



Paper

Outcomes from employer-sponsored career development

Review of the Literature

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Introduction

Employers are being urged to support the life-long career development of their employees. Which has raised the question of what, if anything, beyond reputational advantages of being a 'good' employer can employers hope to gain? IES evaluations of employer-sponsored career development programmes have often found individuals reporting improved career thinking, self-confidence and more clarity about concrete actions they can take. However, occasionally we also find evidence of wider outcomes that positively impact the organisation, such as improved job satisfaction, burnout, and retention.

This paper explores the links between career support and wider outcomes, to understand how one leads to the other. So that employers can design future career development programmes, or tweak their existing ones, to maximise their full potential. The literature review is one element of a wider piece of work which IES was commissioned to conduct for NHS England, and we acknowledge their kind permission to share findings with other employers through the IES HR Network.

Careers have changed over the last several decades. Gone are the days of a 'job for life', as environmental, political and organisational structure have facilitated more fluid and 'boundaryless' careers across multiple organisations. The shift in structure of careers has influenced the way in which employees and employers conceptualise the responsibility of career management (Arthur and Rousseau, 2001). Previously, organisations would be expected to take the leading role in supporting, managing and enabling their employees career development. The support employers can provide is wide ranging and can encompass informal and formal practices. Formal practices are organisationally embedded and form a central part of the career strategy, this could include coaching or mentoring programmes, training and development, providing careers education and guidance or offering job rotation and secondments. Whereas informal approaches are not institutionally embedded and tend to be relationship based, such as receiving advice and guidance from a peer or superior, networking internally and externally to the organisation and receiving ad-hoc mentoring. Regardless of the type of support, the primary aim of these practices is to improve workers knowledge, skills, abilities and perspectives in relation to their professional growth.

COVID-19 appears to have accelerated the shift away from a 'job for life', with nearly two-fifths of UK workers not expecting to be in the same career by 2030 (FutureLearn, 2022). The changes in employment relationships have seemed to shift the responsibility for managing careers away from the employer and towards the individual. This has altered the relationship between employer and worker, where the expectations of the other party have changed (Hall, 2002). The unwritten expectations in an employer-employee relationship are defined within the 'psychological contract'. Like a traditional employment contract, the psychological contract defines the unwritten beliefs and obligations that exist between employer and employee. These expectations influence how both parties behave

toward one another, with any 'breaches' in these expectations resulting in less positive behaviours and outcomes for both sides (Topa, Aranda-Carmena and De-Maria, 2022). Employee expectations of career support from their employer can form part of the psychological contract, and its absence could be perceived as a 'breach'.

It appears, however, that employers may be hesitant about offering career support, in fear that it makes workers more 'marketable' and therefore is likely to increase employee turnover (Tulgan, 2015). There may be evidence to support this theory, with some research suggesting that a career development offer can heighten an employee's perceived sense of employability, both internally and externally (Zhang, Deng, Xia, & Lan, 2021). Other research has shown that employer sponsored career development activities are related to perceived external employability, which in turn is negatively related to organisational commitment (Rodrigues, Butler, and Guest, 2020). Therefore, investing financially in career development could be considered unnecessarily risky in terms of potential negative outcomes for an employer. However, this perspective does not consider the effect of the absence of employer career support on the psychological contract, and how this may bring about detrimental outcomes for employers. In a time of labour shortages and high levels of job vacancies, organisations are struggling to attract and retain talent, particularly compared to before the pandemic (IES, 2023), and therefore organisations are looking for ways to retain and attract talent.

This literature review aims to explore the links between career support and wider outcomes, to understand how one leads to the other. Understanding the relationship between the input and outcomes will allow organisations to consider changes to their programmes that could maximise the potential for positive outcomes. To support employers to maximise the effectiveness of their career development offers, the literature review aims to answer the following research questions:

- What outcomes are associated with organisational career management?
- What are the underlying mechanisms by which these outcomes occur?

Methodology

Method

To answer these research questions a rapid evidence review was undertaken during Summer 2023. This is a pragmatic approach that identifies the critical and most relevant literature on a subject area to provide a broad picture of the research landscape. It is not a systematic approach that captures all the literature pertaining to a topic. The approach consisted of searching, screening and extracting data relevant to the research questions.

