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The impact of employee perceptions of training on organizational commitment and turnover intentions: a study of multinationals in the Chinese service sector

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This study examines the impact of employee perceptions of training on organizational commitment, and the latter's relationship with turnover intentions. Structured equation modelling is conducted on survey data from 437 Chinese employees of five multinational enterprises operating in the Chinese service sector. The results of the survey are consistent with social exchange theory. They highlight the importance of training as a tool to enhance the affective organizational commitment of employees, and reduce turnover. The findings differ from that of previous studies in non-Chinese settings. No evidence was found to indicate that motivation to learn and the perceived benefits of training impact on the organizational commitment of employees. This may be explained by three factors: the involuntary nature of employee training, the limited career development opportunities on offer to local employees of multinational enterprises and the difficulty employees face in applying learnt skills given cultural differences. The implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: China; multinational enterprises; organizational commitment; training; turnover intentions

Introduction

Current international human resource management research has a strong focus on how organizations can improve the organizational commitment of employees (Malhotra, Budhwar and Prowse 2007). Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) see this as having three elements: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Normative commitment has its antecedents in an employee's values as determined by their cultural, social and familial background and prior experiences. These are all exogenous to this study that focuses instead on the impact of HRM interventions after employees join an enterprise, particularly training, on their affective and continuance commitment. The benefit to organizations from high levels of organizational commitment has been widely researched (Gamble and Huang 2008). This research supports the notion that it is related positively to a variety of desirable outcomes including job satisfaction and performance, and to a decline in an employee's intention to leave. This it seems is true in both Western and Asian contexts (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnytsky 2002; Cheng, Jiang and Riley 2003).

The implementation of effective HR practices has been shown to play an important role in building and maintaining the commitment of employees towards the organization (Allen, Shore and Griffeth 2003). According to the social exchange theory, individuals

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enter into a relationship with an organization so as to maximise the benefits they obtain (Blau 1964). Social exchange is based on an implicit agreement between employee and the employer, referred to as a psychological contract (Rousseau 1995). Psychological contracts are governed by the norm of reciprocity and have been shown to play an important role in determining organizational behaviour (Garrow 2004). The literature suggests that employees enhance their commitment towards the organization when the organization meets their expectations with regard to fulfilment of their individual needs (Malhotra et al. 2007).

Recent literature has begun to examine the relationship between training and commitment (Owens 2006; Al-Emadi and Marquardt 2007). A number of studies demonstrate that training provision leads to improvements in organizational commitment (Bartlett 2001; Ahmad and Bakar 2003; Al-Emadi and Marquardt 2007). As part of their unwritten psychological contract with the organization, employees expect to be provided with training and development opportunities in exchange for displayed organizational commitment (Bartlett 2001). Despite Western research investigating this (Klein 2001; Owens 2006), research on this in China is limited.

Motivations for research

Despite a vast literature on the impact of HRM on the described psychological contract, there is little consensus on the antecedents of organizational commitment (Malhotra et al. 2007). Most knowledge on organizational commitment is derived from Western studies (Gamble and Huang 2008). Little is known on the relationships between antecedents and commitment outside the West. The literature suggests that cultural differences between countries exert a considerable influence on commitment (Chen and Francesco 2000; Glazer, Daniel and Short 2004). The key cultural values that multinationals are reported to consider when implementing their HRM practices in China include respect for seniority, group loyalty and the importance of personal relationships between individuals (Bond 1996; Hui and Tan 1996; Lockett 1988). Gamble and Huang (2006) argue that such differences impact on how HRM practices are implemented in Chinese subsidiaries. This research takes such cultural differences and a given level of normative commitment into account when exploring the relationship between training and affective and continuance commitment.

This study makes its contribution to theory and practice in a number of ways. First, it extends to China the work on the relationship between employee perceptions of training and organizational commitment. The results enable researchers to understand whether training provision can be used by multinational enterprises to enhance the affective and continuance commitment of Chinese employees given their pre-existing contextually and culturally determined level of normative commitment. This should help multinationals to better tailor their training provision to enhance employee commitment. To demonstrate how training by multinational enterprises enhances organizational commitment in China, we explore the relationship between affective and continuance commitment and training variables used previously. The research asks a number of questions:

- (1) To what extent can multinationals enhance employee commitment in China by promoting awareness of training opportunities among employees?
- (2) To what extent are multinationals in China able to enhance the commitment of employees by motivating them to participate in training activities?
- (3) To what extent can multinationals in China enhance employee commitment by improving social support for training from supervisors and co-workers?

- (4) To what extent are multinationals in China able to enhance employee commitment by promoting awareness of the benefits of training participation?

This study also examines the impact of organizational commitment on the turnover intentions of employees in China. Multinational enterprises see high turnover as a major challenge in China because of a shortage of good quality middle-managers and intense international and local competition for their skills (Wong, Hui, Wong and Law 2001; Hulme 2006). Over the last 5 years, staff turnover rates in multinationals in China have been high compared with those in developed economies, at between 10 to 15% of the workforce (Leininger 2007). Job turnover has the high associated costs of selection, recruitment and training. In addition, new employees only reach the productivity of the person they replace after some time. To save these costs, one has to reduce employee turnover. Our investigations throw further light on how employers can reduce the turnover intentions of employees by investing in training to enhance organizational commitment, and explore the differences between the results obtained in China from those observed elsewhere.

In the following section, we review the literature on organizational commitment and training before proposing hypotheses and testing them. After discussing our findings, we draw out their implications for management and theory.

