

**An employee perspective of human resource development practices in
the public sector. The role of organizational and supervisor support**

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Abstract

This article adopts an employee-level perspective which is currently lacking in the public sector literature and responds to the call for additional research concerning factors that affect public employees' job attitudes and work behaviors. Based on a survey of civil servants, this study explored the antecedents and outcomes of perceived investment in employee development (PIED). Our research demonstrates the significant role of organizational support (POS) on employees' perceptions of development. Furthermore, supervisor support (PSS) mediated the relationship between POS and PIED. This finding sheds light on the role of supervisors as agents who represent or personify the organization. Also, consistent with the JD-R model and the social exchange theory, we indicated that public employees within a workplace that provides substantial training and developmental incentives, are more likely to report greater levels of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). PIED was found to act as an important mediator between the relationships of POS and employees' outcomes and PSS and employees' outcomes.

Points for practitioners

When HR budgets are increasingly restricted, non-monetary motivators can be a feasible alternative to high-cost financial rewards. It is suggested that employee development practices will not only benefit public organizations in terms of better trained and qualified employees, but also employees' perceptions of organization's

investments in employee development would create a felt obligation among public employees to reciprocate with positive job attitudes and work behaviors.

Keywords: Perceived investment in employee development , perceived supervisor support , perceived organizational support, employee attitudes , employee behaviors, Public management.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades public sector reforms have focused mainly on implementing a range of private sector managerial tools and methods (Ritz, 2009), known as New Public Management (NPM), to maximize the value of employees, among others. Since an appropriately skilled and deployed workforce is crucial for the success of public service delivery (Vermeeren, 2017), today's reformers have adopted Human Resource Management (HRM) systems, such as the knowledge incentive system that focuses on employees' training and development (Tessema, 2014).

Given that organizations are increasingly relying on employee development as a key part of how they function effectively and continuously improve (Pierce and Maurer, 2009), it is not surprising that employee development opportunities have become a topic of utmost importance for both the academics and the practitioners. Kuvaas and Dysvik (2010: 139) adopted an employee perspective and defined perceived investment in employee development (PIED) as '*employees' assessment of their organization's long-term and continuous commitment to helping employees learn to identify and obtain new skills and competencies*'. A number of studies have focused on PIED because of its positive effect on both the organization and employees (Dysvik et al., 2016).

Research on employee development, concerning private sector business and industry, have put forward the significance of interactions between organizations, managers and employees by focusing on social support and specifically on the concepts of perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS). Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined POS as the extent to which the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being, while PSS is defined as employees' views concerning the degree to which their immediate line manager values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Kottke and Sharafinski, 1988).

Based on a survey of public sector employees in Greece, the scope of this study is twofold. First, utilizing the theoretical framework of the job demands-resources model (JD-R model), we conceptualize POS and PSS as job resources and evaluate the effects of employees' supportive perceptions on their perceived developmental opportunities. Second, by integrating the JD-R model and the social exchange theory we explore the effects of POS, PSS and PIED on employees' job attitudes (i.e. organizational commitment) and work behaviors (i.e. organizational citizenship behavior, OCB).

This study extends existing theoretical and empirical knowledge in several ways. First, we adopt an employee-level perspective and respond to the call for additional research concerning factors that affect employees' attitudes and behaviors in the public sector in financially turbulent times (Ko and Smith-Walter, 2013). Second, since most of the previous research in the public sector neglected to examine the interconnections between employees' perceptions of social support and employees' outcomes, our study explores these associations and their underlying mediating mechanisms. Third, we take into account not only employees' perceptions of organizational support when exploring

public employees' outcomes, but also perceptions of supervisor support pointing out that line managers, as organizational agents, play an intermediate role between public administration and employees. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study.

Figure 1 about here

2. Theoretical background and research hypotheses

2.1 Employees' perceptions of support and PIED

2.1.1 Linking POS and PSS to PIED

PIED has captured the attention of researchers in the field of organizational science since it is an important indicator of HRM climate that promotes organizational performance (Dysvik et al., 2016). Early studies have pointed out the importance of exploring perceptual influences, such as supportiveness of the organization and supervisors when studying the notion of 'investment in employee development' (Noe and Ford, 1992).

In this study, we draw on the job resources part from the JD-R model of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) and conceptualize both POS and PSS as resources that influence employees' workplace perceptions. Specifically, the JD-R model suggests that there is an interaction between job demands and job resources i.e. job resources buffer the impact of job demands on employee outcomes. Job demands encompass the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job, that require sustained

physical and/or psychological effort or skill. Job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that reduce job demands, are functional in achieving work goals and more importantly stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Job resources may be located at various levels such as organizational, interpersonal relations, job level and some examples include the social support, job autonomy and performance feedback.

