




Perceptions of sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns as explanatory mechanisms of employees' organisational commitment

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Orientation: Employees' psychological attachment to their organisation remains an important topic of inquiry for organisations concerned about improving their talent management practices for the purpose of retaining valuable human capital.

Research purpose: The aim of the study was to explore the constructs of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns as potential underlying explanatory mechanisms of employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment towards the organisation. Organisational attachment theory was utilised as theoretical framework to study the relations among the variables.

Motivation for the study: The notion of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship, career concerns as explanatory mechanisms of employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment in the South African higher education context is under-researched, and especially from the perspective of organisational attachment theory.

Research approach/design and method: A non-probability convenience sample ($N = 200$) of academic and administrative staff members employed in a South African higher educational institution participated in the study. A cross-sectional, quantitative research design approach was followed. Multiple regression analysis was performed.

Main findings: Person-job sacrifice positively predicted affective, continuance and normative commitment. Perceptions of friendship opportunity accounted for the variance in affective commitment. High levels of work-life adjustment career concerns accounted for higher levels of affective and normative commitment.

Practical/managerial implications: Addressing the underlying psychological needs espoused by employees' perceptions of person-job sacrifice, friendship opportunity and work-life adjustment concerns are important to consider in human resource talent management practices. The constructs speak to employees' sense of employment security which influences their organisational commitment.

Contribution/value-add: The study extends organisational attachment theory by offering insight into the role of person-job sacrifice, friendship opportunity in the workplace and work-life adjustment concerns in explaining employees' organisational commitment. The new insights inform human resource retention practices for academic and administrative staff members in the higher education environment.

Introduction

Key focus of the study

The demand and competition for highly qualified academics and competent administrative staff members have given rise to concerns about retaining valuable human capital in higher educational institutions (Bushe, 2012; Deas, 2017). Employees' psychological attachment to their organisation remains an important topic of inquiry for organisations concerned about improving their talent management practices (Hassan, 2012; Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Research provides evidence that increased job satisfaction, positive behaviours and attitudes towards the organisation and decreased absenteeism and turnover are some of the positive consequences of psychological attachment (Hassan, 2012; Meyer, Kam, Goldenberg, & Bremner, 2013; Qureshi, Frank, Lambert, Klahm, & Smith, 2017). While using the organisational attachment theory (St. Clair, 2000), the present study explores employees' organisational commitment as an aspect of their psychological

attachment (i.e. the psychological and emotional bond that exists between an individual and the organisation) (Hassan, 2012; Meyer & Allen, 1991; St. Clair, 2000).

Background of the study

While research continues to confirm that organisational commitment is worth striving for, for both employees and organisations in the retention context, less attention has been given to the mechanisms accounting for individuals' organisational commitment (Hassan, 2012; Meyer et al., 2013; Solinger, Hofmans, Bal, & Jansen, 2016; St. Clair, 2000). To address this gap in research, the present study focuses on three constructs (i.e. job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendships and career concerns) associated with employees' relationship with the organisation and the job experiences that influence their membership within the organisation. More specifically, the aim of the study is to explore the constructs of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns as potential underlying explanatory mechanisms of employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment towards the organisation.

Previous research indicates positive associations between organisational sacrifice and organisational commitment in the ICT context (Van Dyk, 2012), workplace friendship and organisational commitment in the call centre environment (Milner, Russell, & Siemers, 2010) and career concerns and organisational commitment in the general organisational context (Coetzee, 2015). No previous studies have been conducted within the higher education sector that addressed these constructs. The current research extends organisational attachment theory by exploring the three constructs jointly in a single study as manifested in the South African higher educational environment. This approach allows for assessing the explanatory power of the three constructs in relation to Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component theory of organisational commitment (i.e. affective, continuance and normative commitment). Moreover, the notion of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship, career concerns and organisational commitment in the South African higher education context is under-researched. The findings of the study can therefore potentially add valuable new insights that could inform human resource retention practices for academic and administrative staff members.