Literature review and hypotheses

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment has been defined as the relative strength of an employee's identification and involvement with a particular organization (Steers 1977). The most widely used model is the three-component model developed by Meyer et al. (1993). In this study, for reasons already explained, we examine only two of these components: affective and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to the employees' identification and emotional attachment to their employing organization (Allen and Meyer 1990). Employees with high levels of affective commitment stay because of strong emotional attachment to an organization. Continuance commitment is the perceived costs to the employee of leaving the organization, and may include the loss of benefits or seniority status within the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990). Employees with strong continuance commitment stay with the organization out of self-interest. The third component, normative commitment, depends on the prior attitudes and values of employees before joining the organization and thus should not be significantly impacted by HR practices.

Over the last decade, many studies have been conducted on the organizational commitment of Chinese employees (Chen and Francesco 2000, 2003; Wong et al. 2001; Chen, Tsui and Farh 2002; Chiu 2002; Cheng and Stockdale 2003; Cheng et al. 2003; Wang 2004, 2008; Chan, Feng, Redman and Snape 2006; Yao and Wang 2006; Gamble and Huang 2008). Studied determinants include organizational type (Chiu 2002; Wang 2004), employee demography (Chen and Francesco 2000) and loyalty to supervisor (Chen et al. 2002). However, no Chinese research has been conducted to investigate the effects of organizational commitment on the relationship between employee perceptions of training and turnover intentions.

Training situation in China

Despite the increasing number of multinational enterprises operating in China, research on their training practices is sparse (Ng and Siu 2004). With a shortage of skilled workers,

investment by multinationals in training is viewed as critical to success in China (Wang and Wang 2006). A small but growing literature has examined the transfer of HRM practices to the Chinese subsidiaries of multinationals (Lu and Bjorkman 1997, 1998; Ahlstrom, Bruton and Chan 2001; Gamble 2003; Gamble and Huang 2006). The training practices provided by multinationals are considered by some as potentially inappropriate in China because of cultural differences from elsewhere (Ahlstrom et al. 2001; Gamble 2003; Gamble and Huang 2006). The literature suggests that multinationals must take Chinese cultural values into account, such as the importance of group loyalty and personal relationships, when implementing HRM practices in their Chinese subsidiaries (Lockett 1988). Previous empirical work supports this. A comparative study of UK and Chinese firms demonstrates that cultural factors strongly influence the adoption of professional HRM practices in the Chinese context (Easterby-Smith, Malina and Yuan 1995). Another study (Wong et al. 2001) indicates that investment in training provision, instead of benefiting multinationals, may in fact lead to greater employee turnover, as skilled workers are head hunted by competitors. This has led to reluctance among some firms to invest heavily in training, and impacted on the localisation plans of many multinationals, exacerbating the shortage of skilled managers in China (Wong and Law 1999).

Training and organizational commitment

Training has been identified as contributing greatly to organizational competitiveness (Schuler and MacMillan 1984). Research suggests that investment in training can be justified by the contribution it makes to improved individual and organizational performance (Bartel 2000). However, previous studies have indicated difficulty in identifying causality between training and organizational performance (Tan and Batra 1995; Blundell, Dearden, Meghir and Sianesi 1999). Bartlett (2001) suggests that one problem that exacerbated this difficulty is developing an effective measure for organizational performance. Blundell et al. (1999, p. 18) support this, arguing that a 'lack of suitable data and methodological difficulties have . . . prevented adequate assessment of the impact of human capital appreciation on firm performance' and that 'estimates of the impact of training on productivity are subject to wide margins of uncertainty'.

There is a growing consensus that HRM practices influence employee attitudes and work-related behaviour (Allen et al. 2003; Gould-Williams 2007). In order to judge better the effectiveness of training, it has been suggested that its relationship to organizational commitment be examined directly. This has been demonstrated as positively related to organizational effectiveness (Bartlett 2001). The literature suggests that positive work-related behaviour and attitudes largely depend on employee perceptions as to the extent to which their employer values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Allen et al. 2003). This view is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau 1964), which proposes that the psychological contract between employer and the employee is an important determinant of organizational behaviour. This is the theoretical basis for our study. Social exchange is initiated by organizations when they signal their willingness to care for employee interests (Gould-Williams 2007). Employees reciprocate with positive attitudinal and behavioural responses helpful to their organization (Settoon, Bennett and Liden 1996; Aryee, Budhwar and Chen 2002). Training, like other HRM practices, can be utilised to elicit desired responses that may include improved organizational commitment (Bartlett 2001). Existing research suggests that training and development provision is taken as a sign by employees that their organization desires to enter into a social exchange with them. This creates a strong psychological bond between them and their employer (Garrow 2004).

However, the impact of training on organizational commitment has not been so widely researched. A limited number of studies have been conducted in America (Bartlett 2001), Malaysia (Ahmad and Bakar 2003) and the Middle-East (Al-Emadi and Marquardt 2007). All these studies find a strong positive relationship between training perceptions and affective organizational commitment and a weaker relationship with continuance commitment. Bartlett's (2001) study in the US health care context finds a strong relationship between four training variables and affective commitment. However, his research suggests a limited impact of them on continuance commitment. Ahmad and Bakar's (2003) study, conducted in Malaysia, finds a significant relationship between five training variables and affective commitment. For continuance commitment, their research only demonstrated a significant correlation with two, the training environment and perceived training benefits. Al-Emadi and Marquardt (2007) examine the perceptions of senior staff in the Qatari petrochemical industry on the perceived benefits of training participation and its impact on organizational commitment. They found a positive relationship between perceived training benefits and both affective and continuance commitment.

Previous research in China, on training in multinationals, produces evidence of a positive link between investment in training and performance (Ng and Siu 2004). However, no empirical work has been conducted in China on the relationship between perceptions of training and organizational outcomes. This work fills this void by investigating the nature of the link between perceptions of training and organizational commitment, and the latter's relationship with turnover intentions. This study examines the extent to which training can be used as a tool by multinational enterprises to enhance the organizational commitment and reduce the turnover intentions of Chinese employees. A number of hypotheses are developed from the existing literature and then tested.

