

# The Effect of Employee Career Program and Career Development on Career Commitment

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between career development, career program and career commitment using the method self-report questionnaires that obtained through employees who work at city council in Sabah, Borneo. The results of stepwise regression analysis found two important results: first, the relationship between career planning and career development was positive and significantly correlated with career commitment. Second, the relationship between career management and career development was positive and significantly correlated with career commitment. This outcome proves that career development act as an effective mediating variable in the relationship of career program and career commitment in the organizational sample. Besides, this study also provides discussion, implications and conclusion.*

**Keywords:** Employee career program, career development, career commitment

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In organizations, employee career program is usually seen a strategic human resource development function, it not only focuses on the employees' job, but overall aspects, processes, attitude, behavior and the state affairs that link to the work life of employees (Chang et al., 2007; Greenhaus et al., 2000; Ismail et al., 2011; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Under this perspective, an employer often designs and administers career programs to ensure employees adapt their interests and abilities with organizational opportunities and easily match with current and future organizational changes. Supposing these career programs are properly designed and implemented this may increase the progression of employee careers in order to maintain and support the organizational strategy and goals (Baruch, 2004; Greenhaus et al., 2000; Ismail et al., 2011; Martin, et al., 2001).

Based on human resources development perspective, career program has two influential factors: career planning and career management (Conger, 2002; Ismail et al., 2011; Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Firstly, career planning is commonly known as a first step in career program when a management designs career programs using proper assessment tools (e.g. vocational counseling, workbooks and/or career resource center) to recognize career options and preferences, appoint development objectives, and implement action plans in order to assist employees adapt their interest and capabilities with organizational opportunities (Appelbaum& Shapiro, 2002; Ismail et al., 2011; Mondy et al., 2002; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Secondly, career management is frequently mentioned as a continuous activity when a management monitors the progression of

the employee career ladders to ensure easily match with organizational changes (e.g. turbulent working environment, job stability and security, flexible work practice and multi skilling). For example, communication and thus help them to achieve higher in the career ladder in organizations (Adekola, 2011; Greenhaus, et al., 2000; Ismail et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2001).

Recent studies in the workplace career, highlights that the ability of management to properly plan and manage employees' career progressions based on individual employee needs may have a positive impact on career commitment (Lee, 2000; Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Many scholars like Colarelli and Bishop (1990), McDaniels and Gysbers (1992), Herr (2001), Mondy et al. (2002), and Chen et al. (2004) broadly define career commitment as individuals to assign high career goals, and intend to connect, identify and involve in achieving those targets. Unexpectedly, a thorough investigation of employee career program reveals that effect of career plan and management on career commitment is not direct, but its effect on career commitment is indirectly influenced by career development (Chen et al. 2004; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Many scholars like Greenhaus, et al. (2000), Herr (2001), Mondy et al. 2002), Chen et al. (2004), and Puah and Ananthram (2006), broadly defined career development as employees feel important to continuously update the necessary skills and experience needed (total group of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and chance factors) in order to improve job performance, add value for current and future job, meet feelings of fulfillment and improve life span well-being.

Among an organizational career model, many scholars posited that career planning, career management, career development and career commitment are different, but highly interrelated constructs. For example, the ability of management to properly plan and manage the progression of employees' career will motivate employees to develop their careers, and this may lead to higher career commitment (Nachbagaue & Riedl, 2002; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Although the nature of this relationship has been investigated, little is known about the mediating effect of career development in the workplace career models (Jepsen & Dickson, 2003; Paul, 1996). Many scholars have argued that career development has been less emphasized in previous studies because they have over focused on explaining career program characteristics using a direct effect model to describe the relationship between career program characteristics and career commitment. It is the fact that the influence of career development is given less attention in the workplace career models (Lee, 2000; Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). This fact motivates the researchers to fill in the gap of literature by quantifying the magnitude and nature of the relationship between career program, career development and career commitment.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In previous surveys, most assessments about the linking career program to career development were conducted based on a direct correlation analysis methods in the various organizational settings, such as perceptions of 445 respondents in Portugal (Ferreira et al., 2007), perceptions of 200 nurses in Israeli university and college (Notzer et al., 2004), perceptions of 330 Swiss eighth graders in Switzerland (Hirschi, 2009), and perceptions of 620 students from Portuguese school system (Janeiro, 2010). These surveys reported that the capability of management to appropriately plan and manage the progression of employees' career paths had

been essential determinants of career development in the respective organizations (Ferreira et al., 2007; Hirschi, 2009; Janeiro, 2010; Notzer et al., 2004). Hence, it was hypothesized that:

- H1: Career planning positively correlated with career commitment.
- H2: Career management positively correlated with career commitment.

