

WORK MOTIVATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AMONG GEN Z EMPLOYEES

Nguyễn Thị Vân Anh, PhD¹

Cao Ngọc Ánh², Tạ Mỹ Anh², Nguyễn Thị Hạnh², Đặng Thị Ngọc Ngà²

¹ Lecturer, Faculty of Management – School of Business and Economics, Hanoi University of Industry

² Student, Faculty of Management – School of Business and Economics, Hanoi University of Industry

Abstract

This study aims to elucidate the mechanism through which work motivation is transformed into organizational commitment among Generation Z (Gen Z) employees, focusing on the mediating role of career development opportunities. Drawing upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research argues that work motivation effectively fosters commitment only when "institutionalized" through tangible professional growth opportunities within the organization. Survey data collected from 408 Gen Z employees in Hanoi were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that work motivation has a positive impact on career development opportunities ($\beta = 0,478$; $p < 0,001$), which in turn significantly influences organizational commitment ($\beta = 0,537$; $p < 0,001$). Conversely, the direct effect of work motivation on organizational commitment was found to be weak and limited ($\beta = 0,093$; $p < 0,05$), highlighting the substantial mediating role of career development opportunities. This study contributes to the literature by extending the application of SDT within the context of the young workforce and emphasizing the pivotal role of the organizational environment in converting individual motivation into sustainable commitment. Practically, the results suggest that firms should prioritize establishing clear and transparent career development systems to enhance the retention of Gen Z employees.

Keywords: Work motivation, career development opportunities, organizational commitment, Gen Z employees, Self-Determination Theory.

1. Introduction

Amidst profound fluctuations in the global labor market, maintaining employee commitment has emerged as a central challenge for modern organizations. Shifting professional values, particularly among the younger workforce, are eroding traditional forms of commitment rooted in seniority or obligation. Generation Z—having matured in a digital environment and prioritizing personal growth—tends to place a premium on work meaningfulness, learning opportunities, and clear career trajectories. Simultaneously, they exhibit a higher propensity for job hopping when these expectations remain unfulfilled. Consequently, deciphering the mechanisms underlying the organizational commitment of this demographic has become an urgent imperative for management practitioners.

In organizational behavior literature, work motivation has long been identified as a core determinant of positive employee outcomes, including performance, proactivity, and organizational commitment. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation is fostered when basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and

relatedness—are satisfied, prompting individuals to engage in their work voluntarily and sustainably. However, despite the widely acknowledged role of work motivation, empirical evidence suggests that the link between motivation and organizational commitment is not always as direct or robust as anticipated. Numerous studies indicate that high levels of motivation do not automatically translate into long-term commitment in the absence of supportive organizational conditions.

These findings suggest the need to examine mediating mechanisms that explain how work motivation is converted into organizational commitment. Among these, career development opportunities have emerged as a factor of paramount importance. Beyond mere training programs or promotions, these opportunities reflect the extent of an organization's investment in its employees' futures, thereby shaping their self-worth perceptions and career prospects within the firm. When employees perceive a clear developmental pathway, they are likely to increase their psychological and emotional investment, reinforcing their commitment. Conversely, in the absence of growth opportunities, even highly motivated individuals may experience diminished commitment or seek external alternatives.

While prior research has addressed work motivation and career development opportunities, the literature has predominantly focused on direct relationships. The specific mechanism through which individual motivation is transformed into organizational commitment via cognitive perceptions of the work environment remains insufficiently elucidated. This research gap is particularly pronounced in developing economies like Vietnam, where the Gen Z workforce is expanding rapidly and possesses distinct value orientations compared to previous generations.

Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes the mediating role of career development opportunities in the relationship between work motivation and organizational commitment among Gen Z employees in Hanoi. Specifically, it seeks to answer how and under what conditions work motivation is effectively converted into organizational commitment. By empirically testing the research model, this study not only clarifies the interplay between psychological and organizational factors but also provides an evidentiary basis for designing HR policies tailored to the characteristics of the young workforce.

Theoretically, this research contributes by extending the application of SDT in organizational behavior, emphasizing that intrinsic motivation only flourishes when supported by appropriate organizational conditions—specifically, career development opportunities. Practically, the findings suggest that enterprises should shift from a focus on merely boosting individual motivation toward building clear and transparent career development systems, thereby enhancing commitment and talent retention in an increasingly competitive labor market.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Work Motivation and Career Development Opportunities

In organizational behavior research, work motivation is considered a fundamental factor driving employee behavior and developmental orientation. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation plays a central role in encouraging individuals to proactively engage in their work and seek personal growth opportunities.

