



The effects of career development on job performance:

A study on the influence of employee empowerment and the role of perceived organizational support

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Master Thesis Human Resource Studies

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Date: 7th of October 2019

Project theme: The influence of HR on the perception of the employment relationship and employee well-being and performance.

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Abstract

This study sheds a light on the growing interest in the new type of employee that continuously works on the development of their knowledge, skills and career prospects (CBS, 2016). The trend of looking at and investing in the happiness of one's workforce helps organizations create a valuable competitive advantage for present-day organizations. Over the years the relevance of creating new data and research on this important topic somewhat faded into oblivion. This study aims to create more awareness on this matter and to re-awaken the curiosity for more research with recent numbers. The objective of this quantitative study ($N=231$) was to confirm that career development provided by the employer leads to better job performance and is influenced through employee empowerment. It also focused on confirming that higher levels of Perceived Organizational Support affect the relationship between career development and empowerment is positively. A cross-sectional design was used to test the six hypotheses of this study. Data was gathered using convenience sampling by spreading online questionnaires that were filled in by employees from varying work sectors in different companies in The Netherlands. The findings of this study confirm a positive significant direct relation between career development and job performance. It also confirms a significant effect between empowerment and job performance as well as an indirect of career development and empowerment on job performance. However, it did not find a significant direct relation between career development and empowerment. Nor did this study confirm the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between career development and empowerment. Furthermore, it indicates the relevance of further researching the age factor when it comes to the relationship between empowerment, career development and job performance.

Keywords: Perceived Organizational Support, POS, empowerment, career development, career advancement, job performance, employment relationship.

Introduction

In the always changing labour market, there is an increasing demand for a more experienced and open-minded employee, who is willing to actively learn, adapt and contribute in order to meet the rapidly evolving need for higher levels of job performance. According to Statistics Netherlands, CBS (2016) the growing interest in this new type of employee implies that it is expected of employees to continuously work on the development of their knowledge, skills and career prospects in order to enhance their job performance. However, this may not be experienced as a burden by employees as for them this can bring along career development opportunities, sufficient support, feedback and motivation from the employer (CBS, 2016). All of which contributes to a better and more productive level of job performance for the employer (Lent & Brown, 1996). The challenge of maintaining a healthy balance between recognition for employee well-being and high levels of job performance are associated with a change away from the old-fashioned management model of simply telling an employee what to do and expecting nothing more or less than excellent job performance.

The shift in focusing on giving the employees a sense of added value to the organization has provided employees with additional bargaining power to push employers towards investing in the career development and empowerment of their employees in order to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Foong-ming, 2008). A widely desired outcome for successful organizations is having an outstanding level of job performance within their company, which makes the investment in employee empowerment as means to influence these levels of job performance even more important (Meihem, 2004). Research proves that organizations with higher levels of employee empowerment show an environment in which employees excel in their job performance (Chen, Lam & Zhong, 2007). Involving employees actively in the decision-making processes in the organization and providing them with the necessary information, freedom and control in their tasks as well as their career paths, will lead to an increase in sense of empowerment and to higher and more productive levels of job performance (Daft, 2001). By using empowerment and career development as motivational tools employers will be able to establish a long-term advantage in the form of happy, satisfied and committed employees (Foong-ming, 2008). Overall, the employee's perception of support, appreciation and acknowledgement (also known as Perceived Organizational Support) from the employer towards the employee leads to the development of proactive behaviour, positive attitudes and the

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willingness to go the extra mile when it comes to performance and excellence in task execution (Moorman et al., 1998; Settoon et al., 1996). Empowered employees are individuals that are internally motivated to thrive at their work by feeling supported by their employer (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). By acknowledging the needs of the employee in terms of career development and confidence in the tasks they perform, employers help grow independent, satisfied and motivated employees (Liden et al., 2000). This revived trend of looking at present-day workforce and the relevance of maintaining happy employees in order to create valuable and beneficial organizational advantages, may just be the right direction to head out on in the current labour market. Ultimately, making the accumulation of more academic findings on this topic all the more significant and needed.

This research aims to contribute to creating more awareness on the growing gap in recent scientific data on the employee-organization relationship as perceived by the employee in today's society. As times pass the relevance of understanding how to enhance an employee's job performance through opportunities for career development under the influence of empowerment only grows larger. Research on the topic however, has been quite dated and needs to be replenished with fresh insights and perspectives on the matter based on current data. This starts by providing additional evidence on top of existing studies on the psychological aspects of what fuels an employee to put in the extra effort to achieve higher levels of job performance without losing sight of one's own need to feel valued and empowered by the employer (Lent & Brown, 1996; Bandura, 1986; Kanter 1993; London, 1993; Gary 2002). All the while taking the employee's perception on their employer's commitment and support towards them into account as studies confirm that Perceived Organizational Support influences employee empowerment positively (Guest, Conway & Davey, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007).

By using these studies as a foundation for examining the implementation of empowerment and career development as tools for higher job performance while also considering the perceived organizational support this study will lead to a better understanding of the employment relationship and peak future researchers' interest to further extend studies on this specific topic. Therefore, the following research question has been formulated to indicate the span of this research: "To what extent does employee empowerment mediate the relationship between career development opportunities and job performance, and to what extent is this mediating process moderated by perceived organizational support (POS)?"

Theoretical framework

This section provides a theoretical basis and description of the relevant variables in this study. These variables being career development, empowerment, Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and job performance. The mediating relationship between career development, empowerment and job performance as well as the moderation by POS will be explained thoroughly using several theories.

The relationship between career development and job performance

This section will further clarify the definition of career development and job performance as well as the relationship between these two variables.

