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How workplace support for the COVID-19 pandemic and personality traits affect changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization and job-related well-being

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Abstract

How do organizational responses to environmental disruptions affect employees' job-related well-being? As the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new ways of working, increased health concerns, and added responsibilities, employees are facing important challenges in doing their work that can affect their job-related well-being. This study aims to understand how different types of work support (i.e., perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility) in response to environmental disruption interact with personality traits (i.e., core self-evaluations and future focus) to influence changes in employees' affective commitment to their organization and in their job-related well-being. We develop a moderated mediation model and test it on data collected from 295 individuals working in the United Kingdom. We find that work support for the COVID-19 pandemic, both perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility, is associated with more positive changes in employees' job-related well-being and that this effect is mediated by changes in employees' affective commitment to their organization. Furthermore, we find that personality traits moderate the relationships between these two types of support and changes in affective commitment to the organization, with those relationships being more positive for employees with low core self-evaluations and for those with a high future focus.

KEYWORDS
affective commitment, core self-evaluations, COVID-19, environmental disruption, future focus, job-related well-being, perceived organizational support

1 | INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic was a global shock that disrupted the way people work. As most countries attempted to slow down the rapid spread of the virus by introducing social distancing measures, organizations were forced to swiftly implement new ways of working such as remote working or to organize different types of workflow and interactions between work colleagues or between employees and customers in physical locations. In addition to these changes in working practices, COVID-19 also placed other burdens on individuals, giving them additional health concerns and new responsibilities, such as caring for and educating their children at home. Although some of the stressors associated with COVID-19 are out-of-work stressors, they can nonetheless affect how people experience their job as they affect the mental bandwidth available for work and blur the distinction between private and work activities (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva,

Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). Thus, with its many different stressors, the COVID-19 pandemic is an environmental disruption that, by overturning existing working arrangements (Kim, Vaiman, & Sanders, 2020), poses a great threat to employees' job-related well-being.

However, as organizations differ in how they respond to the crisis, there will be important differences in how employees experience the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study is to investigate how organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic affect changes in employees' job-related well-being, where job-related well-being refers to the extent to which individuals experience positive emotions in relation to work, such as feeling energetic, happy, enthusiastic, inspired, or satisfied (Ouweneel, Le Blanc, Schaufeli, & Van Wijhe, 2012; Van Katwyk, Fox, & Kelloway, 2000). In other words, the central question asked in this study is, what forms of support can be used during the COVID-19 pandemic to improve employees' job-related well-being? Unfortunately, as yet we know very little regarding the types of support measures that organizations can put in place during environmental disruptions in order to help their employees. This is particularly important as crises situations tend to have negative consequences for the employees and, as Ererdi et al. (2020, p. 24) argue in a recent systematic literature review on human resource management in times of crisis, we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of what organizations can do to ensure employees' job-related well-being in such critical moments.

This study makes several theoretical and practical contributions. First, we advance understanding of employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions by developing a moderated mediation model of organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (depicted in Figure 1). We propose that different types of work support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic can trigger changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization and, ultimately, in their job-related well-being. Following previous research showing that there can be both organizational and managerial forms of support (Fazio, Gong, Sims, & Yurova, 2017; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003), we highlight perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility to be different levers that can be used to influence employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions. Perceived organizational support refers to the extent to which

employees feel that the organization values them and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986), and supervisor accessibility refers to the extent to which the supervisor is available for communication and interaction when needed (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002). By considering these different types of support at multiple organizational levels, we provide a clearer understanding of the different options that may be used to improve employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, by considering the mediating role of affective commitment to the organization, we also answer a call for research to understand the ramifications of affective commitment for employees themselves, rather than for organizations (Meyer & Maltin, 2010, p. 323). Thus, through our focus on explaining employees' job-related well-being, our study develops an employee perspective of environmental disruption.

Second, we advance understanding of organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001) by studying it in an extreme context: a global environmental disruption. As previous research suggests that the context needs to be taken in consideration in order to understand existing theories better (e.g., Brewster, Mayrhofer, & Smale, 2016; Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019), we apply and test organizational support theory in the highly uncertain context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et al., 2020). This will give us a better understanding of the theory's boundaries during environmental disruptions. Third, we further advance organizational support theory by considering the mechanisms through which work support affects employees well-being by showing that, during environmental disruptions, this effect works through changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization.

Fourth, we develop a contingency perspective by considering personality traits as important factors that may affect how effective work support is in overcoming the pandemic's potentially negative effects on employees' affective commitment to the organization and, ultimately, their job-related well-being. While previous research generally considers that perceived organizational support enhances employees' affective commitment to the organization (for a meta-analysis, see Kurtessis et al., 2017), the extent to which effect materializes depends on employees' characteristics (Lee & Jeung, 2018). We advance this line of inquiry on the boundary conditions of work support by
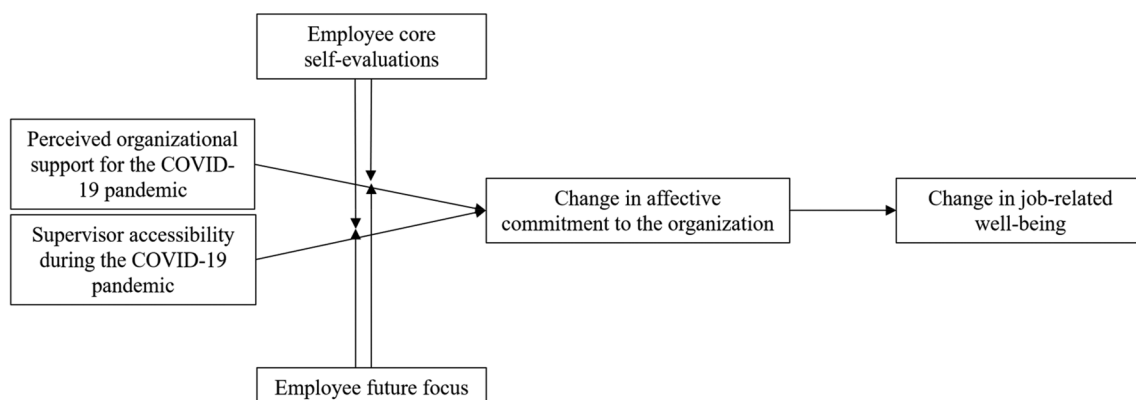

FIGURE 1 A moderated mediation model of how work support for the COVID-19 pandemic relates to changes in employees' job-related well-being

proposing that two personality traits—core self-evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003) and future focus (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009)—affect employees' reactions to supportive actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The contingency perspective we advance in this study is particularly important during times of environmental disruption, when the effectiveness of support can be critical for employees' job-related well-being.

In practical terms, our study on organizational responses during the COVID-19 pandemic has implications for understanding how organizations can stimulate their employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions. As organizations have limited resources, which may reduce further in times of disruption, they need to find the best ways of utilizing those resources to ensure that employees can perform their jobs without additional duress. Furthermore, as the pandemic has changed working arrangements, with many people now having to work from home instead of at the office, our study contributes to the understanding of how to maintain and potentially improve their employees' affective commitment to the organization. As the current pandemic has wide-ranging implications for how employees work, the study may also contribute to the broader understanding of how organizations can support their employees during future environmental disruptions.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Employees' job-related well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic brings additional psychological, social, and work demands, employees can experience a change in how they feel about work. In particular, the pandemic has seen many employees having to adapt to new ways of working because of increased working from home. This shift requires employees not only to adapt to new ways of communicating and interacting with others but also to find new ways to balance work and family demands, since lockdowns in many countries have required people to home-school their children while also doing their jobs (Caligiuri et al., 2020). In addition to these changes in working arrangements, employees also have to deal with added uncertainty regarding financial and health aspects (Ererdi et al., 2020). Cumulatively, these changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic create additional work and out-of-work stressors that may erode employees' job-related well-being. The limited earlier research on the work-related consequences of epidemics and pandemics seems to point in this direction. For instance, research on the consequences of the HIV/AIDS global epidemic in Africa finds that organizations experience negative outcomes in terms of employees' well-being, such as lower work performance, increased levels of absenteeism, and lower morale (Rosen et al., 2003). Gaining a better understanding of how organizations can navigate environmental disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively is important because job-related well-being has been shown to be associated with a wide range of positive work-related outcomes. These

include greater commitment to work, less turnover, less absenteeism (Brief & Weiss, 2002), and better organizational performance (Giorgi, Shoss, & Di Fabio, 2017). It is also associated with various positive nonwork outcomes, such as increased prosocial behavior and better economic prospects (Krueger, Kahneman, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2013) and also better health and greater longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011).

