

**Linking Career Development Practices to Turnover Intention: The Mediator of Perceived Organizational Support**

Foong-ming, Tan, Nagoya University, [k030514m@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:k030514m@yahoo.co.jp)

**Abstract**

This study investigates the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS) in linking career development practices (CDP) with turnover intention with 357 Malaysian knowledge workers. Data were collected from four different knowledge intensive industries, namely finance, information technology (IT), engineering, and education. Under individual perception of long-term CDP, structural equation modeling analysis revealed that POS completely mediates perceptions of career development opportunities, supervisory support, and internal promotion among knowledge workers. Career orientation and cultural influences of the perception of organizational support by Malaysian knowledge workers in the workplace and the impact towards human resource management policies are discussed.

**Introduction**

Organizational support theory has received a lot of attention in its examination of the employee-employer relationship (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Using the underlying social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) suggested that individual attitudes and behaviors are affected by generalized perception of care and support from organizations. Employees feel obliged to repay organization with extra effort and loyalty when such favorable supportive treatments are discretionary-based (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Defined as "employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being", it is termed perceived organizational support (POS). To date, POS literature has been widely examined in relation to human resource (HR) policies with the aim of understanding employees' behavior and attitudes. Yet the mechanisms of how POS exerts influence on important HR policies and the mechanism to explain turnover intentions in knowledge-intensive organizations require further investigation.

Meta analysis of over 70 studies by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) reported consistent antecedents and consequences of POS. However, the burgeoning research into POS did not adequately examine the influence of POS between organizational actions and employees turnover. One study reported POS as mediator for human resource management practices (HRMP) (Meyer & Smith, 2000) with organizational commitment, the other two reported POS mediates supportive HR practices (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003), and job conditions (Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003) on turnover via organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Two studies associated POS with actual turnover, using rewards, procedural justice, and supervisory support (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002)

Most of these studies suggest POS is a weak link to turnover intention. Under organizational support theory, HRMP suggest that investment and recognition in employees could be regarded as organizational care and appreciation of employees. Specifically, career development practices (CDP) that cater to a career plan for individual employees would signal that this is organizational care and support to ambitious knowledge workers in the initial stage of their career. Career development refers to the long term personal and professional growth of individuals (London, 1993). The availability of effective CDP not only heightens the growth and self-esteem of employees for them to utilize skills and knowledge, it could also serve as an important link to retain good employees to stay with the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Adopting findings from Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002), this study suggests organizational reward, promotion, supervisory support, and career development opportunities are mediated by POS to reduce turnover intention.

In the next section, this paper explores the concept of CDP. Using career development as a long-term expectation by employees, this study examines the mediating role of POS to enhance social exchange and hence reduce turnover intention for the four industries that face high turnover, namely the finance, IT, engineering and education industries.

## **Conceptualization and Hypotheses Development**

### **Career Development Practices (CDP)**

Career development involves an organized, formalized, planned effort to achieve a balance between an individual's career needs and the organization's workforce requirements (Leibowitz, Farren & Kaye, 1986; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). CDP was once a crucial part of the HRMP under life time employment practices to motivate employees for career enrichment as well as desired performance in the organization (Nadler & Nadler, 1989).

Traditional views advocate that career planning has inherently paternalistic nature where organization takes a primitive and dominant role in developing employees (Nadler & Nadler, 1989; Gutteridge, Leibowitz & Shore, 1999). Modern views argue that career planning is more progressive whereby employees take a major role in managing their own career (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Baruch, 2003). This stream of researchers defines the term career as a development process of an individual along a path of different work experiences and jobs in one or more organizations (Baruch and Rosenstein, 1992; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994; Hall & Mirvis, 1996). The emphasis of new career success is placed on individual responsibility (Arthur et al., 1999). Arguing that employees should not only manage their own careers, Baruch (2003) went even further in asserting that employees could have multiple careers of their own choice. Employees might have less commitment to an organization, and instead develop multiple commitments towards their industry, occupation, support groups, and career (Parker & Arthur, 2000). Careers then become more open, diverse, and less controlled by employers.

As career development is at one's control and responsibility, one should make choices, adapt to circumstances (such as organizational change), learn to grow, and control one's own destiny (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). The decision for employees to stay or leave might depend on whether the work is challenging, whether they gain support at work and personal growth. This requires employers to provide resources, tools, and the appropriate environment to ensure continued self-development. While individual effort is emphasized, career literature has shown a convergence between individual and

organizational effort in career development is possible. These researchers suggested that CDP represents a form of partnership and mutual commitment in exchange for joint ownership and shared responsibility of employees' careers (Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). CDP must be an ongoing development system associated with an organization's HR policies and structure. The partnership and mutual exchange of commitment portray CDP as a long term progressive event (Leibowitz et al., 1986; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007), hence fostering the capability of employees, and at the same time, forming a durable employment relationship.

