

Exploring public employees' motivation to learn and develop in turbulent times. The role of perceived support and organizational commitment.

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ABSTRACT

This study responds to the call for additional research concerning factors that affect public-sector employees' job attitudes and behaviors in a context of budgetary constraints and austerity measures. Given the importance of training and development in the workplace, this research seeks to understand the mechanisms that drive employees' motivation to learn and develop. The results indicate that the positive effects of supervisor support on employees' motivation to participate in development activities are likely to become less influential when employees concomitantly perceive that their work organization constitutes an unsupportive environment. Moreover, consistent with the social exchange theory and since reciprocal exchanges between supervisors and subordinates are built on commitment, it is found that affective and normative commitment mediate the positive relationship between employees' perceptions of supportive policies and motivation to learn and develop.

Keywords Motivation to learn and develop, perceived organizational support, perceived supervisor support, organizational commitment, Greece.

Introduction

In today's dynamic and turbulent environment, public sector reformers implement a set of private sector managerial tools, the so-called New Public Management (NPM). NPM emphasizes on cost-savings, efficiency and outcomes and hence adopts successful private

sector personnel management systems so as to maximize the value of human resources and to create a highly motivated and properly skilled workforce, among others (Vermeeren, 2017).

Motivational theories acknowledge the value of non-financial incentives, i.e. training, career development, coaching and other employee-related policies. In financially distressed contexts where compensation per employee drops dramatically, managers inevitably shift their attention from monetary rewards to the intrinsic aspects of work (Prouska, Psychogios, & Rexhepi, 2016). The present study focuses on one dimension of intrinsic motivation, namely employees' motivation to learn and develop (MLD). MLD refers not only to a specific desire of the trainee to learn the content of a training program, but also how much employees participate in professional development (Noe & Wilk, 1993).

Since the financial downturn in the late 2000s in almost all OECD countries, the impact of budgetary constraints, restructuring programs and the austerity measures has not been a subject of rigorous empirical scrutiny with regard to their effects on workplace behavior in public administration (Demmke, 2017). In Greece, one of the first countries to experience budget cuts, the severity of the crisis forced public sector organizations to realize the significance of their workforce's development as a means of adapting to ongoing changes more effectively (Mitsakis, 2017). Since government employees at all levels are continually asked to provide more effective and efficient services to meet new challenges (Ho et al., 2011), it is timely to examine employees' MLD in the Greek public sector which has been severely impacted by the debt crisis.

Although the Memorandum austerity measures imposed since May 2010 caused major structural reforms in the Greek public sector, it still remains the largest organization complex system, characterized as unique and problematic. Greek public servants face the challenge of managing and tolerating the augmented workload because of government downsizing. As cost-saving measures were higher in the state than in the private sector

(Christopoulou & Monastiriotes, 2011), maintaining or even improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public service to meet new public demands has become a critical issue. In order to maximize employee performance, training and development programs are the major tools that organizations use to enhance organizational human capital competences (Zahra, Iram, & Naeem, 2014).

Research on employee training and development, with regard to private sector business and industry, has put forward the significance of interactions between managers and employees by utilizing the theoretical framework of the social exchange theory. According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employers and employees develop an exchange relationship. In general, one will try to recompense those that provided help and benefits. In line with this notion, previous scholars identified the significant role of perceived supervisor support (PSS) on MLD and employees' positive outcomes in the private sector. 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 & Sharafinski, 1988). As it has been empirically shown, when supervisors serve as enablers of employees' training and development opportunities, PSS has a positive effect on employees' MLD (Towler, Watson, & Surface, 2014).

Surprisingly, the literature of human resource management (HRM) in the public sector has neglected to explore the importance of the aforementioned relationship between managers and employees and the explanatory power of the social exchange theory. In addition, since the reciprocity norm initiates when the organization provides a supportive and caring atmosphere for employees (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), such that employees reciprocate by feeling attached and committed to the organization and by acting to achieve organizational goals, previous studies have neglected to

explore the role of perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational commitment in the relationship between PSS and employees' MLD.