Search terms were identified at the outset that would capture the appropriate literature. Examples include, 'organisational career development', 'organisational support' 'outcomes' and 'mediators'. Parameters were also used to increase the relevance of the literature, such as literature from the past 10 years, studies from western cultures and peer-reviewed academic journals. However, the terms and parameters were refined as the search was conducted to ensure that sufficient literature was captured. The search was limited to evidence which is readily accessible online. Google Scholar was prioritised as, in our experience, it is an excellent meta-trawler of published studies. We complemented this with searches from a limited number of useful/relevant sources selected to cover the main areas in research relevant to career development. All papers that seemed relevant to the research questions were downloaded for screening. In total, 30 papers were identified for screening.

The 30 articles were screened for relevance to the research questions to develop a final shortlist of literature to include in the review. This involved reading the full text and extracting data to assess its relevance to the review. The shortlisting criteria included ensuring the paper focused on employer-sponsored career support, that outcomes and/or mediating variables were explored and the contextual relevance to UK employers. Upon the first review, rejecting articles based on their contextual relevance proved to significantly limit the evidence base. Many of the studies were conducted in non-western countries and not in healthcare settings, and it was subsequently decided to include the highest quality papers in the shortlist. In total, 12 papers were included in the final shortlist.

Data extraction was carried out on the shortlisted articles. This consisted of transferring the core data from the paper, such as methodology, sample, outcomes explored and practical applications. This data was analysed and synthesised to draw out key themes, inconsistencies in the data and potential implications.

Research scope and definitions

The scope of the research is to understand the specific outcomes associated with careers interventions targeted at working populations. There are many different types of career interventions that can be investigated, and that can be categorised in different ways.

Firstly, they can be thought of in terms of organisational or self-directed. Organisational directed support is led and facilitated by the organisation, these could be things like educational workshops, mentoring, coaching, job shadowing or career discussion. Self-directed, or individual, support is led by the individual and could take the form of networking, seeking career guidance or upskilling oneself. In this review, we are concerned with organisational/employer-led support. However, it must be noted that the research discussed in this review does not single out the isolated outcomes associated with one development e.g. career guidance, mentoring or coaching – the literature considers organisational career support.

Practices can also be considered formal or informal. Formal practices are structured support that tends to be embedded in organisational policy, such as personal development programmes or mentoring schemes. Informal help is not structured, is ad hoc and tends to happen between individuals, such as seeking career advice from a peer or networking to develop personal relationships. This review focuses on formal career support, as the LAY Career coaching scheme is an employer-sponsored programme embedded in a wider strategy.

There are lots of different terms used in the literature to describe organisational directed career support, such as organisational career development, employer-sponsored career development and organisational career management. They all, however, refer to the same concept, so they are comparable in nature. The review uses the terminology as it is in each of the research papers.

Research Findings

The findings of this literature review address the two research questions:

- what outcomes are associated with organisational career management?
- and by what mechanisms do these outcomes occur?

The two questions are inextricably interlinked, and therefore the presentation of the evidence in this review will address the two questions simultaneously, rather than reporting them sequentially.

To describe the mechanism by which outcomes occur, the literature uses the term 'mediating' variable. A mediating variable is an additional variable that makes up a causal pathway and tells you why or how an outcome occurs. So, X leads to Y, because of the presence of Z. Understanding the mediating variables within a relationship provides an understanding of the levers that can be utilised to influence desired outcomes. The following chapter discusses both outcomes associated with organisational career development and mediators of the relationship. The headings in this chapter relate to the mediators reported in the literature. The outcomes associated with each mediator are discussed within each section.

Career self-management behaviours

Multiple studies have found that organisational career development (OCD) is associated with an increased sense of career success or satisfaction. Australian-based research (Renee Barnett & Bradley, 2007) drew on a small sample of 90 participants from both the public and private sectors, and investigated the relationship between OCD and career satisfaction, exploring career self-management behaviours as a mediating variable. Self-management activities include actions around planning, exploration, networking, skill development, seeking social support and job searching. It was found that OCD was positively related to career satisfaction, meaning that employers who invested in providing career support were more likely to have workers who were satisfied with their careers. Interestingly, there was no support for the hypothesis that career management behaviours mediated the relationship between OCD and career satisfaction, so career self-management because of career support did not appear to lead to increased satisfaction. This research suggests that although employer support for careers does positively influence career satisfaction, there are factors other than self-management that are driving this relationship.

