

NAVIGATING CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF GENERATION Z IT EMPLOYEES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A SMART-PLS APPROACH

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Abstract

The IT sector is dynamic, characterized by rapid innovation and technological advancements, making career growth a critical expectation for new-generation employees. This study examined how career development opportunities such as promotions, skill enhancement and structured career paths influence motivation, commitment and work engagement among IT professionals. A quantitative research design was adopted and data were collected from 324 IT employees through structured questionnaires. The partial least squares approach to structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), was employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs. Findings revealed a strong positive relationship between perceived career growth and employee engagement. Employees, with access to advancement opportunities, demonstrated higher enthusiasm, focus and dedication whereas limited growth prospects were associated with reduced engagement. The study highlights the importance of career development in retaining and motivating Gen Z employees. Future research could consider

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the role of organizational culture, leadership and mentorship in strengthening career pathways and sustaining engagement in the IT sector.

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1. Introduction

Technology companies in India face increasingly complex challenges in retaining quality Generation Z employees. Amidst intense competition and high operational demands, maintaining a stable workforce is crucial, to ensure smooth and quality service to the public. High employee turnover rates not only increase recruitment and training costs but can also disrupt operational efficiency and reduce company productivity (**Semwal and Dhyani 2017**). Therefore, technology company management needs to identify key factors, that influence employee retention, in order to create a supportive and motivating work environment.

Career development is one important strategy that can increase employee retention. In the context of technology companies, good career development can provide opportunities for Generation Z employees, to grow and develop according to their potential and skills. This not only increases job satisfaction but also creates employee loyalty to the company. Employees who feel they have clear career prospects and are supported by the company, tend to be more motivated to contribute more and stay in the long term (**Barhate & Dirani, 2022**). In addition to career development, employee engagement also plays a crucial role in employee retention. Employee engagement includes the extent to which employees feel involved, committed to their work. In technology companies, employee engagement can be realized through various initiatives such as employee engagement programs, awards and

recognition for work achievements. Employees, who feel valued and involved in company decision-making, tend to have a high sense of ownership and responsibility, which in turn reduces the intention to leave the company.

Organizational commitment, as a mediating factor, cannot be ignored. Organizational commitment describes the extent to which employees feel bound to the values and goals of the company (**Ringle et al., 2020**). In technology companies, Generation Z employees, who have high organizational commitment will show loyalty and a desire to continue working even when faced with challenges or difficult situations. Organizational commitment can be strengthened through effective communication, positive organizational culture and inspiring leadership.

Beyond these variables, there are a number of other factors, that could influence employee retention in technology companies. These factors include comfortable and safe working conditions, competitive compensation and benefits and work-life balance. Good and safe working conditions are essential to ensure employee health and safety. In addition, competitive compensation and additional benefits such as health insurance, annual leave and employee welfare programs can increase job satisfaction and encourage employees to stay with the company. Another phenomenon that needs to be considered is the changing dynamics of the workforce due to technological developments (**Magano et al., 2020**). Digitalization and automation in technology company operations

can affect employee roles and responsibilities, making it important for companies to provide relevant training and skills development. Thus, employees can adapt to technological changes and still feel relevant in the organization. In addition, organizational culture also plays an important role in employee retention. An inclusive, collaborative, and innovation-supportive culture can create a pleasant work environment and motivate employees to contribute more (**Janssen and Carradini 2021**). In technology companies, implementing a strong organizational culture can help increase a sense of belonging and togetherness among employees, thereby strengthening loyalty and a desire to stay with the company.

Work-life balance is also a significant factor in employee retention. Employees, who are able to balance the demands of their work and their personal lives, tend to have lower stress levels and better wellbeing. Technology companies need to implement policies and programs that support this balance, such as flexible working hours, family leave and mental health programs. To improve employee retention in technology companies, management needs to adopt an approach that includes career development, employee engagement and organizational commitment. In addition, paying attention to other factors such as working conditions, compensation, the impact of technology, organizational culture and work-life balance are also key to creating a work environment that supports employee retention. With a comprehensive approach, technology companies can create an attractive workplace for Generation Z employees and reduce turnover rates that are detrimental to the company.

2. Literature Review

Generation Z refers to individuals, born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, with

exact dates varying across sources, though 1995–2010 is most commonly cited. This generation is widely recognized as the first true “digital natives” (**Lanier, 2017**), having grown up in a technology-driven environment where the use of digital tools and engagement on social networks began at an early age. Consequently, they are often perceived as highly dependent on technology. Members of this cohort are also referred to as “Gen Zers,” “post-Millennials,” or “iGen” (**Magano et al., 2020**).

Within the IT sector, many employees are drawn to careers due to the prestige of working in well-established organizations, the promise of higher salaries that enables quicker financial stability and opportunities for professional advancement. However, these opportunities for career growth often diminish as employees reach the mid-career stage. Understanding the career challenges of IT professionals is therefore crucial, as their skills tend to become obsolete more quickly than in other industries. Moreover, a review of existing literature reveals a lack of studies, examining the career continuum of software professionals in the Indian context. To address this gap, the present study seeks to identify the variables, influencing software employees across different stages of their career journey.

Career development can be defined as the support organizations provide to employees as they progress professionally, especially while transitioning to new projects or roles. This support, typically includes skill development, networking opportunities, career guidance, coaching and mentoring. More specifically, career development refers to the ongoing process of acquiring and applying short-term skills in pursuit of long-term career goals. It is a lifelong process, marked by consistent achievement of milestones, tailored to one’s

chosen career path (**Harmon & Walden, 2021**). A critical element of career development also involves self-reflection and defining the purpose of one's work, which lays the foundation for meaningful career advancement.

The concept of a career path is often illustrated as a ladder, with each rung representing a new role or level. While securing initial employment is a significant first step, most individuals aspire to progress beyond entry-level positions. However, achieving promotions and advancing up the career ladder requires focused effort and strategic planning. Career development thus plays a vital role in identifying the skills and experiences necessary for incremental progress (**Barhate & Dirani, 2022**). With a structured career development plan, professionals are better equipped to pursue career paths that align with their personal values and make the most of their abilities.

According to **Semwal and Dhyani 2017**, career development opportunities exert a stronger influence on employee engagement in IT companies than training initiatives alone (**Kalchik & Oertle, 2010**). Participation in Programs of Study (POS) coursework strengthens the career development process by enabling students to explore potential career paths, prepare for professional roles and shape their career identities. The associated Career Pathways provide a structured framework that guides students' exploration, connecting their course choices and preparation with personal interests (**Hu, Hood, & Creed, 2018**). These findings underscore the crucial role of career goal feedback and goal significance in motivating young individuals to pursue their career aspirations (**Barnett & Bradley, 2007**).

Research further indicates that proactive personality, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), and career management

behaviors are positively correlated with career satisfaction. Additionally, the link between proactive personality and career satisfaction is mediated by career management behaviors, though no mediating effect was observed between OCPD and career satisfaction.

Amidst growing challenges and rapid organizational changes, leaders are compelled to design strategies that enhance performance and ensure sustainability, particularly in competitive service industries such as higher education. One of the most effective approaches to survival in such contexts is recruiting, developing and retaining competent staff (**Serenko & Turel, 2021**). In higher education, retaining skilled personnel requires offering opportunities for career advancement. Career development has thus been recognized as a critical determinant of employee retention, as employees tend to demonstrate stronger commitment to organizations that provide clear opportunities for growth. It not only fosters psychological attachment and loyalty to the organization (**Adamu, Augustus-Daddie, & Ebikeseye, 2017**) but also contributes to building a superior workforce that derives competitive advantage while supporting employees' personal and professional growth.

Kniffin et al. (2021) emphasized that career management encompasses both formal and informal practices, including employee workshops, job rotation, task enrichment and structured career ladders. **Janssen and Carradini 2021** observed that organizations can strengthen employees' career growth by offering ample opportunities for self-development, mentorship and advancement. Conversely, failure to meet employees' progression needs may result in the loss of valuable talent. Career development is therefore best understood as a strategic organizational approach to ensuring that

skilled and experienced professionals are available to meet present and future demands.

IT professionals are often drawn to this field because of the status and reputation associated with working in well-established organizations, along with the financial security and career advancement opportunities it offers. While these factors are appealing at the outset, opportunities for career progression tend to narrow once employees reach the mid-career stage. A review of the literature indicates that although some studies have examined career success, very few have specifically addressed the concept of a career continuum. Therefore, the present study aims to identify the key variables, that influence employees in performing their roles effectively, across different stages of their career continuum.

3. Statement of the Problem

The declining job performance of staff in many institutions poses a serious threat to organizational survival. This decline is largely attributed to inefficiency, a nonchalant attitude towards work and inadequate monitoring and supervision by management. Although career development practices such as mentoring, planning and training are crucial for enhancing employee performance, they are often neglected by management. Consequently, issues such as job dissatisfaction, boredom, stress, absenteeism, lateness and low productivity, have become common. If left unaddressed, these challenges will not only affect staff well-being but also tarnish the institution's image. Therefore, management must take responsibility for supporting employees' career growth and development to improve performance and ensure organizational sustainability.

4. Need of the Study

Generation Z, entering the workforce with unique values and expectations, is reshaping the

talent landscape of the IT industry. Their career aspirations emphasize flexibility, rapid growth, meaningful work and alignment with personal values. As they become a dominant talent segment, understanding their motivations is vital for attracting, engaging and retaining them in a highly competitive sector. The fast-paced and innovative nature of IT, demands tailored career development strategies, that resonate with Gen Z. This study aims to bridge the gap between organizational objectives and Gen Z aspirations, fostering long-term retention, loyalty and sustainable talent development in the IT industry.

5. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research was to examine the factors influencing career development among employees. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Analyse the relationship between training and skill development and career development.
2. Examine the impact of career path and advancement opportunities on career development.
3. Assess the influence of performance feedback on career development.
4. Evaluate the role of organizational support and resources in enhancing career development.

6. Hypotheses of the Study

From the review of existing literature, the following hypotheses were derived;

H1: Training and skill development (TSD) positively influences career development (CD).

H2: Performance feedback (PF) positively influences career development (CD).

H3: Career path and advancement (CPA) positively influences career development (CD).

H4: Support and resources (SR) positively moderate the relationship between training and skill development (TSD) and career development (CD).

H5: Support and resources (SR) positively moderate the relationship between performance feedback (PF) and career development (CD).

H6: Support and resources (SR) positively moderate the relationship between career path and advancement (CPA) and career development (CD).

7. Research Methodology

The research design used in the study was a descriptive survey. Descriptive research entails gathering and evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data. The descriptive study helps the researcher to efficiently and meaningfully condense and synthesize data. This study's design was deemed appropriate to analyse the vast amount of employee data. The unit of analysis was employees.

The systematic investigation of phenomena, through the collecting of numerical data and the application of statistical, mathematical or computer tools, is known as quantitative research (Slevitch, 2011). A quantitative research method works with quantifying and analyzing variables to obtain results. In order to provide answers, it entails the use and analysis of numerical data, using particular statistical approaches. In this study, the quantitative approach method was used for analyzing the data. Convenience sampling, according to (Rahi 2017), is the practice of gathering data from a research population that is easily accessible to the researcher.

7.1. Sampling Selection

The present study analysed the demographic attributes of IT employees in North Tamil Nadu, focusing on the districts of Vellore,

Tirupattur, Ranipet, Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri and Dharmapuri. These districts were purposively chosen as they represent emerging IT hubs and offered accessibility for reaching respondents. A judgment sampling technique was employed, as the study specifically targeted individuals employed in the IT sector. The absence of a comprehensive sampling frame for IT employees made probability sampling impractical. Judgment sampling was therefore appropriate, allowing the Researcher to deliberately include respondents possessing the required characteristics to meet the study objectives. Respondents were identified through professional networks, IT associations, employee references and direct approaches to IT firms in the selected districts. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire, distributed both online and offline. Of the 398 questionnaires circulated, 350 were returned and after data cleaning, 324 valid responses were retained for the analysis.

7.2. Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data were collected from respondents, across the Districts of North Tamil Nadu, using a standardized and validated questionnaire. The survey instrument was designed on a 5-point Likert Scale to capture respondents' perceptions effectively.

7.3. Period of the Study

This study was conducted from Jan 2025 to July 2025. The data collection took about seven months. After data collection, the next step was data analysis, to capture the result.

7.4 Tools used in the study

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was the primary data analysis technique, used in this study. According to (Hair et al., 2011), smart PLS-SEM is deemed

suitable, for analyzing intricate research models, that are presented as an estimating framework integrating relevant theories and empirical data. A non-parametric method, called PLS-SEM, takes advantage of explained variance in latent dimensions, which are invisible to the naked eye (Ringle et al. 2015). Compared to covariance-based SEM, smart PLS-SEM requires less data on sample sizes, measurement scales and residual distributions (Hair et al., 2011; Udin, 2024). A robust and easy-to-use software program, for many statistical data analysis tasks is SPSS (Levesque, 2007). Students and researchers, from the following subjects, utilize this program: sociology, psychology, economics, business studies, medicine, engineering and other disciplines. According to (Vorhies, 2017), SPSS is a fantastic option for marketing and survey firms, looking to forecast and analyze Career aspirations.

8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The PLS-SEM technique has been widely applied, across various domains of management research (Gefen, Rigdon, & Straub, 2011) and has also gained prominence in studies related to HRD (Legate et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2020). In this study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed, to examine the outer model, where indicator loadings established convergent validity, composite reliability (CR), and discriminant validity of the measurement model. The inner model was assessed through path analysis, with the relationships evaluated, based on path coefficients and their statistical significance.

8.1 Demographic Profile

Table-1 presents the demographic profile of the 324 IT sector sample employees surveyed in North Tamil Nadu. The age distribution revealed that the workforce was largely

concentrated in the 25-30 years (28.0%) and 30-35 years (28.0%) groups, with smaller and yet equal proportions in the 20-25 years (21.8%) and 35-40 years (21.8%) categories, suggesting that the sector is driven by young to early middle-aged professionals. Gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 51.1% males and 48.6% females, reflecting increasing female participation though males were slightly dominant. Work experience indicated that 29.8% of employees reported 3-5 years of service while 24.0% reported more than 10 years, 23.7% with 5-10 years, and 22.2% with 1-3 years, pointing to a mix of emerging and experienced professionals. Educational qualifications revealed diversity, with 29.9% diploma holders, 24.0% postgraduates, 23.7% graduates, and 22.2% with high school education, highlighting multiple entry routes into IT. Marital status was nearly even, with 51.1% single and 48.6% married, indicating representation across different personal life stages.

8.2 Discriminant validity

Table-3 indicates that the research instrument's consistency and stability were determined by the reliability analysis and the validity of the dependability of the latent constructs was examined by using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The accepted benchmark for sufficient reliability is a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 and more. A reliability level of 0.8 was suggested by Carmines and Zeller 1979 for most investigations and the reliability of 0.7 demonstrated moderately reliable scale. Good dependability is indicated by CR values of 0.7 or greater, according to Hair et al. 2009. To show an appropriate degree of convergent validity, the AVE should not be less than 0.5. In other words, the latent construct accounts for at least 50% of the indicator variation (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

8.3 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity of the constructs

Table-2 indicates that the bolded elements display the square root of the average variance that was taken from the diagonal elements. Shared variations are shown for elements that are not on the diagonal. The findings indicated that the assumptions were conceptually and empirically distinct from one another and that the discriminant validity of the model was good. All the shared variances, among the factors in the framework, were found to be smaller than the square root of the individual factor AVE. To verify the discriminant validity of constructs in structural equation models, a common method is the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (**Fornell & Larcker, 1981**). A comparison between the squared construct correlations and the average variance extracted (AVE) serves as the basis for the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which is a decision rule. The square root of AVE must be higher than the values of its bivariate correlations with each of the opposing constructs, thus meeting the Fornell and Larcker Criterion.

8.4 Testing of Hypotheses

For examining the constructs of hypotheses **Table-4** provides valuable insights into the factors, shaping career development. **H1** (β 0.164; p value <0.05) was supported, confirming that training and skill development (TSD) significantly enhances career development (CD). In other words, opportunities for continuous learning and professional training would enable employees to strengthen their skills, which in turn accelerates their career growth. **H2** (β 0.185; p value <0.05) was also supported. The performance feedback (PF) positively contributes to career development. In other words, constructive and regular feedback not only improves individual performance but also motivates employees to align their goals with

long-term career advancement. **H3** (β 0.142; p value <0.05) was supported, establishing that career path and advancement (CPA) directly influences career development. This finding revealed the critical role of providing employees with structured pathways and promotional opportunities, which fosters commitment and engagement. In contrast, the findings for **H4–H6** indicated mixed outcomes. While **H4** (β -0.103; p value <0.05) was accepted, indicating that support and resources (SR), in combination with other factors (such as training), could enhance career development, the direct effects of SR alone were not consistently significant. Both **H5** (β 0.010; p value >0.05) and **H6** (β 0.011; p value >0.05) were rejected, as SR did not demonstrate meaningful influence when paired with performance feedback or career path advancement. These results implied that support and resources act more as an enabling environment rather than a direct determinant of career progression. Taken together, the findings confirmed that career development is primarily driven by training, feedback and advancement opportunities while organizational support by itself is insufficient to produce substantial outcomes. Thus, a comprehensive career development strategy must integrate skill-building, performance evaluation and transparent progression pathways, supported by appropriate resources.

9. Finding of the Study

In this study, it was shown that training and skill development would significantly enhance career development, as opportunities for continuous learning and professional training enable employees to strengthen their skills and accelerate their career growth. Performance feedback was also found to play a positive role in career development by improving individual performance and motivating employees to align

their goals with long-term career advancement. Similarly, career path and advancement emerged as a direct influence on career development, highlighting the importance of structured pathways and promotional opportunities in fostering commitment and engagement. Support and resources, though beneficial when combined with other factors such as training, did not show a consistently strong direct effect on career development nor did they demonstrate meaningful influence when paired with performance feedback or career path advancement. Overall, the findings revealed that career development is primarily driven by training, feedback and advancement opportunities while organizational support serves more as an enabling factor rather than a direct determinant. Therefore, a comprehensive career development strategy should focus on integrating skill-building, performance evaluation and transparent progression pathways, supported by appropriate resources.

10. Suggestions

The study suggests that organizations should invest in continuous training and up skilling programs because they strongly support career growth. Such programs should be closely aligned with employees' career goals and changing industry needs. Regular and constructive performance feedback is also important, as it helps employees to recognize their strengths, improve their weaknesses and progress toward long-term career development. In addition, providing clear career paths and transparent promotion opportunities will motivate employees and give them confidence in their growth within the organization. While support and resources alone do not strongly influence career development, they become effective when combined with training and mentoring. Therefore, organizations should focus on integrating support systems such as coaching,

mentoring and resource allocation with training initiatives. At the same time, the existing support and feedback systems should be improved in terms of quality and relevance, in order to directly contribute to employee growth. Finally, resources should be better connected with career advancement opportunities to ensure that the support they receive is translated into real prospects for promotion and development.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, this project has comprehensively examined the multifaceted dimensions of career development, highlighting its critical importance in the modern professional landscape. Through our detailed analysis, the study has identified key strategies and tools, that individuals and organizations can employ, to foster career growth and satisfaction. Effective career development not only enhances personal and professional skills but also contributes significantly to organizational success, by increasing employee engagement and retention. The review has positively recognized that the impact of career development intermediations are context dependent and that there is collaboration between context and learning issues influencing employees, motivation for learning towards career path advancement. It positively influences career development and hence in individuals, who perceive clear career paths and opportunities for advancement within the organization, are more likely to experience positive career development.

This finding revealed the importance of providing employees with structured career trajectories, to foster their professional growth. Performance feedback positively influences the career development. Effective feedback mechanisms would contribute to employees' understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement, facilitating their career progress. Regular and constructive feedback sessions can

enhance job satisfaction and performance, ultimately contributing to career advancement. Support and resources positively influences the career development. Access to adequate support structures and resources, such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities and necessary tools, empowers individuals to navigate their career paths effectively.

Integrating resources with skill-building activities, creates a conducive environment for employees to maximize their potential and achieve career goals effectively. Further exploration is warranted to understand the underlying dynamics, influencing the relationship between support and resources provision and career development outcomes.

12. Limitation of Study

This study suffered from certain limitations, that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused only on IT employees, belonging to Generation Z, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other generational cohorts or industries outside the IT sector. Second, the study was conducted within a specific cultural and geographical context and career aspirations may vary across different regions and socio-economic backgrounds. Third, the data collection relied on self-reported responses, which may be subject to personal bias, overestimation, or social desirability effects. Fourth, the use of a cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between the identified factors and career aspirations. Finally, the application of Smart-PLS, while effective for structural equation modelling, may not fully capture the dynamic and evolving nature of career aspirations in the rapidly changing digital age.

13. Scope for Further Research

This study opens several avenues for future exploration. First, replicating the research in a broader global context, would enhance the

generalizability of the findings and provide deeper insights into geographical variations, among Generation Z IT professionals. Second, future studies could focus on more specific subsets of IT-related disciplines. Although this study did not identify significant differences between management-oriented and technology-oriented courses, examining narrower subgroups may yield more nuanced results. Third, longitudinal research is recommended to observe how career aspirations evolve over time. Since career expectations, such as career anchors, may shift with experience (Chang et al., 2012), a longitudinal approach could capture differences between initial intentions and actual career choices of young IT professionals.

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Table-1: Results of Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Categories	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Age	20-25	71	21.8
	25-30	91	28.0
	30-35	91	28.0
	35-40	71	21.8
	Total	324	100.0
Gender	Male	166	51.1
	Female	158	48.6
	Total	324	100.0
Experience	1-3 years	72	22.2
	3-5 years	97	29.8
	5-10 years	77	23.7
	More than 10 years	78	24.0
	Total	324	100.0
Qualification	High school	72	22.2
	Diploma	97	29.8
	Graduate degree	77	23.7
	Postgraduate degree	78	24.0
	Total	324	100.0
Marital Status	Single	166	51.1
	Married	158	48.6
	Total	324	100.0

Source: Primary data computed by using Smart-PLS

Table-2: Result of Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity of the constructs

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CD	0.733	0.741	0.832	0.553
CPA	0.581	0.604	0.763	0.454
PF	0.527	0.544	0.738	0.416
SR	0.709	0.713	0.820	0.533
TSD	0.798	0.807	0.868	0.623

Source: Primary data computed by using Smart-PLS

Table-3: Result of Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker Criterion for the constructs

Factors	CD	CPA	PF	SR	TSD
CD	0.744				
CPA	0.548	0.674			
PF	0.553	0.447	0.645		
SR	0.705	0.507	0.623	0.730	
TSD	0.384	0.338	0.101	0.245	0.789

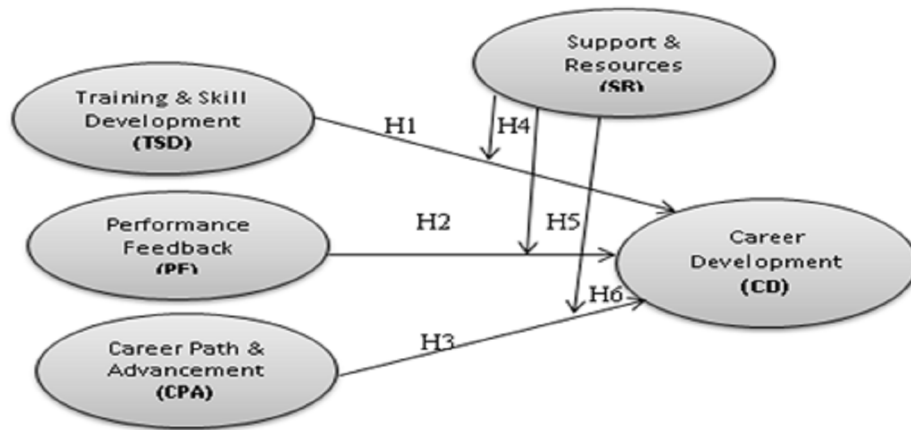
Source: Primary data computed by using Smart-PLS

Table-4: Results of Hypotheses for Direct Effects Testing

H	Constructs	β	SD	T	P	Results
H1	TSD ? CD	0.164	0.033	4.906	0.000	Accepted
H2	PF ? CD	0.185	0.046	4.065	0.000	Accepted
H3	CPA ? CD	0.142	0.049	2.894	0.004	Accepted
H4	SR*TS ? CD	-0.103	0.026	3.964	0.000	Accepted
H5	SR*PF ? CD	0.010	0.028	0.356	0.722	Rejected
H6	SR*CPA ? CD	0.011	0.117	0.341	0.988	Rejected

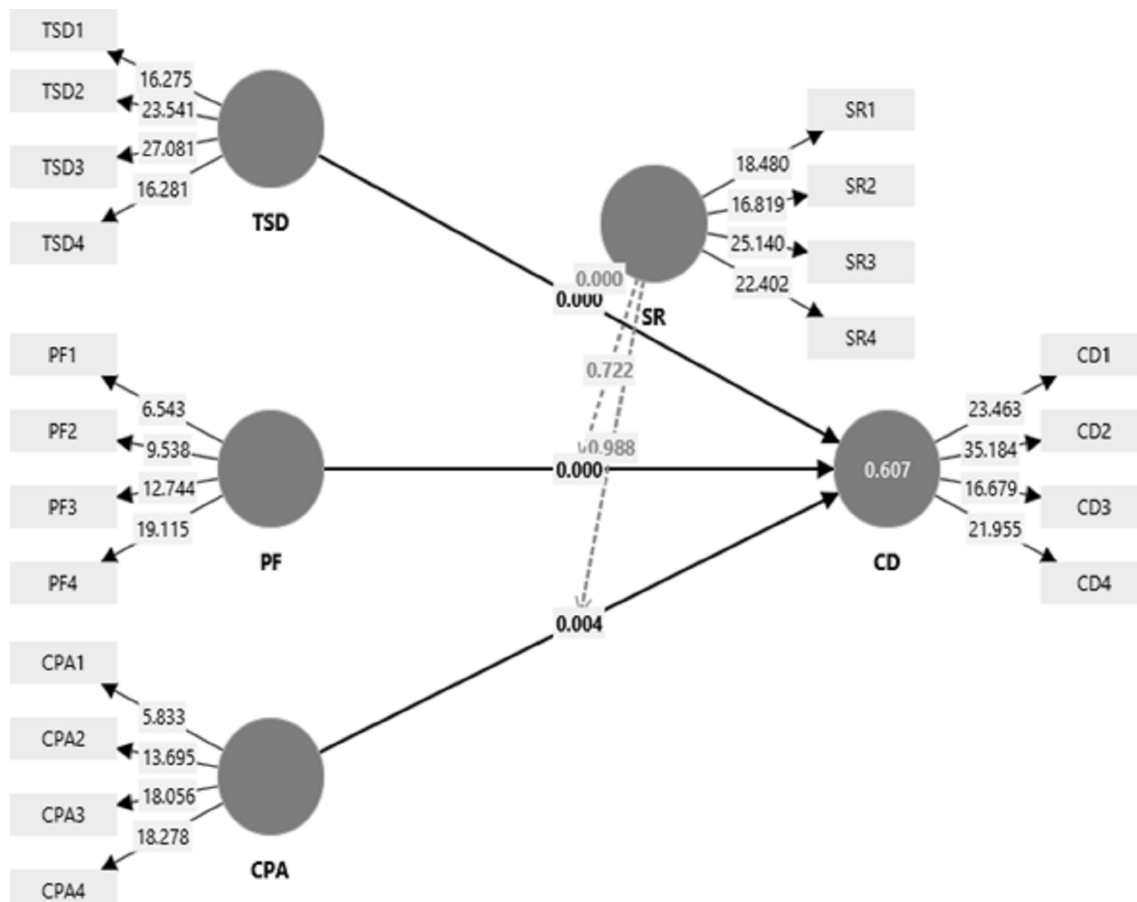
Source: Primary data computed by using Smart-PLS

Figure-1 Proposed Conceptual Model



Source: Compilation by Authors

Figure-2 Results of Structural Equation Model



Source: Primary data, computed by using Smart-PLS