Organizational support theory maintains that mutual commitment between employees and an employer starts with the organization providing a supportive and caring atmosphere for employees, and employees reciprocate by feeling attached and acting to achieve organizational goals. The underpinning social exchange theory predicts that the exchange of favorable treatment could be prolonged if the receipt of resources from another party is highly in need and valuable and the actions are discretionary (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1997). Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997) reported that the history of favorable treatments by an organization to other employees would enhance POS. These imperatives provide conjecture to the individual perception of CDP, whereby a longer period of time would increase employees' POS, and thus it is prone to be reciprocated by the intention to stay and extended extra effort with the employer.

The exploration of antecedents and consequences of POS have been widely observed in the Western context (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, et al., 1997; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades et al. 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Allen et al., 2003), while findings for Asian collective cultures such as Malaysian employees is still in the preliminary stages. Several studies on POS using the Malaysian context mainly concern organizational justice, citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment (Kim, 2001; Tan, 2001; Mohd. Nasuridin, 2003; Lau, 2003), leaving the antecedents and the mechanism for POS to explain the turnover process for further examination. Using knowledge workers, this study wishes to address the generalizations and the distinctiveness of POS with four different types of knowledge intensive industries in Malaysia.

There are several ways for organization to display CDP. From an individual perspective, employees would identify their skills, values and interests, and seek out career alternatives that fit into their career goals and plans (Hall, 1986; Leibowitz et al., 1986; Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992). Organization also plays a part in developing individual career plans. Adding to this view, this study proposes that organizational rewards, career development opportunities, supervisory support, and promotion are effective CDP that reflect basic organizational philosophy in prolonging the mutually beneficial employment relationship. Career development signals organizational care and support in developing the capabilities and skills of employees. On the basis of social exchange and the norm of reciprocity, POS would create an obligation for employees to care about the organization's future goals, and extend self-effort in achieving them. To address whether POS could help explain the relationship, this study considers that CDP would enhance POS, and the heightened POS would help to reduce the intention of knowledge workers to look for outside opportunities. The next section explores the hypotheses of POS as the mediator for the proposed CDP and turnover intention.

### **Organizational Rewards**

Organizational rewards are the return form of appreciation from an organization depending upon one's

performance and contribution. In most studies, rewards are effective in attracting talents and retaining good performers (Lawler, 1981; Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991; Zenger, 1992). As the contributions of knowledge workers are influential on the long term performance of an organization, they are often recruited using a more attractive form of remuneration package compared to other professions. It could be seen as an exchange of loyalty for benefits among knowledge workers (Igbaria, Greenhaus, & Parasuraman, 1991; Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid & Sirola, 1998; Liu, 2004).

Rewards are substantially related to turnover as employees who are satisfied with organizational rewards will believe losing such a competitive reward to be costly and would not find such compensation elsewhere, and therefore they choose to stay. Rewards effectively form a calculative and psychological attachment with an organization (Becker, 1960). Organizational behavioral researchers (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2001) argue that organizational rewards reflect appreciation and recognition of individual performance. As pay increases with tenure, skills and work experience, satisfaction with rewards implies willingness of both parties to invest time and effort in the continuation of the employment relationship. From an employer's point of view, the amount of pay represents the magnitude and willingness to invest on employees in exchange for improved performance. Hence, employees who perceive monetary rewards as a satisfactory form of appreciation would not consider alternatives from other organizations. Surprisingly, not many studies reported the impact of organizational rewards and the entire structure towards turnover intention in POS literatures. So far, there are three studies relating pay with POS. Liu's study (2004) reported pay level as the antecedent of POS for IT workers, while Meyer and Smith (2000) and Rhoades et al. (2001) reported that rewards and benefits were mediated by POS with affective organizational commitment. The entire structure of a rewards package deserves more attention. Since rewards portray a feeling of competence and value by knowledge workers, the examination of the entire structure of rewards package with POS is necessary. Consequently, the enhanced POS will attract a high value of organizational membership. Thus, the hypothesis is proposed as:

*Hypothesis 1: POS mediates organizational rewards with turnover intention*

### **Career Development Opportunities**

The availability of career development opportunities illustrates the willingness and effort of the organization to cherish employees. Generally, organizations that provide relevant quantity and quality development schemes are signaling to employees their likeliness to develop a cadre of skillful employees to grow together with the business. Huselid (1995) suggested that progressive HR practices that embrace career-related practices could improve knowledge, skills and the abilities of an organization's current and potential employees, and enhance the retention of quality employees.

