

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYEE
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT
AZADEA CASE STUDY

by
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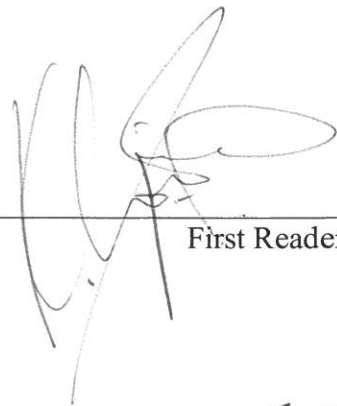
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Mayssa Omar Rizkallah for Master of Human Resources Management
Major: Human Resources Management

Title: Training and development and employee organizational commitment – Azadea Case Study.

Research has been widely focused on measuring productivity and performance as the main outcomes of training & development and minimal study has focused on the understanding of training practices in producing affective organizational commitment especially in a high turnover retail context in Lebanon. This research examined how Training & Development plays a role in the affective organizational commitment of Azadea Group's non-managerial front liners. The paper is qualitative and exploratory in nature and draws on interviews with front liners and shop managers (N=30) from Azadea. The findings of this paper indeed indicate how and why training & development strategies strongly play a role in the organizational commitment of Azadea's non-managerial employees. It also showcases that T&D allows stronger belief in Azadea's mission statement & values, stronger relationships & initiatives in-store and superior loyalty & commitment to Azadea. Finally, this study adds value to Azadea's training & development department, strengthening its position within the group due to the sharing of results with their top management & through research-based recommendations that aim to producing learning activities of higher quality.

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To
My Beloved Family

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To remain competitive in the market, organizations may focus on 3 things: financials, products & people (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). The one function that touches on the professional journey and behavior of people within an organization is that of the Human Resources; and it is highly important for organizations to thrive (Ferris *et al.*, 1999).

One of the most important parts of this function is Training & Development (T&D). Any organization's success or failure highly depends on its employee capabilities. This is exactly why management understood the value of T&D to further develop their people's potential (Elnaga & Imran, 2013) and create a good image of the organization internationally (Jia-Fang, 2010). Mullins (2010) refers to training as an activity led by instructors with the aim of changing "behaviors" or "attitudes". Ideally, training is considered to be an investment, rather than a cost (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger & Smith-Jentsch, 2012).

Training in general provides various benefits for the organization as well as for the employees, and its outcome is highly important. One of the outcomes that is of interest in this study is the increase of employees' organizational commitment (OC), which is the mental and emotional attachment of employees to their organizations (Allen & Meyer, 1990; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

This study examines the case of Azadea, a leading retail company in the Middle East and Africa that operates in various industries like Fashion & Accessories, Food & Beverage, Sporting Goods and Beauty & Cosmetics. The practice of T&D in

the retail industry and other service-related industries is crucial since their success is highly tied to customer service and satisfaction. In order to expose front-liners to customers on a daily basis, it is only fair to train them and ensure optimal success. The commercial team within Azadea has a high turnover rate of 19.25% in 2018 comparing to 16% in 2017 and it sometimes witnesses employee disengagement due to the tiring nature of work, and demands extensive physical and moral efforts. In contrast, Azadea, unlike many other retail organizations operating in Beirut, invests in T&D initiatives and has a structured academy that consists of functional and behavioral classroom trainings as well as in-store trainings mostly targeted at front-liners since they are at the center of the operations. Azadea believes in employee development and has a team of 14 Training & Development professionals across the region and each is responsible for delivering 20 hours of training/FTE/year. Also, the T&D department's mission is to facilitate the succession planning of front-liners through customized personal development plans and to provide them with exceptional learning experiences in their Azadea journey to increase their sense of belonging.

Although a lot of factors play a role in the commitment and engagement of Azadea's front-liners; this study will particularly provide insight on the value and return of T&D initiatives carried in Azadea in terms of employees' organizational commitment. Based on that, an action plan will be designed and delivered to the T&D department on how to reinforce and/or improve training practices in a way that fosters further organizational commitment. Resources are being invested in this department and it is useful to at least see how these resources are adding to Azadea's employees from an engagement and organizational commitment perspective. As per Holton (2005), organizations expect some kind of return on training investments.

This research is also useful in this slow Lebanese economic time because

organizations have the tendency to reduce training costs when they are not doing well (Elnaga & Imran, 2013) and it is essential now more than ever to recognize the value of T&D and how it is an investment rather than a cost, and also a means to engage and increase the sense of belonging of employees to the organization.

Research Goal

The aim of this case study is to explore how Training & Development plays a role in the organizational commitment of Azadea's non-managerial front liners. Based on that, this study will help us (1) identify a set of recommendations to Azadea's T&D department on which existing practices are engaging employees' commitment and which need reinforcement, (2) identify training areas and practices that need improvement, and (3) highlight the value and role of T&D in fostering a sense of commitment among Azadea's front-liners, in alignment with the mission and vision of the organization. This study will help the T&D department prove to the top management the value of T&D in Azadea and thus increase their commitment towards continuous T&D investments.

Research Problem

This study looks to fill the gap in the literature on the role of T&D on organizational commitment. It differs from prior ones in the following points:

- It focuses on a specific context and sample: Lebanon, retail industry & non-managerial front liners. As per the literature review below, the latter combined context chosen has not been studied.
- It uses a qualitative method, in contrast to the previous research using a quantitative approach. This study serves to describe how and why T&D plays a role in

the commitment of front liners in Azadea.

- It studies and advances understanding of training practices in producing affective commitment in contrast to previous research that has been predominantly focused on measuring productivity and performance as the main outcomes.

Research Questions

The study's main objective is to answer the research question: "How does T&D play a role in the organizational commitment of non-managerial front liners?" through the below sub-questions:

- What is the front-liners' perception of T&D generally within Azadea?
- How does T&D affect the reasons employees stay or leave the organization?
- In an organization where turnover and disengagement are high, how does T&D shape behaviors and attitude towards work and play a role in the organizational commitment of non-managerial front liners?
- Which training programs play a role in the organizational commitment of front liners? And why?
- How can T&D leaders adopt a training strategy that harnesses stronger employees' organizational commitment? What can be improved, reinforced and/or changed in the training programs delivered?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Training & Development

People's development through T&D programs is considered to be a crucial part of the Human Resources Management (HRM) in organizations (Elnaga & Imran, 2013). The constant publication of training articles in the Annual Review of Psychology since 1971 shows the worthiness of training in organizations (Campbell, 1971; Goldstein, 1980; Wexley, 1984; Latham, 1988; Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992; Salas & Cannon-Bowers 2001). The training literature was described by Campbell (1971, 565). Moreover, he added it was "faddish to an extreme". Amongst other critics, Kraiger, Ford & Salas (1993) also said that existing training literature was outdated. However, years later, Salas & Cannon-Bowers (2001) admitted that the training research has been making remarkable progress and is now greatly evolving.

Training & Development definitions are various. Some define training as the concept of organizations growing their people's competence in order to perform current and future tasks (Guest, 1997). Others see it as a means to motivate people (Barret & O'Connell, 2001). As per Goldstein & Ford (2002), training is an organized approach to upgrade the potential and productivity of people, teams and corporations. Development, on the other hand, is the collection of new skills with the aim of individual progress (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009) However as per Aguinis & Kraiger (2009), it is hard to differentiate between training & development, therefore, they used the term "training" to refer to training and development concepts in their study.