Many scholars view that the findings of correlation studies are important, but they have not adequately provided information to explain the significant role of human psychology in influencing the effectiveness of career program in dynamic organizations (Chen et al., 2004; Ismail et al., 2011; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Further, several studies were conducted using an indirect effects model to investigate career program based on different samples like perceptions of 367 R&D personnel from Hsinchu Science-based Industrial Park in North Taiwan (Chen et al., 2004), perceptions of 505 employees of a leading international Singaporean hotel in Singapore (Puah & Ananthram, 2006), and perceptions of employees in Nigerian Banks (Adekola, 2011). These studies reported that the ability of management to consider individual employee needs in planning and managing the progression of employees to improve their career development. As an outcome this technique could lead to enhance their commitment to career in the organization (Adekola, 2011; Chen et al., 2004; Puah & Ananthram, 2006).

The research literature contributes the nation of motivation theory. For example, Herzberg's (1959, 1966) motivator-hygiene theory defined that recognition, achievement, possibility of growth; advancement, responsibility and work itself are significant factors that increase individuals' satisfaction. Besides that, Alderfer's (1972) ERG theory posits that personal achievement is a significant element that effect individual actions. Besides that, McClelland's (1962) studied needs theory states that need for achievement may reinforce individuals' behavior. Thus, Hall and Associate's (1986) working model of organizational career development describe that career plan and management are important catalyst for developing individuals' career satisfactions and may contribute positive career outcomes. Implementation of these theories in a career program model views that the capability of managers to properly plan and manage career programs suitable on employee needs (e.g. job characteristics, personal growth, personal achievement and career satisfaction) will strongly enhance individual career development. Consequently, it may lead to an increased career commitment in organizations (Chen et al., 2004; Greenhaus, et al. 2000; Hall & Associates, 1986; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Based on the framework, it can be hypothesized as below:

- H3: Career development positively mediates the relationship between career planning and career commitment.
- H4: Career development positively mediates the relationship between career management and career commitment.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study used a cross-sectional research design, which permitted the researchers to integrate the workplace career literature, the semi-structured interview, the pilot study and the actual survey as a main procedure to collect data for this study. The benefit of such methods may decrease the weaknesses of a single research method and gather accurate, less biased and high

quality data (Cresswell, 1998; Sekaran, 2000). The location of this study was a city council in Sabah, Borneo. For confidentiality reasons, the name of this organization was kept anonymous. At the initial stage of this study, the researchers had designed interview questions related to career program, career development and career commitment. After that, semi structured interviews were conducted involving two experienced employees, namely one executive officer and one assistant administrative officer. These officers were chosen using a purposive sampling technique where they had working experiences for more than 10 years and good knowledge of the workplace career program. Information gathered from this interview method helped the researchers to understand the features and nature of career planning, career management, career development, and career commitment, as well as the relationship between such variables in the studied organization. Next, the information gathered from the interviews was transcribed, categorized according to the research variables and compared with the literature review. The outcomes of triangulated process were used as a guideline to develop the content and format of the survey questionnaires for a pilot study. Hence, a pilot study was conducted by discussing the items in survey questionnaires with the above participants in order to verify the content and format of the survey questionnaires for an actual study. Before sending the questionnaires to participants, back translation technique was utilized to translate the survey questionnaires into Malay and English versions to increase the validity and reliability of the findings (Cresswell, 1998; Wright, 1996).

The survey questionnaire has 3 sections: first, career planning had 4 items and career management had 3 that were derived from career program literature (Baruch, 2004; Desimone & Harris, 1998; Granrose & Portwood, 1987; Greenhaus et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2001; Whymark & Ellis, 1999). Second, career development had 3 items that were adapted from career development literature (Chen et al., 2004; Hall & Associates, 1986; Herr, 2001; Jepsen & Dickson, 2003; Paul, 1996; Puah & Ananthran, 2006). Third, career commitment had 6 items that were collect from career program literature (Chen et al., 2004; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). These items were measured using a 7-item scale ranging from “strongly disagree/dissatisfied” (1) to “strongly agree/satisfied” (7). Demographic variables were used as controlling variables because this study focused on employee attitudes.