We propose that, while environmental disruptions can affect employees' well-being, the extent and direction of the influence depend on how organizations respond while the disruptions are occurring. Specifically, we argue that the extent to which employees experience changes in their job-related well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic depends on the support they receive during the crisis. We consider two types of work support that can be particularly relevant during this pandemic: (a) perceived organizational support and (b) supervisor accessibility.

We focus on these two types of support because earlier research argues that support can be provided at both the organizational and managerial levels (Fazio et al., 2017; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003). *Organizational support* for the COVID-19 pandemic can take several forms. Organizations can introduce various physical measures to help employees adjust to new ways of working. Such measures can include providing new technologies to facilitate communication with colleagues during the pandemic, helping employees to set up facilities to work from home, or offering flexible schedules to help employees to manage both work and home demands more effectively. In addition, organizations can provide softer forms of organizational support, such as acknowledging the extra difficulties that employees are facing as a result of the pandemic and showing their appreciation of the efforts being made or communicating about the company's financial prospects. In this study, we follow previous research by regarding organizational support as an individual-level construct because it captures individuals' perceptions of support, and people exposed to the same level of support may experience it differently (e.g., Swift & Virick, 2013; Yang, van Rijn, & Sanders, 2020). In other words, we consider *perceived* organizational support.

At the managerial level, we consider *supervisor accessibility*, which refers to the extent to which the supervisor is available to communicate with employees (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002). Including managerial-level support builds on Malik and Sanders' (2021, p. 12) argument based on a literature review that managers' actions are particularly important in human resources management during global crises. We focus specifically on supervisor accessibility because it is a form of support that supervisor can provide directly to their employees (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002). While communication per se does not always equate to support, during disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to communicate with the supervisor does represent a crucial form of support. As, by definition, environmental disruptions imply a displacement of existing work arrangements (Kim et al., 2020), a key challenge employees are facing is a lack of understanding regarding how to work and what is expected of them in the new situation. Dirani et al. (2020, p. 383) argue that during the COVID-19 pandemic supervisory support

should be a priority and state that "hearing regularly from team leaders, taking perspective, and ensuring the well-being of those impacted by the pandemic, is one of the core responsibilities of the leaders at a time of the pandemic and business lock down." Also, Carnevale and Hatak (2020, p. 184) argue that for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic an important form of support is informational support to help employees adapt to the changing roles and job requirements. However, despite these pleas that supervisor's communication is a key form of support during environmental disruptions, we still lack a clear understanding of how and when such support is effective. By specifically considering supervisor accessibility we also answer a call to develop a better understanding of how communicating with managers can help employees deal with work demands during the COVID-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et al., 2020, p. 710).

Thus, by focusing on different types of support (i.e., organizational and managerial support) in response to environmental disruption, we can provide insights into different approaches that could be used to support employees.

2.2 | The influence of work support during the COVID-19 pandemic on changes in employees' job-related well-being: The mediating role of affective commitment to the organization

We propose that work support affects employees' job-related well-being and that affective commitment to the organization mediates this relationship. Affective commitment to the organization refers to employees' emotional bond to their organization (Rhoades et al., 2001). Employees' bonds to their organization are particularly in danger, as the increase in remote working means that the COVID-19 pandemic can diminish employees' identification with their organization. Research on virtual teams shows that when employees have fewer opportunities for physical, informal, and spontaneous interaction with colleagues, their connection to the organization can be eroded (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001). This may be especially problematic when the physical disconnect from the organization continues over a longer period of time, as has happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, because people start developing new identities (e.g., self-identity or professional identities) that replace the now less salient organizational identity (Ashforth, 2020). The actions that organizations take during times of crisis can affect the importance of the organization as an entity to which employees develop emotional bonds.

Next, we argue that during environmental disruptions work support can elicit positive changes in employees' affective commitment to their organization and we discuss how these changes in turn affect employees' job-related well-being.

Perceived organizational support can enhance employees' affective commitment to the organization for two main reasons. First, it can enhance the employees' bond to their organization by creating feelings of reciprocity, as suggested by social exchange theory. Social exchange theory holds that to understand the behavior of parties in an exchange relationship, it is necessary to go beyond economic exchange and to consider social interactions in which there are certain expectations regarding repeated exchanges and fulfillment of obligations in the long term (Blau, 1964). Environmental disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic are "moral inflection points," because the severity of the disruption forces organizations to react, providing a moment of truth that can reveal their true core values (Ashforth, 2020, p. 1764). That is, organizations' decisions on how to support their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic can have a major impact on how employees feel about their relationship with the organization. Organizational actions perceived as supportive by employees strengthen their commitment to the organization because they feel an obligation to reciprocate and to give back to the organization (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001). Also, perceived organizational support is associated with positive expectations that the organization will fulfill its obligations and may even reduce the extent to which employees monitor the exchange (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005), strengthening the bond they feel they have to the organization.

Second, organizational support may also increase affective commitment to the organization by reinforcing employees' affiliation to the organization. As a shared stressful experience can help in forming an emotional bond, organizational support can create a feeling of unity between the employee and the organization as they work together to try and defeat a common enemy: the COVID-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et al., 2020). In other words, the organizational support helps develop a shared sense of identity (i.e., us versus the pandemic) while people are working together to overcome the challenges associated with the environmental disruption.

Supervisor accessibility, the second type of work support for the COVID-19 pandemic, can improve employees' affective commitment to the organization in two main ways. First, by making themselves available to talk to employees, supervisors can help reduce employees' work uncertainty during the pandemic. Christianson and Barton (2021) argue that a central challenge of this pandemic is one of sensemaking, as individuals need to pick up on cues in their environment, make sense of them, and take action within a transformed environment. A central factor that people need to make sense of is their work role during the upheaval caused by the pandemic. Communicating with their supervisor can help employees to better understand their role in the organization during the environmental disruption. This is particularly important because the disruption to previous working arrangements and the general uncertainty surrounding the pandemic may make employees feel increasingly disconnected from the organization (Ashforth, 2020). Having more communication with the supervisor helps to strengthen employees' affective commitment to the organization as they may be able to gain a clearer understanding of their work roles during the pandemic.

Second, supervisor accessibility can make employees feel a stronger bond to the organization because it increases their trust in the relationship they have with the organization (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002; DeConinck, 2010), since the supervisor is a representative of the organization (Levinson, 1965). As more frequent communication allows for greater clarity on supervisor's expectations, the supervisors' accessibility can help reduce employees' uncertainty about how they

are expected to perform (Oliver & Anderson, 1994). This is especially important during environmental disruptions such as the COVID-19 crisis when people are working in a reduced bandwidth state because they have additional concerns (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Furthermore, supervisor accessibility can enhance affective commitment to the organization because frequent communication with the supervisor increases the salience of the organization for employees as a reference entity at a time when many employees find themselves physically distanced from the organization due to the sudden move to remote working. Thus, albeit through different mechanisms, both perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility can enhance employees' affective commitment to the organization.

In turn, positive changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic are associated with increased job-related well-being. This is because feeling part of the organization satisfies socio-emotional needs such as the need for affiliation, esteem, or emotional support (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998). Also, affective commitment can enhance job-related well-being as it is associated with greater job motivation, which results from satisfying needs for relatedness (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). In line with these ideas, previous research shows that affective commitment to the organization is related to reduced intention to leave (e.g., Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Panaccio, 2017) and to an increase in citizenship behavior (e.g., Devece, Palacios-Marqués, & Alguacil, 2016). Employees with greater affective commitment to the organization are likely to experience greater job-related well-being because their stronger bond with the organization can help them cope better with the stress of handling a high level of job demands (Rivkin, Diestel, & Schmidt, 2018); this may be especially important during environmental disruption when employees are working in a changed and uncertain work environment. Also, particularly relevant for the COVID-19 pandemic, when many employees have found themselves asked to work from home at the same time as looking after their children, is that previous research finds that affective commitment to the organization can reduce stress and work/life conflict (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). That is, during environmental disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic feelings of belonging to the organization may be particularly important for alleviating the higher than normal levels of work-related uncertainty and stress.

To summarize, we argue that perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic can improve employees' affective commitment to the organization, and this is in turn related to higher employee job-related well-being.

> **Hypothesis 1a.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization mediate the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and changes in employees' job-related well-being.*

> **Hypothesis 1b.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization mediate the positive relationship between supervisor*

accessibility and changes in employees' job-related well-being.

