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Career Advancement Practices and Employee Retention in the Tourism Sector: The Mediating Role of Employee Adaptability in Delhi-NCR

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationships between four career advancement practices—training and development, promotion opportunities, career planning, and mentorship—and employee retention in the tourism sector in Delhi-NCR. It focuses on employee adaptability as a mediating mechanism. The study draws on a quantitative cross-sectional survey. Of 473 responses received, 424 usable responses were retained. The survey data were analysed using PLS-SEM and bootstrapping to estimate direct and specific indirect effects.

Findings: The model explained 60.1% of the variance in employee retention (R^2 = .601; adjusted R^2 = .596), while employee adaptability had R^2 = .499. Four specific indirect effects through adaptability were positive and statistically significant: training and development (β = .079, 95% CI [.049, .114]), promotion opportunities (β = .059, 95% CI [.033, .086]), career planning (β = .082, 95% CI [.052, .116]), and mentorship (β = .100, 95% CI [.068, .135]); all $p < .001$. The direct paths were also described in the study as positive and statistically significant, consistent with complementary partial mediation; exact direct coefficients should be transcribed from the original bootstrapping table before journal submission. The paper evaluates adaptability as a mechanism linking career advancement practices with retention in a tourism-sector context and provides empirical evidence from Delhi-NCR.

Keywords: Employee retention; career advancement; employee adaptability; mediation; tourism; hospitality; PLS-SEM; Delhi-NCR

1. Introduction

Employee retention is a strategic concern for service organisations because workforce continuity can affect service consistency, organisational knowledge, employee coordination, and customer experience. Tourism and hospitality employers operate in conditions characterised by variable demand, emotionally demanding service encounters, irregular schedules, and opportunities for mobility across employers. These features make it important to understand not only why employees leave but also how organisations can cultivate conditions associated with employees' willingness to remain.

Retention research has developed from early process models of withdrawal to more comprehensive accounts of job embeddedness, organisational commitment, and turnover dynamics (Mobley, 1977; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Hom et al., 2017). The literature indicates that turnover is shaped by multiple, interacting factors and that retention should not be reduced to a single human

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resource practice. Career advancement practices represent a meaningful cluster because they communicate investment, opportunity, and future prospects.

The present paper examines four practices: training and development, promotion opportunities, career planning, and mentorship. Training may increase capability and signal investment; promotion opportunities communicate upward mobility; career planning supports goal clarity and career agency; mentorship provides career guidance and psychosocial resources. These practices may be associated with employee retention directly and indirectly by supporting employee adaptability. Adaptability may help employees cope with changing work demands, career transitions, and unexpected disruptions, thereby reducing the mismatch between employees and evolving roles.

Tourism and hospitality research has specifically examined career adaptability and turnover intentions. Rasheed et al. (2020) investigated career adaptability, perceived career opportunities, and turnover intentions in hospitality. Lee et al. (2021) considered the role of work social support and career adaptability in turnover intentions, while Lee et al. (2023) examined career adaptability and attrition intention among hospitality employees. Research on HR practices and retention in tourism also highlights the relevance of organisational practices and work environment (Islam et al., 2022). Yet the mediating role of adaptability in a model containing four distinct career advancement practices remains worthy of further contextual examination.

This study develops and tests an empirical model to address the question: To what extent are training and development, promotion opportunities, career planning, and mentorship associated with employee retention directly and indirectly through employee adaptability? It contributes by testing a mechanism-based model rather than presenting career advancement practices as a simple list of predictors. The analysis is situated in tourism employment in Delhi-NCR and uses the same original dataset and structural specification in the present study.

The paper proceeds in IMRaD format. The literature review develops the conceptual logic and hypotheses; the methodology explains the sample and PLS-SEM procedures; the results present explanatory power and direct and indirect estimates; and the discussion considers theoretical contribution, practical implications, limitations, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Employee retention and career advancement practices

Employee retention is commonly conceptualised through employees' intention or willingness to continue employment, while turnover research distinguishes intention from actual exit behaviour. Early withdrawal models identify job satisfaction and intermediate cognitions as part of the process leading to turnover (Mobley, 1977). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are associated with turnover intentions and turnover (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Contemporary reviews emphasise the complexity of turnover and the need to integrate individual, organisational, and contextual mechanisms (Hom et al., 2017).