The management in organizations perceives training differently. Some view it

as the solution to all challenges (Chaudron, 1996; Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2004) and others view it as a cost for corporations (Costa & Giannecchini, 2005). Aguinis & Kraiger (2009) for example demonstrated the benefits of T&D activities on individuals, teams, organizations and consequently on the economic growth. They also state that with the competition and never-ending changes in the market, organizations are recommended to see training as a benefit sooner than later. As per Khawaja & Nadeem (2013), to sustain successful employees within organizations, investment in T&D should be constant. In addition to training developing behavioral and technical skills, it also upgrades employees' creativity, decision-making and productivity (David, 2006). In a service related industry, employee training is centered around effective customer service (Hollenbeck, Derue & Guzzo, 2004). In addition, Chen *et al.* (2004) stated that training activities help decrease people's experienced anxiety and annoyance on the job. The benefits of T&D go a long way and have been demonstrated by many authors like Harline & Ferrell (1996), Becker (1964), Champathes (2006), Conrade, Woods & Ninemeier (1994) and London (1989).

As per Patel (2010), US organizations invest more than \$135 billion per year on training and development activities. For example, the Special Operations Force of the U.S. Navy SEALs are known for their strong training programs (Clardy 2005). Another example would be PricewaterhouseCoopers PWC that increased its investment in T&D to \$120 million per year, despite cutting costs. Also, Booz Allen Hamilton highly believes in training and developing its people (Fox, 2003). Other industries that use training extensively are the aviation and the military. The latter investments show that organizations today are keen on investing big amounts on training because they believe in its effectiveness and the multiplicity of positive outcomes such as better competitiveness, more performing & dedicated talent and thus, improved bottom line

results (Collings & Mellahi 2009). Finally, there are still some unanswered questions in the training field and future research is crucial and recommended (Salas *et al.*, 2012).

Organizational Commitment

Many authors have critically studied the concept of organizational commitment, with the majority of it coming from US and European researchers (Gutierrez, Candela & Carver, 2012; Huang, You & Tsai, 2012; Meyer, 1997; Meyer, Stanley, Jackson, McInnis, Maltin & Sheppard, 2012; Cohen, 1993; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Wayne, Casper, Matthews & Allen, 2013; Dirani, 2009). It is mainly a result from the relation between people and their organization (Scholl, 2003). As per Mowday, Porter & Steers (1979), organizational commitment refers to the employees' belief in the organization's goal and the desire to see it thrive. Also, as per Sheldon (1971), OC is an attitude that is represented by an alignment between the person's identity and goals with the organization's and a desire to sustain a membership in order to achieve these goals. Buchanan (1974) also defines OC as an internalization of the organization's mission & values combined with an intense sense of loyalty & belonging demonstrated by a "wish to stay" with an entity. The research questions posed in this research attempt to study the terms used to define organizational commitment such as loyalty, belonging, taking initiatives, internalization of values and belief in mission which are common and emerging in almost all the definitions in the literature review. Employee organizational commitment is important if organizations aim to succeed in such a competitive market and it is highly associated with improved performance, staying with the same organization, motivation within a job, and lower absenteeism (Ketchand & Strawser, 2001) and knowing that Azadea does operate in a very competitive and challenging retail Lebanese market, there is indeed a need to

examine the front liners' attitude towards their organizations. OC also allows employees to push beyond their limit and take initiatives (Ramus & Steger, 2000) which is crucial in the retail industry where new and creative ideas need to constantly be implemented to keep up with the changes happening in this industry such as online shopping, virtual reality shopping and bots in-shop. Human resource practices strongly impact employee organizational commitment and motivation and thus organizational effectiveness (Boxall & Macky, 2009).

As per Jafri (2010), "Organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct" (p. 64). The three-component model of organizational commitment represents 3 general themes: affective, continuance and normative (Meyer & Allen 1997). Affective commitment reflects a desire to stay in the organization and a positive emotional attachment to it. Continuance commitment reflects a "need" to stay in the organization due to the recognized costs of leaving it. Normative commitment represents the "obligation" to stay in an organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This model has been highly common and favored since its introduction (Wasti, 2005). Dunham, Grube & Castaneda (1994) stated that the affective commitment is the main theme that helps measure organizational commitment. Therefore, this paper will only study the affective commitment of front liners following training activities.

Training & Development and Organizational Commitment

Salas *et al.* (2012) posit that training is a "system" and it is very important to give attention to what happens after training programs. As Keep and Rainbird (2000) put it, organizations tend to overlook trainings' evaluation. The benefits that training provides are numerous indeed. However, their validation through research is important. One of the most crucial connections to prove has been that of training's effect on

organizational commitment (Roehl & Swerdlow, 1999). Though Elnaga & Imran (2013) and Aguinis & Kraiger (2009) argue that not much attention has been given to that issue on an organizational level.

Human Resource Development (HRD) studies confirm that T&D activities' outcomes are correlated with advantages on individual and organizational levels (Buckley & Caple, 2007). According to Brum (2010), Owen (2006) and Deckop *et al.* (2006) the organization's turnover costs will decrease through the implementation of training that is associated with an increase in employees' commitment. Moreover, the development of employees' capabilities results in improved enthusiasm and self-esteem (Sheeba, 2011). It has been suggested by many authors like Meyer & Allen (1997); Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002); Owoyemi, Oyelere, Elegbede & Gbajumo-Sheriff (2011); Velada & Caetano (2007); Holton (2005); Hutchings, Zhu, Cooper, Zhang & Shao (2009) that not only does T&D impact employees' technical skills, but it also impacts their motivation, positive attitude towards work and organizational commitment. Moreover, it affects job satisfaction (Costen & Salazar, 2011; Atif *et al.*, 2010) and research has connected job satisfaction to organizational commitment and both play an important role in decreasing the intent of employees to leave organizations (Costen, Salazar & Antun, 2006; Ghiselli, LaLopa & Bai, 2001).

In addition, T&D opportunities send a strong message to the employees that they are cared for (Aguinis, 2009). They often perceive it as a "gift" from the organization (Barrett & O'Connell, 2001). Gouldner (1960) refers to this as the norm of "reciprocity" which makes employees feel that they are in debt and thus, produce more efforts and increase their sense of commitment and devotion towards the organization (Brum, 2010; Lee & Bruvold, 2010; Tannenbaum *et al.*, 1991). For example, leadership trainings improve participants' drive, organization involvement and engagement (Dvir

et al., 2002) and a study carried in Norway showcased that investment in T&D leads to higher job fulfillment (Kalleberg & Rognes, 2000). Also, in a study attempting to study the relation between accountants' training and commitment, it has been found that training does indeed result in positive behaviors and increased loyalty to the organization (Saks, 1996).

A lot of studies about the effect of T&D and HRM practices on performance and productivity have been conducted (Purcell *et al.*, 2003). We acknowledge this matter's importance since it increases organizational performance however, when training improves intangible factors such as commitment; this in its turn also improves performance on-the-job (Owoyemi *et al.*, 2011). Vice-versa, Rowden & Conine (2005) state trained front liners deal better with customers and this improved performance in turn increases organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Tsai *et al.*, 2007)

The Lebanese Context

Most of the literature on HRD have been US- or European-centered (McLean & McLean, 2001), and those in the Arab world are insufficient and lacking (Afiouni, Karam & El-Hajj, 2013), and most of them are only theoretical (Dirani, 2012). This calls for further thorough training research in the Middle East to validate Western-based frameworks and/or propose ones that apply here (Tlaiss & Dirani, 2015). It is important to state what characterizes Lebanon as a country from a socio demographic perspective which affects the definition of HRD and L&D in the Lebanese context.