2.3 | A contingency perspective: The influence of personality traits

So far, we have proposed that perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility influence changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization and ultimately their job-related well-being. However, since individual differences make employees interpret organizational situations differently (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004), to gain a better understanding of the role of work support for environmental disruptions it is important to consider its interplay with personality traits. Such a contingency perspective is important because the effectiveness of work support should not be taken for granted. For instance, Lee and Jeung (2018) find that perceived organizational support is more important in stimulating affective commitment to the organization for employees with a low status than for those with a high status in the organization. Yi-Feng Chen et al. (2021) also highlight the importance of considering personality traits as they find in a sample of front line health care professionals working during the COVID-19 pandemic that proactive personality interacts with perceived organizational support to influence well-being outcomes (i.e., thriving).

In this study, we focus on the contingency roles of two personality traits: employees' core self-evaluations and future focus. *Core self-evaluation* is a higher-order construct which brings together various elements that are part of an individual's self-concept based on self-esteem, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge et al., 2003). Core self-evaluations are the basic conclusions that one draws about oneself (Judge & Bono, 2001); individuals with higher core self-evaluations have a more positive opinion of themselves, believe in their abilities, are more emotionally stable, and consider themselves to be more in control of their lives. Because core self-evaluation is one of the main constructs for considering individual differences (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012), it can help provide a clearer understanding of how organizational support in response to environmental disruptions affects changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization and, ultimately, job-related well-being.

The second personality trait that we consider a key factor in how work support for the COVID-19 pandemic affects an employee's affective commitment to the organization is *future focus*, a type of temporal focus. Temporal focus refers to an individual's subjective experience of the past, present, or future (Shipp et al., 2009). The disposition to think about the past, present, or future impacts behavior and decision-making (Bandura, 2001; Bluedorn & Standifer, 2006; Fried & Slowik, 2004). Since the temporal focus of an individual directs attention to events in the past, present or future, it can influence how that individual interprets work support during environmental disruption. Past focus refers to anchoring to the past and using past experiences for decision-making, present focus refers to paying

attention to what is happening right now and making spontaneous decisions based on the current situation, and future focus refers to thinking about the future and possible future events (Bluedorn, 2002; Clark & Collins, 1993; Shipp et al., 2009). In this study, we use future focus rather than the other two types of temporal focus,[1] because it is uncertain how long the COVID-19 pandemic will last and we want to understand how employees experience this uncertainty. In doing so, we are following previous studies that also used a single time focus (Kooij, Kanfer, Betts, & Rudolph, 2018). In addition, as future focus is associated with more positive behaviors such as considering the future consequences of one's actions and planning for them carefully (Aspinwall, 2005; Shipp et al., 2009), we consider it to be more informative than past or present focus in interpreting the work support employees receive in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We focus on employees' core self-evaluations and future focus as key contingencies because we draw on social-exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to explain how perceived support affects employees' job-related well-being and these two personality traits affect how employees experience the exchange relationship with the organization they work for (Usman et al., 2020; Yang, Lin, Fang, & Huang, 2019); that is, they affect how employees interpret work-related events to form reciprocity norms (Gamache & McNamara, 2019; Nübold, Muck, & Maier, 2013). We also focus particularly on core self-evaluations and future temporal focus because Zacher (2014) finds that both of these personality traits are important predictors of change in career adaptability. As environmental disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic imply displacement of current work arrangements (Kim et al., 2020), these two personality traits might be particularly relevant to interpret the exchange relationships during such periods of upheaval. Next, we detail how employees' core self-evaluations and future temporal focus affect how effective work support is in stimulating positive changes in their affective commitment to the organization and, ultimately, in improving their job-related well-being.

2.4 | The contingency role of employees' core self-evaluations

We argue that for individuals with high core self-evaluations, the influence of work support during the COVID-19 pandemic will be less effective in stimulating positive changes in affective commitment to their organizations than for those with low core self-evaluations. First, employees with high core self-evaluations may perceive organizational support and supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic to be unnecessary. Because high core self-evaluations act as a shield against stressful situations (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996), such employees may not benefit from additional support. This is consistent with leadership substitution theory (Childers, Dubinsky, & Skinner, 1990; Kerr & Jermier, 1978), which holds that there are situational factors that can substitute or neutralize leadership behavior. Supporting this idea, Nübold et al. (2013) find that high core self-evaluations are a substitute for transformational leadership with

respect to its effect on work motivation and performance. For instance, employees who have great confidence in their abilities may not see the benefit in having increased access to their supervisor because they may require less explanation about how to work and relate to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, receiving support in the form of either organizational support or supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic can be less effective for employees with high core self-evaluations because it is not congruent with their positive self-concept. According with self-verification theory, individuals want others to see them in the same way as they see themselves; they prefer there to be a match between their own self-image (either low or high in core self-evaluations) and the type of evaluation they receive from others (Swann, 2012). Employees with a high core self-evaluation may perceive support (e.g., the supervisor having more frequent interactions) as being an indication that others see them as needing help and potentially threatening their self-perception. For instance, Deelstra et al. (2003) find that social support is not always welcome because it can be interpreted as a threat to one's self-esteem. Thus, perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility may be less effective for employees with a high core self-evaluation because they have more belief in their own abilities and may not consider themselves to be in need of the support. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

> **Hypothesis 2a.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' core self-evaluations negatively moderate the relationship between perceived organizational support for the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization such that the relationship is less strong for employees with higher core self-evaluations.*

> **Hypothesis 2b.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' core self-evaluations negatively moderate the relationship between supervisor accessibility and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization such that the relationship is less strong for employees with higher core self-evaluations.*

2.5 | The contingency role of employees' future focus

We hypothesize that the relationship between perceived support (i.e., organizational support and supervisor accessibility) and employees' affective commitment to the organization will be stronger for individuals with a higher future focus. Drawing on social-exchange theory (Blau, 1964), there are several ways in which employees' future focus affects how they interpret organizational actions to form reciprocity feelings.

First, because future focus directs attention to the future (Shipp et al., 2009), employees with a strong future focus are more likely to

regard the work support they receive during the pandemic as representative of how the organization will fulfill its duties to them also in the future. This type of extrapolation might be particularly important in strengthening the link between perceived organizational support and affective commitment to the organization. As this link is based on expectations of reciprocity (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2001), receiving support at a critical time such as during the COVID-19 pandemic might be particularly important in stimulating affective commitment for employees who may see support as something that will continue to be important to them in the future. This effect might work in similar way to enhance the importance of supervisor accessibility as employees with a strong future focus might extrapolate in a similar way regarding the trust associated with higher levels of communication, while those with less of a future focus will not do this to the same extent.

Second, due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, a strong future focus may be particularly important for the effectiveness of work support because it can help employees recognize the value of that support; thus, enhancing the reciprocity feeling or felt obligation toward the organization since they perceive the support to be more valuable. Employees with a strong future focus can direct their attention to relevant aspects of what work might involve in the future because they are more proactive and can act with more thought to the future (Bandura, 1986; Ferrari & Diaz-Morales, 2007; Kooij et al., 2018). Also, as future focus promotes goal-setting, motivation, and striving for achievement (Bandura, 1986, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004), it can help individuals understand how the support they receive can help them achieve their work objectives. Whether it comes in the form of perceived organizational support (e.g., access to communication technology or more flexibility in the scheduling) or supervisor accessibility (e.g., more frequent communication), the support may be appreciated more by employees with a strong future focus, because they are able to assess its value in terms of how it helps them to achieve the future they anticipate (Shipp & Jansen, 2011). In other words, employees with a high future focus may be better equipped to use the support they are offered, therefore making it more valuable and enhancing the felt obligation to reciprocate. The above arguments lead to the following hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 3a.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' future focus positively moderates the relationship between the perceived organizational support and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization such that the relationship is stronger for employees with a higher future focus.*

> **Hypothesis 3b.** *During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees' future focus positively moderates the relationship between the supervisor accessibility and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization such that the relationship is stronger for employees with a higher future focus.*

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Sample and procedures

We collected data using an online questionnaire administered through the Prolific platform. The use of this type of platform to collect data for publications in top-tier academic journals has increased dramatically in recent years (Carlson, Thompson, & Kacmar, 2018; Chen et al., 2019; Sherf & Morrison, 2020). The advantages of the Prolific platform are that it allows rapid data collection, which is particularly well suited to the urgency of the COVID-19-related research, and also that it makes it easy to contact respondents for multiple waves of data collection, which can lead to high response rates. Furthermore, the platform allows one to select respondents on the basis of demographic variables. We chose to invite research participants between the ages of 22 and 65 who were working in the United Kingdom. We paid respondents £7 per hour for their participation. Prior validation studies have shown that data collected using these types of online methods are as reliable as those collected in research labs or field settings (Mason & Suri, 2012; Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). Before sending out the questionnaire, we first ran a pilot with 25 respondents whom we asked for feedback on the clarity of the questions. We then adjusted the questionnaire in response to their comments. Data collection took place from late May to early June 2020, a time at which the United Kingdom was experiencing around 4,000 new COVID-19 infections per day and was in a lockdown in which there were bans on "nonessential" travel and interaction with people not living at the same address.

