68.846% of the total variance. Accordingly, there are two sub-dimensions, which are emotional deprivation and social friendship.

Findings on the Relationships Between Variables

Table 8: Correlation Analysis

	Variables	X	Std.S	1	2	3	4	5
1	Organizational Support	3,05	,979	1				
2	Organizational Trust	3,18	1,09	,808**	1			
3	Emotional Deprivation	2,30	,976	-,393**	-,467**	1		
4	Social Friendship	3,87	,877	,378**	,416**	-,249**	1	

*p<0,05 **p<0,01

In order to determine the relationships between the variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. Organizational support has a significant and positive relationship between organizational trust and social friendship. In addition, organizational support and organizational trust has a negative relationship with emotional deprivation. Organizational trust has a positive relationship with social friendship and a negative relationship with emotional deprivation. At last, the relationship between emotional deprivation and social friendship is significant and negative.

Regression Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the mediating role of organizational trust in the effect of perceived organizational support on workplace loneliness. The multiple regression analysis was conducted in three stages: control variables were entered in the first stage, the independent variable emotional deprivation in the second stage, and the mediating variable in the third stage. Autocorrelation refers to the correlation between the error terms. To determine if there is autocorrelation in the error terms, Durbin-Watson (D-W) test can be utilized. If the Durbin-Watson (D-W) statistic is around 2 (ideally between 1.5 and 2.5), it indicates no autocorrelation. If it is close to 0, it suggests positive autocorrelation, and if it values near 4 indicate negative autocorrelation (Cohen, 2003).

To decide if the hypotheses are supported, we looked at the beta (β) values in the regression, how much R^2 changed when new variables were added, and whether this change was statistically significant based on the F-values.

Table 9: Regression Analysis of Direct Effects

Independent variable	Dependent variable	B	β	t	p	F	R^2	ΔR^2	Durbin - Watson
Organizational Support	Emotional Deprivation	-,392	-,393	-6,038	,000	36,460	,154	,154	2,165
Organizational Trust		-,385	-,431	-4,050	,000	27,836	,219	,064	
Organizational Support	Social Friendship	,338	,378	5,767	,000	33,261	,143	,143	1,822
Organizational Trust		,256	,319	2,924	,004	21,533	,178	,035	
Organizational Support	Organizational Trust	,903	,808	19,406	,000	376,610	,653	,653	1,945

According to Table 9, when examining the direct effects, organizational support has a significant and negative effect on emotional deprivation. Organizational support explains 15.4% of the variance in reducing emotional deprivation.

Organizational trust has a significant and negative effect on emotional deprivation. It explains 0,6% of the variance in reducing emotional deprivation.

Organizational trust affects social friendship significantly and positively. It explains 14,3% of the social friendship. Organizational trust affects social friendship significantly and positively. When examining the direct effect of organizational support on organizational trust, a significant and strong positive effect is observed. Organizational support explains 65.3% of the variance in organizational trust.

Table 10. Regression Analysis Results for the Indirect Effects of Organizational Support on Workplace Loneliness

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	B	β	t	p	F	R^2	ΔR^2	Durbin-Watson
Organizational Support	Emotional Deprivation	-0,44	-,044	-417	0,677	27,836	0,219	0,064	1,822
	Social Friendship	0,107	0,120	1,097	0,274	21,533	0,178	0,035	

According to Table 10, the mediating role of organizational trust in the effect of organizational support on workplace loneliness was examined. Both emotional deprivation and social friendship effects became insignificant. Therefore, a full mediating role of organizational trust was determined.

Table 11: Results of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Result
H_1 : In virtual organizations, organizational support significantly affects workplace loneliness.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{1a} : In virtual organizations, organizational support negatively affects emotional deprivation.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{1b} : In virtual organizations, organizational support positively affects social friendship	<i>Accepted</i>
H_2 : In virtual organizations, organizational trust significantly affects workplace loneliness.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{2a} : In virtual organizations, organizational trust negatively affects emotional deprivation.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{2b} : In virtual organizations, organizational trust positively affects social friendship.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_3 : In virtual organizations, organizational support positively affects organizational trust.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_4 : In virtual organizations, organizational trust plays a mediating role while organizational support affects workplace loneliness.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{4a} : In virtual organizations, organizational trust plays a mediating role while organizational support negatively affects emotional deprivation.	<i>Accepted</i>
H_{4b} : In virtual organizations, organizational trust plays a mediating role while organizational support positively affects social friendship.	<i>Accepted</i>

According to Table 11, all hypotheses have been accepted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine the mediating role of organizational trust in the effect of organizational support on workplace loneliness in virtual organizations. Survey data were collected from 202 employees working in two virtual organizations, and the findings were evaluated both descriptively and through hypothesis testing. The overall mean of the ten items measuring organizational support is 3.50, indicating that employees perceive a moderate level of support from their organizations, although this support is not particularly high. The mean score of the eight items measuring organizational trust is 3.18, suggesting that trust in the organization and its representatives is present but remains at a moderate level. Workplace loneliness, assessed in two subdimensions, shows a mean of 2.30 for emotional deprivation and 3.87 for social friendship. Thus, employees in these virtual organizations report relatively low levels of emotional deprivation and relatively high levels of social friendship.

The inferential analyses support the proposed research model. Organizational support has a significant negative effect on workplace loneliness: it reduces emotional deprivation and increases social friendship. Organizational trust shows a similar pattern, with higher levels of trust associated with lower emotional deprivation and higher social friendship. In addition, organizational support has a significant positive effect on organizational trust, indicating that when employees perceive higher support, they are more likely to trust their organization. Finally, organizational trust plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between organizational support and workplace loneliness. In other words, a substantial part of the effect of organizational support on emotional deprivation and social friendship operates through the level of trust that employees develop toward their organization. Although it was not the primary aim of the study, analyses of demographic variables further show that male employees report higher levels of organizational trust and lower levels of emotional deprivation than female employees, and that employees in managerial positions report higher organizational support,

higher organizational trust, and greater social friendship, along with lower emotional deprivation, compared to non-managerial employees.