Career development is about the development of employees that is beneficial for both the individual and the organization. Effective career development programs enhance individual work performance by continuously learning and adapting, while the organization offers favorable developmental relationships with their employees. It is a complex process that shapes the career of any given individuals over their life span. Lips-Wiersma and Hall (2007) suggested career development as the outcome of interaction between individual career planning and institutional career management processes. Thus, career development must be engaged with the organizational HR structures and must not be a one time event, but be over a longer period of time (Leibowitz et al., 1986).

Learning and adaptability are important for employees to continue to strive for career success. Similarly, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) suggested training and exposure may imply a high level of concern for organizations to extend employees' potential in the organization. Employees who receive such developmental opportunities would boost their motivation and confidence in their work. Subsequently, employees who receive such opportunities might repay their organization with the likeliness of extending their self-fulfillment, leading to reduced turnover intention. This then leads to the following proposition:

*Hypothesis 2: POS mediates career development opportunities with turnover intention*

### **Supervisory Support**

Levinson (1965) noted that employees tend to view actions by agents of the organization as actions of the organization itself. Because supervisors are mainly involved in performance evaluations, feedback, and career development programs, their favorable or unfavorable treatment reflect an organization's view and decisions on employees. On the other hand, employees today are dealing with more complicated work tasks, often work long hours, and work in teams (Lee, 2004). They might require higher socio-emotional and growth needs that motivate them to work and perform better in their work tasks. As supervisors play an important role in managing employees and projects, their relations are much closer. Hence, beneficial treatment from a supervisor could increase POS to the extent that such treatment is discretionary, fair, and attributed to the organization's policies and procedures (Rhoades et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Supervisors administer employees' work, providing direct and indirect feedback of their work, and serve as the pivotal person in influencing rewards, appraisal, and career development in an organization. Supervisors provide useful performance feedback and empowerment, and set career goals and plans with subordinates that boost motivation. Today's employees who are equipped with specialized knowledge might welcome the autonomy to do their work, as well as being treated with trust and confidence. While London (1993) distinguished the vital link of supervisory support with individual and organizational career development, Maertz and Griffeth (2004) theorized that attachments to supervisors could have influential effects on employees' turnover intention. A recent study reported the direct and indirect influence of supervisory support on turnover cognition (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell & Allen, 2007), demonstrating inconsistencies of the effect of supervisors on turnover intention.

Several studies showed that satisfaction with supervisory support reduces turnover intention (Krackhardt, McKenna, Porter, & Steers, 1981; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Lee, 2004). Maertz et al. (2007) called for further research on the personal and situational characteristics for supervisors to extend employees' positive attitudes and attachment to an organization, indicating the necessity for in examining the effect of supervisory support in providing performance feedback, trust and confidence, empowerment, and career development plans that could influence turnover intention. Moreover, most studies in the Western context reported a positive relationship of supervisory support with POS (Rhoades et al, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Issues such as how POS could function to reduce turnover intention in an Asian context in contributing to the understanding of global attitudes towards organizations or a particular job should also be considered.

Using Korean hospital staff, Yoon and Lim's study (1999) found that supervisory support leads to

organizational support under a strong collective and relationship orientated. Korean workers tend to seek career success from good relationships with their supervisors. Similarly, Malaysian workers, with their multicultural conformity, tend to have strong relationships in the work place. They seek career success by building good (harmonious) relationships with colleagues and supervisors, forming an “in-group” with trust and loyalty (Abdullah 2001, Hofstede, 2001). The favourable treatment and support given by a supervisor might elevate POS, since employees tend to view the agent's actions as the actions of an organization. The research findings provide an important underpinning to reduced turnover intention. Thus the hypothesis reads as:

*Hypothesis 3: POS mediates supervisory support with turnover intention*

### **Internal Promotion**

Promotion within an organization shows evidence of formal recognition of one's performance and ability rewarded with a rise in pay, work challenges, responsibility, status, and autonomy. Employees view promotion as an achievement of their proven performance record towards career success (Kim, 2005). Promotion carries recognition from the management, helping employees to expand their network within the profession through a wider job scope and perspective (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Wayne et al., 1997).