We collected data in two waves, with a 1-week lag in-between to allow a temporal separation between the data collection for the independent (Wave 1) and the dependent (Wave 2) variables. Temporal separation can help reduce the likelihood of common method bias because it makes it less likely that respondents can predict the overall research model (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In Wave 1, there were 350 respondents. However, we removed 26 respondents as they failed to respond correctly to one of the two attention-check questions. Attention-check questions are a mechanism for filtering out respondents who answer without reading the survey questions carefully (Thompson, Carlson, Kacmar, & Vogel, 2020). We invited the remaining 324 respondents to participate in Wave 2. Of these, 307 responded (95% response rate). We removed a further nine respondents who failed the attention-check questions, and three respondents whose responses had missing data. Therefore, in total, 295 observations were used in the analysis. In the final sample, the majority of respondents were female (71.86%), married or living with a partner (65.42%), and had at least one child (51.18%). The mean age of respondents was 35.27 years and their average organizational tenure was 5.41 years.

We took several steps to avoid potential common method bias. First, we temporally separated the data collection by 1 week for the independent and the dependent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Second, we made the surveys anonymous and confidential, and ensured that the questions asked were not presented in an order

similar to the conceptual model in this article (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, common method bias is less likely in our study because we have hypotheses that include mediation and interaction effects and respondents are less likely to have an underlying theory that would systematically bias their responses (Aiken & West, 1991; Harrison, McLaughlin, & Coalter, 1996). Fourth, we ran a Harman's single-factor test to verify the extent to which our data suffer from common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and the results show this is unlikely to be the case (% variance = 22.27).

3.2 | Measures

We measured all constructs using established scales, although we modified several of the scales to better capture the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, since it was the focus of this study. All response scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) unless otherwise noted. We present the scales that were adjusted for the COVID-19 crisis in the Appendix.

Change in job-related well-being was measured using an adjusted version of the positive emotion items from the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (Van Katwyk et al., 2000; shortened by Schaufeli & Van Rhenen, 2006). This is a subjective measure that aims to capture how respondents experience the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked respondents to assess their job-related well-being by thinking back to the period *before* the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and then to assess their job-related well-being *after* the onset of (i.e., during) the pandemic by thinking about the current situation; we calculated the change by subtracting the before scores from the after the onset scores for each item and calculating the average. That means that the respondents had to recall how they felt about their job before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the magnitude and recency of the COVID-19 pandemic should make respondents able to remember how they used to feel about their jobs before the pandemic started. A similar retrospective measurement approach to capture the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals is used in a variety of disciplines such as psychology, medicine or tourism research (e.g., Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Brand, Timme, & Nosrat, 2020; Kocevska, Blanken, Van Someren, & Rösler, 2020; Wong, Kim, Kim, & Han, 2021). The Cronbach's alpha for the change in job-related well-being was .92. The possible range of scores for changes in job-related well-being is between −6 and + 6.

Change in affective commitment to the organization was measured using three items from Allen and Meyer's (1990) affective commitment scale. We constructed this measure in a similar way to the measure for change in job-related well-being. Again, we asked the respondents to assess their affective commitment twice: thinking first about the period *before* the onset of the pandemic, then about the period *after* (i.e., during the pandemic). We calculated the change by subtracting the first score from the second for each item and then calculate the mean. The Cronbach's alpha for the change in employees' affective commitment to the organization was .94. The possible range of scores for changes in affective commitment to the organization is between −6 and + 6.

The measure of *perceived organizational support* during the COVID-19 pandemic was based on a scale inspired by Eisenberger et al. (1986); however, we modified and added new items to better capture specific support during the pandemic. The Cronbach's alpha was .91. *Supervisor accessibility* during the pandemic was measured using four items adapted from Atuahene-Gima and Li (2002). The Cronbach's alpha was .94. *Core self-evaluations* were measured with the 12 items from the Core Self-Evaluation Scale developed by Judge et al. (2003). The Cronbach's alpha was .88. *Future focus* was measured using three items devised by Shipp et al. (2009), which have frequently been used in previous studies (Nadkarni & Chen, 2014; Strobel, Tumasjan, Sporrle, & Welpe, 2013). The Cronbach's alpha was .83.

We also included 12 control variables that could potentially impact our dependent variable. First set of variables are on participants' demographics: age, gender, tenure at the current firm (i.e., number of years worked at the current organization), number of years in education, type of work contract (full-time, part-time, or freelancer/entrepreneur), number of contracted work hours, size of employer (less than 500 employees = 0; 500 and more employees = 1), personal income level and industry of employer. Furthermore, because risk and uncertainty are important elements of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2020), we accounted for respondents' cultural predisposition to risk by controlling for Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance, which is associated with an individual's country of birth (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In addition, we controlled for financial insecurity, measured using the scale devised by Abeyta, Routledge, Kersten, and Cox (2017). A sample question is "How concerned are you about your financial future?" (1 = *not at all concerned* to 7 = *very concerned*). The Cronbach's alpha for this control variable was .78. Lastly, we asked how many days per week respondents used to work at home on average *before* the COVID-19 crisis and how many they worked *after* it started, and we calculated the change by subtracting the before score from the after score.

4 | RESULTS

Before testing the hypotheses, we first checked the discriminant validity of our scales by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using maximum-likelihood estimation in AMOS version 26. The fit of the hypothesized four-factor measurement model was satisfactory (χ^2 [854] = 2374.74; comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.70; RMSEA = 0.078 [90% CI = 0.074, 0.081], AIC = 2644.74, BCC = 2691.88), and all of the respective items loaded significantly on their latent variables (p < .001). In addition, the hypothesized model was superior to the three-factor model in which organizational support and supervisor accessibility were combined (χ^2[858] = 3170 and p < .001; CFI = 0.54; RMSEA = 0.095, AIC = 3432.00, BCC = 3477.747) and to the two-factor model in which future focus and core self-evaluations were combined (χ^2[861] = 3518.41 and p < .001; CFI = 0.47; RMSEA = 0.102, AIC = 3774.414, BCC = 3819.113). These results indicate the discriminant validity of our scales.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics including the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables. In addition, we

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Age	35.27	10.22	—																
2. Gender	0.72	0.45	-.10	—															
3. Years of education	15.91	2.81	-.22***	.15**	—														
4. Tenure	5.41	6.48	.47***	-.02	-.18**	—													
5. Type of work contract	1.28	0.62	.05	-.08	-.13	-.13*	—												
6. Contracted working hours	32.40	10.69	-.12*	-.14*	.22**	-.03	-.40***	—											
7. Employer size	1.51	0.50	-.09	.10	.09	-.04	-.16**	.09	—										
8. Change in days working from home	1.60	2.68	-.05	.05	.23***	-.06	-.15*	.23***	-.06	—									
9. Financial insecurity	4.12	1.16	-.02	.09	-.23***	-.02	.12*	-.16**	-.04	-.23***	(.78)								
10. Personal income	3.07	1.51	.20***	-.11	.17**	.14*	-.23***	.39***	.13*	.25***	-.33***	—							
11. Culture of birth country	42.23	17.20	-.13*	.02	.07	-.18**	.16**	.02	-.06	-.12	.00	-.16**	—						
12. Perceived organizational support	4.87	1.42	.04	.05	.12*	.07	-.12*	.10	-.02	.25***	-.26*	.21***	-.17**	(.91)					
13. Supervisor accessibility	5.14	1.38	.01	.01	.06	.09	-.11	.08	-.02	.07	-.18**	.08	-.06	.48***	(.94)				
14. Core self-evaluations	4.44	0.90	.12*	-.03	.14*	.04	-.12	.12*	-.06	.12*	-.48***	.21***	-.04	.27***	.22***	(.88)			
15. Future focus	5.52	0.91	-.21***	.09	.00	-.15*	.09	.09	.14*	.12*	-.06	.06	.00	.20***	.15*	.13*	(.83)		
16. Change in affective commitment to the organization	-0.21	1.12	.03	.00	.04	-.07	-.06	.06	.06	.09	-.17**	.03	-.05	.36**	.18**	.13*	-.05	(.94)	
17. Change in job-related well-being	-0.78	1.21	.06	-.07	.04	-.00	-.02	.06	-.02	-.02	-.16**	.03	.06	.12*	.04	.05	.13*	.46***	(.92)

Note: Gender was coded as follows: 0 = female, 1 = male. Type of work contract was coded as follows: 1 = full-time, 2 = part-time, 3 = self-employed/freelancer. Employer size is coded as 0 = less than 500 employees and 1 = 500 employees and more. Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in parentheses. *N* = 295.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001, two-tailed.

performed paired t-tests to check whether there were statistically significant differences between the before and after COVID-19 scores for employees' affective commitment to their organization and for their job-related well-being. These paired t-tests show a statistically significant difference, $t(294) = 3.204$, $p < .001$, between affective commitment to the organization before the onset of COVID-19 ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.55$) and affective commitment after the onset ($M = 4.38$,

$SD = 1.65$). Similarly, the difference between job-related well-being before COVID-19 ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.12$) and after COVID-19 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.25$) is statistically significant ($t(294) = 11.048$, $p < .001$). This is an important finding, as it shows that employees feel that they experienced negative effects after the onset of the pandemic.