However, subsequent research has provided evidence to the contrary, suggesting that career planning and management do play an important role in increasing levels of career success following support from the organisation. The research took place in a Jordanian healthcare setting and explored the idea of joint responsibility for careers and career

success, with an underpinning ideology that workers cannot translate their goals and interests into action if they face insurmountable barriers by the organisation (Aburumman, Omar & Barhem, 2023). The authors wanted to understand some of the outcomes associated with workers and employers taking joint responsibility for career development, so they investigated the influence on career success – both objective and subjective. The results showed that higher levels of joint responsibility were related to higher levels of subjective, but not objective, career success. Objective success was measured in terms of pay and job role progression, however, it is noted that perceived success with one's career is influenced by a variety of different factors, not just seniority or pay. Subjective success is considered a better measure of the importance that a worker places on their own career progression and alignment to personal goals. The mediation analysis demonstrated that career management and career planning was the mechanism that led to perceived career success. That is, higher levels of joint responsibility for careers lead to increased planning and management behaviours by the worker and subsequently improved perceived career success. The findings indicate that joint responsibility for careers can lead to positive outcomes for the individual. However, to get maximum benefit, workers must also actively be involved in their own career planning and management.

A Belgian study (De Vos, Dewettinck & Buyens, 2009) took place in 6 large organisations from a variety of sectors, including healthcare, with a sample of nearly 500 employees. The research aimed to explore the interaction between organisational career management, self-career management and the effect on employee outcomes. The outcomes of interest were organisational commitment, subjective career success and career progress. They also explored if career-self management led to an increase in expectations about organisational career management. The findings showed that workers who engage in more activities to manage their own career, in turn, expect more career management from their employers. This reinforces the message from previous research that career development is a joint responsibility between worker and employer, and upsetting this balance may lead to negative consequences. Further, organisational career management was associated with affective organisational commitment and subjective career success. Providing more evidence that organisational career support can lead to positive organisational and individual outcomes. Notably, the positive outcomes of affective commitment and perceived career success because of organisational career management only occur if the worker also engages in self-management behaviours. This implies that the individual must commit to managing their career for the beneficial outcomes to occur.

Psychological contract fulfilment

A seminal paper authored by Sturges, Conway, Guest and Liefoghe (2005) investigated career management activities, the psychological contract and the outcomes associated with psychological contract fulfilment, such as job performance, absence, and voluntary turnover. They explored both individual and organisational career management activities, but for relevance to this review, the outcomes of organisational activities are reported only. The research is underpinned by a theory of reciprocation, from social exchange

theory (Blau, 1964). Reciprocations can take many forms, if the commodities exchanges are of value to either party. For example, an employer provides career support, and in reciprocation to this, the worker gives high levels of productivity. The present research sought to understand if reciprocation operates through psychological contract fulfilment. A psychological contract is the implicit 'deal' that develops between worker and employer, which are the beliefs about the mutual obligations that exist in the relationship. These unwritten obligations form the basis for behaviours within the relationship, and any deviation from the 'expected' behaviours can result in psychological contract violation, which can result in negative outcomes for both parties. Psychological contracts can be 'fulfilled' when both parties fulfil their 'obligations' and behave in the desired way. Fulfilment is associated with positive outcomes for both parties. The first finding from the research is that informal organisational career management is associated with psychological contract fulfilment, signifying that workers experience a positive psychological state because of organisations providing career support. Secondly, organisational career management is linked with affective commitment and job performance. However, no link was found for continuance commitment, turnover or absence, and interestingly formal help was not linked to any of these variables. Thirdly, psychological contract fulfilment mediated the relationship between informal career management and affective commitment and job performance, meaning that these outcomes occur because career management has led to psychological contract fulfilment, which in turn, leads to positive outcomes.

