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The relationship between competency development and intent to stay at the middle management level

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND

INTENT TO STAY AT THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT LEVEL

A Research Project

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in

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by

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This research project, completed by

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Abstract

Millions of individuals within Corporate America work in roles designated within the middle management category (Zippia, 2023). The complexity of this type of role is that these individuals are tasked with carrying and implementing change, expected to fluidly switch between high and low power styles depending on who they are engaging with, and are often stuck between stakeholders with conflicting expectations (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017a). Because of the financial, cultural, and productivity costs of losing middle managers, it is important to better understand what, if any, relationship competency development has in increasing intent to stay amongst middle managers.

Findings of this mixed methods study demonstrated that competency development does positively impact intent to stay at the middle management level. The two categories most impacting intent to stay are competencies falling under methodological and social competencies and study participants perceived these two competency areas to be interdependent. Specifically, the survey results indicated the most positive impact on intent to stay when middle managers receive competency development in the ability to originate action to improve existing conditions or processes, lead with vision and values, and build strategic working relationships. Additionally, middle manager study participants perceived competency development in these areas to increase autonomy and empowerment to make decisions and felt competency development wholistically increased agency and ownership. Autonomy, empowerment to make decisions, agency, and ownership are all self-designated middle manager needs which, when met, increase intent to stay.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the 1950's, ongoing research has taught us the role middle managers should play in organizations, provided clarity on how their role functions in actuality and what competencies they need for the mid-level managerial role (Harding et al., 2014). However, the literature is gapped when seeking to understand what type of competency development most favorably impacts the middle manager's intent to stay with their organization. Arnulf et al. (2016) indicated that managerial participants embraced competency development activities in general but were not explicitly positive. Study participants indicated disengagement when incompatible developmental activities were not adapted to their organizational and personal developmental needs. Even after participating in strategically designed development programs designed to be "one-fits-all", participants can distance themselves from their organization, even to the point of leaving, because the context of their role was not fully considered (Larsson et al., 2020).

Middle management within an organization is defined as the individuals who implement senior managers' strategic directives and oversee direct reports (including first-level managers and individual contributors) with the aim of promoting efficient and effective organizational operations (Dance, 2019). By this definition, millions of individuals (Zippia, 2023) within Corporate America fall under this middle management category. The complexity of this type of role is that these individuals are tasked with carrying and implementing change, expected to fluidly switch between high and low power styles depending on who they are engaging with, and are often stuck between stakeholders with conflicting expectations (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017a). Many middle managers fall under the umbrella–protector position (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2019) which

frames the managerial role as a protector of subordinates and professional work. Actionably, this can look like information filtering, reshaping messages convey meaning and shape culture, and the recruitment of people who will help develop and evolve this culture.

Every day, across the world, OD practitioners are helping companies navigate numerous acquisitions, new brand innovation, new platform adoption, and industry change, and current employees hitting significant capacity limitations. When employees are operating beyond capacity for extended periods of time, unhappiness is frequently the by-product (Zenger & Folkman, 2014). According to a study on managerial happiness by Zenger and Folkman in 2014, middle managers feel unhappy for several key reasons: lack of value for contribution, view their organization as inefficient, overworked, unfair treatment, work lacks meaning, limited opportunity for promotion, and poor leadership. Unhappiness in the workplace, can often be a short-term state-of-mind, but when employees linger in this space too long, the outcome is frequently company departure. Organizations need to care significantly about this risk, because studies show employee turnover can result in the loss of up to 1.5–2X an employee's annual salary due to hiring, onboarding, and training costs, loss of productivity, and loss of other employee engagement and company culture (Bersin, 2013).

Tengblad and Vie (2012) describe the world of middle management as 'paradoxical, complex and ambiguous' in their studies of management in practice. Because of the financial, cultural, and productivity costs of losing middle managers, it is important to better understand what, if any, relationship competency development has in increasing intent to stay amongst middle managers.

Existence and Importance of the Problem

In the researcher's opinion, both the operational challenges and cost of losing middle management build the need for research at this level of the corporate employee hierarchy. Determining if and what kinds of competency development most impact intent to stay at this level will be a resource for organizational consideration in the development of talent management strategy.

Significance of Study

In 2022, two key evolutions took place in the workplace relative to the previous year, talent acquisition prioritization within organizations fell by nearly 50%, while talent retention has risen to be the number one HR priority (Lattice, 2023). Because middle managers represent a subset of the employed population in the millions (Zippia, 2023) and influence both up and down the organizational hierarchy (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017b), it is critical to understand what actions can be taken to positively impact intent to stay. This study served the purpose of increasing the directional data on how organizations can most positively impact talent retention of middle management through the tool of competency development.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between competency development and intent to stay at the middle management level. The researcher used Schäfer's (2006) commonly used classification system of competences (i.e., professional competence, methodological competence, social competence, self-competence) in conjunction with the volunteer organization's competency framework for employees. The study attempted to address the following questions:

1. Development in which of the four core competency categories most impacts middle management intent to stay?

2. What are the underlying behavioral needs of middle managers that impact value of competency development in relation to their intent to stay?

For the purpose of this study, the term competences and competencies were used interchangeably as the research was not able to determine a distinguishable difference impacting this research.

Study Setting

The setting of this study took place under two varying conditions. The quantitative survey was collected from self-identified middle managers within the researcher's Linkedin network from varying industries and roles within their organizations. The qualitative interview data was gathered in response to the survey findings from a volunteer organization in the consumer products industry with over 8,000 employees. The volunteer organization's reputation for best-in-class training and people development transcends the consumer products industry and a promote from within culture, results in over 50% of employees within sales, commerce, and marketing in middle management having spent their entire career employed by the volunteer organization. The interview participants were all employed in sales, commerce, or marketing roles within the organization.

Organization of Study

This chapter outlined the background, purpose, setting, and significance of the study, Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to three key areas: competency development, intent to stay and middle management to provide additional context on each of these subject matters. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods used in the study, and Chapter 4

reports the study results from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion and summary of the findings.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between competency development and intent to stay at the middle management level. The literature review is designed to examine relevant studies related to organizational and behavioral impacts of competency development. This section first defines the term competency development, followed by key considerations for competency categorization and differentiation, and outlines a learning-conducive environment. The term "intent to stay" is defined for the purpose of exploring the relationship between competency development and employee retention, and literature is examined to explore factors impacting intent to stay. Additionally, this chapter reviews existing studies regarding middle managers in the workplace including the challenges of middle management, employer financial loss when a middle managers leave the organization, and the paradox of competency development for middle managers.

Competency Development

Competency development is discussed in the literature with variations dependent upon the context of use (Albino, 2018; Bach & Suliková, 2019; Burgoyne, 1988; Eilström & Kock, 2008). This variation mirrors the disparity of competencies in the workplace—each organization must select which competencies they require and value on both a role-by-role and organizational basis. The term competence will be used to refer to the capacity of an individual to successfully (according to certain formal or informal standards) handle certain circumstances or complete a certain duty or job (Eilström & Kock, 2008).

According to the literature, there are two core directions in defining the terms competency and competency development. Gómez-Arizaga et al. (2016), describe competencies as "a cluster of resources that are mobilized and reorganized by the individual (knowledge, procedures, and attitudes) to respond in an appropriate manner to a situation" (p. 2). This description of competencies is based around an individual having the skillset to respond to a given situation and can be taken a step further by eliminating the correlation between competences as skills, knowledge or qualifications altogether. This more abstract view of competencies states that they are a higher-order aptitude, utilized to act resourcefully and in a self-organized manner during unforeseen and often chaotic situations (Heyse et al., 2015). Conversely, competence can also be defined in more tactical terms of the requirements of the tasks that create a certain job.

This differentiation matters for the sake of this research and in the following we will align the term competence to refer to the Gómez-Arizaga version, and the term qualification to refer to the latter meaning. With this descriptor in mind, competency development is centered around the organizational activities that develop and uphold an individual's learning and capabilities (Forrier et al., 2009). Competence development means a process of growing, reorganizing and renewing a person's professional, systematic, social and personal options for action (Arnhoff, 2022). As a result, competence development cannot entirely emerge from knowledge or skills taught in trainings, even though both are necessary prerequisites for successful competence development. The learning environment necessary for competencies to be developed in a meaningful way will be discussed within this literature review.

Younas and Bari (2020) led a study exploring the relationship between talent management practices and retention of Generation Y employees with competency

development assessed as a mediating role. The intent of this research was to analyze the effect of talent management practices (i.e., mentoring, strategic leadership, social media, knowledge sharing) on the intention to stay of Generation Y employees. Then to firm this relationship by examining the mediating role of competency development. A total of 372 employees of Generation Y participated in the study in Pakistani software houses. The authors reference social exchange theory (Emerson, 1978) which hypothesizes employees have greater intent to stay when organizations value their needs and expectations. Investments in talent management and leadership development strategies enhance the organization's competitiveness, and retention of Generation Y workers (Carter et al., 2019). The research concluded competency development mediates between the talent management practices and intention to stay of Generation Y employees. Their findings validated the social exchange theory by clarifying the relationship between the talent management practices, competency development, and intention to stay of 'Gen Y' employees (Younas & Bari, 2020).

