

CAREER GROWTH AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG YOUNG ACADEMICIANS IN CHINESE PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *This study examines the role of career growth in strengthening organizational commitment among young academicians in Chinese private universities, while highlighting its practical implications for human capital development. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, the study investigates the effects of four dimensions of career growth-career goal advancement, skill development, professional advancement opportunities, and Remuneration Growth-on organizational commitment. Data were collected through a survey involving 105 young academicians from 25 private universities in Shandong Province, China. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 29 to assess the relationships between career growth dimensions and organizational commitment. The results indicate that all four dimensions significantly and positively influence organizational commitment. Among them, Remuneration Growth emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta=0.294, p<0.001$), followed by professional advancement opportunities ($\beta = 0.238, p <0.01$), career goal advancement ($\beta = 0.235, p <0.01$), and skill development ($\beta = 0.180, p <0.05$). The regression model explained 41.3% of the variance in organizational commitment ($F(4,100) = 17.606, p <0.001$). The findings highlight the pivotal role of career growth in fostering organizational commitment among young academicians and emphasize the importance of providing developmental opportunities, institutional resources, and career advancement pathways. The study contributes to the growing literature on career development and organizational behavior in higher education and offers practical implications for human capital development strategies in Chinese private universities.*

Keywords: *career growth; organizational commitment; young academicians; human capital development; Chinese private universities*

Introduction

In the past 20 years, China's higher education has achieved rapid development and become an important part of the national education system. In 2025, China's Ministry of Education pointed out that the country has more than 400 private colleges and universities, with a total of 7 million students and more than 500,000 academicians. Due to its large population and rapid economic development, Shandong Province has become an important province in China. At present, there are 25 private universities in the province, accounting for 6% of the country's total, and can be used as a typical case to study China's higher education. The objective of this study is to determine the influence of career growth on organizational commitment among young academicians in Chinese private universities.

Although the scale of private universities is increasing, it is difficult to attract outstanding academic talents, and it is difficult to retain young academicians. In private colleges and universities, young academicians face many constraints in their career development, including fierce competition with public universities, insufficient promotion opportunities, relatively low compensation, and insufficient research funding (Weng and Hu, 2009, et al., 2024). The high turnover rate of young academicians in private universities has been recognized by many scholars, which is higher than 15%. The high turnover rate is not conducive to the stability of the school and the enhancement of academic strength, and it will also lead to the loss of human capital.

Organizational commitment is a psychological attachment that individuals have to the organizations to which they belong (Allen & Meyer, 1990). This concept has attracted the attention of scholars, who generally regard it as an important factor affecting the performance and retention of employees. Meyer et al. (1991) analyzed organizational commitment from three aspects: normative commitment, affective commitment, and continuance commitment, emphasizing that affective commitment is the most critical. Academically, it is regarded as a positive result, which can promote employees to have a strong sense of organizational citizenship, have a weak willingness to "jump ship," and perform better (Meyer et al., 2002). In the field of higher education, scholars with high organizational commitment can play a role in teaching, research and development, and make positive contributions to the development of colleges and universities.

Literature Review

This section discusses four key aspects related to the present study:

Career Growth

Career growth is a dynamic process, which is the performance of career development and career progress of individuals in their professional lives. Weng et al. (2009) built a model for the purpose of promoting career growth, which has been recognized by the academic circles and widely used in organizational research. From their point of view, career growth includes the following four aspects: first, career development goals refer to individuals' progress in their professional lives and the achievement of career goals; second, professional skill improvement refers to individuals' accumulation of experience and continuous enhancement of expertise; third, career advancement opportunities refer to individuals' promotion and career progress within the organization; fourth, remuneration growth refers to increased organizational support, assistance and benefits.

Weng et al. (2010) deepened the understanding of these dimensions, believing that career development is a comprehensive assessment of the development of professionals, which includes both subjective perception and objective achievement. Spagnoli et al. (2017) confirmed the cross-cultural equivalence of career growth, and proved that the scale has strong reliability in different cultural backgrounds, including China and Italy.

