



Goal orientation and organizational commitment as explanatory factors of employees' mobility

Factors of employees' mobility

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Abstract

Purpose – To provide a further examination into the explanatory factors of employees' mobility for organizations wishing to improve performance by keeping right employees judging from their goal orientation and organizational commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – The multivariate statistical methods (MANOVA) together with a longitudinal design are used to test the hypotheses generated from the theory with data gathered from two Taiwan-based financial institutions.

Findings – Suggests that those who quit for what they perceive as upwardly mobile career moves and those who enjoy in-house promotions both demonstrate a greater degree of positive learning goal orientation than their colleagues who remain stationary in long-term positions with the same firm. Makes note of the inability of performance goal orientation and organizational commitment to explain employee mobility behaviors.

Research limitations/implications – Generalizability is limited due to the concentration of this longitudinal-design study on two institutions of a single industry in Taiwan.

Practical implications – Provides a positive advice for organizations to create mechanisms and environment that can engage learning-oriented employees as meaningful contributors in principal challenges and to use learning experiences to revitalize them and deepen their commitment.

Originality/value – This paper clarifies the influence of goal orientation and organizational commitment upon employees' mobility and identifies their relationship with findings suggesting a direct link between positive learning goal orientation and positive job performance.

Keywords Learning, Organizational behaviour, Targets, Employee turnover

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Recent research has revealed a strong interest in linking the concept of learning orientation with performance orientation, and seeing both as the major types of goal orientation (Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Elliott and Dweck, 1988; VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). As part of the growing body of research on the individual-difference determinants of work behavior and performance (Kanfer, 1990a, 1990b; Kanfer, 1992; VandeWalle and Cummings, 1997), goal orientation has become a renewed subject for the investigation of individual differences; much of this has, however, been focused on the influence of goal orientation upon performance (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). It is frequently suggested that the concept of goal orientation has important implications for the enhancement of employee and organizational



performance (VandeWalle, 2001). Dweck and her colleagues (Dweck, 1986, 1989; Dweck and Leggett, 1988) have proposed that the goals pursued by individuals create the framework for their interpretation and reaction to events or outcomes. To conceptualize goal orientation, Dweck (1986) defined the two major classes of goal orientation:

- (1) learning goal orientation, to develop competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations; and
- (2) performance goal orientation, to demonstrate and validate one's competence by seeking favorable judgments and avoiding negative judgments.

While Porter and Tansky (1999) have attempted to single out learning orientation from goal orientation and bring it into an organizational context, little empirical effort has, to date, been made to evaluate the relationship between employees' learning orientation and their promotion and turnover.

The importance of employees' motivation and desire to learn has long been recognized in the context of human resource development (HRD) (Donaldson and Scannell, 1986; Goldstein, 1986; Nadler and Nadler, 1989; Pace *et al.*, 1991; Porter and Tansky, 1996). Learning oriented individuals see intelligence as malleable and continually seek challenge, which they believe fosters learning. They persistently examine the results of their behavior in order to determine the best strategy for their next attempt at the same task or situation (Porter and Tansky, 1996). When a task is approached, learning-oriented individuals strive to understand something new or to increase their level of competence in a given activity (Dweck, 1989; Dweck and Leggett, 1988). They interpret negative feedback as an indicator of how to change their strategy for the given task, quite unlike performance-oriented individuals who would interpret the same negative feedback as failure and may defensively avoid further challenge by either quitting the task or drawing attention away from the immediate task (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Porter and Tansky, 1996). Performance-oriented people strive to demonstrate, and thereby gain favorable judgments of, their competence (Dweck and Leggett, 1988).

In the knowledge economy, companies are under severe pressure to cope with increasing rates of environmental change and turbulence. While knowledge management is perceived as one of the most promising approaches for success, organizations that can learn rapidly are viewed as more likely to enjoy enduring long-term competitive advantages (Bierly *et al.*, 2000). Without sufficient learning, organizations may be inadequately prepared for a swiftly shifting environment.

In response, many organizations now try to both *create knowledge* and *encourage employees to learn* (Bierly *et al.*, 2000; Senge, 1990). They design diverse training programs in an effort to best exploit the full potential of their human resources. The committed effort to inspire their employees to learn, however, drives us to questions whether their employees' motivation to learn has something to do with their goal orientation and whether employees' goal orientation is related to their promotion, turnover and retention. We are also interested in knowing whether or not organizations are keeping employees who are learning.

Furthermore, we are curious to know whether or not employees who stay with the firm are the most committed while many organizations are making efforts to improve retention by specifically designing programs to enhance employee commitment.

Employees who are committed should believe that their organizations have satisfied their expectations. If they are learning-oriented, they may think their organizations have provided them with opportunities to learn. If they are performance-oriented, they may discern their performance fairly rewarded.

With the recent years' global financial crisis sweeping through numerous Asian economies, many firms have adopted survival policies built upon the concepts of knowledge management and organizational learning. This study is an attempt to examine whether or not individual employees with a stronger learning orientation as opposed to performance-oriented ones would more easily achieve promotion in learner-friendly workplaces. The authors of this study are also interested in investigating the suggestion that learning-oriented employees who receive disproportionate rewards after they learn to keep overcoming challenging tasks are more likely to quit their current employment as compared to the performance-oriented. Moreover, a comparison of organizational commitment between those who quit and those who are internally promoted also encourages an interest in whether or not those who seek promotion within the organization or those who leave their employers for jobs elsewhere would demonstrate a stronger learning orientation than those who stay on the same jobs without promotion.

This research, therefore, is to study the relationship of goal orientation and organizational commitment with employees' promotion, turnover and retention. To address the above concerns, we first reviewed the literature primarily related to goal orientation, organizational commitment, promotion, turnover and retention. Following the literature review, we described the methodology and used the multivariate statistical methods (MANOVA) to test the hypotheses generated from the theory with data gathered from two Taiwan-based financial institutions. As part of the study, we also used a longitudinal design with information regarding respondents' mobility collected one year after we performed the survey on goal orientation and organizational commitment. The final section drew some implications and recommendations from the analysis for practices of human resource management. Limitations to this study and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Literature review and hypotheses

Goal orientation

Both learning orientation and performance orientation are often referred to as *goal orientation*, with this combined category serving as the primary focus for the examination of performance. Goal orientation, whose implications for industrial-organization and psychology have been extensively discussed (Button *et al.*, 1996; Farr *et al.*, 1993; VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999), creates the mental frameworks that individuals use to interpret and respond to achievement situations (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Elliott and Dweck, 1988; VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999).