The construct of career development can be defined into two forms, actual careers and perceived careers (Milkovich, Anderson & Greenhalgh, 1976). Actual careers possess two important properties: “(1) a patterned sequence of positions usually related in work content and (2) an ordered movement of individuals among these positions” (1976: 20). The interpretation of career development opportunities for employees is the perception of the possibility and the presence of these actual careers. For this research the definition of career development will be considered in the form of the possibilities, support and chances the employer offers his/her employees when it comes to actual career possibilities.

According to the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) performance consists out of two main aspects: “the level of attainment individuals achieve in their work tasks (e.g. measures of success or proficiency) and the degree to which they persist, despite obstacles, at a particular work activity or career path (e.g. perseverance at problem solving, job stability)” (Lent & Brown, 1996, p. 318). Lent and Brown’s (1996) theory supports the idea that performance can be predicted, among other aspects, by the level of self-efficacy and ability one has, as well as outcome expectations and performance goals one sets for themselves. In other words, by managing and anticipating on the needs of an employee when it comes to outcome expectations, employers will be able to guide towards more productive job performance goals and levels through provision of career development. When keeping the SCCT theory in mind, employees will be able to influence the first aspect of job performance (through actively guiding and supporting the employees in their tasks in order to excel and succeed) and more importantly employers will be able to influence the second aspect of job performance (through actively involving employees in career development decision-making which will make the employer more aware of the outcomes an employee expects

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in return for their work) (Lent & Brown, 1996). Holding onto this line of sight, we can suggest that there is a positive relationship between the presence of career development and an expression of gratitude for career development through sustainment of higher levels of job performance by employees.

It is assumed that the higher the anticipated level of positive outcomes is, the more motivated and mobilized employees will be towards sustaining a high-performance behavior during their work. In other words, employees will be more motivated to obtain, and even more important maintain, high performance levels during their work, when they perceive that there is enough support present from the employer when it comes to career development and advancement (Lent & Brown, 1996). The environment an employer creates for the employee weighs quite heavy on the scale of an employee's decision to put in the effort of performing better and achieving greater results at work. When creating an environment where outcome expectations linked to career development of the employee are discussed openly, an employee will feel more motivated to work harder in order to achieve these performance goals (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura (1986) the kind of outcome expectations one holds determines whether one displays a certain performance behavior. Employees are more likely to commit to a given performance standard and even excel at it, when a positive outcome expectation is foreseen. On the other hand, employees will avoid such high-performance actions and behavior when certain outcome expectations regarding career development will not be rewarded with valued outcomes (Bandura, 1986).

Beehr and Taber (1993) confirm in their study that prospects for career development in the form of promotion opportunities, support from the employer and career advancement lead to outstanding and exceptional levels of job performance from the employee. Thus, supporting the first hypothesis that the provision of clear career development (tangible presence of employer's support) will lead to higher sustainable job performance levels. This research will look further into the link between the provision of career development, in an environment that supports empowerment, leading to higher job performance levels. The mediating link of empowerment in this relationship will be elaborated on in the next section. The first hypothesis will be formulated as follows:

H1: The higher the level of support for career development an employee experiences, the higher the level of job performance will be.

The link between career development and empowerment

In the previous section the relationship between career development and job performance has been established. This section will clarify the relationship between empowerment and career development as well as highlight the importance of these opportunities in order to maintain an environment wherein empowerment will develop a positive contribution to the employee's work attitude and thus their job performance.

Spreitzer (1995) has defined the construct of psychological empowerment into four specific dimensions, consisting out of aspects 'meaning', 'competence', 'self-determination' and 'impact'. Meaning being the value that a person assigns to a certain goal or purpose in relation to his or her own ideals and standards (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In terms of empowerment, meaning implicates a good fit between an employee's values, behaviors and beliefs regarding their role at work (Brief & Nord, 1990). Competence refers to the level of self-efficacy one assigns to themselves in terms of believing they are capable in performing a certain set of activities with their skillset (Gist, 1987). In terms of empowerment, competence refers to the mastery of one's behavior. Self-determination refers to the level of autonomy one has in work processes and the freedom of decision-making during work; for example, the freedom of deciding how to perform one's job, the pace of work or the effort that has to be put into a certain work task (Bell & Staw, 1989; Spector, 1986). In terms of empowerment, self-determination refers to the power the employee believes he or she has in deciding how to regulate certain work behaviors or actions (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Impact being the level of influence an individual has over administrative, strategic or operational outcomes in a work context. In terms of empowerment, it means the opportunity for an employee to shape their work context by having a say in it. According to Thomas and Velthouse (1990), these four dimensions specify an almost complete set of cognitions needed to explain the construct of empowerment.

According to Gary (2002) the sense of having empowered employees has proven to be highly effective and beneficial for employers as individuals will perform their tasks in a more effective and productive way when they feel empowered by their employer. It will also enhance their decision-making skills and increase the commitment they feel towards their job while performing the job with a higher sense of competence and self-worth (Gary, 2002). Support for career development has proven to be equally as important, as the provision of career development by creating clear career paths and by increasing career awareness will lead to having more

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empowered employees (Aytac, 2005). By creating an environment where the employees are actively participating in the decision-making on their continuous growth within an organization, the institutional commitment will increase which will lead to more empowered employees (McDermott, Spence Laschinger and Shamian, 2003). According to McNeese-Smith (1999) and Kanter (1993), empowered employees will experience less job stress and be happier at work by enhancing their consciousness on their work behaviors through adjusting their internal processes of belief and faith in an employer. The pillars of successful empowerment however, lie not only with the employee, but involve and require access to resources, support, involvement in decision-making and continuous growth and learning opportunities from the employer (Baker, McDaniel, Fredrickson & Gallegos, 2007). On the other hand, the employee must engage actively in self-reflection and self-examination as making or creating meaning is just as important to us as humans as the outcome itself (Stebleton, 2007). Being able to tell our own story in the steps towards empowerment and career development as active participants in this process is one side of the coin. The other side involves self-exploration in terms of knowing what identity and values one holds dear in order to shape a career path that leads to an empowered employee (Grier-Reed, Skaar & Parson, 2009). So, when employers let their employees engage in career decision-making and career-related tasks, it will give them a sense of belief in their own ability to succeed which leads to effective employee empowerment (Grier-Reed, Skaar & Parson, 2009). In contrary to when employees do not believe in their own competence to succeed, which would lead to performance anxiety and avoidance of challenges, resulting in not empowered or engaged employees (Lent & Brown, 1996). According to Grier-Reed, Skaar & Parson (2009), the way of providing career development, where the employee is encouraged to work on their career development actively rather than passively, will lead to a potentially new direction in engaging in an empowered and diverse workforce.

