



Creating positive outcomes through perceived investment in employee development: Evidence from Kuwait

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the human capital and social exchange theories, this article examines the effect of perceived investment in employee development on three work behavior outcomes: turnover intentions, organization citizenship behavior, and affective commitment. Data from a sample of 126 employees working at different hierarchical levels in three different organizations in Kuwait were collected and analyzed using hierarchical regression analysis. The results support previous studies and indicate that PIED is more related to OCB and affective commitment than turnover intentions.

Keywords: Effective commitment, OCB, turnover intentions.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

It's of interest for all organizations to know that the outcome of any employee developmental activity is advancement potential, and that is exerting a high level of performance (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009a). By investing in employees' competencies, organizations would upgrade its employees' skills and knowledge required to adhere to competitive standards (Tsai and Tai 2003). Understanding the relationship between investment in employee development and individual outcomes has been one of the long-standing goals of behavioral research and has taken a cognitive approach. The specific nature of this relationship depends on the theoretical perspectives researchers have adopted when examining it.

On the one hand, many scholars have adopted the behavioral perspective of investment in employee development (Guest 2002; Edgar and Geare 2005; Muse and Stamper 2007). According to this perspective, the positive perception of employees toward their organization's willingness to increase their competencies is embedded within the context of social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa 1986). Indeed, the employer-employee relationship is built on mutual

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trust and obligation (Hom et al., 2009). Accordingly, employees will tend to believe that they are valued by their organization and reciprocate by working hard to achieve the organizational goals.

On the other hand, many researchers appear to be making the assumption that the stock of knowledge, skills, and abilities among employees provide economic value to the organization (McShane & Von Glinow, 2013). Organizations focusing on the development of their employees more than their behavior invoke the human capital perspective of a firm (Becker, 1964; Lepak & Snell, 1999). This perspective has generated a long debate among researchers on whether the human capital theory constitutes a competitive advantage or a huge risk for organizations. Some scholars have argued that high quality human capital can serve as a source of competitive advantage when investment in employee development increases organization's performance and realizes a return on their investments (Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994; Bishop, 1997; Bartlett, 2001). Others realized that when key employees leave, they take with them some valuable knowledge that makes the organization effective. For that reason, organizations, within the human capital context, would not pay to invest in developing employees' general skills because such practice may increase employee turnover (Becker, 1965; Benson, Finegold and Mohrman, 2004).

The primary purpose of this study is to develop and empirically examine an integrative model of a direct linkage between perceived investment in employee development and individual outcomes such as turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior, and affective commitment. Drawing on the social exchange theory and the human capital theory, I intend to extend the existing employer-employee relationship approach to PIED by providing empirical evidence from the Kuwaiti industry and thereby enriching the existing literature with new theories about similarities and differences in perceived investment in employee development between the western and non-western contexts. First, I aim to study the effect of PIED on employee turnover intentions and the extent to which the developmental activities can increase or decrease an employee's intention to leave. Second, I intend to demonstrate how PIED will be seen differently across employees and can be defined and conceptualized as OCB. Third, this paper will try to offer an affective explanation of the PIED approach as a positive outcome of the relationship between employee development and organization commitment.

This article is organized as follows: First, I present the conceptual foundations of the research, beginning with a discussion about PIED and then its relationships with three different outcomes: Turnover intentions, OCB, and affective commitment. Second, I describe the methodology that was designed to test my hypothesized relationships based on a sample of 126 employees working in three different companies in Kuwait. Finally, I present the results of this study and discuss their theoretical and practical implications.

2.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.01 PERCEIVED INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Many researchers contended that investing in employee development is a motivational practice that leads to a positive attitudes and behavior of employees toward their organizations (Ichniowski et al., 1997; MacDuffie, 1995; Snell and Dean, 1992; Youndt et al., 1996). This motivational process creates an incentive for employees to behave reciprocally and in a positive way (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger et al. 2001). The employer-employee relation is rooted in the concept of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) where organizations provide employees with continuous learning to develop their skills and knowledge, and in return employees express loyalty and commitment to the organization.

Perceived investment in employee development can be defined as the employees' perceptions of the level of organization's commitment toward enriching their skills, knowledge, experiences, and abilities in order to prepare them for future positions, either within or outside the organization (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Rahman, 2012). Therefore, organization's commitment to employees' personal and professional

growth and employees' beliefs that their organization values and recognizes their contribution can lead to various benefits such as greater productivity and financial performance, enhanced employee retention, positive motivation, and high commitment (Rothwell & Kazanas, 1996; Wayne et al., 1997; Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale, 2006).