On the basis of findings drawn from their confirmatory factor analysis on goal orientation constructs, Button *et al.* (1996) suggest that learning orientation and performance orientation are two distinguishable dimensions of goal orientation, which itself has both situational and dispositional aspects. In their research, the learning goal items reflect a desire to engage in challenging activities, an eagerness to improve one's self, and a tendency to evaluate one's performance relative to past episodes of performance while the performance goal orientation is characterized by an avoidance

of challenges and a deterioration of performance in the face of obstacles. In their study, Button *et al.* (1996) also contend that the learning goal and the performance goal are neither mutually exclusive, nor contradictory, and that an individual could simultaneously strive to improve one's skills and to outperform others.

This argument was further supported by Porter and Tansky's (1999) work on expatriate success in which the concept of learning orientation was proposed as a valuable dimension for the assessment and training of expatriate assignment in the organization's effort toward globalization. The interactions between goal orientation and ability studied by Bell and Kozlowski (2002) also supported hypotheses such that learning orientation was generally adaptive for high-ability individuals but had no effect for low-ability individuals, whereas the effects of performance orientation were contingent on both the individuals' level of cognitive ability and the outcome examined.

Building on the precepts of motivational theory, Dweck and her colleagues (Bempechat *et al.*, 1991; Dweck, 1989) suggest that goal orientation is a relatively stable dispositional trait that co-varies with the individual's implicit theory of ability. They cite incrementalists as believing that ability comprises a series of skills and dimensions that can be expanded through effort and experience. This belief is opposed to those who favor an entity theory of ability that orients individuals toward performance goals by maintaining that intelligence is a fixed and uncontrollable global trait (Bempechat *et al.*, 1991; Button *et al.*, 1996; Dweck, 1989; Dweck and Leggett, 1988). A study conducted by Sujan *et al.* (1994) on the two motivational orientations that guide salespeople's behavior also suggests that a learning goal orientation would motivate employees toward working both smart and hard. Sujan *et al.* (1994) define working smart as the engagement in activities that would serve to develop knowledge of sales situations and utilize this knowledge when attempting to sell products. Hence, it is interesting to see if indeed individuals with a stronger learning orientation as compared to those who are performance-oriented will more easily accumulate experiential knowledge and in turn demonstrate a superior capability and performance, which will thus lead to their promotion.

Promotion

As upward promotion involves a new designation of duties and tasks requiring higher levels of skills, those who are learning-oriented should perceive promotion as an opportunity for growth and development and an incentive to take on challenges and learn more. The learning-oriented individual holds to the belief that intelligence is malleable and that challenge will foster learning (Porter and Tansky, 1996). Learning-oriented people are more inclined to seek promotion for newly designated duties and tasks if they find their present jobs no longer challenging.

Believing that learning can enhance ability, those with a positive learning orientation also view effort as a means for activating current ability for task achievement and a way of developing the ability for future task mastery (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, VandeWalle (1997) demonstrates that learning orientation has a positive relationship with the desire to work hard (Helmreich and Spence, 1978) and optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1985). Learning-oriented employees believe that effort leads to success. They enjoy hard work and are optimistic. With this understanding in mind, employees with a learning orientation should be willing to

commit to the effort needed to attain high performance (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999) with which they expect to have more opportunities for promotion.

Also, those who seek promotion internally should be more learning motivated in an aim to prove their superior abilities over other competing candidates. Competition, it should be noted, has been confirmed as a key contributing factor to an individual's learning motivation (Schultheiss and Rohde, 2002). Those who pursue promotion out of the dual expectation that learning augments their abilities and enhances high performance are more likely to experience an even stronger desire for learning in an organization where opportunities for upward promotion are available. In addition, those with a learning goal orientation as a dispositional trait continuously examine the results of their behaviors to determine the best strategy for the next attempt to adapt themselves in their pursuit of promotion. Such focused behavior increases their attention, which in turn reinforces their willingness to learn.

In contrast, employees who do not seek promotion are more likely to pay less attention to learning new skills or improving their abilities. Despite organizational efforts to train them or motivate them to learn, they are less likely to perceive learning as necessary because they do not have to compete with other colleagues for promotion. Moreover, they may be individuals with lower levels of learning orientation as their dispositional trait. These personality types, as opposed to those with the stronger learning orientation described by Porter and Tansky (1996), do not adapt to a changing environment. They tend to do the work with which they are familiar, and do not view new challenging tasks as a means toward personal development or career growth. Nor do they pursue outstanding performance in their jobs as a way to prove themselves. They stay where they are because they feel more comfortable this way. Learning a new skill is simply not a part of their personal job description. A job for them may be considered merely part of their life, or perhaps it is better to say that they see the workplace only as a source of income for maintaining their life. They refuse to learn because they see learning as a threat, and when given a new and unfamiliar assignment, they are more likely to reject it unless they are compensated financially or given an opportunity for promotion. They stay on as long as their employers do not ask them to leave.

In terms of performance-oriented people, they are concerned with obtaining positive evaluation about their ability rather than developing their skills and ability through challenging goals that can lead to personal growth. Given this focus, a difficult goal should be of lower interest because it provides a great potential for failure. As goal difficulty increases, the probability of obtaining a positive evaluation through goal attainment decreases (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). Also, individuals with a performance goal orientation are unlikely to view effort as a means for developing the ability needed for task mastery since they perceive ability as a fixed attribute. Rather, performance-orientated people view high effort as an indicator of low ability because they reason that a capable person would not need to try so hard to accomplish a task (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). As compared to learning-oriented individuals, those who are performance-oriented are less inclined to engage in planning as well. A study by Sujana *et al.* (1994) provided evidence that individuals with a learning goal orientation would be more likely to commit themselves to developing a plan for performance success than individuals with a performance goal orientation.