Competency Categorization

Schäfer (2006) developed one of the most commonly used classification system of competences (i.e., professional competence, methodological competence, social competence, and self-competence). Professional competences handle typical complications in the respective profession. Typically, they are closely linked to an individual's area of expertise. Methodological competences are more complex: they include the ability to solve difficulties or to obtain new knowledge. Social competences are aimed at social interaction: both competency in effective communication and conflict management should be mentioned here. Finally, Self-competences can be described as

automatic or intuitive competence: an individual uses them in correlation to their values, general attitudes, and self-awareness.

Jackson and Chapman (2012) note employees most typically experience development in disciplinary expertise through their education at schools, or training centers with the expectation that they will be equipped to contribute to the achievement of an organization's business objectives. Ultimately, employees are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and know-how in the form of technical competencies to meet designated job qualifications. Comparatively, individual skillsets such as values, attitude, creativity, collaboration, and navigating complexity are also deemed important for employees to be successful. These individual commitments are known as nontechnical or behavioral competencies (Jackson & Chapman, 2012). Technical and behavioral competencies are expected to make individuals successful in organizations (Albino, 2018).

Eilström and Kock (2008) highlight key considerations for a technological-functional perspective by making the following assumptions, among others:

1. Investment in the competence development of employees in a company are governed by a disparity between the demand and supply of qualified people in the company's internal talent pool; this can be caused by changes in the environmental factors of an organization such as new or evolved competition.

2. The progression of actions for competence development can be based around company strategy and clearly formulated policy for competence development, originating from an organization's objectives and business framework.

3. Cost-effectiveness estimates should guide choice to invest in competence development in which the effect of the education is viewed in relation to the costs in the form of salaries, loss of manufacturing, and any additional costs associated with the instruction.

By comparison, the determining factors for relational competency development can be more difficult to capture. Relational competencies can range widely from listening

to others, communication, task flexibility, working well with a team, engaging the right people in a decision, task prioritization, putting the customer first, working under pressure, exhibiting empathy, or bringing innovation to work processes. From these examples and the more general competency development definition, it is possible to think of technical and behavioral competencies as related (Albino, 2018). Challenges can arise with behavioral competency development in particular because many of aforementioned examples can exist as 'inert knowledge,' that is, knowledge that exists in an abstract sense but is actually not applied in practice. Additionally, many employees undergo training to strengthen and explore relational competencies but lack understanding of application (Bach & Suliková, 2019).

Burgoyne (1988) notes in his study of meta-competence that competences, regardless of a technical or relational categorization, are defined as 'applied knowledge.' Then the concept of meta-competence is introduced. Meta-competence allows an individual to adapt or even develop skills in specific situations. Meta-competences, at a macro level, is the competence of using competences. The relationship of meta-competence to others within the technical or relational category is analogous to the relationship of competences to actions. Because meta-competences indirectly affect actions, this form of competency should be considered indirect, while relational and technical competencies can be categorized as direct (Bach & Suliková, 2019).

One of the most important types of meta-competency in the workplace is transfer competency (Seidel, 2012). The term transfer in this context refers to the transformed workplace behavior of an employee in situations that are marked by changed work tasks or an employee completes a routine task more efficiently by means of transfer. The transfer of what has been learned in organizations is critically important because

application in the professional context determines the value of competency development efforts. Bach and Suliková determined in their 2019 research that the ability to transfer knowledge that has been learned can translate to achieving and implementing the acquired knowledge in the workplace. Accordingly, the workplace environment matters for transfer competency to be developed. Workplace situations and the specific conditions prevailing there, and the actual learning situation must be differentiated. Learning usually takes place in a sheltered atmosphere while in the workplace usually more complex and nuanced situations are encountered (Bach & Suliková, 2019).

Learning Environment

In his study on managing organizational transformations, Tichy (1983) determined both the internal and external environment have significant impact on competency development prioritization. Some of the key considerations are as follows: (a) the technical-economic environment (e.g., automation, technology evolution, fragmented focus resulting in lessened productivity), (b) the political environment (e.g. international commodity dependency, political unrest), and (c) the cultural-social environment (e.g. demographic shifts, increase in college-educated professionals, increasing demands and expectations towards the employers). Gill et al. (2005) confirmed these findings noting that external organizational conditions (e.g., competitive pressure, customer demands), as well as internal organizational conditions (e.g., culture of learning, leadership prioritization, corporate strategy) were important factors in determining an organization's willingness to take on competence development. Ultimately, the perception of both leadership and their teams regarding these environmental factors, determine an organization's willingness to invest in competence development.

Kock et al. (2007) conducted a study on competency development for subject matter experts in relation to the learning environment made a distinction between two types of learning environments: constraining and enabling. An enabling learning environment was described as having high qualification requirements, interesting potential for at-work learning, management that supports learning and cross-functional team cooperation. Comparatively, a constraining learning environment was described as having fewer of the aforementioned attributes. The study resulted in finding that the atmosphere of the learning environment was important because subject matter expert operating within an enabling learning environment reported systematically higher learning outcomes when compared to those in a constraining learning environment.

Kock et al. (2007) built on previous research to determine organization environmental factors of particular importance to accomplish the intended effects of organizational investments in competence development. Companies with greatest success over-indexed relative to other companies in the following areas: (a) greater time allocation to learning activities; (b) educational activities correlate with workplace changes; (c) Key decision makers and influencers view education and learning as a an impactful tool to handle the company's issues, and view learning as being important for the company's progress and existence; and (d) the existence of idea advocates who foster ideas, elevate them to the right audience, and take partnership with others to evolve them. Ultimately, for competency development to be deemed necessary, the internal and external environment needs to align, but for it to be effective, it must be a part of the organizational DNA.

Effects of Competency Development

Rodrigues et al. (2019) explored employability paradox and investigated if organizations investing in the career and competency development of their personnel will benefit from higher performance, or if that investment will increase the risk of losing more skilled employees to competitors. The researchers explore the circumstances under which investment in career development benefits employees and organizations by following graduates joining the workforce. Referencing back to social exchange theory (Emerson, 1978), they determined that when companies actionably indicate they care about employees by "investing in their career development and individuals are receptive to such signals and proactively seek to manage their careers, investment in career development has a positive impact on organizational commitment and intention to stay with one's employer" (Rodrigues et al., 2019, p. 1136). Their findings suggest the employability paradox lacks statistical support.

To better understand the relationship that competence development has to employees leaving the company, it is important to have a metric to define and measure the effects of competence development. The original classification was designed by Kirkpatrick (1959) and modified four decades later (Kirkpatrick, 1996). The framework assesses four intended effects: (a) participants' attitudes toward education and perception of results; (b) actual employee skill development and knowledge acquisition, as well as attitude change (e.g. attitude toward new sales technology); (c) degree to which an employee improves their task execution (job performance; and (d) improved performance at the organization level.

Kock et al. (2007) conducted a study of competence development in small and medium-sized companies to explore the effects of competency development and found

the following to be true: increased skill resulting in improved task execution, increased motivation for learning, improved perspective of the job, greater responsibility, and increased job satisfaction. A natural conclusion in seeing these results would be if an employee is more skilled, hungry to learn, and views their job with greater contentment and positivity, that would mean the employee would be more likely to stay with their company. However, those results were not explicitly stated in this study and an employee's intent to stay has the potential to be impacted by numerous factors outside of competency development.

Intent to Stay

Intention to stay refers to an individual's commitment and the willingness to stay with their organization (Younas & Bari, 2020). Organizationally correlated to intent to stay, employee retention is a calculated effort by organizations to create and develop an environment that encourages current employees to stay by having policies and practices in place that address their needs (Khan, 2019). Work environment, work-life balance, and career opportunities are factors directly impacting employee retention. More specifically, factors impacting employee decision to remain in the organization (intent to stay) are work environment, reward, growth and development and work life balance. Career development prospects and training directly affect employee retention (Hassan et al., 2013). Training and development are positively associated to increased organizational commitment, while commitment is strongly and inversely related to turnover intention (Khan, 2019).

For the purpose of this research, it is important to distinguish between job satisfaction, organization commitment, and intent to stay. According to Glisson and Durick (1988), job satisfaction is an employee's attitude toward their job and associated

components such as peer engagement, recognition, reward, working environment and condition. Comparatively, commitment is the individual employee's connection and sentiment surrounding their organization, while intent to stay refers to perceived likelihood of an employee staying at an organization—most typically a conscious and resolute decision (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019). Tett and Meyer (1993) completed research identifying the contributions of job satisfaction and organizational commitment on intent to stay and the results suggest that job satisfaction and organizational commitment have direct and independent effects on employee intent to stay, they also found that job satisfaction was a stronger predictor of employee intent to stay than organizational commitment. Ultimately there are many factors that play into job satisfaction, but overall, it is positively correlated with employee intent to stay (Aydogdu & Asikgil, 2011).

A culture of continuous learning and fostering of employee knowledge sharing within an organization enhances the competency development of employees (Vera & Crossan, 2004). An organizational leader as a learning agent builds employee learning aptitudes, which generates behaviors to foster the feedback of learning processes. Therefore, continuous learning culture and development of knowledge sharing in an organization enhance the competency development of employees (Vera & Crossan, 2004). Based on research of Chami-Malaeb and Garavan (2013), strategic leader communicates the vision and creates the alignment between Generation Y objectives and organizational strategy that help the employers to retain Generation Y employees. Because of this study, we know competency development opportunities offered by the organization influences the intention to stay of Millennials.