A central tenet in perceived investment in employee development is that the outcomes remain positive whether the process is formal or informal, or whether it is formally rewarded or contractually enforceable (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). This implies that organizations, in order to gain competitive advantage, should strive to create a culture that emphasizes a greater importance on upgrading employees' skills and knowledge, and therefore, shift to a learning organization to sustain a permanent employee development program (Malik et al., 2011).

2.02 PERCEIVED INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS

From the social exchange theory perspective (Blau 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986), investing in employee development can create a positive mindset in employees toward the organization, resulting in a trusting and honoring employer-employee relationship (Benson et al., 2004; Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2009a; Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Maurer and Lippstreu, 2008; Foong-ming, 2008). In return, employees will value this relationship which may enhance a stronger desire to stay with their current organization (Farrell and Rusbult, 1981; Sieben, 2007). Previous research has shown that the social exchange theory cannot solely explain the relationship between employee development and turnover intentions (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Huselid; 1995; Malik et al., 2011). According to these scholars, investment in employee development can be associated with many factors such as lower labor turnover, acquisition of non-portable skills, and a personal desire to maintain a valuable organization-employee relationship (McEnrue, 1989; Farrell and Rusbult, 1981).

According to Becker's human capital model (1993), the acquisition of general skills by employees will lead to an increase in turnover and non-transferable skills to a less impact on intentions to leave. Numerous scholars supported becker's human capital model. Frazis and Speltzer (2005) argued that employees who are provided with specific skills have fewer alternatives to quit the organization than those with general skills. Several studies have noticed that some organizations wait until employees are trained by other organizations to poach them and hire them to other companies (Lynch, 1991; Glance et al., 1997; Lynch & Black, 1998). Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H1: there will be a negative relationship between perceived investment in employee development and turnover intentions.

2.03 PERCEIVED INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR (OCB)

It is well known among management researchers that organizations prefer employees who go beyond the required job duties (Barnard, 1938; Katz, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978). This workplace behavior, referred to as organizational citizenship behavior, has received the attention of a great deal of scholars the last few decades (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). One of the most commonly recognized definition is that of Organ (1988) who defined OCB as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregated promotes the effective functioning of the organization". Based on the "norm of reciprocity" of the social exchange theory, Shore et al. (2006) contended that investment in employee development creates feelings of employee obligation to reciprocate through behaviors that exceed their formal job requirements. According to Settoon, Bennett, and Liden (1996), what determines employees' behavior is the type of exchange relationships with organization and with supervisors. Development activities (such as developing a skill or capability) that is perceived to benefit both the organization and the supervisor more than the employee himself/herself is considered as OCB (Maurer, Pierce & Sore, 2002). Similarly, employees who perceive those activities as beneficiary for them may reciprocate in performing

duties not required formally by their job. The exchange relationship with organizations and supervisors leads to the conclusion of [Organ \(1990\)](#) which stated that the best theoretical explanation for OCB was the social exchange theory. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H2: there will be a positive relationship between perceived investment in employee development and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

2.04 PERCEIVED INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Several previous studies have investigated the relationship between employee development and organizational commitment ([Steers, 1977](#); [Bateman and Strasser, 1984](#); [Morrow, 1993](#); [Birdi et al., 1997](#); [Ahmad & Bakar, 2003](#); [Bartlett & Kang, 2004](#), [Paul and Anantharaman, 2003](#); [Tansky and Cohen, 2001](#)). However, and within the human resource development literature, [Mowday and colleagues \(1979\)](#) defined organizational commitment as “the individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization”. Some authors emphasized the multifaceted dimensions of organizational commitment ([Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993](#)). [Meyer and Allen \(1991\)](#) proposed a three component model of affective, continuance and normative commitment. Accordingly, affective commitment refers to employees’ strong emotional attachment to the organization and identification with its goals and values; Continuance commitment refers to the costs associated with employees’ leaving the organization; and normative commitment refers to employees’ feeling of obligation to remain in the organization.