Goal-setting (Pinder, 1998), intended effort (Brown and Leigh, 1996), and intended planning (Smith *et al.*, 1990) are three self-regulation tactics that are found positively related with performance. Although performance success is often perceived to provide more opportunities for promotion, VandeWalle *et al.* (1999) in their study regarding the influence of goal orientation and self-regulation tactics on sales performance indicated that the three self-regulation tactics are positively related with learning goal orientation, but unrelated to performance goal orientation.

Building on these characteristics described above, the authors of this study thereby have developed the following hypotheses:

- H1.1.* Learning goal orientation will be positively related to employee promotion.
- H1.2.* Employees who are promoted internally tend to demonstrate a stronger learning orientation than those who remain in the same position.
- H1.3.* Performance goal orientation will be unrelated to employee promotion.

Turnover

Employee turnover, which impedes effective and efficient delivery of services (Powell and York, 1992), has been recognized as a major concern in financial institutions. Turnover is costly and devastating because it may not only reduce organizational effectiveness and employee productivity (Barak *et al.*, 2001) but also cause a deterioration of rapport and trust, leading to increased client dissatisfaction with agency services (Powell and York, 1992). Turnover-related problems can be especially difficult in organizations such as financial agencies where the productive capacity is concentrated in human capital – in the skills, abilities, and knowledge of employees (Balfour and Neff, 1993). Human capital lies within a person, and hence, it is not easily transferable and can be gained only by investing in a person over a long period of time (Barak *et al.*, 2001).

High employee turnover has grave implications for the quality, consistency and stability of services to those who use financial services. Turnover can also have detrimental effects on both clientele and the remaining staff members who must struggle to give and receive quality services when positions are vacated and re-filled by inexperienced personnel (Barak *et al.*, 2001; Powell and York, 1992). High turnover rates can reinforce clients' mistrust of the system and may discourage workers from remaining in or even entering the field (Barak *et al.*, 2001; Geurts *et al.*, 1998; Todd and Deery-Schmitt, 1996).

Disciplines such as psychology, sociology and economics (Barak *et al.*, 2001; Deery-Schmitt and Todd, 1995) have produced the highest degree of research on the question of employee turnover. An extensive body of literature in these three disciplines (Barak *et al.*, 2001; Deery-Schmitt and Todd, 1995; Geurts *et al.*, 1998; Hom *et al.*, 1992; Miller, 1996; Moos, 1979; Spector and Michaels, 1986; Wright and Cropanzano, 1998) is focused upon the causes and antecedents to turnover. Researchers have identified demographic factors (e.g. age, education, job level, gender, and tenure with the organization), professional perceptions (e.g. organizational commitment, professional commitment, job satisfaction, motivation potential, value conflict, and burnout), and organizational conditions (e.g. stress, social support, fairness-management practices, physical comfort, and organizational culture) as the three primary categories contributing to turnover.

A social psychological-based model provided by Kiyak *et al.* (1997) further suggests that personal background, worker attitude, and job characteristics are also related to job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover (Barak *et al.*, 2001). The researchers cite the latter two variables – attitude and job characteristics – as having the greatest influence upon job satisfaction, which in turn has a direct influence upon employee turnover.

Empirical studies concerning turnover, however, have produced inconsistent results, perhaps reflecting the complexity of defining and measuring the multifaceted predictor and outcome constructs as well as differences among the varying work contexts. While some researchers (Coward *et al.*, 1995) use intention to leave instead of, or in addition to, actual turnover as the outcome variable, researchers such as Barak *et al.* (2001), who have examined antecedents to retention and turnover among human service employees, suggest that the best predictors of intention to quit are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, professional commitment, and burnout. Their findings have also indicated that the strongest single predictor of actual turnover is intention to leave. Despite these findings, little literature has elaborated on the relationship between employees' intention to leave and their personal dispositional traits.

According to Dweck's motivational theory (1989), individuals with a learning goal orientation as their dispositional trait have a stronger motivation and desire to learn. They will more readily adapt when a task is not completed successfully (Porter and Tansky, 1996). Nevertheless, it does not mean that learning-oriented employees will always stay on no matter what occurs within the organization.

Employees with a learning orientation may remain if the organization is able to continually provide them with tasks that allow them to explore new things or broaden and elevate competence. They maintain high levels of satisfaction as long as their work offers them opportunities to learn. Their attitude may change, however, when the organization no longer provides new challenging tasks. A monotonous and routine work environment would lead the learning-oriented employee toward a sense of boredom and a loss of enthusiasm. Perceiving promotion as a new context for learning, they may degenerate toward inactivity if they see themselves as fixed in the same position with minimal opportunity for promotion. In the absence of opportunities for learning, they may begin to ponder the benefits of seeking employment outside of their current organization. Learning-oriented individuals may consider factors such as the detrimental effects upon future employment opportunities that can come from remaining too long in a stationary and uninspiring position that offers no opportunities for learning. A sense of desperation may set in, leading these personalities to quit simply because they feel ready for new skills and new challenges.

Despite the high turnover-related costs and problems, however, few organizations in Taiwan's financial sector have attempted to examine whether those who quit have a stronger learning orientation than those who remain. Although much literature has discussed the relationship between job satisfaction and retention, and confirmed job satisfaction as a key predictor of employee retention (Barak *et al.*, 2001; Clark *et al.*, 1999; Shields and Ward, 2001), little literature has looked into the behavior of those who stay on, especially those who remain in the same jobs or positions. As opposed to those who quit or have the intention to leave, employees who remain may not orient themselves toward learning within their career paths. They seek stability and avoid

risk or challenge. Even if they are dissatisfied with their jobs, those with a weak learning orientation do not quit because they fear the novelty that is part of a new job environment. They are apprehensive about having to learn new skills, a task they view as disturbing and frightful.