Middle Management

Middle managers play a critical role of intermediary in organizations around the world by helping to disseminate strategic direction from senior leadership and direct the actions of the remaining workforce (Mintzberg, 1989, 1998). Middle management competency, role, autonomy, and influence is shaped on a company-by-company basis, but many of challenges of being in a middle management role are universal. Literature focused specifically on the development and retention of middle managers is limited, yet losing employees at this level is costly, and has the potential to damage company culture, knowledge sharing, productivity, and more.

Challenges of Corporate Middle Management

Middle managers are tasked to be both an influential leader to direct reports and an engaged follower to top management throughout any given workday. Most leadership and training programs fail to capture the complexity of this dynamic (Jaser, 2022). For example, many managerial training programs teach leadership to influence direct reports but fail to develop their ability to influence up the chain of command. This development gap is problematic because by influencing up the chain of command, managers can flatten hierarchical distance and aid in organizational connection.

Anicich and Hirsh (2017a) corroborated decades of research indicating that power, or the lack of, impacts how employees think and conduct themselves in organizations. The juxtaposing transitions between high- and low-power states of individuals in middle management impacts the psychological and behavioral actions of these people. Research around middle-power positions and mindsets lead to frequent "vertical code-switching"—this is the name for switching between different behaviors

when interacting in a high-power versus low power dynamic. Frequent vertical code-switching can result in heightened role conflict.

Environmental factors should be discussed in conjunction with the intricacy of middle management because organizations are operating in an age of escalating complexity (National Research Council, 2001). Morieux and Tollman (2014) calculated that companies are operating in a competitive environment that is six times more complex than it was in 1955. Companies are straddling the line of complexity aiding in gaining competitive advantage, but at the same time many are struggling to adapt the competency development practices to appropriately equip their managers for success. To respond to this increasing complexity, management teams have created new processes, structure, and procedures. Paradoxically, the increase of structure merely adds to the complexity.

Perhaps the most core managerial paradox is that many individuals know what they would like to change within their role and company, but few pursue the work required to change it (Jaser, 2022). Given the opportunity to reallocate their time, a BCG and Ipsos survey of 5,000 employees, 30% of them managers, shows managers were only able to find 4 hours per week, a quantity of time that would allow for minimal ideation and subsequent problem resolution. Additionally, managers said that they want to evolve their communication, teamwork and ways of works, as well as improve their technical skills, but most surveyed individuals do not utilize development programs and on-the-job training that develops strategic thinking (Beauchene & Cunningham, 2021).

Middle managers make many important decisions within their jobs, but the context in which they make those decisions is set by senior leadership (Osterman, 2009). An organizations strategic initiative, market focus, investments, mergers, and technology

adaptation is all determined by senior leadership (Osterman, 2009). Ultimately, environmental uncertainty and change is such a constant, that many organizations are struggling to adapt quickly enough, and managers are stuck in the middle of competing priorities. According to the research, managers devote most of their effort to delivering updates, presentation and report generation, and coordinating cross-functionally within their organization, and less than one-quarter with their teams or clients (Beauchene & Cunningham, 2021).

Cost of Losing a Middle Manager

Extensive quantities of literature are focused employee retention because there is significant cost to the organizations when employees leave (Jiří & Žůrková, 2013; Hassan et al., 2013; Khan, 2019). Organizations calculating these costs should factor in substitution cost of the unoccupied position, salary cost correlated with contract termination and conducting of exit interviews, as well as time spent to assess the causes of leaving. Additionally, the cost of the departing employee's previous training, loss of knowledge, and potential loss of customers contribute to the organization loss when employees leave. Employee turnover calculations should also factor costs of lost employee and department productivity (Jiří & Žůrková, 2013). Jiří and Žůrková (2013) considered all of these factors in their calculation research to determine overall costs associated with the employee turnover may be as much as 1.5x higher than the average annual wage of the leaving employee.

Employee instability and turnover represents a frequent, undesirable, and permanent problem in many companies (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). This challenge considers both the departures of skilled employees but also the recruitment and hiring of new team members, it takes time to learn organizational norms and to adopt established

processes and ways of working. Middle Managers are often the individuals tasked with guiding new employees, but when they are leaving the company, it creates significant cause for concern.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to understand how competency development impacts intention to stay with an organization at the middle management level. This chapter highlights the design of the study, the sample of study participants, data collection process and methodology, protection of human subjects, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study utilized mixed methods as the researcher combined elements of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the purpose of scope and depth of understanding and substantiation (Johnson et al., 2007). The researcher used an explanatory sequential QUAN → QUAL design consisting of a survey, followed by an interview. The data collection and data analysis of the interviews took place after the data collection and analysis of the survey because the content depended on survey results (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

Research Sample

The survey portion of this study was conducted utilizing an at-large snowball convenience sample through the researcher's Linkedin network, followed by interviews within a volunteer consumer products company with approximately 8,000 employees to determine degree of resonation with the survey results. The target population for the survey was self-determined middle managers within the researcher's Linkedin network without consideration of industry or role function. The target population for the interview portion of the study was selected from exempt employees in the sales and marketing sectors of the volunteer consumer products company who lead people or operations at the

middle-management level. By the company's definition, middle management

encompasses those with a manager, senior manager or director title. As an employee of

this organization, the researcher was allowed access to 15 middle managers leading teams

or operations in a multitude of functions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Competency X Intent to Stay Interview Participant Sample

Position	n (%)	Function
Business Development Manager	3	Sales
Business Intelligence Manager	1	Sales
Commerce Marketing Manager	2	Commerce
Account Executive	2	Sales
Brand Activation Manager	1	Commerce
Brand Manager	2	Marketing
Sales Planner	2	Sales
Sales Director	2	Sales

$N = 15$

Part 1: Sample A

Sample A consisted of self-selected middle-managers within the researcher's

broader Linkedin network of 966 individuals willing to participate in the survey. The

researcher indicated that both people leader and individual contributor middle managers

were eligible for participating. All employees meeting this criteria were chosen for the

survey sample group. Because there was not a means to determine percent of Linkedin

connections that were middle managers, the researcher does not have an exact sample

size as percentage of total connections.

Part 2: Sample B

Sample B was built using a purposive sampling technique by the researcher based

on the knowledge and judgement the researcher had about the sample set (Govindan,

2014). The participants were selected intentionally based on their professional

background and positions within the volunteer consumer products organization

(Maxwell, 2013), at least one individual from sales, marketing, and commerce functions

was included in the sample. This sample was generated from the August 2022 HR listing

of people leaders with the Manager, Senior Manager or Director title within the broader

sales and marketing organizational functions. The researcher chose fifteen individuals

represented in Table 1 that may or may not have anonymously completed the part 1

survey representing 100% of the target population of 15. This sample had indicated that

they would be willing to participate in an interview after the researcher with each

individual requesting participation via e-mail.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected in two parts: the survey, followed by one-on-one

interviews with the researcher.

Part 1: Sample A

An introductory Linkedin Post (Appendix A) was sent to all potential survey

participants in middle-management roles within the researcher's Linkedin network ($n =$

966) to include the following: an introductory note on the study, commitment to

confidentiality, purpose of the project, and ask for action and transparency from survey

participants. The link to the competency X intent to stay survey (Appendix B) was

included in the body of the Linkedin post. The survey was built using the participating

organization's people leader skills matrix (Appendix C) guided by the four Es

competency groups: envisions opportunity, enlists partners, engages the team, executes

with excellence. The researcher requested the group to complete their survey within ten

days. The researcher sent a reminder post (Appendix D) to complete the survey three

days before the survey was due to be completed. After 10 days, 47 surveys were completed.

Part 2: Sample B

Fifteen individual interviews were conducted to complete part 2 of the sequential explanatory design of this study. The researcher used the sequential explanatory design to explain and interpret quantitative results by collecting and analyzing follow-up qualitative data in more detail through the interview format (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher chose 15 participants from the volunteer consumer products organization to conduct individual interviews with based on a minimum of one person representing each function of the sales, marketing and commerce functions of the business, and with the title of either manager, senior manager, or director.

The researcher sent individual email invitations to participate in individual interviews to all selected participants. The email included the following: an introductory note (Appendix E) on part 2 of the study, commitment to confidentiality, reminder on purpose of the project, voluntary nature of the study, and ask for meeting time from interview participants. The researcher conducted the 15 interviews via Zoom for 30 minutes per individual over the course of 10 days. The participants were asked to verbally consent to the meeting being recorded and to give permission for their responses to be used in the research study. Each participant was asked the same series of four questions (Appendix F) and given the opportunity to ask questions if time allowed. The researcher did not affirm or discourage any responses of interview participants to protect from insertion of their personal views. The researcher took written notes of the interviews in addition to confidentially filing the video recordings of the interviews along with audio transcripts.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher shared all associated documents, the survey, and interview questions with organizational leadership of the volunteer consumer products organization and received written approval to conduct the research from the Vice President of Human Resources on January 12, 2023. Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposed study on February 7, 2023 (Appendix G). The researcher also completed the Human Subjects Protection Training on July 31, 2022 (Appendix H).

Part 1: Sample A

In introductory post (Appendix A) was sent to all potential survey participants in self-identified middle-management roles within the researcher's Linkedin network to include the following: an introductory note on the study, commitment to confidentiality, purpose of the project, and ask for action and transparency from survey participants. The e-mail made clear that participation was voluntary and the subject's consent to participate was inferred by completion of the part 1 survey. The participants of this study received no financial incentives, incurred any costs, nor faced any apparent risk. The time spend of the participants was limited to reading of informational materials and completion of part 1 survey, approximately ten minutes. All data received from the survey was aggregated prior to publication of results.

The survey results were submitted anonymously using Microsoft Forms. The researcher had exclusive access to the excel report generated by Microsoft forms and saved the document as an encrypted file requiring passcode access. A summary of the study results was made available to all participants upon request. The survey (Appendix B) template included disclosure at the header as to how the data will be utilized and who will receive the aggregated data.

Part 2: Sample B

In preparation of part 2, the researcher sent individual email invitations to participate in one-on-one interviews to all selected participants within the volunteer consumer products organization. The email (Appendix E) included the following: an introductory note on part 2 of the study, commitment to confidentiality, reminder on purpose of the project, voluntary nature of the study, and ask for meeting time from interview participants. Consent to participate in the study was implied in the participant's agreement to be interviewed and was gained secondarily by the researcher requesting permission to record the interview. The interview participants were not financially incentivized, nor did they incur any costs by participating. The recordings were downloaded into an encrypted file and passcode protected so all participants responses could be kept confidential. The time spend of the participants from the volunteer consumer products company was limited to the 30 minute interview block. All data received from the interviews was aggregated prior to reporting to the participating consumer products organization and publication of results.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used to assess the relationship of competency development to intent to stay at the middle management level: a survey questionnaire, and secondarily, 1:1 interviews with a smaller subset of the initial population via Zoom. The Competency X Intent to Stay Questionnaire (Appendix B) was composed of four separate, but related sections. Part One consisted of optional demographic questions that were used to collect personal details including gender of the participant, years employed by current organization, and industry the participant was employed. Part Two utilized the Likert Scale to allow the participant to indicate their level of agreement with a given question.

Question 1, was used to gauge the employee's general intent to stay with the organization. Questions 2-5 were built using the participating organization's people leader skills matrix (Appendix C) and was designed to assess the relationship between competency development areas and the individual participant's intent to stay at the organization. Question 6, the final question, was built to allow the participant to indicate that competency development would not impact their intention to stay at the participating organization.

The second part of the research with completed in one-on-one interview format and was guided by four questions of which were the same for all participants working for the volunteer consumer products organization (Appendix F).

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews was reviewed to extract themes as well as similarities and differences across the participants. The researcher used Schäfer's (2006) commonly used classification system of competences: Professional competence, Methodological competence, Social competence, and Self-competence in conjunction with the volunteer consumer product organization's competency framework for employees to determine which competence areas has the most positive impact on middle management intent to stay. The qualitative data was used to determine underlying behavioral needs of middle managers that impact value of competency development in relation to their intent to stay. The findings of this study were presented to the appropriate senior leadership within the Human Resources team at the participating consumer products organization. Additionally, the abstract of this study was shared with participants of the study upon request.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design and methodology to understand the relationship between competency development and intent to stay at the middle management level. The design of the study, the sample of study participants, data collection process and methodology, protection of human subjects, instrumentation, and data analysis procedures were all described in detail. The mixed methods design allowed for both quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate a fuller picture of the research. The intent of chapter four is to report the findings of this study.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents findings of the study and describes the data collection

results. The first section presents only the quantitative survey data collected using the

Competency X Intent to Stay Questionnaire (Appendix B). The survey results will be

reported replicating the participating consumer product organization's people leader

skills matrix (Appendix C) guided by the four Es competency groups: envisions

opportunity, enlists partners, engages the team, executes with excellence. The second

section presents only the qualitative data gathered during interviews with the research

participants. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Competency Development X Intent to Stay Questionnaire Findings

The data collected from the Competency Development X Intent to Stay

Questionnaire is reported in the subsequent sections. The first section will review survey

participant's demographic information, followed by findings regarding the relationship

between various competencies and positive intent to stay.

Demographics

This section provides a summary of the demographic data collected for this study.

Subjects by gender, management type, time with current organization. The

sample consisted of 47 individuals who self-identified as middle managers within their

organization. Of the 47 participating subjects, the majority (68.1%) were female and

31.9% were male, and 57.4% were in a people leadership middle-management role, and

42.6% were in individual contributor middle-management role. The research participants

also indicated the duration of time they have been employed with their current

organization, 48.9% had been with their current employer 1-5 years, 27.7% were

employed for 6-10 years, 21.3% were employed for 11-15 years, and 2.1% of study

participants had worked for their current employer for 16-20 years.

Subjects by industry. The middle managers who responded represented 10

different industries including finance, restaurant, retail, tech, agriculture, healthcare,

manufacturing, marketing/Business, real estate, and consumer products. The majority

(53%) of study participants worked in consumer products, with the second highest

percentage of participants being those who worked in tech (15%).

Subjects by present intent to stay with current organization. The study

participants then indicated their present intent to stay with their current employer at

intervals of the coming 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, or for the duration of their remaining

career (see Table 2). The highest mean score indicates that middle manager intent to stay

is highest in the coming one year, and then declines consistently when indicating

increasing time participants are intending to stay with their current organization.

Table 2

Participants' Present Intent to Stay with Current Organization

Time Intending to Stay	Range	Mean
For the coming one year	1-5	3.9
For the next five years	1-5	3.1
For the next ten years	1-5	2.6
For the duration of career	1-5	2.4

$N = 47$; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Participants' Intent to Stay

Association with envisioning opportunity competencies. The middle managers

indicated their general agreement that competency development improving their ability to

envision opportunity would have a positive impact on their intent to stay (see Table 3).

The highest score ($M = 4.31$) indicating the most positive association with intent to stay

was reported for competency development enabling the ability to originate action to improve existing working conditions and processes. The lowest score (M = 3.19) was reported for the correlation between intent to stay and gaining the technical skills required for their job.

Table 3

Impact of Envisioning Organizational Opportunity Competencies on Intent to Stay

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…	Range	Mean
Gain the technical skills required for my job	1-5	3.19
Make empowered decisions	2-5	4.23
Generate innovative solutions in work situations	2-5	4.24
Actively identify new areas for learning	2-5	4.02
Originate action to improve existing conditions and processes	2-5	4.31
Think broadly, recognize opportunity, and make tradeoffs	1-5	4.19

$N = 47$; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Association with enlisting partnership competencies. The middle managers responding indicated their general agreement that competency development improving ability to enlist partnership would have a positive correlation regarding intent to stay (see Table 4). The highest score (M = 4.28) indicating the most positive correlation with intent to stay was reported for competency development enabling the ability to lead with vision and values. The lowest score (M = 3.36) was reported for the correlation between intent to stay and making customers and their needs a primary focus of their daily actions.

Table 4

Impact of Enlisting Partnership Competencies on Intent to Stay

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…	Range	Mean
Convey information and ideas	1-5	3.60
Make customers and their needs a primary focus of my daily actions	1-5	3.36
Use appropriate interpersonal style to gain acceptance of ideas or plans	2-5	3.83
Interact with others in a way that gives them confidence in my intentions	1-5	4.15
Lead with vision and values	2-5	4.28

$N = 47$; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Association with competency development supporting team engagement. The

middle managers responding indicated their general agreement that competency

development improving ability to engage the team would positively impact their intent to

stay (see Table 5). The highest score (M = 4.28) indicating the most positive correlation

with intent to stay was reported for competency development enabling the ability to build

strategic working relationships. The lowest score (M = 3.70) was reported for the

correlation between intent to stay and the ability to delegating decision-making authority

and task responsibility to others.

Table 5

Impact of Engaging the Team Competencies on Intent to Stay

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…	Range	Mean
Build a successful team	1-5	4.09
Build strategic working relationships	2-5	4.28
Provide feedback and guidance	2-5	4.09
Delegate decision-making authority and task responsibility to others	1-5	3.70
Guide others in accomplishing work	1-5	3.96
Assess talent inside and outside the company	1-5	3.77
Manage conflict	1-5	3.64

N = 47; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Association with competency development supporting executional excellence.

The middle managers responding indicated their general agreement that competency

development improving ability to execute with excellence would have a positive

correlation regarding intent to stay (see Table 6) but would least impact intent to stay

when compared to the aforementioned competency categories. The highest score (M =

4.04) indicating the most positive correlation with intent to stay was reported for

competency development enabling the ability to act with speed and agility. The lowest

score (M = 3.04) was reported for the correlation between intent to stay and the ability to collect and review information.

Table 6

Impact of Executing with Excellence Competencies on Intent to Stay

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…	Range	Mean
Maintain effectiveness when experiencing major changes in the workplace	1-5	3.81
Act with speed and agility to seize opportunities	2-5	4.04
Tolerate stress	1-5	3.62
Establish action plans for myself and others to ensure projects are completed efficiently	1-5	3.57
Collect and review information	1-5	3.04
Ensure that meetings serve their business objective	1-5	3.74
Demonstrate determination and ownership/accountability to the results	1-5	3.89

$N = 47$; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Study participants indicating competency development in the aforementioned areas would not impact intent to stay at current organization. Of the middle managers to participate in this study, 35.2% indicated that competency development would not impact their intent to stay with their current organization, 14.9% indicated neutrality, and 48.9% affirmed that competency development would impact their intent to stay with their current organization.

Survey results integrated with Schäfer's competence classification. The researcher used Schäfer's (2006) commonly used classification system of competences: Professional competence, Methodological competence, Social competence, and Self-competence in conjunction with the volunteer organization's competency framework for employees to determine which area of competence have the most positive impact on middle management intent to stay (Table 7).

Table 7

Volunteer Organization Competencies Categorized within Schäfer's Competence Classification

Competence	Mean
Professional Competencies (Group Mean = 3.48)	
Gain the technical skills required for my job	3.19
Make customers and their needs a primary focus of my daily actions	3.36
Delegate decision-making authority and task responsibility to others	3.70
Assess talent inside and outside the company	3.77
Establish action plans for myself and others to ensure projects are completed efficiently	3.57
Collect and review information	3.04
Ensure that meetings serve their business objective	3.74
Methodological Competencies (Group Mean = 4.09)	
Make empowered decisions	4.23
Generate innovative solutions in work situations	4.24
Actively identify new areas for learning	4.02
Originate action to improve existing conditions and processes	4.31
Think broadly, recognize opportunity, and make tradeoffs	4.19
Maintain effectiveness when experiencing major changes in the workplace	3.81
Act with speed and agility to seize opportunities	4.04
Demonstrate determination and ownership/accountability to the results	3.89
Social Competencies (Group Mean = 4.01)	
Convey information and ideas	3.60
Interact with others in a way that gives them confidence in my intentions	4.15
Lead with vision and values	4.28
Build a successful team	4.09
Build strategic working relationships	4.28
Provide feedback and guidance	4.09
Guide others in accomplishing work	3.96
Manage conflict	3.64
Self Competencies (Group Mean = 3.72)	
Use appropriate interpersonal style to gain acceptance of ideas or plans	3.83
Tolerate stress	3.62

$N = 47$; Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree

Qualitative Data: Individual Interviews

Based on the findings from the quantitative data collected in this study, the researcher built interview questions to collect qualitative data from participants in the volunteer consumer products organization intended to gain additional context around intent to stay in relationship to key competency areas found to have the most and least

positive impact at the middle management level. The competence classifications were used to categorize the competencies and it was determined the competency category most favorably impacting intent to stay with the highest score was for methodological competence (M = 4.09), followed by social competence (M = 4.01), self-competence (M = 3.72), and least impacting middle management intent to stay, professional competence (M = 3.48).

The following section is divided into three parts. The first part lists the data collected about specific competencies found to most favorably impact intent to stay. The second part reports the data generated by a question about specific competencies found to least impact intent to stay. The third and final part reports on the data generated on the general reasons competency development impacts intent to stay for middle managers.

Competency Development Most Enhancing Middle Management Intent to Stay

Interview Question 1 stated the survey participants indicated strong agreement that middle management intent to stay would increase if they had greater competency in two key areas: the ability to originate action to improve existing conditions and processes and build strategic working relationships. All interview participants (*n* = 15) agreed that competency development better equipping them to originate action and improve existing conditions and processes and competency development to build strategic working relationships would increase their intent to stay with their current employer. The question was designed to capture feedback on representative competencies from both the methodological and social competency categories, as those were the two categories of competency development most positively improving intent to stay for middle managers. A key finding during the interviews was that over half of the participants (*n* = 8)

considered these two competency areas to be related and codependent. One survey

participant stated the following, summing up this finding effectively:

> When I think about retention and intention to say, I think it surrounds your feelings around being heard, that you can be part of that action to create change if you feel like there is a need. I think when an individual in middle level management in an organization does not feel like their action or proposed ideas can create change, this creates a lot of frustration and animosity, it becomes a blockade for positivity. People start to think, you know, in simplistic terms, the grass is greener, maybe another company or another organization does do that, or can do that or I will be heard. I think it's hand in hand with strategic working partnerships and relationships because you feel like you know who to reach out to that can help enact change or that will hear you or listen to you. If you feel like that partnership is there and that action is being worked on and you feel as if you have a listening ear, you have a partner, the enlistment is there. But I think between the two if you're not feeling like you've got partnership in what you're trying to drive and that you're not going to see action against it, then you're going to move somewhere else where you think that might be a place that it lives.

An additional key finding was that the majority of middle managers ($n = 12$)

associated competency development in building strategic relationships and the ability to

impact outcomes with increased autonomy and empowerment to make decisions. These

participants indicated that experiencing increased autonomy and empowerment to make

decisions would increase their intent to stay.

Competency Development Least Likely to Enhance Intent to Stay

Interview Question 2 stated the initial survey results indicated the following two

areas would least favorably impact intent to stay: the ability to better gain the technical

skills required for their job and the ability to better collect and review information. This

question was designed to capture representative competencies reported to least impact

intent to stay under the broader category of professional competencies. All interview

participants ($n = 15$) agreed that competency development in collecting and reviewing

information would not impact their intent to stay. However, survey participants were

divided in their responses to their intent to stay being impacted by the ability to better gain the technical skills required for their job. While, the majority of participants agreed ($n = 10$) that their intent to stay would not be impacted by the ability to better gain the technical skills required for their job, the remainder of survey participants ($n = 5$) felt competency development in this area would increase their likelihood to stay. A key insight gathered from survey participants agreeing that competency development in technical skills or information processing and gathering would not impact their intent to stay was a shared sentiment that these competencies were foundational to doing a given job well, but did not hold enough differentiating value to positively impact their intent to stay. The below quote highlights this sentiment:

> I care to sharpen and broaden my learning and working relationships and my broader ability to add creativity in my unique touch to whatever role I'm in. It has practically nothing to do with the technical skills or functions of the job. Or collecting information about the job specifically, it's more what technical functions and learnings do I need in order to do my job well, beyond that, I'm not super interested.

Comparatively, interview participants who disagreed ($n = 5$) specifically with the survey results that stated competency development allowing them to better gain the technical skills required for their job would least impact their intent to stay shared a different insight. These participants agreed that technical skills were foundational to doing their job well, but felt that competency development in technical skills was critical to job satisfaction and would ultimately impact intent to stay if they didn't feel like they had the ability to do their core job well. A different interview participant communicated this sentiment below:

> Personally, for me, if I don't feel like I have the skills to do my job, it would greatly impact feeling like I was being supported. And that could impact my decision to want to leave a place if I didn't feel like I had the right technical skills, or the right support to get those technical skills.

A key distinction gathered from the interviews regarding Question 2 is that competency development enabling middle managers to better gain the technical skills required for their job and the ability to better collect and review information did not negatively impact intent to stay. Competency development in these areas was interpreted to have neutral intent to stay impact for middle managers, which supported the survey data.

Underlying Middle Manager Needs Affecting Value of Competency Development in Relation to Intent to Stay

Question 3 asked interview participants if they agreed or disagreed with the survey results stating 35% percent of survey participants said that competency development would not impact their intent to stay. This question was designed with the intent to understand the context of study participant's circumstance and attitude who did not feel competency development impacted their intent to stay. However, all interview participants ($n = 15$) felt competency development would impact their intent to stay, so contextual data supporting the 35% of survey respondents was not collected in this study. The below quote captures the positive correlation with competency development and intent to stay from a middle manager participant: "For me it felt like competency development makes me feel empowered, knowledgeable, confident, for sure. And I think those things are like probably paramount to my job satisfaction."

Key findings were gathered in this section regarding the underlying needs of middle managers that competency development fulfills, ultimately resulting in higher intent to stay. Of all interview participants, the majority ($n = 12$), felt competency development led to a positive future path within the organization and in turn this would positively impact their intent to stay. Second, competency development supporting an

individuals expressed personal development desires also increased intent to stay for the majority of study participants ($n = 10$). Finally, the majority of interview participants indicated that competency development resulted in two key needs being met: higher degree of agency ($n = 12$) and more ownership ($n = 8$), and these needs being met resulted in a higher intent to stay amongst this group of middle managers.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of this study. The first section highlighted the results of the survey seeking to understand the relationship between competency development and intent to stay. The various competencies were then categorized within Schäfer's competency categorizing structure to determine which competency category most positively impacted middle manager intent to stay. The second section of the results highlighted the qualitative findings of the interview portion of this study. The second section reviewed key findings of each key interview question and highlighted key quotes supporting these insights. Chapter 5 draws conclusions from the study results and discuss implications for further research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Middle managers represent a subset of the employed population in the millions (Zippia, 2023) and influence both up and down the organizational hierarchy (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017a, 2017b). Understanding what actions positively impact intent to stay matters because in 2022, two key evolutions took place in the workplace relative to the previous year, talent acquisition prioritization within organizations fell by nearly 50%, while talent retention rose to be the number one HR priority (Lattice, 2023). This study served the purpose of increasing the directional data on how organizations can most positively impact talent retention of middle management through the tool of competency development.