Since the JD-R model is a broad model that does not restrict itself to specific job resources (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014), in the current study we conceptualize both POS and PSS as resources that determine employees' positive or negative workplace experiences. This argument is in line with the early work of Eisenberger et al., (1986) which proposes that the perceptions of the quality of HRM practices are affected by the abundance of job resources. Indeed, previous research conducted in the private sector, empirically indicated a positive relationship of both employees' perceived organizational (POS) and supervisory support (PSS) with a strong HRM climate of receiving investments (PIED) and also with performance (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2012; Kraimer et al., 2011; Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010; Mayes et al., 2017; Pazy and Ganzach, 2009). Specifically, it is found that in order for HRM practices to have an impact on performance, employees should feel support both from the organization and the supervisor. These two forms of social support generate a strong HRM climate of receiving investments, and thereby lead to positive outcomes such as enhanced individual and business-unit performance (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2012; Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010).

Hence, in line with the role of job resources on determining workplace experiences, we posit that public sector employees' increased levels of social support (POS and PSS) are related to employees' positive perceptions of promotion opportunities and developmental experiences.

H1: POS is positively related to PIED.

H2: PSS is positively related to PIED.

2.1.2 The mediating role of PSS in the relationship between POS and PIED

The relationship between POS and PSS has been a matter of interest and dispute. Some early scholars argue that POS and PSS are similar concepts (Levinson, 1965), while others posit that employees can differentiate between these two notions of social support (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Hutchison, 1997; Kottke and Sharafinski, 1988).

The main argument in support of the idea of concepts similarity is the proposition that supervisors are not merely part of the organization but they constitute the representatives of the organization since they are charged with the communication of the organization's values and goals. Alternatively, opponents of this view argue that despite the role of supervisors as representatives of the organization, employees develop individual relationships with their managers and hence can distinguish their relationship with the organization. Consequently, and given the unique exchange relationships that employees may hold with various organizational entities, it is possible that employees experience a high level of support with one entity (e.g. organization) while at the same time may experience low level of support with another entity (e.g. supervisor) (Simosi, 2012: 306).

Nowadays, an important characteristic of the public sector is the direct communication, through electronic channels, of the public administration with its stakeholders (Meijer et al., 2012). Accordingly in Greece, as a result of the recent public reform, state-owned organizations publicly announce their organizational values, goals, resources as well as training and development opportunities not only through the Government Gazette but also through a variety of governmental internet channels such as Ministries' websites and the OpenGov platform (The Greek Open Government Initiative) that has been designed to serve the principles of transparency, deliberation, collaboration and accountability.

In the current study, based on this open and direct communication of the public administration, we posit that state employees are able to develop an overall perception of the organizations' support (POS) that can be distinguished from their perceptions of supervisors' support (PSS). Nevertheless, as the immediate line manager serves as the deliverer or implementer of the HR practices that bring HR policies to life (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007), previous research has demonstrated the significant role of supervisors in the implementation of HR practices. Specifically, Kuvaas and Dysvik, (2010) argued that line managers are of vital importance in implementing developmental HR practices, either because they influence how such practices are perceived by employees or because positive experiences with both line managers and HR practices seem to be needed in order for developmental HR practices to positively influence employee performance.

To the extent that employees believe supervisors to be influenced by the organization's views and act as intermediates, perceived support by the organization (POS) should increase PSS. Indeed, based on this argument, Yoon and Thye (2000) indicated that employees' beliefs that the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being might lead them to believe that supervisors, as agents of the organization, are favorably inclined toward them. Based on this rationale, we posit that the positive relationship between employees' perceptions of organizational support and employees' perceptions of 'investments in employee development' to be mediated by perceptions of supervisory support.

H3: The positive relationship between POS and PIED is mediated by PSS.

2.2 The effects of POS, PSS and PIED on employees' attitudes and behaviors.

Research on employee development, concerning private sector business and industry, has utilized the theoretical framework of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to unveil the relationships between organizations, managers and employees. In general, the social exchange theory posits that one will try to pay back those that provided help and benefits. In this sense, organizations that provide support to their employees create a feeling of obligation on the employee's part. To discharge their obligation, employees respond in ways that benefit the organization, namely, they enhance their performance and support organizational goals (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Since POS and PSS capture the essence of social exchange in employment relationships (Pazy and Ganzach, 2009) and as investing in employee development is one way of developing a felt responsibility or obligation among employees (Dysvik et al., 2016), in this study, we integrate the JD-R model and the social exchange theory so as to

improve our understanding of how and why social support resources, create a relationship of mutual exchange that in turn influences employees' outcomes.