The mediation model results with organizational support as the predictor are presented in Table 2. Perceived organizational support

TABLE 2 Results for perceived organizational support for the COVID-19 pandemic

	Mediation model				Moderated mediation model			
	Change in affective commitment to the organization		Change in job-related well-being		Change in affective commitment to the organization		Change in job-related well-being	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Control variables								
Age	1.31	0.98	.97	1.01	1.03	0.96	.92	0.15
Gender	−.01	0.14	−.10	0.15	.02	0.14	−.10	0.15
Years of education	−.02	0.02	.01	0.03	−.02	0.02	.01	0.03
Tenure	−.29***	0.09	−.05	0.10	−.27	0.09	−.01	0.10
Type of work contract[a]								
2 (part-time)	−.09	0.22	.00	0.23	−.12	0.21	.00	0.23
3 (freelancer/entrepreneur)	−.07	0.24	−.20	0.25	−.06	0.24	−.20	0.25
Contracted working hours	.09	0.10	−.05	0.10	.09	0.09	−.05	0.10
Employer size	.18	0.13	−.10	0.14	.18	0.13	−.10	0.14
Industry[b]								
2 (professional services)	−.06	0.26	−.07	0.27	−.09	0.25	−.08	0.27
3 (healthcare)	.36	0.27	−.23	0.28	.35	0.26	−.23	0.28
4 (retail and hospitality)	.13	0.26	−.52	0.27	.08	0.26	−.53	0.27
5 (education)	.22	0.27	−.62*	0.28	.26	0.26	−.60*	0.28
6 (government services)	−.02	0.30	−.32	0.32	−.05	0.30	−.33	0.32
7 (others)	.00	0.24	−.30	0.25	−.03	0.24	−.30	0.25
Change in days working from home	.01	0.03	−.03	0.03	.00	0.03	−.03	0.03
Financial insecurity	−.12	0.06	−.10	0.07	−.12	0.06	−.10	0.07
Personal income	−.07	0.04	−.01	0.05	−.05	0.05	−.01	0.05
Culture of birth country	.00	0.00	.00	0.00	.00	0.00	.01	0.00
Independent variables								
Perceived organizational support	.30***	0.05	−.03	0.05	.30***	0.05	−.02	0.05
Core self-evaluations	.02	0.08	−.06	0.08	.01	0.08	−.06	0.08
Future focus	−.20***	0.07	−.10	0.08	−.20**	0.07	−.10	0.08
Interaction terms								
Perceived organizational support × Core self-evaluations					−.15**	0.05	−.03	0.05
Perceived organizational support × Future focus					.10*	0.05	.03	0.05
Mediator								
Change in affective commitment to the organization			.50***	0.06			.49***	0.06
R^2	.21		.27		.25		.28	

Note: N = 295.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. Two-tailed.
[a]Reference group is employees on full-time contract.
[b]Reference group is IT/media industry.

was positively related to change in affective commitment to the organization ($B = .30$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$). In addition, change in affective commitment to the organization was positively related to change in job-related well-being ($B = .50$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$). We also tested the indirect effects of organizational support on change in job-related well-being via change in affective commitment to the organization using the bootstrapping method with PROCESS. The mediating effect

of change in affective commitment to the organization was 0.19, with a 95% CI [0.11, 0.29]. The confidence interval excluded zero, supporting the relationship proposed in Hypothesis 1a.

Next, the mediation model results with supervisor accessibility as the predictor are shown in Table 3. Supervisor accessibility was positively related to change in affective commitment to the organization ($B = .13$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .01$). In addition, change in affective

TABLE 3 Results for supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic

	Mediation model				Moderated mediation model			
	Change in affective commitment to the organization		Change in job-related well-being		Change in affective commitment to the organization		Change in job-related well-being	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Control variables								
Age	1.42	1.03	.97	1.01	1.25	1.02	1.00	1.02
Gender	.03	0.15	−.11	0.15	.06	0.15	−.10	0.15
Years of education	−.02	0.03	.01	0.03	−.02	0.03	.01	0.03
Tenure	−.27**	0.09	−.01	0.09	−.27*	0.09	−.01	0.10
Type of work contract[a]								
2 (part-time)	−.16	0.23	.00	0.23	−.16	0.23	.00	0.23
3 (freelancer/entrepreneur)	−.04	0.26	−.20	0.25	−.01	0.26	−.21	0.25
Contracted working hours	.09	0.10	−.04	0.10	.08	0.10	−.05	0.10
Employer size	.16	0.14	−.10	0.14	.16	0.14	−.10	0.14
Industry[b]								
2 (professional services)	−.19	0.27	−.05	0.27	−.18	0.27	−.04	0.27
3 (healthcare)	.26	0.28	−.20	0.28	.23	0.28	−.20	0.28
4 (retail and hospitality)	−.02	0.27	−.50	0.27	−.01	0.27	−.49	0.27
5 (education)	.17	0.28	−.61*	0.28	.22	0.28	−.61*	0.28
6 (government services)	−.14	0.32	−.32	0.32	−.13	0.32	−.31	0.32
7 (others)	−.16	0.25	−.28	0.25	−.18	0.25	−.27	0.25
Change in days working from home	.03	0.03	−.03	0.03	.03	0.03	−.03	0.03
Financial insecurity	−.15	0.07	−.10	0.07	−.14	0.07	−.10	0.07
Personal income	−.05	0.05	−.01	0.05	−.03	0.05	−.02	0.05
Culture of birth country	.00	0.00	.01	0.00	.00	0.00	.01	0.00
Independent variables								
Supervisor accessibility	.13**	0.05	−.03	0.05	.10*	0.05	−.03	0.05
Core self-evaluations	.06	0.08	−.06	0.08	.05	0.08	−.06	0.08
Future focus	−.14	0.08	−.10	0.08	−.12**	0.08	−.10	0.08
Interaction terms								
Supervisor accessibility × Core self-evaluations					−.09*	0.04	−.03	0.04
Supervisor accessibility × Future focus					.10	0.05	.01	0.05
Mediator								
Change in affective commitment to the organization			.50***	0.06			.50***	0.06
R^2	.12		.27		.14		.28	

Note: $N = 295$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$, two-tailed.
[a]Reference group is employees on full-time contract.
[b]Reference group is IT/media industry.

commitment to the organization was positively related to change in job-related well-being ($B = .50$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$). In addition, we tested the indirect effects of supervisor accessibility on change in job-related well-being via change in affective commitment to the organization using the bootstrapping method with PROCESS. The mediating effect of change in affective commitment to the organization was 0.09, with a 95% CI [0.02, 0.18]. The confidence interval excluded zero, supporting the relationship proposed in Hypothesis 1b.

4.1 | Testing the moderated mediation effects

In Table 2, we present our moderated mediation model results with perceived organizational support as the predictor. The interaction term between organizational support and core self-evaluations on change in affective commitment to the organization was negative and significant ($B = -.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .01$). Also, the interaction term between organizational support and future focus was positive and significant ($B = .10$. $SE = 0.05$, $p < .05$). The results are therefore in line with the relationships proposed in Hypotheses 2a and 3a. Table 3 shows the results from our moderated mediation model results with supervisor accessibility as the predictor. The interaction term between supervisor accessibility and core self-evaluations was negative and statistically significant ($B = -.09$, $SE = .04$, $p < .05$). However, the interaction term between supervisor accessibility and future focus was not statistically significant ($B = .10$, $SE = 0.05$, $p > .05$). Therefore, results support the relationship proposed in Hypothesis 2b, but Hypothesis 3b is rejected.