As per McLean & McLean (2001), HRD definitions do vary from one country to another. As part of the Middle East, Lebanon is the most westernized and individualistic when it comes to lifestyle & family and work values (Dirani, 2009), however, comparing to Western countries, the Lebanese society still believes in social

conformity rather than originality and innovation (Jabbra, 1989) which affects the learning culture in organizations in a sense that learning aims to implementing new unorthodox creative ideas in the workplace and typically, the Lebanese workforce still resists being unconventional in the way of doing things. Also, Lebanon is known for its power distance culture, uncertainty avoidance (Hostfede, 1984) and patriarchal culture where the family responds to the father's rules. The latter means that in the workplace, obeying to authority is still prevalent which limits innovative thinking and makes it harder to implement a real learning culture as employees are used to taking little or no initiatives and find it hard to make independent decisions without going back to their superiors. Lebanese employees are not naturally challenged to advance their careers unless it is related to family factors; that are why employers must keep in mind the motivator that pushes employees to learn and develop which is providing for their families (Khalaf, 1987).

On another note, the quality of the educational system in Lebanon is superior to its counterparts in the Middle East and the Lebanese workforce is considered to be overeducated for what the work market has to offer which has led to thousands of youngsters emigrating to find better job opportunities. This resulted in the "brain drain" that highly affected the overall skills that the country has highly decreased its competitiveness (Hamdan, 1999); this is exactly why the organizations must understand the importance of Talent Development to fill these gaps and increase their competitive advantage. However, the investment in L&D is a recent concept in Middle East and especially Lebanon (Budhwar & Mellahi, 2007).

Human resources (HR) leaders in Lebanon are trying to upgrade HRD activities. However, they are still at their early stages of development. Trainings in the Middle East are still conducted in an ad hoc way and focused on short-term results

(Dirani, 2012). In Tlaiss & Dirani's (2015) study, most of the women in Lebanon (80%) stated that their organizations do not have a department only dedicated to T&D and access to training is hard. Therefore, there also seems to be gender discrimination when it comes to training opportunities. In fact, as per Jabbra (1989), respect and attentions in Lebanese organizations are given more to men and individuals with better social status. In Azadea's case, this is not salient as training opportunities are equally given to all employees but it is still important to understand the general context. Tlaiss & Dirani (2015) showcased the perception of training as an expense rather than an investment in Lebanese organizations. As a result, top management's awareness about the importance of continuous T&D needs to be raised, hence this research for Azadea Group. Finally, in an attempt to measure the relation between a learning culture and organizational commitment in the Lebanese banking sector, Dirani (2009) proved that there is indeed a positive correlation.

The Retail Industry Context

The retail industry in the US plays a huge role in the economy (Farfan, 2011). US retailers highly focus on the development of their employees' selling skills to thrive and ensure optimal customer satisfaction since their success is mostly based on that. They invest big amounts in sales training every year but fail to explore their outcome, which is essential (Tan & Newman, 2013). The prosperity of the retail sector calls for successful HR strategies (Chakraborty, 2007; Chella, 2002) especially that labor turnover in the retail service industry is one of the highest and employee satisfaction has also been an issue of interest (Hurst & Good 2009).

As per Korn Ferry Hay Group survey in 2016 that drew on replies from HR and total reward professionals at 55 key retailers, the median turnover rate globally is

65% for retail employees and the most common reason for the exit of employees is the lack of career advancement. In fact, the turnover rate is mainly a result of job dissatisfaction and lack of commitment mostly caused by many stressors in the retail industry such as lack of job enrichment, tiring nature of retail and long hours (Ongori, 2007).

Retailers should pay attention to this issue because if they increase employee engagement by only 5%, there would be an increase of revenues by 3% (Hetu, 2016). The Hay Group study states that “training” should be a key area of focus to decrease the turnover rates in retail which is highly aligned with what this research is looking at. For example, the training department at Mattress Giant implemented a strong learning strategy in 2005 that resulted in the decrease of the turnover rate from 300% to 75% (Chief Learning Officer, 2008).

It is important to know what satisfies front liners because the more they are satisfied, the more their attitude and behaviors will enhance to deliver good customer service (Rust, Stewart, Miller & Pielack, 1996). Organizations must constantly look at where their employees stand when it comes to organizational commitment and what drivers increase it. For example, in 2015, Khatri & Gupta studied the concept of HRM practices’ effects on organizational commitment in Delhi’s retail sector and succeeded in proving the positive correlation.

The apparel retail industry in Lebanon has been expanding due to the presence of tourists and expatriates in the country. In 2012, the apparel’s market size increased by 3.9%. Nevertheless, it decreased in 2013 by 4.3% due to the economic and political situation in Lebanon (BankMed Analysis Report, 2014). When it comes to HRM, there is no reliable data on the employee turnover rate in the Lebanese retail industry; however we recognize that Azadea’s turnover rate of 20% is less than the global one

which may be explained by the abundance of learning opportunities, depending on the study's results. Regardless of this sector's importance in Lebanon, no research related to its HRD activities has been conducted prior.

Value & Contribution

There have been no published studies on the role of T&D on employees' organizational commitment in Lebanon and more specifically in the retail industry. This indicates the need to conduct such research and highlight the affective outcome of T&D in a high turnover retail context that is considered wide in Lebanon.

First, the relationship between T&D and organizational commitment has been studied before, as shown in the above literature review. However, it has been studied in various countries and industries and it is important to note that the review cannot limit itself to (1) western countries because the Lebanese culture is widely different from others (Dirani, 2006) neither to (2) general industries as the nature of the retail industry is different and its people perceive things differently.

Second, the above literature has been focused on measuring rather than identifying and describing. This gap in the literature is crucial in studying such a subject because it does not explain the process through which T&D plays a role in the organizational commitment of employees. Also, it is important to be close to the group studied and not generalize findings. Authors like Lee & Bruvold (2010) and Costen & Salazar (2011) stated that conducting interviews with employees and understanding which training programs are important in future research would add a lot of value to the knowledge on the role of T&D.

Third, the above literature provides evidence that there is a theoretical relationship between T&D practices and organizational commitment, and this study

aims to understand its nature at Azadea and provide a roadmap on how to specifically improve the T&D practice in Azadea through a clear action plan by the end of it.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

- *Ontological Position*

In this study, I believe that reality is not already constructed and rigid. It is rather constructed by the people of Azadea and their social context. Reality in this study is flexible and highly dependent on its participants.

- *Epistemological Position*

In this study, my epistemology position is interpretivist. Knowledge is extracted from Azadea non-managerial front liners and it is highly dependent on their individual thoughts, opinions and interactions.

- *Methodological Position*

The method that best suits this study's research questions is the constructivist approach and qualitative method that is used to collect and analyze the data. As a researcher, I was interested in studying and extracting rich data on the process of how, why and when T&D adds value to the non-managerial front liners of Azadea in terms of organizational commitment.

Data Collection

Sampling

In order to answer this study's research questions, the sample chosen is (1) 15 non-managerial front liners from Azadea (sales associates) that operate in diversified regions and stores and (2) 15 shop managers because they are the ones who can provide

us with insights on the employees' attitudes and behaviors after trainings the best being close to them on the ground. The sample includes participants of various genders, age and years of service in the company.