Ultimately, London (1993) confirms in his study that employees will feel more empowered through active support for career development (training the employee, providing performance feedback, influencing the performance goals by developing career plans with the employee) by their supervisor. It will boost the employee's self-confidence and demonstrate that the employee is valued as an individual by the organization. Empowered employees will show more work involvement, commitment and appreciation (London, 1993). This leads to the formulation of the second hypothesis as follows:

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H2: The higher the level of support for career development an employee experiences, the more empowered an employee will be.

The mediating link between career development, empowerment and job performance

In the previous sections a coherent relationship has been established between the importance of empowered employees, career development and the effectiveness of high levels of job performance. This segment will now further elaborate on the triangular relationship between empowerment, career development and job performance.

Empowerment and its benefits for businesses and their employees has been widely studied and through various empirical research a valuable and positive link has been established towards the increase of job performance levels (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011; Aryee & Chen, 2006; Harris, Wheeler & Kacmar, 2009; Liden, Wayne & Sparrowe, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995). It is also the case that the prevalence of studies on empowerment and its positive effects on job performance has expanded over the years due to its importance to the survival of any organization with an eye for the relevance of maintaining a competitive advantage through happy and motivated employees (Maynard, Gilson & Mathieu, 2012; Meihem, 2004). The fact of the matter is that any organization stands to benefit from heightened job performance due to greater empowerment among employees when this leads to having a more active, adaptive and flexible workforce (Maynard et al., 2014). According to Lashley (1995) and Mullins (2005), the empowerment of employees leads to better use of knowledge and skills by the employees, creation of a more motivated and responsive staff, increased productivity and lower turnover rates. All of which contributes to a better job performance and organizational outcomes. As outstanding job performance is considered to be one of the most desired outcomes for successful business, it is of the essence to invest in employee empowerment in order to influence the levels of job performance in one's organization (Meihem, 2004). Organizations with high levels of empowerment among employees show a more relaxed and less rigid work environment for the employees in which they excel in job performance (Chen, Lam & Zhong, 2007).

The presence of empowerment in an organization does also create a work environment wherein the employer can expect a certain level of high job performance from their employees as a workplace that fosters empowerment sets a standard for information sharing among employees and a certain capability of employees to manage themselves (Seibert et al., 2004). As a result, employees that feel empowered by their employer expect in return a level of commitment from

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their employers towards their outcome expectations in term of career development (Wilkinson, 2001). That makes it of the essence that employers send out a distinctive and consistent message towards the employees in terms of the provided possibilities of career development in order to reach the desired level of empowerment through clear communication and the fostering of consensus. This way, the intended practice of empowerment will be in line with the perceived practice as individuals may display different responses and attitudes towards these provided opportunities of career development (den Hartog et al., 2004; Kazlauskaite, Buciuniene & Turauskas, 2011).

Previous research by Maynard et al. (2014) confirms that empowerment will not only be beneficial for job performance in the short-term, but will sustain an equal level of positive relatedness towards changes in performance over time. Even more importantly, the positive relationship between empowerment and job performance is inherently linked to the provision of career development in order for employees to have concrete plans for their future within the organization as well as tangible evidence of an organization that is committed to the needs of her employees (Maynard et al., 2014). Logical reasoning suggests that the relationship between career development and job performance has come in to place through the level of empowerment present in an organization. Leading to the structuring of the following hypotheses:

H3: The more empowered an employee will be, the higher the level of job performance will be.

Additionally, an overall hypothesis on the mediation process in this study:

H4: The level of support for career development has an overall indirect effect on the job performance through empowerment.

The moderating-effect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on the link between career development and empowerment

Allen et al. (2003) defined Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as “the global beliefs about the extent to which an employing organization both values employees’ contribution and cares about their wellbeing”. It is proven that an organization who values its employees will come upon various beneficial and positive outcomes as it can improve the employee’s job performance, citizenship behaviors, work attendance, job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organization (Allen et al., 2003). Allen et al. (2003) stated that employees who experience high levels of POS, meaning they perceive that their employer supports and values them, are less likely

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to seek or accept a job in an alternative organization which would in turn contribute to accepting career development and advancement possibilities within their current organization.

Based on the underpinnings of the Social Exchange Theory (SET), we can assume that the perception of a favorable and supportive treatment by an organization towards its employees will lead to employees being more prone or even feeling slightly obliged to reciprocate this treatment with extra effort, more loyalty and a greater organizational commitment (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Eisenberger et al., 2001). This suggests that environments with high levels of POS boost the commitment of an employee towards their employer, which in turn can strengthen the sense of empowerment an employee experiences. On the other side of this moderating relationship, the presence of POS helps foster a better relationship between the provision of career development (perceived as the organization's appreciation and care towards their employees) and empowerment (feelings of being valued by your employer) (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). This in turn will lead to the employee feeling more empowered by the organization as the possibility of being in control of one's own career development, stimulates personal growth and challenges employees to add meaning to their work in orders to sustain continuous self-development (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Foong-ming, 2008). It can be assumed in this that higher levels of POS will give a positive boost to the already existing positive relationship between the provision of career development and the employees feeling empowered by their employer. In essence, higher levels of POS would stimulate the growth of a more sustainable mutual partnership between employer and employee based on reciprocated feelings of commitment, shared responsibility towards common goals and collective proprietorship of one's own development (Guest, Conway & Davey, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Leibowitz et al., 1986).