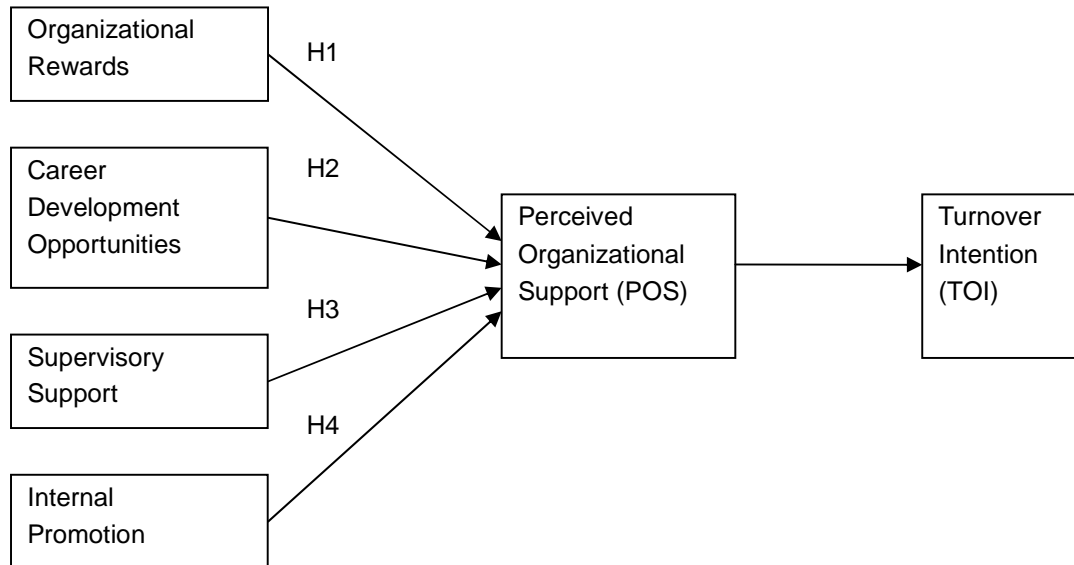
Internal promotion connects an employees' career interest with the current employing organization, while through performance recognition the organization invites employees to stay and extend their organizational goals in the future. The perception of future advancement opportunities within the organization acts as motivation for employees to perform up to expectations (Vroom, 1964), and stay with the company to demonstrate their skills and ability. Aligned to organizational support theory, promotion delivers favorable treatment to employees, indicating that an organization is recognizing and appraising the employees' performance via formal promotion. It also serves as a commitment from the organization to continue developing every employee's career path and learning opportunity (Guest et al., 2002).

The perception of the availability of promotion within the organization could also be seen as a discretionary decision to reward performing employees. As employees feel appreciated, they reciprocate with loyalty and extend extra effort (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This serves as an exchange whereby employees who seize their career prospects in the organization are more willing to stay and exert the organization's goals. Theoretically, employees with promotional opportunities tend to connect their career opportunities and interest to seek self-fulfillment with the organization (Alderfer, 1972). This is considered an important HRMP in staff retention in HR management and turnover literatures (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Allen et al., 2003; Chang, 2005). Wayne et al. (1997) found positive relations between promotion and POS, while Meyer and Smith (2000) reported that performance appraisal was mediated by POS with affective organizational commitment. Under the norm of reciprocity, the perception of the availability of promotion would be seen as a form of organizational support to reduce turnover intention. The hypothesis is proposed as:

*H4: POS mediates internal promotion with turnover intention*

Figure 1 presents the hypothesized model.

**Figure 1**  
**Hypothesized Model**



## **Methodology**

### **Sample and Procedures**

The definition of knowledge workers in this study is defined as those who work for a living at the tasks of developing or using knowledge (Drucker, 1994). It is believed that through certain knowledge infusion, workers become more creative and analytical in problem solving as much as is required for the development of an economy. Due to the nature of this study, the participants were widely selected based on the following criteria to qualify them as knowledge workers: a) highly educated or professionally trained to suit their work nature, b) has been involved for at least three years in the same profession in order to be able to fully utilize their knowledge within their own discretion, and c) firms in use of intensive knowledge in offering products and services.

An Amsterdam based professional publishing company established 20 years ago in Malaysia was approached for its strong and broad connections with professional subscribers in knowledge-intensive industries. Target companies were restricted to the finance, IT, engineering and education sector. Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi highlighted these industries in the development of a knowledge-based economy in his Budget Speech for 2007 (Treasury Malaysia, 2006). After careful selection of the background and employees formation of these selected industries, four companies were approached for this study.

A questionnaire survey was administered in September 2006 to the four selected companies located on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. A cover letter with survey forms in English was delivered to 1197 employees. Since previous studies used the English language for Malaysian samples (Westwood and Everett, 1995; Sheppard, 2001; Lim & Itakura, 2003) and English is an accepted medium used in the public and private sector for Malaysia, this survey was prepared in English. The respondents were asked

to return the survey directly to the researcher in the postage-paid envelope provided. A follow-up mailing with the same questionnaire attached took place 3 weeks later through HR managers after the initial mailing to remind respondents to fill in and return the questionnaires.

A total of 401 questionnaires from these four companies were received. A respond rate of 33.5 percent is considered good as Malaysians are not keen on such filling in such questionnaires (Westwood & Everett, 1995). After deleting some invalid surveys, 357 qualified respondents were left. The four companies represented finance, IT, engineering, and education. Due to the definition of knowledge workers, respondents were strictly categorized by education, work experience, tenure, and job position.