Perceived availability of training

The perceived availability of training is taken to be the extent to which employees feel they are able to access training opportunities. Prior research suggests that employees with positive perceptions of this will be more committed to the organization (Bartlett 2001). As previously indicated by studies in the USA and Malaysia, the perceived availability of training has a strong relationship with affective but not continuance commitment (Bartlett 2001; Ahmad and Bakar 2003). These findings suggest that organizations may enhance affective commitment by promoting awareness of training opportunities. This study tests this in the Chinese context. Contrary to previous findings, it is hypothesised that the perceived availability of training will be positively related to continuance commitment as well as affective commitment. Previous work has confirmed that Chinese employees stay with their employer as they are concerned that they should not lose the training opportunities offered to them (Anonymous 2006). This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1a:* There is a positive relationship between the perceived availability of training and affective commitment.
- H1b:* There is a positive relationship between the perceived availability of training and continuance commitment.

Motivation to learn

Well-motivated employees are more likely to have a positive perception of the training environment in their organizations. This has been shown to lead to greater participation in training activities (Mathieu, Tannenbaum and Salas 1992). Empirical research also

indicates that those motivated to learn tend to apply learnt skills more effectively in their work (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Tannenbaum and Mathieu 1993; Fecteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd and Kudisch 1995). The resulting benefits should generate positive feelings towards the organization, and so enhance affective commitment.

Empirical studies by Bartlett (2001) and Ahmad and Bakar (2003) confirm a strongly significant relationship between an individual's motivation to learn and their affective commitment, but no relationship with continuance commitment. These findings suggest that organizations may benefit from greater affective commitment through motivating their employees to participate in training activities. Previous research in Hong Kong also confirms a positive relationship between motivation to learn and affective commitment (Cheng and Ho 2001). This study tests whether multinationals in China may engender greater commitment by improving employee motivation to learn. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a positive relationship between motivation to learn and affective commitment.

Perceived supervisor support for training

A growing body of research has demonstrated that support in the workplace has vital implications for the proper functioning of the organization. Studies have shown that social support increases job satisfaction and commitment, and decreases turnover and absenteeism (La Rocco, House and French 1980; Allen and Meyer 1990; Hutchison and Garstka 1996; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski and Rhoades 2002; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell and Allen 2007). The combined evidence suggests that social support is an essential determinant of organizational effectiveness. For a number of decades, researchers have consistently demonstrated that social support is an important resource in that it facilitates the psychological, physical and overall well-being of individuals (La Rocco and Jones 1978; La Rocco et al. 1980). Social support comes from three sources: family and friends, work colleagues (Ganster, Fusilier and Mayes 1986) and the immediate supervisor (Eisenberger et al. 2002).

Perceived support for training from senior colleagues has been shown to influence training participation (Noe and Wilk 1993). Bartlett (2001) demonstrates a significant relationship between supervisor support for training and both affective and continuance commitment. These findings illustrate the potential benefits that may be brought from the creation of an environment in which participation in training and development activities is encouraged by supervisors.

It has been suggested that the relationship between supervisor and subordinate is extremely important in Chinese organizations given the hierarchical nature of Chinese Confucian society (Farh and Cheng 2000). In China, it is known that employees are more loyal to others than to a system (Redding 1990). In such a society, employee loyalty is more likely to be based on personal gratitude to their particular supervisor, not to the organization (Chen et al. 2002).

Empirical research in China has demonstrated the vital role played by supervisors in cultivating subordinate commitment (Cheng et al. 2003). Such personal attachment to a supervisor results from a prescribed social norm dictating a requirement to be loyal to those with seniority (Wang 2008). In this study, we examine the extent to which multinationals are able to enhance employee commitment by encouraging supervisory level employees to provide more support to their subordinates, particularly to participate in training activities and apply learnt skills in their work. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H3a:* There is a positive relationship between perceived supervisor support for training and affective commitment.
- H3b:* There is a positive relationship between perceived supervisor support for training and continuance commitment.

Perceived co-worker support for training

The impact of the relationships between co-workers on organizational performance has received less attention than the relationships between supervisors and their subordinates (Wang 2008). However, co-worker support may have important performance-related outcomes (Shah and Jehn 1993). Perceived co-worker support for training has been shown to have a positive impact on participation rates and affective commitment (Noe and Wilk 1993; Tharenou 1997; Bartlett 2001). These findings illustrate the potential benefits brought to organizations creating a culture in which co-workers support each other's participation in training.

As we have seen, the collective, personalised nature of Chinese society should lead to closer relationships between co-workers than is the case in the West (Wang 2008). We would thus expect co-worker support for training in China to be more closely related to affective commitment there leading to:

- H4:* There is a positive relationship between perceived co-worker support for training and affective commitment.

Perceived benefits of training

Ahmad and Bakar (2003) suggest that employees who recognise the benefits from training will tend to be more committed and so be more willing to participate in an organization's training activities. Empirical work confirms such a relationship (Bartlett 2001; Ahmad and Bakar 2003; Al-Emadi and Marquardt 2007). Ahmad and Bakar (2003) find evidence of a significantly positive relationship between the perceived benefits of training and affective and continuance commitment. Bartlett (2001) distinguishes between the career-related, personal and job-related benefits of training. He finds strong evidence of a relationship between the perceived career-related and personal benefits of training and both affective and continuance commitment. These findings illustrate the potential benefits of enhancing the organizational commitment of employees by promoting the personal and career-related benefits of participating in training. This study tests this relationship in China, leading to the following hypotheses:

- H5a:* There is a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of training and affective commitment.
- H5b:* There is a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of training and continuance commitment.