This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive approach of employees' perceptions regarding supportive conditions. For this reason, the current research, posits that the relationship between PSS and MLD is subject to POS and organizational commitment. Employees are expected to respond differently to the support offered by the supervisor, depending on their perception of organizational support (Simosi, 2012). For instance, low levels of POS may be considered by employees as an unwillingness or incapability on the part of the organization to support their efforts, despite the supportive intentions of the immediate supervisor. Hence, employees may become confused about the consequences of such an organizational orientation or view it with disdain. These circumstances may in turn create downward spiral effects that often lead to conflict and uncertainty (Gounaris, Chatzipanagiotou, Boukis, & Perks, 2016). This study also shows that in a supportive working environment, personnel's MLD is prompted by employees' positive attitudes, i.e., affective and normative commitment. As employees perceive the provision of supervisors' support as recognition of their contribution, then this supportive stance triggers a social exchange process in which employees feel both committed and obligated to reciprocate to the organization (Bashir & Long, 2015).

This research extends existing theoretical and empirical knowledge in several ways. First, it responds to the call for additional studies concerning factors that affect employees' attitudes and behaviors in the public sector (Ko & Smith-Walter, 2013). Second, it takes into account organizational factors, i.e., the moderating role of organizational support, when exploring public employees' behaviors and thus overcomes the prevailing, but narrow, view that line managers, as organizational agents, are the sole influencers of employee behaviors. Third, since most of the previous research in the public sector neglected to examine the

interconnections between PSS, MLD and commitment, this study points out the mediating role of affective and normative commitment in the relationship between PSS and MLD. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study.

Figure 1 about here

Theory and hypotheses

Perceived supervisor support as an antecedent of employees' motivation to learn and develop

The concept of PSS reflects the exchanges between supervisors and employees, and it is indicated that when supervisors act as sources of support, then employees are more likely to reciprocate with positive job attitudes and work behaviors (Eisenberger, Malone, & Presson, 2016; Giannikis & Nikandrou, 2013). Supervisors can play an influential role in defining and implementing HR policies, HR practices, and expectations that shape employee participation in training (Towler et al., 2014). Specifically, regarding training and development, the role of supervisors often involves: *“encouraging and motivating employees to attend training programs, helping employees before, during and after training programs in terms of time, budgetary support and resources, getting employees to be actively involved in decision-making, and guiding trainees in applying the new competencies that they have acquired in their workplace”* (Ismail, Sieng, Abdullah, & Francis, 2010, pg. 4).

Tracey and Tews, (2005), indicated that supervisors can send clear signals regarding the role and value of training, development, and professional growth in the firm, which may, in turn, motivate employee behavior regarding development activities. Similarly, Park, Kang, & Kim, (2018) and Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, (2012) empirically

showed that supervisor support positively correlates with motivation to learn, in the US context. Accordingly, Al-Eisha, Furayyan, & Alhemoud, (2009) in their survey demonstrated that public sector employees who perceived higher degrees of support from their supervisors reported higher motivation to participate in training programs.

The moderating role of POS in the relationship between PSS and MLD

Another form of social exchange relationship that captured researchers' attention is POS. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, (1986) defined POS as the extent to which the organization values employees' contributions and cares about their well-being. Previous research on POS has demonstrated that employees interpret organizational actions such as supportive HRM practices as indicative of the personified organization's commitment to them.

Early studies indicated that POS and PSS are two distinct forms of social exchange (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Accordingly, Simosi (2012) argued that given the unique exchange relationships employees hold with various organizational entities, it is possible someone to experience a high level of support with one entity (e.g., organization), while at the same time to experience low level of support with another entity (e.g., supervisor).

