An Employee-Based Perspective on Corporate Investments in Human Capital:

The Value of Personalized and Supportive Employee Development Programs

By

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Abstract

Human resource management has increasingly acknowledged the value of fostering skillful and knowledgeable employees (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 1). Economic researchers have long worked to understand the importance of corporations investing in employees' human capital (Nafukho, 2004, p. 545-546). According to this research, multiple benefits can result from investment in human capital, such as increased productivity, decreased turnover rates, and long-term financial performance. (Nafukho, 2004, p. 546). However, these factors solely rely on the potential benefits of the corporation and fail to take into account the employee who is utilizing these investments.

This paper analyzes the effects on corporate investment in human capital by focusing on employees' perception of employee development programs. I interviewed 24 corporate employees working within various industries with the common background of attending Drew University, a liberal arts university, for their college studies to allow for a more distinguishable analysis from a comparable background through enduring well-rounded subject learning. Drawing on Noe et al's (1997) four-dimensional employee development model–which has been utilized in previous employee development research (Dachner et al, 2021, p.6), this case study shows the potential for individual growth of personalized and supportive employee development programs.

While Dachner et al emphasize the role of proactivity of employers for employee development (Dachner et al, 2021, p. 4), the results of this study show how proactivity is a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee. The study also highlights the value of personalized and interconnected development methods, as employees consider personal relationships and mentoring most useful for their individual growth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Investment in human capital is essential to human resource management and to achieve organizational goals. In the past, human resource professionals have emphasized more traditional methods such as formalized courses that are carefully designed and instructed at the employer's discretion (Dachner et al., 2019, 2). Studies have shown that there have been various positive effects with the more traditional approaches, but more recently human resource specialists have been branching off from these methods. Research has shown that the previous perception of what constitutes proper investment needs to be implemented through a broader and more up-to-date conceptualization of employee development expanding past one's capacity to function effectively in their present or future work environment (McCauley & Hezlett, 2001, p. 314). Recent human capital literature has emphasized the importance of human capital being reliant on the employee to be proactive in their development. There is a strong understanding in previous human resource development literature about educational and training resources that corporations can use in order to maximize an employee's productivity and reduce employee turnover. However, there is a lack of understanding to what constitutes the most value for the employee who is making use of the investments. Recent human capital literature has emphasized the importance in human capital being reliant on the employee to be proactive in their development. These two contrasting views between the human capital and human resource development literature leaves a gap to understanding what types of corporate investments are best suited for the growth and development of their employees. It raises the question as to what responsibility both the employer and the employee have in the human capital development process. In order to understand the relationship and effects between corporate investments and

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employee's learning and development, this qualitative case study connects with 24 current employees working for large corporations within the United States. The first section of study will emphasize the important relationship between previous human capital and human resources literature with a strong emphasis on the well-regarded employee development four-dimensional taxonomy. The second section will help to understand the relevance and importance of the methodological manner chosen of a qualitative study to see such relationships. The next section will then examine the findings through the qualitative study interview process. It will proceed with a discussion of these findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Human Capital

The idea of what denotes economic production has evolved over time past physical capital, land, labor and management (Mincer, 1962, pp. 50-79; Becker, 1993, pp. 389-405). There have been many advancements in the various facets of capital and the idea of labor as a form of production (Nafukho 2004, 545). The human capital theory constitutes that skills and knowledge are a form of capital (Schultz 1961, p. 3). The learning capacities that one acquires through various education and training has value in the production of goods and services (Lucas 1988, pp. 3-42). Some companies provide employees with learning opportunities because what the employees learn strongly contributes to the intangible assets of human capital. There are various factors that equate under the umbrella of human capital, but the two main factors that have an effect on human resource development within a corporate work setting are specified under education and training. Schooling and learning new skills have a positive impact on income and workplace productivity (Nafukho 2004, p. 546). In order to have efficient

management of a firm, human capital needs to be analyzed as to the proper investments that should be made when it comes to education and training employees. Various investment decisions will be based on the organization's interests (Aliaga, 2001, p. 21). These investments will not only increase the productivity of the individual at the company, but will also help company growth and development. The human capital literature argues that there needs to be an investment in employees in order to increase their productivity, but human resource development initiatives must advocate for the education and training necessary to improve employee development. Research on human resource development has emphasized the importance of understanding what methods of training and education correlate the best returns on investment. (Psacharopoulos,1985, pp. 583-601). Human resource professionals can address the criticisms of the various methods when it comes to the wellbeing of the organization as a whole in conjunction with employees and shareholders. They also can take into the account the impacts that human capital development initiatives have on their employees and have a proper way of assessing them so they can see the overall growth of their employees that was made on these investments (Nafukho, 2004, p. 549). The ties of human capital and its effects on employee development are analyzed in this study as a method to understand what facets of employee development have a long-lasting and most meaningful impact on both the employee and the corporation. While the human capital literature has been focusing on individual action through education and training to foster growth, less has been analyzed from the side of the corporation that can provide these various opportunities. To further investigate how corporations can have an effect on employee development, this study bridges the gap between human capital literature and the literature on employee development.

2.2 Employee Development- Definition and Purpose

Employee development consists of "an integrated set of planned programs, provided over a period of time, to help assure that all individuals have the competence necessary to perform to their fullest potential in support of the organization's goals" (Jacobs & Washington, 2003, p. 344). There is a direct positive correlation between employee development and organizational performance (Jacobs & Washington. 2003, p. 347). There is a wide range of opportunities for both the employee and the employer when organizations offer a wide variety of learning opportunities that can benefit the performance of the employee as well as the success of the organization. Organizations' main approach to their HR strategy is to invest in training and development programs. In order to expand one's individual capacity there are a variety of development activities for learning which include formal education, personality assessments, professional relationships, skills and abilities to grow professionally, and on the job experience. Researchers have an understanding that formal development programs such as working through various assessments, on-line courses and degree programs, mentorship programs, learning objectives, and organizational expectations can fulfill human capital needs (Dachner et al., 2019, pp. 6-9).

2.3 Noe et al's Four Dimension Development Taxonomy

A recent and comprehensive literature review on human capital development has argued that employee development should be analyzed in an updated context and be more employee-driven to keep up with new trends in the workplace. The literature review frames their research around a model developed in 1997 by Raymond Noe, Steffanie Wilk, Ellen Mullen, and James Wanek that works employee development into four main categories. The four categories include formal courses or programs, assessments, professional relationships, and on-the-job experience.

The framework is still used today through a contemporary context. Table 1 shows the contents in which current development research is lacking under the human capital construction of development methods (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 6).

Table 1: Adapted from Noe, Wilk, Mullen, & Wanek (1997) Four-Dimension Taxonomy of Developmental Experiences

DEVELOPMENT CATEGORY	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
Formal Courses and Programs	Courses and other autonomous development activities to enhance one's skills and knowledge	· Massive online open courses (MOOCs) · Webinars · In-house training program
Assessments	Certifications, feedback, and other autonomous activities to upgrade skill sets and identify positioning for better performance and future opportunities	· Feedback · Certifications · Mid-year/annual reviews
Professional Relationships	Networking, mentorship, and other developmental activities that require effort towards fostering relationships with other professional in order to create new growth opportunities	· Mentorship · Networking · Communities of Practice
On-the-Job Experience	Engaging in tasks on-the-jobs in order to meet skill and learning needs and fulfill career aspirations	· Learning on the job · Job crafting/ expanding

The first development category constitutes formal courses and programs that the company provides. These courses can be provided in person or in an online setting. Massive open online courses are available to any employee who would like to utilize them and allows for an online working environment with lectures, quizzes, assessments, and interactive course work. There also are an abundance of webinars that are made available such as live seminars, lectures, and workshops that allow for real-time learning. Many organizations are allowing their employees to take advantage of these webinars because they allow for real-time learning without the cost of venue and travel and for participants to be spread out geographically. Many of these opportunities allow for learning on employees' own terms with extra flexibility based on their own learning goals and interests without having to wait for organizational approval (Dachner et al., 2019, p. 7).

Assessments are also an employee development method that require completing certifications and feedback-seeking activities. Employees can use these graded assessments as a way to better prepare and increase the confidence for future job roles and personal performance. They are often provided by an institution or society for people that meet the required qualifications. Feedback seeking is a way for employees to understand their work performance by receiving critiques on their performance and knowledge. Feedback seeking allows for employees to have a proper reflection on their own personal strengths and weaknesses and to take initiatives into making their own clear development plan. Employees tend to respond to the assessment and feed-back seeking method with a strong commitment to the organization which in turn allows the organization to make increased investments in them. There is a strong value in employee mentoring and managers and peers are able to provide that to them through giving constructive feedback (Dachner et al., 2019, pp. 6-7).