Performance-oriented employees avoid risk or challenge as well. They view a challenging task as a threat because there is the risk of failure that would demonstrate their inadequate ability. And they interpret negative feedback of their performance as unacceptable failure. In challenging situations, therefore, they pursue a maladaptive response pattern, in that they withdraw from the task, make negative ability attributions, and report decreased interest in the task (VandeWalle *et al.*, 1999). A study by Phillips and Gully (1997) also indicated that a performance goal orientation has nonsignificant or negative relationships with a preference for challenging tasks, the use of goal-setting procedures and optimism. As such, employees who are performance-oriented may quit if they are positioned in a working environment that continuously challenges them with exigent responsibilities that go beyond their ability. They may stay on, however, by shirking tricky tasks and selectively working on preferred ones that can prove their ability as long as their workplaces do not strictly require them to handle unfamiliar things.

Subsequently, we predicted that once an organization is incapable of offering opportunities for growth, it would be the learning-oriented employees who would be more likely to leave their jobs. On the basis of this prediction, we offer the following hypotheses:

H2.1. Employees who quit tend to demonstrate a stronger learning orientation than those who remain at the same jobs.

H2.2. Performance goal orientation will be unrelated to employee turnover.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment has been at the center of studies into individual and organizational performance for several decades. During this time, much has happened to the ways in which organizations behave, including the evolution of new forms of employee relations and new psychological contracts (Swaiiles, 2002). Related research has also been structured to describe the construct of organizational commitment in one of several ways (Goulet and Frank, 2002).

Organizations, for-profit and non-profit alike, have made great efforts to maintain employees' organizational commitment; to do otherwise would incur the high costs resulting from turnover. The direct costs of employee turnover are identified as costs stemming from separation, replacement and training (Blankertz and Robinson, 1996; Braddock and Mitchell, 1992). Barak *et al.* (2001) described the indirect costs associated with employee turnover as more complicated to assess. They report that the indirect costs result mainly from the loss of efficiency of employees *before* they actually leave the organization, the impact on their co-workers' productivity, and the loss of productivity while a new employee struggles to achieve full mastery of the job.

In view of the high costs resulting from turnover, many organizations have sought to increase their employees' organizational commitment and improve retention rates by designing numerous incentives such as promotion, monetary bonuses, pay increases, and other job factors (Kaplan and Ferris, 2001; Mallam, 1994).

Organizational commitment – which can be conceived of as a pattern of behaviors, a set of behavioral intentions, a motivating force, or an attitude – has been associated with influencing many organizational and behavioral outcomes (Goulet and Frank, 2002). In a meta-analysis of 124 published studies, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found that organizational commitment would have a negative linear relationship with turnover. On the basis of this work, they report that an individual who is committed to an organization is more likely to remain at work.

Committed employees are deemed as those who share the common values and beliefs espoused by the organization, and have a willingness to not only remain with their employer but a stronger desire to exert effort for the organization (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). Committed employees, therefore, should believe that their organizations would constantly offer them opportunities to grow in their career paths. Embracing this belief, they stay on and are more predisposed to deepen their commitment to the company if they are pursuing promotion.

On the other hand, those who have the intention of quitting should demonstrate less satisfaction with their employers, believing that the organization is no longer able to provide that which they expect from their jobs. If they are learning-oriented, they may think their organizations have failed to challenge them with opportunities to learn. If they are performance-oriented, they may see their performance as being unfairly judged. In either case, unless their personal goals coincide with those of the organization, they would find it difficult to continue their commitment and will engage in the search for opportunities elsewhere, the first step toward actual turnover.

Organizational commitment, however, may make no significant difference among those who remain at the same jobs. Some who remain are people who view a job as nothing but a financial source for them. Some may be dissatisfied with their jobs but have not taken action for leaving. Others may be committed but are still waiting for opportunities for promotion.

The authors of this study therefore predicted that those who stay on to pursue promotion in-house would likely be more willing to commit their efforts to attaining performance than those who intend to leave. This gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H3.1. Organizational commitment will be positively related to employee promotion.

H3.2. Organizational commitment will be negatively related to employee turnover.

Methodology

Sample

Considered one of the few Asian economies to have successfully weathered the storm that was the financial crisis in the late 1990s, Taiwan serves as a useful site for an examination of employee behaviors within thriving firms. To test the above-stated hypotheses, the authors of this research contacted employees of two Taiwan-based financial institutions, the firms chosen being known for having made use of survival strategies based upon knowledge management, organizational learning, and human capital.

Under the global trend toward economic liberalization, Taiwan has over the past decade gradually deregulated its private financial market and opened these to foreign

investors; this, in turn, has heightened its competition in the industry (Wang, 1989). Because of the highly competitive nature and Taiwan's increasing bid for expanding and upgrading its management in the service sector, it is expected to add some more insightful value to our investigation to study the relationship of employees' goal orientation with their promotion, turnover, and retention as well as organizational commitment in financial institutions in Taiwan.

Because of the longitudinal nature required by our study for the examination of the studied sample's promotion, turnover and retention, the authors did not collect the data from a random sample but, fortunately, from two financial institutions willing to promise high cooperation during our study and allowing us to collect new data regarding the studied employees' mobility status one year after the initial survey was conducted.

In the two financial institutions participating in this study, the authors targeted the sales departments of about 40 employees each for our sample population. As our study was intended to examine whether the employees who got promoted internally or quit their jobs showed differences in their goal orientation or organizational commitment, the difficulty in acquiring such data illustrated our limitations in finding a sufficient number of financial institutions that could provide a large sample size for our study. Also, any attempt to enlarge the sample size by randomly and extensively surveying employees of different financial institutions and units disregarding the personnel promotion or turnover status of certain focus units might fail to present a representative picture of this study's intent. Although the aggregation of the two samples from different organizations into a single data set may raise some sampling concern, our data were collected from the sales departments of the two financial institutions, with the high homogeneity of the two studied departments considered in an attempt to help clarify such concern.