The unit of analysis for this study is employees who have worked in the studied organization. In the first step of data collection procedure, the researchers had obtained permission from the HR manager to conduct this study, and seek advices from him about the rules for distributing survey questionnaires in his organization. Considering the organization rules, and the duration of this study and financial constraints, a quota sampling technique was employed to determine the manageable sample size of 140 for this study. Next, the survey questionnaires were distributed using a convenient sampling technique to employees through the contact persons (e.g. secretary of department heads, assistant managers and/or human resource manager) in the organization. This sampling technique was employed in this study because the HR manager could not provide the list of registered employees to the researchers for confidential reasons and this situation did not allow the researchers to select participants randomly from the population. Of the number, 140 usable questionnaires were returned to the researchers, yielding a 56 percent response rate. The survey questions were answered by participants based on their consent and on a voluntary basis. The number of this sample exceeds the minimum sample of 30 participants as required by probability sampling technique, showing that it may be analyzed using inferential statistics (Sekaran, 2000; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 18.0 was used to analyze the data. Firstly, exploratory factor analysis was used to assess the validity and reliability of measurement scales (Hair et al, 1998; Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). Relying on the guidelines set up by Hair et al (1998), and Nunally and Bernstein (1994), a factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was first done for all items that represented each research variable, and this was followed by other tests: Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Test (KMO), Bartlett's test of sphericity, eigenvalue, variance explained and Cronbach alpha. These statistics were useful to determine the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses for the measurement scales before testing research hypotheses. Secondly, Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze the validity and reliability of the constructs (Tabachnick et al., 2001; Yaacob, 2008). Finally, a stepwise regression analysis was undertaken to test the mediating hypothesis as it can assess the magnitude of each independent variable, and varies the mediating variable in the relationship between many independent variables and one dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Foster et al., 1998). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the mediating variable can be clearly determined when a previously significant effect of predictor variables is reduced to non-significance or reduced in terms of effect size after the inclusion of mediator variable(s) into the analysis (Wong et. al., 1995). In this regression analysis, standardized coefficients (standardized beta) were used for all analyses.

#### **4.0 FINDINGS**

Table 1 shows that the majority of the participant characteristics were female (57.1 percent), ages between 26 to 35 years old (42.9 percent), SPM/MCE holders (43.2), employees who served more than 21 years (25.2 percent), and non-management employees (82.1 percent).

**Table 1:** Participant Characteristics (n=140)

| <b>Participant Characteristics</b> | <b>Sub-Profile</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Gender                             | Male               | 42.9              |
|                                    | Female             | 57.1              |
| Age                                | 18-25              | 12.9              |
|                                    | 26-35              | 42.9              |
|                                    | 36-45              | 28.6              |
|                                    | >46                | 15.7              |
| Education                          | Master Degree      | 1.4               |
|                                    | Bachelor Degree    | 10.1              |
|                                    | Diploma            | 22.3              |
|                                    | STPM/HSC           | 6.5               |
|                                    | SPM/MCE            | 43.2              |
| Length of Service                  | SRP/LCE/PMR        | 16.5              |
|                                    | <1 years           | 7.2               |
|                                    | 1-5 years          | 24.5              |
|                                    | 6-10 years         | 19.4              |
|                                    | 11-15 years        | 15.8              |
|                                    | 16-20 years        | 7.9               |
| Position                           | > 21 years         | 25.2              |
|                                    | Management         | 17.9              |
|                                    | Non-management     | 82.1              |

*Note:*

SRP/LCE/PMR : Sijil Rendah Pelajaran Malaysia/Lower Certificate of Education/  
Penilaian Menengah Rendah  
SPM/MCE : Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysia Certificate of Education  
STPM/HSC : Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia/Higher School Certificate

Table 2 shows the results of validity and reliability analyses for measurement scales. The original survey questionnaires consisted of 21 items, which related to five variables: career planning (4 items), career management (4 items), career development (6 items), and career commitment (7 items). The factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was done for all variables. After that, Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Test (KMO) which is a measure of sampling adequacy was conducted for each variable. Relying on Hair et al. (1998) and Nunally and Bernstein's (1994) guideline, these statistical analyses showed that (1) the value of factor analysis for all items that represent each research variable was 0.4 and more, indicating the items satisfactorily met the acceptable standard of validity analysis, (2) all research variables exceeded the acceptable standard of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's value of 0.6, were significant in Bartlett's test of sphericity, (3) all investigated variables had eigen-values larger than 1, and had variance explained values more than 0.45, (4) the items for each variable exceeded factor loadings of 0.40 (Hair et al., 1998), and (5) all research variables exceeded the acceptable standard of reliability analysis of 0.70 (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). These statistical analyses demonstrated that the measurement scale met the acceptable standard of validity and reliability analyses as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The Results of Validity and Reliability Analyses for the Measurement Scale