The financial company contributed 28 percent of the respondents to the usable surveys, the IT company 25 percent, the engineering company 24 percent, and the educational institution 23 percent. All the sample organizations are local set-ups, ranged from 300 to 500 employees. The samples were in line with the nature of the firm, consisting of financial consultants, IT professionals, engineers, and lecturers. In total, the average age reported was 32.18 (SD = 6.8) and average organizational tenure was 4.2 years (SD = 4.8), and 58 percent female. The sample comprised of 17.6 percent Malays, 68.9 percent Chinese, 9.5 percent Indians, 2.2 percent others, and 1.7 percent expatriates. Respondents had an average of 8.1 years working experience (SD = 6.4). 46 percent graduated with bachelor degrees, 41 percent were trained in professional or vocational qualifications while 13 percent completed a post graduate program. 60 percent of the employees were single.

### **Measures**

Questions were designed for employees to assess evaluations of their organizations' CDP pertinent to the structure of organizational rewards, career development opportunities, supervisory support, and promotion. All measures were made on the 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly dissatisfied/disagreed; 7 = strongly satisfied/agreed).

**Organizational Rewards (OR).** Six items reworded from the Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire developed by Heneman & Schwab (1985) were used to ask to what extent the satisfaction with employee's overall pay conditions were. To better understand which component of compensation was most preferred, this study chose the highest loadings consisting of four elements including pay level, pay benefits, pay raise, and pay structure/administration. Pay level covered only the current salary, pay benefits covered bonus, allowances, and other incentives, pay raise covered the raise in the year end appraisals, and pay structure and administration covered differences of pay within and outside the company in the same profession.

**Career Development Opportunities (CD).** Four items were adopted from a PhD dissertation developed by Liu (2004) to measure long-term career development opportunities and career goals available in the organization. Examples are "in the long run, my organization will facilitate me in accomplishing my goals" and "my organization takes steps to insure that I maximize my career potential". These items were reported by Liu to have a strong impact on POS for IT workers in the United States.

**Supervisory Support (SS).** Eight items reworded from London's (1993) scale to ask about the treatment of empowerment, career plans, treatment at work, and performance feedback by their immediate supervisors. A study of Korean hospital employees showed noticeable differences on the effect of

supervisory support on organizational support (Yoon & Lim, 1999). Under the umbrella of Asian culture, this study expects to see high correlations between supervisory support and POS.

**Internal Promotion (IP).** This study adopted three items from Gaertner & Nollen's measure (1989). The words "in the future" and "it has been" were included in all the items to measure how employees perceived the availability of promotional opportunities in the future within the firm. It is reasonable that promotion within the organization could be interpreted as support and commitment to the employees, resulting in attachment from the employees. It is then believed that this factor is strongly related to POS as promotion is one of the strongest signs for organizations to recognize employees' work.

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS).** Voluminous studies surveyed different occupations and organizations and provide high reliability and uni-dimensionality of the survey of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). To assess employees' perceptions about their contributions and well-being, ten items with the highest loadings in Eisenberger et al.'s scale (1986) were selected equally in regards of two sections (employees' well-being and contribution).

**Turnover intention (TOI)** was measured using the same wording in Carmeli & Gefen's (2004) study. According to prior work, intention is more likely to lead to actual turnover. TOI and turnover were measured separately, but TOI has generally been recognized as the final and most important cognitive variable having an immediate causal effect on actual turnover (Mobley, Horner & Hollingsworth, 1978). It was taken as an outcome variable in this study and was operationally defined by three single indicators using Mobley et al.'s (1978) turnover model: thinking of quitting, intent to search, and intent to quit. Employees were asked to assess their status with the three items mentioned.

**Control Variables.** Previous theoretical and empirical work reported that different industries, work processes and technology would differ across different occupational groups (Osterman, 1994). Also, different occupational groups might have different levels of turnover (Cohen & Hudecek, 1993). Thus, age, marital status, tenure, and education were considered influential towards turnover intention included for analysis. Age and tenure were input as figures and sex and education were coded in numbers.

## **Analysis**

Data collected from four organizations were initially analyzed separately to test the hypotheses. Due to the similarity of the results across organizations and industries, data were then combined into one model. This study applied structural equation modeling (SEM) approach in AMOS for data analysis and evaluation of the fit of the hypothesized measurement model.

Following Bentler & Bonnett's (1980) recommendation to interpret multiple fit indices, AMOS fit statistics such as overall model chi-square measure ( $\chi^2$ ), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, Tucker & Lewis, 1973), comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA, Browne & Cudek, 1993) were used. TLI greater than or equal to .96, CFI greater than or equal to .96, and RMSEA less than or equal to .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) show the parsimony adjusted fit indices for the overall model fit.

To test the hypothesized mediating role of POS, four conditions suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) were in use: 1) the independent variables must be related to the dependent variable; 2) the independent variables must be related to the mediator; 3) the mediator must be related to the dependent variable; and finally 4) the independent variable must have no effect on the dependent variable when the mediator is held constant (full mediation) or should become significantly smaller (partial mediation).

Combining four sets of data, the variable was measured by at least three indicators. POS was constituted by six indicators with equal distribution of measures for organizational support for well-being and contribution. Next, the analysis proceeded with analyzing the matrix of covariances among scales scores. Scale scores were used as the indicators for all the variables. The researcher corrected for measurement error in the scale values in two steps: 1) by setting the path from the latent variable (underlying construct) to the indicator (variable) equal to the square root of the indicator's scale reliability; 2) the error variance for each indicator was set equal to the product of one minus the reliability and the variance of the indicator (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Williams & Hazer, 1986). The control variables were measured without error.

To assess the overall fit and path estimates, the proposed model was compared to other nested models with constrained paths (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In a constrained model, one or more paths in the hypothesized model were added to test the fourth condition of the mediating effect for POS. The mediated effect was tested with one path added from CDP to TOI, forming Model 2 to Model 5. Model 6 was measured with four paths added from CDP to TOI. These five constrained models were compared to the hypothesized full mediated model (Model 1) to examine the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable and assess the best fitting model. The comparison process continued with sequential chi-square difference tests, until the best fit model was found (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980). The change of chi-square differences and goodness-of-fit indices between the two models reflected the effect of added paths and was a test of significant change to the hypothesized model. If the change in chi-square is significant, it suggests that the added paths are important in comparison to the hypothesized model and that the tested model has a better fit.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliability for each variable. The correlations are based on the maximum sample available for each combination of variables. Reliability scored more than .70 indicated internal consistencies satisfying research instruments (Hatcher, 1994). As shown in the table, organizational rewards ( $r = -.29$ ), career development opportunities ( $r = -.30$ ), supervisory support ( $r = -.29$ ) and internal promotion ( $r = -.23$ ) were negatively related to AC and significant at 0.01 level, supporting condition 1 for the mediating test.

**Table 1****Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Alpha Coefficients**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Organizational Rewards	3.86	1.22	[.89]					
2 Career Development Opportunities	4.06	1.34	0.46	[.95]				
3 Supervisory Support	4.47	1.24	0.41	0.63	[.94]			
4 Internal Promotion	4.06	1.15	0.52	0.61	0.56	[.78]		
5 POS	4.33	0.84	0.43	0.65	0.62	0.54	[.84]	
6 Turnover Intention	3.74	1.40	-0.29	-0.30	-0.29	-0.23	-0.39	[.84]

N=357. All correlations are significant at 0.01 level

Figures in parentheses are alpha reliabilities.

Hypothesized model shows full support for condition 2 and 3 for the mediator test as presented in Figure 1. Organizational rewards, career development opportunities, supervisory support and internal promotion showed positive relations with POS and negative relations with turnover intention. The hypothesized model achieved satisfactory fit, with  $\chi^2(24) = 45.35$ ; TLI = .96; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .04]. Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommendations, the hypothesized model was compared with other nest models to analyze the fourth condition on the mediating effect for POS. Table 2 presents the series of comparisons with hypothesized model 1.

**Table 2****Results of model comparisons**

Models	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	$\Delta p$	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1 (Hypothesized Model)	45.35	24	>.001	--	--	--	0.96	0.98	0.05
Model 2 (Partial mediator for OR)	36.77	23	>.001	8.58	1	**	0.97	0.99	0.04
Model 3 (Partial mediator for CD)	43.32	23	>.001	2.03	1	>.05	0.96	0.98	0.05
Model 4 (Partial mediator for SS)	43.11	23	>.001	2.24	1	>.05	0.96	0.98	0.05
Model 5 (Partial mediator for IP)	44.79	23	>.001	0.56	1	>.05	0.95	0.98	0.05
Model 6 Partially mediated model)	34.99	20	>.001	10.4	4	>.05	0.96	0.98	0.05

Note. N = 357, \*\* p < 0.05

$\Delta\chi^2$ , chi-square differences;  $\Delta df$ , degree of difference differences;  $\Delta p$ , p value on chi-square difference CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker-Lewis Index; and RMSEA, root mean square error of approximat

OR = Organizational Rewards; CD=Career Development Opportunities; SS=Supervisory Support;

IP = Internal Promotion; POS = Perceived Organizational Support; TO I= Turnover Intention