Many scholars contended that this model has not received a universal support ([Bergman, 2006](#); [Chen & Francesco, 2003](#); [Cheng & Stockdale, 2003](#)). Within the framework of human resource development and its effect on organizational commitment, the affective construct has been extensively explored by numerous researchers as the only indicator of commitment ([Kuvaas, 2006b](#); [Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefoghe, 2005](#)). In this vein and from a social exchange perspectives, employees who perceive investment in their employment by their organizations will be emotionally committed to them and will reciprocate in increasing their productivity and commitment ([Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007](#); [Balkin & Richebé, 2007](#); [Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009](#)). These studies suggest that organizations may enhance affective commitment by promoting awareness of training and development opportunities. Accordingly, numerous studies confirmed that as long as employees perceive investment in their development positively, a strong relationship with affective commitment arises ([Bartlett 2001](#); [Ahmad & Bakar, 2003](#)). Thus, I hypothesize the following:

H3: there will be a positive relationship between perceived investment in employee development and affective commitment.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.01 PROCEDURES

To test the relationship between PIED and employee outcomes a total of 200 paper-and-pencil questionnaires were administered to various levels of permanent employees in three different companies through their HR departments. Each form included on its cover page a letter to the participant explaining the purpose of the study. In order to achieve honest and non-predisposed results, employees participating in the survey were assured confidentiality; identification information was not required. In total, 126 employees responded which resulted in an overall usable response rate of 63.1% and a 36.9% non-usable response rate.

3.02 SAMPLE PROPORTIONS

The questionnaire participants were chosen based on a combination of cluster and simple random sampling methods. Three Kuwaiti companies were chosen: State Audit Bureau, Kuwait Institute for

Scientific Research, and Partnerships technical Bureau, creating the cluster samples, and randomly chosen employees of each company were administered the survey.

Of the 126 participants, 54.8% were male and 45.2% were female. 73.8% of employees had more than 5 years of experience in their job and 83.1% of them had less than 10 years of experience in their current position. About 69.6% of employees held an undergraduate degree and the remaining ones held a master or a postgraduate degree. The population is relatively young since the majority of surveyed employees were less than 45.

4.0 MEASURES

The independent and dependent variables were measured using a five-point likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The questionnaire included 29 items distributed as follows:

Independent variable-Perceived investment in employee development (PIED): which aimed at evaluating employees' views on organizations' continuous and long-term investment commitment in employee development was adapted from [Lee & Bruvold \(2003\)](#). Seven items measured this variable; example items are, 'My organization stands out as an organization that is very focused on continuous development of the skill and abilities of its employees', as well as, 'I definitely think that my organization invests more heavily in employee development than comparable organizations'.

4.01 DEPENDENT VARIABLES

-Turnover intention (TI): turnover intentions were assessed by five items used by [Kuvaas \(2006a\)](#), such as: 'I will probably look for a new job next year', and 'I will likely actively look for a new job within the next three years'.

-Organization citizenship behavior (OCB): A seven-item scale validated by [Van Dyne and LePine \(1998\)](#) served to measure OCB. Examples of which include 'I volunteer to do things for my work group' and 'I attend functions that help my work group, even though they are beyond the formal requirements of my job'.

-Affective commitment (AC): Six previously used items from [Meyer et al. \(1993\)](#) were utilized to measure AC. Item models used include, 'This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me' and 'I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization'.

Gender, age, organizational tenure, positional tenure and educational level were included as control variables. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable coded such that (1) was male and (2) was female; Age, grouped as such that (1) is 21-35 years, (2) is 36-55 years, and (3) is over 55 years; Years of work experience, grouped as such that (1) is 0-5 years, (2) is 6-10 years, and (3) is over 10 years of experience; Number of years in current position, grouped as such that (1) is 0-5 years, (2) is 6-10 years, and (3) is over 10 years of experience; Education level, categorized as such that (1) is high school education, (2) is having a diploma, (3) is having a graduate degree, (4) is having postgraduate degrees, and (5) as other educational levels achieved, which was left to be specified.

5.0 RESULTS

As shown in table I, the principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed on all multiple scale items to determine item retention (e.g. [Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004](#)). Although most of the scales have been used in prior research. Therefore, and in order to avoid confounded measures of the closely-related constructs, relatively stringent rules-of-thumb were applied, i.e. retention of items only with a strong loading of 0.40 or higher ([Osborne and Costello, 2004](#)), and a differential of 0.20 or higher between factors ([Van Dyne et al., 1994](#)). The principal component analysis revealed that one of the perceived supervisor support and one of the affective commitment items did not meet the 0.4 loading criterion.