Specifically, we argue that fostering a working environment, where employees experience enhanced social support (both organizational and supervisory) and higher levels of PIED are developed, a social exchange relationship between organizations, supervisors and employees is elicited. As a result, employees reciprocate for the provided support and resources by developing positive job attitudes and behaviors towards the organization and, in turn, a willingness to work hard to increase the organization's effectiveness.

2.2.1 Exploring the relationships between employees' perceptions of support and organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment is considered multidimensional and a distinction should be made between affective, normative and continuance commitment since these three conceptually different components are likely to have quite different antecedents (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization. Employees with strong affective commitment remain in the organization because they *want* to. Normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with strong normative commitment remain in the organization because they feel they *ought* to do so (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment refers to the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization. Past studies revealed that the most important antecedents of continuance commitment include (a) the costs associated with leaving the organization (side-bet theory including

the threat of wasting the time and effort spent acquiring non-transferable skills, giving up seniority-based benefits and losing promotion opportunities, among others) and (b) the lack of alternatives (Meyer and Allen, 1984). Employees with strong continuance commitment remain because they *need* to (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

Previous research indicated that POS and *affective commitment* are conceptually and empirically linked via the norm of reciprocity. In their early work, Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that by fulfilling socioemotional needs, POS would increase employees' affective commitment to the organization. Later studies provided support for the notion that POS could be regarded as a job resource, as such, is a strong predictor of affective commitment. Specifically, it is found that employees who receive the support and recognition from the organization are expected to develop a desire to reciprocate by accepting the organizational goals and values, by helping the organization to achieve its goals, and by maintaining a strong desire to be “part of the family” (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

The relationship between POS and *normative commitment* has not yet received much attention despite the fact that there is a ‘possibility that reciprocation is based on employee's felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare’ (Simosi, 2012). Initially, antecedents of normative commitment were based on Weiner's (1982) study on socialization experiences. According to Weiner, socialization experiences create within the employee a sense of obligation to remain in the organization. These socialization experiences may be both prior to (familial/cultural socialization) and following (organizational socialization) the entry into the organization. Indeed, the revised measures of normative commitment allow the possibility that organizational

supportiveness creates a feeling of obligation to reciprocate (Meyer and Parfyonova, 2010).

With regard to *continuance commitment*, the study of Colakoglu, et al. (2010), proposed that POS reduces the feelings of entrapment that develop when employees are forced to stay with their organization because of the high costs associated with leaving. Contrary to their expectations, their empirical results revealed that POS positively affects continuance commitment. The authors proposed that employees with strong levels of continuance commitment are likely to feel that they “had to” remain with the organization because of the lack of attractive alternatives in the current unfavorable economic climate.

H4: POS is positively related to (a) affective commitment, (b) normative commitment and (c) continuance commitment.

Given that the supervisor acts as an agent that represents or personifies the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002) and based on the proposition that supportive perceptions are regarded as job resources, it is implied that employees’ perceptions of supervisory support also positively influence affective, normative and continuance commitment. Indeed, preceding research conducted in the private sector has demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between PSS and the three dimensions of organizational commitment (Miao et al., 2013).

H5: PSS is positively related to (a) affective commitment, (b) normative commitment and (c) continuance commitment.

The mediating role of PIED

Scholars of organizational commitment identified employees' work experiences as the most influential antecedents of affective and normative commitment and suggested that commitment develops as the result of positive experiences (Meyer and Parfyonova, 2010). In particular, HRM practices that satisfy employees' need to feel comfortable in the organization and competent in the work role, are expected to positively and strongly affect employees' level of affective and normative commitment (Giannikis and Nikandrou, 2013). Specifically, it is suggested that levels of commitment can be enhanced by promoting awareness of training and development opportunities and that as long as employees perceive investment in their development positively, a strong relationship with commitment arises (Zaitouni, 2016).

Based on the above, we suggest that in work contexts where both the organization and the supervisors provide substantial developmental inducements, employees are more likely to reciprocate with strong affective and normative commitment. Thus, employees who experience positive situations are not only more likely to remain in the organization because they *want to*, but also they feel that they *ought to* give something in return, i.e., to remain a valuable employee in the organization.

With regard to continuance commitment, we argue that within a supportive organizational culture where the supervisors concomitantly value employees' contributions, care about their well-being and provide developmental inducements, an increased level of continuance commitment is expected. In such a work environment, employees, through the mechanism of promotional side-bets as well as the fear of losing a supportive workplace, are more likely to report a greater *need to* remain in the

organization. Additionally, the lack of alternative attractive job opportunities due to the economic slowdown enhances the proposed relationship.

H6: The positive relationships between POS and (a) affective commitment, (b) normative commitment and (c) continuance commitment are mediated by PIED.

H7: The positive relationships between PSS and (a) affective commitment, (b) normative commitment and (c) continuance commitment are mediated by PIED.

2.2.2 Exploring the relationships between employees' perceptions of support and OCB.

OCB is defined as 'individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization' (Organ, 1988). OCB refers to employee behavior that is extra-role or unenforceable behavior. Motivating employees to go beyond their job task has recently attracted scholarly attention. In particular, in financially turbulent times where resources are limited, OCB as a discretionary and non-required employee behavior is considered valuable to the success of the organizations (Pierce and Maurer, 2009).

Previous research has indicated that various job resources in the workplace, such as social support among others, stimulate positive extra-role behavior. In their pioneer work, Eisenberger et al. (1990) indicated that POS is the most important antecedent of OCB. In line with the social exchange theory, research pinpointed the linkage between OCB and the employee-employer exchange relationship and proposed that when employees feel that the organization attaches great importance to their personal values, they reciprocate via increased OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

Furthermore, as supervisors are in regular contact and form relationships with their subordinates, then the quality of such a relationship has an important role in motivating employees to reciprocate in citizenship behavior (Ladebo, 2008). Recent studies have provided evidence for this argument and established the significant and positive relationship between PSS and OCB (Kim et al., 2016).

As existing research has highlighted the importance of employees' perceptions regarding organizational and supervisor support, similar patterns should be expected for the relationship between PIED and OCB. Indeed, previous scholars proposed that skill development activities provided by the organization and supported by the supervisors lead to increased OCB (Zaitouni, 2016). On the basis of the social exchange theory, it is suggested that employees who perceive those developmental activities as beneficial for them reciprocate by performing duties not required formally by their job description. Hence, the following hypotheses are examined:

H8: POS is positively related to OCB.

H9: PSS is positively related to OCB.

H10: The positive relationships between (a) POS and OCB and (b) PSS and OCB will be mediated by PIED.

3. Method

3.1 Research context

As the financial crisis reforms public administration globally, Greece offers an interesting context for examining the impact of the fiscal crisis on public administration and management. Greek administration is characterized by marginal displacements of the established bureaucratic pattern. Greek public sector is diachronically typified by

low performance, irrationality, extreme politicization, limited institutional capacity, legalism, formalism, corruption, patronage, clientelism, fragmented and inconsistent procedures, lack of coordination, ad hoc arrangements and frequent changes at the top administrative levels. The volume and the endurance of these shortcomings and the established bureaucratic pattern explain to a certain extent the weak results of all the reform attempts (Lampropoulou and Oikonomou, 2018: 114).

Therefore, it is timely to examine public sector employees' perceptions under the ongoing Memorandum austerity measures imposed since May of 2010. While the imposed austerity measures introduced a set of private sector HRM techniques, such as NPM techniques, Greek public servants face the challenge of managing and tolerating the augmented workload as the result of the government downsizing and the minimization of expenses. Within the current financial difficulties, employee supportive practices and in specific developmental policies at an organizational level, are subject to tight budget constraints imposing particular challenges to managers of the public sector. Therefore, maintaining or even improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public service to meet new public demands has become a critical issue.

3.2 Sample

We surveyed 800 public sector employees in nine different public organizations (local government agencies and national agencies) located in Northern Greece. We received 490 useable responses (61.25% response rate). Our sample was comprised of 249 (50.80%) male participants and 241 (49.20%) female participants. Regarding age, 38.80% were from 18 to 34 years old. Respondents reported that 49.60% had a high school certificate or technical-professional training and 50.40% had a bachelor's degree

or higher. Employees with more than 6 years of tenure represented 46.50%, while the majority (94.10%) were employees (5.90% management position).

3.3 Measurements

Perceived organizational support. POS was measured using four items from the ‘Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS)’ (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990). Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). A sample statement for POS was “The organization strongly considers my goals and values”. The internal reliability of the four items was 0.92.

Perceived supervisor support. PSS was measured with four items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986). Respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement on a seven-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. A sample statement for PSS was “My supervisor really cares about my wellbeing”. The internal reliability of the four items was 0.83.

Perceived investment in employee development. We measured PIED with a seven-item scale adapted from Lee and Bruvold (2003) and further developed by Kuvaas and Dysvik (2010). Responses were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) and internal consistency for the total scale was 0.95. A sample statement for PIED was ‘By investing time and money in employee development, my organization demonstrates that it actually invests in its employees’.

Organizational commitment. We used the three-component model of organizational commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1991) to measure affective, continuance and normative commitment. Specifically, we used eighteen items (six for each of the components of commitment) and each one was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. A sample item for affective commitment was ‘I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own’, for continuance commitment ‘It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to’, for normative commitment ‘I would feel guilty if I left my organization now’. The coefficient alpha reliability for affective, continuance and normative commitment was 0.93, 0.94 and 0.93, respectively.