Model 1: All paths from OR, CD, SS, IP to POS, POS to TOI

Model 2: Add path from OR to TOI

Model 3: Add path from CD to TOI

Model 4: Add path from SS to TOI

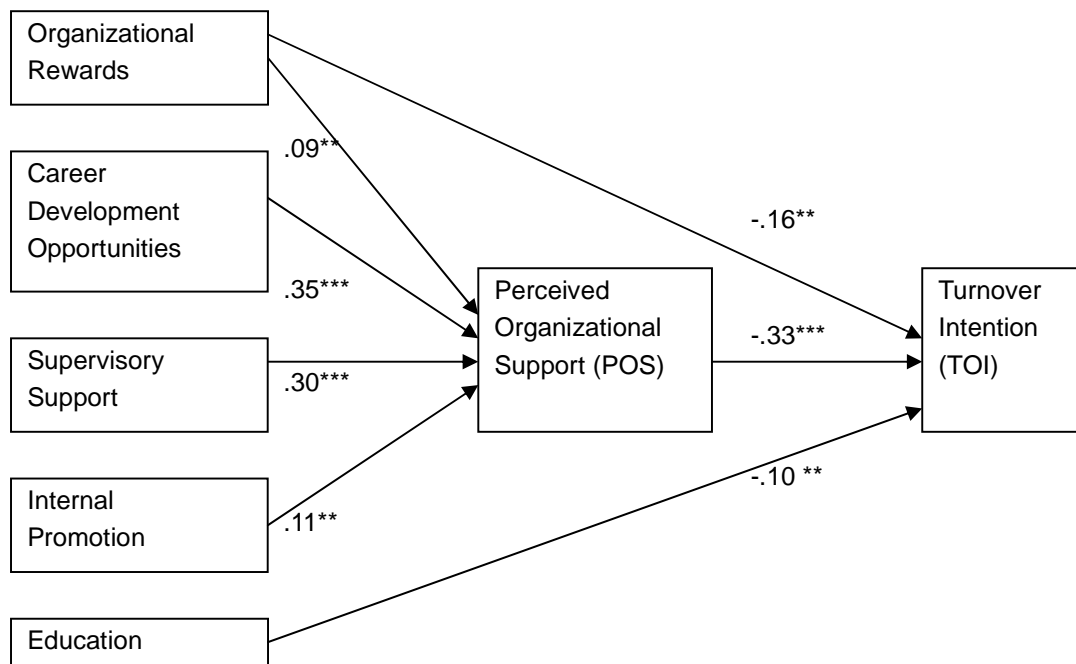
Model 5: Add path from IP to TOI

Model 6: Add paths from OR, CD, SS, IP to TOI

As shown in Table 2, adding paths from CDP to TOI resulted in a significant improvement in model fit for organizational rewards in Model 2 [ $\chi^2(23) = 36.77$ , TLI = .97; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .05] while other nested models were not significantly different from the hypothesized model. The chi-square difference indicated a significant difference [ $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.58$ , p < .05] between Model 1 and Model 2, and suggests POS partially mediates organizational rewards with TOI, but fully mediates career development opportunities, supervisory support, and internal promotion with TOI. Education was significantly related to TOI ( $\beta = -.10$ , p

< .05). Figure 2 presents the standardized parameter estimates for best fit Model 2. Thus, hypothesis 1 was partially supported, and hypothesis 2, 3, and 4 were fully supported.

**Figure 2**  
**Path Estimates of the Best Fit Model 2**



\*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .001

## Discussion

By examining the mediating role of POS with CDP and TOI, this study extends previous research by supplying evidence that POS fully mediates career development opportunities, supervisory support, and internal promotion, and partially mediates organizational rewards with turnover intention for Malaysian knowledge workers in four different industries.

Above all, POS is negatively related to turnover intention ( $b = -.33, p < .001$ ) suggesting that POS could be a close link to turnover intention rather than via job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment (Wayne et al., 1997; Rhoades et al., 2001; Allen et al., 2003). Adding to the understanding of POS literature, this study provides a valuable contribution in explaining the long term expectation of CDP that could invoke employees' reciprocal social obligation to stay with the company that could go beyond calculative attachment (Blau, 1964). This exemplifies an effective way to retain knowledge workers.

The availability of career development opportunities ( $b = .35, p < .001$ ) is considered as the most explicit support from organization to foster employees' career path. The often changing business environment and employment relationship have created recognition for knowledge workers to look for lifelong learning

opportunities for personal growth throughout their career (Baruch, 2003). The availability of career development could be seen as discretionary support leading to POS, and could be reciprocated with a willingness to remain members of the organization. This is consistent with Liu's (2004) finding on IT workers in the United States, stating the importance of development opportunities as an important supportive HR tool to enhance loyalty for knowledge workers.

The long term prospects of internal promotional opportunity are another form of important recognition of one's performance. Knowledge-intensive organizations have less hierarchical layers, and this consequently leads to less opportunity for knowledge workers. The availability of career-inducement programs leading to promotion is hence strong organizational recognition to reduce the intention of knowledge workers to look for other alternatives.