Key Findings

A review of the research data and evaluation of the study's key findings led the researcher to draw three key conclusions. First, the middle managers participating in this study, on average, did not indicate a positive intent to stay beyond one year with their current organizations. However, of the 62 total participants in this study, 74% indicated that competency development would positively impact their intent to stay.

This finding validates existing literature that shows a positive relationship between development and training and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment in turn is negatively associated with turnover intention (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010). These findings support the Work Institute (2018) research that has shown approximately one-third of employees could have been retained by their organizations, further illustrating the pressing need to clarify key antecedents in

the turnover process so that organizations can take preventative actions to retain their

most expensive assets, skilled and experienced workers.

Second, in no instance within this study, did competency development negatively

impact intent to stay at the middle management level. This validates the work of

Rodrigues et al. (2019) who found the employability paradox, the risk of losing more

skilled employees to competitors, invalid. However, the data from this study suggests that

all forms of competency development are not valued equally in their impact to middle

management intent to stay. The survey results indicated the most positive impact on

intent to stay when middle managers receive competency development in the ability to

originate action to improve existing conditions or processes (M = 4.31), leading with

vision and values (M = 4.28), and building strategic working relationships (M = 4.28).

The researcher categorized all three of these competency areas as non-technical or

behavioral due to their clear correlation with Jackson and Chapman's (2012) behavioral

competencies description of values, attitude, creativity, collaboration, and ability to

navigate complexity, all of which are important for employees to be successful in the

workplace.

Comparatively, this study suggests the least impactful competency development

areas on intent to stay at the middle manager level were: collecting and reviewing

information (M = 3.04), gaining the technical skills required for a job (M = 3.19), and

making the customer and their needs the primary focus of the employees daily actions (M

= 3.36). The researcher considers these competency areas to align with those that

employees are expected to demonstrate their knowledge and know-how in the form of

technical competencies to meet designated job qualifications (Jackson & Chapman,

2012).

Based on these results, the researcher is led to believe that behavioral or relational competency development most favorably impacts intent to stay at the middle management level. However, from these examples and the more general definition of competencies by Gómez-Arizaga et al. (2016), as a "a cluster of resources that are mobilized and reorganized by the individual (knowledge, procedures, and attitudes) to respond in an appropriate manner to a situation" (p. 4), it is possible to think of technical and behavioral competencies as related (Albino, 2018).

Third, the researcher found significant literature (Carter et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2019; Younas & Bari, 2020) about the impacts of competency development that referenced social exchange theory (Emerson, 1978) which hypothesizes employees have greater intent to stay when organizations value their needs and expectations. The researcher collected additional data supporting this theory when the majority of study participants confirmed their belief that competency development lead to a positive future path within the organization they were employed and a positive future path would positively impact their intent to stay. Second, competency development supporting an individuals expressed personal development desires also increased intent to stay for the majority of study participants. The perception that the company is investing in the study participants by developing their competencies led to greater intent to stay. The researcher believes this to be a key learning for organizations: competency development should be in line with the employees stated interests to favorably impact intent to stay and be perceived as valuable.

The aforementioned data was foundational to the researcher's ability to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1

The first question of this study asked, development in which of the four core competency categories most impacts middle management intent to stay? The researcher used Schäfer's (2006) competency classification categories of professional, methodological, social, and self-competencies to categorize the volunteer consumer product company's competency framework into a more broadly utilized competency structure. Firstly, the researcher found that while development of professional competencies has the potential to play a role in middle managers' intent to stay, competency development in this area least favorably impacted middle management intent to stay and had a neutral impact on intent to stay. In this study, the minority of study participants ($n = 5$) perceived competency development for their professional skills and knowledge in areas such as strategic planning, decision-making, and industry-specific to hold meaning beyond helping them to feel competent in their roles. For some, this sense of competence contributed to job satisfaction and fostered a desire to remain in their positions due to their perception of being more valuable contributors to the organization. However, for the majority ($n = 10$) of study participants, an association was not made to support Gómez-Arizaga et al. (2016), description of competencies being around an individual having the skillset to respond to a given situation.

Secondly, methodological competencies encompass skills related to planning, organizing, and implementing projects and processes efficiently. Middle managers who continually develop their methodological competencies are better equipped to handle complex tasks, coordinate teams, and deliver results effectively (Schäfer, 2006). Methodological competency development was found to most impact middle management intent to stay, followed closely by social competency development. A key finding of this

study indicated that participants found interdependency between development in social and methodological competences. Social competencies involve building and maintaining effective relationships, fostering collaboration, and influencing others. The majority of middle managers who participated in the study felt development in social competencies better equipped them to navigate organizational dynamics, resolve conflicts, and engage with stakeholders at various levels. They felt that by strengthening their social competencies, middle managers were better equipped to develop a network of professional connections and support systems that enhance their job satisfaction and ability to get things done in their organization.

Lastly, self-competencies encompass skills related to self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and personal development. Development to improve self-competencies may also contribute to middle managers' intent to stay, but the researcher was not able to distinguish based on the acquired data set how this area of competency development impacted intent to stay agnostic of other competency areas.

Research Question 2

The second question in this study asked, what are the underlying needs of middle managers that impact value of competency development in relation to their intent to stay? A key finding related to this question was that the majority of middle manager interviewees ($n = 12$) correlated competency development in building strategic relationships and the ability to impact outcomes with increased autonomy and empowerment to make decisions. These participants indicated that experiencing increased autonomy and empowerment to make decisions would increase their intent to stay. Additionally, the majority of study participants indicated that competency development resulted in two key needs being met: higher degree of agency ($n = 12$) and

more ownership ($n = 8$), and these needs being met resulted in a higher intent to stay amongst this group of middle managers.

This correlation between competency development, managerial needs, and intent to stay supports the study conducted by Debus et al. (2012) that found autonomy was positively related to job satisfaction and employee retention. When middle managers have a sense of autonomy, they feel empowered and trusted, which increases their motivation, job satisfaction, and intent to stay. The researcher concluded that middle managers value autonomy because it grants them the freedom to make decisions and exercise control over their work. The middle managers interviewees ($n = 8$) in this study felt autonomy was correlated with the ability to utilize their expertise and experience to shape strategies, set goals, and determine the best approaches to achieve them.

Agency, strongly related to autonomy, refers to the ability to influence and shape the outcomes and direction of one's work. Research by Kiefer et al. (2014) demonstrated that middle managers' perceived agency positively influenced their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. The middle managers who participated in this study indicated competency development in methodological competencies increased a sense of agency, which enabled them to have a more meaningful impact on the organization and its goals.

Ownership refers to the feeling of responsibility and accountability for one's work and its outcomes. The middle managers who participated in this study, indicated the competency development resulted in greater ownership and enabled them to take pride in their roles and feel a personal connection to the organization's success. A study by Gopalan et al. (2017) highlighted the positive relationship between perceived ownership and job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

This research suggests that autonomy, agency, and ownership are underlying needs of the majority ($n = 10$) of middle managers interviewees resulting in a greater degree of impact on intent to stay, when competency development is perceived to support increased levels of these needs being met.

Study Limitations

This study was limited in its external validity due to two key factors: the limited number of participants ($n = 47$) in the quantitative portion of the study as well as the selection of subjects for the qualitative portion of the study from a single organization in the consumer products industry with over 8,000 employees. As an employee of the aforementioned organization, potential researcher bias is an additional limiting factor. However, the researcher attempted to account for this potential bias in the mixed methods research design of the study; the quantitative data analysis was completed by the researcher and confirmed by an independent auditor, and the qualitative data collected in interviews was in response to these findings, serving to potentially reduce bias.

Recommendations For Future Study

The researcher recommends three key areas for future research. The first recommendation is to replicate this study with some key modifications and a significantly larger sample size across multiple industries and organizations. The researcher would recommend modifying the quantitative part of the data collection to utilize competencies that are not specific to one organization's competency framework. Additionally, the researcher would recommend modifying the qualitative interview questions to better capture why middle managers value some types of competency development over others, and more overtly capture what need the most valued competency development categories fulfill. Related to this, future research is needed to better assess what types of competency

development are most valued by middle managers in different job functions to better understand overlap and disparities.

Second, the research available about middle managers was limited relative to the amount of literature on employee retention, intent to stay, and competency development. Consequently, the researcher was not able to find an established model for competencies middle managers should be held accountable to exhibiting in the workplace, this could be an additional area for future research to better design a benchmark for middle management competencies.

Finally, the researcher sees an opportunity to further research on the impact of other employee-retention and development practices on intent to stay at the middle management level. There is opportunity to better understand what practices within organizations have the greatest positive correlation to retaining middle managers beyond competency development.

Summary

This chapter summarized the research findings, highlighted conclusions drawn from the collected body of research, and comments on how they validate or refute existing literature in the field. The researcher revisited the initial research questions to determine how the research findings answered these questions. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research projects were also provided.

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Appendix A: Survey Introductory Post

PEPPERDINE
— UNIVERSITY —

Many of you know I am currently pursuing my Master's Degree in Organization Development at Pepperdine University, while also working full-time at E. & J. Gallo Winery. **I am posting today to ask you to participate in my thesis research if you are considered a middle manager within your organization.** The purpose of my thesis research is to understand how competency development impacts intention to stay with an organization at the middle management level.