Perceived organisational career management

A study of Chinese workers, in a variety of different industries and job roles, found that perceived organisational career management was positively related to subjective career success. Perceived organisational career management was measured by the extent to which workers think that they have access to a variety of quality career management activities, such as succession planning, career ladders and paths, job posting, and individual counselling. Subjective career success was measured by the worker's assessment, rather than by objective markers, such as salary or seniority. The results reinforced the evidence provided in the previous studies, that the greater the perceived access that workers had to organisational career management, the more successful they perceived their careers. Further, perceived organisational career management was negatively related to turnover intention, meaning that higher levels of perceived career support led to lower intention to leave the organisation. Therefore, this paper demonstrates not only the positive outcomes that organisational career support can have on the individual but also how the positive personal impact can lead to beneficial outcomes for the organisation. This paper also explains the findings using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The authors suggest, in this case, an organisation 'gives' workers career management support, which leads to them feeling higher levels of career success. They are then motivated to reciprocate something equally beneficial to the organisation, with lower levels of intent to leave. This relationship operates partly via perceived career success, signifying that other factors also influence the relationship (Y Guan, W Zhou, L Ye, P Jiang, Y Zhou, 2015).

Perceived organisational support

A meta-analysis is a robust analytical approach that draws upon all the available literature in one research area. It provides a comprehensive view of the state of the evidence and gives confidence in the resulting findings. A recent meta-analysis (Ng, Yim, Chen and Zou, 2022) reviewed 1113 articles, covering a sample of 589,274. The research looked at the influence of organisational career development, including but not limited to activities such as training, mentoring programmes, career workshops and coaching by peers supervisors managers, on a range of employee outcomes; perceived organisational support (POS), organisational attachment (OA), task performance, organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB), counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intention. They were trying to provide evidence contrary to the ‘developmental paradox’, the perceived phenomenon that investing in organisational career development makes workers more marketable and therefore presents a risk for an organisation. This is a common worry for employers, especially when investing in career activities most likely represents a financial component, such as the time or direct costs associated with activities.

The research is underpinned by a theoretical position called ‘organisational support theory’, where the belief is that workers evaluate actions from their employer based on their supportiveness, which leads to increased feelings of ‘perceived organisational support’. These perceptions are likely to motivate workers to ‘reciprocate’ in kind, demonstrated by positive behaviours and attitudes, such as commitment, job performance and lower intent to leave. As mentioned previously, reciprocated behaviours are anything that positively impacts the organisation. In simple terms, if a worker believes that organisational practices come from a place of support and care, workers are more likely to positively respond in ways that benefit the organisation. Perceived organisational support is the psychological basis for reciprocation. The study found that organisational career development was positively related to perceived organisational support, meaning that the greater the presence of organisational career development practices, the more likely a worker is to consider their employer as ‘supportive’. Interestingly, the availability of organisational career development was more strongly related to perceived organisational support, than the actual use of the services. This suggests that workers do not actually have to engage with the services to get the psychological benefit. Similarly, practices that were institutionally embedded, rather than line-manager-led, were more strongly related to perceived support. Finally, career-focused, rather than job-focused, practices were more strongly related to perceived support – so practices that do not just focus on upskilling workers for their job roles.

Perceived organisational support was found to play an important role in mediating other outcomes. Perceived organisational support was found to indirectly lead to beneficial outcomes via the mediating variable of organisational attachment. The more supportive workers believed their employers to be the more attached they became to the organisation. In turn, this support–attachment mechanism led to several positive employer outcomes; increased task performance and organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) and a reduction in counterproductive work behaviours and turnover intention. Therefore,

the authors conclude that the presence of organisational career development can improve organisational outcomes, via the process of perceived organisational support and increased attachment. The article highlights the importance of considering how practices are interpreted by workers to gain maximum benefit from the psychological process, employers should consider the marketing and positioning of organisational career development to reinforce their 'caring' and 'supportive' nature.