To optimize the data collected, the selected employees have at least attended 3 trainings during their journey in Azadea and they attended the interviews after having participated in a training program at least a month prior to the data collection. Table 1 summarizes the sample characteristics.

Table 1

Participants' Sample Characteristics

Identifier	Gender	Age	Title	Shop	Length of experience in Azadea	Number of trainings attended
P1	Male	23	Sales Associate	Decathlon Le Mall Dbayeh	15 months	4
P2	Female	25	Sales Associate	Punt Roma B. Souks	11 months	5
P3	Female	19	Sales Associate	Calzedonia Le Mall Sin el Fil	11 months	3
P4	Female	22	Sales Associate	Stradivarius Beirut Souks	2 years	5
P5	Male	21	Sales Associate	Massimo Dutti ABC Verdun	18 months	5
P6	Female	25	Sales Associate	Oysho Kaslik	9 months	5
P7	Female	24	Sales Associate	Calzedonia City Mall	18 months	5
P8	Male	22	Sales Associate	Sunglass Hut City Mall	2.2 years	4
P9	Female	23	Sales Associate	Sunglass Hut ABC Verdun	6 years	5
P10	Male	23	Sales Associate	Zara Home ABC Verdun	15 months	4
P11	Male	25	Sales Associate	Stradivarius Beirut City Center	12 months	4
P12	F	22	Sales Associate	Intimissimi Le Mall Dbayeh	11 months	3
P13	Male	20	Sales Associate	Massimo Dutti Le Mall Dbayeh	12 months	4
P14	Female	21	Sales Associate	Massimo Dutti Kaslik	12 months	4

Table 1 – “Continued”

Identifier	Gender	Age	Title	Shop	Length of experience in Azadea	Number of trainings attended
P15	Female	25	Sales Associate	Salsa Jeans Beirut Souks	3 years	5
P16	Female	39	Shop Manager	Zara Beirut Souks	10 years	NA
P17	Female	29	Shop Manager	Stradivarius Beirut Souks	5 years	NA
P18	Male	32	Shop Manager	Decathlon Le Mall Dbayeh	2 years	NA
P19	Male	26	Shop Manager	Boggi ABC Verdun	6 years	NA
P20	Female	27	Shop Manager	Salsa Jeans Kaslik	4 years	NA
P21	Female	28	Shop Manager	Intimissimi Le Mall Dbayeh	6 years	NA
P22	Male	27	Shop Manager	Stradivarius Beirut City Center	8 years	NA
P23	Male	28	Shop Manager	Gap Beirut Souks	5 years	NA
P24	Male	30	Shop Manager	Bershka Kaslik	7 years	NA
P25	Female	27	Shop Manager	Bershka ABC Achrafieh	9 years	NA
P26	Female	31	Shop Manager	Calzedonia Choueifat Mall	2 years	NA
P27	Female	27	Shop Manager	Massimo Dutti Kaslik	5 years	NA
P28	Female	32	Shop Manager	Gap Le Mall Dbayeh	7 years	NA
P29	Male	26	Shop Manager	Pull & Bear Le Mall Sin El Fil	6 years	NA
P30	Female	30	Shop Manager	Pull & Bear Le Mall Dbayeh	7 years	NA

Recruitment Process

All the participants were recruited in-house from Azadea through a formal email invitation that thoroughly explains the objective of the study, its benefits, who has access to the data, why they have been chosen and its strict confidential & anonymous aspect. The latter was reinforced in the informed consent document that they signed upon approval. The researcher got their contact information from the company’s

Address Book that is accessible by the researcher internally and by all Azadea employees. Interviews were scheduled at their convenience and took place outside Azadea's premises at a time and place of their convenience to make them feel comfortable and ensure anonymity.

Data Collection Methods

In this study, the method that was used to collect data was interviews. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews (See Appendix I) were conducted with (1) 15 non-managerial front liners to explore closely their attitudes, beliefs and opinions about T&D's role in their organizational commitment and (2) with 15 shop managers as they work closely with sales associates every day and can provide valuable insights. This is what we call triangulation of information. The interviews were conducted mainly in English but both of them switched between English and Arabic during the interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in English for analysis.

Data Analysis

This study adopted the exploratory content analysis where the researcher immersed themselves in the data collected and allowed the categories to flow from the data. Where current literature is limited in the context desired, this data analysis method is the most appropriate (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). In fact, the benefit of the conventional approach is that information and data are captured directly from participants without imposing theoretical and predetermined categories.

To report themes and make sense out of the data collected, thematic analysis method was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method used in this paper is very similar to that of the qualitative analysis and coding of Afiouni's study (2014). The method entails discerning patterns related to T&D's role in the organizational commitment of the sample within the interview by first becoming familiar with the data through reading

the interview transcripts multiple times. Then, expressions and statements for every question were identified and grouped into relevant formed categories. Whenever possible, similar categories were merged to reduce the number of categories. The themes are data-driven but also related to the theoretical framework that operationalizes organizational commitment the same way the questions are asked in the interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The themes and categories identified through the analysis of the 30 interviews are captured in Table 2, which constitutes the thematic template. The quotes in the table are to validate and illustrate the categories. Also, additional quotes have been added in the below results to strengthen the category.

T&D Perception

Seven categories were identified under the key theme of “T&D perception”. The question asked was “How do you perceive T&D within Azadea?” and “How do your employees perceive T&D within Azadea?” The categories were not only derived from the answers to this question. Throughout the interviews, participants stated expressions that represented how they perceive T&D.

Professional Growth

Participants stated that they perceive T&D as a way to improve their customer service skills on-the-job and their communication skills with others. They believe that the latter helped them grow the ladder within Azadea and reach higher positions.

- I consider T&D to be the base to everything: How to behave, how to perceive things at work, how to communicate with others and how others perceive you.
- Trainings are very beneficial for individuals especially if somebody is lacking a specific skill. Training professionals make sure to fill the gaps (Sara).

Gift-Valuable Benefit

Participants suggested that T&D is crucial in Azadea; they perceive it as a gift

and it is a benefit that they did not have in their previous work experiences. At multiple points, many compared their old learning experience or their friends' to Azadea's.

- I worked for other companies like Retail Group and they did not have anything called training. And everybody knows that before joining Azadea, I really wanted to be part of it because I always had this impression that they care about their people and invest in them. And indeed when I joined, I understood that it's true.

- T&D is very special because not all companies have a T&D department especially in the retail industry. My friends in other companies do not attend any training.

Emotional Connection

Interviewees used words and expressions that expressed emotions when talking about T&D in Azadea. From what they said, it does seem that T&D creates in them a feeling of happiness and attachment.

- T&D helped me love Azadea more.
- If it wasn't for T&D, we would have been nothing (laughs). They really care about us.

Loyalty & Commitment

Participants expressed that T&D is one factor that would shape their decision to stay with Azadea and not leave it when asked "How do you think T&D would impact someone's decision to stay or leave an organization?" Many talked about situations where they were about to leave the organization but thought twice because of the benefit of trainings and managers validated this by talking about the lack of turnover because of trainings.

- I felt like there's a department likes T&D that got my back no matter what. So this is where I changed my decision of leaving and decided to stay and wait for

what's next in my Azadea journey.