Organizational citizenship behavior. Based on the 24 item OCB scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990), we adopted four statements to assess the dimension of civic virtue. Participants were asked to indicate how characteristic each of the four statements are of their own behavior at work. A sample item for OCB was “Attends meetings that are not mandatory but are considered important”. The coefficient alpha reliability for ‘civic virtue’ was 0.84.

Control variables. A number of demographic and work-related variables are considered to control for individual variations. Similarly, to prior studies on employee attitudes and behaviors, we collected information with regard to gender, age, educational level, tenure, employment position status and pay level (e.g., Monsen and Boss, 2009). We included a dummy variable for gender (0=female, 1=male) and job position (0=staff/worker, 1=management). Age, education and tenure were measured by categorical questions with six categories each and pay level with nine categories, as

follows: For age, (1) represented 18 to 24-year-old and (6) represented age 65 or older. For education, (1) represented high-school level and (6) represented postgraduate level. For tenure, (1) represented less than 1 year and (6) represented more than 15 years. For pay level, (1) represented €580 to €780 per month and (9) represented more than €2,181 per month.

Additional measurement tests appear in Appendices (online). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first conducted to summarize the factor structure and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then performed to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. Further, discriminant validity of our subscales was evaluated as well as it is found that common method bias was not a problem in our study.

4. Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all the variables. It is shown that both PSS and POS are positively associated with PIED and employees' outcomes ($0.19 \leq r \leq 0.44$). In addition, PIED is positively correlated with affective ($r=.40, p<.001$), normative ($r=.49, p<.001$) and continuance commitment ($r=.20, p<.001$) as well as OCB ($r=.49, p<.001$).

Table 1 about here

Table 2 presents the results from the hierarchical linear models. Specifically, we tested for direct (hypothesis 1 and 2) and mediation effects (hypothesis 3) by regressing PIED on perceptions of PSS (Model 1, step 2a), POS (Model 2, step 2b) and their joint contribution (Model 3, step 2c), while controlling for a range of individual variables (step 1). Regression results indicate that both PSS (Model 1, step 2a, $R^2=.09$, $F=17.15$, $b=.29$, $p<0.001$) and POS (Model 2, step 2b, $R^2=.20$, $F=17.31$, $b=.45$, $p<.001$) have a significant effect on PIED, providing support for hypothesis 1 and 2. A comparison between PSS and POS indicates that POS is a stronger predictor of PIED ($\Delta R^2=.19$ for POS compared to $\Delta R^2=.08$ for PSS). Additionally, Table 2 shows that there is evidence of partial mediation effects. Specifically, it is found that the joint contribution of PSS and POS (Model 3, step 2c) has a significant and positive effect on PIED. Nevertheless, POS had a decrease in beta weight from $b=.45$ ($p<.001$) to $b=.39$ ($p<.001$). These findings meet the requirements for partial mediation of Liden et al. (2000). According to the authors, the reduced strength of the predictor-outcome relationship after inclusion of the mediator suggests a mediation effect. In addition to Liden et al. (2000) approach for mediation, we performed the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982). The Sobel test evaluates the significance of the indirect path from the independent variable to the dependent. It is found that the indirect path is significant ($p<.05$) and that the relationship between POS and PIED is mediated by perceptions of PSS. Hence, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 2 about here

Tables 3 and 4 present the regression analyses for the direct effects of POS and PSS on employee outcomes (i.e. affective, normative, continuance commitment and OCB) as well as the potential mediating effects of PIED, while controlling for individual variables (step 1). Results provide support for the proposed direct effect hypotheses 4, 5, 8 and 9. It is found that both POS (see table 3, step 2a) and PSS (see table 4, step 2a) have a significant and positive effect on the three facets of commitment: affective (POS: $b=.21$, $R^2=.08$; PSS: $b=.20$, $R^2=.08$), normative (POS: $b=.25$, $R^2=.07$; PSS: $b=.18$, $R^2=.04$) and continuance (POS: $b=.36$, $R^2=.15$; PSS: $b=.37$, $R^2=.16$), as well as on OCB (POS: $b=.37$, $R^2=.14$; PSS: $b=.27$, $R^2=.08$). The above values indicate that POS compared to PSS is a better predictor of affective, normative commitment and OCB.

To test for mediation (hypotheses 6, 7 and 10), we rerun the regressions with the mediator (PIED) included in step 2b. Table 3 and 4 show that there is evidence of mediation effects of PIED towards all employee's outcomes. Full mediation occurs when the independent variable no longer influences the dependent variable after the mediator has been controlled, while partial mediation is present when the independent variable's influence on the dependent variable is reduced after the mediator is controlled (Liden et al., 2000). Hence, Table 3 and 4 indicate a full mediation effect for affective and normative commitment (POS and PSS become insignificant) and a partial mediation for continuance commitment and OCB. Furthermore, we performed the Sobel test to confirm whether the differences in betta weights are significant. Results indicated significant mediation effects for all the relationships ($p<.05$). Consequently, there is support for hypotheses 6, 7 and 10.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 about here

Lastly, we used structural equation modelling (SEM) to estimate all relations to a single model simultaneously and synchronously. The path coefficients are depicted in Figure 2. The model fit was good: $\chi^2_{[821]}=2175.00$, RMSEA=.058, NFI=.94, CFI= .96, GFI=.83. Overall, the SEM results are in line with the previous findings. It is indicated that the positive relationship between POS and PIED is partially mediated by PSS. Furthermore, it is showed that the positive relationships between the independent variables (POS, PSS) and employee outcomes (affective commitment, normative commitment and OCB) are either fully or partially mediated by PIED. Fully mediation occurs when the direct effects become insignificant. Nevertheless, compared to the separated analyses conducted for each independent variable, the mediation effect for the outcome of continuance commitment becomes insignificant (PIED→Continuance commitment; $b=.01$; $p>.05$) when we consider all variables in the model.

Figure 2 about here

5. Discussion

Based on a survey of public servants in Greece, we conceptualize POS and PSS as job resources and evaluate the effects of employees' social supportive perceptions on their perceived developmental opportunities. Specifically, it is indicated that employees' perception of organizational support (POS) is a stronger predictor of PIED, compared to PSS. This finding provides support for the role of supervisors as agents who represent or personify the organization. This intermediate role of the supervisors is further supported by the fact that PSS mediated the relationship between POS and PIED. Hence, it can be suggested that the organization is viewed by employees as the primary source of support and that line managers, working on behalf of the organization, serve as the deliverers or implementers of the HR practices that bring HR policies to life (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

Furthermore, by integrating the JD-R model and the social exchange theory, which still remains incomplete and deficient in public management literature (Paille et al., 2013), we explored the effects of POS, PSS and PIED on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Our study points out the mediating role of PIED in the aforementioned relationships. Findings suggest that by fostering a working environment, where employees experience enhanced social support (both organizational and supervisory) and higher levels of PIED are developed, a felt obligation to reciprocate is elicited. As a result, employees in return for the provided support and resources, reciprocate with citizenship behavior and with a strong desire to remain in the organization not only because they '*need*' to (continuance commitment), due to the of the lack of alternatives, but also because they '*want*' to (affective commitment) and because they feel they '*ought*' to do so (normative commitment).

The current study provides important practical implications in contexts of budget austerity where monetary rewards cannot constitute a feasible motivator, due to pay freezes or even wage cuts. Since our findings demonstrate that the two forms of social support (POS and PSS) can enhance employees' perceptions of receiving developmental investments, it can be suggested that, in Greece and other countries with ongoing crisis such as in the South-East Europe, non-monetary incentives can be an effective alternative to high-cost financial rewards. When public organizations are forced to do more with less and HR budgets are increasingly restricted, it is vital for public administration to focus on non-financial rewards and specifically on the dynamics of social support (POS, PSS) and the generation of a strong HRM climate of receiving developmental opportunities.

Nevertheless, findings suggest that public employees' developmental perceptions are primarily affected at an organizational level and that employees expect from their supervisor to play an intermediate role in the above relationship. Since managers constitute the representatives of the organizations, their words and actions should be congruent with the organizational policies relating to personal development. An unwillingness or incapability on the part of their immediate supervisor to support employees' efforts, despite the supportive intentions of the organization, may in turn create downward spiral effects that may lead to conflict and uncertainty.

Lastly, this study suggests that public organizations can motivate employees to remain committed to the organization as well as encourage them to engage in OCB behavior by delivering HR developmental opportunities. Employee development programmes will not only enhance employees' perceptions of organizational investments and benefit firms in terms of better trained and qualified personnel but will also provide a strong indication of both the organization's and supervisor's support. Taking into account that POS and PSS capture the essence of social exchange in employment relationships, a felt obligation among employees to reciprocate with positive attitudinal (organizational commitment) and behavioral (OCB) outcomes is created. Furthermore, since the literature supports that the positive job attitudes and behaviors lead to enhanced job performance and lower turnover and absenteeism rates, public sector organizations are expected to view investments in employee development favourably as an approach to improve both employees' and organizations' outcomes.

Limitations

Nevertheless, as in all studies, there are limitations that represent opportunities for future research. One limitation is that data was obtained through the use of self-reports which could raise concerns of common method variance. Although, post-hoc tests were performed to assess the impact of common method bias and it was found that its effect was negligible, future studies could complement the quantitative employee-centered approach of this study by collecting additional qualitative data (i.e. narrative descriptions) not only from employees but also from top managers and HR professionals.