Line manager support and perceptions of internal employability

Research from Europe (Soares & Mosquera, 2021) investigated the effect of organisation career management on a range of outcomes; organisational commitment, turnover intentions and burnout, and they also explored the way by which these outcomes potentially materialise. Organisational commitment was broken into its component parts; affective, continuance and normative. These represent an emotional commitment, loyalty and a sense of responsibility that workers feel for their organisation respectively. These factors combined are considered to maximise workers' chances of staying at an organisation, but individually they each have unique positive outcomes. Interestingly they compared the source of the career support and found that organisational career support was not associated with a reduction in turnover intention, but supervisor career support was. This is slightly contradictory to the previous research included in this review, but it suggests that in some cases, the line-manager may play an important role in providing career support to their direct reports to influence turnover intentions. This could be explained by the idea that relationships with supervisors and colleagues are often cited as a major cause of dissatisfaction and turnover intent (Robbins & Judge, 2017). While this finding appears to be a minority in the literature, whereby 'organisational' sponsored career support typically does appear to be associated with a reduction in turnover intention. Supervisor career support was also associated with affective commitment and a reduction in burnout. The findings also showed that organisational career management was associated with all three levels of organisational commitment. This suggests that organisational-level career support, such as coaching interventions, may be more likely to influence commitment rather than turnover intentions. Perceptions of internal employability mediated the relationship between organisational and supervisor support and all outcomes, except continuance commitment (Soares & Mosquera, 2021). Perceptions of internal employability are the extent to which a worker believe in the possibility to find and/or maintain a position in the internal labour market. People evaluate their internal employability by considering the extent the organisation values their contribution and their job role. Therefore, the findings suggest that positive outcomes such as reduction in turnover intentions and organisational commitment are dependent on workers feeling as if they have high levels of internal employability.

Perceived career opportunities

Further research (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden & Bravo, 2011) explored the antecedents and behavioural outcomes associated with workers perceptions of

organisational support for development. They critically wanted to examine if any factors alter the relationships between inputs and outputs, in particular perceived career opportunities. Support for development was defined as either formal or informal activities that enable employees to develop their skills, confidence, capabilities or knowledge. Although this definition is slightly broader than some of the other studies included in this review, within the definition it encompasses career-related support. The theoretical underpinnings of the research are also very similar to many of the previous articles discussed in this review, using social exchange theory's idea of reciprocation, which therefore suggests that the findings can be appropriately applied to the more specific area of career development. Perceived career opportunity is the extent to which job tasks and job opportunities available within an organisation align with an individual's career interests and goals. The sample consisted of 290 US employees working within a manufacturing organisation. The first finding was that participation in development activities, such as training or career mentoring, was positively related to perceptions of perceived support for development. Therefore, the more workers engaged in developmental support, the more supported they felt by the organisation. However, the most interesting finding was about the role perceived career opportunity played in the antecedent and outcome relationship. Development support was positively related to job performance, but only when internal perceived career opportunity was high. Similarly, development support was associated with reduced voluntary turnover, but only when perceived career opportunity was high. Conversely, development support was associated with increased turnover when perceived career opportunity was low. These findings are very significant, as they highlight the importance of the internal job context of shaping the outcomes associated with development support. In relation to turnover, investing in development support without having the opportunities available internally could potentially present a risk to the organisation as it may inadvertently motivate turnover.

Job satisfaction

A final study from India (Jena & Nayak, 2023) uses 422 millennials in their sample investigating the relationship between organisational career development and worker retention. The study was specific to the IT sector, so the application of the findings may be more limited than other evidence in this review. The results showed that organisational career development was positively related to retention, whereby job satisfaction and organisational engagement mediated the relationship. This means that organisational career development led to increased job satisfaction and organisational engagement, which in turn influenced retention. This finding suggests that satisfaction with your current job role and your engagement with an organisation is important in motivating you to stay at an organisation. That is, if a worker is dissatisfied with their job or their organisation, high levels of organisational career development alone may not be enough to retain them. However, this research is specific to a particular demographic group and is not set in a Western context. Therefore, the applicability of the results is limited, particularly as no other research that investigated job satisfaction was identified.

Chapter summary

The research findings suggest that employer-sponsored career development activities support the development of a positive psychological relationship between employer and employee. The outcomes that are associated with organisation career interventions are:

- Perceived career success or satisfaction
- Organisational commitment – particularly the ‘emotional’ commitment to an organisation
- Perceived organisational support
- Turnover and intention to leave, albeit with mixed evidence. The literature suggested turnover may not be a direct outcome of career support, but as a results of improvement in psychological states.
- Job performance, and to a lesser extent job satisfaction. Although, similarly to turnover intention, this appears to be an indirect outcome.

The literature also shed light on the way in which the outcomes occur. The mediating variables that influence the outcomes associated with organisational career development are:

- Self-management career activities
- Perceived organisational support
- Perceived career opportunities
- Perceived internal employability
- The breadth of career development opportunities available

Discussion and Implications

This rapid evidence review summarised recent literature related to organisational career development activities. The evidence identified outcomes and mediators associated with organisation career development, both of which are important to understand when developing career support interventions. The following chapter summarises the literature findings and discusses the implications in relation to employer-funded career development initiatives.

Outcomes associated with organisational career development

The outcomes identified in the literature primarily measured individual-level attitudes. These in turn, however, can lead to positive results for an organisation. Several studies detected increased career satisfaction or perceived career success as an outcome of employer-sponsored career development. Interestingly, this outcome was only true of subjective career success, not objective career success. This suggests that how individuals assess their career satisfaction or success is different to external benchmarks of success, such as pay or level of seniority. A second outcome associated with organisational career development is increased levels of organisational attachment, which is an indication of how committed a worker is to their organisation. The finding suggests that the more career support that an employer provides, the more likely the employees are to feel a sense of 'attachment' to their employer.

There was conflicting evidence related to organisational career development and turnover intentions. Early work by Sturges, Conway, Guest and Liefvooghe (2005) did not find any relationship between organisational career development and turnover intentions. However, a more recent meta-analysis (Ng et al, 2022), looking at thousands of individual papers, did identify an indirect relationship between organisational career development and turnover. This means that the relationship was operating through a mediating variable. Interestingly, some research found that line-manager career support was directly associated with a reduction in turnover intentions. The authors suggested that this could be due to line manager quality often being cited as a 'push' factor that influences leaving intentions. From examining the literature, it appears that a reduction in turnover intention is not a common direct outcome associated with organisational career development. Instead, it seems that this relationship operates through mediating variables, whereby other factors are driving the changes in turnover intention.

The review also found evidence of job-related outcomes because of organisational career development, research found that organisational career management was linked to job performance, and to a lesser extent, job satisfaction. Job performance in the studies was

measured objectively by behavioural measures assessed at the annual appraisal. However, similarly to turnover intention, job performance outcomes appear to be an indirect outcome of organisational career development.

Mediating factors influencing organisational career development outcomes

Many of the studies included in this review adopt the paradigm of social exchange theory, taking the stance that an employer-employee relationship is underpinned by reciprocation. Behaviours are 'exchanged' based on a cost-reward analysis. A party will evaluate the benefit of the action bestowed on them and will reciprocate with a behaviour that they believe to be 'equal' in value to the one they received. In the context of career support, scholars are suggesting that workers who receive career development support from their organisation perceive it to be positive and beneficial to them, and therefore will reciprocate 'in kind'. Reciprocated behaviours can include the beneficial outcomes discussed above, such as increased job performance, higher levels of commitment and lower levels of intention to leave.

Overall, the evidence suggests that career self-management activities are a driver of positive outcomes following organisational career support. Individuals who engage in active career management and planning activities, alongside support from an organisation, were more likely to report higher levels of perceived career success and commitment to the organisation. Furthermore, individuals who engage in more career self-management and more likely to expect career support from their employer.

A critical psychological factor identified as a mediating variable is perceived organisational support (POS), this is the extent to which an employee feels their employer values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing a socioemotional needs (Eisenberger et al. 1986). POS is influenced by various factors, but in the context of careers, availability of support, the extent to which the offer is integrated into the organisational strategy, and a focus on career development (rather than job-specific development) were most strongly related to POS.

Another psychological factor is perceived organisational career management, which is the extent to which employees feel they have access to career management activities. This is an attitude that is fostered by the scope and quality of career development activities available to them. Another psychological mediator is perceived internal employability, which is the extent to which an employee believes they will find a job within their current organisation. This is evaluated by the degree to which they believe their employer values their job role and their unique contribution. If perceived employability is low, any career support provided is less likely to lead to positive outcomes such as reduced turnover and increased commitment.