In our study, therefore, we distributed our survey to a total sample of 77 employees in the two selected financial institutions in Taiwan, with each having a department of 38 and 39 employees responding to the questionnaire, respectively. The sample was 55.8 percent females. The ages ranged mainly from 26 to 40, accounting for 77.9 percent of the studied sample. Of the respondents, approximately 80 percent had a college degree and 76.6 percent served in non-managerial positions. Also, 36 percent achieved promotion and 28 percent left their jobs one year after the survey was conducted. The sample showed no significant difference in the gender, age, education, position, tenure, and mobility distribution of the employees between the two studied units (see Appendix 1, Table AI). The high percentage of turnover was a result of employees' voluntariness while no large-scale downsizing was enforced during the study period, according to the studied institutions. Also, integration in the financial sector was practiced at the time in Taiwan. Employees might have more opportunities to find jobs elsewhere even though some might have felt compelled to leave due to maladjustment in the highly competitive environment.

Indeed, it was a 100 percent participation of the employees at the two departments studied. The impressive response rate was luckily due to the high cooperation won from the two studied units. As promised, the participating departments allowed us to distribute the questionnaire to all their employees at office hours and provided us with the data concerning the studied employees' promotion, retention, and turnover one year later. The longitudinal data acquired at a one-year interval allowed the authors to test

for the relationship between promotion, turnover, and retention in terms of employees' goal orientation and organizational commitment.

Missing data, however, forced us to drop two respondents (one in each studied company) from our sample in the goal orientation and organizational commitment analyses. Thus, our final sample consisted of 75 employees.

Measures

Thirty-one measures were initially used to capture the various latent constructs for this study. Responses were based on a seven-point scale that ranged from (−3) “strongly disagree” to (3) “strongly agree”. Zero-point was to demonstrate an attitude of “Not Sure”.

Strong agreement with the learning goal orientation items indicates a strong desire to perform challenging work, learn new skills, and develop alternative strategies when working on a difficult task (i.e. a strong learning goal orientation). Low agreement suggests little concern for mastering tasks or gaining competency (i.e. a weak learning goal orientation). In terms of performance goal orientation, high agreement with these items indicates a strong desire to obtain favorable judgments of one's competencies or, conversely, a desire to avoid negative judgments of one's competence (i.e. a strong performance goal orientation). Low agreement suggests little concern for performing better than others or making errors (i.e. a weak performance goal orientation) (see Appendix 2, Table AII).

The measures of learning orientation and performance orientation were drawn from previous goal orientation studies (Button *et al.*, 1996) because they exhibited acceptable psychometric properties tested by two sets of LISREL VIII confirmatory factor analyses. The research of Button *et al.* (1996) illustrated that goal orientation was best represented with two distinguishable dimensions – performance goal orientation and learning goal orientation. In their measurement model, the resulting eight-item performance goal orientation scale exhibited a Cronbach's α of 0.73, while the α for the eight-item learning goal orientation was 0.79. Also, the estimates of the factor loadings for each variable were found all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and were greater than 0.41 in their two-factor model.

The two eight-item scales initially developed in the research of Button *et al.* (1996) for the learning orientation and performance orientation constructs were reassessed in our research and exhibited a Cronbach's α of 0.91 and 0.83, respectively. In consideration of context relevance, however, we further conducted a factor analysis together with a Varimax rotation. In the initial factor analysis, three factors (eigenvalues over 1) were extracted, explaining a total variance of 64.751 percent, with each explaining 39.681 percent, 18.050 percent and 7.021 percent, respectively (see appendix 2, Table AII). To ensure the criteria of salient loading, the authors then performed a Varimax rotation and suppressed loadings with absolute values below 0.4 to attain more considered explanation (results also indicated in Appendix 2, Table AII). Owing to double loading, however, one item in the learning orientation measures was later dropped. Consequently, two factors (eigenvalues over 1 and predicted by the Scree plot), as developed by Button *et al.* (1996), were also exactly extracted in our final factor analytic model (see Appendix 3, Table AIII). And the two extracted factors, learning orientation and performance orientation, explained a total variance of 58.586 percent, with each explaining 31.698 and 26.888 percent in variance, respectively. Because of

the small sample size of this research, however, the authors did not perform a LISREL VIII confirmatory factor analysis in this regard.

The two goal orientation constructs were measured so that the authors could later comparatively examine whether performance-oriented and learning-oriented employees demonstrated different levels of propensity in promotion, turnover, and retention.

In terms of organizational commitment, we used the well-established measures developed by Mowday *et al.* (1979). The construct was assessed with 15 items, exhibiting a Cronbach's α of 0.91 in our study.

The hypotheses were later tested using multivariate tests (MANOVA), followed by post hoc tests with a Scheffe method for multiple comparisons in goal orientation and organizational commitment among those who got promotions internally (promotion group), remained on the same positions (retention group), or quit their jobs (turnover group) one year after the survey was conducted. Taking into account the potential effects and interactions which might result from some demographic or contextual variables, the authors additionally brought into the MANOVA analyses such control variables as gender, age, education, tenure, position, and company affiliation. SPSS was used for statistical analyses.

Results

Using the MANOVA, we found significant support for *H1.1*, *H1.2*, and *H2.1*, suggesting that learning goal orientation would be positively related to employee promotion and that employees who were promoted internally or quit their jobs would have demonstrated a stronger learning orientation than those who remained on the same jobs. MANOVA results as presented in Table I indicated significant learning orientation differences across the promotion, turnover, and retention groups ($F = 5.401$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$). Post hoc tests with the Scheffe method for multiple comparisons also indicated a significant mean difference of 3.3647 ($p < 0.05$) between the promotion group and the retention group and a mean difference of 2.9685 ($p < 0.05$) between the turnover group and the retention group. These results further confirmed that the promotion group and the turnover group would have a significantly stronger learning orientation than those employees who remained in the same positions (see Appendix 4, Figures A1-A3 for the profile plots).

Despite the strong learning orientation posed by both the promotion and turnover groups, a comparison in this respect between these two groups, however, indicated no significant difference, which suggested that both groups might be inclined to have commensurately high levels of learning orientation.

Results of the MANOVA, indicating no significant difference among the promotion, turnover, and retention groups in terms of performance goal orientation, also supported *H1.3* and *H2.2*, which predicted that performance goal orientation would be unrelated to promotion and turnover. These results suggested that performance orientation, as compared to learning orientation, should not make a good explanatory factor differentiating employees' promotion, turnover and retention.