To gain further insights into how the moderated mediation effects work, we used the PROCESS macro version 3.5.2 Model 7 (Hayes, 2013) to generate estimates of indirect effects for the

perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility at different values of the moderators. We used a bootstrapping procedure to quantify the indirect effects at low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of both core self-evaluations and future focus (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). Table 4 shows the conditional indirect effect of X (perceived organizational support) on Y (change in job-related well-being) via M (change in affective commitment to the organization) at low, mean, and high levels of future focus and core self-evaluations. We see from the results of the conditional effect of the independent variable on the mediator that all the combinations are statistically significant ($p < .05$), as the confidence intervals do not contain zero. Table 5 shows the conditional indirect effect of X (supervisor accessibility) on Y (change in job-related well-being) via M (change in affective commitment to the organization) at low, mean, and high levels of future focus and core self-evaluations. The results show that all the conditional indirect effects are significant, except when core self-evaluation is high ($+1$ SD) and when future focus is low (-1 SD).

In Figures 2–4, we plotted simple slopes for interaction effects for low (-1 SD) and high ($+1$ SD) values of the moderators, following previous studies (e.g., Ma, Ganegoda, Chen, Jiang, & Dong, 2020). From Figure 2 we can see that, in line with the expectations from Hypothesis 2a, the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization is stronger for employees with low core-self evaluations than for those with high core-self evaluations. The influence of perceived organizational support for COVID-19 on changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization is positive and significant when core self-evaluations were low ($B = .40$, $t = 6.6$, $p < .001$) and also when core self-evaluations were high ($B = .18$, $t = 2.85$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, from Figure 3, we see that, in line with Hypothesis 3a, the positive relationship between perceived

TABLE 4 Results of conditional indirect effects estimates for perceived organizational support for the COVID-19 pandemic

Conditional indirect effect of X on Y via M				
Moderators				
Core self-evaluations	Coefficient	*SE*	LLCI	ULCI
−1 *SD*	**0.20**	**0.06**	**0.085**	**0.330**
M	**0.14**	**0.04**	**0.074**	**0.222**
+1 *SD*	**0.09**	**0.03**	**0.031**	**0.154**
Future focus				
−1 *SD*	**0.12**	**0.04**	**0.050**	**0.218**
M	**0.15**	**0.04**	**0.081**	**0.246**
+1 *SD*	**0.19**	**0.05**	**0.096**	**0.298**

Note: X = perceived organizational support, M = change in affective commitment to the organization, Y = change in job-related well-being. LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval. Coefficients are centered in all models. For the conditional indirect effects, we used 95% confidence intervals (CIs) calculated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Conditional effects that are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level are in bold. N = 295.

TABLE 5 Results of conditional indirect effects estimates for supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic

Conditional indirect effect of X on Y via M				
Moderators				
Core self-evaluations	Coefficient	*SE*	LLCI	ULCI
−1 *SD*	**0.09**	**0.05**	**0.004**	**0.194**
M	**0.05**	**0.03**	**0.002**	**0.117**
+1 *SD*	0.02	0.03	−0.047	0.086
Future focus				
−1 *SD*	0.22	0.04	−0.048	0.110
M	**0.62**	**0.03**	**0.009**	**0.139**
+1 *SD*	**0.10**	**0.05**	**0.027**	**0.205**

Note: X = perceived supervisor accessibility, M = change in affective commitment to the organization, Y = change in job-related well-being. LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval. Coefficients are centered in all models. For the conditional indirect effects, we used 95% confidence intervals (CIs) calculated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Conditional effects that are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level are in bold. N = 295.

FIGURE 2 Moderating effects of employees' core self-evaluations on the relationship between perceived organizational support and the change in employees' affective commitment to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic
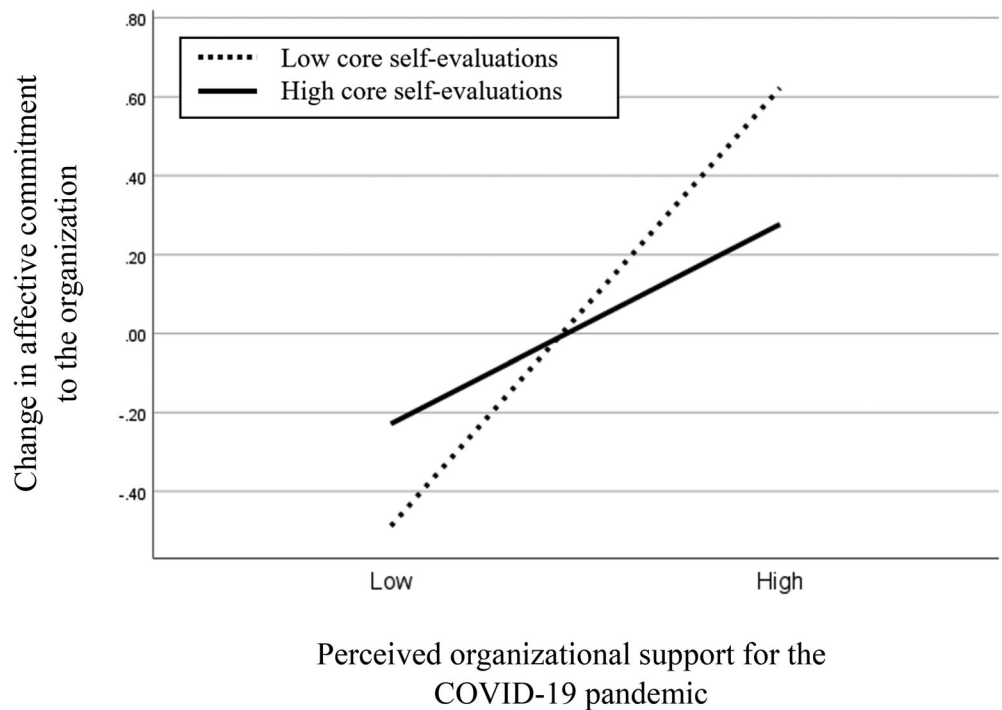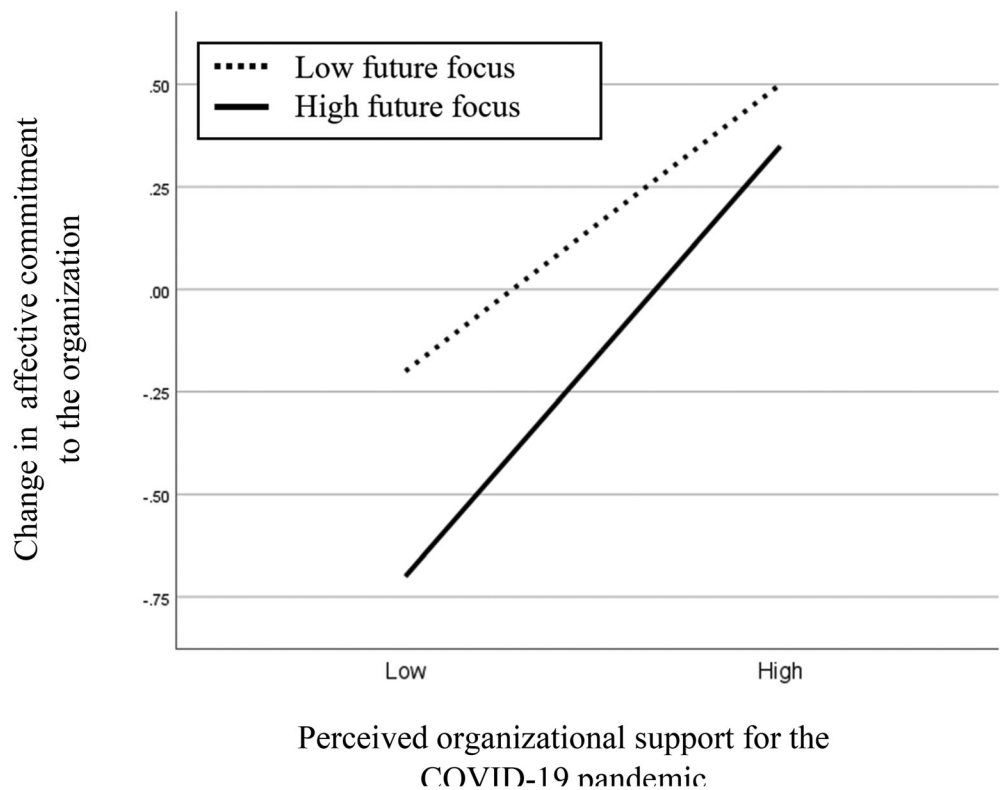