Professional relationships allow for employees to create relationships by networking or engaging in community practice initiatives. Networking is a social capital development behavior and people that can do so properly create stronger social connections to gain informal advice and information that can be extremely valuable in the workplace. Organizations can provide networking events where their employees can meet professionals in the same field and beyond. These are referred to communities of practice because they are more informal based and can provide valuable communication of people who share the same interests and goals. Many employees also have an extensive network from their own doing when it comes to the advancement of online platforms making it extremely easy to connect. These relationships are more organic and can be very beneficial for future use when looking for new experiences or mentorship (Dachner et al., 2019, p. 8). Firm-specific human capital is produced when social ties with colleague's form. Firm-specific human capital is capital that is not transferable when an employee changes roles from one organization the next. Relationships between two employees at the same firm will not progress to the firm one employee chooses to move to. The investment made between the two employees to create a strong relationship will degrade when there is no connection between the two within the company. The only investment that will remain is if they create strong alumni ties between company networks (Dachner et al, 2019, pp. 2-8).

On-the-job experience represents the fourth category of employee development methods. On-the-job experience id allows employees to actively engage in tasks and opportunities during work in order to meet their personal development goals. Many take on the role of job crafting in which employees "task emphasize" and "job expand" in order to go above and beyond their basic job roles. Job crafting involves employees taking more proactive steps to enhance and redesign their daily work routine by changing tasks and relationships that affect the behavioral

and relational state at their jobs. By task emphasizing employees are able to alter tasks by allocating more time and attention to them. Job expanding is when employees take on a new task that may be more demanding and challenging with an unknown solution. By employees going above and beyond the nature of simply completing their day-to-day roles, they are expanding their learning capacities and evolving their personal development skills. They are also making themselves a valuable asset to the company by making themselves open and reliable to new roles and opportunities (Dachner et al., 2019, p. 9).

The main professional organization for HR development and professionals, The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), states that employees must be proactive and identify their own personal needs when it comes to their development. Past researchers that have used the Noe et al four-dimensional taxonomy recommend utilizing the concept of proactive behavior. Proactive behavior is "initiating and creating change by taking control of a situation for the purpose of removing uncertainty and ambiguity, rather than passively adopting to present conditions" (Crant, 2000, p. 456). The concept of this theory dictates that with the ability to self-initiate for oneself and one's action's employees will have a more positive work situation and future. Employees are able to anticipate the skills they need to have for their job and they are able to present those skills to their managers so that they can be well equipped prior to a formal assessment from them. This method allows employees to be accountable towards their own trajectory within their careers. However, it can often lead to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout for employees which can affect their work-life balance and other aspects of their life (Dachner, 2019, p. 4). The study that proceeds analyzes the effects of self-promoting growth and proactive behavior with complimentary and additional mentorship.

The second recommendation that researchers suggest based on the Noe et Al's dimensional taxonomy is to update the context for learning. They emphasize that the context for learning, such as workplace culture, job-hopping, and advanced technology has an effect on learning. The shift of routine tasks to more complicated tasks in the workplace has created more critical thinking and problem-solving which creates new requirements for those on the job. These complex tasks often take up more time and workload demand when it comes to added responsibility. These advancements need to be taken into account when managers are structuring learning for their employees and employees need to take this into account when they are looking to advance their skills. There has also been a decline in vertical growth opportunities that can add to more upward mobility and a more horizontal structure. This has caused an absence of promotional opportunities for employees. Researchers suggest there needs to be a more alternative focus to keep employees engaged and continue to learn if upward mobility is not the key to their motivation. The issue of job-hopping also has raised questions as to what learning opportunities are best fit for employees if companies feel there will be people continuing to exit and enter the company. Researchers reveal that these trends make it very complex for companies to properly invest in their employees and in turn make it hard for employees to have a commitment to their investment initiatives (Dachner, 2019, pp. 4-5). This upcoming study analyzes the ways in which current companies and employees can properly adapt to the updated contexts for learning and ways in which they should best do so.

Lastly, researchers who have studied the Noe et Al's employee-driven development methods also suggest that there needs to be a different understanding of how human capital is valued. With past job roles being very routine with set skill sets, there were formal programs set in place to address employment needs and the gaps needed were filled. However, with the

increase in more complex, wide-ranged, and critical thinking tasks that emerged in the workplace, the relationship between employers and employees has been ever so changing. Success in the workplace is no longer through one's commitment to an organization and investments in internal labor markets are ever so disappearing. The question that comes into play is who is exactly responsible for investing in human capital and who should guide the investments. Studies have shown that investing in general human capital rather than firm-specific can be a valuable option. However, they put the investment initiative on the employee rather than on the organization itself. They state that if all employees can make the investment in themselves, it would not put any company or employee at a disadvantage. Employees having these skills can make them more marketable to the labor market (Dachner, 2019, pp 5-6). However, as the upcoming study shows, there needs to be a two-way investment between the employer and the employee to see success on both ends. The proper methodologies in which the employer and the employee can do so will be analyzed in this study.

All four of the employee development categories can be utilized as a framework to understand what methods are best suited for employee success and growth. These four models have been studied independently against the overall measure of human capital through the lens of employee development throughout the interview methodology process.

2.5 Employee Development Research Limitations

The large variance in employee development approaches makes it difficult for researchers to identify the relationship between organizational development and its effect on employment (Jacobs & Washington, 2003, p. 344). There is a lack of information when it comes to the effects on performance through employee development programs because they are often

very difficult to accurately measure. It is very difficult to measure how a completed training program can help with critical thinking skills and problem solving when they are very valuable assets employers seek in their employees. Learning is viewed by corporations from a very broad perspective. The various learning opportunities are often very diverse and aim for many different organizational and employee outcomes. In addition, many of the employee development initiatives are incorporated within other programs making employee development a side subject rather than the primary focus. In order to properly study the matter, employee development can be the independent variable where not only are the outcomes of the various programs and initiatives analyzed, but the consequences on the organization and employee are most strongly taken into account (Jacobs & Washington, 2003, p. 347).

Employee development programs often integrate irrelevant learning experiences rather than having a distinct focus. The focus of many programs are very broad based with unrelated learning and linkages to the employees specific field of study (Jacobs & Washington, 2002, p. 344). There are two different lenses when looking at employee development. The first is using employee development as a way for individuals to meet their personal goals when it comes to their own self-development. Organizations allow their employees to openly engage in different development opportunities based on the various self-interests and ambitions they may have (Jacobs & Washington, 2002, p. 347). This concept of general human capital provides training that is useful to many firms and not just the one that is providing it. The knowledge and the skills that are learned by the employer are easily transferable. The firm providing the knowledge and training will receive a return because they are able to train their employees to meet organization needs, but are also taking the risk of losing those returns when an employee leaves to go to another organization. Many firms that offer general training do not pay for it and employees need

to pay for it themselves to have their own return on their investment with the future of increased wages when they go to another firm. The skills that are offered in these training are very general based so they are easily transferable to many organizations. Many firms do not offer this general training because if they would like to hire someone who has already acquired these transferable skills, they will look outside the firm to hire (Aliagia, 2001, pp. 21-22). The other lens is looking at employee development from an organizational perspective. This lens is more strategic and employees would learn based on the direct needs of the organization (Jacobs and Washington, 2002, p. 347). This concept of firm-specific training is not transferable and is not useful to other firms (Becker, 1993, p. 40). The skills that are developed using the organizational training that is provided will only be used within that specific organization. Most firms will pay for this type of training because they know they will receive a great return on their investment. They are able to develop employees to increase their productivity directly within the specific workplace. If the employee decides to quit or move to a different role outside of the organization, that knowledge cannot be transferred to the new role. In order for the organization to share the rewards on their investment, they need to increase the salary for the employee and allow them to move up within the organization. This will motivate the employee to have a strong connection with the company and in turn create a positive and longer-lasting relationship between the employer and the employee. There is a lower turnover rate for employees that are trained through a firm-specific model rather than a general model (Flamholtz & Lacey, 1981, p.33). If an employee were to leave the organization, the replacement cost is much greater because they are trained specifically through the firm, therefore organizations must make a conscious effort to provide a sense of return to the employee such as an increased salary or other incentives that make them want to stay (Aliaga, 2001, 21-23).

McDonald and Smith (1995) directed a study of 437 publicly traded companies to analyze the effects employee management programs have on business performance. Their results displayed that companies that did not treat employee development at the core of their business practices with an absence of performance management programs were underperforming in comparison to their industry financial averages. Companies that had employee development programs such as a performance management program were high performers. They were able to analyze each company three years prior to the study and three years after the study by analyzing their total shareholder return. After the proper implementation of performance management to the publicly traded companies, their total shareholder returns increased to 19.7 per cent above the industry standard. By companies incorporating performance management programs into their business practices, stakeholder satisfaction has increased. However, there are limitations as to what performance management programs dictate the best shareholder return (McDonald & Smith 1995, 59-64).