Although *H3.1* and *H3.2* suggested that organizational commitment would be positively related to promotion and negatively related to turnover, MANOVA results, as presented in Table I, did not support these suggestions. No significant statistical difference was indicated in this regard; nor did the Scheffe method demonstrate a

	Promotion	Turnover	Retention	<i>F</i>	Multiple comparison – Scheffe
<i>Learning orientation</i>					
Mean	2.4066	2.3500	1.9259	5.401**	1 > 3*; 2 > 3*
SD	0.4707	0.6611	0.5988		
<i>Performance orientation</i>					
Mean	1.9231	1.5250	1.8009	1.177	ns
SD	0.7608	0.9980	0.9029		
<i>Organizational commitment</i>					
Mean	0.7897	0.6600	0.6222	1.116	ns
SD	0.4190	0.3236	0.4874		
<i>Gender</i>					
Mean	1.6154	1.3500	1.6667	2.658	ns
SD	0.4961	0.4894	0.4804		
<i>Age</i>					
Mean	2.6154	2.2500	2.7037	1.959	ns
SD	0.9414	0.6387	0.7753		
<i>Education</i>					
Mean	2.8462	3.0000	2.6667	1.217	ns
SD	0.8339	0.6489	0.6794		
<i>Position</i>					
Mean	1.2308	1.1000	1.2963	1.302	ns
SD	0.4297	0.3078	0.4653		
<i>Tenure</i>					
Mean	2.2692	1.5500	2.4815	5.360**	3 > 2*
SD	0.9616	0.8256	1.1222		
<i>Company affiliation</i>					
Mean	1.4231	1.5000	1.5556	0.454	ns
SD	0.5038	0.5130	0.5064		

Note: Hotelling's Trace*; Wilks' Lambda*; Pillai's Trace*; Roy's Largest Root**; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table I.
MANOVA analysis of differences across promotion, turnover, and retention groups

significant mean difference across the promotion, turnover, and retention groups. Such results suggested that using organizational commitment as an explanatory factor to distinguish the turnover group from the promotion or retention group should be empirically unjustified.

Regarding the potential effects of the control variables, as presented in Table I, most of the MANOVA results did not indicate any significant difference across the three groups except for tenure ($F = 5.360$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$), which suggested that those with longer tenure should tend to stay in the same positions. The authors further used the control variables as covariates in another MANOVA analysis to examine their relationships with learning orientation, performance orientation, and organizational commitment (see Table II). However, only tenure indicated a significant difference in performance orientation ($F = 4.120$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.05$) and education in organizational commitment ($F = 6.041$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.05$) while learning orientation still maintained a significant difference across the promotion, retention, and turnover groups ($F = 5.031$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.01$) in the analysis. Based on their correlations (see Appendix 5, Table AIV), the results suggested that employees with longer tenure should tend to show a stronger performance goal orientation and that those with higher degrees of education should be more inclined to demonstrate weaker organizational commitment.

Further, no significant difference in company affiliation shown in our findings has somehow validated our attempt to enlarge the sample population by aggregating the two samples from different organizations into a single data set.

Discussion

This paper builds upon the concept of goal orientation as well as organizational commitment to investigate to what extent both goal orientation and organizational commitment is related to employee mobility and whether or not organizations are promoting and keeping learning-oriented and committed employees. In an effort to answer these questions, we examined the relationships of goal orientation and organizational commitment with employees' promotion, turnover, and retention. Analysis in two institutions of the financial sector in Taiwan provided support for the hypotheses that employees who were promoted internally or quit would have demonstrated a stronger learning orientation than those who remained on the same jobs while performance goal orientation and organizational commitment was found unrelated in similar comparisons.

People with a learning orientation continue to seek challenge because they believe that intelligence is malleable and that ability comprises a series of skills and dimensions that can be expanded through effort and experience. They are more predisposed to adapt when a task is not completed successfully (Porter and Tansky, 1996). Our findings convincingly confirmed this premise. Employees with a stronger learning orientation, as supported by our research, are supposed to more readily accumulate experiential knowledge and in turn demonstrate superior capability and performance, which will thus lead to their promotion. In this sense, employees who were promoted in our studied sample were found to have demonstrated a significantly stronger learning orientation than those who remained stationary in their positions.

Learning orientation was also found significantly related to employee turnover. Learning-oriented employees tend to perceive promotion as a new context for learning. They may want to quit if the organization fails to provide them with an opportunity to be promoted or are unable to constantly challenge them with new inspiring tasks for them to learn. This rationale is further validated by our finding that employees who left their jobs during a period of one year after our survey was conducted had exhibited a stronger learning orientation.

Although most empirical research has focused on the examination of goal orientation's influence on performance, results of our analysis as compared to learning

Table II.
MANOVA analysis of relationships of mobility and the control variables with goal orientation and organizational commitment

	<i>F</i>		
	Learning orientation	Performance orientation	Organizational commitment
Mobility	5.031**	0.784	1.606
Gender	0.413	0.858	1.097
Age	0.005	0.001	1.939
Education	0.127	0.820	6.041*
Position	0.015	0.060	0.256
Tenure	0.175	4.120*	0.143
Company affiliation	0.912	3.748	0.008

Note: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01

orientation, surprisingly, indicated no significant relationship in performance goal orientation across the promotion, turnover, and retention groups. It is therefore suggested that employees who are performance-goal oriented may not exhibit such personal dispositional traits in their promotion, turnover, or retention.

In an attempt to examine whether or not organizational commitment is related to employee promotion, turnover, and retention, we further investigated the relationship in organizational commitment across the three groups. Our findings, interestingly, fail to support the hypothesis in this respect. That is, no significant difference in organizational commitment was found across the promotion, turnover, and retention groups. Given these findings, we suggest that organizational commitment should not be a good factor explaining employee mobility. While the results further confirm O'Malley (2000) argument that employees who stay with the firm are not often the most committed, our findings also strengthen our belief in learning orientation as a strong explanatory factor in promotion, turnover, and retention.