When basic psychological needs—namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are satisfied, employees not only perform more effectively but also tend to actively explore learning and development opportunities within the organization.

However, recent studies suggest that work motivation does not merely influence current behavior but also shapes how individuals perceive their work environment, particularly regarding career development opportunities. Highly motivated employees are typically more proactive in seeking, utilizing, and positively evaluating opportunities for learning, promotion, and professional growth. Conversely, individuals lacking motivation tend to be passive and are less likely to perceive developmental opportunities, even when they are provided by the organization.

In the context of the Gen Z workforce, this relationship becomes even more pronounced. Gen Z is characterized as a generation that highly values personal development and tends to evaluate employment not only based on income but also on the potential for learning and advancement. Therefore, work motivation can serve as a catalyst, driving employees to perceive and capitalize on development opportunities within the organization.

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Work motivation has a positive impact on career development opportunities.

2.2. Career Development Opportunities and Organizational Commitment

Career development opportunities are regarded as a key indicator of an organization's investment in its human capital. Beyond simple training sessions or promotions, these opportunities encompass long-term professional prospects and the potential for enhancing individual competencies within the firm.

Theoretically, career development opportunities can be understood as an organizational resource that satisfies the need for competence within the SDT framework. When employees perceive growth potential, they develop a sense of progress, self-efficacy, and worth, which in turn fosters stronger emotional and psychological attachment to the organization.

Empirical research further indicates a robust correlation between career development opportunities and organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment. When organizations provide clear and transparent growth trajectories, employees are likely to exhibit higher levels of trust, obligation, and long-term retention. Conversely, a lack of such opportunities can lead to a state of aimlessness and diminished commitment, even when other working conditions remain favorable.

For Generation Z, this factor is paramount, as they tend to evaluate organizations based on their capacity to support long-term personal growth. Thus, career development opportunities serve not only as a facilitator but as a prerequisite for fostering organizational commitment.

H2: Career development opportunities have a positive impact on organizational commitment.

2.3. Work Motivation and Organizational Commitment

According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is a driver that encourages individuals to engage in their work voluntarily and sustainably, thereby enhancing their organizational bond. Extensive literature has shown that highly motivated employees tend to work more

proactively, demonstrate greater extra-role behaviors, and exhibit higher commitment levels.

However, empirical evidence also suggests that the link between work motivation and organizational commitment is not always strong or consistent. In certain cases, high individual motivation may not lead to long-term commitment if the work environment fails to meet developmental expectations. This is particularly evident among Gen Z, who are prone to rapid turnover if clear growth prospects are absent.

Therefore, while work motivation is expected to positively influence organizational commitment, this effect may be insufficient without appropriate mediating factors from the organizational environment.

H3: Work motivation has a positive impact on organizational commitment.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Career Development Opportunities

As discussed, work motivation can drive employees to proactively seek and more positively perceive growth opportunities. Simultaneously, these opportunities play a vital role in forming and reinforcing organizational commitment. This suggests a sequential impact where work motivation influences commitment through the mediating mechanism of career development opportunities.

From an SDT perspective, this process can be explained as follows: intrinsic motivation impels individuals to seek conditions that satisfy their need for competence, where career development opportunities act as a critical environmental factor. Once this need is fulfilled, individuals tend to internalize organizational values and increase their commitment.

This perspective also helps explain why, in many instances, work motivation does not directly translate into commitment but requires mediating factors that reflect the organizational context. Consequently, examining the mediating role of career development opportunities is essential to clarifying the underlying mechanism between the variables in the research model.

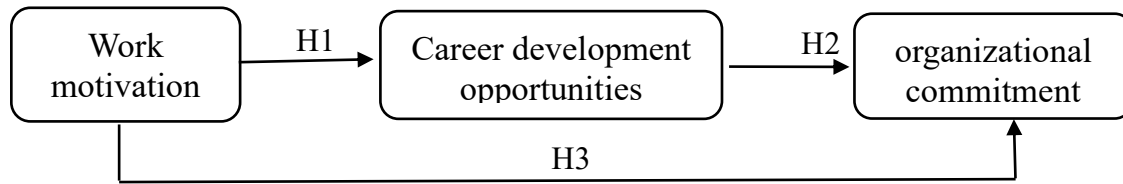
H4: Career development opportunities mediate the relationship between work motivation and organizational commitment.

2.5. Proposed Research Model

Based on theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, this study proposes a model to explain the mechanism by which work motivation is transformed into organizational commitment through the mediating role of career development opportunities. Specifically, work motivation is hypothesized to not only directly impact organizational commitment but also exert an indirect influence via employees' perceptions of professional growth opportunities.