In addition, Taufleur and Hyten (1995) analyzed learning experience on job performance in their study that included treatment condition factors such as feedback, goal setting, task checklists, training, and bonuses for good performance. During the treatment condition stage, there was an increase in employee accuracy, satisfaction and timeliness while on the job. One of the main factors was the discussion-based development that occurred between employees and their supervisors, and there was a correlation that when job discussions are fair, there is an increased positive attitude in employees when it comes to organizational and goal commitment, and overall job satisfaction. This study set out to understand the positive correlation between feedback assessment that included proper mentorship. The study was conducted several years ago and can be analyzed in an updated work context (Tafleur & Hyten, 1995, pp 69-93).

Within the same year, Jeffrey (1995) conducted a study that included a survey for new entry-level employees on the amount of training that they have received when they entered the position. The sample of 152 employees and their questionnaire responses indicated that the amount of training opportunities the new employer received was positively related to job performance, satisfaction, commitment and a decrease in turnover intentions. This study set the background for more advancements in the field to explore what training opportunities are most beneficial for the new employee (Jeffrey, 1995, 79-82).

2.5 Shift of Employee Development Trends

For decades organizations have used formal training and development programs that have strategically valued human capital resources through employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other resources (KSAOs). Learning through formal development programs has been a huge focus for organizations through an extensive amount of strategic spending. Over time there has been a shift in workload demands for employees that has made it difficult for them to bring the attention and level of energy that they need to learn to these programs. A company's budget constraints have also made it difficult to provide these costly opportunities to their employees. There also has been a change into a more geographically dispersed workforce due to more online platforming and increased job opportunities for work across the globe. There has been a huge increase in technology by companies as an attempt to overcome these challenges. Organizations are utilizing video platforms for training and various online education methods for learning (Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2012, pp.246-247).

Human resource professionals have worked to study how human capital, which is essential for competitive advantage and career advancement in the workplace, can be effectively utilized through employee development to enhance an individual's learning capacity. One of the

most valuable facets of learning under the branch of human capital is continuous learning. Continuous learning is more informalized learning through deliberate practice of skills in order to not only advance workplace knowledge but to also enhance self- development. Informal learning allows for the employee to encounter more meaningful learning experiences that formal training cannot provide. It is self-reflection based by learning through mentors, supervisors, and peers. Human capital also revolves around the realm of knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer is the ability to transfer knowledge from one who has the understanding to others who need it. Knowledge transfer can occur face-to-face and communication with experts or coworkers within the field. Knowledge transfer allows to build more interpersonal-based relationships and allows organizations to eliminate other facets of learning that can be a burden on their costs. Knowledge transfer guides more efficient and innovative projects that can be done in a timely fashion (Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2012, pp.247-263).

Organizations can provide learning opportunities that make employees more passive agents. Employees can learn the skills they need to be able to do their day-to-today job effectively and organizations can control their path based on the needs and wants of the company. On the other hand, organizations can provide a sense of learning that is employee controlled to have a more positive social effect on the workplace with a more natural flow of learning (Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2012, p.248).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Why Qualitative

In order to examine the research question and understand the relationship and effects between corporate investments and employee's learning and development a qualitative approach was used for this study. A qualitative approach is used in many different facets, but this analysis will be represented as a grounded-theory based interpretive research method. This approach allows for organizational experiences to be heard first hand in order to provide meaning, an understanding, and allow for theorizing around them (Gehman, 2018, p. 284). Through this idea I was able to conduct 24 interviews with former Drew alumni that are working in the corporate world today.

3.2 An Inductive "Knowledgeable Agents" Approach

Throughout the interview process former Drew alumni were asked questions involving their educational path, the start of their career, the training and mentorship that went into their career, their current position, and thoughts on their overall success. Various questions were straightforward and clear cut. Others were very open-ended and left up to interpretation. Allowing for questions to be more open-ended and up for discussion allowed for the interviewees to explain their experiences, stories, and personally reflect on their career path. This allows the informants to be "knowledgeable agents" as they can explain their thoughts and emotions. It allows for the interviewee to express themselves while the interviewer shows a sense of understanding. The interviewer has an open mind on what the interviewee is trying to convey without displaying any prior assumptions. Allowing the interviewee to be a

"knowledgeable agent" can provide a more in-depth analysis of the social constructs that are being discussed (Gehman, 2018, p. 291).

3.3 Sampling Frame Rationale

Interviewees were targeted based on if they have received a liberal arts education at Drew University and are currently working in the corporate world for a large organization. The ages of the 24 participants varied from the youngest age of 25 to the oldest of 61. These participants work in a variety of industries which include the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare industry, financial services industry, business services industry, merchandise retail industry, communication technology industry, and entertainment service industry. There was no direct categorization or distinction of job title for the sampling of the study. The employees ranged from associate directors, senior counsel, manager, senior manager, vice president, and many others. The study focusing on those who have received an education from Drew University allows for a more distinguishable analysis from a comparable background. The liberal arts education provides for enduring subject learning with a holistic approach. It allows for one to learn subjects in a well-rounded manner and to look at various concepts without one set way of application (Bevins, 2012, p. 10).

3.4 Sample

In order to develop the proper sampling of participants that have received a liberal arts education at Drew University, recruiting was done through LinkedIn and the alumni relations department. Recruitment through LinkedIn was done by personally messaging all alumni who attended Drew University that have a career in a large corporation. After finding these

employees on LinkedIn their emails were able to be accessed through the Drew University Alumni Relations office in order to get in touch with the participants.

Once the interviewees agreed to participate, they were sent an Informed Consent Form that is based on Interview Based Research. The consent form highlighted all of the various aspects of the study on how they are going to be asked questions based on their previous education, work experience, and training. The consent form explained how they would be anonymously represented in the study based on industry. It also included the confidentiality aspect in detail to allow the participant to understand that all material would remain confidential. They were asked to sign the consent form and to email it back to me at their earliest convenience. All of the interviews took place on the Zoom platform and the consent form explained that I would be recording the entire interview for notes purposes with their permission, unless noted otherwise. Once the interviews were scheduled and started, I acknowledged that I would be recording so they were made fully aware and made sure they agreed. Each interview was approximately 40 minutes long.

The demographic profiles of each of the 24 participants are listed below in table 1. As shown in the table, both females and males were analyzed. The age ranges of all employees were not limited as they range from the youngest age of 25 to the oldest age of 61. Gender is a key component to see if there are trends and different experiences between male and female employees. The effects gender has on employees in the workforce when it comes to management and mentorship, access to training and education, and overall success is strongly taken into account throughout the study. Their past education history and their decision to further their education after Drew University was also analyzed. This component is important later on to see whether they wanted to extend their education for further advancement in their career, self-

fulfillment learning purposes, or for monetary value. Each employee is categorized by industry. The specific company name is not listed for anonymity purposes. The table also lists the number of years they have been in their current position.

Table 1: Demographics of Sampling Participants

Name	Age	Sex (M/F)	Graduation Year from Drew University	Additional Education	Industry	Current Occupation Title	# of years with current company
DP #1	≈38	M	2005	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Business Development Manager,	14 years
VH #2	≈26	M	2017	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Senior Associate Scientist	4 years
EL #3	≈61	M	1982	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Senior Scientist	8 months
AL #4	≈44	M	1999	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Director	6 years
AC #5	≈37	F	2006	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Senior Counsel	1 year
LB #6	≈26	F	2017	YES	Financial Services	Global Client Senior Manager	2 years 7 months
JC #7	≈46	F	1997	NO	Pharmaceuticals	Associate Director	1 year 3 months
DV #8	≈54	F	1989	YES	Pharmaceuticals	Associate Director and Project Manager for Portfolio Governance	21 years
SR #9	≈37	F	2006	YES	Financial Services	Aircraft Dispatcher	15 years
CN #10	≈25	M	2016	NO	Business Services	Senior District Sales Manager	2 years 11 months
GF #11	≈28	F	2015	NO	Financial Services	Associate	5 years
JI #12	≈35	F	2008	YES	Merchandise Retail	Corporate Counsel,	6 years 7 months
DG #13	≈39	M	2004	YES	Financial Services	Managing Director	5 years
KB #14	≈37	F	2006	YES	Financial Services	Director - In- House Counsel	6 years 4 months
JF #15	≈39	F	2004	NO	Financial Services	Senior Vice President	7 years
HM #16	≈31	M	2012	YES	Communication Technology	Talent Acquisitions Manager	4 years 6 months