The final contextual factor identified from the review is perceived internal career opportunity, the extent to which job tasks and job opportunities available within an organisation align with an individual's career interests and goals. Simply, it is the availability of desired job opportunities within the organisation. This factor moderated the

relationship between organisation career support and outcomes such as job performance and voluntary turnover. This means that the presence or absence of internal job opportunities changed the outcomes. Development support was positively related to improved job performance and reduced voluntary turnover, but only when internal career opportunity was high. Conversely, development support was associated with increased turnover when perceived career opportunity was low. This suggests that the opportunities available in the employing organisation can critically influence outcomes associated with career development support. This finding identifies the barrier that perceived career opportunity may play in realising positive outcomes

Implications for career development interventions

The literature provides an evidence base to support organisations to understand the conditions that facilitate effective organisational career development outcomes. The review has highlighted the factors unrelated to the design of the intervention, instead, it focuses on the psychological and contextual factors that influence outcomes during and after the intervention. Therefore, when an employer is considering their career development offer, and managing any risk associated with increased employability, it should think beyond the intervention itself. The research identifies that the employee experience in the workplace after a career development intervention is instrumental in realising beneficial outcomes. Consequently, it may be helpful for employers to expand their understanding of the timeline associated a career development support. The 'formal' element of the support is a first step (either as a one-off intervention or a series of activities), but 'informal' activities continue in the weeks and months that follow, often (but not exclusively) led by the individuals themselves. During this time when the individual is engaging with their own career development, their experience at work is fundamental in shaping the outcomes associated with the career intervention that ultimately impacts employer and employee.

The evidence suggests that alongside organisational career support, individuals should also engage in career self-management activities. The evidence has shown that career development is most effective when employers and employees consider themselves to be 'jointly responsible' for careers. If the balance is uneven, then outcomes are likely to be affected. Therefore, employees need to be actively encouraged and supported to engage in career self-management activities in addition to career support provided by the organisation. These activities could include networking, seeking advice or guidance, developing job-related skills or planning their next steps. While engaging in these behaviours and activities is ultimately the responsibility of the individual, employers can play a pivotal role in creating an encouraging and supportive environment for them to do so. This could be by providing opportunities to network within and outside of the organisation, allowing time in work to be dedicated to career development, offering training and development opportunities not limited by job role or signposting to relevant materials.

Organisations should consider how supportive their staff perceive them to be as an employer, particularly in relation to career development but also more generally. The

communication and advertisement of career development opportunities is a primary opportunity to demonstrate the supportive nature of the employer. When developing a career development strategy, employers should consider how the overall approach symbolises the motivations for such activities. For example, are employers truly trying to support their staff's career aspirations and developments? If so, to what extent is this symbolic purpose reflected in the positioning and communication of the offer. The literature offered three areas that organisations should try to incorporate into their career support narrative. Firstly, emphasise the availability of career help available – staff do not have to use the services to feel supported. Secondly, ensure communications reflect the 'kind' intent of the organisational offer, for example, that there are no obligations for staff who engage in the services. Finally, careers support should have a careers focus, not a job focus. A job focus, such as specific skill development, could be construed as development that provides the organisation a benefit. Whereas a pure careers focus is more employee-centric and less likely to be thought to have ulterior motives.

The availability of a wide range of quality organisational career support increases perceived support and overall positive outcomes. As mentioned previously, employees do not need to have engaged in the support to feel it is reflective of a supportive organisation. Therefore, organisations must communicate the extent of their offer widely. Furthermore, 'formal' career support that is organisationally embedded is more likely to elicit beneficial outcomes. This is believed to be because employees perceive it to be reflective of the caring nature of the organisational. Informal, relational support, such as mentoring is considered less likely to be reflective of the organisation's values. Therefore, employers should consider the formal, organisational structures they have in place to support employee careers.

However, this is not to say that line managers do not also play an integral role in career support. Some evidence suggests that line managers are particularly significant when it comes to reducing turnover intentions, reminiscent of the adage 'people leave line managers, not organisations'. Consequently, line managers should form also part of an organisation's career strategy, alongside formal institutional practices. Line managers can provide mentoring, advice-giving, internal job search support, and many other career enhancing practices. Employers should consider the role they want the line manager to play in career support, and ensure they have the skills to be able to do so effectively.

Employers should also pay attention to their employee's sense of perceived internal employability, particularly after someone has engaged in career development activities. The extent to which employees feel they are employable within the organisation, either within their current role or in a new one can be fostered in many ways. Each organisation will have a unique context, but employers should consider how staff are supported (organisationally and by line managers/peers) and communicating to staff how they and their specific contributions, are valued by the organisation. Other approaches could include internal networking, opportunities to increase visibility and providing regular feedback.