I am seeking voluntary study participants for approximately 10 minutes of time for survey completion, you will be asked to complete a survey using the Likert scale, with no open-ended questions.

Please consider re-posting or sharing if you, yourself are not an applicable study participant!

Important Fine Print:
Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity as a participant will be protected

before, during, and after the time that study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place and only aggregated data will be published. Survey data will be collected anonymously unless participants choose to share their name to participate in secondary research. Completion of the survey indicates consent to participate, and participants may choose to leave the study at any time. All survey will be saved in a secured file

Thank you in advance for your consideration and willingness to support these thesis research efforts – your candor and thoughtfulness is immensely appreciated. If you have any questions or would like to see the results of the study, do not hesitate to comment below or send a direct message.

Click HERE to begin the questionnaire. Please complete by DATE, I will post one reminder post.

Sincerely,

Miriam Chambers

Appendix B: Competency X Intent to Stay Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is designed to understand the relationship between development in the competency areas highlighted below and your intention to stay working at your current organization. Your current role is self-designated under the broader term of middle manager, and middle managers are the focus group of this study. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential – please answer honestly. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

For the sake of this study, the Gómez-Arizaga et al. (2016) definition of competencies will be used to align understanding and minimize interpretation by survey participants. Competencies are "a cluster of resources that are mobilized and reorganized by the individual (knowledge, procedures, and attitudes) to respond in an appropriate manner to a situation [...]. This description of competencies is based around an individual having the skillset to respond to a given situation.

Directions: Please mark the applicable box

Part 1:

(1) What is your gender?
A. Female
B. Male

(2) How many years have you worked for your organization?
A. 0-5 years
B. 5-10 years
C. 10-15 years
D. 15-20 years
E. 20 years or more

(3) What industry is your organization a part of?
A. Consumer Products
B. Tech
C. Finance
D. Real Estate
E. IT
F. Manufacturing
G. Retail
H. Healthcare
J. Government

Part 2

1. Please rate your agreement with the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Disagree
I intend to stay working at my current organization in the coming year					
I intend to stay working at my current organization in the next five years					
I intend to stay working at my current organization in the next ten years					
I intend to stay working at my current organization for the duration of my career					

2. Please rate your agreement with the following:

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better..,

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gain the technical skills required for my job					
Make empowered decisions					
Generate innovative solutions in work situations					
Actively identify new areas for learning					
Originate action to improve existing conditions and processes					
Think broadly, recognize opportunity, and make tradeoffs					

3. Please rate your agreement with the following:

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Convey information and ideas					
Make customers and their needs a primary focus of my daily actions					
Use appropriate interpersonal style to gain acceptance of ideas or plans					
Interact with others in a way that gives them confidence in my intentions					
Lead with vision and values					

4. Please rate your agreement with the following:

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Build a successful team					
Build strategic working relationships					
Provide feedback and guidance					
Delegate decision-making authority and task responsibility to others					
Guide others in accomplishing work					
Assess talent inside and outside the company					
Manage conflict					

5. Please rate your agreement with the following:

I would be more likely to stay working at my current organization if I could better…

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Maintain effectiveness when experiencing major changes in the workplace					
Act with speed and agility to seize opportunities					
Tolerate stress					
Establish action plans for myself and others to ensure projects are completed efficiently					
Collect and review information					
Ensure that meetings serve their business objective					
Demonstrate determination and ownership/accountability to the results					

6. Please rate your agreement with the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Competency development in the aforementioned areas would NOT impact my intent to stay at my current organization					

Appendix C: Organization Skills Matrix 4Es (Competency Groups

ENVISIONS OPPORTUNITY
Seeks and Sees Opportunity Beyond the Current Environment

ENLISTS PARTNERS
Enlists Others to Help Make the New Idea a Reality

ENGAGES THE TEAM
Effectively Mobilizes People Toward the Achievement of the Goal

EXECUTES WITH EXCELLENCE
Drives to Deliver Results

Job Categories Defined:
These suggestions are typical, but not intended to describe all roles.
Please work with your supervisor and HR Representative to make a selection, examining the associated competencies for fit.

ADMINISTRATIVE / PROJECT SUPPORT	TEAM MEMBER	SALES	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKER	PEOPLE LEADER	EXECUTIVE
Non-exempt employees	Exempt individual contributors with **NO** direct reports	Employees whose primary role involves heavy interface with customers or external vendors. Typically, exempt Sales and Customer Service employees.	Exempt, highly specialized, individual contributors, typically with **NO** direct reports.	Exempt employees who lead people/teams, up to and including Director level.	Exempt employees who lead departments, functions, or business units at the Sr. Director level and above.

ENVISIONS OPPORTUNITY
Seeks and Sees Opportunity Beyond the Current Environment

	TEAM MEMBER	SALES	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKER	PEOPLE LEADER	EXECUTIVE
Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:
Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.	**Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills** Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.	**Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills** Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.	**Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills** Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.	**Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills** Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.	**Technical/Professional Knowledge and Skills** Maintaining a high level of technical and professional or knowledge in position-related areas.
Decision Making Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.	**Decision Making** Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.	**Decision Making** Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.	**Decision Making** Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.	**Decision Making** Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.	**Decision Making** Identifying and understanding issues, problems, and opportunities; comparing data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches for choosing a course of action or developing appropriate solutions; taking action that is consistent with available facts, constraints, and probable consequences.
Innovation Generating innovative solutions in work situations; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	**Innovation** Generating innovative solutions in work situations; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	**Innovation** Generating innovative solutions in work situations; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	**Innovation** Generating innovative solutions in work situations; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	**Innovation** Generating innovative solutions in work situations; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.	**Innovation** Generating innovative solutions in work situation; trying different and novel ways to deal with work problems and opportunities.
Applied Learning Assimilating and applying new job-related information in a timely manner.	**Applied Learning** Assimilating and applying new job-related information in a timely manner.	**Continuous Learning** Actively identifying new areas for learning; regularly creating and taking advantage of learning opportunities; using newly gained knowledge and skill on the job and learning through their application.	**Continuous Learning** Actively identifying new areas for learning; regularly creating and taking advantage of learning opportunities; using newly gained knowledge and skill on the job and learning through their application.	**Continuous Learning** Actively identifying new areas for learning; regularly creating and taking advantage of learning opportunities; using newly gained knowledge and skill on the job and learning through their application.	
			Continuous Improvement Originating action to improve existing conditions and processes; using appropriate methods to identify opportunities, implement solutions, and measure impact.	**Continuous Improvement** Originating action to improve existing conditions and processes; using appropriate methods to identify opportunities, implement solutions, and measure impact.	
					Can Think Broadly and Deeply Has broad knowledge and perspective; can anticipate future consequences and trends accurately; is future oriented; can paint credible pictures of possibilities and likelihoods; can create competitive, breakthrough strategies and plans.

ENLISTS PARTNERS
Enlists Others to Help Make the New Idea a Reality

ADMINISTRATIVE / PROJECT SUPPORT	TEAM MEMBER	SALES	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKER	PEOPLE LEADER	EXECUTIVE
Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:
					Networking and Recruiting Continually building and maintaining a strong external professional network and actively participating in the recruiting of key talent.
Communication Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.	**Communication** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.	**Communication** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.	**Communication** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.	**Communication** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.	**Communication** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.
Customer Focus Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; developing and sustaining productive customer relationships.	**Building Customer Loyalty** Effectively meeting customer needs; building productive customer relationships; taking responsibility for customer satisfaction and loyalty.	**Building Customer Loyalty** Effectively meeting customer needs; building productive customer relationships; taking responsibility for customer satisfaction and loyalty.	**Customer Focus** Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; building positive relationships with customers.	**Customer Focus** Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; building positive relationships with customers.	**Customer Focus** Making customers and their needs a primary focus of one's actions; building positive relationships with customers.
	Gaining Commitment Using appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to gain acceptance of ideas or plans; modifying one's own behavior to accommodate tasks, situations, and individuals involved.		**Gaining Commitment** Using appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to gain acceptance of ideas or plans; modifying one's own behavior to accommodate tasks, situations, and individuals involved.	**Gaining Commitment** Using appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to gain acceptance of ideas or plans; modifying one's own behavior to accommodate tasks, situations, and individuals involved.	**Gaining Commitment** Using appropriate interpersonal styles and techniques to gain acceptance of ideas or plans; modifying one's own behavior to accommodate tasks, situations, and individuals involved.
		Building Trust Interacting with others in a way that gives them confidence in one's intentions and those of the organization.		**Building Trust** Interacting with others in a way that gives them confidence in one's intentions and those of the organization.	**Building Trust** Interacting with others in a way that gives them confidence in one's intentions and those of the organization.
		Negotiation Effectively exploring alternatives and positions to reach outcomes that gain the support and acceptance of all parties.	**Negotiation** Effectively exploring alternatives and positions to reach outcomes that gain the support and acceptance of all parties.		
					Building Partnerships Identifying opportunities and taking action to build strategic relationships between one's area and other areas, teams, departments, units, or organizations to help achieve business goals.
		Formal Presentation Presenting ideas effectively to individuals or groups when given time to prepare; adapting presentation strategies to suit the needs of the audience and the situation.	**Formal Presentation** Presenting ideas effectively to individuals or groups when given time to prepare; adapting presentation strategies to suit the needs of the audience and the situation.		**Formal Presentation** Presenting ideas effectively to individuals or groups when given time to prepare; adapting presentation strategies to suit the needs of the audience and the situation.
		Sales Ability / Persuasiveness Using appropriate interpersonal styles and communication methods to gain acceptance of a product, service, or idea from prospects and clients.			
				Leading Through Vision and Values Keeping the organization's vision and values at the forefront of associate decision making and action.	**Leading Through Vision and Values** Keeping the organization's vision and values at the forefront of associate decision making and action.