KG #17	≈60	M		1983	YES	Healthcare/ Financial Services	Senior Account Executive	22 years
NZ #18	≈30	M		2013	YES	Financial Services	Vice President- Complex Risk Officer	7 years 8 months
CR #19	≈50	F		1993	YES	Business Services	Director of Product Marketing	24 years
BE #20	≈32	M		2011	YES	Communication Technology	Senior Manager - Product Development/ Management	3 years 8 months
MS #21	≈30	F		2014	YES	Healthcare/Financial Services	Senior Manager	2 years 9 months
SL #22	≈33	F		2010	YES	Business Services	Senior Project Manager	3 years 5 months
NC #23	≈32	M		1989	YES	Communication Technology	Senior Manager- Associate Recruitment	2 years 7 months
TZ #24	≈48	M		1995	YES	Entertainment Services	General Manager- Product Leader	16 years

3.5 Interpreting Qualitative Data

Through the qualitative research method, the "Gioia method" was adopted as a systematic methodology for inductive research (Gioia, 2013, pp. 20). The method is derived from grounded-theory and is a very common qualitative research method in management. The inductive approach allows not just for basic analysis of what the interviewees are saying, but for a more systematic representation (Gehman, 2018, p. 286). After conducting the interviews, a 1st-order analysis was developed into categories based on the information given. 2nd-order themes were then developed in order to understand what the data was conveying into more structured concepts and themes. The inductive method that is grounded in the data allows for key data-to-theory connections. The approach allows for an advancement in qualitative research because oftentimes there is a lack of data to theory (Gioia, 2013, pp. 20-22). As I carried out the data analysis, I noticed that my interviewees were providing novel employee-based insight into Noe et al's

(1997) taxonomy and Dachner et al's (2021) analysis of new trends in employee development. I thus systematically compared my codes to the taxonomy and recommendations provided by this prior research.

3.6 Limitations

While the nature of the study that was conducted did have an average and strong sample size of 24 participants there are still various limitations. One of the variables in the data that was analyzed was how receiving arts education has helped employees in the workforce in terms of overall success in their career. All participants received their education from Drew University, a small liberal arts college in New Jersey, but this education path does not take into account other interviewees who have received their education at other liberal arts colleges. The liberal arts curriculum is very broad and can encompass many different learning opportunities that Drew University may not offer. The study also did not take into account those who received a technical education whose career path could be completely different then someone who went to a liberal arts college. A technical education is one that has more hands-on applications where students can more so engage in the learning process and dive into one specific discipline (Bevins, 2012, p. 11).

One limitation that should be taken into account is interviewees leaving out information that can be used to analyze management relationships and the overall work environment that they are experiencing. All participants were informed that everything would remain confidential and anonymous but some may not feel comfortable to speak up about work issues and the different experiences they have had. These aspects that are left out of the interview could be very beneficial when analyzing the effects they have on their progression in their career path and their overall feelings of success.

There also is a major distinction of ages in the sampling that participated. The oldest was 61 years of age and the youngest was 25 years of age with everyone else in between scattered in age. Being there is such a wide range of ages, the information that was given by informants does not take into account advancements in society at the time as the years have progressed. Some of these factors include technological advancements when it comes to online learning, easier access to search for jobs, and various online training programs. However, while some of the older informants touched upon the changes in their career path as years progressed, there was not a correlation between age when it comes to the education and training that is provided when it comes to overall success in the workplace.

Chapter 4: Findings

Each interviewee's educational and corporate path was examined based on their prior liberal arts education, their preparedness to enter the workforce, their method of receiving a job, the confidence on the job, and the corporate initiatives that were taken to improve their employee development. Each interviewee analysis was grounded on Noe et Al's four-dimensional method taxonomy on each employee's development structure. In order to see their development within the corporate ladder, the company's initiatives towards providing formal courses and programs, assessments, professional relationships, and on-the-job experience were analyzed.

4.1 The Role of a Liberal Arts Education

The first analysis that was conducted was to see how a liberal arts education at Drew University affects employee's development when referring to overall preparedness to entering the workforce, receiving a job, confidence on the job, and receiving extended education. Most

alumni spoke positively of their Drew education in that it allowed them to broaden their

horizons, be solution-oriented, and be more well-rounded. However, one of the major similarities

across interviews was receiving extended education post an undergraduate degree. 20 out of 24

interviewees, 83.3%, have extended their education past their undergraduate degree. There was

no clear industry or job role that explained the reason for employees extending their education.

One of the main universal trends was the desire for employees to extend their education based on

the competitive nature of their job and many other coworkers having an extended education in

order to boost up the corporate ladder. One example, BE #20, a senior manager for product

development management for a large communications technology company explained how

receiving an MBA was something he felt he needed in order to move up the corporate ladder and

be in his current position. He says,

"I was like I need to get this done because I knew that I couldn't stay with the company and I

knew I needed additional education to move up into the role that I am in. In the corporate environment it

was very difficult to get a position with just an undergraduate degree and even though I came from a

really unique background and had tons of work experience even as an owner of a business at 25 years

old, I knew I needed that additional education to give my experience almost like authority. To provide

that level of validity to my experience and I did that by getting my MBA."

BE #20 places a strong value on extended education that has helped him move up within

the corporate ladder and make meaningful advancements within the company. For many, they

perceived that receiving additional education has allowed them to advance their job title within

the company and helped them receive a job. NC #23, a senior manager for associate recruitment

for a large technology company, was able to use his education at both Drew University and his

master's degree to get an internship which led to a full -time position and placement into the

leadership and development program. He credits his success in receiving the full-time position to his master's education. He says,

"So from there I got an internship at a public transportation agency which ultimately led into getting a full time job and getting into their leadership and development program, but I probably wouldn't of been able to do that without my background in political science and my master's degree is what unlocked my ability to access that development program, even though I was already there full time. I think graduate school in that sense was basically a way for me to get a career in a roundabout way. It was not necessarily what I learned, it was the fact that I had a masters, I was able to use that as currency to get into a program."

NC #23 was one of the 8 interviewees to receive additional education directly after receiving their undergraduate degree. NC #23, as like many other interviewees, felt if they did not go directly after undergraduate studies, they would not go back later. Out of those that received their additional education right after Drew, they felt they would eventually need to receive more education in order to advance, meet their career goals, and feel confident and prepared. When LB #6, a Global Client Senior Manager in the financial services industry was asked if she felt confident in her education and that it prepared her to enter the workforce, she says,

"Yes, I definitely think so. That is why I got my MBA right away. I always knew that I wanted to get a graduate degree and I felt like what the MBA did was it really honed in on a lot of the soft skills that I already felt comfortable with, like presenting. From the start of my MBA, for example, I used to present one way, and then by the end I had done it so often that it became second nature to me. I also collaborated with so many groups and people during the program, and I was able to bring that into how I operate now at my job."

LB #6 was one of the few in the sampling to receive their education directly after graduation. Those in the law field also received an additional degree right after their

undergraduate degree because they would not be able to enter the field without it. They needed more advanced knowledge on the subject. Some others that were able to receive their first job without an extended degree and eventually went back to school years later were able to receive company compensation for their schooling. While some companies pay only a portion each year or a certain number of credits, a few companies pay for the entire tuition. SR #9, an aircraft dispatcher within the financial services industry was able to receive her Masters of Arts in Business communications fully covered by the company. She explains,

"When I ultimately decided I wanted more education and I wanted to pursue a master's degree, as long as you can show that it applies to your career at my current company, they cover 100% of your master's education. If you do not have an undergraduate degree and you were working at a technical capacity, they will pay for your undergrad. So, I work with pilots who got both their undergrad and their masters on the company's dime."

SR #9 received her first job through an internship opportunity and has been with the company for 15 years. She finds a strong value in the company advocating for her education and has been able to advance herself within her career taking on more projects within the workplace, allowing her to feel more confident with her day-to-day job role.

The extent in which companies invest in employees receiving additional education has a positive impact on employee's personal feelings of success, commitment to the company, and job tenure. Companies actively investing in their employees to better their skills create a strong sense of value between the employer and the employee.

4.2 Preference for In Person Formal Courses and Programs

The information that was collected from all 24 interviewees raised the question of how much of an investment do companies make in formal courses and programs for their employees

and in what capacity and what structure are they most effective. Formal in-person courses and programs range from live workshops, seminars, and classes offered to the employee. It also includes online platforms that provide such experiences. These programs also encompass development initiatives that are offered to the employee on both a personal development and professional development level. In speaking to each interviewee, the question was raised as to what type of training was provided to them when they started the job and as they continue to work for the company. 14 out of 24 employees, 58%, discussed how they have been involved in some sort of formal courses and programs to help with their development. These formal courses and programs do not include mandatory annual training courses. They include those that allow the employee to learn more about the industry they are in, how to do their day-to-day roles, learn from other employees, and enhance their overall skills.