The analysis was conducted using data from the Greek public sector that recently fostered a specific set of HRM techniques, imposed by the austerity measures. Our results are in line with most of the international literature examining employees' PIED. However, since, HR practices might be sensitive to cultural or legal particularities, the generalizability of the present research might be limited to the Greek context and to other countries with similar economic and cultural conditions.

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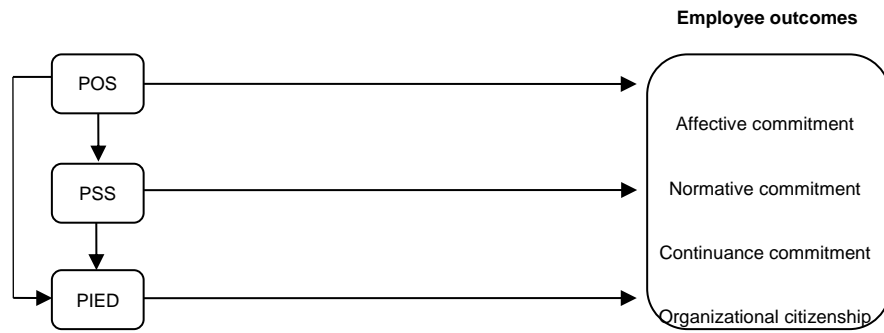


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Table. 1 Descriptive statistics and pairwise correlations

	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender (female=0, male=1)	.51	.50	-												
2. Age (categorical variable)	3.22	1.28	.24 ^b	-											
3. Educational level (categorical variable)	3.55	1.34	-.21 ^b	-.28 ^b	-										
4. Tenure (categorical variable)	3.31	1.32	.18 ^b	.34 ^b	-.09	-									
5. Job position (0=staff, 1=supervisor)	.06	.24	.04	.10 ^a	.10 ^a	.32 ^b	-								
6. Pay level (categorical variable)	2.89	.98	.00	.01	.61 ^c	.52 ^b	.50 ^b	-							
7. POS	4.15	1.67	.01	.00	.09 ^a	-.02	.02	.00	(.92)						
8. PSS	4.43	1.35	-.02	-.06	.05	.00	.01	-.01	.44 ^b	(.83)					
9. PIED	3.85	1.64	.02	.04	-.01	-.05	-.01	-.04	.44 ^b	.28 ^b	(.95)				
10. Affective commitment	4.18	1.78	-.09 ^a	-.05	.17 ^c	-.02	.06	.08	.23 ^b	.22 ^b	.40 ^b	(.93)			
11. Continuance commitment	4.38	1.74	-.07	-.01	.10 ^a	.06	.07	.06	.36 ^b	.37 ^b	.20 ^b	.17 ^b	(.94)		
12. Normative commitment	4.19	1.45	.07	.00	.05	.03	.03	.03	.25 ^b	.19 ^b	.49 ^b	.29 ^b	.18 ^b	(.93)	

13. OCB	4.03	1.45	.00	.00	.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	.37 ^b	.27 ^b	.49 ^b	.36 ^b	.22 ^b	.37 ^b	(.84)
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Notes: Reliability coefficients for the scales are in parentheses along the diagonal.

^a $p \leq .05$; ^b $p \leq .001$

Table 2 Regression analysis

<i>Predictors</i>	Outcome			
	<i>PIED</i>			
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	
	<i>PSS as a predictor</i>	<i>POS as a predictor</i>	<i>POS as a predictor and PSS as a mediator</i>	
<i>Step 1 Controls</i>				
Gender	.02	.02	.00	.01
Age	.06	.08	.05	.05
Education	.01	-.05	-.11	-.12
Tenure	-.08	-.12	-.12	-.13 ^a
Job position	.01	-.02	-.03	-.03
Pay level	-.01	.06	.10	.12
<i>Step 2a PSS as a predictor</i>				
PSS		.29 ^c		
<i>Step 2b POS as a predictor</i>				
POS			.45 ^c	
<i>Step 2c Predictor and mediator</i>				
POS				.39 ^c
PSS				.12 ^c

F	.57	17.15 ^c	17.31 ^c	16.25 ^c
R ²	.01	.09	.20	.23
ΔR ²		.08	.19	.22

Notes: a= $p \leq .05$; b= $p \leq .01$; c= $p \leq .001$

Table 3 Regression analysis for direct effects of POS and mediating effects of PIED