FIGURE 3 Moderating effects of employees' future focus on the relationship between perceived organizational support and the change in employees' affective commitment to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic

organizational support for COVID-19 and employees' changes in affective commitment to the organization is stronger for employees with a high future focus than for those with a low future focus. Also, the relationship between perceived organizational support for COVID-19 and changes in employee's affective commitment to the organization is positive and significant for both employees with a low future focus ($B = .24$, $t = 3.85$, $p < .001$) and for those with a high future focus ($B = .36$, $t = 5.94$, $p < .001$). Lastly, Figure 4 shows that, as proposed in Hypothesis 2b, the relationship between supervisor accessibility and changes in employees' affective commitment to the organizations was positive and significant when core self-evaluations were low ($B = .18$, $t = 3.16$, $p < .01$); this relationship was
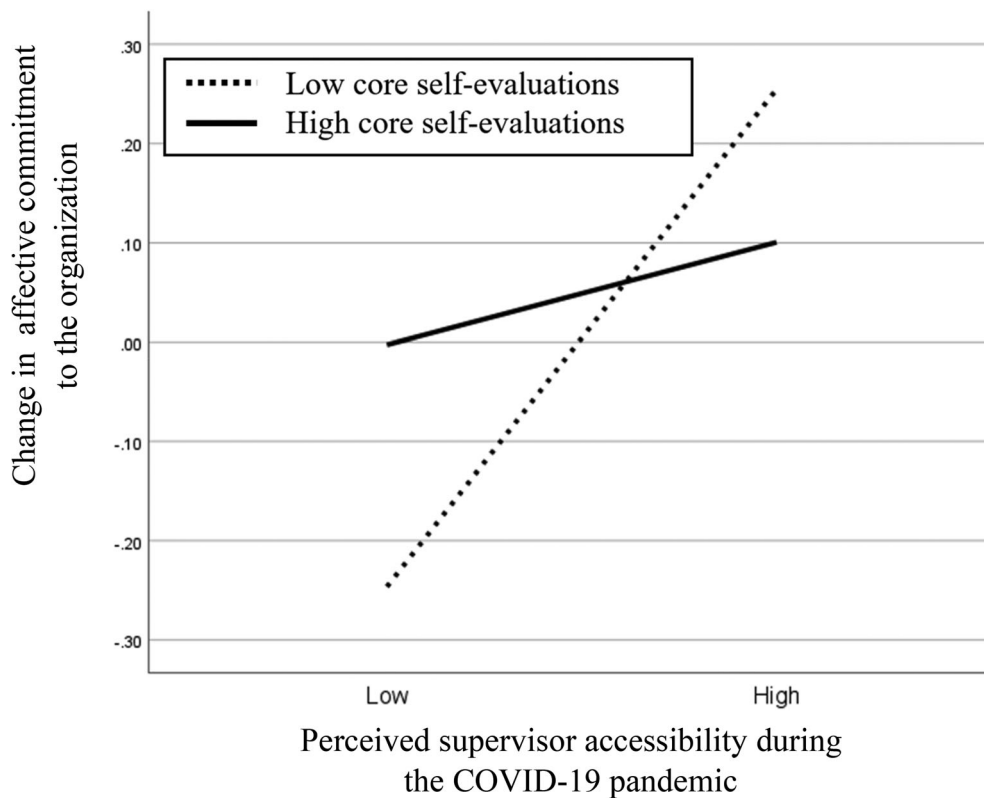
FIGURE 4 Moderating effect of employees' core self-evaluations on the relationship between supervisor accessibility and the change in employees' affective commitment to the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic

nonsignificant when core self-evaluations were high (B = .03, t = 0.56, p = .58). That is, supervisor accessibility as a support measure for COVID-19 does not seem to relate to changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization.

4.2 | Supplementary analyses

In the study, we hypothesized only about the moderating role of employees' future focus because we believed this to be the most relevant focus, given the uncertainty over how long the COVID-19 pandemic would continue. However, we performed additional analyses examining the past and present focus of the employees as well. First, we considered the moderating role of employees' past focus. Our empirical analysis shows that past focus does not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between perceived organizational support and change in employees' affective commitment to the organization (B = .02, SE = 0.05, p > .05). Similarly, it does not have a statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between supervisor accessibility and change in affective commitment (B = .03, SE = .04, p > .05). Therefore, the influence of work supports during the COVID-19 pandemic on changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization, and ultimately on changes in their job-related well-being, does not appear to depend on employees' past focus.

In addition, we tested the moderating effect of employees' present focus. The results show that present focus does not moderate the relationship between perceived organizational support during the

COVID-19 pandemic and change in employees' affective commitment to the organization (B = .03, SE = 0.05, p > .05). Furthermore, we find that present focus has a moderating effect on the relationship between supervisor accessibility and change in employees' affective commitment to the organization, and that this effect is positive and significant (B = .10, SE = 0.05, p < .05). Therefore, from these additional analyses, we can conclude that of the three temporal orientations, future focus is the most relevant when considering work support measures during environmental disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

5 | DISCUSSION

5.1 | Implications for theory

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused attention to the importance of understanding human resource management theories in the context of environmental disruption (Kim et al., 2020). While the concept of crisis is not new in human resource management research, the crises considered in previous research have had a more limited scope, as they have tended to affect a particular geographic region or have had implications for a particular aspect of life. For instance, in a recent literature review, Ererdi et al. (2020) define three types of crises: economic crises, natural disasters, and political uncertainty. What makes the COVID-19 pandemic such an exceptional situation is that it has combined the elements of all these different crises into a globally disruptive event. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a plethora

of new demands, new ways of working, financial uncertainty and widespread uncertainty regarding one's own health and safety and that of important others (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Our findings on the influence of organizational support on employees' well-being during the COVID-19 crisis, can provide more general insights into the role of human resource practices for employees during environmental disruptions (Kim et al., 2020).

This study provides a better understanding of employees' well-being during environmental disruptions and of what organizations can do to ensure their well-being does not suffer. This is important not only for the employees themselves but also for the organizations that employ them, since previous research shows that employee well-being is linked to a variety of organizational outcomes, including lower turnover, absenteeism (Brief & Weiss, 2002), and overall better organizational performance (Giorgi et al., 2017). By examining employees' well-being during environmental disruptions, we are responding to previous calls for this to be a priority in crisis research (Ererdi et al., 2020, p. 24) and complement previous research showing the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's general well-being (Sibley et al., 2020). Specifically, the findings of our study make several important contributions.

First, our employee perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic advances the understanding of the implications of environmental disruptions as we find that employees, on average, feel that their job-related well-being has decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this is not surprising, given the severity of the environmental disruption, it is nevertheless a vital finding because it highlights the importance of gaining a better understanding of how organizations can support their employees during such critical periods. Our finding is in line with earlier research showing drops in job-related well-being during the 2008–2009 financial crisis, which also came with work re-organization for some (Green, Felstead, Gallie, & Inanc, 2016). Generally, previous research on well-being during crisis situations tends to focus on showing the negative consequences for employees (Ererdi et al., 2020). Our study advances this research by considering how organizations' responses can alleviate negative changes and can stimulate some positive changes in employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions. Overall, our study advances research on employees' job-related well-being (c.f. Bliese, Edwards, & Sonnentag, 2017) by expanding research to crisis situations.

Second, our findings help advance understanding of how organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) applies in periods of environmental disruptions. Our findings suggest that organizations can respond to environmental disruptions by devising different support measures at both the organizational and managerial levels (Fazio et al., 2017; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003). Specifically, we find positive relationships between both perceived organizational support and supervisor accessibility for the COVID-19 pandemic and positive changes in employees' job-related well-being and that these relationships work through positive changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization. In this way, we contribute to research on perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades et al., 2001), as we show how important such support is in the context of extreme environmental disruption.

We also find that supervisor accessibility is another important form of support during environmental disruptions because increased communication with the supervisor can help employees to cope with the uncertainty of the situation. This finding complements previous research on the COVID-19 pandemic that considered how the characteristics of the communication from managers affect employees' reception of the message (Sanders, Nguyen, Bouckenooghe, Rafferty, & Schwarz, 2020). While we knew from previous research that the management's communication strategy matters, our study shows that there are benefits for employees from being able to get personalized interaction with their direct supervisors. This finding also answers the call made by Caligiuri et al. (2020), p. 710) for more research to explore the role that "communication and support from MNE managers (or lack thereof) play in the way employees cope with the demands of work during the pandemic." It enables us to provide some early empirical evidence to show that communication from managers is indeed a key form of support during the pandemic, as it can help improve employees' affective commitment to the organization and ultimately also their job-related well-being.