Fundamentally, the strength of how empowered and supported employees feel by their organization through the act of providing them with the availability of career development and the corresponding support, varies under the condition of the levels of POS (in the form of making the employees feel cherished and valued as well as creating an environment wherein the organization cares for their employees' welfare). This leads to a boost in the employees' confidence about their competence and increase in their motivation. Eventually, resulting in more empowered and satisfied employees (Niehoff et al., 2001; Pitts, 2005; Foong-ming, 2008; Yen et al., 2004). Based on the aforementioned studies, logical reasoning suggests that an environment with high appreciation and support from the employer (meaning high levels of POS) would lead to

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stimulation of a better relationship between providing an employee with career development in order to gain more empowered employees, rather than an environment where POS is low or not present. In this line of thinking the fifth hypothesis will be formulated as follows:

H5: The relationship between career development and empowerment is moderated by Perceived Organizational Support (POS), such that at higher levels of POS, this relationship is more positive.

As the boosting effect of POS on the relationship between career development and empowerment can contribute to the mediation in the model that will be tested in this study a sixth hypothesis was formulated for the overall model. By testing the relevance of the variables in this study within this specific model setup a path will be cleared for future similar studies to deepen this line of reasoning or even explore another path or reasoning. This sixth hypothesis will focus on the overall moderated mediation model and is formulated as follows:

H6: The overall indirect effect that the level of support for career development has on job performance through empowerment is moderated by Perceived Organizational Support.

Hypotheses of the study

The previously explained variables and the complementary findings lead to the composition of the six aforementioned hypotheses (see figure 1 for the conceptual model):

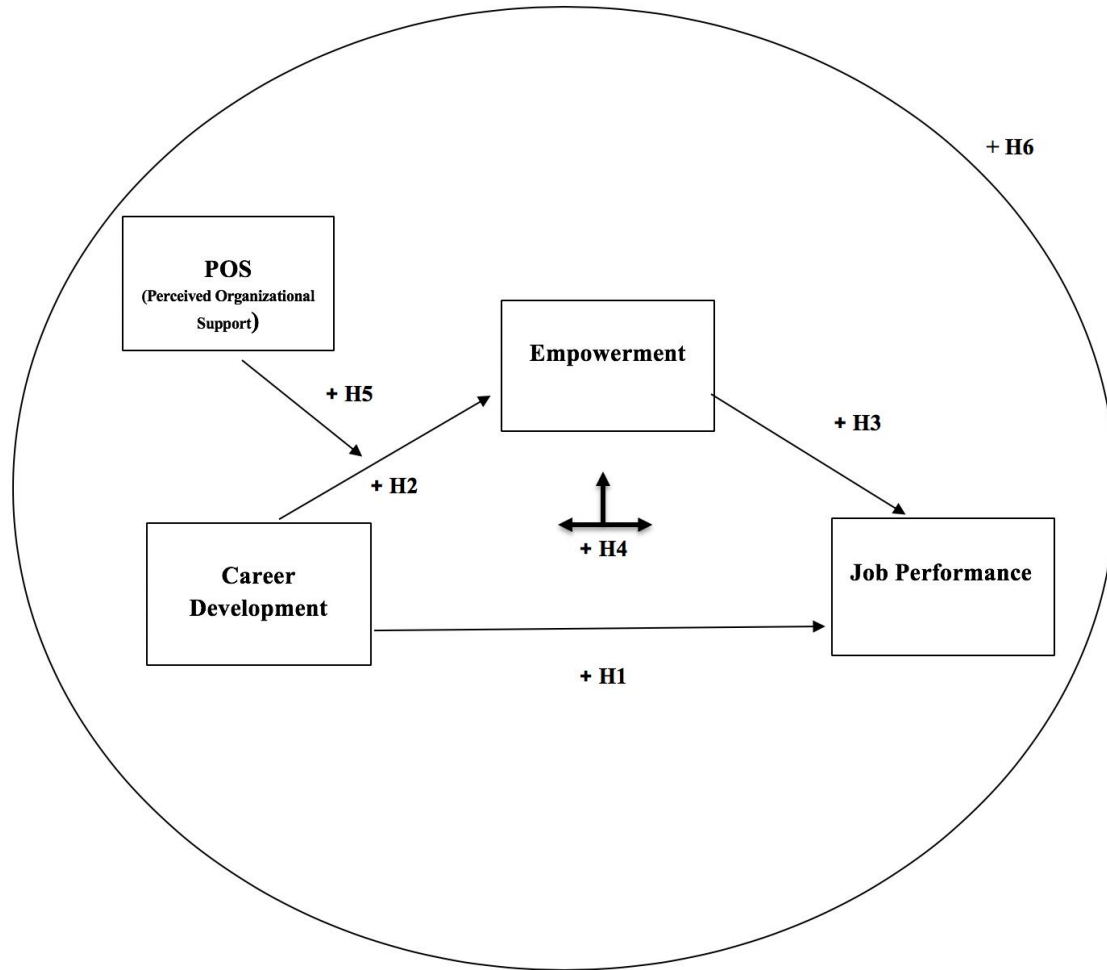


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the hypotheses.

Methods

Design of study

The cross-sectional data used in this research was gained through spreading online questionnaires and was part of a larger study on employment conditions. In order to gain insight on the relationship between career development, empowerment, job performance and POS, this study was designed as a quantitative study. For this research specifically, only the parts relevant to the variables POS, empowerment, career development and job performance were selected from the dataset and used for further study purposes.

