



The relation between employee organizational and professional development activities ☆

Gary Blau ^{a,*}, Lynne Andersson ^a, Kathleen Davis ^a, Tom Daymont ^a,
Arthur Hochner ^a, Karen Koziara ^a, Jim Portwood ^a, Blair Holladay ^b

^a Temple University, Human Resource Management Department, 1810 N. 13th Street, 384 Speakman Hall, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA

^b American Society for Clinical Pathology, 33 W. Monroe Street, 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60603, USA

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Abstract

A model is presented showing hypothesized common and parallel antecedents of employee organizational development activity (ODA) versus professional development activity (PDA). A common antecedent is expected to affect both ODA and PDA, while a parallel antecedent is expected to affect its corresponding work referent. This model was tested using a sample of 197 medical technologists over a four year time period. Prior ODA and PDA were controlled for before testing hypotheses. Results showed that the common antecedent of learning motivation was a robust indicator of both ODA and PDA. Looking at parallel antecedents, job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment had a positive impact on ODA, while occupational satisfaction and affective occupational commitment had a positive impact on PDA. ODA had a negative impact on subsequent intent to leave organization, but PDA did not have a similar impact on intent to leave profession. Study limitations, issues around operationalizing ODA and PDA, and future research directions are discussed. © 2007 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Recent career research emphasizes concepts such as the “protean” and “boundaryless” career, in which the burden falls on the employee to develop and learn potentially new job or occupationally transferable skills, and if necessary physically relocate (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). A self-serving motivation for employee development is partially driven by the continued downsizing, merger and re-organization activities, which are expected to continue (Blau, 2006; Cascio, 2002; Chadwick, Hunter, & Walston, 2004). As Maurer and his colleagues have explained (Maurer & Palmer, 1999; Maurer,

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* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 215 204 8362.

E-mail address: gblau@temple.edu (G. Blau).

Pierce, & Shore, 2002) there also can be other-focused motives for employee development, including helping co-workers, supervisors and one's employing organization. Beyond helping their organization, where it is vocationally relevant, employees may also want to help their occupation or profession through their development activities (Snape & Redman, 2003). Also, if employees believe that their organization does not do enough to maintain their employability they may invest in professional development (Parker, Arthur, & Inkson, 2004). Professional development activity may also help an employee feel that they have an additional source of potential new job contacts if needed (Van Emmerik, 2004).

A review of the employee development literature suggests that more empirical work has focused on organizational development activities (ODA) than on professional development activities (PDA). Research to date has not tested for antecedents of ODA and PDA in the same study. Furthermore, prior research designs have not first controlled for the impact of prior ODA or PDA when testing for the impact of temporally intervening variables on subsequent ODA or PDA. By doing so in this study will allow for stronger inferences about causality. The present research examined the relationships of individual, work attitude, and insecurity antecedents in explaining ODA in a work sample not previously studied (medical technologists). Also, the study investigated the applicability of these common individual and parallel work attitude and insecurity referent antecedents for explaining PDA. The linkages of ODA and PDA to parallel types of subsequent withdrawal intentions were tested.

1.1. Defining development activity and distinguishing ODA versus PDA

Employee development activities can take many forms, including assessment and feedback, training programs or courses, and other work experiences. Employee development may not be a formal part of one's job, and can occur through such work experiences as special assignments, voluntary participation in task forces, committees and projects, and other events in which something is learned or skills are developed (Noe, Wilk, Mullen, & Wanek, 1997). Maurer et al. (2002) presented a model and discussed employees' pursuing development activities based at least partially on who benefits from such activities, and they note three beneficiaries—the person, the supervisor or the organization. Maurer et al. (2002, p. 433) assumed that development activities (in whatever form they take and towards whomever they benefit) involve learning new tasks or information. This assumption is also made for this study.

Prior research has recognized that some development activities, such as volunteering to participate in seminars, workshops, programs, or on committees can be categorized as examples of prosocial organizational behavior or PSOB. PSOB is defined by Brief and Motowildo (1986, p. 711) as, "behavior directed towards an individual, group or organization, with the intent of promoting the welfare of the individual, group or organization". As such Maurer et al. (2002) point out that PSOB is a more inclusive behavior category that encompasses organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) which is more narrowly defined as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988, p. 4).

A review of research studies in the employee development literature suggests that a formal distinction can be made between "organizational-focused" development activities (ODA) versus "professional (occupational)-focused" development activities (PDA). In their conceptual model of general employee development activity and learning outcomes, Noe et al. (1997) discuss three organizational antecedents of such activity, i.e., business strategy, climate, and pay systems, including tuition reimbursement policies, as well as the individual antecedent of occupational preference. This referent distinction, i.e., organization versus occupation or profession, already exists in the commitment literature (Blau, 2003; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). As defined here, ODA focuses on an employee volunteering to participate in *organization-specific* initiatives, such as seminars, workshops, learning activities, courses, etc. which are designed to help an employee learn and/or apply new *organizational-relevant* skills or information (e.g., Birdi, Allan, & Warr, 1997; Maurer, 2001; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Maurer et al., 2002; Noe, 1996; Noe & Wilk, 1993). As such, ODA can be categorized as a form of PSOB (Brief & Motowildo, 1986). PDA focuses on the same employee (to allow comparison to their ODA activity level) volunteering to participate in *profession-based* initiatives, such as continuing education or attending a workshop, designed to facilitate this individual learning and/or applying new *profession-relevant* skills or information (Meyer et al., 1993; Snape & Redman, 2003).

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