The proposed research model illustrates the relationships between these factors, where work motivation acts as an individual-level catalyst, career development opportunities reflect employees' perceptions of the organizational environment, and organizational commitment serves as the ultimate behavioral outcome. Accordingly, career development opportunities are expected to function as a mediator, elucidating the transformation of work motivation into organizational commitment. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model



- Hypothesis H1: Work motivation has a positive impact on career development opportunities.
- Hypothesis H2: Career development opportunities have a positive impact on organizational commitment.
- Hypothesis H3: Work motivation has a positive impact on organizational commitment.
- Hypothesis H4: Career development opportunities mediate the relationship between work motivation and organizational commitment.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach to test the relationships between work motivation, career development opportunities, and organizational commitment. Data were collected through a questionnaire-based survey targeting Generation Z employees currently working in various enterprises in Hanoi.

The survey participants were identified as individuals born between 1995 and 2010 with practical work experience in organizations. A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques was utilized to reach the target demographic, given the constraints in accessing the total population. Despite using a non-probability sampling method, the study attempted to diversify the sample sources in order to improve the representativeness of the collected data.

A total of 450 questionnaires were collected, of which 408 valid responses were retained for formal analysis after excluding incomplete or unreliable entries. This sample size meets the minimum requirements for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

While non-probability sampling methods may limit generalizability (representativeness), the study sought to diversify the sample sources through multiple channels to minimize bias and enhance the reliability of the findings.

3.2. Measures and Research Variables

The variables in the research model were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 – *strongly disagree* to 5 – *strongly agree*). The scales were adapted from previous studies to ensure validity and suitability for the current research context.

- Work Motivation: Measured through observed variables reflecting employees' levels of interest, proactivity, and desire for professional growth.
- Career Development Opportunities (CDO): Reflects employees' perceptions of learning potential, promotion prospects, and professional advancement within the organization.
- Organizational Commitment (OC): Represents the degree of psychological and emotional attachment employees have toward their organization.

Before the formal survey, the questionnaire was refined through expert consultation and a pilot test to ensure the clarity and appropriateness of the observed variables.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected via an online questionnaire between November 2025 and February 2026. The survey was distributed through social media platforms and personal networks, with participants encouraged to share it with peers who met the research criteria.

To ensure data quality, responses that were incomplete, exhibited straight-lining patterns (constant response patterns), or had outlier completion times were excluded prior to analysis. Additionally, the study ensured anonymity and confidentiality to minimize social desirability bias.

3.4. Data Analysis Method

Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software following a two-step procedure. First, the measurement model was assessed to verify the reliability and validity of the scales. Criteria included Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity via the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Second, the structural model was tested to evaluate the research hypotheses. Key metrics included path coefficients (β), p-values, the coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect size (f^2). A bootstrapping procedure with an appropriate number of resamples was employed to test the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships.

3.5. Common Method Bias (CMB) Testing

Since the data were collected from a single source at a single point in time, the study conducted tests for Common Method Bias to ensure the integrity of the results. In addition to Harman's single-factor test, a full collinearity test was performed. The resulting Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were below the threshold of 3.3, indicating that common method bias does not significantly affect the research model.

4. Research Results

The evaluation of the measurement model indicated that the scales achieved adequate reliability and validity. Specifically, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.819 to 0.872, and Composite Reliability (CR) values fell between 0.871 and 0.901, all exceeding the acceptable threshold. Factor loadings for all observed variables were greater than 0.7, and AVE values exceeded 0.5, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, HTMT values below 0.85 confirmed strong discriminant validity. Detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation Results

Biến	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Work motivation	0,819	0,871	0,550
Career development opportunities	0,854	0,889	0,597
Organizational oommitment	0,872	0,901	0,599

For the structural model, the analysis results show no multicollinearity as all VIF coefficients are less than the threshold of 5. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that the model has a moderate to good explanatory power, with the career development

opportunity variable (CDO) reaching $R^2 = 0,513$ and the organizational commitment variable (OC) reaching $R^2 = 0,429$.