Population and sample

In order to establish a sample size the Monte Carlo Power Analysis web application was used (Boulton, Schoemann & Short, 2017) to determine the amount respondents needed. As this web application is usually used for mediation models only, the results retrieved from this analysis were used as a lower bound for the moderated mediation model of this study. An additional 20% surplus was calculated to ensure a valid number of respondents. The Power Analysis indicated that a number of at least 180 respondents was required, so the aimed number was set at 220 respondents. After the survey was handed out, the number of participants (employees) that filled in the survey on their working conditions turned out to be 239. However, eight participants were excluded from the data set due to unreliable data caused by extreme outliers, missing values or unrealistically fast completion of the online survey. This resulted in a final sample size of 231 respondents. The participants were employed in various sectors of expertise and came from various companies in the Netherlands (varying from large banking corporations to medium-sized companies) as the data was obtained randomly via online surveys on social media channels. Both part-time and fulltime employees were asked to participate in the research. The sample population ($N= 231$) consisted out of 57.3% female participants and 42.7% male participants. Besides the gender, control variables such as job tenure (varying from 0 to 44 years) and age (varying from 18 to 67 years) were considered as well (see table 1).

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of sample*

| <i>Control variables</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Standard Deviation</i> |
|--------------------------|----------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Gender (Female) | 57.3 | | |
| Job tenure (in years) | | 9.66 | 10.53 |
| Age (in years) | | 37.36 | 13.73 |

Procedure

The data collection was performed by six students participating in the same thesis circle group of the Master Human Resource Studies at Tilburg University. Each student posted and spread the online survey within several companies and organizations (from varying sectors) using their personal network and social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram). The

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employees were given a digital cover letter (short introduction) that explained the purpose of the research and an online questionnaire they had to fill in. The online program 'Qualtrics' was used for this purpose. The translated questionnaire used for this online survey were included in Appendix A of this research.

The participants were randomly selected based on their willingness to participate in this research. In addition to the questionnaires and cover letter, employees were provided with a brief explanation on the voluntariness of participation, the anonymity of their participation and the confidentiality to ensure academic integrity throughout the process of data collection. All gathered data was eventually accumulated into one data set for the study.

Control variables

Previous research indicates that the control variables age (*in years*), job tenure (*in years*) and gender (*male/female*) are factors that can influence the outcome of the variables used in this study (Aryee & Chen, 2006). Hence, the choice was made to include these in the hypotheses for statistical control and to account for certain alternative explanations in the results.

According to Skaar and Parson (2009) age is a relevant factor when taking career development into account as younger people tend to crave more guidance in this matter and older employees are expected to change careers more often over their lifespan, thus craving less guidance. Also, the longer employees work within a company the less optimistic they are about their career development/advancement (Landau & Hammer, 1986). Female and older workers tend to be more cynical towards the support and appreciation (POS) from their employer than male and younger workers (Landau & Hammer, 1986). Eylon and Bamberger (2000) also confirm that the impact of empowerment on job performance varies by gender.

Measures

The constructs of the variables career development, empowerment, POS and job performance were measured using questions from existing scales mentioned further on. Furthermore, the reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha. The control variables gender, age and job tenure were considered, since existing research supported these for this study (e.g. Aryee & Chen, 2006; Grier-Reed, Skaar & Parson, 2009; Landau & Hammer, 1986).

Career Development. This variable was measured using eight items, based on the career development opportunities scale by van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994. All items were scored on

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a 4-point Likert scale (always- never). A sample item was ‘‘Does your job offer you opportunities for personal growth and development?’’. The reliability of the scale is good ($\alpha = .85$).

Empowerment. This variable was measured using twelve items, based on the empowerment scale by Spreitzer (1995). The scale items assessed the four dimensions of psychological empowerment: meaning, impact, competence and self-determination. All items were scored on a 7-point rating scale (strongly disagree- strongly agree). A sample item for the dimension of meaning was ‘‘The work I do is very important to me’’. The reliability of the scale is good ($\alpha = .84$).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS). This variable was measured using eight items, based on a perceived organizational support scale by Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli (2001). All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree- strongly agree). A sample item was ‘‘My organization cares about my opinions’’. The reliability of the scale is good ($\alpha = .87$).

Job Performance. This variable was measured using six items, based on the job performance scale by Abramis (1994). This scale has been adjusted for the purpose of this research, removing the element of time in the items. A sample item of the unaltered scale was ‘‘How well did you fulfil the task of making decisions in your last working week?’’. All items were scored with a 5-point Likert scale (very badly- very well). A sample item of the altered scale used for this study was ‘‘How well did you fulfil the task of making decisions?’’. The reliability of the altered scale is good ($\alpha = .77$).

Data analysis

To test the hypotheses, the Hayes PROCESS macro (version 2.16) was used in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). The PROCESS macro used bootstrapping confidence intervals to estimate the conditional indirect effects of career development in the empowerment-job performance linkages, which was preferred to the Sobel test (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). The analysis was performed based on 5000 bootstrap samples with a confidence interval of 95%. Furthermore, model 7 (Hayes, 2013) was used to test the mediated moderation model of this research. In view of this, the independent variable was career development and the dependent variable was job performance, being mediated by empowerment. The moderator in this model

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was POS, whereas its effect on the relationship between career development and empowerment was tested. In testing this model, the control variables were controlled as covariates.

The data was checked for errors, outliers and missing values. As an online survey was distributed to the participants, the chances of having missing values were limited. However, if missing values were found, single imputation was used for missing data less than 5 to 10 percent. So, mean imputation was used for five respondents on the job tenure variable and one respondent on the POS variable.

The outliers were filtered out through the use of a scatter plot, histogram and boxplot. After which was decided how strong the outlier would have affected the current dataset when it came to correcting these outliers. As mentioned in the previous population and sample section eight respondents were excluded from this dataset.

Results

This section will elaborate on the results of the statistical analysis and the hypothesis testing of the six aforementioned hypotheses.