Linked to perceived internal employability, employers should give thought to the availability of internal job opportunities. After a careers intervention, individuals are likely to explore the opportunities available to them, and if something is not available internally, they may look elsewhere. Practically, all job opportunities should be widely advertised

internally, and ideally, current staff are prioritised for these positions. Employers should not make assumptions about the roles that 'fit' particular people based on their current jobs or a subjective assessment of their skills. Individuals may aspire or goals to more horizontally, or even reskill completely, and therefore would benefit from seeing the full range of opportunities within the organisation. Line managers should have insight into the career aspirations of their staff, so can signpost to relevant opportunities and plan developmental activities accordingly. Where permanent job moves are not currently possible, organisations could offer secondments, job shadowing and job goal specific development to prevent individuals leaving the organisation. However, caution must be exercised when supporting individuals to remain in the organisation if the appropriate opportunities to fulfil someone's career goals will likely never arise. The aim of career development should be to support that person to meet their goals, even if that means they do not remain in the organisation.

What does this mean for your organisation?

The findings raise some specific challenges but the implications for most employers need to be contextualised.

Measure more/different outcomes from your existing initiatives

If your organisation already provides or commissions career support for all or some of your employees, you might consider using the insights to identify potential outcomes worth you measuring. It may be you are already achieving these outcomes, but you just aren't evidencing it yet!

Think about how the different parts of your group or sector connect

If your organisation markets and funds the career development (for example if you are membership or representative of a whole sector) but do not directly employ the workers accessing the support, you won't have direct control over the practices and support provided by the employing organisations. Indeed, local employers may not even be aware that their staff member is receiving career support. To ensure each organisation within the group or the sector (especially relevant in public services) achieves the outcomes on offer, some key questions need to be considered:

- How can the basic knowledge and skills necessary to help staff with career development be improved among managers within employers in your sector?
- How can you encourage better career conversations within workplaces and more access to developmental work experiences for staff?
- Is there a shared understanding of what 'turnover' means, how the internal job market is defined and therefore how any improvements in 'retention' can be measured?

Positive practical messaging and information

It is reasonable to infer from the research that some positive messaging and information about career options could help achieve desirable positive outcomes. Organisations might usefully consider whether they could perhaps be clearer about what the career 'deal' is in their organisation, why it can be a great place to work, what kind of careers and pathways are available and what skills are needed now and later.

You could position your career support programmes as a key part of the practical support that it is available for people in helping them develop their career. Your programmes therefore become additional to (and not instead of) career conversations with others (e.g. your manager, formal or informal mentors through professional bodies or information contacts and your networks). This should increase positive outcomes among those who use the support and, most importantly, even among those who are aware of the support on offer to them but do not themselves use it.

Improving the quality of everyday career conversations

Achieving many of the intended outcomes are dependent on the HR and management practices of employers and their leaders. Furthermore, the social exchange theoretical positioning of most of the evidence is an important consideration, as it suggests that the relationship between the two parties is critical in terms of where 'benefits' are directed. The 'giver' of the benefits should also be the 'receiver' of reciprocations. If you subcontract career support delivery services, it may be less likely that users of the service conceptualise the coaching as 'organisational support' and therefore they will not respond by directing positive behaviours towards their employer. To address this potential issue, you might consider changing the communications to emphasise the role that your organisation plays in supporting the support, and how encouraging you are of staff engaging with it. Ensure that you as an employer can personalise the advertising materials, making them specific to your organisation. The aim would be for you to position the careers support as something you are providing to their staff, rather than it being an external offer.

Exploring the specific role that line managers play in career outcomes was beyond the scope of this research. However, one paper isolated their influence and suggested that line managers could play a particular role in reducing turnover. Therefore, if this is a key outcome of interest for your organisation, you may want to consider the role line managers could play in your career development offer(s) or how to integrate basic knowledge and practical career conservation skills into the development of those with managerial responsibilities.

A final thought about scaling up interventions

Improving access to career conversations beyond line managers may be desirable. Talking to a Career Guidance Counsellor or Coach is of course an ideal but the more

other people within the system that can help support during and beyond formal careers guidance or support, the better. Ideal would be to broaden the extent of skills or knowledge of career opportunities which may be on offer, for example, through volunteer mentors, learning and development specialists, professional body information leads and other networks. If your organisation were to provide targeted career workshops, career courses or facilitated development for people within the organisation, and combine this with wider sharing of self-help materials, the benefits given to those participating in career development programmes might be scalable to a much wider audience.

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