In the development of higher education in China, in order to attract outstanding academicians, all colleges and universities have realized the importance of career development. Zhang et al. (2024) said that compared with public universities, private universities do not have strong institutional prestige and can not provide good career development opportunities for academicians. However, they can attract outstanding talents by creating a good career development platform.

Organizational Commitment

In the process of studying organizational behavior, scholars generally agree that organizational commitment is an important factor that can have a significant impact on employee behavior and attitude. In the study of this topic, the theory of Allen and others (1990) is more influential. He built a model with three components: normative commitment, affective commitment, and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment that employees have for the organization, which means that they are willing to participate in the development of the organization and identify with the organization. Continuous commitment means that employees are aware of the cost of leaving the organization, and normative commitment requires employees to be responsible for the organization and produce a sense of moral obligation.

Meyer et al. (1991) analyzed the characteristics of the three commitment dimensions, believing that the three dimensions are related to behavior and have antecedents. The research results show that affective commitment can bring good organizational results, which are positively related to organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intention, and so on (Meyer et al., 2002). In contrast, although continuance commitment can also play a role in reducing the turnover rate of employees, it can not produce good work behavior and can not bring higher job satisfaction. A sense of normative commitment is moderate, ranking between the two.

In the field of higher education, scholars have realized the importance of organizational commitment to organizational development, and the topic has attracted widespread attention. In the research, it is pointed out that staff with higher organizational commitment can achieve higher research productivity in the teaching process, and can produce outstanding teaching effectiveness. In addition, these scholars are willing to make efforts for the development of the organization, and can provide good guidance for the students, and can also participate in professional activities. Institutional governance, strategic planning, and organizational development are all their contributions.

Career Growth and Organizational Commitment

Social exchange theory was put forward by Blau in 1964. The theory can help us understand how to maintain a good relationship between the organization and the employees, and how to achieve career success. It points out that, in the process of social development, individuals should pursue more benefits and pay less costs in social interaction. In the employment process, employees and organizations will form an exchange relationship, and employees will show

loyalty to the organization and make efforts for it, and the organization will give them corresponding rewards.

If employees are given opportunities for career development in the organization, employees will feel that the organization is willing to invest in them and repay the organization with loyalty and commitment (Weng and McElroy, 2012). This kind of exchange is more prominent in knowledge-intensive work environments, where employees' abilities and skills are critical to organizational competitiveness.

Empirical research has a strong supporting role in the relationship between organizational commitment and career growth. Weng et al. (2012) analyzed the data of Chinese employees and found that there was a positive relationship between career growth and organizational commitment. Al-Ali et al. (2022) studied the public sector in Oman and believed that career growth had a strong predictive power for organizational commitment, and that career advancement opportunities and skills growth had a significant predictive effect. Chen et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of career development on employee turnover in Chinese private education institutions and further realized the importance of career growth to employee retention.

Previous studies have generally confirmed the positive relationship between career growth and organizational commitment. However, many studies remain focused on general organizational contexts, while limited attention has been given to young academicians in private higher education. Based on Social Exchange Theory, career growth can be viewed as an important form of institutional support. When young academicians perceive opportunities for status advancement, competence development, promotion, and remuneration growth, they are more likely to develop stronger organizational commitment. This study therefore extends existing literature by examining career growth in Chinese private universities and linking the findings to broader higher education concerns, such as faculty retention and human capital development.

Hypotheses Development

Using the theoretical framework of social exchange theory, combined with the empirical evidence obtained in the previous analysis, this paper puts forward the following hypotheses:

- H1: Career goal advancement has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H2: Skill development has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H3: Professional advancement opportunities have a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.
- H4: There is a positive relationship between remuneration growth and organizational commitment.
- H5: Career growth (overall) has a significant positive effect on organizational commitment.