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviation and correlations of the variables. Perceived Organizational Support is positively correlated with career development ($r = .449, p < .01$), empowerment ($r = .287, p < .01$) and job performance ($r = .291, p < .01$). POS is negatively correlated with control variable job tenure ($r = -.166, p < .05$). Career development is positively correlated with empowerment ($r = .329, p < .01$) and job performance ($r = .388, p < .01$). Career development negatively correlates with control variables job tenure ($r = -.178, p < .01$) and age ($r = -.133, p < .05$). Empowerment has both positive correlations with job performance ($r = .482, p < .01$) and control variable age ($r = .195, p < .01$). There is also a positive correlation present between control variables job tenure and age ($r = -.690, p < .01$).

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Table 2. *Correlation matrix with means and standard deviations (N=231).*

| | M | SD | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. |
|--------------------------|-------|--------|--------|---------|--------|------|--------|------|----|
| 1. POS | 3.493 | 0.673 | | | | | | | |
| 2. Career Development | 2.665 | 0.594 | .449** | | | | | | |
| 3. Empowerment | 5.307 | 0.770 | .287** | .329** | | | | | |
| 4. Job Performance | 3.934 | 0.471 | .291** | .388** | .482** | | | | |
| 5. Job tenure (in years) | 9.66 | 10.531 | -.166* | -.178** | .085 | .023 | | | |
| 6. Age (in years) | 37.36 | 13.731 | -.055 | -.133* | .195** | .066 | .690** | | |
| 7. Gender | 1.57 | 0.496 | .019 | -.045 | -.073 | .031 | .076 | .074 | |

** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Regression analysis

The conceptual model was tested with the Hayes PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) as a moderated mediation with model 7 using a two-tailed test and the following variables: X (career development), Y (job performance), M (empowerment) and the moderator W (POS). The control variables job tenure, age and gender were added as covariates. The number of bootstrap samples for bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals is 5000. The results of the regression analysis are displayed below in Tables 3 to 6.

The results in the mediation part of the model-testing are to a great extent significant. The direct effects of career development on job performance were found to be significant ($\beta = .2216$) as presented in Table 3, as well as the indirect effects of X on Y at the values of the moderator (POS) with a bootstrap confidence interval of [.0451, .1569] at a moderate level of POS as shown in Table 5. However, the link between career development (X) and the mediator

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empowerment is found to be insignificant with a P-value of 0.7143. The relationship between the mediator empowerment and job performance is significant ($\beta = .2376$) with a P-value of 0.0000.

As shown in Table 4, the interaction effect of POS on the relationship between career development and empowerment was found not to be significant, with a P-value of 0.4734. Thus, the moderation is not significant. Lastly, Table 6 reveals that the overall moderated mediation model is found to be not significant with a bootstrap confidence interval of [-.0374, .0857].

Table 3. *Direct effect of career development on job performance.*

| Coeff. | SE | <i>p</i> | LLCI | ULCI |
|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| .2216 | .0493 | .0000 | .1245 | .3188 |

LL, lower limit; CI, confidence interval; UL, upper limit.

Table 4. *Results PROCESS regression analysis with β -effects and P-values.*

| | Empowerment (M) | | | Job performance (Y) | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------|
| | Coeff. | SE | <i>p</i> | Coeff. | SE | <i>p</i> |
| Career dev. (X) | .1356 | .3698 | .7143 | .2216 | .0493 | .0000 |
| POS | .0310 | .2549 | .9033 | | | |
| Empowerment | | | | .2376 | .0384 | .0000 |
| Int. (X × W) | .0733 | .1021 | .4734 | | | |
| Age | .0123 | .0046 | .0079 | -.0006 | .0027 | .8296 |
| Job tenure | .0020 | .0061 | .7467 | .0018 | .0035 | .6003 |
| Gender | -.1105 | .0919 | .2305 | .0697 | .0537 | .1959 |
| | R ² =.2132 | | | R ² =.2979 | | |
| | F=(10.1169) <i>p</i> =.0000 | | | F=(19.0912) <i>p</i> =.000 | | |

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Table 5. *Indirect effects of career development on job performance at the values of POS.*

| Values of POS | Effect | Boot SE | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|----------------|--------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| 2.7650 (-1 SD) | .0804 | .0383 | .0052 | .1549 |
| 3.6250 (0 SD) | .0954 | .0295 | .0451 | .1569 |
| 4.0000 (+1 SD) | .1019 | .0322 | .0483 | .1722 |

Table 6. *Index of moderated mediation.*

| | Index | Boot SE | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|-----|-------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| POS | .0174 | .0306 | -.0374 | .0857 |

Hypothesis testing

A full overview of the six hypotheses presented in this study can be found in the previously shown conceptual model (Figure 1).

The first hypothesis suggesting that the higher the level of support for career development is, the higher the level of job performance will be. A significant direct effect ($\beta=.2376, p= .0000$) between career development and job performance while controlling for age, job tenure and gender supports this hypothesis (see Table 3). Even when the mediator was added to the equation, the direct link between career development and job performance maintained significant.

Assuming that a higher level of support in career development would lead to a higher level of empowerment experienced by the employee did not turn out to be significantly grounded. The relationship between career development and empowerment was not supported with a significant effect ($\beta=.1356, p= .7143$). This result was achieved while once again controlling for gender, age and job tenure. Thus, the second hypothesis can be rejected.

Furthermore, the third hypothesis presuming that the more empowered an employee would feel, the higher the level of job performance will be while controlling for the aforementioned control variables is supported. A significant effect between empowerment and job performance ($\beta=.2376, p= .0000$) supports the third hypothesis of this study. Thus, the third hypothesis is accepted.