The hypothesis testing results using the bootstrap method show that all relationships are statistically significant. Specifically, work motivation has a positive influence on career development opportunities ($\beta = 0,478$; $p < 0,001$), and career development opportunities have a strong influence on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0,537$; $p < 0,001$). Meanwhile, the direct impact of work motivation on organizational commitment was relatively weak but still statistically significant ($\beta = 0,093$; $p < 0,05$). Detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural Model Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Coefficient (β)	P-value	Conclusion
H1	0,478	0,000	Ủng hộ
H2	0,537	0,000	Ủng hộ
H3	0,093	0,014	Ủng hộ

Table 3. Coefficient of determination (R^2)

Dependent Variable	
Career development opportunities (CDO)	0,513
Organizational commitment (OC)	0,429

Notably, the mediation analysis results reveal that the indirect effect of work motivation on organizational commitment via career development opportunities is statistically significant ($\beta = 0,257$; $p < 0,001$). Since the direct effect remains significant, career development opportunities are identified as a partial mediator. This finding suggests that work motivation does not translate entirely into organizational commitment directly; rather, it operates through a cognitive mechanism regarding perceived professional growth opportunities. Detailed results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation Effect Testing Results

Relationship	Indirect Effect	P-value	Conclusion
Word motivation \rightarrow CDO \rightarrow OC	0,257	0,000***	Significant

5. Discussion and Managerial Implications

5.1. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide a clearer understanding of the mechanism through which work motivation is translated into organizational commitment among Gen Z employees. First, work motivation has a positive effect on career development opportunities ($\beta = 0,478$; $p < 0,001$), indicating that motivation serves as a driving force that encourages employees to actively recognize and utilize development opportunities within the organization.

Notably, career development opportunities exert the strongest effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0,537$; $p < 0,001$) and play a significant mediating role in the relationship between work motivation and organizational commitment (indirect $\beta = 0,257$; $p < 0,001$). This result suggests that individual motivation does not directly translate into organizational commitment, but rather needs to be “institutionalized” through specific

organizational mechanisms, particularly clear and structured career development opportunities.

In addition, the direct effect of work motivation on organizational commitment is relatively weak ($\beta = 0,093$), although it remains statistically significant. This finding indicates that motivation alone, when operating independently, may not be sufficient to generate strong organizational commitment. Instead, it highlights the essential role of organizational context in transforming individual motivation into meaningful attachment to the organization.

In the context of Gen Z employees, this finding may reflect their heightened expectations regarding career development. Even highly motivated individuals may not develop strong organizational commitment if they do not perceive clear pathways for career advancement within the organization. Therefore, organizational commitment should not be viewed as a direct outcome of motivation, but rather as the result of a mediated process in which career development opportunities play a central role.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the field of organizational behavior by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation does not directly lead to organizational commitment, but operates through organizational mediating mechanisms. In this regard, career development opportunities function as a critical “transformational” mechanism that connects individual motivation with organizational commitment.

5.2. Policy Implications

The managerial implications of this study are derived from the finding that career development opportunities play a central role in enhancing organizational commitment.

First, organizations should shift their focus from merely increasing individual motivation to designing structured career development systems. Motivation is only effective when employees perceive clear career progression pathways. Therefore, organizations should establish transparent career paths, implement Individual Development Plans (IDPs), and provide opportunities for learning and job rotation.

Second, career development opportunities should be treated as a strategic tool in human resource management. Development policies need to be designed in a fair and transparent manner and closely aligned with performance outcomes in order to strengthen trust and enhance employee commitment.

Third, organizations should strengthen organizational support to maximize the effectiveness of development initiatives. Support from leadership, feedback mechanisms, and recognition systems play a crucial role in helping employees interpret development opportunities as genuine organizational commitment.

Finally, in the context of increasing “quiet quitting” behaviors, enhancing organizational commitment should be considered a core strategic solution. Rather than focusing on behavioral control, organizations should prioritize creating a positive work environment, fostering meaningful work, and aligning individual goals with organizational objectives.

5.3. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the use of non-probability sampling (combining convenience sampling and snowball sampling), along with data collected solely from Hanoi, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Gen Z employees in Vietnam or other contexts.

Second, the cross-sectional research design captures relationships at a single point in time, thereby limiting the ability to establish causal relationships among the constructs.

Third, the study relies entirely on self-reported data collected from a single source, which may introduce common method bias, despite the statistical tests conducted to address this issue.

Future research is encouraged to adopt probability sampling methods and expand data collection across multiple regions and types of organizations. In addition, longitudinal or time-lagged research designs and multi-source data should be employed to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Further studies may also extend the model by examining moderating variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, or generational differences in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationships among the constructs.

Moreover, the use of multi-source data (e.g., supervisor evaluations or objective behavioral data) can help reduce bias associated with self-reported measures and improve the reliability of the findings. Comparative studies across countries or developing economies may also help determine whether the mediating role of career development opportunities is context-specific or broadly generalizable.

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