Career advancement practices may strengthen retention by communicating future opportunity and organisational investment. Organisational support theory suggests that employees form general beliefs about whether their organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Developmental opportunities can be interpreted as signals of support, while blocked progression may contribute to perceptions of limited future prospects. Career growth has been associated with affective occupational commitment and turnover intentions (Weng & McElroy, 2012). In tourism and hospitality, career opportunity and HR practices are particularly relevant to employee mobility and retention (Rasheed et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2022).

2.2 Training and development and employee retention

Training and development can strengthen job competence, employability, and perceived organisational investment. Employees may reciprocate opportunities to learn and grow through positive attitudes and continued employment, consistent with social exchange reasoning (Blau, 1964). In lodging, Costen and Salazar (2011) found that opportunities to develop skills were associated with job satisfaction, loyalty, and intent to stay. Hospitality research also examines training as a component of HR systems that can relate to retention (Islam et al., 2022). Therefore:

H1a: Training and development is positively associated with employee retention.

2.3 Promotion opportunities and employee retention

Promotion opportunities provide signals of future career mobility, recognition, and access to more advanced roles. Perceived opportunities may reduce the appeal of external job alternatives by making future growth plausible within the organisation. Career growth is linked to occupational commitment and turnover intentions (Weng & McElroy, 2012), while hospitality studies identify career opportunities as relevant to turnover intentions (Rasheed et al., 2020). Thus:

H1b: Promotion opportunities is positively associated with employee retention.

2.4 Career planning and employee retention

Career planning can increase clarity about possible pathways, competencies, and developmental steps. A self-directed career orientation emphasises personal agency in career management (Hall, 2004), while career development research recognises that organisational systems and individual planning interact (Baruch, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Employees who can envision a future in their organisation may be more willing to remain and invest in its opportunities. Therefore:

H1c: Career planning is positively associated with employee retention.

2.5 Mentorship and employee retention

Mentorship can provide career sponsorship, guidance, feedback, and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). Such support may strengthen social ties and perceived organisational support, which are relevant to commitment and retention (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). An Indian study of Gen Y employees found mentoring associated with intention to stay, with perceived organisational support and affective commitment considered as intervening mechanisms. Hospitality research likewise treats mentoring as a developmental practice with implications for employees' attitudes and career experiences. Therefore:

H1d: Mentorship is positively associated with employee retention.

2.6 Employee adaptability and retention

Employee adaptability refers to resources or capacities for adjusting to changing tasks, work roles, and career conditions. Career construction theory frames adaptability as a resource for coping with vocational transitions and disruptions (Savickas, 1997). In hospitality, career adaptability has been studied in relation to turnover intentions (Rasheed et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021, 2023). Employees who can adapt may experience less strain when work requirements change and may be better able to manage career uncertainty. Therefore:

H2: Employee adaptability is positively associated with employee retention.

2.7 Employee adaptability as a mediating mechanism

Career advancement practices may influence retention not only through direct organisational signals but also by helping employees develop adaptive resources. Training expands skill repertoires; promotion opportunities may stimulate readiness for future roles; career planning supports anticipatory action; and mentorship offers guidance for interpreting and responding to change. Adaptability may therefore transmit part of the association between career practices and retention. Mediation should be evaluated through specific indirect effects and their bootstrapped confidence intervals rather than inferred from separate direct paths (Zhao et al., 2010).

H3a: Employee adaptability mediates the relationship between training and development and employee retention.

H3b: Employee adaptability mediates the relationship between promotion opportunities and employee retention.

H3c: Employee adaptability mediates the relationship between career planning and employee retention.

H3d: Employee adaptability mediates the relationship between mentorship and employee retention.