As presented in the previous section, existing literature indicated a direct and positive link between PSS and MLD. When the immediate line manager is supportive, values employees' contribution and cares about their well-being, then employees are more likely to participate in training and development programs. Nonetheless, past theoretical models have often overlooked how, why, and in which organizational contexts this relationship is established. Hence, this study claims that the strength of the relationship between PSS and MLD rests on employees' perceptions of organizational support. PSS is likely to become more influential when employees are within a supportive environment at an organizational

level. Within this context, managers are not only willing to but also are able to fully apply beneficial HRM practices, such as employees' participation in work decisions and employees' participation in training and development programs. On the other hand, the supervisor's support is likely to become less influential when employees perceive that their work organization constitutes an unsupportive environment (Simosi, 2012).

H1: The positive relationship between PSS and MLD will be moderated by POS - the higher the POS, the more positive the relationship.

The mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between employees' motivation to learn and develop and supervisors' support

Since the concept of PSS reflects the reciprocal exchanges between supervisors and subordinates due to the positive interactions built on commitment and trust (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), then it is reasonable to expect positive employee attitudes such as organizational commitment to act as mediators in the relationship between supervisor support and employees' MLD. Organizational commitment is considered one of the most important notions in the field of organizational behavior and HRM (Dhar, 2015). Meyer & Allen (1991) proposed that commitment is multidimensional and that a distinction should be made between the three components of commitment: affective, continuance and normative. Affective and normative commitment have been investigated in this study, since both dimensions of commitment are developed through reciprocity norms and influenced by perceptions of mutual obligations (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Affective Commitment

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 (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Pioneers of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991) identified employees' work experiences as the most influential antecedents of affective commitment and suggested that commitment develops as the result of experiences that satisfy employees' needs and/or are compatible with their values. In particular, it is showed that HRM practices which 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 commitment (Kooij & Boon, 2018).

Since the immediate line manager serves as the deliverer or implementer of the HR practices that bring HR policies to life (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), previous research has demonstrated the significant role of supervisors in the implementation of HR practices (Kuvaas, Dysvik, & Buch, 2014). Hence, not surprisingly, and as has been discussed in Iversen and Rimol (2015), employees' level of PSS affects important organizational and individual outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, turnover intentions and organizational commitment, while antecedents of PSS include the provision of challenging tasks, feedback and training. Specifically, focusing on organizational commitment, recent studies revealed that supervisor support has a significant positive influence on affective commitment (Nazir S., Shafi, Qun, Nazir, & Tran, 2016).

Yet few organizational scholars have explored the relationship between affective commitment and employees' MLD (Bashir & Long, 2015; Newman et al., 2011). For instance, Barrett & Kang (2004), examined the relationship between affective commitment and motivation to learn. Findings confirmed a positive relationship between the examined

variables. Similarly, the study of Bulut & Culha, (2010) showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between affective commitment and motivation to learn and develop.

Based on the above findings, it is suggested that when the immediate supervisors act as facilitators of support (increased PSS), then employees are more likely to develop strong affective commitment. Furthermore, in such a supportive environment, committed employees are anticipated to reciprocate by willingly participating in training and development programs. Therefore, this study suggests the following:

H2: The positive relationship between PSS and MLD will be mediated by affective commitment.

Normative Commitment

Normative commitment is the least studied component of organizational commitment and 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 & Allen, 1991). Initially, antecedents of normative commitment were based on Wiener's (1982) study on socialization experiences. According to Wiener, 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. However, the revised measures of normative commitment allow the possibility that the receipt of benefits (e.g., job training, compensation and rewards) and the recognition of these investments to create a feeling of obligation to reciprocate (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010).

The relationship between organizational support and normative commitment has attracted researchers' attention since there is a 'possibility that reciprocation is based on

employee's felt obligation to care about the organization's welfare' (Simosi, 2012). Bambacas (2010) showed that levels of normative commitment improved when organizations provided support for continuous learning and normative commitment was strongest for those who valued the continuous learning they received while managing their own careers. Furthermore, Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, (2017) found that organizational support is positively correlated with normative commitment.

Nevertheless, with regard to the relationship between PSS and normative commitment, taking into account existing literature, only the study of Nazir et al., (2016) focused on the topic and found that supervisor support had a substantial impact on employees' normative commitment.