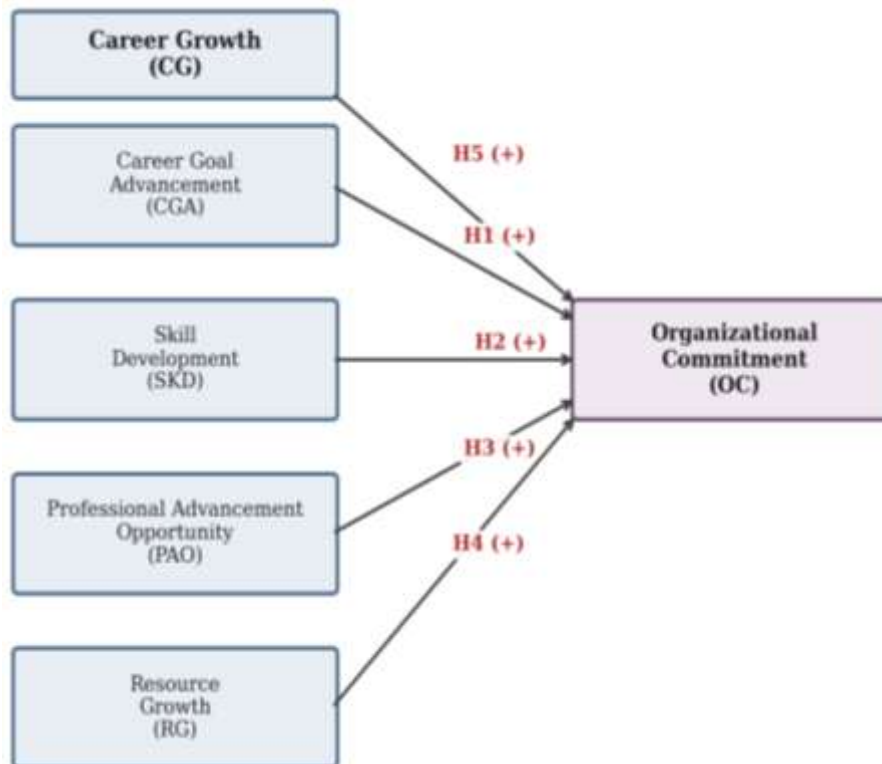


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed by the Authors Based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Previous Studies

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, a quantitative cross-sectional survey design is adopted to analyze the relationship between organizational commitment and career growth among young academicians in private universities in China. Quantitative methods can analyze variables and test hypotheses, which are more reasonable. Cross-sectional surveys are conducive to collecting data efficiently from the target population in a short time, which is consistent with the views of Sekaran et al. (2016).

Population and Sampling

In this study, young scholars at private universities in Shandong Province were selected as research objects, and they were all young people under the age of 40. In the process of sampling, the sample size determination table was used as a reference, and it was necessary to sample at least 105 people to ensure the accuracy of the data. In this study, 120 questionnaires were distributed through convenient sampling, of which 105 were valid questionnaires, and the validity rate was 87.5%.

Instrument

In this study, the two instruments are used to measure organizational commitment and career growth. The career growth scale is revised from the research results of Weng et al. (2009), which includes 18 items that can be divided into four dimensions: career goals (CGA, 4 items), professional skills (SKD, 4 items), professional opportunities (PAO, 6 items), and remuneration (RG, 4 items). The five-point Likert scale is used to measure all items, and the score range is

1-5 points, which means strongly disagree and strongly agree. The organizational commitment scale is revised from the research results of Allen et al. (1990), with 18 items and three dimensions, namely, affective commitment (AC, 6 items), normative commitment (NC, 6 items) and continuance commitment (CC, 6 items). This scale is the same as the career growth scale, which also adopts the five-point Likert scale.

Pilot Study Results

Before the investigation, 50 young scholars from private universities were selected as the research subjects for the pilot test, with the aim of clarifying whether the measurement instrument was reliable and could meet the requirements of the investigation. The pilot test found that the scale was reasonable and reliable, and only a small number of questions needed to be adjusted. In the next stage, 105 samples were investigated to obtain more empirical data. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the two variables, which can be seen that the internal consistency of the two variables is relatively high.

Convenience sampling was adopted due to accessibility constraints; thus, the generalizability of the findings should be interpreted cautiously. The 105 valid responses were considered suitable for the preliminary analysis of this conference paper. Respondents were informed of the study purpose, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Construct validity and common method bias were also examined to strengthen methodological rigor.

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha)

Dimension	Items	Alpha	Status
CGA	4	0.883	Acceptable
SKD	4	0.862	Acceptable
PAO	6	0.827	Acceptable
RG	4	0.911	Acceptable
AC	6	0.930	Acceptable
CC	6	0.855	Acceptable
NC	6	0.898	Acceptable
CG Overall	18	0.870	Acceptable
OC Overall	18	0.868	Acceptable

Source: Authors' Analysis of Survey Data

Data Analysis

SPSS 29 software is used to analyze the data, and multiple regression analysis is used to grasp the relationship between organizational commitment and career development, and the significance level is set at 0.05. In the process of analysis, a VIF diagnostic test is carried out, and the validity of the results is analyzed by means of correlation analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

In the analysis of the descriptive statistics of the survey data, Table 2 is the most important table, which provides the standard deviation and average of all variables and further explains the current situation of organizational commitment and career development of the survey

objects through the statistical results. The scores of the two dimensions of career growth and organizational commitment are between 3.254 and 3.283, which shows that the respondents have a moderate understanding of organizational commitment and career development opportunities.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD
CGA	3.283	0.767
SKD	3.257	0.761
PAO	3.270	0.650
RG	3.283	0.797
CG	3.273	0.499
AC	3.254	0.772
CC	3.271	0.666
NC	3.254	0.729
OC	3.260	0.493

Source: Authors' Analysis of Survey Data

Correlation Analysis

Table 3 is a correlation matrix, which takes all variables as research objects. The dimensions of career development are positively related to organizational commitment ($r = 0.461$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient between the overall career growth measure and organizational commitment reached 0.638 ($p < 0.01$). The above results further confirm the hypothesis.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

	CGA	SKD	PAO	RG	CG	OC
CGA	1,000	.263	.271	.227	.629	.414
SKD	.263	1.000	.365	.270	.683	.409
PAO	.271	.365	1.000	.273	.748	.448
RG	.227	.270	.273	1.000	.643	.461
CG	.629	.683	.748	.643	1.000	.638
OC	.414	.409	.448	.461	.638	1.000

Source: Authors' Analysis of Survey Data

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4 focuses on the prediction of organizational commitment and carries out multiple regression analysis to obtain the results. The overall model is $F(4, 100) = 17.606$, which has good statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). The model can explain the variance of organizational commitment and reach 41.3% ($R^2 = 0.413$, $\text{Adj } R^2 = 0.390$).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	VIF
CGA	0.151	0.053	0.235	2.880	0.005	1.137
SKD	0.117	0.055	0.180	2.127	0.036	1.227
PAO	0.181	0.065	0.238	2.799	0.006	1.233
RG	0.182	0.051	0.294	3.589	0.000	1.142

Note: Durbin-Watson = 1.926, $F(4, 100) = 17.606$, $p < .001$, $\text{Adj } R^2 = .390$, $R^2 = .413$

Source: Authors' Analysis of Survey Data

The four dimensions of career development can play a predictive role in organizational commitment, among which the most critical is remuneration growth ($\beta=0.294$, $p<0.001$), followed by the possibility of professional promotion ($\beta=0.238$, $p<0.01$), career goal promotion ($\beta=0.235$, $p<0.01$), and skill development ($\beta=0.180$, $p<0.05$). VIF values vary from 1.137 to 1.233, all below 10, with no serious multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019; Ahmed, 2025). The Durbin-Watson statistic is 1.926, close to 2, indicating that the residual term is not autocorrelated.