Many of the courses that are offered that have to do with enhancing one's skills are optional to the employee if he/she wishes to utilize them. These options are often on online platforms such as LinkedIn learning where there are a variety of courses where an employee can learn anything from how to properly present a project, how to use Microsoft Office, or how to network. These courses typically offer a variety of materials where one can self-learn and take quiz assessments to see their progress. Companies are investing in these online courses because they feel they offer a variety of learning tools and skills that the employee may want to acquire, making them easily accessible. However, many employees do not want to be a number and to be told to go online informally to learn. They want to be able to have a deeper connection to what they are learning. Several employees also mentioned that there is access to courses but the company does not make them very known. They do not take advantage of the courses if they do not directly correlate to what they will be doing on the day-to-day job and they do not want to

feel like they are just clicking buttons to get tasks done. NZ #18, Vice President- Complex Risk Officer in the financial industry explains not only are the programs and training virtual, but they are self-driven. He says,

"We have LinkedIn learning which is like self-learning and there are business related topics and if you want to learn how to knit or sew or things like that, they have classes on that. Its online tutorials. So, there are a lot of resources out there but a lot of them are self-driven. You have to be willing to sign up for the courses and log on and do the work. Whatever you take out of it is usually what you put into it honestly. I wish it had been more formal in person but it is difficult with Covid at this point."

DV #8, an associate director and project manager for portfolio governance at a large pharmaceutical company explains the extensive amount of course training that is offered on the company's online platform. She does not utilize the platform often because the training offered is not targeted to her role and not necessary for her to perform her day-to-day job. DV #8 emphasizes the importance of assessments with management in order to develop, rather than formal courses and programs. She says,

"We have a training program at my current company where I can go in and look for general project management courses and do some training. We also have access to the extensive LinkedIn Learning database where I can pull courses for topics or skills of interest. If I want to take a formal project management course, even though not requiring it for my role, I could do that. The company would pay for an external course. Right now, there isn't much of a business need for me to do that, and with COVID no one is traveling. I have not pursued this option because it is not critical for me to do my job."

CR #19, a director of product marketing in the business services industry also explains how utilizing online platforms to advance skills is also self-motivated within the company she works for. She says,

"Then based on your role there are different things that you can do. Some are self- motivated and self-driven and then others are the things you need to do for the job. In my current and most of my

previous roles, everything is online and it has been that way for a while, but we can take soft skills

training such as crucial conversations, or other management type classes, learning how to manage

employees and things like that. Then there is the whole gamut of technical training for those in IT and we

will outsource those."

However, not all employees find training programs and courses to be the most valuable

aspect of their development. SR #9, an aircraft dispatcher in the financial services industry says,

"They do have training that I have participated in that if you want to be a leader, they will teach

you leadership skills, and you do every Monday for a month to the Princeton office and someone is

teaching that for the entire day. So, I have done some stuff like that and it has been okay. It's not like

anything earth shattering. It is cool to get out and try these things."

SR #9 understands the value of large corporations offering different programs for their

employees but does not feel they are as beneficial as other corporate investments.

In order for companies to make an impact on their employee's self-development and to

create a commitment culture to them, interviewees considered that the most beneficial way to

provide courses and programs is through an in-person setting. In this setting employees can meet

face to face to network with other employees and those within the industry. They also feel a

sense of purpose. One interviewee, DP #1, a business development manager for one of the

largest pharmaceutical companies explains the benefit of being able to go to the corporation's

headquarters to take classes on active listening and how to properly speak to people. Another

employee, AL #4, a director in the pharmaceutical industry explains the benefits of entering the

IT development program which is offered to those who just graduated college to enter a six-to-

nine-month rotational program completing three rotations that expose post-graduates to be

exposed to different areas of the business. They were able to complete the rotations at the

company's headquarters and all of the members in the program became a close-knit unit that

shared similar experiences. AL #4 leans on the employees who went through the program when he has a question because those who went through the program have different facets of valuable information.

Although in person learning through formal courses and programs is more beneficial than online programs, there also are downfalls. One of the positive aspects of online seminars and programs is that they are open to a wider group of employees for open enrollment. Employees can join easily and they are often available to everyone because there is no cap on participants. Many in-person training programs that are offered by the corporation are often capped if they involve hosting employees with a certain number of seats and involve travel. BE #20, a senior manager for product development management for a large communications technology company is fortunate enough to be asked to the various master marketing classes through nomination and putting himself out there as a leader, but not all are fortunate enough to get the opportunity. BE #20 says,

"I have been fortunate enough because I continued and took on more responsibility and put myself out there as a leader. Even from an individual contributor perspective, I am nominally nominated for these master marketing classes that are led by different consulting groups as well as in partnership with UPENN school of business. I have been super fortunate to get those nominations and take part in those. Yeah, that helps lay a foundation but really the proof is in the execution of your goal."

While some employees are able to be provided these opportunities, those with less experience or seniority are often undermined and not given the opportunities their higher-ups are. This creates a lack of training at the lower level which makes it extremely hard for employees to work their way up to the senior positions if companies solely invest and focus on course programs and formal training. BE #20 discusses the nomination process by explaining,

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"In some training scenarios there are limited seats available. They will ask different VP groups to identify folks who have exemplified that they would benefit from a particular training focus. Most of the training is open. Especially in this new digital work from home environment a lot of it is done where you can literally be with 100 other people and there is no cap on seats. That said, there are some executive level training opportunities that because of the limited number of seats, say there are group projects, you have to be nominated to participate in those."

The extensive number of online platforms offer more opportunities for those at the lower-level entry positions but they do not create a sense of value for the employee. Employees will click buttons and be behind a screen and will not have a personal connection with the company, fellow coworkers, and will not be able to fully embrace company culture.

Employees also place a strong emphasis on both internal and external certifications. In addition to getting various licenses for employees to be able to do their job properly and comply with rules and regulations, many enroll in outside certification programs in order to advance their skills in their field. These external certifications allow the employee to put in extra time outside of their daily work day to commit to various projects. Current business development manager, MP #1, has self-enrolled and has been accepted into the Project Management Professional certification program. He has taken an abundance of project management courses to advance his skills. In addition, DP #1 has also enrolled into an internal certification program in order to become a project lead. He says,

"Also, my current companies internal project management methodology which is called Flawless project management execution, or FPX. The fascinating thing about that is you can attain different levels to be certified as a project lead. What I am going through now is to become a subject matter expert. To be able to train other people to become project leads and actually subject matter experts".

DP #1 has received his certification to train others only a few months after the interview. These various certifications that companies offer allow employees to be rewarded for their learnings. Completing these certifications are self-gratifying with a feeling of self-accomplishment. DP #1 discusses how helpful they are in terms of developing his skills and he is now able to teach others what he has learned and become a leader within the workplace.

Overall, the extensive number of online courses that are made available to employees through the human resources and learning and development teams of companies is not as beneficial as recent research has claimed. Employees do not feel like these online programs directly correlate with their day-to-day job functions and they do not provide a rewarding experience. The change over time to more digital learning spaces has not created a sense of purpose to the employer, therefore in person courses are the best way for employees to learn and continue to grow within their development.

4.3 Preference for Continuous over Intermittent Assessment

Employee assessments are at the core of many companies' evaluation processes. Assessments are used as an evaluation method to understand if the employee's and company's goals were met throughout a set period of time. The interview process set out to see what evaluation processes were most effective for both the employee and the employer. It also evaluated the gaps within various employee assessments and the room for growth that these evaluations can offer.

Companies today are often relying on online-based platforms that are able to allow the employer to develop their goals, state their progress on various projects, and managers can see if they are meeting their personal and company goals. One large management services company

acquired the Marcus Buckingham Company, an innovator in human capital management, back in 2017 to expand their talent portfolio. The company is allowing their employees to have a more scientific approach to employee engagement and performance. CR #19, a company employee for over 24 years, explains how they are currently using the Marcus Buckingham online platform that allows her to input her standout performance indicating what her best characteristics are, weekly check-in priority objectives, and how she felt about her focus areas for the week. She says,

"We used to do annual performance-based reviews which were based on monthly situation reports you submitted. Your boss would evaluate based on what was accomplished, along with your own self-assessment of here are all of the things I did and here is the value it brought to the company or clients, or whatever your role fit in. Now since we bought the Marcus Buckingham company, we have "Standout". Each employee completes an assessment and it tells you what your main characteristics are. There are 8 characteristics, and based on how you answer these questions Standout provides you with your characteristics. I am an "advisor - creator". My boss is "teacher - stimulator" or my teammate is "teacher - connector" so there are all these different characteristics. Every week we do a check in and you put your priorities. We base ours based on our focus areas for our role in the company so mine is product messaging, influence, things like that. Then we say what our objectives are this week related to those focus areas, such as how we are going to bring value to the company. Then you need to put what your loves and your loathes are, so what I loved doing last week and what I loathed doing, then anything you need help with from your boss. That goes straight to our boss and then your boss is tracking that and it gives you a projection over time such as you have been very engaged. It is trying to see your engagement level."