Turnover intentions

The relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions has been widely studied (Gamble and Huang 2008). Previous research in China finds strong evidence that turnover intentions are negatively related to both affective and continuance commitment (Chen and Francesco 2000; Cheng and Stockdale 2003), leading to the following hypotheses:

H6a: There is a negative relationship between affective commitment and turnover intentions.

H6b: There is a negative relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions.

Figure 1 shows the proposed research model.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

Self-completion survey questionnaires were employed in this research. The original questionnaire was written in English. The questionnaire was translated into Chinese using the back translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1993). A pilot test of this translation was conducted and some minor adjustments were made to the final Chinese version. The fieldwork was conducted over a 2-month period from May to July 2008 in five multinational enterprises. Table 1 provides information on each of the organizations participating in the research and the fieldwork locations.

Employees were randomly selected from human resource department records in each organization and were invited to participate. All of them were full-time employees and worked at a managerial or administrative level in the organization. In each organization formal training existed for such employees.

In three organizations online questionnaires were utilised, and in two paper questionnaires. In the case of online questionnaires, the HR department sent out a personalised questionnaire link to each participant allowing them to send their responses

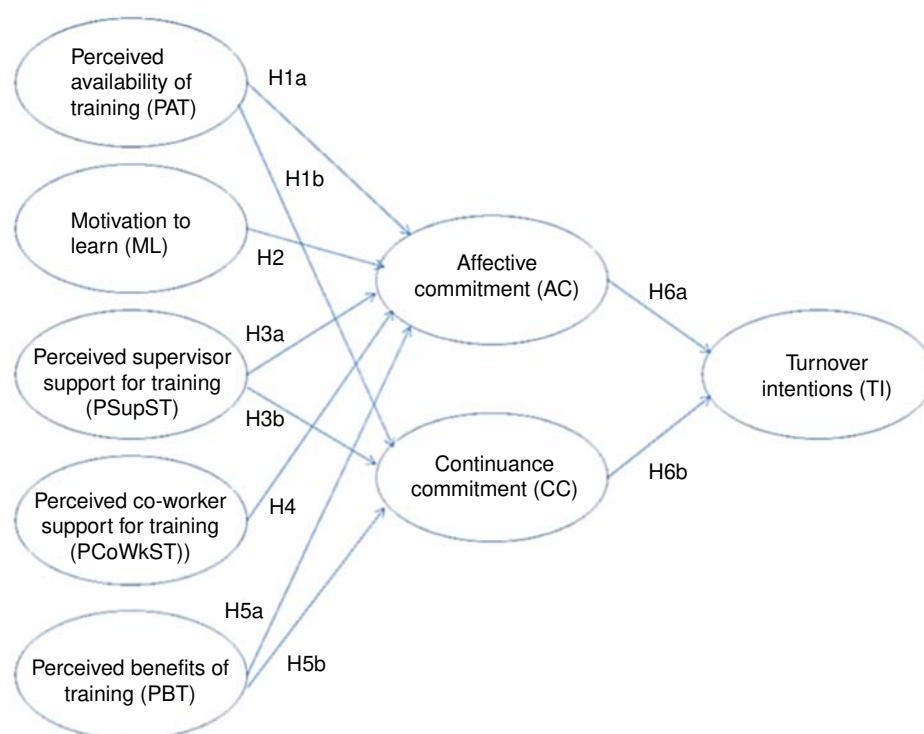


Figure 1. The research model.

Table 1. Company information.

<i>Company</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Head office</i>	<i>Fieldwork locations</i>	<i>Total distributed</i>	<i>Total complete responses</i>
A	Retail	Shanghai	Nationwide	500	215
B	Retail	Shanghai	Nationwide	200	95
C	Banking	Beijing	Zhejiang province	100	59
D	Education	Zhejiang province	Zhejiang province	100	37
E	Airline	Shanghai	Zhejiang province	100	31

to the research team directly. This validated their responses. Stamped-addressed envelopes were provided with paper questionnaires to allow participants to return to the research team directly. Four hundred and thirty seven valid responses were obtained from 1000 prospective participants, a response rate of around 43.7%. The respondents were 64.5% female and 35.5% male. The average age was 30 with tenure of around 4 years. This was in line with the demographic profile of the organizations.

Measures

Turnover intentions were measured using Farh, Tsui, Xin and Cheung's (1998) 4-item scale. The α coefficient for this scale was 0.909. The three component organizational commitment scale of Meyer et al. (1993) was adopted. Two 6-item scales were used to measure affective and continuance commitment. After deleting items that did not load onto the two requisite factors, two 4-item measures of affective and continuance commitment were constructed for the final analysis. The α coefficients of these were 0.879 and 0.843 respectively.

Five training-related variables were utilised. A 5-item scale was developed to measure perceived availability of training. Items included: 'My organization provides a good environment for new recruits to learn job-specific skills and knowledge' and 'My organization provides assistance for its employees to take management training and development courses'. The suitability of this scale was tested through exploratory factor analysis on a separate data-set. The α coefficient for this scale was 0.928. Motivation to learn was measured using three items taken from Noe and Schmitt's (1986) study. The α coefficient for this scale was 0.870. Perceived co-worker support for training and perceived supervisor support for training were measured by 17 items taken from Noe and Wilk (1993). After conducting factor analysis, we deleted two items that did not load. This left us with a two-item scale to measure perceived co-worker support for training and a 13-item scale to measure perceived supervisor support for training. The α coefficients for the two scales were 0.833 and 0.951. Perceived benefits of training were measured by seven items taken from Noe and Wilk (1993). The α coefficient for this scale was 0.936. All responses were measured on a 5-point likert scale.

Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the scales. As suggested by Churchill (1979) items that did not load well onto their corresponding constructs were dropped from further consideration. The final question items used in the analysis and their cross loadings and reliability estimates are shown in Table 2. As can be seen, the composite reliability estimates range from 0.833 to 0.951, all of which are >0.7 , the threshold commonly used for reliability (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Table 3 shows the latent variable correlations with the diagonal elements being the square root of the average

Table 2. Cross loadings and composite reliability.

	<i>Turnover intentions</i>	<i>Affective commitment</i>	<i>Continuance commitment</i>	<i>Perceived availability of training</i>	<i>Perceived co-worker support for training</i>	<i>Perceived supervisor support for training</i>	<i>Perceived benefits of training</i>	<i>Motivation to learn</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>
I often think of quitting my present job	0.866	−0.556	−0.186	−0.395	−0.272	−0.475	−0.213	−0.279	0.909
I may leave this company and work for another company in the next year	0.872	−0.550	−0.260	−0.456	−0.243	−0.518	−0.211	−0.316	
I plan to stay in this company to develop my career for a long time	0.804	−0.539	−0.184	−0.356	−0.240	−0.478	−0.254	−0.305	
I may not have a good future if I stay with this organization	0.840	−0.601	−0.145	−0.474	−0.314	−0.555	−0.302	−0.342	
I really feel that this organization's problems are my own	−0.410	0.592	0.087	0.329	0.149	0.455	0.295	0.408	0.879
I do not feel like 'part of the family' at this organization	−0.595	0.864	0.175	0.438	0.394	0.492	0.266	0.326	
I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization	−0.548	0.882	0.162	0.387	0.362	0.445	0.284	0.335	
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization	−0.569	0.849	0.168	0.416	0.305	0.465	0.266	0.313	
Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decide wanted to leave my organization now	−0.194	0.157	0.673	0.198	−0.004	0.144	0.036	0.093	0.843
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization	−0.216	0.199	0.783	0.219	−0.011	0.112	0.102	0.094	
One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives	−0.158	0.104	0.812	0.196	−0.154	0.046	−0.073	−0.014	
If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere	−0.128	0.113	0.757	0.211	−0.154	0.087	−0.097	0.032	
My organization provides its employees with good opportunities to undertake in-house job-specific training	−0.405	0.394	0.222	0.870	0.179	0.469	0.185	0.412	0.928

My organization provides a good environment for new recruits to learn job-specific skills and knowledge	−0.483	0.473	0.233	0.884	0.237	0.515	0.174	0.416	
My organization provides its employees with good opportunities to learn general skills and knowledge inside the organization, which may be of use to me in my future career	−0.445	0.450	0.208	0.861	0.236	0.508	0.207	0.453	
My organization provides its employees with good opportunities to undertake general training programmes and seminars outside of the organization	−0.406	0.395	0.262	0.834	0.106	0.438	0.109	0.371	
My organization provides assistance for its employees to take management training and development courses externally at educational institutions	−0.366	0.359	0.232	0.795	0.055	0.406	0.102	0.369	
My co-workers resist my efforts to apply new knowledge or skills on the job	−0.225	0.271	−0.066	0.148	0.795	0.222	0.289	0.228	0.833
My co-workers are reluctant to give advice	−0.306	0.375	−0.115	0.183	0.903	0.290	0.230	0.230	
I am comfortable discussing my skill weaknesses with my manager	−0.443	0.459	0.048	0.377	0.253	0.750	0.428	0.416	0.951
My manager shares information (problems, trends) influencing career plans	−0.413	0.430	0.115	0.403	0.174	0.780	0.302	0.378	
My manager supports my participation in training and development programmes	−0.473	0.443	0.133	0.414	0.284	0.797	0.342	0.379	
My manager gives me coaching and guidance to help achieve my work objectives	−0.494	0.498	0.077	0.438	0.234	0.862	0.341	0.411	
My manager believes advising and training as one of his/her major job responsibilities	−0.452	0.437	0.079	0.424	0.211	0.794	0.279	0.373	
I do not hesitate to tell my manager of a training need	−0.414	0.350	0.039	0.383	0.219	0.610	0.253	0.395	

Table 2 – *continued*

	<i>Turnover intentions</i>	<i>Affective commitment</i>	<i>Continuance commitment</i>	<i>Perceived availability of training</i>	<i>Perceived co-worker support for training</i>	<i>Perceived supervisor support for training</i>	<i>Perceived benefits of training</i>	<i>Motivation to learn</i>	<i>Composite reliability</i>
My manager makes sure I get the training and development needed for job effectiveness	–0.545	0.482	0.166	0.544	0.195	0.772	0.260	0.371	
My manager provides me with specific feedback on my job performance	–0.485	0.473	0.137	0.433	0.226	0.840	0.325	0.343	
My co-workers help me to develop the skills I have learned in training and development	–0.399	0.387	0.038	0.384	0.266	0.663	0.280	0.363	
My manager helps me to develop the skills I have learned in training and development	–0.520	0.477	0.141	0.489	0.264	0.840	0.326	0.395	
My manager is supportive of my efforts to acquire new skills and knowledge	–0.438	0.423	0.089	0.377	0.280	0.784	0.437	0.377	
My manager is willing to discuss problems I have in using new skills and knowledge	–0.454	0.420	0.039	0.418	0.252	0.825	0.372	0.396	
My manager assigns projects using skills and knowledge from training and development	–0.487	0.475	0.126	0.452	0.230	0.715	0.454	0.502	
Participating in training programmes will help my personal development	–0.179	0.192	–0.039	0.055	0.288	0.323	0.816	0.356	0.936
Participating in training programmes will help me network with other employees	–0.146	0.203	–0.034	0.114	0.244	0.277	0.763	0.347	
Participating in training programmes will help me perform my job better	–0.248	0.293	–0.002	0.136	0.282	0.366	0.892	0.422	
Participating in training programmes will help me stay up to date on new processes and products or procedures related to my job	–0.208	0.281	–0.027	0.079	0.277	0.332	0.854	0.396	
Participating in training programmes will help me reach my career objective	–0.320	0.355	–0.036	0.228	0.257	0.419	0.869	0.450	