Supervisory support has become a major topic in recent research (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Maertz, et al., 2007). These study contribute to the growing body of research on the influence of supervisor to staff motivation and retention. Other intangible socio-emotional elements of supervisory support such as providing empowerment, confidence at work, personal guidance in career plans as well as treating subordinates with respect and trust are coherent with organizational support and care. Apart from work related feedback and development opportunities, personal relationships could affect a larger portion of those with attachment to the organization via favorable actions of agents (Levinson, 1965). This might explain the preference of Malaysians to work in harmonious and relationship-based workplace (Pearson & Chong, 1997, Abdullah 2001). Such a culture shows that authority and supervisory support play a pivotal role in influencing employee work related perceptions, attitudes and behaviors (Ferris & Gilmore, 1984; Yoon & Lim, 1999).

The four CDP explained 51.7 percent variance of POS, suggesting these practices could heighten employees' confidence with their employer. Consistent with previous studies, CDP through organizational discretion that provides coaching, personal worth and perceived competence could meet the socio-emotional needs of employees, and hence lead to a favorable behavioral outcome (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Wayne et al., 1997; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Consistent with Wayne et al.'s (1997) findings, time factors are highly connected to turnover intention. Volatile economic factors often affect corporate structure and ownership, and this could shatter the confidence of employees to stay without career prospects. Hence, proven stable HR practices could regain confidence and the employment relationship remains stable for both employees and employers.

Interestingly, different elements of organizational rewards including benefits and pay raise did not prove to be strong elements of organizational support ( $b = .09, p < .05$ ) and turnover intention ( $b = -.16, p < .05$ ). This is inconsistent with Rhoades et al.'s (2001) findings which suggested a full mediating effect between organizational rewards and actual turnover by POS. Malaysian workers have been portrayed as money-oriented and inclined to job hop for better career offers (Kawabe, 1991). Since knowledge workers are used to working long hours and often need to solve complicated problems, they should be rewarded accordingly. Monetary rewards in Malaysia might also have not been as attractive as other knowledge intensive industries in other industrialized countries like Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea, exacerbating the turnover rates in Malaysia. Monetary rewards to some extent should be in parallel with job

responsibilities to attract and retain knowledge workers. Since they are aware of their value and contributions to the organization, it is justifiable to design remuneration that is lucrative enough for them to stay.

This research provides a considerable contribution to HR policy makers by understanding the importance of organizational support to the retention of a competent work force. Interpersonal relationships with supervisors are especially crucial in recognizing the personification of an organization, further inducing organizational support as a favorable inclination to employees. This is especially emphasized in Asian culture (Yoon & Lim, 1999; Abdullah, 2001; Hofstede, 2001) as social relationships are more durable than economic/calculative exchange in the long run. For dynamic knowledge workers, the incorporation of career-related advancement could enhance the obligation of employees to choose to remain with the organization.

### **Limitations and Perspectives for Future Research**

As this study was cross-sectional and assessed using self-report, it could only make inferences and correlations among the examined variables. Cause-effect relations cannot be inferred from these findings. Employees who perceive career opportunities in the organization would be more inclined to stay with their employer for a certain period of time, and the underpinning social exchange with the norm of reciprocation process requires further empirical investigation. Further research that adopts a longitudinal design on knowledge workers might be instrumental to ascertain the causal basis of relationships. Additionally, this study is prevented from examining actual turnover, which could accurately predict the strength of POS.

This sample is limited to four industries with relatively young employees (average age 32.18 years with 4.2 years of tenure). These ambitious young professionals could have developed the inclination to rely on constructive supervision for work and their careers. From a calculative perspective, searching for alternatives might be the best way when the foreseeable future cannot be established in the current organization (Becker, 1960). It might also explain why knowledge workers are driven by monetary compensation if there is no career development program available. Knowledge workers possess a certain level of knowledge and skills, and hope to be rewarded with a satisfactory level of remuneration package. Although it is more important for these professionals to gain skills and network in their early stages, monetary rewards should not be undermined. A larger sample incorporating older respondents from more diversified industries is recommended in order to investigate the effect of perceptions of rewards and career development opportunities towards POS.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the antecedents of POS vary depending on the nature of the work and organizational practices. With slightly inconsistencies in comparison to previous studies, notwithstanding, the present findings provide support for the generalization of POS in knowledge-intensive industries. The increasing demand for knowledge workers has added bargaining power to knowledge-intensive organizations. Their needs and wants certainly should be fulfilled to help organizations in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Career orientation of this group of workers should be regained as part of HR policies to form a solid employee-employer relationship. In Malaysia, relationships among subordinates and supervisors are relatively important. A caring organization that appreciates its employees has to be conveyed through agents. The supervisory role deserves more attention in the future incorporating a larger role in the

retention of employees. HR policies and practices that enhance personal growth and motivate the workforce would secure a durable employee-employer relationship via social exchange process, which brings a win-win situation that benefits both parties in the long run.

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