Online platforms such as the Marcus Buckingham platform allow for management teams to evaluate their employees continuously. Managers and supervisors are able to check in whenever they would like to see how their employees are developing and to make sure they are

on the right track. After speaking to all 24 employees, 14 out of 24, 58%, explained that they are required to have a quarter year, mid-year and/or end-of-year evaluation with their boss or management team to go over their performance and to evaluate if they are meeting their personal goals and the goals of the company. While these check-ins allow for employees and employers to have conversations, they are not enough to create a continuous commitment culture for employees. By having platforms that can continuously check on employee's growth and emphasize employee's strengths, they feel a sense of purpose at all times on the job. Many employees that were interviewed did not feel like mid-year and end-of-year reviews were enough and that continuous conversations with their bosses need to occur on a regular basis. HM #16, a talent acquisitions manager who has been employed by the company for over 4 years explains,

"It's an ongoing process. That is important to note. This is the one thing I tell a lot of teams. You can't just come to me at the end of the year and tell me someone is not doing well because I will tell you that's not how you do business. You have to do continuing assessments right. Not even assessments, continuous conversations. That's why I say if you are a leader you have to have one on one on a weekly basis. What is going wrong, what is going well and also any personal stuff you want to talk about outside of work. It is continued, that is why we have a midyear review and an end year review. Those conversations in mid-year aren't going to throw you for a loop. There should never be a time in the mid-year where you're like "what are you talking about?" There should always be hey this is what I need you to work on and get better or you are doing really well what's next in your career. So, there's an ongoing conversation as a leader because for me as a leader I have always thought of servant leadership. I don't know if you have read up on it but that is something that is really important to me and companies. It is not what you as a leader do for you, it is what you do for them. It's the other way around and that is really important. So, for me it's ongoing completely throughout the year."

If companies want their employees to feel like they are benign valued throughout their development, assessments should be an ongoing regular process. DV #8, an associate director of

for portfolio governance explains how she meets directly with her management on a weekly basis to regularly receive feedback and explore growth opportunities. She has constantly felt motivated from the company and her management to continue her professional development even though she has worked for the company for over 21 years. This ongoing process allows employees to feel motivated for the entire year and each day on the job. Employee development is not a cyclical process but one that keeps progressing and improving. The way to have that constant progression is to make sure employee's bosses and company management are in constant communication with their employees. Mid-year and end of year reviews can continue to be implemented by organizations, but they can be a complementary resource as more of a formalized check-in.

Another source of assessment that was analyzed is Multisource feedback (MSF). Multisource feedback "provides information about on-the-job performance by eliciting responses from multiple raters, including supervisors, peers, direct reports, and, in some cases customers or clients" (Bracken, 1996). By getting evaluations from all angles, supervisors are able to receive valuable and meaningful feedback about the employer. Many interviewees explained how they are rated through multisource feedback. EL #3, a senior scientist in the pharmaceutical industry, explains how they receive feedback from key stakeholders. They receive an end-of-the-year rating which is a culmination of the stakeholder feedback and what has been accomplished in regards to set objectives. KG #17, a senior executive for 22 years receives feedback through his higher-ups doing an outreach to other employees that he works with of his choosing so they can give input.

However, multisource feedback has its limitations. One of the issues is the raters ability to properly rate other employees. Raters may be unable to accurately assess their coworkers

which will in turn will lead to lower ratings. The best way for companies to deal with such limitations is by providing the raters with proper examples of how each behavior or question is properly implemented in the workplace. The examples that they give should align with the company's set objectives. If they are analyzing a coworker's leadership ability, they should be given exactly what constitutes quality leadership so they can properly identify what constitutes exceptional to poor performance. This is a form of frame-of-reference training as a way to enhance raters observation skills. Frame of reference training allows for less halo errors to occur. Halo errors are judging a positive or negative work incident that occurred when evaluating other performance measures. In addition, the more response categories that there are for raters to answer, the less of a chance there is for there to be discriminatory responses (Bracken, 1996, pp. 117-143). GF #11, an associate in the financial services sector says,

"All the MDs and managers sit in a room together and gossip about everyone and that's when people you have never really worked with can speak up and be like I don't really like that person. It could have been something as silly as not holding the door for them, it's one of those annoying things that you don't want to rub someone the wrong way. It doesn't happen as often but it can. You make your case with your self evaluation, other people review you, and then your manager makes the decision of what is valid feedback and criticism and someone is annoyed at you one day and gets worked up, which happens. I think my manager does a decent job of weeding out the outliers. He is very big on focusing on the positive. He really tries to focus on the good. Which is good and bad, but that's really how our process works."

Various incidents that can happen in the workplace that can affect the relevancy and validity of employee ratings and feedback make using stakeholder feedback as an assessment method questionable. Stakeholder feedback is a valuable resource to evaluate employees but it should be done so with a cautious eye. Supervisors often question the use of ratings because

there is a lack of information or skills needed to make reliable ratings, employees are not trained to do the ratings properly, raters are not experienced enough, employers tend to harshly rate demanding managers to undermine their authority, and many will inflate ratings to avoid manager retaliation. There should be a set of training principles that the employee should abide by when doing ratings and those should be made easily accessible by the company (Bracken, 1996, p. 139)

Through findings, interviews consider the most effective and efficient way for companies to assess their employees is by creating an open-dialogue system between the employer and the employee on a continual basis. Companies that provide ongoing feedback on a routine basis will be more prone to creating a long-lasting commitment culture from the employee. Employees will feel a sense of purpose in the sense that managers and their supervisors care strongly about their development and are assisting them on the proper track.

4.4 Satisfaction through Extensive Networks and Mentorship

Through findings, the strongest value of employee development is through networks and professional relationships. Networking is a social capital development behavior which encompasses "activities of individuals aimed at developing relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their careers" (Ng & Feldman, 2010, p.700). Researchers have shown that those who actively involve themselves in networking and do it properly can develop positive social relationships to gain advice and learn new information (Klein et al., 2004, pp.952-457). Employees are able to create relationships with industry professionals, mentors, and others involved in their organization that can allow for immense growth opportunities.

Out of all 24 employees interviewed, 12 out of 24, 50%, explained how they have received their current position through networking or having strong relationships. They also were able to connect with old alumni, friends they had gone to school with, and other mentors. AL #4, a director in the pharmaceutical industry recalls getting his current job through a relationship he had through his previous job. He says,

"So that was the same network of people that initially got me out of the consulting group to a large pharmaceutical company. I went back to the well again and said 'what are you guys working on and are looking to hire people?' I told them my interests around the work they were doing and so my good friend set up dinner at his home with my current boss. We had dinner and a few drinks, talked about the job, and I basically said to my current boss "how do I work with you guys? What is it going to take to get an interview... I want a shot" and that was all I had to say. He said he will get me an opportunity to interview and guide me through the process since it was a very rigorous job screening. So I was fortunate to have someone on the inside that could help guide me through the process."

AL #4 was able to have someone in his corner to guide him through the interview and onboarding process. Many employees specifically mention the importance of having mentors and role models that can help guide them throughout their development. EL #3, a senior scientist in the pharmaceutical industry also was able to receive his current position through a past relationship he had with one of his former colleagues. He stated,

"So when I left the previous company I worked for it was purely opportunity driven. There was nothing wrong with working there. In fact, I think back in the day they had one of the best research organizations in the pharma industry. So, when it was announced that we were closing the site, I called one of my former and explained what was going on and within a few hours the head of the chemistry department called me up and said 'hey don't worry about anything, we are going to create a position for

you and you can come back'. So I didn't really have to do any interviewing. In fact, I was an employee at

my current company before I was formally done being an employer for the previous."

EL #3 was able to create such strong relationships at the previous company that he

worked for and after leaving the company, he was able to return several years later to take on a

more advanced role. He was able to have a smooth transition back over the company he had

previously worked at and having those relationships allowed him to speed up the process. NC

#23 was able to receive a position as a Senior Manager in the technology communications

industry through family ties and his own personal work ethic to succeed. He says,

"So, I was looking online for jobs but I also knew some people so I knew about the company and

ultimately, I saw this recruiter position and they looked at my resume and were like 'ehh I don't know if it

is going to translate. My fiancé is a director at the company and of course I put that on my application

because I don't want to do anything shady. They were like 'listen, just give him a courtesy interview

because of who his fiancé is and it will be fine'. Apparently, I nailed the interview. My boss at the time

told me all of this after the fact. He said 'yeah, I saw your resume and I was like you are qualified but you

know I wasn't sure and then they mentioned he knows the director so let's try it out and I did and it was

the best thing I ever did'. Like that is so nice of you. So, it worked out really well."