ENGAGES THE TEAM
Effectively Mobilizes People Toward the Achievement of the Goal

	TEAM MEMBER	SALES	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKER	PEOPLE LEADER	EXECUTIVE
Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:
Contributing to Team Success Actively participating as a member of a team to move the team toward the completion of goals.	**Contributing to Team Success** Actively participating as a member of a team to move the team toward the completion of goals.		**Developing Others** Planning and supporting the development of individuals' skills and abilities so that they can fulfill current or future job/role responsibilities more effectively.	**Building a Successful Team** Using appropriate methods and a flexible interpersonal style to help build a cohesive team; facilitating the completion of team goals.	**Building a Successful Team** Using appropriate methods and a flexible interpersonal style to help build a cohesive team; facilitating the completion of team goals.
Building Strategic Working Relationships Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.	**Building Strategic Working Relationships** Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.	**Building Strategic Working Relationships** Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.	**Building Strategic Working Relationships** Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.	**Building Strategic Working Relationships** Developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals.	
	Collaboration Working effectively and cooperatively with others; establishing and maintaining good working relationships.		**Coaching** Providing timely guidance and feedback to help others strengthen specific knowledge/skill areas needed to accomplish a task or solve a problem.	**Coaching** Providing timely guidance and feedback to help others strengthen specific knowledge/skill areas needed to accomplish a task or solve a problem.	
				Delegating Responsibility Allocating decision-making authority and/or task responsibility to appropriate others to maximize the organization's and individuals' effectiveness.	**Delegating Responsibility** Allocating decision-making authority and/or task responsibility to appropriate others to maximize the organization's and individuals' effectiveness.
				Aligning Performance for Success Guiding others in accomplishing work by setting clear objectives, monitoring progress, and providing feedback.	**Aligning Performance for Success** Guiding others in accomplishing work by setting clear objectives, monitoring progress, and providing feedback.
				Assessing Talent Is a good judge of talent, can articulate the strength and limitation of people inside or outside the organization. Can accurately project what people are likely to do across a variety of situations.	**Assessing Talent** Is a good judge of talent, can articulate the strength and limitation of people inside or outside the organization. Can accurately project what people are likely to do across a variety of situations.
				Managing Conflict Dealing effectively with others in an antagonistic situation; using appropriate interpersonal styles and methods to reduce tension or conflict between two or more people.	

E&J Gallo Winery

EXECUTES WITH EXCELLENCE
Drives to Deliver Results

ADMINISTRATIVE / PROJECT SUPPORT	TEAM MEMBER	SALES	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE WORKER	PEOPLE LEADER	EXECUTIVE
Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:	Key Skills Include:
Adaptability Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.	**Adaptability** Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.	**Adaptability** Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.	**Adaptability** Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.	**Adaptability** Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.	**Adaptability** Maintaining effectiveness when experiencing major changes in work tasks or the work environment; adjusting effectively to work within new work structures, processes, requirements, or cultures.
Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.	**Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency** Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.	**Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency** Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.	**Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency** Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.	**Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency** Acting with speed and agility to seize opportunities and achieve objectives.	**Initiating Action/ Sense of Urgency** Acting with speed and agility to seize opportunities and achieve objectives.
Stress Tolerance Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).	**Stress Tolerance** Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).	**Stress Tolerance** Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).	**Stress Tolerance** Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).	**Stress Tolerance** Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).	**Stress Tolerance** Remaining calm and maintaining stable performance when under pressure or opposition (such as time pressure or job ambiguity).
Managing Work Effectively managing one's time and resources to ensure that work is completed efficiently.	**Managing Work** Effectively managing one's time and resources to ensure that work is completed efficiently.	**Planning & Organizing** Establishing action plans for oneself and others to ensure that tasks and projects are completed efficiently	**Planning & Organizing** Establishing action plans for oneself and others to ensure that tasks and projects are completed efficiently	**Planning & Organizing** Establishing action plans for oneself and others to ensure that tasks and projects are completed efficiently.	
Quality Orientation Accomplishing tasks by considering all areas involved, no matter how small; showing concern for all aspects of the job; accurately checking processes & tasks; being watchful over a period of time.	**Quality Orientation** Accomplishing tasks by considering all areas involved, no matter how small; showing concern for all aspects of the job; accurately checking processes & tasks; being watchful over a period of time.	**Work Standards** Setting high standards of performance for self and others; assuming responsibility and accountability for successfully completing assignments or tasks; self-imposing standards of excellence rather than having standards imposed.	**Information Monitoring** Setting up ongoing procedures to collect and review information needed to manage an organization or ongoing activities within it.	**Information Monitoring** Setting up ongoing procedures to collect and review information needed to manage an organization or ongoing activities within it.	
Follow Up Monitoring the results of delegations, assignments, or projects, considering the skills, knowledge, and experience of the assigned individual and the characteristics of the assignment or project.	**Meeting Participation** Using appropriate interpersonal styles and methods to help reach a meeting's goals while considering the needs and potential contributions of others.	**Follow-Up** Monitoring the results of delegations, assignments, or projects, considering the skills, knowledge, and experience of the assigned individual and the characteristics of the assignment or project.	**Meeting Participation** Using appropriate interpersonal styles and methods to help reach a meeting's goals while considering the needs and potential contributions of others.	**Meeting Leadership** Ensuring that a meeting serves its business objectives while using appropriate interpersonal styles and methods and considering the needs and potential contributions of others.	
	Tenacity Continuing to work hard to achieve goals in spite of barriers or difficulties.				

Appendix D: Survey Participant Reminder Post

Date

Hello Again All,

As promised, this is a reminder post to complete the survey I have created for my thesis research to better understand the relationship between competency development and intent to stay at an organization at the middle management level. Survey participants must be at the middle management level within their organization.

Please consider re-posting or sharing if you, yourself are not an applicable study participant!

Your participation is voluntary, and if you are willing, immensely appreciated. As a reminder, the survey can be found HERE and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you!
Miriam Chambers

Appendix E: Invitation to Interview

Date

Hi Name of Participant,

My name is Miriam Chambers and I am currently working as one of the Senior Commerce Marketing Managers within the Commercial BU. However, today, I am reaching out to you as a Masters of Organization Development Candidate at Pepperdine University, requesting you to participate in my thesis research! The purpose of my thesis research is to understand how competency development impacts intention to stay with an organization at the middle management level.

I am seeking voluntary study participants for a 30 minute individual interview, you will be asked a series of four open-ended questions pertaining to the results of my survey completed external to Company Name. The intent of this interview is to build greater clarity and context around the data synthesized from the survey.

I am reaching out to you because I am confident that your background, expertise, and current role will provide valuable information to further the study. May I set up time for a 30 minute 1:1 interview with you?

As a reminder, COMPANY NAME is aware that this research is being done, has been given complete visibility to the research build and interview questions, and supports participation from employees on a voluntary basis. Additionally, this study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University and meets all research requirements by the university. Please note, all responses will be kept confidential, and only aggregated data will be presented back to the organization leadership. Participation in the interview indicates consent to participate, and participants may choose to leave the study at any time.

Thank you!
Miriam Chambers

Appendix F: Interview Script

Opening Comments:

Thank you for participating in an interview to better understand the relationship between competency development and intent to stay at the middle management level. As a reminder, your participation in this interview is voluntary and you can choose to not answer a question or leave at any time. Your answers are confidential, please be as honest and direct as possible. Do I have permission to record our conversation for the sake of documentation? Are you ready for me to begin?

1) The part 1 survey results indicated strongest agreement that middle management intent to stay would increase if they had greater competency in two key areas: to originate action to improve existing conditions and processes and build strategic working relationships. Do you agree with both, and why do you think that is the case?

2) The part 1 survey indicated the strongest disagreement that middle management intent to stay would increase if they had greater competency in two key areas: gain the technical skills required for their job and collect and review information. Do you agree, and why do you think that is the case?

3) 35% percent of survey participants said that competency development would not impact their intent to stay. Do you agree or disagree with this sentiment? Why? Are there other things that would have equal or greater impact on your intent to stay?

4) In your opinion what would be the most effective way to develop competencies in our organization? Why?

Appendix G: Pepperdine University IRB Approval

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 07, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Miriam Chambers

Protocol #: 22-08-1918

Project Title: The Relationship Between Competency Development and Intent to Stay at the Middle Management Level

School: Graziadio School of Business and Management

Dear Chambers:

Thank you for submitting your amended exempt application to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the **Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual** at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory Affairs Specialist

Appendix H: Human Subjects Training Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 31-Jul-2022
Expiration Date 30-Jul-2025
Record ID 46450366

This is to certify that:

Miriam Chambers

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

MSOD Human Subjects Training
(Curriculum Group)
MSOD Human Subjects Training
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w8e585398-fab7-4e45-aad2-87aa836e7146-46450366