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The fourth hypothesis assumes that career development has an indirect effect on job performance through the mediator empowerment. The results show that although the direct effect of career development on empowerment is insignificant (see hypothesis 2), the overall indirect effect proves to be significant (see Table 5). With a bootstrap confidence interval of [.0451, .1569] at a moderate level of POS, the mediation remains significant as zero is present in the interval. The rejection of the second hypothesis contributes to the conceptualization of the partial mediation rather than a full mediation. As both the direct and indirect effect of career development on job performance proves to be significant, it suggests that job performance is influenced in a joint mediating relationship with career development and empowerment. Thus, leading to an acceptance of the fourth hypothesis supporting a partial mediation while controlling for age, gender and job tenure. Moreover, the model shows an R^2 of .2979, meaning that 29.8% of the variance in job performance can be explained using this specific model (see Table 4).

The fifth hypothesis of this study focuses on the moderation part of the moderated mediation model. It suggests that the relationship between the support an employee experiences for career development and actually feeling empowered as an employee is moderated by the level of Perceived Organizational Support the employee experiences. In this case, this hypothesis clearly can be rejected as the interaction effect (Table 4) proves to be insignificant ($\beta=.0733$, $p=.4734$). Peculiarly, both career development ($\beta=.1356$, $p=.7143$) and POS ($\beta=.0310$, $p=.9033$) prove to be insignificant predictors for empowerment according to the results.

Finally, the last and sixth hypothesis suggests that the overall indirect effect the level of support for career development has on job performance through empowerment is moderated by POS while controlling for the aforementioned control variables. It specifically refers to the overall significance of the moderated mediation model. The index of moderated mediation shows that the overall model has proven to be not significant with a bootstrap confidence interval of [-.0374, .0857] as the zero is present in the interval (see Table 6). The knowledge that this moderated mediation model is not the strongest setup to test these variables could be food for thought for future studies with similar variables.

Discussion

Summary

The aim of the study was to provide insight in the positive effects that career development supported by the employer has on the job performance of an employee. All the while taking the mediating effect that employee empowerment will have on this relationship into account as well as considering the role of moderator for perceived organizational support. The findings of this study support the direct positive effect that career development has on the job performance of one's employees as well as the strong connection between having empowered employees and an increased productivity in an employee's performance at work. Although no groundwork was found that supported the idea of career development being a direct influencer on the sense of empowerment an employee feels, these two variables share a common denominator: job performance. The provision of career development and having empowered employees have an indirect effect on the job performance of an employee. On the other side of the model, POS was found not to be a significant moderator on the link between career development and empowerment. The overall moderated mediation model used for this research was found to be insignificant.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to existing human resource literature in this specific area of research by both highlighting the importance of the presence of career development (actual career advancement and support for future careers) in an organization as well as shedding a light on other personal influencing factors (feeling empowered, supported and appreciated as an employee). The interpretation of the results in this section will lead to a greater understanding of the theoretical implications of this study.

In accordance with Lent et al. (1994) and Hansen (1994) this study confirms that employees who have positive outcomes lying ahead of them (career development, promotions etc.) are more stimulated to commit to a given task at work, leading to an increase in job performance. Employees will overtime develop affinity and interest faster for their job when great development or chances are lying ahead. They will also be more committed to their employer when they perceive that they are supported by them in terms of career development (Lent & Brown, 1996). The results of this study also align perfectly with the notion that job performance can also be influenced and enhanced through an increase in empowerment (e.g. empowered employees), according to several researches (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011; Aryee & Chen, 2006; Harris, Wheeler & Kacmar, 2009; Liden,

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Wayne & Sparrowe, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995). By having happy, motivated and creative staff the organization stands to benefit from this in terms of gaining a whole set of flexible, satisfied and productive employees (Lashley, 1995; Mullins, 2005).

Furthermore, empowerment has several psychological internal stimulators to encourage empowered behaviours within employees. This makes it difficult to establish a link between employees feeling empowered and it actually being caused by the career development instead of other components that play a part in this (such as status and respect). As every employee and human being interprets this differently it may vary over different sample groups with different demographics (older sample group with higher job tenure for example) as supported by Zhou (2009). However, this study did support a joint (indirect) effect of empowerment and career development on job performance.

Lastly, in contradiction to prior research (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Foong-ming, 2008) there was no positive or boosting effect established between having a high level of Perceived Organization Support and the link between career development and empowerment. As Boxall & Purcell (2003) suggest, in order for employees to feel empowered and reach better levels of job performance they must be provided with the proper and suitable resources bringing out these desired behaviours of them. An explanation for the lack of significant moderation effect could be that employees view the availability of career development as booster for POS instead of having POS strengthen the link between career development and the sense of feeling empowered (Foong-ming, 2008). According to Foong-ming (2008) career development in combination with POS could be used to make employees more loyal and committed to the organization rather than making them feel more empowered. This new perspective does open the door for future studies to explore the option of in-depth research on the relationship between POS and career development.

Interestingly, this study found a link between age and empowerment suggesting that the older an employee is the more empowered he/she feels at their workplace. On the other side of the coin it also suggests that with an increase in age, a decrease in career development follows. This could explain the unsupported link between career development and empowerment that was initially suggested as the average age of the sample size was relatively young (37 years) resulting in a lack of sense of empowerment, but a presence of career development. In consonance with Kong, Sun & Yan (2016), creating and sustaining empowered feelings within employees that are younger of age will not be as simple as providing them with career development. Employees

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younger of age crave for more than just the opportunity of fulfilling a task and being rewarded for it. They long for the recognition and respect of their employer for their delivered services and work (Kong, Sun & Yan, 2016).

In conclusion, this study did provide evidence for further research on the fact that career development does bolster the job performance of an employee. It also confirmed that empowered employees do lead to more productive and higher job performance and that a combination of the two (career development and empowerment) leads to a beneficial outcome when it comes to job performance.

Limitations and future research

The limitations of this study and future research recommendations will be given due consideration in this section.