| Measure            | Item | Factor Loading | KMO  | Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Eigen value | Variance Explained | Cronbach Alpha |
|--------------------|------|----------------|------|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Career Planning    | 4    | 0.66-0.86      | 0.75 | 228.65, p=.000                | 2.66        | 66.58              | 0.80           |
| Career Management  | 4    | 0.40-0.80      | 0.77 | 156.62, p=.000                | 2.44        | 61.08              | 0.79           |
| Career Development | 6    | 0.51-0.71      | 0.83 | 283.16, p=.000                | 3.28        | 54.67              | 0.83           |
| Career Commitment  | 7    | 0.60-0.73      | 0.80 | 387.03, p=.000                | 3.737       | 53.381             | 0.8485         |

Table 3 shows the results of Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics. The mean values of the variables are between 5.3 and 6.1, signifying the levels of career planning, career management, and career development ranging from high (4) to highest level (7). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between the independent variable (i.e. career planning and career management) and the mediating variable (i.e. career development), and the relationship between the dependent variable (i.e., career commitment) were less than 0.90, indicating that the data were not affected by serious co-linearity problem (Hair et al., 1998). These statistical results further confirmed that the constructs satisfactorily met the standards of validity and reliability analyses as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Pearson Correlation Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

| Variables             | Mean | Standard Deviation | Pearson Correlation (r) |        |        |     |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------|--------|-----|
|                       |      |                    | 1                       | 2      | 3      | 4   |
| 1. Career Planning    | 6.1  | 0.62               | (1)                     |        |        |     |
| 2. Career Management  | 5.3  | 0.86               | 0.53**                  | (1)    |        |     |
| 3. Career Development | 5.3  | 0.94               | 0.29**                  | 0.48** | (1)    |     |
| 4. Career Commitment  | 5.7  | 0.71               | 0.28**                  | 0.46** | 0.43** | (1) |

Note: Significant at \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$  Reliability Estimation is shown in a diagonal.

The outcomes of testing Hypotheses 1 and 2 were shown in Table 3. First, career planning positively and significantly correlated with career development, therefore H1 was supported. Second, career management positively and significantly correlated with career development, therefore H2 was supported. This result explains that the ability of management to appropriately plan and manage the progression of employee career paths has upgraded employees' career development in the studied organization.

**Table 4:** Results for Stepwise Regression Analysis

| Variable                    | Dependent Variable<br>(Career Commitment) |         |          |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|----------|
|                             | Step 1                                    | Step 2  | Step 3   |
| <u>Controlling Variable</u> |   |         |          |
| Gender                      | .00                                       | .00     | -.06     |
| Age                         | .14                                       | .11     | .28      |
| Educational Level           | -.11                                      | -.15    | -1.17    |
| Length of Service           | -.02                                      | .05     | .56      |
| Position                    | .20                                       | .16     | .15      |
| <u>Independent Variable</u> |   |         |          |
| Career Planning             |   | .21*    | .19*     |
| Career Management           |   | .19     | -.02     |
| <u>Mediating variable</u>   |   |         |          |
| Career Development          |   |         | .42***   |
| R Square                    | .18                                       | .38     | .52      |
| Adjust R square             | -.01                                      | .09     | .27      |
| R square change             | .03                                       | .11     | .12      |
| F                           | .74                                       | 2.78**  | 5.29***  |
| F Δ R Square                | .74                                       | 8.64*** | 21.85*** |