Theoretical framework: Organisational attachment theory

Attachment theory is a psychological model attempting to describe the dynamics of specific facets of long-term and short-term interpersonal relationships between humans (Bowlby, 1979). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; St. Clair, 2000) proposes felt security as the goal of a behavioural system (i.e. the set of interrelated actions that lead to a specific goal). Monitoring experienced levels of security, comparing them to desired levels and action to obtain the desired level of security in relation to caregiver figures are facets of the personal attachment system (Bowlby, 1979). Attachment theory explains the reasons why employees may remain with

an organisation (St Clair, 2000). Employment security is seen as one of the major goals in the organisational behavioural system (St Clair, 2000). In organisational attachment theory, the personal attachment system is seen as an analogue of personal attachment (i.e. enduring affective bonds) to the organisation as primary caregiver of employment security. Workplace conditions, practices and experiences that negatively affect employees' satisfaction may be perceived as potential threats to their employment security, which in turn, may affect their levels of commitment towards the organisation (St Clair, 2000; Wu, & Parker, 2017). It is therefore important to note that employees' psychological attachment to their organisation remains an important topic of inquiry for organisations concerned about improving their talent management practices for the purpose of retaining valuable human capital.

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment denotes employees' emotional attachment to the organisation (affective commitment), having a sense of obligation to the organisation (continuance commitment) or concerns about the perceived cost of leaving the organisation (normative commitment) (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2012; Qureshi et al., 2017). Employees' organisational commitment reflects their attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation that act as a stabilising force in the attachment system resulting in employees becoming committed to a particular course of action such as remaining with the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997; St Clair, 2000). Attitudinal commitment alludes to the process individuals follow in establishing relationship with their organisation while behavioural commitment reflects the inability to leave the current employment for a variety of reasons and the way that employees deal with the situation (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Reflecting the emotional reasons for remaining with the current organisation, affective commitment is seen to originate from feelings such as loyalty, affection, warmth, belongingness, fondness and pleasure experiences in the workplace (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993; Potgieter & Ferreira, 2018). Positive work experiences that foster the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs for feeling competent, belonging and constructive interaction with others, clarity of mutual expectations, consideration and support for individual needs increase employees' affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997).

Continuance commitment reflects a psychological state or mindset about the perceived threat of leaving the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Such threats include the perceived cost associated with organisational investments such as pay, seniority, pension, social relationships and job-specific competencies, all of which facilitate a sense of employment security. Employees do not want to lose certain benefits or advantages that the organisation may offer and will therefore remain at the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Normative commitment alludes to a sense of

responsibility (obligation) to continue employment with a specific organisation. Normative commitment develops as a result of beliefs that are internalised through socialisation processes, both familial and cultural, that occur both before and after entry into the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

The mindset of desire reflected in affective commitment is seen to explain a wider range of employee behaviours than in the case of continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment creates emotional bonds that can make the employee develop a sense of obligation (normative commitment) towards the organisation (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). On the other hand, employees may exhibit normative commitment even though they do not feel affection for the organisation and are dissatisfied there. Normative commitment can lead to continuance commitment owing to the emotional involvement with the organisation, which may lead to the desire for continuation (Van Dyk, 2012). In general, personal characteristics such as age, tenure, gender and ethnicity are also seen as important personal characteristics influencing individuals' levels of organisational commitment because they provide an explanation of differences in organisational commitment (Van Dyk, 2012).

Commitment alludes to how employees respond to dissatisfaction with experiences and conditions at work (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Seen through the lens of attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), the psychological states of affective, continuance and normative commitment are temporary mindsets that are influenced by conditions and experiences in the organisational attachment system that either support employees' sense of employment security or give rise to perceived threats to their employment security. The constructs of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns denote perceived work experiences and psychological needs that speak to employees' sense of psychological security in the organisation.

Job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns

Job-embedded sacrifice is a core facet of the construct of job embeddedness which refers to the selection of social, financial and psychological job and organisational conditions that affect employees' decisions to remain in or leave their current job or organisation (Ampofo, Coetzer, & Poisat, 2017; Kaizad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman, 2015). Sacrifice refers to apparent psychological or material costs linked with leaving the work or organisation (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). The more an employee would have to give up (financially or psychologically) by leaving a job or organisation, the more difficult it will be for the individual to end employment with the organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001). Job-embedded sacrifice comprises perceptions of person-job sacrifice and person-organisation sacrifice. Person-job sacrifice denotes aspects of the job that provides a sense of security, such as having freedom and autonomy on the job, respect from people at work and promotional opportunities (Mitchell et al., 2001). Organisational factors

that enhance a sense of employment security and that are seen to be sacrificed should one decide to leave the organisation include compensation and organisational benefits (i.e. healthcare and retirement) and prospects of continued employment at the company (Mitchell et al., 2001). Research indicates positive links between affective, continuance and normative commitment and person-job sacrifice and person-organisation sacrifice (Van Dyk, 2012). It was therefore also expected that high levels of perceived person-job and person-organisation sacrifice would positively relate to high levels of affective, continuance and normative commitment. Seen through the lens of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), high levels of sacrifice denote a high sense of employment security which the employee is not willing to sacrifice and which therefore may explain higher levels of affective, continuance and normative commitment.

Perceptions of workplace friendship opportunities and workplace friendship prevalence have important implications for employees' perceptions of the overall employment relationship (Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000). Friendship opportunities refer to the perceived chances an individual has to get to know, communicate and work together with other individuals in the same organisation. Friendship prevalence refers to the feeling an individual has with regard to strong friendships at work, which are usually categorised by trust, confidence and a strong desire to interact and even socialise with outside the workplace (Nielsen et al., 2000). Friends at work are usually the persons that the individual works closely with and therefore may be seen to presumably have connections for career progress and for providing direction within the work environment (Khaleel, Chelliah, Khalid, Jamil, & Manzoor, 2016). Although workplace friendship may have differing criteria reliant on the cultural and demographical settings, positive perceptions of workplace friendship opportunities and friendship prevalence can meet employees' psychological needs for affection, approval, social interaction and employment security and reduce interpersonal tensions and work stress (Milner et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2000).

A number of research studies indicate that workplace friendships have positive outcomes within the work environment, such as increased job satisfaction (Winstead, Derlega, Montgomery, & Pilkington, 1995), increased organisational commitment and job performance and reduced turnover intention (Milner et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2000). Similarly, it was expected that workplace friendship would relate positively to affective, continuance and normative commitment. Seen through the theoretical lens of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), the fulfilment of employees' psychological needs for relatedness at work through opportunities for and the prevalence of friendship may, apart from perceived sacrifice, further enhance their sense of employment security and therefore contribute to explaining employees' levels of affective, continuance and normative commitment.

Career concerns reflect employees' current state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their career development within an organisation. Getting established in a workplace, fitting in with others and having opportunities for individual growth and development (i.e. developing competencies) while experiencing career and economic stability through the employment situation is a key concern for most employees. Addressing employees' need for career establishment provides a sense of employment security because of the fulfilment of employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness provided by the job (Bester, 2017; Coetzee, 2015; Super, 1990). Research also shows positive links between low career establishment concerns and work-related commitment (Coetzee, 2015).

Employees' career concerns may also revolve around adapting to changing organisational and external market conditions and ensuring that they remain employable through upskilling (i.e. amending one's interests, talents and capabilities in order to create opportunities to fit in with the current working environment). Career adaptation concerns may also include preoccupations about continuing one's career development within the organisation or exploring opportunities elsewhere in order to sustain one's marketability (Coetzee, 2015). Employees' career adaptation concerns have been found to mediate the link between their passion for their work and their career satisfaction (Bester, 2017). Strong concerns about career adaptation, career renewal and employability are positively linked with lowered organisational commitment to the job or career in the current organisation and a high interest in external job opportunities in the job (Coetzee, 2015). Research also indicates a heightened concern about achieving work-life balance (Takawira, 2017). Work-life adjustment concerns involve the need to settle down, decreasing one's workload and achieving work and personal life balance, which might also implicate withdrawing from ones' paid occupation completely. Addressing employees' need for work-life adjustment results in higher levels of career satisfaction, which in turn, is associated with higher levels of organisational commitment (Bester, 2017; Takawira, 2017).