- When the employees feel the progress in their performance, they will think twice before leaving the company. I know this because I was once an employee and I personally never left Azadea for this reason.

Informal Recruitment

Participants mentioned that they would recommend Azadea to their friends/acquaintances and T&D is one of the benefits that they would talk about to others to attract them to the organization. Being exposed to trainings in Azadea creates in them a feeling of pride and the need to share it with their entourage.

- For example, when I am sitting with my friends during university breaks, we all talk about our companies and when it's my turn, I always make sure to mention how great Azadea is and how much it invests in learning opportunities. I tell them how great the T&D and HR department are.

- Actually let me tell you a story. Before I joined Azadea, my sister was there and she always used to tell me to join Azadea because the trainings they provide are amazing. And when I joined and started attending trainings; I understood what she meant and she was totally right. Therefore, I now do the same with my friends.

Driver of Initiatives

The front-liners' managers clearly stated at several points when answering the question "How do trainings help your employees take more initiatives?" that, after trainings, their staff's motivation is translated into implementing new out-of-the box ideas that drive others' engagement and solve problems in the store.

- ...This is where we notice initiatives in the stores when they come with new ideas to improve the workflow and enhance the sales.

- Employees tend to apply what they learned recently in order to test and see

what they are capable of and this always leads to many initiatives that enhance the store. Such as the creation of one of the employees of an internal competition that boosts the sales and increase the VOC Rating.

Table 2

Thematic Template

Theme	Categories	Quotes from interviews
T&D Perception		<i>"Trainings are very beneficial for individuals. Especially if somebody is lacking specific skills, training professionals make sure to fill this gap."</i>
	Professional Growth	<i>In "The Exceptional Customer Service" training, I learned a lot of techniques like the funnel technique that changed the way I deal with customers"</i>
		<i>"Employees in Azadea rely on T&D to enhance their performance in order to reach higher positions."</i>
	Gift-Valuable Benefit	<i>"T&D in Azadea is every special because not all companies have a T&D department especially in the retail industry. My friends in other companies do not attend any training"</i>
		<i>"My employees are appreciative to the company's efforts in helping them grow and develop their skills"</i>
	Emotional Connection	<i>"When I started attending trainings, I started appreciating the company more and I actually felt that they care about me"</i>
	<i>"Trainings motivate us... I don't know what is the secret but it is true!"</i>	
	Loyalty and Commitment	<i>"I had an interview in a company for a social media position and the pay offered was very good/ But honestly I thought that I will not find there the trainings I am being offered here, therefore I decided to stay in Azadea"</i>
		<i>"When the employees benefit from training, they think twice before leaving Azadea. I know this because I was once an employee and I personally never left Azadea for this reason"</i>
	Informal Recruitment	<i>"I always recommend Azadea and try to help others to get in. & I surely mention trainings as a benefit, in fact, every time I attend a training, I tell all my friends about it!"</i>
		<i>"Yes I recommend Azadea and for sure I mention T&D because if someone has the will to develop their skills & knowledge, they will definitely care about the availability of trainings."</i>

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Table 2 - "Continued"

Theme	Categories	Quotes from interviews
	Driver of initiatives	<p>"After attending trainings, employees feel more involved in the shop and ready to apply what they learned"</p> <hr/> <p>"Trainings let them think outside the box, this is where we notice new initiatives in the store coming from them"</p>
T&D and alignment with mission	Emotional attachment	<p>"After being introduced to the mission in the training, I felt like it entered my mind and my heart"</p> <hr/> <p>"Azadea's main goal is customer centricity and I can ensure you that it has become our goal too"</p>
	Technical Guidance	<p>"Trainings like Exceptional Customer Service and Art of Customer Satisfaction helped me know how to reach the mission of Azadea"</p> <hr/> <p>"The tools provided by T&D are so practical that they can be applied on-the-job to give exceptional customer service"</p>
	Motivator	<p>"What motivated me is the certificate I got after the customer service training and this pushes you to give more to Azadea and help it reach its mission"</p> <hr/> <p>"T&D provides an –entertaining and exciting way of life- for us and this pushes us to replicate this experience to the customers"</p>
		<p>"Trainings make me happy and being happy affects the experience that I am going to give to customers..."</p>
T&D and internalization of Azadea's values	Indirect Reinforcement	<p>"The most important value that T&D reinforces is teamwork because of the methods used in the training. They always encourage team bonding and activities"</p> <hr/> <p>"T&D increases the employees' motivation and this motivation translates into the value of Passion"</p> <hr/> <p>"My employees feel more passionate because they feel values by the company and they become more accountable because they know more"</p>
	Values Ambassador	<p>"T&D really helps a lot in the application of Azadea values. In fact, I know and live by Azadea values because of T&D"</p> <hr/> <p>"I wouldn't have been aware of Azadea's values if it wasn't for T&D. They are the first people who brief us about the values, their definition and even how to apply them"</p> <hr/> <p>"T&D were always the reminder of the values. Silly example: The training room is full of the values written on the walls so this really helps"</p>
T&D and attitude with colleagues	Positive Energy	<p>"T&D makes us more motivated and passionate about our work and this reflects on our attitude in the store with others, we become much more positive."</p>

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Table 2 - "Continued"

Theme	Categories	Quotes from interviews
		<i>"My energy due to any development opportunity increases so much and I reflect it back amongst everyone in the shop and energy is contagious"</i>
	Enhanced attitude	<i>"The trainings introduce us to Azadea's code of conduct and when it is reinforced, your behaviors with your colleagues become more professional, ethical, respectful..."</i> <i>"The communication skills training really affected my relationships with my colleagues especially that I used to say Yes to everything. Now I became more assertive with them"</i>
	Driver of knowledge sharing	<i>"They say sharing is caring and there is no better feeling than sharing what I learned with my friends in the store"</i> <i>"Whenever they attend a training, employees come back to the store and share the knowledge with the rest of the team which creates nice vibes in the store"</i>
Key Training programs	Effective Communication Skills	<i>"What is so strong about Effective Communication Skills is the fact that it affected not only how I work but also my personal life [...] This is what made me attached to Azadea"</i> <i>"It's definitely Effective Communication skills because the learning stays with you at Azadea and outside of it"</i>
	Customer Service programs	<i>"ECS is super important in my Azadea journey, I am very exposed to customers and these trainings send us a message that Azadea wants us to be the best version of ourselves"</i> <i>"The training that really really influenced me and made me love Azadea more is ECS because I came back to the floor super confident with dealing with customers"</i>
	Orientation	<i>"From an attachment perspective, Orientation is the one that added the most value because it helped me know the culture of Azadea and it turned out to be a great one"</i> <i>"This program is very important because it creates a sense of belonging and pride in the new joiner which is carried all along in their Azadea journey"</i>
T&D areas for improvement	Increase of non-managerial trainings	<i>"We would want more trainings that can be applied not only on the job but also in our personal lives. Make us feel that you are investing in us for us not only Azadea"</i> <i>"I don't like the fact that the training library is divided between "managerial" & "non managerial". There are a lot of trainings addressed only to managers that the staff will benefit a lot from"</i>
	Increase of in-store trainings	<i>"I would like to see the trainers more on the floor discussing with the staff what they would like to learn about or new ideas..."</i>

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Table 2 - "Continued"

Theme	Categories	Quotes from interviews
		<i>"I would like to suggest you delivering trainings in-store instead of HQ's classroom. The employees will feel that Azadea is being more empathetic towards them when T&D delivers in the store"</i>
	Increase of collaboration with managers	<i>"Why not T&D collaborate more with managers and hands them part of the T&D responsibility on the floor?"</i> <i>"I think T&D should give the managers the opportunity to also evaluate progress of the employees because we are the ones with them every day"</i>

T&D and Alignment with Mission

Participants & managers were asked whether or not T&D affects the staff's contribution to Azadea's organizational mission statement and how. The analysis of this question resulted in 3 categories.