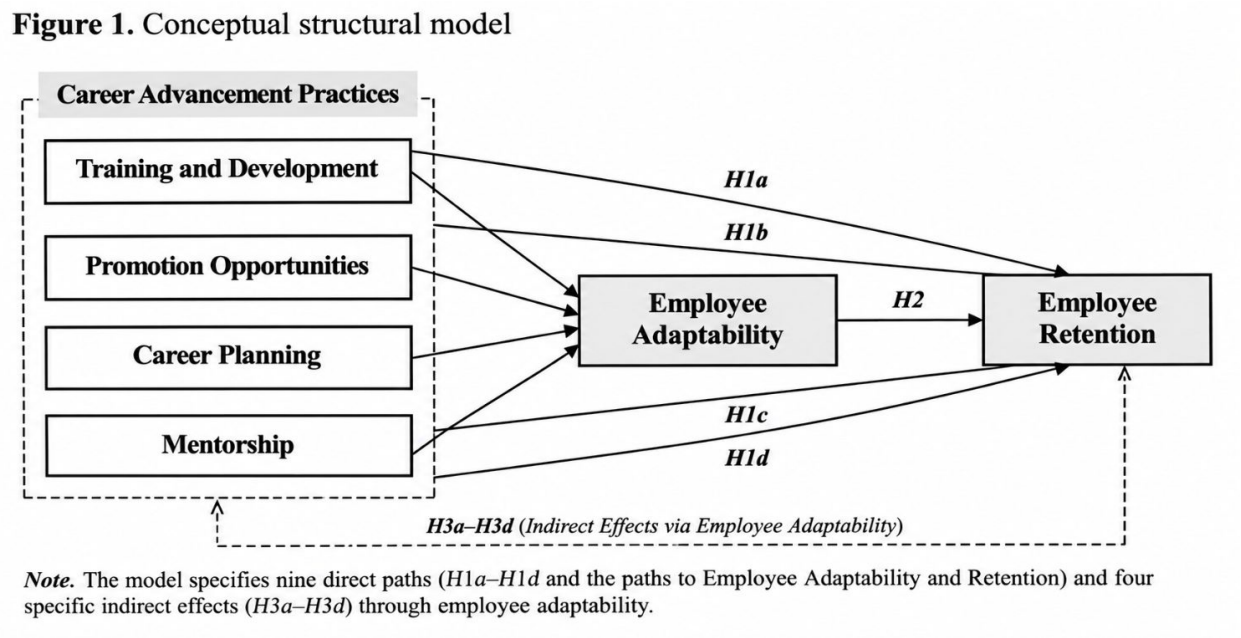


Figure 1. Conceptual structural model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and context

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory design in the tourism sector in Delhi-NCR. Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire. The research model comprised training and development, promotion opportunities, career planning, and mentorship as exogenous constructs; employee adaptability as mediator; and employee retention as the endogenous outcome. Cross-sectional evidence supports estimation of associations but does not establish temporal causality.

3.2 Sample and screening

A total of 473 responses were received. Following screening, 49 were excluded and 424 were retained for analysis (89.64%). Convenience sampling was used, with eligibility screening intended to retain employees working in tourism-related organisations in Delhi-NCR.

Table 1. Response screening

Data screening stage	n	%
Responses received	473	100
Responses excluded	49	10.36
Usable responses retained	424	89.64

3.3 Measures and structural model

The six constructs were measured using the study questionnaire. The exact indicators and response anchors must be reproduced from the original instrument. The structural equations were:

$$EA = \beta 1TD + \beta 2PO + \beta 3CP + \beta 4M + \zeta 1$$

$$ER = \beta 5EA + \beta 6TD + \beta 7PO + \beta 8CP + \beta 9M + \zeta 2$$

where EA denotes employee adaptability, ER employee retention, TD training and development, PO promotion opportunities, CP career planning, and M mentorship. β1–β9 represent structural path coefficients; ζ1 and ζ2 are disturbance terms.

3.4 Analytical approach

SmartPLS 4.1.1.6 was used for PLS-SEM. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, internal consistency reliability, AVE, and HTMT. The structural model was evaluated through collinearity, R^2, path coefficients, and bootstrapping. Mediation was evaluated through four specific indirect effects.

Statistical significance was interpreted using the reported bootstrap p-values and confidence intervals. The manuscript reports the study results and does not claim a fresh re-estimation.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The study reports voluntary participation, an explanation of the academic purpose, confidentiality, and academic use of the responses. Before submission, authors should verify whether the target journal requires a formal ethics approval number or a specific informed-consent statement and add only institutionally accurate information.