NC #23 was given an opportunity to interview with the company through having a

relationship within the company. He was fortunate enough to have been given the opportunity

and to be highly considered for the role based on the relationship he has to one of the employees

at the company. While he says he felt very privileged for the opportunity, he also wanted to

make sure that when he was receiving the job it was not just because of the relationship he had.

He wanted to create his own identity and allow himself to shine in the role separate from his

fiancé being an employee. He says,

"It's like, when people talk about privilege, I think that definitely played a factor in lining me up for the opportunity but then you have to nail it. You can't just walk in and think they are just going to hand you it because you know someone. That doesn't sit well with me. I wouldn't want that but also you probably are not going to get the job and you won't get these opportunities. So if you are able to access them that is great but then you also have to put in the effort. I try to keep in balance that not everybody has these opportunities, but you do make the most of them and try as a people leader to turn around and help other people and give them to them."

In addition, many of the employees spoke upon job postings not being open to the public because many employers have specific employees, they have in mind to fill the role that meet the qualifications. KG #17 a senior executive in the healthcare financial services industry says,

"Often times when people are hiring for someone, they don't advertise for it or they know who they want, but they must follow the required company hiring process. In corporate America there's a lot of bureaucracy; rules must be followed so that potential lawsuits are avoided with federal, state and/or regulatory bodies. It often occurs where a position is not currently available but, at a later date, they may come back and say that a position is available. "If you are interested, we can now."

KG #17 emphasizes that by keeping your network it allows a leg-up in the hiring process. Employees stress the importance of cultivating your network. Many of the relationship's employees have been through past relationships with previous employers or employees that they have remained in touch with. In addition, many were able to utilize LinkedIn and other online profiles to connect with industry professionals who work for organizations within their field.

After talking to the employees about how they were able to perform at their best one of the most important aspects that they mentioned was having proper mentorship and those in their corner. They feel a strong sense of value when those around them are constantly motivating them to reach their goals and their fullest potential. According to Dachner et al, networking and

relationship building is a proactive behavior (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 8). The findings of this study have shown that networking and professional relationships is a proactive behavior that employees will immensely take advantage of. Having mentorship and professional relationships in the workplace does not constitute one specific method of employee development and can be intertwined through all four methods of the dimensional taxonomy.

4.5 The Importance of Effective on the Job Learning

Employees having on-the-job learning experiences where they can actively engage in developing certain skills needed for their job role is one of the most beneficial ways of learning according to those interviewed. Employees place a strong emphasis on having structured training when they are starting a completely new role for the first time. However, those who have transferred over to a similar role just with a different company do not feel it is necessary to have a built-in training program considering many of the day-to-day work functions are the same.

For employees, when changing over to another company was one the key differences is company culture. Company culture is not something that can be taught, but something that can be understood by being actively involved within the organization's operations. On-the-job learning allows employees to be directly involved in the day-to-day role while working with other employees and mentors. KG #17, a senior executive in the healthcare industry explains,

"It's not like I took several months to train. I had been client facing for quite some time and there was a lot of on-the-job training where I had to learn. Even though it was a different company that I worked with, there were a lot of similar things that they did or terminology that I knew, but things were done totally differently from the way things were done at my previous company" There was a lot of on the job learning required."

KG #17 explains how the dynamic within the company that he moved to was different than the previous company he had worked for. He had all of the terminology and basic skill sets that were needed for the new role, but he had to adapt to the current company's way of doing things when it came to their style and culture.

NC #23, a senior manager for associate recruitment in the technology services industry explains how he was able to learn a lot on the job when he transitioned over to his current position. He was able to learn how the new company operated. He says,

"They do offer a lot of training, especially for people who come in and they hire a lot of people right out of school who may not have recruiting experience. I was fortunate in that I did and I only had to really learn my current company's way of doing everything. I didn't have to learn everything over again. The company offered a lot of training and some of it I had to do because it was mandatory but it wasn't on stuff I didn't already know. The computer system that they use was the same computer system that I used at the public transportation agency. It was PeopleSoft. So obviously there are differences from company to company because you can customize it but essentially, it's the same. So, once you get over that hump from talking to people and learning it wasn't like a major transition in that regard.

NC #23 did not have to go through the extensive initial training program when he entered the company because he already had a lot of the required skill sets. When he transitioned to the new company the computer software system was the same so he did not have to be taught how to use it from the start, but just had to make some adjustments to the way the current company was using the platform. LB #6 also explains how transitioning over to a company where she did not have an entry level role did not allow for any formal training. She says,

"It was a very "on the job" kind of learning for sure. There was no formal training, even though I was entry level at that point. Not all business units and functions offer a formal training program to entry level colleagues, so I relied on my manager and my peers to bring me up to speed."

However, LB #6 also feels like she was "thrown into the fire" with the role when she first started. She had to learn by doing. In order for employees to not feel like they are being "thrown into the fire" the best way to have proper on the job learning is to make sure there is proper mentorship at every stage. Several employees explained how they felt comfortable transitioning from one role to the other because they had the proper management team behind them helping them along the way. MS #21, a senior manager in the healthcare industry says,

"I was super close with my manager for the first few months and she was downloading me on everything that needed to be done and how she wanted to see it be done and things like that."

MS #21 was able to learn directly from her manager and always had her manager in her corner as she was developing and progressing into the new role. She did not have any formalized training program but was able to learn and feel confident just by learning on-the-job with the help of her manager.

On-the-job learning can be a proper tool for employee development if it is used in the right way. The best way to have proper on-the-job learning is to make sure that there are mentors to help guide and answer questions as needed by the employee. Employees want to feel valued when transitioning to a new role and they do not want to feel alone in the process. They want to make sure someone is in their corner if they have any questions or concerns.

The other most beneficial way to develop employees is to make sure that the on-the-job training is directly tailored to the needs of the employee. The employee places a strong value on learning what is needed or doing their day-to-day role.

4.6 The Role of Proactivity in the Workplace

The current context for development as studied by HR professionals takes the place of employees being proactive on their learning and growth opportunities. Employees in the study emphasize the importance of being proactive in their development by taking on extra tasks, being

self-motivated and diligent to complete their daily tasks, and effectively communicating with their peers and hire ups to make sure they are on the right track.

GF #11, an associate in the financial services sector, has been able to reach out to her peers and higher ups if she doesn't know something and wants to learn something new. She understands the value in admitting what you do not know. In the role she is in now, she feels comfortable enough to reach out and ask questions and have tough conversations about steps moving forward in her role. She explains,

"So, what ended up happening was I started being more proactive and I sat down with members of the team and I said hey I don't understand X Y and Z concepts, can we just sit down and talk about it. We would go through questions and I would send questions. Some of it was really hard to do because I felt judged and people were looking at me like I was dumb because I didn't know. It was definitely a hard thing to go through and I think now I have come out for it better. There is still a lot I do not know and I definitely feel more comfortable and confident. I think I have a better sense of what I should be doing."

For others, asking questions and being proactive can be challenging if they do not feel like they have mentors in their corner to help and guide them through the development process. GF #11 was able to have those conversations because she felt confident in doing so with the mentors and coworkers that were on her side. TZ #24, a general manager in the entertainment service industry, explains how his previous boss was the first person to really actively invest in his development. He was not only proactive in her development, but had his boss in his corner to also be proactive and advocate for him to have new experiences. He says,

"The first person, my boss who was there about 8 years ago, was the first person to really invest in me in terms of training and professional development. She sent me out to some conferences to speak. She encouraged me to join networking groups where I was able to network with people in similar roles and similar levels. They sent to some courses that Amazon has that

are open to employees to sign up for. Some you have to be nominated for. It really wasn't up until that point where anyone had taken an active interest in developing me."

TZ #24 felt like that extra push from his boss and the opportunities that were provided to him really helped him learn and grow. The constant communication that he was having with his boss allowed her to engage in new opportunities, such as conference and networking groups, that he may not have engaged in if there wasn't the external drive to do so. AC #5, a part of the senior counsel within the pharmaceutical sector has had the same experiences with an open leadership team. She explains,

"So, it is very open and leaders are very accessible and so I can go to my boss for anything. I happen to be walking around somewhere yesterday and I ran into him and I said this came up and I don't know how to answer it and asked him his thoughts and he took the 10 minutes to chat with me through to and gave me his opinion and we talked about it and how I should respond and they want people to succeed."