As this was a cross-sectional study using self-reported online questionnaires, the scope of research focuses on a specific period of time whereas it is difficult to establish how these variables would react with each other over a longer period of time. Cause-effect relationships cannot be derived from these findings. Future research should take a longitudinal approach ensuring the production of more detailed results and insight on their relationships beyond this study. The self-reporting aspect makes this study also sensitive for common method bias as employees may want to fill in a socially desired answer rather than their true perspective on the matter (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). A multi-level perspective would be recommended for future research taking both the employee as the supervisor's perspective into account. This would provide the study with a broader range of perspectives into an organization's culture and the internal relationships which could lead to more varying answers and insights.

Even though the large sample size of this study makes it easier to generalize this research, it would be more valuable to this study on career development to focus on performing future research in specific areas or work segments where development opportunities are inevitable or at least widely present within the company construct. It makes it hard for an employee to assess the career development in a company where this might not be clearly present in contrast to an employee that has a tangible career development plan worked out for them. Employees in the banking sector might have different opinions about career development and empowerment than employees in healthcare (e.g. nurses). Focusing on a work sector where career development is

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more likely to be present could lead to discovery of better and stronger causalities between the variables.

During the analysis of the variables a significant correlation between POS and empowerment as well as POS and career development was discovered; however, it requires more research to clarify these relationships. It would be interesting for future studies to zoom in on the relationships between these variables using POS as a mediator instead of a moderator as former research already confirms a relationship between these variables separately (Guest, Conway & Davey, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Leibowitz et al., 1986).

Finally, a better understanding of the variables will arise when future research uses a combination of questionnaires and interviews to gain in-depth results instead of using only quantitative data such as done in this study (via online questionnaires). A combination of these two types of research methods will ensure analysis and exploration of the data in a purer form as weaknesses of both methods will be neutralized by using them simultaneously (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Conclusion and practical implications

First of all, this study adds practical value by creating insight for organizations to develop a sustainable competitive advantage through increased job performance and employee commitment by investing in the development of their employees' need for career development and need for support.

By adapting the HR practices in the organization towards a more open and approachable attitude when it comes to career advancement, support and personal guidance for the employee, the employees will be more likely to use these tools to benefit themselves and the organization with further skill and knowledge development. These could be simple tools such as self-efficacy trainings to boost one's self-confidence, career development consultation with the supervisor/superior or demonstrating that the employee's values are appreciated by involving them more actively in career-decision making processes and work processes (London, 1993). Ultimately, employee empowerment is relevant and one could even say vital for an organization's survival as happy employees make a better and long-lasting work culture possible (Kazlauskaitė, Buciniene & Turauskas, 2011). This study also highlights the importance of considering the age of the target group as younger professionals will respond to empowerment activities differently than older employees. A link between one's age and feeling empowered by

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the employee became visible as well as decline in POS when an employee works longer for an organization. A high level of job tenure showed a negative correlation with POS and career development. These external factors should be considered thoroughly by an organization before setting up an HR practice to boost empowerment and provide career development.

To at long last answer the predominant question of this study: *“To what extent does employee empowerment mediate the relationship between career development opportunities and job performance, and to what extent is this mediating process moderated by perceived organizational support (POS)?”*, a more extensive and in-depth view is needed through additional research. This study did establish a significant indirect relation between empowerment, career development and job performance. It is however hard to define to which extent empowerment is mediating this relationship as no direct effect with career development was found. As empowerment itself is a complicated variable to measure because of its many components (e.g. meaning, self-determination, impact and competence) that are being influenced by various intrinsic and external factors such as organizational culture and environment, personal susceptibility and motivation (Spreitzer, 1995). POS proved to have a significant correlation with both empowerment and career development which could explain that a higher level of support and recognition from the employer could lead to more empowered employees. It could also explain the connection with career development as an involved employer would provide such career advancements to its employees. The exposure of an employee towards empowerment and career advancements could help mold their perspective and their susceptibility towards it being effective on their job performance. The lack thereof could then again make it harder to motivate and empower employees through the possibility of career development.

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Appendix A

Online survey questions for employees (English)

Perceived Organizational Support (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001)

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |

- 1. My organization really cares about my well-being. 1 2 3 4 5
- 2. My organization strongly considers my goals and values. 1 2 3 4 5
- 3. My organization shows little concern for me. (R) 1 2 3 4 5
- 4. My organization cares about my opinions. 1 2 3 4 5
- 5. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor. 1 2 3 4 5
- 6. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem. 1 2 3 4 5
- 7. My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part. 1 2 3 4 5
- 8. If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (R) 1 2 3 4 5

Empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995)

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree | Agree | Strongly agree |

- 1. I am confident about my ability to do my job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 2. The work that I do is important to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 3. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 4. My impact on what happens in my department is large. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 5. My job activities are personally meaningful to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 6. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 7. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my own work. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 8. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 9. I have mastered the skills necessary for my job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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10. The work I do is meaningful to me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. I have significant influence over what happens in my department. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Job performance (Abramis, 1994)

| | | | | |
|------------|--------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Very badly | Rather badly | Neither well not badly | Rather well | Very well |

In your own judgement, how well did you fulfil the following tasks?

1. Make decisions. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Perform without mistakes. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Devote yourself to work. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Achieve your objectives. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Take initiatives. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Take responsibility. 1 2 3 4 5

Career development (Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994)

| | | | |
|-------|-----------|-------|--------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Never | Sometimes | Often | Always |

1. Do you learn new things in work? 1 2 3 4
2. Does your job offer you opportunities for personal growth and development? 1 2 3 4
3. Does your work give you the feeling that you can achieve something? 1 2 3 4
4. Does your work offer you the possibility of independent thought and action? 1 2 3 4
5. Does your job offer you the possibility to progress financially? 1 2 3 4
6. Does your current job improve your chances and opportunities on the job market? 1 2 3 4
7. Does your organization give you opportunities to follow training schemes
and/or courses? 1 2 3 4
8. Does your job give you the opportunity to be promoted? 1 2 3 4