In the analysis of H5, the development of the career is positively related to organizational commitment ($r=0.638$, $R^2=0.407$, $p<0.001$) (Yun Bai, 2025).

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 5 summarizes the hypothesis testing results.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Result	p-value	Status
H1: CGA $\rightarrow$ OC	$\beta=0.235$	0.005	Supported ✓
H2: SKD $\rightarrow$ OC	$\beta=0.180$	0.036	Supported ✓
H3: PAO $\rightarrow$ OC	$\beta=0.238$	0.006	Supported ✓
H4: RG $\rightarrow$ OC	$\beta=0.294$	<0.001	Supported ✓
H5: CG $\rightarrow$ OC	$r=0.638$, $R^2=0.407$	<0.001	Supported ✓

Discussion

Career Growth and Organizational Commitment

In this study, it is further proved that the two variables are closely related, and the four hypotheses put forward are supported, and the multiple regression model is used to describe the relationship between the two variables, which can explain 41.3% of the organizational commitment. Therefore, it is necessary to provide more career development opportunities for young academicians and enhance their organizational commitment, which is consistent with the prediction of social exchange theory. This shows that the development of teachers' careers cannot be separated from the investment of institutions, and academicians will be more willing to make contributions to the development of institutions with a stronger sense of organizational commitment.

Relative Importance of Career Growth Dimensions

In the analysis of career growth dimensions, the importance of remuneration growth has been fully felt, which is positively related to organizational commitment ($\beta=0.294$, $p<0.001$). This conclusion shows that private universities in China should accumulate more tangible resources, especially research funds and institutional support, to enhance the commitment of faculty members. This is also what other scholars have pointed out: the growth of practical resources can have a significant impact on young scholars and enhance their sense of organizational attachment.

Career advancement opportunities ($\beta=0.238$, $p<0.01$) and career goals ($\beta=0.235$, $p<0.01$) are the second and third most critical factors, and the results of the two dimensions are similar, which means that the perception of career development opportunities will have a significant impact on organizational commitment, and it is an important factor that can not be ignored in

the development of career goals. If the staff can clearly feel that they have a good development path, they will be more willing to enhance their organizational commitment.

Emotional and psychological attachment to their institutions.

In the study, organizational commitment is regarded as an important index, but the prediction ability of skills development is not high, which is $\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$. This conclusion shows that the development of competence can bring positive factors to organizational commitment, but the impact is relatively small. Young scholars regard the improvement of employability as an important goal in their career development, and the development of skills is only a means to this end.

Implications for Human Capital Development

From the practical point of view, the study further clarifies the need to build a perfect career development system for private colleges and universities in the process of formulating human capital development strategies. Specific measures should include: First, the wages and salaries of all staff and faculty should be increased to provide them with good development conditions and reasonable research resources; secondly, a fair and transparent promotion system should be built to provide more career development opportunities for academicians; thirdly, a platform should be built to provide development opportunities for academicians; fourthly, teachers should be trained and taught and researched. Investing in these areas to promote the growth of college staff and faculty can enhance the sense of belonging of young academicians, reduce turnover, and obtain more long-term returns.

Conclusion

In this study, the organizational commitment of young academicians in Chinese private universities is analyzed, focusing on the role of career growth. The research results show that career goal advancement, skill development, professional advancement opportunities, remuneration growth, and so on are the four dimensions of career growth that can predict organizational commitment. Remuneration growth is the most critical factor in predicting organizational commitment. The model can explain 41.3% of the organizational commitment variance, which is consistent with social exchange theory.

In practice, Chinese private universities need to formulate effective human capital development strategies and allocate resources reasonably to enhance transparency and promote the improvement of the system. At the same time, we should also pay attention to the development of the future, carry out longitudinal research, analyze the relationship between organizational commitment and career development, and analyze the subjective experience of young scholars.

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the use of convenience sampling may affect the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study focused only on young academicians in private universities in Shandong Province. Future studies should use longitudinal designs, larger samples, and broader regional contexts to further validate the findings.

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