Note: Significant at \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Further, the mediating role of career development in the hypothesized model was shown in Table 4. The outcomes of stepwise regression analysis revealed that the inclusion of career development in Step 3 had explained 52 percent of the variance in dependent variable. Specifically, Step 3 highlighted that relationship between career program (i.e., career planning and career management) and career development positively and significantly correlated with career commitment ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), therefore H1 and H2 were supported. This result explains that before the inclusion of career development in Step 2, career planning ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was found to be significantly correlated with career commitment whereas career management was found to be insignificantly correlated with career commitment ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). After the

inclusion of career development in Step 3, the previous significant relationship between career planning and career commitment (Step 2:  $\beta=.0.19$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) did not change to insignificant (Step 3:  $\beta=.0.19$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), but the strength of relationship between such variables was decreased. Conversely, the previous insignificant relationship between career management and career commitment (Step 2:  $\beta=0.09$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) did not change to significant (Step 3:  $\beta=-.0.02$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Statistically, this result meets the Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediating testing condition where it send a message that linking career program to career development has been an important determinant of career commitment in the organizational sample.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study explains that career development does act as an important mediating variable in the relationship between career program and career commitment in the studied organization. Within this study, managers have included individual needs in planning and managing the progression of employees' career. The majority of employees perceive that the ability of managers to plan and manage such career programs help employees to enhance their career development. As a finding, it may help to increase career commitment in the organization.

The implications of this study can be divided into three major aspects: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and contribution to practitioners. In term of theoretical contribution, this study reveals two important outcomes: firstly, career development has mediated the effect of career management on career commitment. This result explains that the ability of managers to properly manage career programs based on employee needs have increased employees' career development. Consequently, it may lead to an increased career commitment in the studied organization. The finding of this study has supported and extended career program research literature published in Western and Eastern organizational settings (Adekola, 2011; Chen et al., 2004; Puah & Ananthram, 2006). Secondly, career development has not mediated the effect of career planning on career commitment. The information gathered from the semi-structured interview method reveals that this result may be affected by external factors. Firstly, respondents may have different judgments and interpretations about the values and importance of career development programs implemented in the organization. Secondly, respondents may have different views about the capability of management to design and implement career development program for employees who have worked in different job groups. These factors may decrease the influence of career development in the relationship between career planning and career commitment in the studied organization.

Regardless to the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaires applied in this study had reach the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses; this may lead to achieve accurate and reliable research outcomes. On behalf of practical contributions, the results of this study can be used as guidelines by management to increase the progression of the employees' career paths in the organizations. The aim to achieve this objective, management needs to emphasize on the following issues: firstly, encourage leaders to use transformational style in managing employees. For example, the capability of leaders to use this leadership style will improve the quality of the communication between leaders and followers, and stimulate followers to improve their competencies in managing challenging and unstructured jobs. Secondly, high commitment management practices should be implementing in organizations. For

example, management needs to motivate employees to work in groups and this practice may help them to decrease work conflicts and accomplish job demands faster. Thirdly, management needs to adjust pay level according to employee merits. For example, the willingness of management to adjust the type, level and/or amount of pay according to skill certifications and performance may increase retain and motivate high performing employees to support organizational strategy and goals. Fourthly, update the training content and methods. For example, the readiness of management to properly design and administer theory and practical based training will inculcate necessary soft and hard knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as positive attitudes to all employees. These training programs may help employees to transfer what they learn in the workplace. Finally, encourage positive social support within an organization. For example, the willingness of supervisors and co-workers to practice positive social support (e.g., helping, respect and guidance) will help employees to tensions and raise their motivations in performing daily job. If organization gives attention to this suggestion this can motivate employees to appreciate and accept the workplace career and thus lead to support organizational strategic mission.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

This study suggested hypotheses based on the workplace career program research literature. The confirmatory factor analysis proved that the instrument applied in this study met the acceptable standards of validity and reliability analyses. There for result s of SmartPls path model analysis viewed that relationship between career program and career commitment in studied organization. This finding explains that the ability of management to consider individual employee needs in planning and managing career programs have helped employees to improve their career development. As a result, it may lead to an enhanced career commitment in organizations. Specifically, the findings of this study revealed that career development had only mediated the effect of career management on career commitment. This result has supported and broadened previous studies mostly published in Western countries. Conversely, career development had not mediated the effect of career planning on career commitment. This result may be affected by inconsistent and subjective respondent views about the value and importance of career development, as well as the capability of management to career development programs for employees who work in the various job classifications. These factors may decrease the mediating role of career development in the relationship between career planning and career commitment in the studied organization Therefore, current research and practice within the career program models needs to consider career development as a crucial element of the workplace career program domain. This study further suggests that the ability of managers to properly plan and manage career programs based on employee needs will strongly increase employees' career development. Consequently, it may lead to increased subsequent positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, trust, performance, fairness and ethics). Thus, these positive outcomes can lead to maintained and achieved organizational strategic missions.

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