4. Results

4.1 Sample and measurement model

The final sample included 424 usable responses. The study reports that all indicator loadings exceeded .70, reliability coefficients exceeded .70, AVE values exceeded .50, and HTMT values were below .85. These results were interpreted as evidence supporting measurement reliability and validity.

Table 2. Measurement-model summary

Criterion	Reported result	Assessment
Outer loadings	All > .70	Indicator reliability
Reliability coefficients	All > .70	Internal consistency
AVE	All > .50	Convergent validity
HTMT	All < .85	Discriminant validity

4.2 Explanatory power

The model yielded R^2 = .499 for employee adaptability (adjusted R^2 = .494) and R^2 = .601 for employee retention (adjusted R^2 = .596). The predictors therefore accounted for 49.9% and 60.1% of variance in the respective endogenous constructs.

Table 3. Coefficient of determination

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Employee Adaptability	0.499	0.494
Employee Retention	0.601	0.596

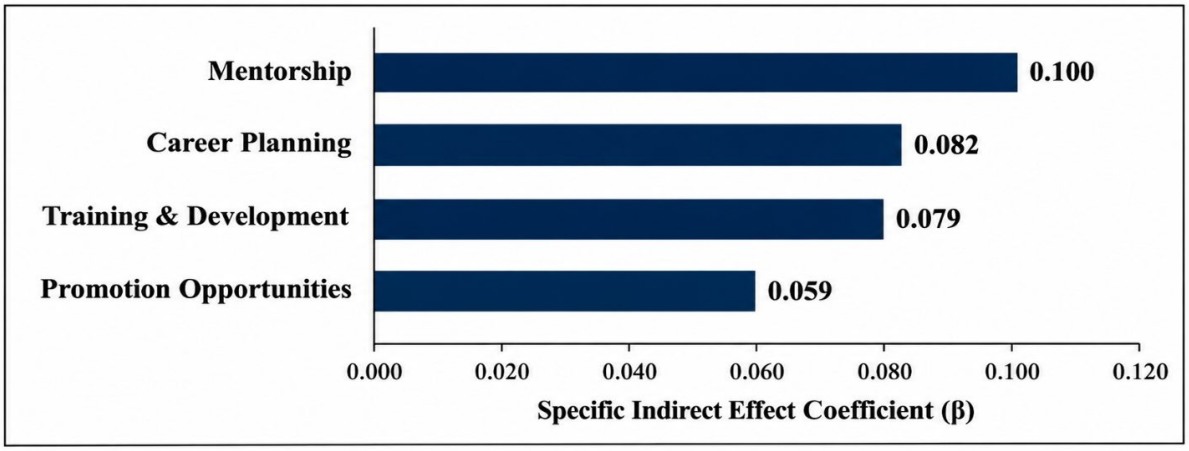
4.3 Specific indirect effects

All four specific indirect effects through employee adaptability were positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$). Mentorship had the largest indirect effect (β = .100), followed by career planning (β = .082), training and development (β = .079), and promotion opportunities (β = .059). Each 95% bootstrap confidence interval excluded zero.

Table 4. Bootstrapped specific indirect effects

Indirect path	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
TD → EA → ER	0.079	0.017	4.782	< .001	Significant
PO → EA → ER	0.059	0.014	4.278	< .001	Significant
CP → EA → ER	0.082	0.016	5.016	< .001	Significant
M → EA → ER	0.1	0.017	5.875	< .001	Significant

Figure 2. Relative magnitude of specific indirect effects



Note. A simple comparative display of indirect-effect coefficients; bars are illustrative, not a new statistical analysis.

Figure 2. Relative magnitude of specific indirect effects

4.4 Direct paths and mediation classification

The study states that the direct paths from career advancement practices to employee retention were positive and statistically significant and that employee adaptability was positively related to retention (β = .307). Taken together with significant indirect effects, this pattern is consistent with complementary partial mediation. The direct path coefficients, their t-statistics, p-values, and confidence intervals must be copied from the study bootstrapping table for a fully auditable journal table; they are not invented here.