Third, we advance understanding of the mechanisms through which work support helps improve employees' job-related well-being during environmental disruptions. Specifically, we find that affective commitment mediates the relationship between work support and improvements in employees' job-related well-being. We complement previous research that found that virtual working tends to erode affective commitment to the organization (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001) by showing that providing support in response to environmental disruptions can prevent employees from experiencing dwindling affective commitment to the organization, and some can even strengthen that commitment. In this way, our study answers Ashforth's call (Ashforth, 2020, p. 1763) for research "examining how event-specific organizational responses to the pandemic (and major events in general) affect identification with the organization." Also, by showing that changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization affect their job-related well-being, we shift the focus from the widely studied consequences for organizations to the consequences for employees, which are less well understood (Meyer & Maltin, 2010, p. 323).

Fourth, by developing a contingency perspective in which we consider personality traits as a key boundary condition, we help to build a deeper understanding of the role of work support during environmental disruptions. Understanding the contingencies of organizational support theory is important since previous studies been critical of the lack of attention given to the boundary conditions of work support, especially with respect to its influence on affective commitment to the organization (Lee & Jeung, 2018, p. 75). We contribute to a growing line of research showing that the effectiveness of perceived organizational support in stimulating individual outcomes depends on individual characteristics such as self-construal (Yang et al., 2020) or status in the organization (Lee & Jeung, 2018). Specifically, we find that the effectiveness of perceived organizational support depends on employees' core self-evaluations and future focus and is associated with more pronounced positive changes in affective commitment to

the organization for those with lower core self-evaluations and for those with a higher future focus. Also, we find that supervisor accessibility can elicit positive changes in affective commitment to the organization for employees with low core self-evaluations. Thus, we show that during environmental disruptions, the effectiveness of support is not universal and depends on employees' personality traits. Understanding these boundary conditions might be particularly important during environmental disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, since changes to employees' job-related well-being can occur more suddenly and organizations may need to intervene more quickly than in normal circumstances.

In addition, our findings advance social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) by showing its applicability in the extreme context of environmental disruptions. Specifically, our empirical findings support previous theoretical assertions environmental disruptions might be key moments in which employees judge the actions of their organizations due to the criticality of the situation (Ashforth, 2020). Furthermore, our empirical findings regarding the contingency role of personality traits broaden leadership substitution theory (Childers et al., 1990; Kerr & Jermier, 1978). Particularly, we provide additional support to previous research that core self-evaluations can substitute for leadership actions (Nübold et al., 2013) and extend existing knowledge by finding temporal focus of employees as a new personality trait that conditions the extent to which individuals respond to their leader's actions.

Thus, our findings provide validation of how important work support is during times of environmental disruption and indicate that personality traits (i.e., core self-evaluations and future temporal focus) act as important contextual differences in how employees react to support.

5.2 | Practical implications

Overall, our study shows that organizational responses matter during environmental disruptions. Our findings suggest that during environmental disruptions employees may experience negative consequences such as decreased job-related well-being, but organizations can counter these effects by putting in place support measures for their employees. Specifically, during environmental disruptions, work support is associated with positive changes in employees' affective commitment to the organization and ultimately in their job-related well-being. Importantly, support mechanisms can be used at different levels in the organization, with different emphases. At the organizational level, support can include, for example, providing communication technology that enables new ways of working, offering flexibility in scheduling, offering conditions of employment to facilitate combining work and care, providing prevention of or coping with high work demands or job stress, providing attention to physical and mental health of employees in performance appraisals or providing greater clarity about the organization's financial situation.

At the managerial level, supervisors can provide support during environmental disruptions by making themselves accessible to employees. As during environmental disruption work arrangements

are upended (Kim et al., 2020), supervisors can make themselves accessible to their employees. As employees need to make sense of the new situation (Christianson & Barton, 2021), the ability to communicate with the supervisor gives them the opportunity to reduce uncertainty regarding their roles, how to do their jobs and what is expected of them. This finding is important for organizations as it shows that not all support functions are solely to do with financial resources. That is, there are opportunities to support employees by helping them feel less uncertain, at least about their own work tasks. However, taking this idea a step further, organizations should enable supervisors to interact more with their employees during environmental disruptions and crises situations by implementing measures that give them the space for this type of interactions such as by temporarily reducing other work expectations (e.g., reduce administrative meetings or shift nonessential goals to a later date).

In addition, our findings caution that "one-size fits all" solutions may fall short of providing the desired effects since work support is not equally effective for all types of employees in terms of enhancing their affective commitment and job-related well-being. Importantly, our findings regarding the moderating roles of personality traits suggest that organizations need to design their support mechanisms very carefully as not all employees will see them as equally helpful. Particularly, our findings suggest that, during environmental disruptions, work support should be developed around principles of customization. While support cannot be tailor-made for each employee, organizations could give the employees the ability to choose from an array of support measures. This ability to choose from an array of support measures could be particularly important during environmental disruptions when the employees not only have different personalities but also face different challenges. For example, those employees with young children faced more difficulty in following regular work hours compared to those who live on their own due to the sudden need for homeschooling. In this case, those employees needed to adjust the work hours to be more flexible so that they can redistribute the work hours to perhaps to later in the day or to weekends. This principle of customization and opting-in for support can also apply to supervisor accessibility. For instance, instead of scheduling additional meetings for all employees to increase communication, supervisors could provide opportunities for additional communication for those employees who need this extra support.

Thus, our findings during the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that work support is important as it can help change how employees relate to the organization and their job-related well-being. Furthermore, our findings suggest that to alleviate the effects of environmental disruptions, organizations should design support solutions at different organizational levels and try to allow for employees customization rather than providing one-size-fits-all solutions.

5.3 | Limitations and future research

Our study makes several important findings, but these need to be considered in the light of the study's limitations. Also, there are

several important avenues for future research. First, although we made a temporal separation when collecting data relating to the independent and dependent variables, this study could be improved by employing a longitudinal design. As Bliese et al. (2017, p. 399) recommend, since theories of stress are inherently causal, it is preferable to use methodologies that allow stronger causal links to be made.

Second, future research could also consider the relationship between organizational support and job-related well-being at various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on this idea, future research on environmental disruptions could seek to understand whether different types of support are more important for job-related well-being at different stages during the disruption. This might be particularly interesting during environmental disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic that with an unclear and long time horizon.

Third, while core self-evaluations and future focus are important personality traits, other traits are potentially also important in terms of how support affects job-related well-being. Research has, for instance, found that the interplay between perceived organizational support and proactive personality matters for individual outcomes during the pandemic (Yi-Feng Chen et al., 2021). Future research could explore additional personality traits that are likely to affect how employees experience organizational and managerial support. Since leadership style has different effects for introverted versus extroverted employees (Guay & Choi, 2015), the degree of introversion is also likely to condition how employees respond to work support.

Fourth, while we focused on the personality traits of employees as key contingencies, future research could try to understand contingencies associated with the organization or with the leaders providing the support. At the organizational level, important contingencies could be factors such as the organizations' resource stock or the degree to which they were affected by the environmental disruption because such factors can affect how employees perceive the exchange relationship with the organization as well as their expectations. At the managerial level, factors such as gender or leadership style might be relevant as Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) find that female leaders are more effective than their male counterparts at managing during crises.

Fifth, we have used respondents residing in the United Kingdom at the time of the survey and, although we controlled for their country of birth, future studies could expand this line of research to other countries. Specifically, future research could try to understand the relationship between work support and employees job-related well-being in different institutional and cultural contexts as previous research shows that the effectiveness of human resource practices vary between countries due to differences in how employees relate to their organizations and supervisors (Cogin, Sanders, & Williamson, 2018; Ollier-Malaterre, Valcour, Dulk, & Kossek, 2013).

6 | CONCLUSION

Our study finds that organizations can alleviate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing support to employees and may even be able to improve their affective commitment to the organization and their job-related well-being. However, the effectiveness of such support depends on individual personality traits. We hope that these findings will stimulate organizations to develop appropriate support structures for their employees during environmental disruptions.

ENDNOTE

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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APPENDIX A.

Measures adjusted for the COVID-19 pandemic Perceived organizational support for the COVID-19 pandemic (inspired by Eisenberger et al., 1986)

Considering the situation after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements about your company?

1. My company provides satisfactory measures for supporting communication withcolleagues working at different locations.
2. My personal needs were taken into consideration when changing working arrangements.
3. My company provided support to setup working from home facilities.
4. My company cares about my well-being.
5. My company appreciated extra effort and contributions from me.
6. My company clearly communicated how the future prospect of the company looks like.

Supervisor accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002)

Considering the situation after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

1. My manager is available to talk with me.
2. When needed, my manager takes time for me.
3. When needed, I can ask my manager to work with me.
4. My manager is available for feedback or guidance when needed.