These findings make several contributions to the literature. First, by conceptualizing workplace loneliness in terms of two complementary dimensions – emotional deprivation and social friendship – the study shows that organizational support and organizational trust are not only important for reducing negative feelings of isolation, but also for strengthening positive social ties and friendship at work. This dual perspective goes beyond viewing loneliness merely as a deficit in social relationships and underscores that building positive social friendship is just as critical as preventing emotional deprivation in understanding employees' experiences in organizational settings. Second, the results help clarify the mechanism through which organizational support influences workplace loneliness. Consistent with social exchange theory, organizational support can be interpreted by employees as a signal that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. The present study shows that this signal is largely translated into reduced workplace loneliness through the development of organizational trust. Employees do not simply respond to supportive practices in a transactional manner; they interpret support as an indication that the organization is honest, fair, and benevolent. This interpretation strengthens their trust and, in turn, lowers emotional deprivation while enhancing social friendship. In this sense, organizational trust emerges as a central socio-emotional mechanism that links organizational support to workplace loneliness.

Third, the study was conducted in virtual organizations operating in Türkiye, thereby extending previous research that has largely focused on traditional, face-to-face organizations and Western contexts. Demonstrating that the relationships between organizational support, organizational trust, and workplace loneliness hold in virtual, technology-mediated work environments contributes to the contextual breadth of theories on organizational support and trust. It also highlights that socio-emotional processes remain critical even when work is geographically dispersed and interaction is primarily digital. The findings suggest that, despite the flexibility and efficiency often associated with virtual organizations, employees' experiences of support, trust, and loneliness must be managed carefully if these organizational forms are to remain sustainable.

The results also have important practical implications for managers and human resource professionals in virtual organizations. Since organizational support reduces emotional deprivation and enhances social friendship, organizations should actively design and communicate supportive practices, especially in remote work environments. This may include showing genuine interest in employees' problems, making work more enjoyable and meaningful, valuing personal goals and values, considering employees' opinions, demonstrating concern for their well-being, forgiving tolerable mistakes when appropriate, and recognizing and celebrating achievements. Such practices signal to employees that the organization stands behind them and values both their contributions and their well-being. At the same time, given the strong association between organizational trust and workplace loneliness, systematic trust-building efforts are essential. Trust can be strengthened through consistent, fair, and transparent decision-making, through managers and employees developing mutual confidence, and through colleagues having strong trust in one another. Particularly in virtual organizations, clear communication, consistent follow-through on commitments, and visible integrity in leadership behaviour are crucial for creating a trustworthy organizational climate.

Addressing workplace loneliness directly is also important. Workplace loneliness, defined as a state arising from inadequacies in the social environment and in interpersonal relationships within the organization, can be intensified by remote work and limited face-to-face interaction. The findings suggest that virtual organizations can alleviate loneliness by simultaneously enhancing organizational support and organizational trust and by creating opportunities for

social interaction and friendship, such as informal online gatherings, virtual social activities, mentoring programmes, or interest-based communities. These practices can strengthen employees' sense of belonging and social integration. Furthermore, the demographic patterns identified in this study indicate that female employees and non-managerial staff may be more vulnerable to emotional deprivation and lower levels of trust and support. Virtual organizations should therefore pay particular attention to potential gender-based and hierarchical disparities, take preventive measures against possible discrimination toward women, and ensure that non-managerial employees perceive the organization as fair and inclusive. Targeted initiatives such as mentoring and sponsorship for women, inclusive communication strategies, and transparent criteria for recognition and rewards may help reduce these disparities.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations that should be taken into account. The data were collected from employees of only two virtual organizations in a single national context, and although the sample size is sufficient for the analyses conducted, the findings may not generalize to all virtual organizations or to different cultural and sectoral settings. Future research could replicate this study in other countries, sectors, and organizational forms to test the robustness of the relationships identified here. Moreover, the cross-sectional research design does not permit strong causal inferences. Although the hypotheses are theoretically grounded and empirically supported, it is not possible to determine the temporal order of changes in organizational support, organizational trust, and workplace loneliness. Longitudinal studies would therefore be valuable for examining how these constructs co-evolve over time and for identifying potential reciprocal relationships. In addition, all data were obtained via self-report questionnaires, which raises the possibility of common method variance and social desirability bias. Future research could employ multi-source data, combining employees' self-reports with evaluations from supervisors or peers and with objective organizational indicators, to strengthen the validity of the findings. Finally, the present study focused on organizational support and organizational trust as key predictors of workplace loneliness, but other factors such as personality traits, job characteristics, team climate, leadership style, and digital communication norms may also significantly influence loneliness in virtual organizations. More comprehensive models integrating these additional variables would provide a deeper understanding of employees' socio-emotional experiences in virtual work settings.

In conclusion, as virtual forms of organizing become increasingly widespread, understanding employees' socio-emotional experiences in these environments gains critical importance. The findings of this study show that organizational support and organizational trust are closely interrelated and jointly shape workplace loneliness in virtual organizations. Organizational support alone is not sufficient; it is the trust that emerges from supportive practices that ultimately reduces emotional deprivation and strengthens social friendship among employees. By investing in organizational support and systematic trust-building initiatives, managers can create virtual workplaces that are not only efficient and flexible, but also socially connected and psychologically healthy, thereby contributing to the sustainability of virtual organizational structures and to the well-being, commitment, and performance of employees who work within them.

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