Emotional Attachment

Participants showcased an emotional attachment to the mission statement and complete readiness to go the extra mile to help Azadea reach it.

- I want the customer to feel that Azadea is the best company.
- I try my best to keep the mission of Azadea at heart of everything I do

because I care.

Technical Guidance

Participants made it clear that if it wasn't for T&D, they will have not been ready to reach the mission of Azadea, even if they wanted.

- Without T&D, I wouldn't have known how to work towards it....
- Of course employees contribute to the mission statement by applying the

skills and info they gain in trainings.

Motivator

Participants focused on the fact that the trainings they attend create a positive feeling in them that drives them to replicate the “exciting” experience given to them, to the end customers which is Azadea’s main goal of existence.

- Employees become more passionate while assisting the customers after learning new things.

T&D and Application of Azadea Values

The analysis of the question about the application of Azadea’s four values to both staff and managers resulted in three categories.

Indirect Reinforcement

Azadea believes in four values: Accountability, Passion, Integrity and Teamwork. Participants expressed statements that confirm T&D’s role in indirectly affecting the day-to-day application of Azadea’s values. For example, the fact that all the activities done in training are done in teams, reinforces the teamwork value. Also, the fact that trainings provide knowledge and trainers trust the trainees with the knowledge, reinforces the value of accountability.

- Employees who feel engaged when attending trainings feel the urge to apply Azadea’s value of accountability.

Values Ambassador

Participants stated at multiple stages that aside of everything, T&D is the main department that raises others’ awareness and reinforces the values of Azadea directly. They believe that the orientation introduces the values and the values discovery training explains what every value means and how employees should live them.

- All the trainings increase the awareness of employees on Azadea values and

how they should align their behaviors with it. Also, T&D always knows how to integrate the values in all the trainings.

- Some people have these values but do not know how to apply them in store so really T&D always gives us relevant examples on how to apply every value.

T&D and Attitude with Colleagues

The researcher identified three categories under the theme of “T&D and attitude with colleagues”. The question asked was “How does T&D affect your relationships and attitude with your colleagues?” and “How do trainings affect your employees’ relationships and attitude with their colleagues?”

Positive Energy

Participants stated that their attitude with their peers become very positive after trainings due to the motivation they gain in learning opportunities. They come back to the store full of energy able to transform the atmosphere in the shop from negative or neutral to positive & enthusiastic.

- The positive vibes transmitted during trainings are carried by the teams to the shops. They tell their colleagues about the experience and encourage them to attend the trainings as well.

- Really! My energy due to any development opportunity increases so much and I reflect it back amongst everyone in the shop and energy is contagious.

Enhanced Attitude

Many interviewees referred at multiple points to the “Communication Skills” training and how it highly helped them in enhancing their attitude with their colleagues in the store. This learning experience helped them manage conflicts more effectively, listen better and deal with different personalities.

- So these trainings really facilitated my way of communication with other and solved conflicts in-store.
- After providing the needed trainings for these employees, we can see and measure the impact of the trainings on their attitude and the relation between them and their colleagues.

Driver of Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing within the stores after trainings is something very common that all employees and managers said that it happens. They stated that this creates a team centered environment within the store.

- Actually when they come from the trainings all excited & motivates, they start sharing what they have learned with their colleagues.

Key Training Programs

The analysis of the question “Which training programs play a role in the organizational commitment of front liners? And why?” resulted in only 3 common categories for all participants.

Effective Communication Skills

This training was commonly stated amongst participants and managers because they consider it as an investment from Azadea not only to increase productivity on-the-job but most importantly to enhance their attitude in their personal lives. It makes them feel that Azadea cares about them.

- For non-managerial positions, the most important training that has a lot of impact on the behaviors of employees is the effective communication skills.
- Communication skills add the most value as it is not only technical and shop related it is something that adds value to them and this is a really important point to any

employee as they feel more satisfied and engaged since they learned something that lasts a lifetime.

Customer Service Programs

As per the participants, the customer service programs are hands-on and they feel that they can apply all learning immediately after training sessions and grow up the ladder.

- Based on personal experience, the training programs that add the most value to employees' attachment is the essential training for their career development such as Exceptional Customer Service.

Orientation

Participants recognize the importance of the Orientation program when it comes to their attachment to Azadea because it introduced them to the company's culture, identity and values. They feel that it is the first step that creates in them a sense of belonging.

- Orientation was my favorite. I learned a lot about Azadea and the goal it wants to reach through us so this gave me a lot of motivation. I was so happy with the value drawing activities. And this activity is what makes me remember the values.

T&D Areas for Improvement

After analyzing the content of the responses to the question "How do you think T&D can do better to further increase your OC?" 4 categories were identified under the theme of "*T&D areas for improvement to increase OC*". An action plan will be designed for the T&D department in the last section to tackle the points suggested.

Increase of Non-Managerial Trainings

Some interviewees suggested that in order to sustain the positive impact of

T&D and stay attached to Azadea, the library of non-managerial trainings should expand:

- We can add more training to the non-managerial positions to keep the commitment sustainable.
- Maybe add more training for all positions? I think that sales associates should also have access to managerial trainings... maybe like Emotional Intelligence? It is important for sales associates to attend it. Yes more training will allow me to more attached to Azadea.

Increase of in-Store Trainings

Interviewees expressed the need for T&D to be more empathetic when it comes to where they conduct the training sessions:

- I would like to suggest you delivering trainings in our store instead of in the HQ's classroom. For example, the in-store trainings that are delivered by shop managers are not always delivered effectively... some of them do not know how to transfer the message. Moreover, when you once came to our shop to deliver a training, it was seriously AMAZING! I wish you can do that more often....

Increase of Collaboration with Managers

Shop managers mentioned that the impact of T&D on employees can become even higher and more sustained if the department effectively collaborates with managers.

- If the shop manager does not keep the momentum in the store after the training, then the effect of trainings will soon be over.
- “Why not T&D collaborate more with managers and hands them part of the T&D responsibility on the floor?”

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This paper has examined how training & development within Azadea plays a role in the organizational commitment of non-managerial front liners. It is noteworthy to mention that the initial themes and categories were first identified from the 15 interviews with the staff. When analyzing the second batch of interviews with managers, it was clear that the results are aligned and no modification or addition to the existent categories was necessary. This indicates that the views of both staff and managers are consistent and broad across Azadea and the data in the second sample provided validation to the first set.

Based on the literature review and its operationalization of affective organizational commitment, the results of the study confirm that the front liners' affective commitment is highly a result of learning activities. Most importantly, the results above also show how and why T&D plays this key role with a big alignment in the perception between the front liners and their managers.

In order to address the research questions, the below discussion will center around the main findings that confirm the role of T&D in the OC of Azadea's staff.

