Exploring the role of organizational developmental HR practices in enhancing employees’ commitment to organizational career: a multilevel investigation

Ting Deng, Chunyong Tang and Yanzhao Lai
School of Economics and Management, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu, China

Abstract

Purpose – Drawing upon the conservation of resources (COR) theory, this study examined the relationship between organizational developmental human resource (HR) practices and employees’ commitment to the organizational career (COC), while considering the mediating role of psychological availability and the moderating effects of links and fit.

Design/methodology/approach – A hierarchical linear modeling analysis was conducted to analyze the data from a 3-wave time-lagged study with 394 employees and 65 supervisors in ten Chinese firms.

Findings – The study’s findings suggest that organizational developmental HR practices have a positive and indirect impact on employees’ COC, with psychological availability serving as a mediator. The indirect effects were stronger for employees with stronger links and better fit.

Practical implications – This study provides managers with guidelines to improve employees’ COC. Managers should also focus on supporting employees’ psychological resources. Furthermore, organizations should be aware that employees with varying levels of links and fit may respond differently to psychological availability.

Originality/value – The study offers a new understanding of how and under what conditions organizational developmental HR practices can increase employees’ COC. It also highlights the role of psychological availability as the psychological mechanism mediating this relationship and adds to the limited literature on the potential positive impact of strong links and fit.

Keywords Commitment to organizational career, Developmental HR practices, Psychological availability, Links, Fit

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a significant shift in the nature of careers (Meijerink and Keeghan, 2019). Individuals’ career motivations have evolved from a focus on “employment-oriented” to “development-oriented” goals (Cao and Hamori, 2020). As a result, employees are now more likely to switch jobs and seek out new career opportunities than they were in the past (Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2021). However, this can create a dilemma for employees who must balance their career commitment with their organizational commitment. On one hand, frequent job changes can cause companies to lose human capital investments. On the other hand, remaining in a single organization for too long can lead to career development stagnation and plateauing issues (Yang et al., 2019). Therefore, finding ways to integrate employees’ career commitment with organizational commitment is key to effectively reducing turnover.

This study was funded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (No: 71832007 and 71572157).
One area of research that addresses this issue is the commitment to organizational career (COC) research. Researchers in this field define COC as an individual’s commitment to pursuing a long and successful career within a specific organization (Lapointe et al., 2019). COC recognizes the possibility that individuals may have career goals that are tied to a particular organization. Despite a proliferation of scholarly discussions and reviews of career or organizational commitment, research has continued to focus on how personal characteristics (Singhal and Rastogi, 2018), job characteristics (Zhu et al., 2020) and organizational characteristics (such as human resource (HR) practices) (Lin et al., 2022) influence employees’ career or organizational commitment. However, organizations lack an evidence-based understanding of how HR practices can develop higher levels of COC among employees, which limits our ability to use HR practices to increase an individual’s COC.

Recent studies have suggested that HR practices such as high-performance, high-commitment, or high-involvement aimed at improving organizational performance may not effectively meet the growth needs of employees (Kuvaas, 2008; Guest, 2017). As a result, scholars have turned their attention to developmental HR practices that can empower employees and facilitate the coordinated development of organizations and employees (Chen et al., 2020; Cao and Hamori, 2020). Developmental HR practices provide support for employee growth from three key aspects: career development, skills training and performance feedback (Jung and Takeuchi, 2018). By providing career promotion and development support, creating a clear career development path and offering fair internal promotion opportunities, these practices meet the development needs of employees (Lin et al., 2020). Therefore, we focus on organizational developmental HR practices as a predictor of employees’ COC since being developed in the workplace is highly valued.

To better understand the effects of organizational developmental HR practices on employees’ COC, this study investigates the potential mediating mechanisms. COR theory suggests that when employees are provided with valued resources that fulfill their career-related needs, they tend to perceive a greater availability of resources, which in turn increases their determination and enthusiasm for high-yield resource investment activities (Hobfoll, 1989). Psychological availability refers to an individual’s psychological expectation and confidence in the resources obtained at work (May et al., 2004). It is considered a powerful trigger for both career commitment and organizational commitment, with previous research showing that it is a key link between workforce exposure to high-quality job resources and the level of commitment (Liu and Zhou, 2018; Pak et al., 2019). Organizational developmental HR practices provide resources that are relevant to employees’ development (Pohl et al., 2019), which can enhance individual psychological availability. Increased psychological availability indicates that the associated resources are more capable of fulfilling career-related needs (May et al., 2004), thereby promoting employees’ COC. Consequently, this study examines the role of psychological availability as a mediator linking organizational developmental HR practices to employees’ COC.

In addition, this study explores when psychological availability is more likely to influence COC by including links and fit (e.g. support from colleagues or supervisors, understanding of what the organization values) as a moderator in this relationship. Specifically, we propose that the positive indirect effect of organizational developmental HR practices on employees’ COC via psychological availability is stronger when employees have closer relationships with colleagues and are more aligned with the organization. According to COR theory, links and fit represent relationship resources and belonging resources (Chi and Pan, 2012), which converge into the contact network between individuals and organizations with tangible or intangible resources (Zimmerman et al., 2020). Employees who fit within the organization and have strong interpersonal bonds are more likely to have a stronger connection with the
organization and acquire additional work resources (Russo et al., 2018). Stronger connections will stimulate their motivation to stay and enable them to achieve their career development more effectively (Hu et al., 2021).

This study contributes to the literature on HR practices and COC in several ways. Firstly, it enhances our understanding of the effectiveness of HR practices in employees’ COC from an organization-employee coordinated development perspective, responding to calls to expand research on organizational HR practices and the implications for employees’ commitment. Secondly, building on COR theory, we demonstrate that psychological availability is the psychological mechanism underlying this relationship, which sharpens our understanding of employees’ COC. Finally, we explore the potential moderating role of links and fit in the relationship between psychological availability and COC.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Organizational developmental HR practices and employees’ COC

Developmental HR practices are organizational activities that provide employees with comprehensive training and development opportunities to promote their knowledge and skill acquisition. Employees often value such opportunities because they can gain new skills, knowledge and professional growth (Cao and Hamori, 2020). By providing these benefits, the organization may promote employees’ positive attitudes towards the organization (Pak et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020).

This study proposes that organizational development HR practices can enhance employees’ COC for three primary reasons. First, career promotion occurs when organizations offer employees tailored career advancement and development support based on their knowledge and capabilities (Jung and Takeuchi, 2018). This approach fosters employees’ career growth, marked by speed, quality and sustainability (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). As employees experience accelerated career development and achieve their career goals, they become more inclined to pursue these objectives within the organization, leading to a stronger COC. Second, skills training involves the systematic development of employees’ knowledge, skills and behaviors (Pohl et al., 2019). This process sustains employees’ abilities and keeps their knowledge up to date, addressing individual career development needs (De Vos and Cambre, 2017), which in turn promotes COC. Lastly, performance feedback acknowledges employees’ positive achievements and guides them towards improved performance (Tong et al., 2021). By supporting employees in attaining strong performance and fulfilling their desire for positive self-esteem, they are more likely to integrate into their current career group and develop a sense of belonging (Sears and Han, 2021).

The conservation of resources (COR) theory posits that individuals with more resources are more inclined to invest in those resources, leading to a spiral of resource appreciation and growth (Hobfoll, 1989). Developmental HR practices are formal strategies created by higher management that provide employees with motivation, abilities and opportunities (Pak et al., 2021). In practice, these practices, such as offering internal career development channels, sufficient training opportunities and developmental performance evaluations, can enable individuals to acquire greater knowledge and skills, furnishing ample resources for employee development (Marescaux et al., 2019; Guan et al., 2019). Individuals with more resources possess stronger motivation and the ability to achieve goals (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). Consequently, they actively pursue career development opportunities with their abundant resources. As employees find it easier to achieve career growth, their attachment to the organization and desire to attain career development strengthen (Lin et al., 2020). In turn, this leads to a positive COC. Based on these insights, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Organizational developmental HR practices positively relate to employees’ COC.
The mediating role of psychological availability

Psychological availability represents an individual’s expectations and confidence in the resources they obtain at work, which influences their decision-making regarding whether and how to engage in organizational activities (May et al., 2004). Prior research has indicated that having sufficient resources can positively affect participants’ psychological states, such as psychological availability, leading to favorable outcomes (Russo et al., 2018; Fletcher et al., 2018).

When organizations implement developmental HR practices, individual psychological availability is expected to increase as an initial effect. Specifically, organizational developmental HR practices offer employees career development support, fair promotion opportunities and practical training activities (Marescaux et al., 2019). Moreover, when an organization attends to employees’ career needs, employees may perceive that the organization is committed to fostering their long-term competence and satisfaction as members of the organization (Chen et al., 2020; Cao and Hamori, 2020). Organizational developmental HR practices create a context of career support, enabling employees to feel confident in their resources to pursue a career within the organization (Dimotakis et al., 2017). Consequently, we posit that developmental HR practices have a positive relationship with psychological availability.

According to COR theory, individuals continually strive to build and maintain resources (Teo et al., 2021). Those with a high perception of resources are more likely to engage in new resource investment behaviors to expand their resource reserves (Song et al., 2021). For instance, employees may conserve resources by increasing the likelihood of promotion (resource acquisition) and decreasing the risk of being laid off (resource preservation) within the organization (Mukerjee et al., 2021). Additionally, employees who benefit from organizational developmental HR practices should also experience a heightened perception of resources. From the employees’ perspective, high psychological availability should facilitate the pursuit of identity-relevant organizational career goals (Byrne et al., 2017), resulting in a stronger COC.

H2. Psychological availability serves as a mediator in the positive relationship between organizational developmental HR practices and employees’ COC.

The moderating role of links and fit

Links refer to the close relationships between employees and organizational members (Felps et al., 2009), indicating that employees can establish strong interpersonal networks in the work environment and seamlessly integrate into the team. Research has shown that interpersonal relationships can enable employees to perform activities more effectively, as they receive abundant information and support (Chi and Pan, 2012).

When individuals have closer relationships with their colleagues, employees are more likely to remain in the organization for their career development (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Stronger connections not only stimulate their motivation to stay and work, but also enable them to perform these activities more effectively (Robertson et al., 2020). For instance, extensive and close links facilitate activities such as obtaining the latest information, collaborating with colleagues and receiving support (Hayton et al., 2012). However, when employees with high psychological availability lack links, their motivation and ability to achieve career development may be diminished. Steindorsdottir et al. (2020) argued that favorable organizational benefits alone are insufficient to prevent employees from leaving, as these employees may lack the interpersonal resources necessary to attain their career goals (Singh et al., 2019). Therefore, when they have strong links with others, employees with high psychological availability are more likely to exhibit COC.

According to COR theory, employees with abundant resources will cultivate a resource appreciation spiral to acquire more assets (Bayraktar and Jiménez, 2020). On the one hand,
employees with high psychological availability typically exhibit stronger self-confidence and a positive work attitude. High links allow them to access more additional work information and support resources through social relationships (Regts et al., 2019), enabling them to better pursue career development within the organization. On the other hand, these existing resources (such as links) are difficult to re-establish in a new organization (Guan et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2020). Employees are reluctant to risk losing existing resources by leaving their current organization to pursue career development in other organizations. Psychological availability more strongly mediates the positive effects of developmental HR practices on COC for employees with stronger organizational links.

H3a. Links moderate the positive relationship between psychological availability and COC, such that the positive relationship is more pronounced when links are high rather than low.

Fit pertains to the assessment of whether an individual’s values align with the organization’s culture or values (Felps et al., 2009). The more an employee’s values and goals correspond with work requirements and organizational culture, the more likely they are to feel connected to the organization (Chi and Pan, 2012).

First, when employees fit well with the organization, they can more easily and quickly integrate into the organization and adapt to the requirements of their position (Hu et al., 2021). Second, fit can provide instrumental knowledge about organizational needs and values (Gao et al., 2020). As a result, well-fitting employees possess shared values, knowledge, skills and effective career development (Guo et al., 2021). Third, for well-fitting employees, personal career goals become automatically linked with organizational goals, creating a chain reaction (Roulin and Krings, 2020). As the organization achieves its goals, personal career goals also improve. Thus, when employees have a better fit with the organization, those with high psychological availability are more likely to exhibit COC.

According to COR theory, fit can be considered an initial resource possessed by employees. High fit encourages employees to cultivate new resources and apply existing resources to valuable activities. When employees with high psychological availability perceive a strong fit, they should be more motivated (Dimotakis et al., 2017). Fit enables individuals to experience emotions, attitudes, or behaviors that are consistent with themselves and their expectations for the environment (Hu et al., 2021). Individuals with a higher degree of fit feel more secure and a sense of belonging at work (Erdogan et al., 2020). Therefore, when individuals believe they fit well within the organization, employees with higher psychological availability will be more willing to pursue career development within the organization. Psychological availability more strongly mediates the positive effect of developmental HR practices on COC for employees with a better fit.

H3b. Fit moderates the positive relationship between psychological availability and COC, such that the positive relationship is stronger when fit is high rather than low.

The theoretical model summarizing the hypothesized relationships is shown in Figure 1.

**Method**

**Sample and data collection**

We collected multilevel data from ten companies in five major Chinese cities. We conduct random selections against a sample of full-time white-collar employees. Our sample focuses on company size and strives to ensure that our respondents work for companies that are most likely to have formally established HR systems that included employee training and development programs.

A contact person provides a survey package to at least four employees in each department and their superiors in each firm. All employees and superiors voluntarily participate.
1, 105 supervising managers were invited to complete a survey containing questions about organizational developmental HR practices. 82 managers responded (78.1% response rate). At Time 2, which was four weeks after Time 1, 672 employees of those 82 participating managers were invited to complete a survey with questions about psychological availability, links and fit. 526 employee survey responses were collected (78.3% response rate). At Time 3, which was four weeks after Time 2, those 526 employee respondents were asked to complete a survey about their COC. 394 employee survey responses were collected (74.9% response rate).

Finally, we obtained a final sample of 394 employees and 65 supervisors. Group size ranged from 3 to 9 employees, with the average of approximately 6 employees per group. In the final supervisor sample, the average age was 38.82 years and average organizational tenure was 7.83 years. The supervisor sample was predominantly male (76.2%). In the final employee sample, the average age was 30.27 years and average organizational tenure was 3.48 years. The employee sample was also predominantly male (57.2%). Average dyadic tenure among supervisors and employees was 3.16 years.

**Measures**

All the scales were scored by five Likert points, from “1” to “5,” respectively, indicating the degree of compliance from low to high. We averaged these items to create an overall mean for each variable.

**Developmental HR practices.** Supervisors completed a six-item measure of developmental HR practices developed by Allen and Ericksen (2009). Sample items included: “We appears to be very concerned with the continuous development of its employees’ skills and abilities.” Its Cronbach’s alpha was 0.80.

**Psychological availability.** Employees completed a five-item measure of psychological availability developed by May et al. (2004). Sample items included: “I am confident in my ability to handle competing demands at work.” Its Cronbach’s alpha was 0.76.

**Links.** Employees completed a three-item measure of links developed by Felps et al. (2009). Sample items included: “I work closely with my coworkers.” Its Cronbach’s alpha was 0.79.

**Fit.** Employees completed a three-item measure of fit developed by Felps et al. (2009). Sample items included: “I feel like I am a good match for my organization.” Its Cronbach’s alpha was 0.79.

**COC.** Employees completed a five-item measure of COC developed by Lapointe et al. (2019). Sample items included: “Having a career within this organization is really important to me.” Its Cronbach’s alpha was 0.83.
Control variables. To exclude influences on employees’ COC, we controlled employees’ age, education, organizational tenure and managerial/technical level at the individual-level and organization level, including firm type and firm size. Prior studies have suggested that these factors may affect employee behaviors (Gubler et al., 2014; Li et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Results

Measurement validation

We conducted CFAs to validate the discriminability of variables at level 1. As shown in Table 1, the fitting index of the assumed four-factor model is excellent ($\chi^2$ (105) = 238.63, $p < 0.001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.96 and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94), and it is significantly better than other models.

Preliminary analyses

This study includes two levels of variables: group-level variables: developmental HR practices and individual-level variables: psychological availability, links, fit and COC. Table 2 presents means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among variables. As expected, psychological availability is positively related to COC ($r = 0.27; p < 0.05$). Moreover, there is a positive relationship between links and COC ($r = 0.32; p < 0.05$). Fit is also positively related to COC ($r = 0.57; p < 0.05$).

Hypotheses testing

We calculated ICC$_1$ values to inspect if our individual variables (psychological availability and COC) differ between organizations. We found that this was the case for both variables (psychological availability: $\sigma^2 = 0.43$, $\tau_{00} = 0.09$, ICC$_1 = \tau_{00}/(\tau_{00}+\sigma^2) = 0.17 > 0.138$; COC: $\sigma^2 = 0.48$, $\tau_{00} = 0.10$, ICC$_1 = \tau_{00}/(\tau_{00}+\sigma^2) = 0.17 > 0.138$), indicated by a significant ANOVA for both models. Furthermore, we could show that 17% (psychological availability), respectively, 17% (COC) of the total variance exists between organizations, proving that our multilevel procedure is reasonable.

Hypothesis 1 posited that developmental HR practices positively relate to employees’ COC. As shown in Table 3 (Model 3), after controlling all variables at levels 1 and 2, the results show that developmental HR practices significantly predicted employees’ COC ($\gamma = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$).

As shown in Table 3 (Model 1), developmental HR practices were positively related to psychological availability ($\gamma = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). When the effects of developmental HR practices and psychological availability were considered together, the effect of psychological availability was significant ($\gamma = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$), but the effect of developmental HR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-factor model</td>
<td>238.63</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-factor model$^a$</td>
<td>376.37</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-factor model$^b$</td>
<td>524.41</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-factor model$^c$</td>
<td>669.00</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-factor model$^d$</td>
<td>882.03</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-factor model</td>
<td>1088.48</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): N = 394; $^a$ = links and fit are combined; $^b$ = fit and COC are combined; $^c$ = psychological availability and links are combined, fit and COC are combined; $^d$ = psychological availability and COC are combined, links and fit are combined

Source(s): Authors’ work

Table 1. Results for confirmatory factor analysis

Enhancing employees’ commitment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>–0.12*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Managerial/technical level</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
<td>–0.02</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational tenure</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>–0.11*</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Psychological availability</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Links</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>(α = 0.76)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Fit</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>–0.00</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>–0.02</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>(α = 0.79)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. COC</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>(α = 0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Firm type</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Firm size</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Developmental HR practices</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
<td>(α = 0.80)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** N = 394. Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal in italic. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 and ***p < 0.001, two-tailed.

**Source(s):** Authors' work
practices also remained significant ($\gamma = 0.15, p < 0.05$), indicating partial mediation by psychological availability.

Employee’s sex, education, managerial/technical level and organizational tenure were included as controls. The results of the analyses are summarized in Table 4. Model 4 of Table 4 shows that links had a significant moderation effect on the relationship between psychological availability and COC ($\gamma = 0.10, p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 3a. Moreover, as shown in Model 5 of Table 4, the psychological availability x fit interaction was significant for COC ($\gamma = 0.17, p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 3b.

In order to determine the form of significant interactions, we used conventional methods to plot the simple slopes of high and low links and fit levels. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.50*** (0.37)</td>
<td>1.93*** (0.33)</td>
<td>2.29*** (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.11* (0.05)</td>
<td>0.15** (0.05)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.16* (0.07)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/technical level</td>
<td>-0.04 (0.04)</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>0.08 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.20** (0.06)</td>
<td>0.15** (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological availability</td>
<td>0.18* (0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm type</td>
<td>0.09 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.15* (0.07)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm size</td>
<td>-0.15** (0.04)</td>
<td>0.14* (0.06)</td>
<td>0.15* (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental HR practices</td>
<td>0.30** (0.09)</td>
<td>0.22** (0.08)</td>
<td>0.15* (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma square</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>101.04** (61)</td>
<td>114.36*** (61)</td>
<td>179.36*** (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>836.69</td>
<td>864.88</td>
<td>786.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): $N = 394$ (Level 2 unit = 65). *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ and ***$p < 0.001$, two-tailed
Source(s): Authors’ work

Table 3. Tests of direct and indirect relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.16** (0.04)</td>
<td>0.09* (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.13* (0.06)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial/technical level</td>
<td>0.05 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>0.21*** (0.05)</td>
<td>0.14** (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent variable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological availability</td>
<td>0.14* (0.07)</td>
<td>0.23** (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links</td>
<td>0.19*** (0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.52*** (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological availability*Links</td>
<td>0.10* (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological availability*Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.17* (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.47***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): $N = 394$. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ and ***$p < 0.001$, two-tailed
Source(s): Authors’ work

Table 4. Regression results for moderation effects
results showed that the relationship between psychological availability and COC was positive and statistically significant when links and fit were higher ($b = 0.23, t = 3.02, p < 0.01; b = 0.37, t = 6.31, p < 0.001$), yet nonsignificant, when links and fit were lower ($b = 0.06, t = 0.72, \text{ns}; b = 0.10, t = 1.07, \text{ns}$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3a and 3b were partially supported.

**Discussion**
We offer a novel explanation for how and under what circumstances organizational developmental HR practices can promote employees’ COC, based on COR theory. From the COR perspective, employees respond favorably to organizational developmental HR practices because these practices enhance employee competencies, knowledge and skills, which in turn improve individual psychological availability and motivate them to stay and pursue career goals. Moreover, when employees have close links and a good fit, those with high psychological availability exhibit better COC because they possess the resources necessary for career development.

Our results broadly support our hypothesized relationships: psychological availability mediates the positive effect of organizational developmental HR practices on employees’ COC. The effect is more pronounced for employees with closer links and a better fit.
Consequently, we can draw several conclusions from our primary research. Our work offers important theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical implications
First, we contribute to the COC literature by positioning HR practices as a formally designed organizational context and exploring how such a context relates to individuals’ COC. Little empirical research has been conducted on employees’ COC, and the underlying theoretical mechanisms of COC development have not been well understood (Lapointe et al., 2019). Thus, we investigated “what drives an employee to have higher COC”, which extends the current understanding of the processes associated with employees’ COC development activity. This integration responds to Lapointe et al.’s (2019) call for a better understanding of the antecedents of COC. Our results show that employees are more likely to integrate into the organization if managers can incorporate organizational interests and employee development (Sears and Han, 2021). Employees’ career development leads to higher commitment to the organization (Singhal and Rastogi, 2018). As employees place special emphasis on personal development, providing developmental opportunities will enable them to better integrate into their work (Cao and Hamori, 2020).

Second, this paper constructs a theoretical model to explain the mechanism and differs from previous research perspectives based on social exchange theory (Bouraoui et al., 2019; Lapointe et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2020) of COC by employing COR theory. We demonstrate that psychological availability is the psychological mechanism underlying this relationship, which refines our understanding of employees’ COC. Indeed, it identifies an indirect effect of increased organizational developmental HR practices on employees’ COC. The more organizations focus on individual development, the higher the employee’s perception of the availability of work resources (Dimotakis et al., 2017). As predicted by COR theory, an increase in a person’s psychological availability will encourage them to stay and perform well because they have the motivation to maintain their job and related rewards (Song et al., 2021). This significant developmental HR practices-psychological availability-COC indirect effect suggests that the developmental experiences obtained from the organizational environment form the foundation upon which employees develop their psychological availability, which in turn influences their COC.

Third, we contribute to a small body of literature documenting the potential beneficial effects of strong links and fit. We propose that both will interact with psychological availability to strengthen developmental HR practice’s indirect effects on COC. Employees with high psychological availability can better realize their career development in the organization when they have closer links or better fit, as these deep-rooted forces can enhance their ability to carry out these activities more effectively (Robertson et al., 2020; Erdogan et al., 2020). For instance, individuals with close links (i.e. with leaders or colleagues) have a stronger emotional attachment to superiors and colleagues (Zimmerman et al., 2019), so they are more willing to achieve career development within the organization. Similarly, for employees who have a better fit with the organization, managers can often stimulate employees to generate a high degree of internal motivation and self-driving force through their self-cognition and self-needs (Roulin and Krings, 2020). These employees have more willingness and energy to work and achieve career development.

Practical implications
First, developmental HR practices provide managers with some guidelines to help them improve employees’ COC. Before formulating a HR management strategy, managers can understand the needs of employees concerning career development, training opportunities and performance evaluation and provide them with targeted resources (Marescaux et al., 2019).
Matching the needs of employees in work-related aspects will improve their abilities, skills and knowledge levels (Jung and Takeuchi, 2018). All these measures may make employees feel that the organization attaches great importance to their growth (Chen et al., 2020). They make employees more likely to stay in the organization and pursue career success, enabling them to form a joint force to achieve coordinated development and establish a long-term and mutually beneficial employee-organization relationship.

Second, managers should emphasize supporting employees’ psychological resources and pay attention to employees’ perception of available resources. First, the organization should establish an employee assistance plan to understand the psychological dynamics of employees in a timely manner and improve their stress resistance (Fletcher et al., 2018). Second, it is possible to provide employees with abundant resources by establishing good relationships between superiors and subordinates and increasing communication and interaction (Russo et al., 2018; Fletcher et al., 2018). Third, the organization can provide employees with training and learning opportunities to increase knowledge and acquire new skills promptly. This enables employees to develop professional qualities, enhance work self-confidence, gain a sense of accomplishment and realize the company’s long-term development (Sonnentag et al., 2021).

Third, managers should be cognizant that employees with varying levels of links and fit may respond differently to psychological availability. They can invest heavily, encourage all team members to engage in in-depth communication and social interaction, create a positive atmosphere and build strong relationships with employees who have low links and fit (Guo et al., 2021). Because these employees are more likely to respond constructively to the organization’s favorable treatment, when recruiting, the organization should fully consider the employees’ personal values and goals and consciously select employees similar to the organization’s values and goals (Roulin and Krings, 2020). Managers should improve the value fit between employees and organizations, create a good interpersonal atmosphere and promote employees’ COC. Further, managers can provide formal and informal guidance plans to strengthen employees’ interpersonal skills and emotional awareness.

**Limitations and future research directions**

First, the causal relationship between variables cannot be established (Antonakis et al., 2010). While we believe that developmental HR practices are unlikely to produce reverse causality, this study would benefit from follow-up experimental research. Second, our study did not explore the impact of employees’ qualifications and skills on the relationship between psychological availability and COC. Highly skilled employees may have more job opportunities and may not feel as committed to the organization. Future research could investigate these boundary conditions to further enhance our understanding of this relationship. Finally, our survey data was collected from Chinese companies, which may limit the generalizability of our findings to other countries and cultures. Therefore, future research should consider replicating our study with more diverse samples from different cultural backgrounds to increase the statistical power and generalizability of our findings.

**References**


Corresponding author
Yanzhao Lai can be contacted at: laiyanzhao@swjtu.edu.cn