<i>Predictors</i>	Outcomes							
	<i>Affective commitment</i>		<i>Normative commitment</i>		<i>Continuance commitment</i>		<i>OCB</i>	
<i>Step 1</i>								
<i>Controls</i>								
Gender	-.06	-.06	.00	.00	-.06	-.06	.00	.00
Age	-.01	-.03	-.01	-.03	-.05	-.05	.00	-.02
Education	.18 ^b	.23 ^b	.01	.06	-.05	-.04	.01	.05
Tenure	.04	.09	-.01	.04	-.10	-.10	.00	.05
Job position	.07	.09	.02	.04	.04	.05	-.02	-.01
Pay level	-.01	-.14	.02	-.03	.12	.12	-.01	-.05
<i>Step 2a POS as a predictor</i>								
POS	.21 ^c		.25 ^c		.36 ^c		.37 ^c	
<i>Step 2b Predictor and mediator</i>								
POS	.04		.04		.34 ^c		.19 ^c	

PIED		.39 ^c		.47 ^c		.05		.41 ^c
F	6.48 ^c	15.90 ^c	4.95 ^c	19.78 ^c	11.99 ^c	10.64 ^c	11.36 ^c	22.86 ^c
R ²	.08	.21	.07	.25	.15	.16	.14	.28
ΔR ²		.13		.18		.01		.14

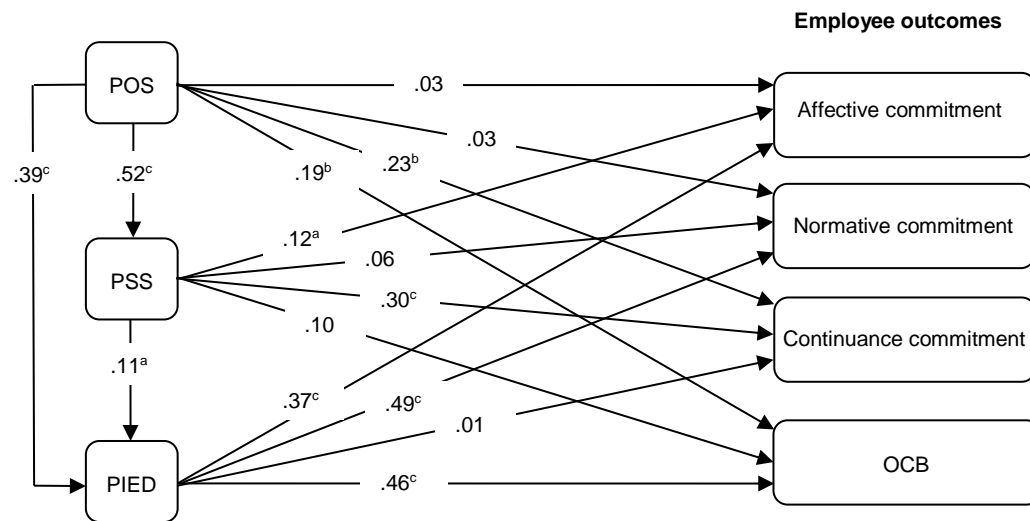
Notes: a= $p \leq .05$; b= $p \leq .01$; c= $p \leq .001$

Table 4 Regression analysis for direct effects of PSS and mediating effects of PIED

<i>Predictors</i>	Outcomes							
	<i>Affective commitment</i>	<i>Normative commitment</i>	<i>Continuance commitment</i>	<i>OCB</i>				
<i>Step 1</i>								
<i>Controls</i>								
Gender	.05	-.06	.01	.05	-.06	.01	.01	.00

Age	.01	-.02	.01	.01	-.02	.01	.03	.00
Education	.21 ^c	.23 ^c	.04	.21 ^c	.23 ^c	.04	.06	.08
Tenure	.03	.08	-.01	.03	.08	-.01	.00	.05
Job position	.08	.08	.03	.08	.08	.03	.00	.00
Pay level	-.11	-.13	-.01	-.11	-.13	-.01	-.05	-.07
<i>Step 2a PSS as a predictor</i>								
PSS	.20 ^c		18 ^c		.37 ^c		.27 ^c	
<i>Step 2b Predictor and mediator</i>								
PSS		.09		.06		.34 ^c		.13 ^c
PIED		.39 ^c		.40 ^c		.10 ^c		.46 ^c
F	6.02 ^c	16.48 ^c	2.64 ^c	19.80 ^c	12.89 ^c	12.04 ^c	5.56 ^c	21.42 ^c
R ²	.08	.22	.04	.25	.16	.17	.08	.26
ΔR ²		.14		.19		.01		.18

Notes: a= $p \leq .05$; b= $p \leq .01$; c= $p \leq .001$



Notes: a= $p \leq .05$; b= $p \leq .01$; c= $p \leq .001$

Figure 2. Structural model and path coefficients