Furthermore, there is no evidence on the relationship between normative commitment and motivation to learn. Previous literature neglected to explore whether employees with high normative commitment are also highly motivated to participate in training and development programs. In this study it is argued that employees, who believe that they ought to continue employment, are also anticipated to have a sense of moral obligation to reciprocate by participating in training and development activities. By doing so, not only do they intend to improve their performance and service delivery (Ho et al., 2011) so as to repay supportive actions, but they also seek to feel confident in their work by acquiring new skills, knowledge and abilities (Nazir et al., 2016).

Building on the preceding discussion, it is suggested that when the immediate supervisors act as facilitators of support (increased PSS), then employees are more likely to reciprocate with normative commitment and hence are more willing to participate in training and development programs. Thus, based on the rationale of reciprocity by obligation, it is argued that:

H3: The positive relationship between PSS and MLD will be mediated by normative commitment.

Method

Measurements, reliability and validity of scales

All measures were translated into Greek using two peer scholars to assess their accuracy (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973). In addition, the questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure the ambiguity of the instructions and that all items and scale format were clearly understood.

Perceived supervisor support. PSS was measured with four items adopted 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 is “My supervisor really cares about my wellbeing”. The four items showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$).

Perceived organizational support. POS was measured using four items from the ‘Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS)’ (Eisenberger et al., 1986). 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 is “The organization strongly considers my goals and values”. The internal reliability of the four items was 0.92.

Affective commitment. Affective commitment was measured using the six-item scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). A sample statement for affective commitment is “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”. Each item was

measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach’s alpha) for the six items was 0.93.

Normative commitment. To assess normative commitment, the six-item scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) was used. A sample statement for normative commitment is “I think I would be guilty if I left my current organization now”. Each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. The internal reliability of the five items was 0.93.

Motivation to learn and develop. MLD was measured with seven items adopted from Noe and Wilk (1993). A sample statement is “I would like to improve my skills”. Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement on a seven-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. The internal reliability of the five items was 0.80.

Additionally, discriminant validity and common method bias was assessed. Following the recommendation of Fornier and Larcker (1981) to assess discriminant validity, the AVE was compared with the shared variance between constructs. Discriminant validity is confirmed if the AVE for each construct is greater than its shared variance with any other construct. In this study, for each construct, it was found that the AVE was greater than the shared variance suggesting discriminant validity. In order to assess the presence of common method bias, based on the suggestion of Podsakoff P. M., MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, (2003), all indicators were loaded on a single factor. Results indicated that a single factor model is not a good fit to the data: $\chi^2_{[495]} = 11520.40$, RMSEA = 0.21, NFI = 0.67, CFI = 0.69, GFI = 0.41. Moreover, the principal component analysis indicates that four components

are extracted and no single factor account for most of the variance. Therefore, it can be concluded that common method bias does not present a serious issue in this study.

Control variables. A number of demographic and work-related variables are considered to control for individual variations. Similar to prior studies information with regard to gender, age, educational level, tenure and pay level was collected (e.g., Qiao, Khilji, & Wang, 2009). A dummy variable for gender (0 = female, 1 = male) was included. Age, education and tenure were measured by categorical questions with six categories each and pay level with nine categories. For instance, 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.

Sample

A total of 490 useable responses (61.25 percent response rate) were collected from public sector employees located in Northern Greece. The questionnaires were hand-delivered by the researchers to the employees. Prior to the completion of the questionnaire's participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were assured that all information would be kept completely anonymous and confidential. There were 249 (50.80 percent) male participants and 241 (49.20 percent) female participants. In terms of age, 5.70 percent were aged from 18 to 24 years old, 33.10 percent from 25 to 34, 16.70 percent from 35 to 44, 22.40 percent from 45 to 54 and 22.00 percent from 55 to 65 years old. Respondents reported that 49.60 percent had a high school certificate or technical-professional training and 50.40 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Employees with more than 6 years of tenure represented the 46.50