Table I: Principal component analysis with varimax rotation

	PIED	TI	OCB	PSS	AC
Perceived investment in employee development					
My organization invests heavily in employee development (for instance by way of training, programs, and career development)	.772				
My organization stands out as an organization that is very focused on continuous development of the skills and abilities of its employees	.804				
By investing time and money in employee development, my organization demonstrates that it actually invests in its employees	.870				
I'm confident that my organization will provide for the necessary training and development to solve any new tasks I may be given in the future	.847				
By way of practices such as developmental performance appraisal, counselling systems, competence development programs and leadership development programs, my organization clearly demonstrates that it values development of the skills and abilities of its employees	.844				
I definitely think that my organization invests more heavily in employee development than comparable organizations	.811				
My organization is effective in meeting employees' requests for internal job transfers	.712				
Turnover intentions					
I often think about quitting my present job		.619			
I may quit my present job during the next twelve months		.836			
I will probably look for a new job in the next year		.885			
I do not see many prospects for the future in this organization		.603			
I will likely actively look for a new job within the next three years		.790			
Organization citizenship behavior					
I volunteer to do things for my work group			.779		
I help orient new employees in my work group			.851		
I attend functions that help my work group, even though they are beyond the formal requirements of my job			.743		
I assist others in my work group with their work for the benefit of the group			.809		
I get involved in order to benefit my work group			.834		
I help others in my work group learn about the work			.845		
I help others in my work group with their work responsibilities			.818		
Affective commitment					
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization					.400
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own					.404
I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization					.767
I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization					.805
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization					.786
Eigenvalues	9.147	4.327	2.799	1.782	1.354
% of variance	31.542	14.920	9.561	6.144	4.670
Factor loadings less than 0.35 are not shown; underlined loadings are included in the final scales; PIED, perceived investment in employee development; TI, turnover intention; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior; PSS, perceived supervisor support; AC, affective commitment					

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are shown in table II.

Table II: Descriptive statistics, and correlations

	Means	SD	Age	Gender	Pos.Ten	Org.Ten	Edu.Lev	PIED	AC	TI	OCB
1.Age	1.5476	.49971	1								
2.Gender	1.4524	.49971	-.007	1							
3.Pos.Tenure	2.1429	.80711	.082	.672**	1						
4.Org.Tenure	1.5645	.76766	.055	.559**	.552**	1					
5.Edu.Level	3.2160	.71374	.143	-.007	.139	.042	1				
6.PIED	3.0092	.85515	-.053	.246**	.131	.138	-.084	1			
7.AC	2.9080	.56992	-.032	-.106	-.121	.006	-.103	.177	1		

8.TI	2.6733	1.02143	.075	-.183*	-.264**	-.068	.038	-.510**	.009	1	
9.OCB	3.9901	.73201	.066	.138	.169	.188*	.059	.287**	.015	-.216**	1

Pos.Tenure = positional tenure; Org.Tenure = Organizational tenure; EduLevel = educational level; PIED = Perceived investment in employee development; AC = affective commitment; TI = Turnover intention; OCB = Organization citizenship behavior.

Hierarchical regression analyses (in SPSS 20.0) were used to analyze the relations between perceived investment in employee development, perceived supervisor support and turnover intention, organization citizenship behavior and affective commitment (Table III). The control variables such as age, gender, organizational tenure, positional tenure and educational level were entered in the first step. Perceived investment in employee development was entered in the second step and was negatively but significantly related to turnover intention both before ($B = -.481, P < 0.001$) and after ($B = -.485, P < 0.001$) perceived supervisor support was included in the model. Moreover, perceived investment in employee development was positively and significantly related to both organization citizenship behavior ($B = .172, P < 0.01$) and affective commitment ($B = .175, P < 0.01$).

Table III: Regression analysis predicting turnover intention, organization citizenship behavior and affective commitment.

	Turnover intention		OCB		Affective commitment	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Age	.045	.053	.076	.072	-.026	-.038
gender	-.048	.075	.018	-.034	-.087	-.150
Pos.Ten	-.284*	-.328**	.079	.102	-.086	-.062
Org.Ten	.132	.142	.109	.102	.109	.102
Edu.Lev	.076	.035	-.013	.002	-.105	-.088
PIED		-.481***		.221*		.218*
R	.069	.218	.039	.046	.033	.044
square		.287		.085		.077
change		30.630		4.860		4.774
R	.069		.039		.033	
square						
F	1.490		.781		.690	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Standardized regression coefficients are shown

Pos.Ten = positional tenure, Org.Ten = Organizational tenure, Edu.lev = educational level, PSS = Perceived supervisor support, PIED = perceived investment in employee development, OCB = organization citizenship behavior.