Table 5. Hypothesis-testing summary

Hypostudy	Relationship	Thesis-reported conclusion
H1–H4	Four career practices → EA	Positive paths; coefficients in Paper 1
H2	EA → ER	Positive, β = .307; study reports significant
H1a–H1d	Four career practices → ER	Positive and significant per study narrative
H3a–H3d	Four indirect paths via EA	All positive and significant, p < .001

5. Discussion

The results support the proposed mechanism in which employee adaptability forms one pathway linking career advancement practices with employee retention. The model explained 60.1% of the variance in retention, while adaptability accounted for 49.9% of its own variance through the four career advancement practices. The four specific indirect effects were positive and statistically significant, and the results indicate the direct paths as significant as well. This combination is consistent with complementary partial mediation, subject to confirmation of the complete direct-effect table and the same model specification.

Mentorship yielded the largest indirect effect (β = .100). The finding suggests that developmental relationships may connect career practices with retention partly through employees' adaptive capacity. Mentors can offer career guidance, feedback, role modelling, and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). Such resources may help employees respond to changing service expectations and career demands, while also strengthening social connection and perceived support. The result aligns with the broader argument that social support and adaptability matter in hospitality turnover processes (Lee et al., 2021).

Career planning showed the second-largest indirect effect (β = .082). Planning may support employees in

clarifying career direction and anticipating developmental needs. Employees who can see a pathway and take action towards it may be better positioned to manage change and sustain their attachment to the organisation. This interpretation is consistent with self-directed career perspectives (Hall, 2004) and career management research (Baruch, 2006; Guan et al., 2015).

Training and development had a positive indirect effect (β = .079). Training may enhance employees' perceived capability to manage work demands, with adaptability serving as one possible bridge between learning opportunities and retention. The result complements hospitality studies that connect development opportunities with loyalty and intent to stay (Costen & Salazar, 2011). It also resonates with social exchange theory: employees may respond to investments in their development with positive work attitudes (Blau, 1964).

Promotion opportunities had the smallest indirect effect (β = .059), although it remained statistically significant. This indicates that the indirect relationship was positive but comparatively lower in magnitude within the estimated model. Promotion opportunities may support future-oriented motivation and signal organisational investment, but their effect through adaptability may depend on the clarity, fairness, and attainability of promotion pathways. The result should not be read as suggesting that promotions are dispensable.

The employee adaptability-to-retention path (β = .307) is conceptually consistent with career construction theory, which positions adaptability as a resource for coping with transitions and disruptions (Savickas, 1997). Tourism and hospitality employees may face changing tasks, customer expectations, and employment conditions. Adaptive resources may help employees manage such demands and perceive greater capacity to continue in their current roles. Prior studies have connected career adaptability with turnover intentions in hospitality (Rasheed et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021, 2023), and the current findings add a model in which adaptability is explicitly positioned as a mediator between organisational career practices and retention.

The paper also contributes to retention theory by examining a bundle of career practices rather than a single HR intervention. Turnover is a complex process (Hom et al., 2017), and career advancement may be one among several relevant antecedents. The results are consistent with a multi-pathway account: career practices may relate to retention directly through organisational signals and indirectly through employees' adaptive resources. However, because the data are cross-sectional, this interpretation is theoretical rather than a demonstration of temporal mediation. Longitudinal data are needed to establish whether career practices precede adaptability and whether adaptability precedes retention outcomes.

6. Implications and Limitations

6.1 Theoretical implications

The study integrates organisational career advancement practices with employee adaptability and retention in a single empirical model. It extends career construction and adaptability perspectives (Savickas, 1997) by examining organisational practices as antecedents of adaptive resources and retention-related outcomes. It also advances tourism and hospitality retention scholarship by testing four specific indirect effects in a Delhi-NCR sample.

6.2 Managerial implications

Tourism organisations should combine career systems with relational development. Mentoring programmes may be designed with explicit goals, mentor preparation, feedback cycles, and opportunities for career conversations. Career planning should be accessible and revisited, rather than treated as a one-time appraisal activity. Training should be tied to changing work requirements and employees' future roles. Promotion pathways and criteria should be transparent and accompanied by developmental support. These recommendations are not causal prescriptions from an experiment; they are practical implications consistent with the observed associations.