In consideration of potential effects and interactions that might result from some demographic or contextual variables, results of our findings indicated that employees with longer tenure would tend to stay at the same jobs and demonstrate a stronger performance goal orientation, suggesting that those who stay longer and stationary in long-term positions would be more likely to perceive ability as a fixed attribute and avoid developing their skills and ability through challenging goals for personal growth. Moreover, our analysis indicated that employees with higher levels of education would tend to be less committed to their firm. This finding suggests that those who are highly educated should be more likely to seek independence.

There are limitations to our research design that provide opportunities for future research. Our study concentrates on two institutions of a single industry in Taiwan, thus limiting generalizability. Despite the difficulty in finding a sample that is representative enough to actually present a significant picture of promotion, turnover and retention over time, future research should assess whether or not differences in goal orientation across these three groups exist in other institutions of the financial industry, in other industries or in other cultures. A cross-cultural assessment of goal orientation in the relationship among employee promotion, turnover, and retention is also suggested since individualist and collectivist cultures may not exhibit the same relationship between employees' goal orientation and their mobility.

The field of organizational management has been jolted by the recent flood of attention given to the knowledge-based view of the firm and organizational learning (Bierly *et al.*, 2000). While organizations are sparing no effort to motivate their employees to learn, the important issue we address here is whether organizations are keeping employees who are willing to learn. The results of our findings are a valuable contribution insofar as concerns their implications for managerial practices in human resource development.

First of all, organizations are recommended to create mechanisms and environments that can engage learning-oriented employees as meaningful contributors in the principal challenges.

Second, organizations should never evaluate anything but performance as a criterion for promoting and rewarding employees. Learning organizations are those in which people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire (Senge, 1990).

Third, use learning experiences to revitalize learning-oriented employees and deepen their commitment. Although employees with a strong organizational commitment are usually perceived as having a willingness to devote effort to the organization and a desire to stay with the organization, any endeavor by the organization to increase employee commitment without creating environments for them to learn may prove in vain. Instead, organizations are recommended to constantly provide their employees with opportunities for learning, and should therefore devise tasks to keep challenging them.

Organizations evolve and grow only if employees continue to learn through adaptation and knowledge development (Aldrich, 1999; Glynn *et al.*, 1994). Inertia will stifle organizations' vitality and turnover will worsen organizations' losses of valuable human capital if they fail to identify their learning-oriented employees and develop ways to keep these individuals learning and progressively growing.

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Appendix 1

		Company		Total Sample N/%	X ²
		A. Sample N/%	B. Sample N/%	77	
Gender	Male	18 (23.4%)	16 (20.8%)	34 (44.2%)	0.314
	Female	20 (26.0%)	23 (29.9%)	43 (55.8%)	
Age	Below 26	3 (3.9%)	2 (2.6%)	5 (6.5%)	0.305
	26-40	29 (37.6%)	31 (40.3%)	60 (77.9%)	
	Over 40	6 (7.8%)	6 (7.8%)	12 (15.6%)	
Education	High School	0	3 (3.9%)	3 (3.9%)	4.026
	College	32 (41.5%)	30 (40.0%)	62 (80.5%)	
	Graduate	6 (7.8%)	6 (7.8%)	12 (15.6%)	
Position	Non-managerial	30 (39.0%)	29 (37.7%)	59 (76.6%)	0.226
	Managerial	8 (10.4%)	10 (13.0%)	18 (23.4%)	
Tenure	Below 1 yr	9 (11.7%)	14 (18.2%)	23 (29.9%)	3.452
	Over 1-3 yrs	13 (16.9%)	16 (20.82%)	29 (37.7%)	
	Over 3-5 yrs	6 (7.8%)	4 (5.2%)	10 (13.0%)	
	Over 5 yrs	10 (13.0%)	5 (6.5%)	15 (19.5%)	
Mobility ^a	Turnover	10 (13.3%)	11 (14.7%)	21 (28.0%)	0.701
	Retention	12 (16.0%)	15 (20.0%)	27 (36.0%)	
	Promotion	15 (20.0%)	12 (16.0%)	27 (36.0%)	

^a Missing data caused us to drop one respondent in each company in the mobility category

Table AI.
Sample descriptive statistics

Measures	Factor (with initial loadings)			Factor (after rotation and suppressing loadings with absolute values below .4)		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. The opportunity to do challenging work is important to me.	0.815	-0.267	-1.443E-02	0.790		
2. When I fail to complete a difficult task, I plan to try harder the next time I work on it.	0.624	-0.373	0.239	0.635		0.426
3. I prefer to work on tasks that force me to learn new things.	0.677	-0.522	-5.902E-03	0.825		
4. The opportunity to learn new things is important to me.	0.683	-0.388	-0.322	0.839		
5. I try hard to improve on my past performance.	0.777	-0.199	-0.188	0.768		
6. The opportunity to extend the range of my abilities is important to me.	0.726	-0.345	-0.220	0.820		
7. When I have difficulty solving a problem, I enjoy trying different approaches to see which one will work.	0.656	-0.358	-2.243E-02	0.721		
8. I do my best when I'm working on a fairly difficult task.	0.679	-0.238	0.488	0.535		0.684
9. I prefer to do things that I can do well rather than things that I do poorly.	0.211	0.493	-0.251		0.572	
10. I'm happiest at work when I perform tasks on which I know that I won't make any errors.	0.585	0.428	0.147		0.625	
11. The things I enjoy the most are the things I do the best.	0.541	0.698	6.727E-02		0.841	
12. The opinions others have about how well I can do certain things are important to me.	0.627	0.351	-0.402		0.707	
13. I feel smart when I do something without making any mistakes.	0.735	0.383	0.112		0.674	
14. I like to be fairly confident that I can successfully perform a task before I attempt it.	0.460	0.186	0.580			0.710
15. I like to work on tasks that I have done well on in the past.	0.369	0.675	6.944E-02		0.732	
16. I feel smart when I can do something better than most other people.	0.621	0.487	-0.187		0.767	
Initial eigenvalue (over 1)	6.349	2.888	1.123	4.866	3.741	1.752
Variance explained (%)	39.681	18.050	7.021	30.410	23.392	10.949
Cumulative variance explained (%)	39.681	57.731	64.751	30.410	53.802	64.751

