



## Organizational career growth, affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions

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### ABSTRACT

Survey data, collected from the People's Republic of China, were used to test Weng's (2010) four facet model of career growth and to examine its effect on occupational commitment and turnover intentions. Weng conceptualized career growth as consisting of four factors: career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth. Results from a sample of 396 managers failed to confirm the four factor model, showing instead the need to collapse promotion speed and remuneration growth into a single facet, rewards. The three remaining dimensions of career growth were negatively related to turnover intentions and affective occupational commitment was found to partially mediate these relationships. Results are discussed in terms of using career growth to manage turnover.

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Today an individual's career is no longer tied to a single organization, as career changes and job mobility have become common phenomena (Rousseau, 1998). To be successful in one's career, employees today have to balance the relationship between their desire for career growth and their attitudes toward their current organizations. Recent research has shown career growth opportunities to be an important determinant of employee–organizational relationships. Organizations that provide mechanisms for employee career growth create a mutual investment type of relationship with their employees (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997), a relationship that ties career growth to important outcomes such as organizational commitment (Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Liu, 2010). However, one would expect that any relationship between career growth and employee outcomes would depend on whether the employee is committed to pursuing a career, rather than simply holding a job, in the first place.

Rather than considering career growth in terms of the general utility of one's present job for future career outcomes (Bedeian, Kemery, & Pizzolatto, 1991), we use Weng's (2010) multidimensional conceptualization of career growth. His model suggests that career growth consists of four factors: meeting career goals, developing one's professional abilities, and receiving promotions, and compensation commensurate with those abilities. In essence, this view of career growth is an individual-level, organization specific, concept. That is, he argues that career growth is a measure of the degree to which an individual perceives that their current organization creates an environment in which the employee is able to meet his/her career-related needs and reinforces those accomplishments through promotions and compensation (Weng et al., 2010). However, this model was developed using a wide cross-section of employees, including managers, professional, and clerical across 176 organizations. One purpose of this study is to test the validity of Weng's (2010) multidimensional conceptualization of career growth using a sample limited to managers. We focus on managers because they are more likely than workers to be presented with career growth opportunities, particularly in China.

A second purpose of this study is to examine the mechanisms by which organizational career growth influences work-related outcomes. Of particular interest is how the various aspects of organizational career growth relate to the outcome of occupational commitment. Of all of the forms of work commitment, career or occupational commitment has received the least attention (Aryee

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& Tan, 1992; Goulet & Singh, 2002). Despite a growing body of research on occupational commitment (e.g. Gobeski & Beehr, 2009; Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000), researchers continue to call for research that will better enable us to understand this concept and its effects (Jones & McIntosh, 2010). Recently, organizational career growth has been shown to have positive effects on attitudinal variables such as organizational commitment (Weng et al., 2010), but no one has examined the relationship between career growth and affective occupational commitment. Our second aim is to address this gap in the literature.

Finally, turnover intentions are an additional outcome of interest, one shown to be related to career commitment (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). The notion of met expectations or, alternatively, fulfilling the psychological contract (Rousseau, 2004), is at the heart of explaining how organizations affect individual behavior (Bedeian et al., 1991; Chang, 1999). That is, the degree to which a company satisfies the career needs of its employees affects the employee–organization relationship. One way in which organizations can meet their career needs is by providing employees with opportunities for career growth. Bedeian et al. (1991) found that career growth opportunities, or what they called the utility of the present job for one's career, were related to employees' intentions to leave. Our third objective, therefore, is to extend the work of Bedeian et al. (1991) by examining the role of employees' career growth opportunities with their current employer, as opposed to how the organization prepares employees for future career growth opportunities, on turnover intentions and test the mediating role of occupational commitment on these relationships.

## 1. Organizational career growth

Much of the research by vocational psychologists and organizational scholars on the effects of career growth focuses on objective and subjective measures of one's career success (e.g. Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005) over one's work life or career stage, and across organizations, in contrast to viewing career growth experiences from the perspective of one's experiences within their current organization. Consequently, in this paper career growth will be referred to as organizational career growth to reflect the fact that it refers to one's career growth within one's current organization, rather than one's assessment of their career growth over their total career in the workforce. Jans (1989) captured this aspect of career growth by defining the notion of career prospects as one's perceptions of the chances of development and advancement within an organization, as opposed to Bedeian et al. (1991) who used the idea of the utility of one's present job for one's career. Weng (2010) expanded on this notion of development and advancement by proposing that employee organizational career growth could be captured by four factors: career goal progress, or the degree to which one's present job is relevant to and provides opportunities for one to realize their career goals; professional ability development, or the extent to which one's present job enables them to acquire new skills and knowledge; promotion speed, an employee's perceptions of the rate and probability of being promoted; and remuneration growth, or employee perceptions of the speed, amount, and likelihood of increases in compensation. This multi-dimensional conceptualization implies that organizational career growth is both a function of the employees' own efforts in making progress toward their personal career goals and acquiring professional skills within the organization and the organization's efforts in rewarding such efforts, through promotions and salary increases. This multi-dimensional view of organizational career growth is consistent with both Porter and Steers (1973) met expectations hypothesis and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 2004).

## 2. The role of organizational career growth on occupational commitment

Career commitment is an umbrella used to describe one's commitment to a number of work related targets; namely, to one's career, one's profession and one's occupation (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). In practice, however, career, professional, and occupational commitment are often used interchangeably (Lee et al., 2000). In making the case for occupational commitment, Lee et al. (2000) do a nice job of articulating the differences among these terms. They argue that occupational commitment has the right amount of specificity regarding commitment to one's line of work. That is, one does not have to be in a profession to develop a sense of commitment to that chosen line of work. Thus, they see the term professional commitment as overly restrictive. Career commitment, on the other hand, is used by some to represent a series of jobs/occupations over the course of one's work life and is, therefore, too general. Consequently, Lee et al. (2000) opt for the term occupational commitment which they define as the "psychological link between a person and his or her occupation that is based on affective reaction to that occupation" (Lee et al., 2000, p. 800). This definition is consistent with Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) notion of affective occupational commitment. Recognizing that other forms of occupational commitment exist, such as continuance and normative (Meyer et al., 1993), we focus on how affective occupational commitment affects the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions.

The development of affective occupational commitment begins with occupational choice and changes based on actual experience. Early in one's career, occupational commitment is typically low, but positive job experiences that illuminate career goals, explore different careers and achieve better person-job fit help build affective occupational commitment (Goulet & Singh, 2002; Meyer et al., 1993). Therefore, the degree that an organization provides for career growth via activities that meet career goals, develop one's professional abilities, and rewards individuals for those activities should enhance their emotional attachment to their chosen occupation. This is consistent with the works of Thomas (2000) showing that meeting career goals and developing new skills are related to occupational attachment and of Darden, Hampton, and Howell (1989) showing a relationship between perceived increases in work related rewards and satisfaction with one's current occupation.

**H1.** The organizational career growth dimensions of career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth are positively associated with affective occupational commitment.

### 3. The role of organizational career growth on turnover intentions

The theory of met expectations states that people's attitudes and behavior are the result of the degree to which the organization meets their expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973). According to Chang (1999), individuals who seek career growth have higher expectations for career growth opportunities within their organizations. To the degree that individuals can meet their career growth needs within an organization, they are more likely to remain with that organization. Failure to meet these expectations would lead these individuals to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Career growth opportunities can also be viewed as inducements within the framework of the psychological contract. To the degree these inducements are offered by the organization, the employee responds by contributing more to the organization's goals.

These two frameworks suggest that opportunities for career growth within an organization should result in employees wanting to remain with their employing organizations. According to Meyer et al. (1993) this is because people who work in organizations that enable them to satisfy their needs develop a stronger positive emotion toward those organizations which results in greater psychological attachment to those organizations. Indeed, research has borne out a positive relationship between career growth practices and organizational commitment (Chang, 1999; Weng et al., 2010). Conversely, organizations that fail to provide career need satisfaction opportunities make the prospects of employment elsewhere more attractive.

An alternative, but complementary, explanation for postulating a relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions focuses on economics. Simply put, employees who experience career growth opportunities in their current organizations risk giving up those opportunities should they change employers. Organizations that provide for career goals and professional development in organizations and that reward their employees with promotions and compensation not only offer an emotional incentive to stay, but also constitute large opportunity costs associated with leaving that organization. Indeed, Salamin and Hom (2005) found promotions and salary growth, respectively, to be negatively associated with turnover. On the other hand, people who perceive little progress toward meeting their career goals or few opportunities for professional ability development in their current jobs and/or who feel under-rewarded by the organization in terms of promotional opportunities or compensation, have little to lose by leaving that organization.

Our purpose is not to examine which of these rationales best explains the connection between organizational career growth and turnover intentions, but rather to look at the factors comprising career growth as predictors of turnover intentions.

**H2.** The organizational career growth dimensions of career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth are negatively associated with turnover intentions.

### 4. The mediating role of affective occupational commitment

Chang (1999) suggested that to understand how organizations affect employees one should consider the role of individual attitudes toward careers or a particular line of work. Her reasoning is that people with high levels of commitment to their career/occupation will expect more from their employers and the degree to which those expectations are met will determine their employment relationship. Career commitment has even been shown to be a more important determinant of turnover than other forms of commitment among some occupational groups, such as librarians (Millard, 2003) and call center employees (Zhou, Long, & Wang, 2009). One reason for this is that high career commitment, in the absence of commitment to one's job or organization, may make these other reference groups less salient, resulting in one staying with their current employer because of its utility for their career (Mobley et al., 1979). This is consistent with Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran's (2005) finding of a negative relationship between affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions.

This connection between affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions, coupled with the expected relationships posited in hypotheses 1 and 2, suggests a mediating role for affective occupational commitment on the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions. Previous research has verified an intermediary role for occupational commitment on the relationship between career growth and turnover intentions, but has done so by assuming its role as a moderator. Aryee and Tan (1992), for example, pointed out that those with high career commitment spend more time developing their skills, and are more reluctant to leave their professions. Bedeian et al. (1991), in a direct test of this, found support for the moderating role of career commitment on the relationship between the expected utility of one's present job and turnover intentions. This research, however, ignores the direct relationships between organizational career growth and occupational commitment as well as between occupational commitment and turnover intentions. To include these relationships, we follow the work of Duffy, Dik, and Steger (2011) who studied the relationship between career calling and work-related outcomes such as organizational commitment and turnover intentions, by positioning career commitment as a mediator.

**H3.** Affective occupational commitment mediates the effects of the organizational career growth dimensions of career growth progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth on turnover intentions.

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Procedure and sample

Two waves of surveys were used to collect the data. Initially, 1000 surveys were distributed to 131 companies operating in 9 cities in China. To avoid any one city or company skewing the results, between 10 and 25 organizations in each city were chosen

with no more than 10 respondents from any given company. To be included in the sample, respondents had to be employed in a managerial position for a minimum of three months with their current employer. Three months was deemed a minimum amount of time to assess career growth opportunities within their current organization. Of the 817 surveys returned, 692 were returned by managers while 615 met the three month requirement. This initial survey collected data on organizational career growth and affective occupational commitment. Three months later, a second questionnaire was e-mailed to each responding manager through their company's chief executive with instructions to return the questionnaire to the researchers directly via e-mail. Of the 427 who responded to the second survey, 31 were eliminated because they had either changed positions or had incomplete data, leaving two sets of responses from 396 managers.

Responding managers were from a wide range of industries (35.2% high technology, 22.5% manufacturing, 18.3% business services, 11.6% retail, 7.7% social services, other 4.7%), functions (38.2% administration, 15.3% marketing, 12.1% accounting, 10.8% finance, 10.4% engineering, 9.6% MIS, and 3.6% other), and positions (22.3% senior managers, 39.6% middle managers, and 38.1% first line supervisors). Managers in our final sample averaged 32.2 years of age, 56.3% were male and 18.0% had less than a college degree.

## 5.2. Measures

The surveys were designed to capture the three concepts being investigated in this research: organizational career growth, affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions. All of the items employed a five-point Likert scale format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) unless otherwise indicated.

### 5.2.1. Organizational career growth

A 15-item scale developed by Weng (2010) was used to measure the four dimensions of organizational career growth at time 1. This measure asks subjects to assess their career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration growth during the time they had been with their current employer, which was a minimum of three months. The first three dimensions were measured via 4-item scales while remuneration growth used a 3-item scale. Sample items for each of the four scales include “my present job moves me closer to my career goals,” “my present job encourages me to continuously gain new job-related skills,” “my promotion speed in my present organization is fast,” “my salary is growing quickly in my present organization”. These scales showed good reliability in this study with coefficient alphas for career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth being .85, .86, .86, .80 and .78, respectively.

### 5.2.2. Affective occupational commitment

Blau's (2003) 6-item measure was used to assess the managers' affective occupational commitment at time 1. This scale is widely accepted with evidence of strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Gobeski & Beehr, 2009). Sample items from this scale include: “My current occupation is important to my self-image”, “I am happy to have entered my current occupation”, and “I am proud to be in the field of my current occupation”. The coefficient alpha of the scale for this sample was .81.

### 5.2.3. Turnover intentions

With actual turnover data unavailable, we used Kelloway, Gottlieb, and Barham's (1999) 4-item measure to assess respondents' turnover intentions at time 2, three months after the initial survey. Longitudinal research on turnover does not indicate an optimal time lapse but three months is consistent with the time frame used by others (e.g., Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011). While we did not have direct data on actual turnover, research has repeatedly shown turnover intentions to be the best predictor of actual turnover (Bedeian et al., 1991; Mobley et al., 1979; Steel, 2002). The four items that comprise this scale; “I am thinking about leaving this organization,” “I am planning to look for a new job,” “I intend to ask people about new job opportunities,” and “I don't plan to be in this organization much longer,” yielded a coefficient alpha of .76.

### 5.2.4. Control variables

Data were also collected in time 1 on four demographic variables; age, gender, education level, and position. Education was grouped into four categories: no college, some college, a bachelor's degree, and master's degree or above, while position in the organization was grouped according to whether the respondent occupied a senior, middle or first-line management position. In addition, turnover theorists have generally portrayed perceived job alternatives (Mobley et al., 1979) as an important aspect shaping turnover decisions, including turnover cognitions. The idea is that perceived job opportunities motivate employees to consider other options. Consequently, we controlled for this by collecting data on perceived opportunities at time 2. Perceived opportunities was measured using a four-item scale adapted from scales reported by Steel and Griffeth (1989), and Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer, and Sablinski (2007). The items were: (1) “It would not be difficult for me to find a new job after leaving this organization.” (2) “I feel there are many opportunities for development outside my current organization.” (3) “With my skills and competence, it is very easy to find another suitable job.” (4) “If I leave this organization, there are many available new jobs for me to choose from.” The internal reliability estimate for this scale was .77.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Dimensionality of career growth on a managerial sample

The first purpose of this study was to investigate the applicability of Weng's (2010) four dimensional model of organizational career growth in a managerial sample. To examine the dimensionality of the organizational career growth instrument, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation using LISREL 8.54. To examine the dimensionality, we compared the fitness between a one-factor model (all items loaded on one factor), two-factor model (career goal progress and professional ability development on one factor, promotion speed and remuneration growth on the other), three-factor model (promotion speed and remuneration growth on one factor) and four-factor model (career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth as separate factors). Results, shown in Table 1, indicate that the 3-factor model fits the data better than other models. Since it was not possible to differentiate promotion speed and remuneration growth, these two dimensions were combined into a single dimension of organizational rewards. Thus, for this study, organizational career growth consisted of the following three dimensions: career goal progress, professional ability development and organizational rewards. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the three scales were: career goal progress = 0.86, professional ability development = 0.85, and organizational rewards = 0.85.

### 6.2. Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelation matrix for the study's variables are shown in Table 2. Turnover intentions are negatively related to the three dimensions of career growth, with the correlation coefficient of career goal progress being the highest ( $r = -.36, p < .01$ ), followed by professional ability development ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ), and then organizational rewards ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ). Turnover intentions are also negatively related to affective occupational commitment ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ).

With respect to the control variables, age is negatively correlated with turnover intentions ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). Education is positively correlated with career goal progress ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ), professional ability development ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ), affective occupational commitment ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated with turnover intentions ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ). Perceived opportunities were positively related to all three organizational career growth dimensions, with correlations ranging from .16 for professional ability development to .13 for career goal progress. Perceived opportunities were also positively related to affective occupational commitment ( $r = .10$ ). Given these associations, the demographic variables, along with perceived opportunities were used as controls in the remaining analyses.

### 6.3. Common method error

Part of any common method error problem was reduced by collecting turnover intentions and perceived opportunities at a separate point in time from the other variables. However, because the organizational career growth and affective occupational commitment variables were collected via surveys from a single source and at a single point in time, we checked for common method variance. In designing the survey, we used established instruments, which contained neutral words, multiple items and reverse coded items; steps designed to reduce common method bias (Song & Zahedi, 2005). Moreover, survey responses were anonymous which minimizes the possibility of socially desirable responses. To determine whether common method bias was problematic, we employed Harmon's single-factor test to determine whether the majority of the variance could be accounted for by one general factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Results showed that the first factor accounted for only 20.1% of the variance. Finally, as shown in Table 2, the independent variables do not show statistically significant correlations above the .70 threshold (Zhu & Kraemer, 2002) indicating that these variables are distinct.

### 6.4. Regression analysis

Hierarchical regression was used to test hypotheses 1–3. We first examined the relationship between career growth and affective occupational commitment. (See Models 1–1 and 1–2, Table 3.) The demographic control variables were entered in step 1, with education being the only significant predictor of affective occupational commitment. The three dimensions of organizational

**Table 1**  
Goodness-of-fit information for the alternative factor models.

Structure	Chi-squared	df	Chi-squared/df	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	NNFI	CFI
1-factor	347.40	90	3.86	.79	.77	.115	.78	.80
2-factor	234.07	89	2.63	.84	.83	.091	.88	.89
3-factor	128.76	87	1.48	.92	.91	.052	.97	.98
4-factor	162.96	84	1.94	.90	.89	.068	.95	.96

Notes: All Chi-squared values are significant at  $p < .001$ . GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index.

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Gender <sup>a</sup>	1.44	.497									
2 Age	32.2	7.86	-.05								
3 Education level <sup>b</sup>	2.35	.85	.06	.04							
4 Position <sup>c</sup>	2.15	.52	-.06	-.07	.12*						
5 Perceived opportunities T2	3.26	.72	-.06	.00	.17**	-.14**					
6 Career goal progress T1	3.34	.79	.00	-.02	.17**	.05	.13**				
7 Prof. ability development T1	3.73	.67	.04	.00	.18**	-.02	.16**	.45**			
8 Organizational rewards T1	2.97	.84	-.04	-.02	.01	-.09	.15**	.42**	.30**		
9 Affective occ. commitment T1	3.19	.73	-.02	.08	.20**	.03	.10*	.63**	.45**	.47**	
10 Turnover intention T2	2.71	.76	-.05	-.20**	-.20**	-.03	.04	-.36**	-.26**	-.23**	-.31**

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
<sup>a</sup> 1-Male, 2-Female.  
<sup>b</sup> 1-No college, 2-some college, 3-bachelors, 4-masters and above.  
<sup>c</sup> 1-Senior manager, 2-middle manager, 3-firstline manager.

career growth were entered in step 2 and resulted in career growth predicting an additional 45% of the variance in affective occupational commitment. Among the three factors that comprise career growth, the effect of career goal progress was greatest ( $\beta = 0.50, p < .001$ ), followed by organizational rewards ( $\beta = 0.37, p < .001$ ), and professional ability development ( $\beta = 0.34, p < .001$ ). Therefore, H1 was supported.

Secondly, we explored the influence of organizational career growth on turnover intentions, as shown in Models 2–1 and 2–2. In this analysis, perceived opportunities were entered in as a control variable along with the demographic variables in step 1. As shown in Model 2–1 of Table 3, the only significant control variables were age and position, which were both negatively related to turnover intentions. Adding the three organizational career growth factors in step 2 explained an additional 12% of the variance in turnover intentions. Each of the three dimensions of organizational career growth had a significant negative effect on turnover intentions, with career goal progress having the largest association ( $\beta = -0.31, p < .001$ ), and professional ability development ( $\beta = -0.16, p < .01$ ) the lowest. Thus, H2 was supported.

The regression results presented in Model 2–3 show that affective occupational commitment also predicted turnover intentions. Following the controlling variables, affective occupational commitment predicted an additional 13% of the variance in turnover intentions ( $\beta = -0.38, p < .001$ ).

Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach to establishing evidence of mediation, Model 2–4 shows that the addition of affective occupational commitment reduced but did not eliminate the significance of career goal progress, professional ability development and rewards for predicting turnover intentions. Therefore, affective occupational commitment partially mediates the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions, which supports H3.

**Table 3**  
The regression of career growth on affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions.

Predictor variables	Affective occ. commitment		Turnover intentions			
	Model 1–1	Model 1–2	Model 2–1	Model 2–2	Model 2–3	Model 2–4
Step 1						
Gender	-.01	-.02	-.07	-.06	-.07	-.06
Age	.05	.10*	-.24***	-.27***	-.22***	-.24***
Education level	.21***	.09*	-.01	-.00	.01	.01
Position	.02	.03	-.13*	-.08	-.08	-.07
Perceived opportunities			-.06	.14**	.18**	.18***
Step 2						
Career goal progress		.50***		-.31***		-.16**
Prof. ability development		.34***		-.16**		-.11*
Organizational rewards		.37***		-.19***		-.14***
Step 3						
Affective occ. commitment					-.38***	-.25***
R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.50	.08	.20	.21	.28
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.50	.07	.18	.20	.20
F	3.84**	45.57***	6.65***	10.37***	14.56***	16.95***
<sup>a</sup> F		96.59***		14.36***	48.74***	18.90***
<sup>a</sup> R <sup>2</sup>		.45		.12	.13	.07

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .  
<sup>a</sup> F and R<sup>2</sup> Change report changes from the prior model, except for Model 2–3, which report changes from Model 2–1.

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1. Dimensionality of organizational career growth

Previous research has used a variety of measures of career growth. Some, such as [Bedeian et al. \(1991\)](#) try to capture career growth using a single variable, i.e., the expected utility of one's present job, while others operationalize career growth as an array of human resource practices (e.g., [Chang, 1999](#)). This study employed a view of career growth that couples the opportunities offered to employees by their current employer to meet career goals and develop professional skills with the organization's reward structure. The results of CFA on the sample of managers failed to support this four-dimension model of career growth, due to the inability to separate the dimensions of promotion speed and remuneration growth. This may be unique to the managerial ranks in China wherein remuneration is closely tied to one's position. An alternative explanation is that perhaps the receipt of an increase in compensation is viewed by Chinese managers as a change in status, similar to that of a promotion. This does not, however, diminish the fact, established in previous research ([Weng et al., 2010](#)), that organizational career growth consists not only of the opportunities made available by organizations for their employees to grow (i.e., make progress toward their career goals and acquire new skills) but that organizations need to recognize and support such efforts through their reward systems. Future research using other employee samples, e.g., technicians, laborers, professionals, will help sort out the boundary conditions under which the various dimensions of organizational career growth apply.

### 7.2. Organizational career growth and affective occupational commitment

The finding that the dimensions of organizational career growth explained significant amounts of variation in affective occupational commitment suggests that what goes on within one's organization affects the degree to which an individual identifies with their chosen line of work. These results support previous research showing that meeting career goals, developing new skills ([Thomas, 2000](#)) and receiving work-related rewards ([Darden et al., 1989](#)) are related to how one feels about his/her occupation. In other words, these work experiences related to career growth reinforce one's choice of career. Career goal progress constitutes the means by which employees assess their career choice, while professional skill development is the basis for long-term career success. The sense of achievement one gains from achieving career goals and acquiring new skills should increase their identity with their chosen career. Finally, the degree to which one is rewarded for their efforts should increase the perceived value of their career choice.

### 7.3. Organizational career growth and turnover intentions

The results of this study show that the three organizational career growth factors are each negatively related to turnover intentions. This suggests that the greater opportunities provided by an organization for employees to meet their career goals, acquire additional professional skills, and the degree to which the organization rewards those activities, make it less likely employees will think about leaving that organization. This fits both the theory of met expectations ([Porter & Steers, 1973](#)) and the psychological contract. One mechanism that has been used to explain this connection focuses on the role of organizational commitment ([Bedeian et al., 1991](#); [Chang, 1999](#)). That is, employees whose expectations are met and for whom their psychological contracts are seen as being fulfilled, become more psychologically attached to their organizations, making them less likely to leave. For example, career goal progress, reflects the association between one's career goals and one's current job. If this association is strong, one becomes more socio-emotionally linked to their employer which decreases their inclination to look elsewhere for work.

Similarly, with respect to professional ability development, the degree to which one is able to acquire new skills in one's current place of employment can make employment there attractive. Moreover, if the skills being acquired are unique to the employing organization, there may be limited opportunities to transfer those skills to another employer, making employment in one's current organization more salient. This finding supports the work of [Bedeian et al. \(1991\)](#) whose concept of expected utility of one's present job was based primarily on the degree to which one's present job was relevant to one's longer term professional growth and development.

Finally, our finding of a negative relationship between organizational rewards and turnover intentions may also be explained by the idea that receipt of rewards leads to increased commitment. [Zhang, Li, Liu, and Deng, \(2005\)](#) suggested that increasing promotion opportunities satisfies employees' achievement needs which accounts for lower voluntary turnover rates of valued employees. To the extent that the efforts of such employees are rapidly promoted, they have a vested interest in remaining with their current employer. Our results support the work of [Xiong \(2008\)](#), who demonstrated among Chinese employees, that remuneration growth constitutes one reason employees remain with their employing organizations.

### 7.4. The role of affective occupational commitment

We began this paper with the assertion that the effects of organizational career growth on employee behavior depends on whether the employee is interested in pursuing a career in the first place. The finding that affective occupational commitment partially mediates the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions suggests that this assertion

is only partially true. Future research could address whether this partial mediation holds for employee behaviors and attitudes other than turnover intentions.

The above discussion raises an interesting issue. Organizational career growth has been shown here to be related to occupational commitment and in previous research to organizational commitment (Chang, 1999; Weng et al., 2010). As such, one's career related experiences at work reflect on both their choice of occupation and their choice of organization. This begs the question of what the relationship is between the effects of occupation commitment and organizational commitment on the role of career growth in organizations. Future research should heed the call of those advocating a multi-dimensional approach to examining how commitment to multiple commitment targets affects employee attitudes and behavior (e.g., Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005).

### 7.5. Limitations and future research directions

The results of this study must be viewed in light of its limitations. First, while turnover intentions have been shown to be a good predictor of actual turnover (Steel, 2002), they are not equivalent. Longitudinal research employing actual turnover would help cement these relationships and remove any doubts about common method bias. Moreover, we have no way of knowing whether turnover intentions in this study were of a voluntary or involuntary nature.

Second, the cutoff used for inclusion in our sample was 3 months of managerial experience within one's current organization. One might argue that this limited experience constitutes an inadequate time period in which to assess whether their organization is progressing them toward their career goals, etc. (except possibly within organizations that take a very aggressive approach toward career development). Given the way organizational tenure was measured in this study, we have no way of pinpointing precisely how many managers had this limited amount of experience, but we do know that less than 8% of the sample had between 3 months and one year of tenure. Thus we are confident that the study's results reflect sufficient awareness of how one's current job relates to career growth opportunities.

Third, this study captured organizational career growth in terms of three of the four factors originally proposed by Weng (2010). Consequently, additional research is needed on the stability of the dimensions underlying this concept. Moreover, it is possible that there are other underlying dimensions not tapped by this study, so additional research determining precisely what constitutes career growth is needed.

Fourth, other factors may be involved that affect these relationships. For example, it may be that the mediating role of affective occupational commitment on the relationship between organizational career growth factors and turnover intentions may be the result of its effects on organizational commitment. While we did not measure one's attachment to their employing organization, it may well be that organizational career growth affects affective occupational commitment, which, in turn, affects turnover but only because of its interactions with organizational commitment. Future research on the exact nature of the role of organizational commitment in connection with the model tested here is needed.

Fifth, our results surrounding turnover intentions provide longitudinal support for Aryee and Tan's (1992) cross-sectional finding of a negative correlation between career commitment and turnover intentions. However, our relationship between organizational career growth and occupational commitment was not based on longitudinal data. While our model posits that organizational career growth leads to occupational commitment, Aryee and Tan's (1992) model predicts the opposite; that career commitment leads to career growth. Since both studies rely on cross-sectional data in examining this relationship future research of a longitudinal nature is needed to ascertain the direction of causality between these two concepts.

Sixth, this study's results focus exclusively on affective occupational commitment and support a socio-emotional perspective on the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions. Future research should examine whether these relationships hold up when considering other forms of occupational commitment. For example, the idea that experiencing organizational career growth may lead employees to perceive added costs associated with leaving an organization may be more a function of continuance rather than affective occupational commitment. Such a finding would lend support to an economic-based perspective linking organizational career growth with turnover intentions.

Finally, we did not take into account other individual differences as other potential variables that might affect the relationship between organizational career growth and turnover intentions. Three candidates for future research, in addition to the aforementioned organizational commitment, are perceived organizational support (POS), growth need strength, and performance. POS may be an alternative explanation for the relationships uncovered in this study. It could very well be that by providing employees with opportunities for career growth, an organization is signaling to the employees that they care about and support them. While previous research (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003) has shown POS to be related to organizational commitment, it remains to be seen whether POS provides a vital link between organizational career growth and commitment to one's occupation. Growth need strength would seem a natural extension of the variables in this study in that the dimensions of organizational career growth may be more important to individuals high in growth need strength while other inducements such as compensation and time off might be more salient to employees reporting low growth need strength. Moreover, coupling research on growth need strength with the various forms of occupational commitment (affective versus continuance) may also help explain the applicability of the socio-emotional versus the economic perspectives behind these relationships. Lastly, one would expect that individual performance would play a role in these relationships. High performers, for example, may not only have greater employment opportunities elsewhere but may be in a position to reap greater organizational career growth opportunities as well.

## 7.6. Implications

Organizational career growth shows potential for managing turnover, its biggest impact is on those who desire a career; i.e., have high occupational commitment. The good news is that one's career experiences within an organization can build that sense of commitment. One area of immediate implication is employee recruitment. The use of career plans and training programs aimed at professional skill acquisition along with clearly articulated career paths (e.g., career ladders) can clarify expectations for new employees. Tying annual reviews and rewards to career goals and skill acquisition (e.g., through skill-based compensation) will provide clear markers to existing employees as to their career progress. In short, anything the organization can do to increase employee perceptions that they are making progress toward their career goals, whatever they may be, that they have the opportunity to acquire new skills related to their career, and that the organization is one that will reward those efforts will increase the odds of retaining those employees and building their sense of occupational commitment. Of course, this is predicated on a desire on the part of the employing organization to want to retain particular employees, e.g., based on their performance and availability of replacements. An additional option is to use occupational commitment as an evaluation criterion in the hiring process. Firms that are committed to providing an environment that fosters organizational career growth can jump start the effects of doing so by hiring people who have high levels of affective commitment toward their chosen careers.

Just because someone has a high level of occupational commitment does not mean that they are necessarily tied to their organization. But knowing which employees are high in occupational commitment provides information on what is important to those employees, expectations that, if met, would increase the organization's chances of retaining those employees.

Turnover has been recognized as something to be managed rather than simply minimized. Given that individuals are no longer tied to single organizations and organizations are less committed to their employees (as evidenced by downsizing, layoffs, and offshoring), organizations need to look beyond the obvious attitudinal determinants of turnover like organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Our results add organizational career growth and occupational commitment as additional levers available to managers in their efforts to manage turnover.

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