Table 6. Evidence-linked managerial implications

Empirical result	Suggested organisational response
Mentorship indirect effect largest (β = .100)	Strengthen mentoring, coaching, and developmental feedback
Career planning indirect effect (β = .082)	Formalise career conversations and individual development plans
Training indirect effect (β = .079)	Provide continuous learning tied to role and career transitions

Table 6. Evidence-linked managerial implications *(continued)*

Empirical result	Suggested organisational response
Promotion indirect effect (β = .059)	Clarify criteria and provide transparent progression information
EA → ER (β = .307)	Support employees' ability to adapt to change and new demands

6.3 Limitations

The present study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among career advancement practices, employee adaptability, and employee retention. Although the findings indicate statistically significant relationships, longitudinal investigations would provide a more robust understanding of how these associations evolve over time.

Second, the study is geographically confined to the Delhi-NCR region, which may limit the generalisability of its findings to other regions with different economic conditions, organisational structures, and employment practices. Third, the study focuses exclusively on employees in the tourism sector, and therefore, the applicability of the findings to other industries remains uncertain.

Fourth, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire responses may introduce potential response biases, including social desirability bias, perceptual subjectivity, and common method bias. Employees' perceptions of career advancement practices and their adaptability may not necessarily reflect actual organisational policies or behavioural outcomes.

Fifth, the use of a non-probability sampling approach may restrict the representativeness of the sample, despite the adequacy of the collected responses for the statistical analysis. Finally, the study examines four career advancement practices and employee adaptability as a mediating variable, while other potentially influential factors, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, leadership support, compensation, and work-life balance, remain outside the scope of the proposed model. These limitations provide opportunities for further investigation and refinement of the conceptual framework.

5.4 Future Research Avenues

Future research could extend the present study in several directions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between career advancement practices, employee adaptability, and employee retention. First, longitudinal research designs could be employed to examine how career advancement initiatives influence employee adaptability and retention over time, thereby providing stronger evidence regarding temporal relationships. Second, comparative studies across different geographical regions and tourism sub-sectors, including hospitality, travel agencies, tour operations, and destination management organisations, could establish whether the observed relationships remain consistent across diverse organisational contexts. Third, future investigations could incorporate additional mediating and moderating variables, such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, perceived organisational support, psychological empowerment, career motivation, and perceived career opportunities, to examine the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of these relationships.

Furthermore, qualitative research involving interviews, focus groups, and employee narratives could provide deeper insights into how employees perceive mentorship, career planning, training opportunities, and promotion practices in shaping their adaptability and retention decisions. Future studies could also examine differences across demographic and employment characteristics, including age, gender, tenure, employment status, and hierarchical position. Finally, researchers could investigate the role of emerging technologies, digital learning platforms, and AI-enabled career development systems in enhancing employee adaptability and retention. Such extensions would strengthen theoretical understanding and provide more context-sensitive recommendations for human resource management practices within the tourism sector.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the direct and indirect relationships between career advancement practices and employee retention, with employee adaptability serving as a mediating mechanism in the tourism sector in Delhi-NCR. Drawing on 424 usable responses, the

study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the proposed relationships among training and development, promotion opportunities, career planning, mentorship, employee adaptability, and employee retention. The findings indicate that the proposed structural model explains 60.1% of the variance in employee retention, demonstrating substantial explanatory relevance. The analysis further reveals that all four specific indirect effects through employee adaptability are positive and statistically significant. Among these, mentorship exhibits the strongest indirect effect (β = .100), followed by career planning (β = .082), training and development (β = .079), and promotion opportunities (β = .059). These findings suggest that career advancement practices are associated with employee retention partly through their relationship with employees' capacity to adapt to changing work demands, organisational expectations, and professional challenges. The study contributes to the literature on career development, employee adaptability, and workforce retention by highlighting adaptability as a potential mechanism connecting organisational career advancement initiatives with retention outcomes. From a managerial perspective, the findings underscore the importance of structured mentorship, career planning, training opportunities, and transparent promotion systems in supporting employees' professional development and organisational attachment. Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the cross-sectional research design establishes associations rather than causal relationships. Future research may employ longitudinal approaches, comparative sectoral analyses, and broader geographical samples to strengthen the understanding of these relationships and examine their applicability across diverse organisational contexts.

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