6.0 DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to examine different alternative relationships between perceived investment in employee development and turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment. This was accomplished by an empirical investigation of the level of perception of investment in full-time Kuwaiti employee development, working at different hierarchical levels in three different companies in Kuwait.

The negative relationship between perceived investment in employee development and turnover intentions replicates the findings of Kalleberg and Rognes (2000) and Pfeffer and Sutton (2006). The latter propose that for organizations to avoid higher turnover intentions, they must provide all employees with opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge. These findings suggest that organizations able to elicit skills development programs that will maximally help employees to improve their competencies will be perceived as more credible and therefore, have direct impact in reducing turnover.

Furthermore, this study examined a direct linkage between PIED and turnover intentions. Prior research suggested that this relationship could be mediated by many factors that may have a direct influence on turnover intentions. One of these factors is P-O fit. According to (Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001), the P-O fit reduces employees' intentions to leave the organization. Employees prefer to stay with organizations that positively match their characteristics (Schneider, 1987; Van Vianen, 2000).

Another factor that may impact directly and mediate the relationship between PIED and turnover intentions is reward. Employees who ensure high levels of skills and abilities expect to be rewarded by their organization for the efforts they undertook to respond positively to training opportunities. Those employees are reluctant to leave their organization as they feel obliged to reciprocate the reward provided (Benson et al., 2004).

The findings of this study are also consistent with prior literature that examines the relationship between perceived investment in employee development and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). A key point raised by the results of this study is that despite the positive relationship between the two variables, OCB should be viewed as a group phenomenon. According to Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008), little evidence confirms a direct linkage between PIED and OCB, therefore, this relationship needs to be assessed in relation to other sources affecting OCB such as employee intrinsic motivation. This finding suggests that employees who perceive positively their development opportunities would be intrinsically motivated and therefore increase their OCB. Although, intrinsic motivation can serve as an incentive for employees to put out efforts beyond what is expected of them as they feel obliged to reciprocate the positive perceived beneficiary of investment in their development. Intrinsically motivated employees are more aware of the importance of their development, and are more likely to be engaged in the work of their colleagues than employees with lower intrinsic motivation (Guay et al., 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

The significant and positive relationship between perceived investment in employee development and affective commitment suggests that employees satisfied with development opportunities are more likely to have positive attitudes towards their organization and therefore build an emotional bond with it (Blau et al., 2001; Tansky and Cohen, 2001). Ahmad & Bakar (2003) found evidence of positive relationship between perceived training opportunity and affective commitment in a study conducted in a non-Western society. It is of interest to mention here that the supervisor plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between employment development and affective commitment, especially in the Kuwaiti culture where personal relationships and individualized support from the supervisor are more valued than the system itself. Kuwait is considered a collectivistic society where supervisory styles are highly paternalistic (Tanure & Duarte, 2005). Therefore, Kuwaiti employees who perceive their supervisor support for development programs positively report higher affective organizational commitment. Lee & Bruvold (2003) found a positive linkage between PIED and employees' affective commitment and job satisfaction as well.

This study, like any other research, has some limitations that should be taken into consideration in the analysis of results. First, given data were obtained at one point in time means it is difficult to draw important conclusions about inference of causality. It is possible, for example, that affective commitment serves as antecedent of turnover intentions and therefore, influences positively employees with high intentions to leave the organization. To be more conscious about the causality inference on the relationship between the different variables of this study, longitudinal studies are needed. Second, the generalizability of findings could be a problem since this study is conducted in a specific country, Kuwait. Therefore, a question can be raised as to whether a more general employment development context would produce similar findings. Third, the fact that our data were obtained from cross-sectional self-completed survey, the possibility of common method variance is increased. In order to reduce the negative consequences associated with the use of self-report data, I tried to maintain confidentiality of responses and separate the scale items for the predictors and the criterion validity (Podsakoff et al., 2003)

Future research should extend my efforts by considering specific areas of perceived investment in employee development with other variables. An interesting avenue for practitioners would be to investigate the mediating role of person-organization fit on the relationship between PIED and turnover intentions and how this relationship may differ across career stages. Such practice would enhance positively employees' commitment and their intention to stay within the organization. Another implication of this study is that in order for perceived investment in employee development to increase organizational citizenship behavior, this relationship must depend on employee level of intrinsic motivation. Future research might also suggest that employee development programs that provide employees with broadly marketable skills should be integrated with perceived supervisor support to increase affective commitment. Finally, I believe that this study should be replicated in different organizational settings and different perspectives taking into consideration the differences in culture between Kuwait and other cultural contexts.

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