AC #5 has been able to learn how to handle various situations and has used them as a learning experience through the mentorship and leadership that she has within the workplace. In regard to assessments and training programs that employees can take, some employees felt like the resources available to them were not made clear. Employees have access to resources, but there is not a huge push to utilize the resources, especially if they do not feel like they are within the realm of what they need to know for their day-to-day role. When employees were asked about the resources that are offered when it comes to training and learning new skills they do not have much knowledge on what exactly is available. DG #13, a managing director in the financial service industry explains how there are resources available currently if you would like to utilize them but they are not made clear. When asked if there are training programs and resources available, he says,

"Perhaps. I don't know. It was more of a 'hey we will write a check so you can go to school' rather than training otherwise. Again, we are talking 10 to 15 years ago at this time, so it's been a while. To the extent there were program opportunities. I don't recall. I didn't participate in any of them. I found that the bigger the organization the more stuff is out there if you are willing to go look for it. It's not going to hit you in the face but if you go to a big place there are resources if you want to go down that path."

Many other employees who were asked about the resources available to them said they were unaware of them. Unclear development opportunities reduce the employees' proactive behavior. In addition, if they are easily accessible, many do not utilize them because they do not feel they are beneficial for their career path and there is no push from their employer to fulfill the training. Employers are investing in training expecting employees to be proactive and complete what is available to them based on their own desire to do so. However, employees would like their employers to be just as proactive in ensuring that the tools available are communicated to them. If employees are proactive in their development, they want to feel like they are supported in doing so. Oftentimes, it is very hard for employees to get their foot in the door for training programs and new opportunities and they are unaware of the next steps to take, therefore, having a mentor in their corner to guide them allows them to be proactive and utilize the opportunities available to them.

Chapter 5: Discussion

By focusing on employees' perspective on employee development programs, my findings extend Dachner et al 2021's recent literature review of employee development trends and methods. In particular, my findings show 1) the value of making employee development personal

and 2) the importance of understanding proactive behaviors and employee development as a two-way dynamic relationship between employees and employers.

5.1 Making Employee Development Personal

As seen through results of this study, employees place a strong value on formal courses and programs that are taught in an in-person setting. Many courses and programs for employees to attend are now offered on an online setting in order for open enrollment and easy access. However, while Noe et al claims massive open online courses (MOOCS) and online learning environments create a space for employee growth and development, my findings show they are not the best space for learning (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 7). Corporations offering a wide access of online courses for employees to take at their own disposal was not seen as beneficial by the employee. While companies are providing massive open online courses and webinars that are offered by outside companies, employees are not signing up for them because they do not feel they directly correlate with their day-to-day role. While advanced technology has allowed for easier accessibility for learning opportunities for the masses, it takes away the personal connection between the employer and the employee that employees feel is immensely valuable for their development. In these online settings employees feel they are just a number. Based on these findings, employee satisfaction is more likely through courses and programs if they are offered in-person. If corporations continue to invest in online platform learning, they can be faced with employee dissatisfaction with development, which would decrease their opportunity for learning and growth. Employees feel like their development is valued by the employer when they are able to meet face to face with experts in the field or their managers to learn new skills for their daily work activities.

While incorporating in-person training can help build a connection between the employer and the employee, there are also many other invaluable tools and practices that can be utilized to make development personal. For example, many employees emphasized their involvement in the communities of practice that they are a part of. According to Hara, communities of practice refer to "informal [social] networks that support professional practitioners to develop a shared meaning and engage in knowledge building among members" (Hara, 2000, p. 11). Employees spoke highly of the variety of network groups that companies offer that are free of charge to both the employee and the employer. These communities of practice utilize different social media platforms. They allow for a supportive culture, shared meaning of knowledge and purpose, and learning and professional identity building (Hara, 2000, p.9). Employees are responsible for maintaining and managing professional relationships and understand the value in doing so. These social relationships within the organization create firm-specific human capital which is very difficult to replicate if the employee leaves the firm unless it creates company alumni network ties (Dachner et al., 2021, pp. 8-9).

5.2 A Two-way Relationship of Proactivity

Dachner et al and The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) take the stance of development being highly employee-driven and not reliant on organizational investment (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 4). However, the study has found that this is not the case. While employees are proactive about their own development and understand the importance in doing so, they feel they still need proper organizational guidance and commitment from the company they are a part of. Employees feel better valued by the company when there is an extra push by the employer as reassurance that there is continuous progression within their career.

There are many ways that employee's proactive development can be supported by their organizations. First, feedback seeking is a proactive behavior that can be utilized by both the employer and the employee. Feedback seeking occurs "when employees actively inquire about their work performance or observe others and infer their strengths and weaknesses based on those comparisons" (Ashford & Cummings, 1983, pp. 370-398). This concept is known as proactive behavior because employees are able to initiate their progression and seek help when needed. In order for feedback seeking to occur employees have to initiate the concern for their work and employers have to be well aware of their development goals in order to assist them. Employers can support these feedback seeking behaviors by providing them with a well-executed plan through providing tools and resources and new initiatives and goals. Through findings, employees are very proactive in creating relationships with their higher-ups in order to receive advice and mentorship. In addition, mentors can also put employees on a steady path by supporting job crafting. Job crafting or job expanding involves "employees taking the initiative to create opportunities to learn on their own within the realm of their job responsibilities" (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 9). These opportunities involve the employee to be proactive. However, many employers do not feel they are in the position of authority to abruptly ask for new experiences and roles. Employers can be more open and responsive to employees endeavors by guiding them to new opportunities and advancing their day-to-day role and responsibilities. This can be through the employer assisting the employee in creating a goal-oriented step by step plan. By creating a goal-oriented plan the employee can feel like they can strive for the aspirations they have with the support of the employer. Both feedback seeking and job crafting are proactive steps that employees can take to enhance their development but can be best utilized through conjunction and guidance from the employer. Human capital literature has emphasized the

importance of human capital being reliant on the employee to be proactive in their development but these proactive steps rely on both the employer and the employee.

Conclusion

While previous human development research has worked to understand the importance of corporate investment in employee's human capital, there has been a lack of exploration as to what constitutes proper investment from an employee's perspective (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 1). The qualitative study that was conducted examines the case of former liberal arts graduates who are currently employed in large corporations in order to hear their perspective on educational and training methods that are most beneficial for their development. The study also worked to understand the effectiveness of proactivity within the workplace. Drawing on the Noe et al (1997) four-dimensional taxonomy, scholars have argued that employee development methods can be updated to better fit current workplace contexts (Dachner et al., 2021, p. 6). While current workplace trends are increasingly resorting to remote methods of training and education, my findings show that these updated methods are taking away the personalized relationship between the employer and the employee. The study has shown that employees grow and develop when they realize their employer acknowledges and guides their development. More current methods of development that are put in place by employers such as online learning courses and evaluations put the employee at a distance reducing employee satisfaction and causing them to feel less valuable in the workplace. In addition, while the previous context of human capital development advocates for employees being proactive and initiating their own growth, I show

that employees can progress most efficiently when corporations are also proactive in employee growth. Corporations that take clear initiatives in their employees' progression allow the employer to feel they are committed to them and understand the value that they add to the organization.

6.1 Further Research

While the study worked to understand the benefits and value of human resources investment in human capital from the perspective of the employee, more research can be done from the side of the employer to understand why they make certain investment decisions. Research can also be implemented by looking specifically into personalized employee development methods that support proactive behaviors. In addition, while this study was conducted using 24 employees, both male and female, with a variety of professions within the large corporate setting, the study can be done with a higher sample size in order to have more variance. The study was also done with participants who all initially attended Drew University, a New Jersey liberal arts private college for their undergraduate degree. A further step in the research is to analyze employees who attended a variety of schools such as public schools, large state universities, junior colleges, and those who studied internationally. The additional variance in the study can account for future findings within the area of study.

6.2 Managerial Implications

In order for employees to maximize their learning potential, corporations can consider implementing more personal methods such as guidance and mentoring into their human resource strategies. If employees feel like they are valued by the employer because they are being

motivated and given the opportunity to network and create new relationships to advance their career, their satisfaction with their job will increase. An efficient way for companies to invest in human capital development for their employees is by providing more in-person learning opportunities and minimizing the use of online learning platforms. In addition, companies can provide resources that allow the employees to network within the firm and beyond considering employees find personal relationships at each dimensional level to be extremely beneficial. These networking opportunities that are provided by the firm can allow employees to feel a personal connection to their job, their coworkers, and other industry professionals. In addition, considering employees' proactivity increases when they feel their employers are also proactive in their development. Corporations can consider using proactive methods that are reciprocal. In order for proactive behavior to be reciprocal, both the employer and the employee can initiate the sense of urgency for an employee's progression. Employees can be proactive by initiating feedback seeking in their assessments and corporations can ensure that they are devoted to providing that feedback. In order to create an open dialogue of proactivity, corporations can consider initiating more continuous rather than intermittent assessment. Employees making development personal and proactive can be intertwined between each of the four methods of employee development.

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