Professional Growth

The findings strongly indicate that T&D is viewed as a growth enabler & skill builder to enhance productivity, competencies and competitiveness (Lang and Wittig-Berman, 2000) which is very important in the context of organizational commitment because when people feel that they are able to perform better on-the-job, they become

more confident, thus attached to the provider of growth and performance. In fact, as per Aguinis & Kraiger (2009) the main positive outcome of training is job performance and all other benefits such as loyalty flow from the improvement of the latter.

Gift-Valuable Benefit

Azadeans see trainings as a gift which is an optimistic point because employees realize that Azadea is providing them with a gift and based on the theory of reciprocity (Eisenberger, Jasolo & Davis-La Mastro, 1994), they feel the need to give back through committing and genuinely caring about the organization.

Loyalty & Commitment

The staff explicitly stated that T&D shapes their reason to stay with the organization and managers confirmed that ever since training activities started being implemented within Azadea, the turnover in their shop decreased. Also, Azadeans obviously hold a pride in being in a company that invests in them, thus, they invest their time in attracting their entourage to this company and make sure to mention T&D as a great benefit. In fact, investment in learning & development practices create positive emotions in the employees based on the cognitive appraisal theory (Marescaux, DeWinne & Sels, 2013) and these positive emotions are positively correlated with going the extra mile and staying with the same company (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman & Taylor, 2000).

Driver of Initiatives

Affective commitment to the company is translated into taking initiatives and going the extra mile for the company (Ramus & Steger, 2000) and all 15 shop managers

talked about outside the box initiatives that their staff take after learning activities such as creating in-store competitions. The latter affect the results of the stores, thus the organization's.

T&D and Alignment with Mission

The findings also show the strong role that T&D plays in regards to the belief of employees in Azadea's mission statement and values. In order to be affectively attached to an organization, one should not only believe in its identity and reason of being but also work hard to be a contributor to these (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1979). Azadeans consider the mission of Azadea as their mission in the organization and they state that it is T&D that allows them to know how to live it since the mission of "providing an entertaining and exciting way of life to customers" is directly related to customer centricity and 60% of the training library consists of trainings that purely target customer centricity. Also, T&D activities create a strong feeling of motivation in the employees that translates into extra energy in providing the same experience to customers.

T&D and Internalization of Azadea Values

T&D in Azadea plays the role of a "Values Ambassador" and front liners owe their behaviors aligned with the values to the learning activities whether directly or indirectly. Living by the company's organizational values is one of the most important results of the investments made in leadership development practices (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013). In fact, Azadea's T&D department recently designed and developed a "Values Integration" program that really create a big awareness amongst employees and helped them operationalize the values of Azadea better and act upon them.

T&D and Attitude with Colleagues

What is also interesting is the fact that T&D even plays a role in the attitude of trainees with their colleagues back on the shop floor, which succeeds in creating positive attitude toward work and thus, higher organizational commitment (Costen & Salazar, 2011; Atif *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, learning within Azadea is powerful when it comes to gathering the teams in the shops and strengthening team bonds over knowledge sharing.

Key Training Programs

On a different note, participants showed a strong alignment when it comes to the trainings programs that they perceive as attachment enablers. The 3 powerful training programs are effective communication skills that makes Azadeans grateful since they feel that they can apply the learning outside the workplace which is highly related to the focus that the Lebanese society puts on their social life (Khalaf, 1987), the orientation program that creates a sense of pride and belonging in Azadeans and finally, customer service programs that allow them to perform better on-the-job & be promoted and when that happens, they become more attached to their work.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings confirm that T&D is indeed doing a great job in increasing the affective organizational commitment of front-liners, however, there does seem to be areas for improvement to strengthen the OC and the researcher is keen on developing how these findings can add value to the existent T&D department through an action plan to move forward stronger (See table 3). The activities in the action plan are chosen based on the emerging trends that were identified in response to the question “How do you think T&D can do better to further increase your organizational commitment?” addressed to both employees and managers.

Increase of Non-Managerial Trainings

In Azadea, most of the behavioral trainings are targeted at managers i.e. managing conflict & time management; and participants recurrently mentioned that they, too, need these competencies to complete their jobs. Therefore, it is recommended that the T&D professionals create leveling to the programs they design instead of only targeting managers. Every program can be customized to both managers and non-managers. It seems that this differentiation between managers and non-managers makes them feel underappreciated at some stages and in order to increase their OC, we have to invest further in training programs.

Increase of In-Store Trainings

The staff believe that, in order to appreciate T&D and Azadea more, they want

to experience learning activities in their comfort zone where they are mostly able to apply the learning. They are aware that this needs more time and effort from Azadea's side, and this is exactly why they will translate this effort into higher care which positively affects their affective OC.

Table 3

T&D Action Plan

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>How?</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
#1: Increase of non-managerial trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid differentiation between managers and non-managers • Invest in front liners further through a wider training library 	Leveling the existing training programs & customizing content to 2 different audiences	Senior T&D specialist with the assistance from T&D specialist
#2: Increase of in-store trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T&D to become closer to the front liners in their environment • Learning activities to become easily applicable on-the-job 	Conducting 1-hour sessions in various locations before the opening of the stores on quarterly basis	T&D Specialist
#3: Increase of collaboration with managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the momentum after trainings • Learners to relate more 	Handing them the responsibility of conducting monthly sessions in the store and raising their awareness on how to have L&D discussion with their teams	Senior T&D Specialist
#4: Investment in training programs that have personal & professional benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T&D to make front liners feel that Azadea cares about them 	Outsource a specialized training provider and work hands in hands for optimal success	Senior T&D specialist with the assistance from T&D specialist

Increase of Collaboration with Managers

Shop managers made it clear that no matter how strong and positive the impact of the learning activities are on employees; if the shop managers do not buy-in and are not given the responsibility to sustain the momentum in the store, the impact will soon fade away. It is highly important that T&D lets go of some of the training responsibility and hands it to the shop managers because they are the ones that can mostly influence the employees. What is interesting is that researcher wrote a while ago a critical reflection (Appendix II) called “Who really owns L&D?” that tackles this specific matter.

Investment in Training Programs that Have Personal & Professional Benefits

Participants repeatedly spoke about the “Effective Communication Skills” training and its impact on their attachment to Azadea for the simple reason that it does not only tackle on-the-job performance issues, but also personal ones. I recommend that the T&D department designs more of these programs because when the employees feel that the company cares about things bigger than only their productivity, they feel the desire and the need to give back. Such programs could include self-awareness, designing own mission & values, emotional intelligence and others.

In conclusion, this study confirms that T&D plays a role in the organizational commitment of Azadea’s non-managerial front liners as per the literature review. The researcher shed light on how learning practices within a Lebanese retail organization leads to higher affective commitment which is mostly aligned with the Western theories suggested in the literature review. The results will be shared with Azadea Group’s top management to strengthen the position of the T&D department within the group. On another note, the researcher acknowledges that this study may not have application

outside the retail industry; therefore, further research can address different industries and target audiences.

APPENDIX I

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For Group 1: Non-managerial front liners

1. How do you perceive T&D within Azadea?
2. Describe what changed since you started attending trainings within Azadea. Give examples.
3. How do you think T&D would impact someone's decision to stay or leave an organization?
4. Does T&D affect your contribution to Azadea's organizational mission of "providing an entertaining and exciting way of life to customers"? If no, why? If yes, how? Give examples.
5. Does T&D affect your application of Azadea's organizational values (Integrity, Passion, Accountability and Teamwork)? If no, why? If yes, how? Give examples.
6. How does T&D affect your relationships and attitude with your colleagues? Give examples.
7. Which training programs do you think adds the most value to your attachment to Azadea? Why?
8. Do you recommend Azadea to your entourage? If no, why? If yes, do you mention T&D as being one of the reasons you are working there and they should too? If not, why?
9. How do you think T&D can do better to further increase your organizational commitment?

For Group 2: Non-managerial front liners' managers

1. How do your employees perceive T&D within Azadea?
2. How does T&D affect your employees' decision to stay or leave Azadea? How is it demonstrated?
3. Describe what changed since your employees started attending trainings within Azadea. Give examples.

4. Does T&D affect your employees' contribution to Azadea's organizational mission of "providing an entertaining and exciting way of life to customers"? If no, why? If yes, how?
5. Does T&D affect your employees' application of Azadea's organizational values (Integrity, Passion, Accountability and Teamwork)? If yes, how? Give examples.
6. How do trainings affect your employees' relationships and attitude with their colleagues? Give examples.
7. How do trainings help your employees take more initiatives? Give examples.
8. Which training programs do you think adds the most value to your employees' attachment to Azadea? Why?
9. How do you think T&D can do better to further increase your employees' organizational commitment?

APPENDIX II

CRITICAL REFLECTION – WHO OWNS L&D?

WHO REALLY OWNS L&D?

Two years back, I remember attending my first retail shop managers' meeting at my company's head office. A lot of discussions usually happen during that meeting; however, I was waiting for the one about Learning & Development (L&D) since I happen to be the internal L&D specialist. A manager voiced her honest opinion that particularly stood out saying: *"I do not understand the Training & Development (T&D) specialists... They preach our teams about skills directly related to their jobs and they are not on the floor to really know what is going on. I believe our team's development is OUR role, not theirs!"*

Surprised with her statement and full of rage, I went out of the meeting room, met my manager and started criticizing the shop manager's words: *"Who is she to say that? Is she serious? Does she even know what L&D means?"*

In a fast paced environment, the effect of such discussions is forgotten, rather disregarded, within hours. Why? Because who likes to hear that what they are doing is useless?

Two years down the road, I choose to take some time and reflect on the shop manager's words: Isn't the L&D function the champion of growth? Isn't it the one responsible for the development of 1,400 front liners?

The talent development department is not all rainbows and butterflies. It faces uncountable number of challenges: Low attendance, disengagement of learners, the top management's perception of L&D being a cost center, the lack of knowledge transfer and retention, lack of effective budget to carry on learning activities and many others. For example, as per LinkedIn's 2017 Workplace Learning Report, 49% of respondents think that the top challenge for L&D at their company is having a limited budget and 32% think that the top challenge is demonstrating ROI.

We tend to blame others for all the latter: employees, top management and managers. Today, however, I want to take responsibility and challenge the current traditional L&D model. We put so much work into designing formal classroom workshops, include them in a monthly training calendar, prepare logistics and wait for employees to enroll themselves. We are driving learning to become a random periodic event in a classroom without thinking if classrooms are really the ultimate way to drive behavior change. For example, I was once on a store visit and asked one of the employees who attended a customer service training a while ago, a simple question that was covered in the workshop; she looked at me confused and simply said: *"I forgot! Although I really*

remember having fun in this training...” Disappointed, I invited her to attend the training again thinking that it will make a difference, but will it really?

What is worse than in-house classroom trainings are outsourced non-customized programs sold at abnormal high prices. How about offering soft skill e-learning opportunities that are totally isolated from the workplace and expecting people to actually complete them? Learning professionals keep driving on the same road without challenging it, but we need to realize that formal training is not a magic pill and trainers are not heroes. Who, then, owns L&D?

Shop managers... The people who are close to the front liners, able to speak their language and constantly put learning in context. Take some time to ponder over that idea... Trainers got addicted to the traditional model and to the hits of dopamine when receiving nice compliments after every training session. However, they should go back to the end in mind which is driving behavioral change, and maybe shop managers can do this more effectively.

As per the famous 70:20:10 learning model created by Michael M. Lombardo & Robert W. Eichinger, 70% of the front liners’ knowledge comes from experiences on-the-job, 20% from coaching & mentoring and only 10% comes from formal classroom trainings. For example, my friend who happens to be a shop manager was telling me last time about assignments she gave to sales associates to groom them to become assistant managers. The way her assignments were designed was practical, contextual and highly relevant to their job and this is what I would call impactful learning. In fact, a learning culture is embedded when learning is continuous and not only occasional in a classroom. As per CIPD’s 2014 L&D report, the most effective training practice is on-the-job training. In addition, I was once attending an in-store training delivered by a shop manager and from a training technicalities perspective, it was not perfectly delivered but the learning was transferred and this is what matters at the end of the day. Front liners look up to their managers because they relate to them and want to be like them unlike the case of listening to a trainer that has never been in their shoes before. Adding to this, I keep receiving e-mails from shop managers implementing initiatives in the stores to reinforce learning such as designing educational corners full of books and tools to improve on-the-job skills. In fact, in a survey called “Revive” done by Zag Learning, 82% of team leaders said they feel responsible for developing their team’s soft skills. Also, 55% of managers perceive developing their people as a very important matter. Most importantly, most of the shop managers think that T&D merely completes their job of developing their people and, as per the survey, 50% of the team leaders rely on T&D occasionally for advice.

Nevertheless, criticism relating to the line managers’ ownership of L&D should be considered. First, the retail environment is fast paced and full of pressure; therefore, what guarantees us that line managers will block time to develop their teams? Without structured training programs, learning may disappear. Second, we cannot assume that all line managers are learning-oriented and able to effectively apply the training needs analysis, knowledge facilitation and evaluation. After all, we cannot give full responsibility to people that haven’t received formal L&D training. Third, we cannot assume that the relationship between all line managers and their teams are healthy. What if the manager does not get along with a certain team member and chooses not to

help them grow and develop? By giving full L&D ownership to line managers, wouldn't we be unfair to some employees?

Therefore, the best practice is not to marginalize the L&D function, rather to improve it. As Dr. Einstein put it: *"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results."* and L&D specialists need to start challenging the traditional model and start driving on a different road. Moving forward, to build L&D's brand up, specialists should let go of the ownership they have had for a while and give it to line managers while guiding them on how to build a learning culture on-the-job, where the magic happens. We should exist to coach them, mentor them and give them all the right resources to succeed in making learning transformational and real. For example, I lately made it a point to spend 70% of my time in the shops with the people, living their lives instead of sitting behind a laptop that is great at providing unneeded theories, and this is what will help me become more of a business savvy, thus successful in leading change. Moreover, and in order to ensure successful transfer of ownership, the talent acquisition department needs to start hiring front liners who are learners and line managers who are passionate about human potential. Also, line managers must be accountable for learning KPIs, they must be involved in the training needs analysis that L&D conducts every year and they must be the main content developers because simply, they are the ones who live and breathe on the shop floor.

We will need more in-store trainings, less classroom trainings, more line manager involvement, different L&D specialists' involvement, more sharing of knowledge between retail experts, less transfer of knowledge from L&D specialists...

Every L&D story tends to end with a trainer saving the day and leaving impact. Today, however, I will end it differently: Trainers are not the heroes, and they will never be, unless they partner with line managers and empower them to become the learning revolutionists.

What do you think?

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