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DOES PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK ENHANCE CAREER COMMITMENT? A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Human resource management (HRM) plays a crucial role in developing strong organizational culture and preparing highly qualified staff. It's particularly became one of the necessary tools for academic development within a higher education institutions (HEI) (Kohon and Bergoc, 2010). Higher education institutions heavily rely on human resources and continuous investment in acquiring, developing and retaining highly committed faculty members. Managers, leaders and academics have become the first priority to survive in increasingly competitive environment and meet new demands of higher education circumstances (O'Meara, 2015). Compared to other occupations, academic profession has higher entrance costs in the form of lengthy postgraduate training. Academia is also associated with high intrinsic motivation, readiness to accept lower pay in exchange for independence and flexibility, and "taste for science" (Roach and Sauemann, 2010). Therefore, the aforementioned aspects of academic profession require special attention to the concept of career commitment in designing and implementing organizational strategies in HEI.

The core of the concept of the career commitment refers to the "strength of one's motivation to work in a chosen career role" (Hall 1971, p. 59). One of the features of this concept is that membership in professional community (e.g. scientific community) is not limited to a job or an organization (Blau 1985). Amid the rise of managerialism in HEI, decision makers and human resource management (HRM) professionals should consider these peculiarities of academia. Past research has revealed a positive relation between career commitment and different work-related outcomes, including career success, job satisfaction, and work quality (Goulet and Singh 2002, Ballout 2009, Areyee and Tan 1992). Therefore, managing individuals' career commitment is of prime interest to any organization.

This research will contribute to the literature and practice as follows. First, by understanding factors which may directly and indirectly affect carer commitment, this work will address to the call for research to understand how contemporary organizations can build and sustain a career-committed workforce (Arora & Rangnekar, 2016). More specifically, managing the career aspiration (CA) is vital for any organization, due to its ability to predict various work-related outcomes (Vandenberghe & Ok, 2013). Furthermore, the detailed knowledge about individual factors enables HRM managers to develop their organizational strategies and policies accordingly. Second, our work contributes to the existing career and vocational psychology literature. The findings of this study will help to develop the integrative approach of studying career commitment in HEI. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first attempt to systematically investigate the impact of professional research network on career commitment via the mediation of the research self-efficacy (RSE) and moderation of the CA.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Development of cooperative relationships becomes increasingly important, particularly in the emerging global markets. One of the reasons is that improvements require considerable progress. From the business standpoint two complementary firms need both make solid commitment that in turn have a positive influence on their business? This phenomenon is reflected in the growing academic interest in different cooperative relationships and occupations (Holm, at all, 1999). Likewise, Blau (1985) noted that certain occupations (e.g. scientists, lawyers, doctors) have higher degree of commitment to their professions. This might be due the nature of the profession that facilitates stronger collaboration. One of the important aspects of mentoring doctoral students is providing mentee with access to supervisor's network (Curtin, Malley and Stuart, 2016). During the doctoral studies and later stages of academic career, researcher attends various conferences, seminars and other networking events. Early career researchers are advised to use networking opportunities for professional success (Stenken and Zajicek, 2009). Networking refers to the developing, maintaining, and utilizing informal relationships to facilitate work related activities of individuals and it was found that it has positive impact on career development, satisfaction and success (Wolff and Moser, 2009, Ismail and Rasdi, 2007). Taking into account its potential to predict such career related concepts commitment, satisfaction and success, it can be hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Professional research network has positive impact on career commitment

PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK AND RESEARCH SELF-EFFICACY

According to Aldrich, Rosen and Woodward (1987) networking is the process of developing contacts and obtaining resources. Other authors defined this concept as the enlargement of individuals' circle of trust (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991). In this paper, we are proposing that Professional research network (PRN) has a positive influence on RSE for the next reasons. Firstly, this research is based on the description of the professional networking as an instrument to develop relationship with an aim to gain additional resources, knowledge and capabilities (Coviello and Munro, 1995). In addition, it can help people to get access to resources and opportunities which otherwise are unavailable (Aldrich and Reese, 1993). Hence, having wide PRN should provide opportunities for greater involvement in research, which in turn may lead to increased RSE. Secondly, faculty members with large PRNs are more likely to have extensive communications, opportunities to get research-related support or advice. Therefore, PRNs can help faculty members to enhance their RSE. Thirdly, individuals with wider PRNs have more opportunities to get close interactions and information exchange among network members, which may lead to improved RSE. Furthermore, network members are more willing share their knowledge and ideas with each other because of greater familiarity between them. Lastly, the formation of PRNs may promote a climate that is conducive to build RSE. Based on the above arguments, it is posed that faculty members with a large PRN are more likely to have higher RSE.

Hypothesis 2: Professional research network has a significant effect research self-efficacy

RESEARCH SELF-EFFICACY AND CAREER COMMITMENT

In this paper, our assumption that faculty members with higher RSE are more likely to be dedicated to their research career is based on the following arguments. The first one is that self-efficacy is a vital motivational factor determining positive attitudes and behaviours toward different career-related outcomes such as career choice, career development (Hackett & Betz, 1995) and career goals (Abele & Spurk, 2009). The second argument is based on the findings that organizational members tend to be dedicated to those tasks that they believe themselves capable of accomplishing (Busch, Fallan, & Pettersen, 1998). The third one is relying on the fact that amount of effort individuals put into their career was predicted by the level of self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Finally, in accordance with Bandura (1977) a career of an individual with high self-confidence is likely to be achieved successfully. In sum, based on the reasons outlined above, the following hypothesis was proposed.

Hypothesis 3: Research self-efficacy positively affects career commitment

THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF RESEARCH SELF-EFFICACY

In this work, we are postulating that RSE mediates the PRN-career commitment link. A support for this hypothesis might be obtained from the input-process-outcomes model of Hackman & Oldham, (1976). The model gives more insight into how PRN may affect career commitment via the mediation of psychological states. Thereby, in the first stage (input), having large PRNs expected to enhance psychological states (process) in the second stage. Outcomes (outputs) are reached in the third stage, in terms of positive career-related outcomes. Accordingly, in this work we assume that PRNs (input) will be positively influence with individuals' RSE (process), which, in turn, encourages career commitment (output). Therefore, the next hypothesis is developed.

Hypothesis 4: Research self-efficacy mediates the relationship between professional research network and career commitment

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF CAREER ASPIRATION

According to Gray & O'Brien (2007) CA refers to the 'degree of commitment to a given career' (p. 318). This concept is a form of one's intrinsic motivation for a career achievement which in turn may shape individuals' values, norms and beliefs (Ramly, Ismail, & Uli, 2009).

In the current work, we are assuming that career aspiration plays a moderating role by strengthening the effect of RSE and career commitment for the following reasons. First, Gray and O'Brien (2007) has demonstrated that employees with higher CA are more prone to chase opportunities for leadership and promotion, and these organizational members are more likely to be chosen to train and manage new personnel. Therefore, individuals with higher CA are more likely to be committed to their career. In another words, CA can be considered as a motivation state that may influence individual's job-related attitudes. Second, one's CA is assumed to be a motivational goal-oriented concept which regulates a people's career related behaviours (Lent et al., 1994). More specifically, in the context of our research, if a faculty member aspires to have a successful career in her/his workplace, the RSE may have a stronger effect on her/his career commitment. On the other hand, if a faculty member shows a

low level of CA, she/he may be less committed to the career, even with greater levels of RSE. Our third argument is based on the fact that employees with high aspirations were compatible with their work settings showed greater career satisfaction and strong organizational commitment. These findings were supported by different studies around the P-O fit congruency model (e.g., Verquer, Beehr and Wagner 2003). Fourth, CA can be primary driver for individuals' professional development. Each organizational member CA provides various behaviours for attaining career success. Particularly, Derr (1986) proposed a general taxonomy for classifying career success aspirations such as Getting Free, Getting Ahead, Getting Secure, Getting High and Getting Balanced. For example, some individuals will work in their jobs that offer them prestige (i.e. Getting Ahead aspiration concept). Another general wish of people is that an employer be well known and have good reputation (i.e. Getting High aspiration concept) (Dawis 1980). Therefore, individual's aspiration can promote individuals' effort and persistence towards goal attainment (Greenhaus et al., 2010). Consequently, employees' CA much like their expectations is emphasized on career success and determines the likelihood of attaining their career (Judge et al. 1995). In this study context, employees with higher levels of CA and RSE would be more likely to be committed to their researchers' career. Relying on these arguments, the fifth hypothesis was developed.

Hypothesis 5: The career aspiration moderates the relationship between RSE and career commitment.

MODERATED MEDIATION

In addition to our hypothesis that research networks are likely to affect career commitment via RSE, it is assumed that career aspiration may play a crucial role in this link. Based on the arguments discussed before, the moderated mediation model was proposed to examine the mediating role of RSE and the moderating role of career aspiration in the relation between research network and career commitment (see Figure 1). More specifically, the strength of the mediated effect increased along with level of career aspiration. To test this relationship the following hypothesis was formulated.

Hypothesis 6: Career aspiration moderates the indirect relationship between research network and career commitment.

METHODOLOGY

DATA AND SAMPLE

Quantitative approach to study will be used based on the survey. The questionnaire will be developed in accordance with the ethics rules taking into account the confidentiality issues. It consists of 5 parts that describes personal information about respondent, Professional research network, research self-efficacy, career commitment and career aspiration. In order to meet reliability and validity criteria it was decided to use back translation scheme. Questionnaire will be developed in English, and then translated into Russian, than again translated back to English. A total of more than 1000 questionnaires planned to be distributed among science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and non-stem faculty members across ten leading universities of Almaty and Astana, these two cities are the main research and educational hubs of Kazakhstan.

MEASURES

Measures for each variable were used from previously validated instruments.

Professional research network: The six-item scale of research network was adopted from the work of Bland et al., (2005). The sample item included: “I have a well-developed network of colleagues with whom I discuss research projects and education within my academic department (faculty)”.

Research self-efficacy: In this paper, the RSE of faculty members was measured using nine-item scale developed by Holden and his colleagues (1999). Each item begins with the phrase “How confident are you that you can...?”.

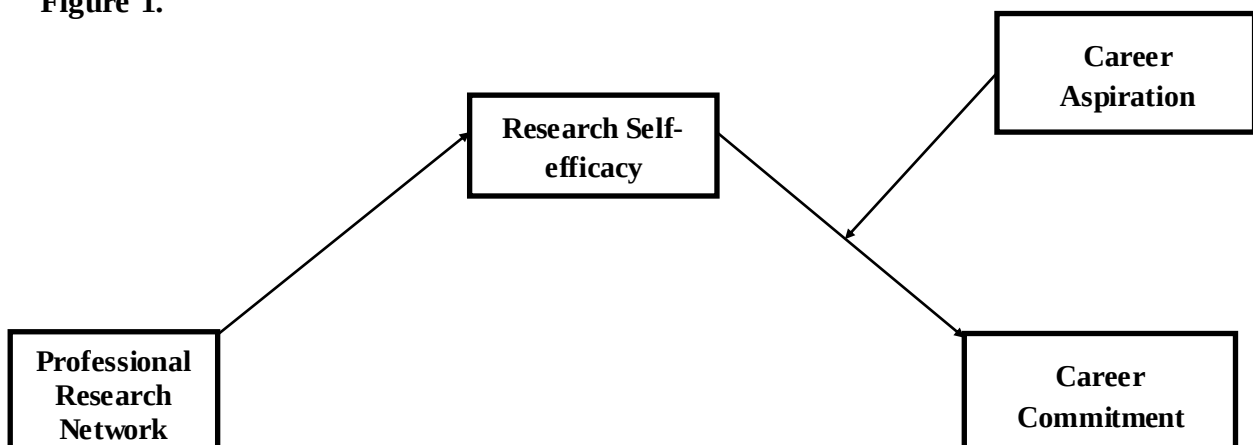
Career commitment: This construct was measured by five-items, which were all derived from Bauer & Green (1994). The sample item included: “I am committed to a research career”.

Career aspiration: We used the ten-item scale from O’Brien (1992) to measure career aspiration. An example item is “I hope to become a leader in my career field”.

PILOT STUDY

In order to identify potential misunderstandings or problems and, therefore, correct possible shortcomings, pilot study was carried out to test and refine the questionnaire. Pre-testing a questionnaire on a small size sample was helpful to find any potential issues related to the used instrument for this work (Babin & Zikmund, 2015). Taking into account time constraints, questionnaire was performed among 20 academicians of the targeted group. In terms of education level, almost all of the respondents had a PhD degree. The working experience of respondents varied from less than 1 year to more than 15 years. The pilot study was First, in our pilot study, reliability analysis was performed. A reliability coefficient ranging from 0.6 to 0.7 is considered as sufficient (Nunnally, 1978). It was found that all constructs of the current research were higher than the recommended threshold value of 0.7. Consequently, the internal consistency reliability of the measures can be recognized to be good. An extra area was added to ask respondents about possible mistakes, and ways to improve the questionnaires. Taking those comments into account, we made adjustments - some of the questions were rephrased or removed. All procedures were completed within 2 weeks.

Figure 1.



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