percent. With regard to monthly salary, 72.20 percent indicated that they receive from €781 Euros to €1,180 per month.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and the pairwise correlations among the model variables. The mean values for PSS, POS, affective commitment, normative commitment and MLD were 4.43, 4.15, 4.18, 4.19 and 4.71, respectively. Furthermore, Table 1 indicates that MLD is significantly and positively correlated with PSS, POS, affective and normative commitment. In order to test for multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance coefficient values were computed. Values of VIF above 10 and tolerance values below 0.1 signify multicollinearity problems (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). In the study, since none of the VIF values are greater than 10 (all values close to 1) and none of the tolerance values are lower than 0.1 (all values close to 0.9), it can be concluded that there are no problems of multicollinearity.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 presents the results from the hierarchical linear models. Specifically, direct and moderation effects were tested (hypothesis 1) by regressing MLD on perceptions of PSS (step 2), POS (Step 3) and their interaction (PSSxPOS, Step 4), while controlling for a range of individual variables (Step 1). Regression results indicate that PSS (Step 2) and POS (Step 3) have a significant effect on MLD. Additionally, the interaction term between PSS and POS (PSSxPOS, Step 4) has a significant and positive effect on MLD suggesting that the relationship between MLD and PSS is moderated by POS. In other words, PSS is more likely

to have a positive influence on MLD when employees' perceptions of organizational support are higher, providing support for hypotheses 1. To facilitate interpretation of the moderating effects for the significant interaction terms, the interaction plots are provided in Figure 2. The graph presents the moderating effects of POS on the relationships between MLD and PSS. It is shown that while PSS has a positive relationship on MLD, it increases more rapidly when perceptions of organizational support are higher.

Table 2 about here

Figure 2 about here

Structural equation modelling was used to test the proposed hypotheses and the three-step mediated approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was adopted. According to the authors, mediation occurs when three conditions are met: (a) the predictor variable (i.e., PSS) should be related significantly to the mediator (i.e., affective and normative commitment), (b) there has to be a significant relation between the predictor (i.e., PSS) and the outcome (i.e., MLD), (c) the mediating variable (i.e., affective and normative commitment) should be related to the outcome (i.e., MLD) with the predictor (i.e., PSS) in the equation. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), the reduced strength of the predictor-outcome relationship after

inclusion of the mediator suggests a mediation effect. For a total mediating relationship to exist, the effect of the predictor on the dependent variable will become non-significant when it includes all the relationships in the model. For partial mediation to exist, the effect of the predictors on the dependent variable will decrease when it includes all the relationships in the model.

Consequently, in order to test hypotheses 2 and 3 five models were estimated. Model 1 suggests that PSS has a direct effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.27, p \leq 0.05$), normative commitment ($\beta = 0.24, p \leq 0.05$) and MLD ($\beta = 0.49, p \leq 0.05$) (Table 2). The model fit was good: $\chi^2_{[311]} = 927.11, p < 0.05$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.064, normal fit index (NFI) = 0.92, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94, goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.88. Therefore, the findings satisfy the first and the second criterion for mediation. To test the third criterion of mediation, four structural models were estimated (model 2, model 3, model 4 and model 5). Model 2 and model 4 suggest that the relationship between PSS and MLD is fully mediated by affective and normative commitment, respectively. In model 2 and model 4, all paths were significant. In Model 3 and model 5, a direct path from PSS to MLD was included so as to suggest partial mediation. In Model 3 and model 5, all paths were significant. The fit indices reported in Table 3 and the model comparisons indicate that for both affective ($\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df) = 72.65 (1), p \leq 0.05$) and normative commitment ($\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df) = 75.84 (1), p \leq 0.05$) the partial mediation models (model 3 and model 5) have a better fit than the full mediation models (model 2 and model 4). Therefore, the results reported in Table 3 provided support for hypotheses 2 and 3. In particular, it is indicated that PSS is positively related to MLD and this relationship is partially mediated by affective and normative commitment.

Table 3 about here

Discussion

NPM in the public administration seeks to react to current challenges, such as calls for more efficient and cost-effective public services, through employee training and development policies (Thaler, Spraul, Helmig & Franzke, 2017). This study responds to the call for additional research concerning the effects of training and development on public sector employees' behavior in a context of budgetary constraints (Ko & Smith-Walter, 2013). To this end, based on a sample of employees in the Greek public sector which has been strongly affected by the austerity measures, the purpose of this paper is threefold: First, to explore PSS as an antecedent of employees' MLD. Second, to evaluate the moderating role of POS in the aforementioned relationship. Third, to explore the mediating role of organizational commitment on the relationship between employees' MLD and supervisor support.

Findings validate previous research conducted in the private sector (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012) and demonstrate that the strong positive relationship between PSS and MLD is also applicable to the public sector. Nevertheless, prior studies, conducted both in the private and the public sector, have neglected to explore the factors that mediate/moderate this relationship (Fazio et. al., 2017). For this reason, this research further considered organizational-level factors, i.e., POS. This is in line with recent calls to overcome the prevailing and rather narrow conceptualization that managers are the sole influencers of employees' outcomes. It is found that the strength of the relationship between PSS and MLD rests on employees' perceptions of organizational support. In other words, supervisor support is likely to become less influential when employees perceive that

their work organization constitutes an unsupportive environment as a result of prescribed and limited budgets as developed by the organization.

Next, this study explored the mechanisms that mediate the positive relationship between supervisors' support and employees' MLD. Since the concept of PSS reflects the exchanges between supervisors and subordinates due to the positive interactions built on commitment and trust, this research explored the mediating role of organizational commitment. It is found that employees who either want to (affective commitment) or ought to (normative commitment) continue employment, are also anticipated to willingly participate in training and development activities. As employees perceive the provision of supervisors' support as recognition of their contribution, then this supportive stance triggers a social exchange process in which employees feel both committed and obligated to reciprocate to the organization.

Apart from the above theoretical contributions, the current study also provides important practical implications. Managers, as the first guarantors of the NPM procedures, play a vital role in the successful implementation of HR development practices. As line managers have the power within their organizations to approve or deny training and development (McDowall, 2010), organizations should be more selective when promoting or recruiting to line manager positions and look for candidates with genuine interest in people rather than solely technical expertise (Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010).

Nevertheless, more importantly, findings suggest that public employees' development opportunities should be supported by both supervisors and the organization. Managers' words and promises, relating to training and development practices, should be congruent with the organizational policies and actions (Op de Beeck, Wynen & Hondeghem, 2017). Hence, the organization's strategic employee development plan should be effectively communicated and implemented by line managers. The decentralization of personnel management systems

would also provide greater discretion to supervisors and could be used to create an organizational environment which promotes managerial flexibility in public organizations (Park et al., 2018). Accordingly, financially distressed public organizations should avoid cutting the training budgets as such an action would not only seem shortsighted but would also signal to employees the lack of organizational support and this, in turn, would hinder managers' supportive actions.

Additionally, this study argues that in times of financial turbulence, and limited monetary motivators, non-financial rewards are vital. Nevertheless, in order to enhance employees' motivation to learn and develop, public administration should acknowledge the important role of employees' organizational commitment. Enhancing employees' commitment through supportive actions (both organizational and managerial), such as recognition, communication and fairness, triggers a social exchange mechanism. In such a supportive environment, despite the financially unfavourable conditions and limited monetary incentives, committed employees are anticipated to reciprocate by willingly participating in training and development programs.

As in all studies, there are some limitations that present opportunities for future research. First, this study was based on a sample of public organizations located in Greece. Consequently, one limitation is that the geographical coverage of the sample is restricted; thus, the results might not generalize to other samples. Second, a convenient sample of public organizations in North Greece was chosen; thus, in future studies researchers will need to use larger, nation-wide samples. Moreover, the sample is comprised only of public sector employees. In order to gain a more complete understanding of employees' perceptions of organizational investments in employee development, future research, preferably longitudinal and/or cross-cultural, is needed to explore private-sector counterparts' perceptions as well.

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