Participating in training programmes will give me a better idea of the career path I want to pursue	−0.293	0.349	0.025	0.187	0.237	0.411	0.861	0.430	
Participating in training programmes will result in more opportunities to pursue different career paths	−0.191	0.204	0.024	0.203	0.124	0.335	0.683	0.293	
I try to learn as much as I can from training programmes	−0.208	0.218	−0.043	0.254	0.271	0.350	0.409	0.718	0.870
I believe I tend to learn more from training programmes than others	−0.256	0.313	0.045	0.361	0.146	0.399	0.359	0.848	
I am usually motivated to learn skills emphasised in training programmes	−0.404	0.461	0.113	0.513	0.257	0.493	0.434	0.923	

Table 3. AVE and correlations of latent constructs.

	<i>Affective commitment</i>	<i>Continuance commitment</i>	<i>Perceived co-worker support for training</i>	<i>Perceived benefits of training</i>	<i>Motivation to learn</i>	<i>Perceived supervisor support for Training</i>	<i>Perceived availability of training</i>	<i>Turnover intentions</i>
AC	(0.806)							
CC	0.188*	(0.758)						
PCWST	0.387*	−0.110	(0.850)					
PBT	0.342*	−0.013	0.296*	(0.823)				
ML	0.422*	0.065	0.267*	0.477*	(0.834)			
PSST	0.575*	0.126	0.305*	0.438*	0.506*	(0.775)		
PAT	0.490*	0.272*	0.196*	0.185*	0.477*	0.552*	(0.849)	
TI	−0.665	−0.228	−0.317	−0.291	−0.368	−0.600	−0.499	(0.846)

Note: *Indicates significance at the 1% level.
Numbers in parentheses are the Cronbach's alphas.

variance extracted (AVE). As shown, the AVE of each construct exceeds 0.5, the benchmark for convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The square root of the AVE of each variable is greater than the correlations between the variable and other variables in the model, suggesting adequate discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Discriminant validity is further established by verifying that all items load more highly on their corresponding factors than other factors (Gefen, Straub and Boudreau 2000), see Table 2. Overall, the measurements show satisfactory reliability and validity.

Structured equation modelling using LISREL 8.80 was adopted as the tool for analysis. It allows the simultaneous estimation of multiple interrelated dependence relationships and so is suitable for developing empirical models. The results are shown in Figure 2.

Overall, our model shows satisfactory explanatory power for affective commitment and turnover intentions. These account for 57 and 62% of the variance, respectively. However, the model explains only 10% of the variance in continuance commitment. Apart from Hypotheses H2, H3b, H5a and H5b, all hypothesised relationships are supported.

As there is no consensus on the appropriate method of determining overall goodness-of-fit, a number of measures were calculated to assess this. Five measures were utilised to determine the absolute fit of the model; the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted GFI (AGFI), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the chi-square goodness-of-fit test (χ^2) and the ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom (χ^2/df). Three measures

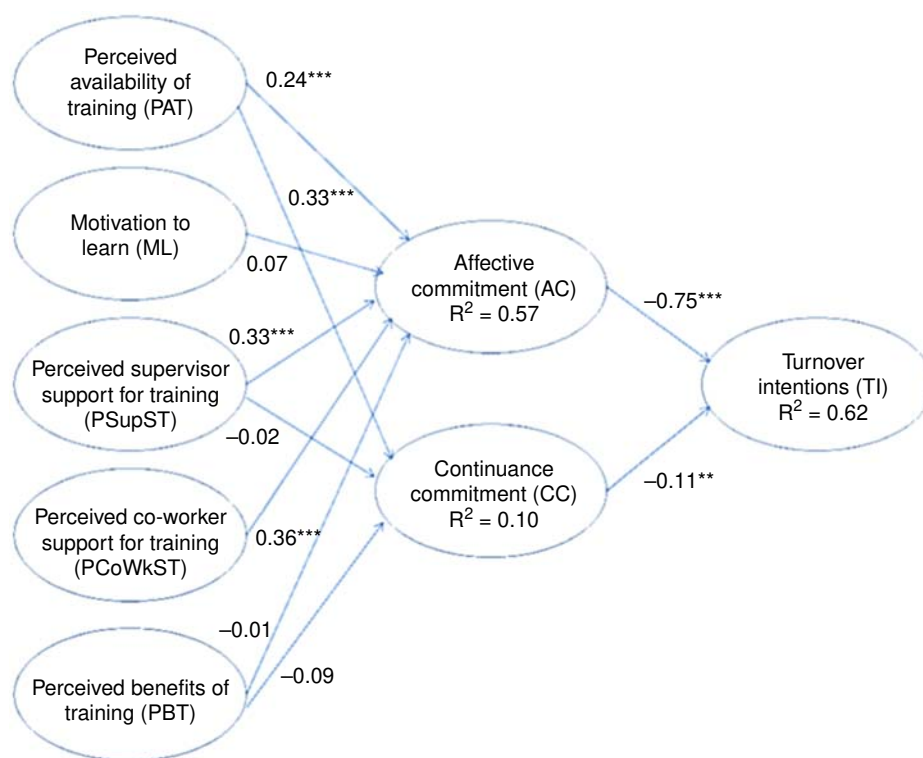


Figure 2. LISREL results. Notes: ** $p < 0.1$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Model fit statistics.

Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.80
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI)	0.77
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.066
χ^2	2139.30
χ^2/df	2.68
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.97
Non-normed fit index (NNFI)	0.97
Incremental fit index (IFI)	0.97
Akaike's information criterion (AIC)	2504.21

were utilised to determine the incremental fit of the model; the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI).

We provide the model fit statistics in Table 4. The GFI and the AGFI are both close to 0.8, the commonly suggested benchmark, indicating a marginal fit to our model. The other model fit statistics, however, look more promising. The RMSEA is < 0.08 , indicating an adequate model fit (Browne and Cudeck 1993). The CFI, NNFI and IFI are all > 0.90 , a common cut-off for goodness of fit. Collectively, these fit index values suggest that our model fits the data more weakly than we would like.

To improve the model fit, we removed all insignificant relationships from the model. The test results for the new model are shown in Figure 3. The model fit statistics are shown in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, the removal of the insignificant paths improved the GFI and AGFI statistics, without hurting the other model fit statistics significantly. Furthermore, the Akaike's information criterion (AIC) for the final model is 1490.41 that is smaller than the AIC for the initial model, which is 2504.21. Therefore, this model is preferred as it explains the data with fewer parameters (Burnham and Anderson 1998). Table 6 provides a summary of our results. A number of competing models were also tested, but none provided a better fit than the model shown in Figure 3.

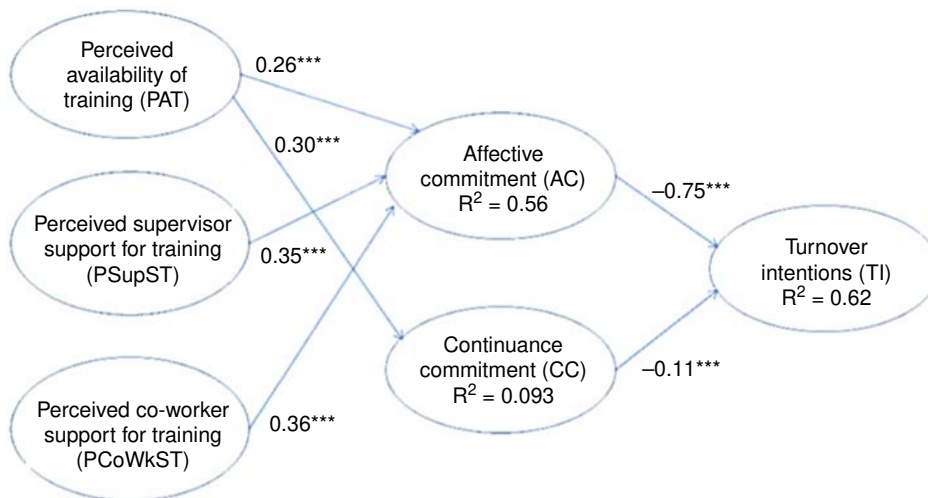


Figure 3. LISREL results for the final model. Notes: ** $p < 0.1$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Model fit statistics for the final model.

Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.84
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI)	0.81
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.067
χ^2	1318.81
χ^2/df	2.90
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.97
Non-normed fit index (NNFI)	0.97
Incremental fit index (IFI)	0.97
Akaike's information criterion (AIC)	1490.41

Table 6. Summary of the results.

H1a: There is a positive relationship between the perceived availability of training and affective commitment	Supported
H1b: There is a positive relationship between the perceived availability of training and continuance commitment	Supported
H2: There is a positive relationship between motivation to learn and affective commitment	Not supported
H3a: There is a positive relationship between perceived supervisor support for training and affective commitment	Supported
H3b: There is a positive relationship between perceived supervisor support for training and continuance commitment	Not supported
H4: There is a positive relationship between perceived co-worker support for training and affective commitment	Supported
H5a: There is a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of training and affective commitment	Not supported
H5b: There is a positive relationship between the perceived benefits of training and continuance commitment	Not supported
H6a: There is a negative relationship between affective commitment and turnover intentions	Supported
H6b: There is a negative relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions	Supported

Results and discussion

To a certain extent, our results support the contentions of social exchange theory (Rousseau 1995). They confirm existing findings by demonstrating a strong relationship of three variables to affective commitment: the perceived availability of training, supervisor support for training and co-worker support for training. This is in line with the results of previous empirical work in a non-Western context (Bartlett 2001, Ahmad and Bakar 2003). Our results suggest that both the supervisor and co-workers are extremely important in supporting employee training participation in China and the subsequent application of skills learnt. Previous literature indicates that this may result from the nature of Chinese culture that places high importance on the values in hierarchies and personal relationships rather than on the system itself (Redding 1990; Wang 2008). In such a society, employee loyalty is more likely to be based on gratitude for individualised support from a supervisor above any perceived personal role obligations they may have (Chen et al. 2002).

In line with existing work, we found a much weaker relationship between perceptions of training and continuance commitment (Bartlett 2001, Ahmad and Bakar 2003). A significant relationship was found between a single variable, perceived availability of training and continuance commitment. This suggests that employees who have positive views of the

training availability in their organization will be more inclined to stay with the organization for fear of losing the training opportunities that leaving the organization may incur.