Table AII.
Goal orientation items in
initial factor analysis
matrix

Appendix 3

Measures	Factor	
	1	2
Learning Goal Orientation		
1. The opportunity to do challenging work is important to me.	0.820	
2. When I fail to complete a difficult task, I plan to try harder the next time I work on it.	0.719	
3. I prefer to work on tasks that force me to learn new things.	0.866	
4. The opportunity to learn new things is important to me.	0.805	
5. I try hard to improve on my past performance.	0.759	
6. The opportunity to extend the range of my abilities is important to me.	0.797	
7. When I have difficulty solving a problem, I enjoy trying different approaches to see which one will work.	0.734	
8. I do my best when I'm working on a fairly difficult task. ^a		
Eigenvalue (over 1)	4.755	
Variance explained after rotation	31.698%	
Performance Goal Orientation		
1. I prefer to do things that I can do well rather than things that I do poorly.	0.521	
2. I'm happiest at work when I perform tasks on which I know that I won't make any errors.	0.690	
3. The things I enjoy the most are the things I do the best.	0.884	
4. The opinions others have about how well I can do certain things are important to me.	0.648	
5. I feel smart when I do something without making any mistakes.	0.741	
6. I like to be fairly confident that I can successfully perform a task before I attempt it.	0.427	
7. I like to work on tasks that I have done well on in the past.	0.764	
8. I feel smart when I can do something better than most other people.	0.756	
Eigenvalue (over 1)	4.033	
Variance explained after rotation	26.888%	
Cumulative variance explained after rotation	58.586%	

^a Item dropped due to double loading after a factor analysis followed by a Varimax rotation.

Table AIII.
Goal orientation items in final rotated factor analysis matrix

Appendix 4

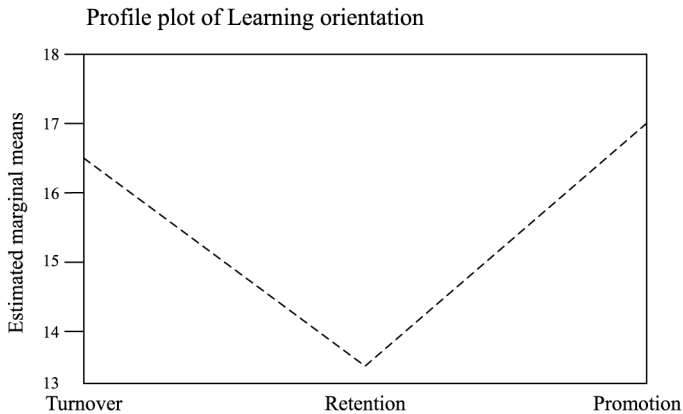


Figure A1.

PR
34,3

352

Figure A2.

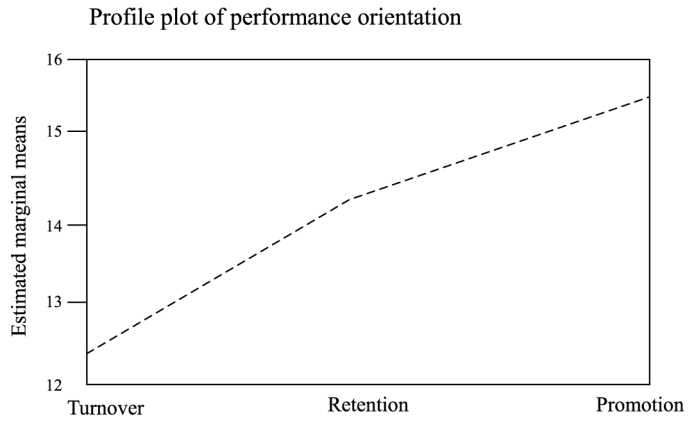
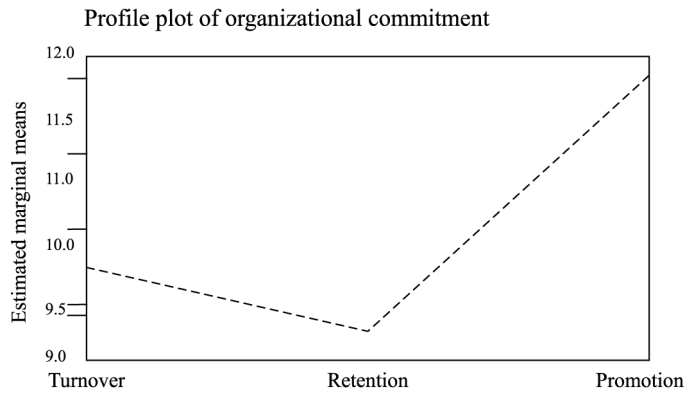


Figure A3.



Appendix 5

Factors of employees' mobility

	Mean	SD	LRN	PRM	CMMT	Mobility	Gende	Age	Edu	Position	Tenure	Firm
LRN	2.2301	0.6097	1.000									
PRM	1.7597	0.8759	0.348 ^a	1.000								
CMMT	0.6996	0.4225	0.473 ^a	0.439 ^a	1.000							
Mobility	2.0800	0.8014	0.027	0.160	0.131	1.000						
Gender	1.5584	0.4998	-0.125	-0.028	-0.146	0.188	1.000					
Age	2.5844	0.8327	0.009	0.132	0.298 ^a	0.181	-0.352 ^a	1.000				
Edu	2.8052	0.7441	0.046	-0.156	-0.229 ^b	-0.107	-0.340 ^a	-0.047	1.000			
Position	1.2338	0.4260	0.000	0.073	0.174	0.111	-0.127	0.574 ^a	0.063	1.000		
Tenure	2.2208	1.0837	-0.035	0.220 ^a	0.128	0.270 ^a	0.037	0.453 ^a	-0.256 ^b	0.371 ^a	1.000	
Firm	1.5065	0.5032	0.056	0.179	0.007	-0.068	0.064	0.007	-0.155	0.054	-0.208	1.000

Notes: ^a $p < 0.01$; ^b $p < 0.05$ level. LRN: learning orientation; PRM: performance orientation; CMMT: organizational commitment; Edu: education

Table AIV.
Means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables