Antecedents of Commitment of Academic Staff in Universities in Uganda: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

The importance of employee commitment (EC) in so far as enhancing employee job performance is concerned is widely recognised in scholarly literature. Committed employees may be more likely to engage in extra-role behaviours such as creativity, have less intentions of leaving the organisation, accept and enhance organisational change and involve in knowledge sharing. Despite the apparent importance of EC, evidence shows that there is low EC among academic staff of universities of Uganda. Academic staff engage in frequent strikes, threats of strikes, absenteeism, delayed handing in of marks, part-time activities and show declining motivation and commitment to excellence. This means that if the problem of lack of EC among academic staff persists, there will be complete decline in the academic standards of universities. This paper proposes a study to isolate significant antecedents that can enhance EC of academic staff in universities of Uganda. The antecedents to be appraised are in three categories, namely, human resource management (HRM) practices, organisational characteristics and personal characteristics. This paper that is derived from aPhD proposal, highlights the introduction, theories, the problem, objectives, significance, framework, related literature and the corresponding hypotheses to be tested. It also proposes the methodology to be used in the study. The PhD monograph and future articles to be generated from the proposed studywill give the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Key words: Employee Commitment. Human Resource Management Practices. Organisational Characteristics. Personal Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Many definitions of employee commitment (EC) have been offered, but perhaps the most comprehensive of those definitions is that of Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova (2012) who define EC as a multidimensional variable that has affective, continuance and normative perspectives. The affective dimension of EC refers to an emotional attachment to, and involvement with an organisation; continuance commitment denotes the perceived costs of leaving the organisation; while normative commitment refers to the felt responsibility to support and remain a member of the organisation. Thus, it can be discerned from the definitions such as one above, that EC is a bond between an employee and the organisation such that he/ she (the employee) wants to continue serving the organisation and to help it achieve its objectives. The concept of EC has received much attention from various scholars because of its perceived importance. Yilmaz and Çokluk-Bökeoğlu (2008) expound that employees with high EC feelings affect organisational performance in positive ways because they lessen the frequency of performing negative behaviour and improve the quality of service.

As far as an organisation is concerned, a committed employee is a more compatible and productive individual who has higher levels of satisfaction, loyalty and responsibility. They continue to observe that EC not only increases the success in a certain role, but also encourages the individual to

exhibit organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), that is to do many voluntary actions necessary for the organisation. Other authors propose that EC reduces employee turnover. For example, Lambert and Hogan (2009) state that committed employees are loyal to the organisation, share its values, and identify with the goals of the organisation. Thus, they have little reason to want to leave. Visagie and Steyn (2011) suggest that EC leads to acceptance of organisational change, explaining that when an organisation engages in change initiatives, committed employees provide many benefits such as putting in extra effort to ensure that the change succeeds.

Also, committed employees during change serve as public relations representatives and go above and beyond the norm to assist the organisation to function effectively. Demirel and Goc (2013) indicate that EC enhances knowledge sharing between employees, expounding that with knowledge sharing, information, skill or expertise are reciprocally exchanged among members of the organisation. Knowledge sharing leads to the creation and forwarding of new ideas among the employees, which ideas are fundamental to a living organisation. In summary, the various scholars above are unanimous to the effect that EC is important in so far as enhancing job performance is concerned. Hence, several scholars that have devoted effort to the study of EC can be traced from the 1960s. Old studies (e.g. Allen & Meyer, 1990; Alutto, Hrebiniak& Alonso, 1973; Porter &Dubin, 1975; Ritzer&Trice, 1969;Snizek& Little, 1984; Steers, 1977) sought to establish the antecedents or determinants of EC.

Other old ones (e.g. Allen & Meyer, 1990; Ko, Price & Mueller, 1997; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979) constructedand validatedinstruments for measuring EC. Several studies in the recent past (e.g. Bayona-Sáez, Goñi-Legaz&Madorrán-García, 2009; Fisher, Boyle &Fulop, 2010; McCabe &Garavan, 2008; Smeenk, Teelken, Eisinga&Doorewaard, 2009; Wang, Indridason& Saunders, 2010) also sought to establish the antecedents or determinants of EC. Other recent ones (e.g. Jaros, 2007) have constructed and validated instruments for measuring EC. However, as suggested by the above studies, there has been a bias towards the Western World, such as the USA (e.g.Aluttoetal., 1973; Mowdayetal., 1979; Porter &Dubin, 1975; Ritzer&Trice, 1969;Snizek& Little, 1984; Steers, 1977);the UK (e.g. McCabe &Garavan, 2008;Wang etal., 2010); and Spain (Bayona-Sáezetal., 2009). This calls for further research on EC in other contexts such as the developing world.

2. Theoretical Review

In relating employee commitment (EC) to its antecedents, this conceptual paper is based on three theories namely; the Social Exchange Theory, Leader–Member Exchange Theory and Social Identity Theory. Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that human resource management (HRM) practices contribute to positive exchange relationships between employees and their employer. This positive exchange relationship is especially sowhen the employer considers the needs of individual workers to which employees reciprocate with favourable attitudes and behaviour (Marescaux, De Winne&Sels, 2013). Geetha and Mampilly (2012) explain that the basic principle with SET is that employees view satisfying HRM practices as an organisation's commitment towards them. Employees thus reciprocate this through positive behaviours like EC. They are thus more likely to exchange their commitment for resources and benefits provided by their organisation. Basing on this theory, it is reasonable to suggest that HRM practices may lead to EC.

The Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory propounds that high-exchange relationships between the leaders and subordinates characterise good employer-employee relationships, involving highlevels of trust, liking, and respect and involve expectations of mutual exchange. The leader provides outcomes desired by the subordinates, such as interesting tasks, additional responsibilities, and larger rewards and the subordinates reciprocate with commitment to work and loyalty to the leader. Exchange relationships develop gradually over time and are reinforced by the behaviour of the leader and the subordinates (Yukl, O'Donnell & Taber, 2009). This means that an organisation whose structure leads to assigning of employees interesting tasks and responsibilities, a leadership style that offers rewards, and support to employees will be reciprocated with EC. Thus, it can be argued that organisational characteristics promoted by the leader relate to EC.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT)suggests that people's sense of who they are is enhanced by knowing not only that they belong to certain groups, but also that they are different from members of other groups (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes& Haslam, 2009). Jones and Volpe (2010) expound that, SIT proposes that individuals classify themselves and others into various social categories such as organisational membership, gender, race, age cohort, or religious affiliation and view their membership in particular groups based on social roles and role relationships. SIT thus suggests that individuals categorise themselves according to individual characteristics, which givethem identity leading to positive implications such as EC. In summary, therefore, the theory proposes that the personal characteristics of individual employees have implications on the behaviour of the individual employees such as commitment to their jobs.

3. Research Problem

Despite its importance, employee commitment (EC) appears to be low among the academic staff in universities in Uganda. This is indicated by their frequent strikes (Ajuna, 2011; Angulo &Walubiri, 2013; Birungi, Kikooma&Ntayi, 2010; Businge, 2008), threats of strikes (Ahimbisibwe, 2014a), absenteeism (Agababyona, 2014) and delayed handing in of marks (Baryamureeba, 2014). There is also declining motivation and commitment to excellence among academic professionals whereby for example some lecturers do not mark examinations but instead fake marks and cheat examinations for students (Ahimbisibwe, 2014b; Asiimwe& Steyn, 2013) and others do not to prepare for lectures relying on online plagiarised notes (Natukunda, 2014). If the problem of lowECamong the academic staff persists, there will be a drastic decline in the academic standards of the universities. To address the problem of low EC among the academic staff in universities in Uganda, it is necessary to isolate factors which underpin the problem. Basing on the theories reviewed in section 2, this paper proposes the need to appraise whether human resource management (HRM) practices, organisational and personal characteristics are antecedents of the commitment of the academic staff to their jobs.

4. Objectives

The main objective of the study is to establish the antecedents of the employee commitment (EC) of academic staff in universities in Uganda. Specifically, the study seeks to establish whether human resource management (HRM) practices, organisational and personal characteristics respectively, are antecedents of the EC.

5. Significance

This study will help the managers of the universities to enhance the employee commitment (EC) of academic staff through implementing appropriate human resource management (HRM) practices, establishing suitable organisational characteristics and managing staff personal characteristics in a way that enhances their EC. The study will also provide a benchmark for responsible government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Public Service and the National Council for Higher Education to introduce policies that enhance the EC of academic staff in the universities in the country. Besides, this study will contribute to the body of knowledge (BoK) by providing researchers and academicians with new knowledge on the antecedents of EC.

6. Framework

Basing on the three theories (Social Exchange Theory, Leader–Member Exchange Theory and Social Identity Theory) reviewed earlier (section 2), Figure 1 provides a framework relating employee commitment (EC) to its antecedents. EC has been operationalised as having three dimensions, namely the affective, continuance and normative (Meyer etal., 2012). In turn, the antecedents are categorised as human resource management (HRM) practices, organisational and personal characteristics. The HRM practices identified as independent variables are namely recruitment, selection, job design, training, appraisal, promotion, participation, rewards (Burchielli, 2008), job security (Vlachos, 2009) and grievances handling (Zulkiflee, Faizal, Shakizah&Durrishah, 2010). The organisational characteristics are

the organisational structure, leadership style, employee relationships and organisational support (Nguyen, 2011). The personal characteristics identified are namely, age, gender, educational level, marital status, job experience, job position (Suman & Srivastava, 2012) and self-efficacy (Zulkiflee et al., 2010).

Independent Variables

HRM Practices
- Recruitment*
- Selection*
- Job design*
- Training*
- Appraisal*
- Promotion*
- Participation*
- Rewards*
- Job security*
- Grievances handling**

Organisational Characteristics
- Organisational structure+
- Leadership styles++
- Employee relationships+++
- Organisational support++++

Personal Characteristics***
- Age
- Gender
- Educational level
- Marital status
- Job experience
- Job position
- Self-efficacy

Dependent Variable

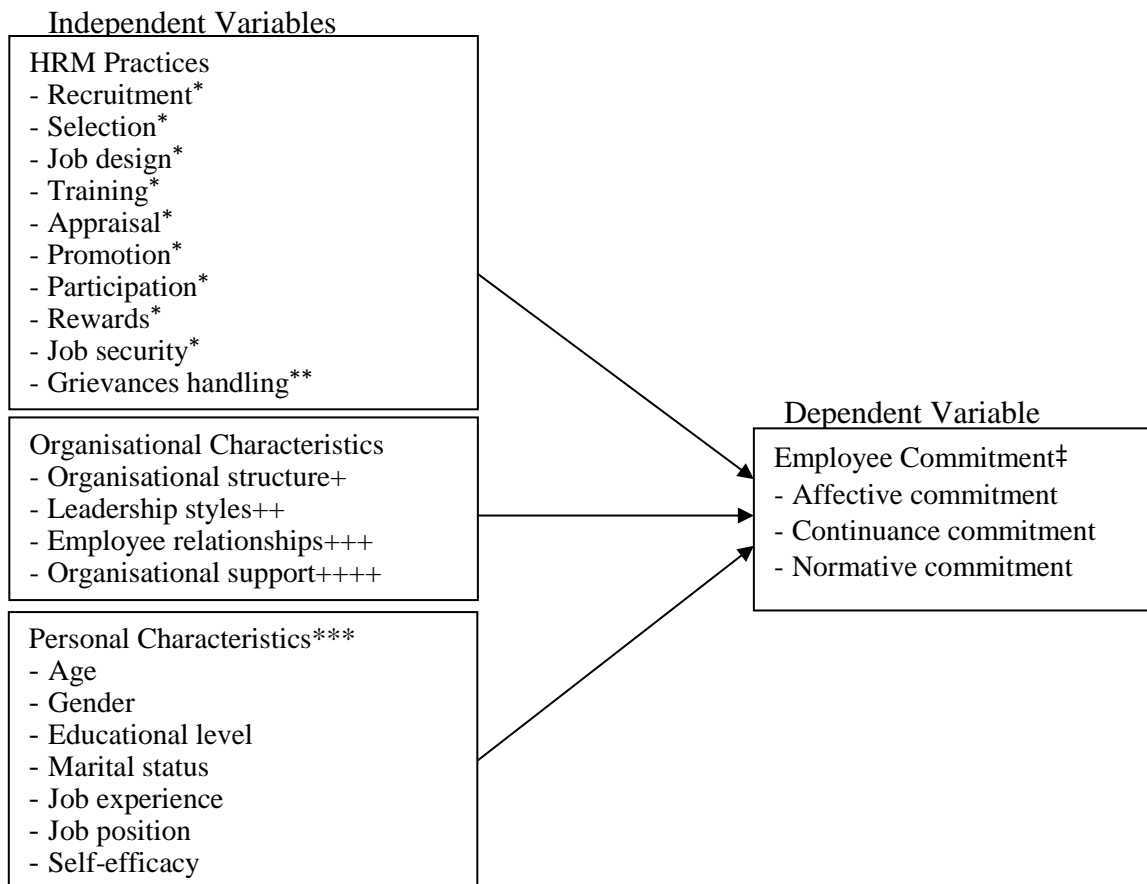| Employee Commitment‡ |
| --- |
| - Affective commitment |
| - Continuance commitment |
| - Normative commitment |

Figure 1: Conceptual framework postulating that HRM practices, organisational and personal characteristics are antecedents of employee commitment.

Sources: Concepts adapted from existing literature: *Burchielli (2008); **Vlachos (2009); ***Zulkiflee et al. (2010); +Nguyen (2011); ++Suman and Srivastava (2012); and ‡Meyer et al. (2012).

7. Related Literature

7.1 HRM Practices as Antecedents of Employee Commitment. Various scholars (e.g.Bayona-Sáezetal. 2009; Chew & Chan, 2008; Harold &Shiju, 2012; Mohyin, Dainty & Carrillo, 2012; Savaneviciene&Stankeviciute, 2011) have studied human resource management (HRM) practices as antecedents of employee commitment (EC). Bayona-Sáezetal. (2009) studied how to raise the EC of teachers at the Public University of Navarra in Spain. In their study, they related HRM practices that were namely;autonomy, participation in decision-making, participation in management tasks, opportunities for promotion and job security with the affective and continuance aspects of EC. Using two ordered logit models, they established that none of those HRM practices was a significant antecedent of EC. Chew and Chan (2008) related HRM practices, EC and intention to stay, using the employees from higher education, public, health care and manufacturing sectors in Australia.

Using correlation analysis, they established that person-organisation fit (recruitment and selection), remuneration, recognition and an opportunity to undertake challenging employment assignments (job design) positively affected EC. They also established that there was no significant relationship between training and career development (promotion) and EC.Harold and Shiju (2012)

studied the influence of HRM practices on the EC of teachers in colleges in India. Via multiple regression analysis, they established that the HRM practices of recruitment and selection significantly positively influenced affective commitment. The grievance handling process and promotion significantly positively influenced continuance commitment while training significantly positively influenced normative commitment.Mohyinetal. (2012) carried out a qualitative analysis of HRM strategies for managing EC using the employees of small construction professional service firms in the UK. They established that five HRM strategies, namely job design, performance and career management, training and development, reward management and employee involvement were important in developing EC.

Savaneviciene and Stankeviciute (2011) in their study using a correlation analysis on HRM practices linkage with EC and job satisfaction on employees in a service sector organisation in Lithuania, established that skill-enhancing, motivation-enhancing and engagement-enhancing HRM practices had significant positive relations with affective EC.However, as the studies above suggest, researches have been biased towards the Western World such as Spain(Bayona-Sáezetal. 2009), Australia (Chew & Chan, 2008), UK (Mohyinetal., 2012) and Lithuania (Savaneviciene&Stankeviciute, 2011). Besides, whereas the studies generally found significant positive relationships between training/ career development and EC, Chew and Chan (2008) established that there was no such significant relationship. On their part, Bayona-Sáezetal. (2009) established that none of the HRM practices they considered namely, autonomy, participation in decision-making, participation in management tasks, opportunities for promotion and job security was a significant antecedent of EC. These gaps make it necessary for this study to evaluate whether in the context of the academic staff in the universities in Uganda, the following hypothesis holds:
H1: HRM practices are antecedents of EC.

7.2   Organisational Characteristics as Antecedents of Employee Commitment. Scholars such as Bambacas and Patrickson (2008); Brunetto, Farr-Wharton andShacklock (2010); Caykoylu, Egri, Havlovic and Bradley (2011); Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010); Dunn, Dastoor and Sim (2012); Harney and Jordan (2008); Sahoo, BeheraandTripathy (2010); Suman and Srivastava (2012) were interested in the relationship between organisational characteristics and employee commitment (EC). Bambacas and Patrickson (2008) carried out a study on senior human resource (HR) managers in medium to large organisations in Southern Australia. Their data from interviews revealed that a leadership style that engendered trust was of the highest importance when HR managers wanted to enhance EC. Brunettoetal. (2010) studied the impact of supervisor–subordinate relationships on EC using a questionnaire survey and focus group discussions with nurses from four states of Australia. In a regression analysis, they found out that good workplace relationships in terms of supervisor-subordinate relationships significantly positively influenced EC. In their study, Caykoyluetal. (2011) analysed key antecedents of EC for nurses, paramedical professionals and non-clinical staff in Canada. The results of their correlation analysis revealed a positive significant relationship between acceptance by co-workers (relationships) and EC. Colakogluetal. (2010) studied the effects of perceived organisational support on employees' affective outcomes in five star and chain hotels in Bodrum, Turkey.

Their correlation results showed that perceived organisational support had a significant positive effect on the affective, normative and continuous aspects of EC. Dunn etal. (2012) studied transformational leadership and EC with employees from the USA and Israel in a large multi-national high-tech corporation as their units of analysis. Using a correlation analysis, they established that the transformational leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way and encouraging the heart were positively related to the employees' affective and normative commitment for the respondents in both the US and Israel alike. However, there was no relationship between transformational leadership and continuance commitment except only for the practice of inspiring the vision which was found to have a correlation in the US but not in Israel. Harney and Jordan (2008) sought to find out whether line managers could stimulate improvements in firm performance by eliciting appropriate employee outcomes. Interview responses from staff of a call centre in the UK disclosed that flat structures did not motivate EC because a company with flat structures provided no clear routes in terms of career progression.

Sahooetal. (2010) in a systematic review of previous research works on employee empowerment and workplace commitment established that a sense of commitment could be developed in employees through the process of de-layering (organisational flattening). Suman and Srivastava (2012) studying antecedents of EC across different hierarchical levels of the public sector in India used staff of a steel plant as the study sample. Through regression,they showed that organisational structure predicted EC. However, the context of the studies reported is predominantly the Western World with only one study (Suman & Srivastava, 2012) carried out in Asia. Besides, in some of the studies there are controversial results. For instance, whereas the study by Dunn etal. (2012) indicated that for employees from the US the transformational leadership practice of inspiring the vision correlated with EC, this was not so in Israel. Besides, whereas Harney and Jordan (2008) in a study in the UK established that flat structures did not motivate EC, Suman and Srivastava (2012) in a study in India showed that organisational structure predicted EC. Sahooetal. (2010) in systematic review of previous research works established a positive relationship between organisational structure and EC. These gaps make it incumbent for the proposed to test whether organisational characteristics are antecedents of EC. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed with respect to academic staff in the universities in Uganda:

H2: Organisational characteristics are antecedents of EC.

7.3 Personal Characteristics as Antecedents of Employee Commitment. Various scholars(e.g. Bayona-Sáezetal., 2009; Benligiray&Sonmez, 2013; Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink&Hofman, 2012; Dick, 2011; Innocenti, Profili&Sammarra, 2013; Suman & Srivastava, 2012) have studied personal characteristics in relation to employee commitment (EC). Bayona-Sáezetal. (2009) studied how to raise the EC of teachers at the Public University of Navarra in Spain. Using logit models of analysis, they established that of the personal variables of age, gender, marital status and ability, only age and gender were not significant antecedents. Benligiray and Sonmez (2013) studied demographic and work life variables which affected the EC of nurses in Turkey. Their correlation results showed a positive correlation between educational status and EC. In another study, Canrinusetal. (2012) investigated how relevant indicators of teachers' sense of their professional identity (job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy and change in level of motivation) were related among Dutch teachers.

In a correlation analysis, they established that classroom self-efficacy positively significantly related to the affective component of the teachers' EC. Dick (2011) carried out a study on the influence of managerial and job variables on EC in a census of a county police force in the UK.Using correlation analysis, the study found out that rank seniority significantly positively related with the EC for the police officers. Innocentietal. (2013) in their study of age as a moderator in the relationship between human resource (HR) development practices and employees' positive attitudes, using employees of 37 Italian companies both multinational and domestic through a multilevel regression model, established that managers and employees with a higher degree of education had higher levels of affective commitment. As regards to age, employees who were younger reported lower levels of affective commitment.

Suman and Srivastava (2012) investigated the impact of various personal and organisational characteristics on the EC of employees working at different hierarchical levels. The survey involved the employees of a steel plant in India. Using regression analysis, they found out that locus of control (self-efficacy) had significant positive contribution in determining the EC of the workers. The above studies however were largely carried out in the Western World context. Besides, except for the Bayona-Sáezetal. (2009) whose units of analysis were university teachers, all the other studies were carried out in non-university contexts. These gaps left the question as to whether personal characteristics of employees positively correlated with EC in other contexts such as universities in Uganda still unanswered. Thus, with respect to the academic staff in the universities in the Ugandan context, it is still necessary for this study to appraise whether:

H3: Personal characteristics are antecedents of EC.

8. Methodology

8.1 Paradigm and Design. The proposed study will adopt the positivist or quantitative paradigm because it will involve the testing of hypotheses to establish the antecedents of employee commitment (EC). In particular, the proposed study will be a survey based on correlational and cross-sectional designs. The study will be a survey in that it will involve a large number of respondents to facilitate generalisation. The correlational design will help in relating each of the three antecedents (human resource management practices, organisational and personal characteristics) to EC. The cross-sectional design will permit the collection of data in a relatively short period of time.

8.2 Data Collection Instrument. Data will be collected from a sample of academic staff from universities in Uganda. The data collection instrument will be a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) developed basing on instruments already used by other scholars (see Table 1). The use of these earlier instruments will be based on the premise that their reliabilities and validities can be taken for granted initially. The guarantee of validities will be based on the ground that an instrument cannot be valid unless it is reliable (Tavakol& Dennick, 2011). In other words, since reliabilities of the variables are already guaranteed from earlier instruments, the variables are likely to be valid too. As Table 1 illustrates, the first independent variable (IV1) happens to be human resources management (HRM) practiceswith 10 constructs namely; recruitment, selection, job design, training, appraisal, promotion, participation, rewards, job security and safety, and grievances handling, each with a number of items adapted from reliable instruments.

The secondindependent variable (IV2) is organisational characteristics with four constructs namely; structure, leadership style, employee relationships and organisational support also having a number of items adapted from reliable instruments. The third independent variable (IV3) is personal characteristics with seven constructs namely; age, gender, educational level, marital status, job experience, job position and self-efficacy. However, because most of these personal characteristic are categorical, reliability is not applicable to them, except for only one numerical personal construct, namely self-efficacy.Employee commitment (EC) which is the dependent variable (DV) has three constructs namely, affective (AC), continuance (CC) and normative (NC), each of which has a number of items adapted from a reliable instrument.

Table 1: Variables in the Instrument, their Constructs, Number of Items, reliabilities and Sources

Variable	Construct	Number of items adapted	Source of instrument, number (n) of items and their reliability (α)
HRM practices (IV1)	Recruitment	4	Demo, Neiva, Nunes & Rozzett, 2012 (n = 6; α = 0.84)
	Selection	2	Chen & Huang, 2009 (n = 3, α=0.815)
		2	Wan, Ong & Kok, 2002 (n = 7; α = 0.8324).
	Job design	5	Dwivedula & Bredillet, 2009 (n = 18, α = 0.85)
	Training	4	Wan et al. 2002 (n = 7; α = 0.8324).
		3	Demo et al. 2012 (n = 6; α = 0.88)
	Appraisal	3	Chen & Huang, 2009 (n = 3, α=0.903)
		3	Demo et al. 2012 (n = 5; α = 0.86)
	Promotion	5	Negash, Zewude & Megersa, 2014 (n = 6; α = 0.77)
		2	Chen & Huang, 2009 (n = 3, α=0.762)
	Participation	5	Demo et al. 2012 (n = 12; α = 0.93)
	Rewards	3	Oldham et al., 1986 (n = 10; α = 0.70)
		3	Demo etal. 2012 (n = 5; α = 0.81)
	Job security and safety	3	Oldham, Kulik, Stepina & Ambrose,1986 (n = 10; α = 0.87)
		2	Demo et al. 2012 (n = 6; α = 0.84)
	Grievances handling	5	Zulkiflee, Faizal, Shakizah & Durrishah, 2010 (n = 11; α = 0.827-0.926).
Organisational characteristics (IV2)	Structure	4	Schminke, Cropanzano& Rupp, 2002 (n = 5, α = 0.73)
		2	Hansen & Høst, 2012 (n = 11; α = 0.52)
	Leadership styles	9	Kanste, Miettunen & Kyngäs, 2007 (n = 37; α = 0.78- 0.93).
	Relationships	7	Dilber, Bayyurt, Zaim & Tarim, 2005 (n = 7; α = 8209)
	Organisational support	7	Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986 (n = 36; α =0.97)
Personal characteristics (IV3)	Sex, age, education level, marital status, number of years employed and job position	1 each	Not applicable
	Self-efficacy	8	Chen, Gully& Eden, 2001 (n = 8, α = 0.86.
Employee commitment	Affective (AC)	7	Allen & Meyer, 1990 (AC: n = 8, α = 0.87; CC: n = 8, α = 0.75; NC: n = 8, α = 0.79)
	Continuance (CC)	5	
	Normative (NC)	7	

8.3 Data Management. The data collected will be processed and analysed. Data processing will involve coding the data and entering them into the computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), summarising them using frequency tables and editing them to remove errors. Whereas the reliabilities of the constructs are already guaranteed by earlier studies (see Table 1) and their validities implied (Tavakol&Dennick, 2011), after the collection of data, the reliabilities of the constructs will be retested using Cronbach Alpha method provided by SPSS. Similarly, the validities of multi-item constructs still will be tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. This retesting will be done because differences in samples call for retesting of instruments (Tavakol&Dennick, 2011). The data analysis will be done at different levels, namely univariate, bivariate and multivariate. The data analysis at univariate level will be based on percentages from the frequency tables and descriptive statistics, specifically the mean. At the bivariate level, the dependent variable (DV), employee commitment will be correlated with each of the antecedents. At the multivariate level, three regression models will be run, with each regressing the DV on a particular category of antecedents.

9. Conclusion

This research concept paper proposes to appraise whether human resource management (HRM) practices, organisational and personal characteristics are antecedents of employee commitment (EC). The paper is derived from aPhD proposal that will lead to a monograph and future articles. The paper has highlighted the introduction, theories, the problem, objectives, significance, framework, related literature and the corresponding hypotheses to be tested.The PhD monograph and future articles to be generated from the proposed studywill give in greater details the introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations.

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