Contrary to expectations, we found no relationship between motivation to learn and the perceived benefits of training, and both types of commitment. This contradicts findings from other countries (Bartlett 2001; Ahmad and Bakar 2003; Al-Emadi and Marquardt 2007). The lack of a relationship between motivation to learn and organizational commitment could result from a number of factors. First, an employee's motivation to learn might not actually lead to greater participation in training activities. This has been shown to lead to greater affective commitment (Bartlett 2001). In most multinationals operating in China, training is not voluntary. It is the organization or supervisor who decides on who will participate. In addition, there are limited options to engage in external training due to the limited provision of management education in China (Gamble 2003; Gamble and Huang 2006). Second, although employees might be motivated to learn, their inability to apply learnt skills might explain the lack of an observable relationship with organizational commitment (Benson, Debroux, Yuasa and Zhu 2000). This may result from the inadequate nature of the training offered that might not have been adapted to the Chinese context. Previous research highlights the difficulties faced by multinationals in designing HRM programmes for China because of the cultural differences (Gamble 2003; Gamble and Huang 2006). Third, the limited career development opportunities in China and the existence of a 'glass ceiling' for local employees may also explain our findings. Previous work has suggested that perceptions of training might only be related to commitment when training is tied to career development (Meyer and Smith 2000).

Similar to motivation to learn, we find no evidence of a relationship between the perceived benefits of training and organizational commitment. First, employee perceptions of the benefits of training might not lead to greater training participation. As for motivation to learn, this may be a result of the compulsory nature of many training programmes in China. Second, although employees who perceive benefits from participating in training may be more motivated to participate, this may not increase their commitment if they are unable to gain promotion or apply learnt skills.

Our findings are consistent with the results of previous studies in China (Chen and Francesco 2000; Cheng and Stockdale 2003), confirming that organizational commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions, with affective commitment having a stronger impact as opposed to continuance commitment.

Our findings have important managerial implications. They provide indicative guidance to multinational companies wishing to enhance the organizational commitment of Chinese employees. First, the weak relationship between employee perceptions of training and continuance commitment indicates that in China, provision for training should not be used to enhance continuance commitment. To achieve this, multinationals should consider improving salary and fringe benefit packages. Previous research demonstrates that these extrinsic factors might play a greater role in promoting continuance commitment than training provision (Malhotra et al. 2007).

Second, our research confirms a strong relationship between the perceived availability of training and organizational commitment. This is consistent with social exchange theory (Settoon et al. 1996). Our findings underline the importance for organizations in China to improve employee perceptions of training and associated development opportunities and so meet their employees' expectations in these two areas of organizational development (Bartlett 2001; Ahmad and Bakar 2003). The organization might do this by publicising training opportunities more widely and providing assistance to managers to explain the availability of training opportunities to their subordinates.

Third, our research indicates that both perceived supervisor support and co-worker support are important to the development and maintenance of affective commitment. This has useful implications for multinationals designing training and development programmes for Chinese employees. The importance to commitment of creating an environment in which participation in training activities is strongly encouraged by supervisors and co-workers needs to be recognised.

Fourth, our findings suggest that limited benefits accrue from attempting to improve the motivation to learn of employees or promoting awareness of the benefits obtained from training participation. No link is evident between these variables and both types of commitment. Multinationals may be better advised to focus on improving the transferability of skills learnt in training to the Chinese workplace and encouraging social support for training in the workplace. Employers could also place more emphasis on developing greater ties between training and career development. Our results suggest that there is a weak link between these in China. Multinationals might also make participation in training voluntary. This might actually lead to greater affective commitment than is the case with compulsory training.

Fifth, our findings reveal that both types of commitment are negatively related to turnover intentions, and that affective commitment has a stronger impact than continuance commitment. From a practical point of view, employers might encourage employees to consider the organization as a family/in-group (Chen and Francesco 2000) for which they might be more willing to exert effort. This might then be manifested in a greater intention to stay. Multinationals should, therefore, consider how to get their employees to strongly identify with their organizational goals, missions and values.

Limitations of existing research

The findings of this research should be interpreted by recognising its limitations. First, the results are only generalisable to similar populations in China, i.e. employees of multinationals operating in the service sector. Existing research has shown that the organizational commitment of Chinese employees differs considerably between different ownership types and industrial sectors (Wang 2004). Further research is needed across different geographical settings and across different industries before these results can be generalised (Schuler, Dowling and De Cieri 1993). Additionally, future research would also be useful on the impact of organizational commitment on other key outcome variables both in China and in other Asian countries.

Second, our research suggests a strong moderating influence from cultural variables on the relationship between perceptions of training and commitment. Recent commitment research has begun to examine this with factors such as traditionality, collectivism and power distance (Francesco and Chen 2004; Chen and Aryee 2007). Future research may address the moderating effects of such variables on the training/commitment relationship.

Third, the fact that our findings are drawn from cross-sectional data obtained by self-completed survey questionnaires means we cannot draw hard conclusions about the direction of causality. Although our findings are consistent with the hypotheses based on the existing literature, we cannot rule out the possibility that causality operates in a direction opposite to what we suppose, i.e. more committed employees will evaluate the training provided by the organization more positively. In order to resolve such issues, future longitudinal research seems in order.

Fourth, one should remember that as all variables were assessed using self-report measures in a single questionnaire, the possibility of common method bias is increased.

We believe that this effect had a minor influence. Although it is difficult to establish the extent to which this problem existed in the present study, there was considerable variation between the perceptions of training variables and their correlation with organizational outcomes. This increases our confidence that the respondents were answering discriminately and accurately. To eliminate such common method bias, objective measures such as data on actual turnover behaviour might be included in future research.

Conclusion

In this study of multinationals in the Chinese service sector, we sought to understand the relationship between perceptions of training and organizational commitment, and the latter's relationship with turnover intentions.

A strong positive relationship was established between three variables: perceived availability of training, supervisor support for training and co-worker support for training, and affective organizational commitment. Only perceived availability of training was found to be significantly related to continuance commitment. Our findings also confirm a strong inverse relationship between both components of organizational commitment and employee turnover intentions.

It must be concluded that when applying HRM theories developed in the West to China, the differences in culture need to be taken into account. The findings of our research differ from studies conducted in other cultural contexts. They have significant managerial implications for multinationals operating in China. The need to account for culture in training design and implementation is evident.

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