Employees' career concerns involve cognitive appraisals of the current employment relationship and whether the organisational conditions support their career development needs as an aspect of their employment security. Seen through the theoretical lens of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), high levels of career concerns may reflect perceptions of impending threats to employment security if not addressed and are therefore expected to explain lower levels of affective, continuance and normative commitment.

Although the three constructs of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns all seem to influence employees' general sense of organisational commitment, it is not clear how they relate to the affective, continuance and normative commitment components of the general construct. Although the links between person-job sacrifice and person-organisation sacrifice and the three commitment constructs have been established in the ICT

context (Van Dyk, 2012), it is not clear whether this association will also be relevant to the higher education environment. Similarly, the constructs of workplace friendship and career concerns are under-researched in the higher educational context and especially in relation to the three organisational commitment components. The objective of the research was therefore to explore whether job-embedded sacrifice (person-job sacrifice and person-organisation sacrifice), workplace friendship (workplace friendship opportunities and workplace friendship prevalence) and career concerns (career establishment preoccupations, career adaptation preoccupations and work-life adjustment preoccupations) significantly accounted for the variance in affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment as manifested in a sample of individuals employed in the higher education environment. The following research hypothesis was tested:

Research hypothesis: Sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns predict employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment towards the organisation. High levels of sacrifice and workplace friendship will account for high levels of commitment while high career concerns will account for low levels of commitment.

The next section of the article will focus on the research design, which comprises the research approach and method, followed by the presentation of the results and a discussion of the findings. The article concludes with a brief summary of the key conclusions, implications for practice and recommendations for potential future research.

Research method and design

Research approach

A cross-sectional quantitative research approach was followed in order to achieve the research objective. Cross-sectional research involves individuals who differ on one key characteristic at one specific point in time (Setia, 2016).

Participants

A non-probability convenience sample of 200 ($N = 200$) permanently employed adults (60% female; 40% male) participated in the study. The participants were employed within a distance higher educational institution situated in Gauteng, South Africa. They were employed on an academic (58%) and administrative level (42%) and comprised predominantly white (52%) and black employees (48%). The participants were mostly in their early and middle career stages (78%, 26–55 years; 22%, 56–65 years) and had between 1 and 10 years (53%) and between 11 and 20 years (47%) of service at the institution.

Measuring instruments

Sacrifice

The Job Embeddedness Scale (JES) developed by Mitchell et al. (2001) was utilised to measure the participants' perceptions

of person–job sacrifice (5 items, e.g. ‘I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job’) and person–organisation sacrifice (5 items, e.g. ‘The benefits are good on this job’). Responses were measured on a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). Research by Mitchell et al. (2001) provides evidence of the construct validity of the JES. The internal consistency reliability coefficients obtained in the present study were 0.80 for person–job sacrifice and 0.67 for person–organisation sacrifice.

Organisational commitment

The Organisational Commitment Scale (OCS) developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) was utilised to measure respondents’ affective commitment (8 items, e.g. ‘This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me’), continuance commitment (9 items, e.g. ‘Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organisation now’) and normative commitment (6 items, e.g. ‘I would not leave my organisation right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it’). A seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree) was used for subject responses to each of the items. Research by Meyer and Allen (1997) provides evidence of the construct validity of the OCS. The internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged between 0.75 and 0.86.

Workplace friendship

The Workplace Friendship Scale (WFS) developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) was utilised to measure respondents’ perceptions of friendship opportunity (6 items, e.g. ‘I am able to work with my co-workers to collectively solve problems’) and friendship prevalence (6 items, e.g. ‘I socialise with co-workers outside the workplace’). A five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used for subject responses to each of the items. Research by Nielsen (2000) provides evidence of the construct validity of the WFS. The internal consistency reliability coefficients obtained for friendship opportunity was 0.86 and for friendship prevalence was 0.81.

Career concerns

The Psychological Career Preoccupation Scale (PCPS) developed by Coetzee (2015) was utilised to measure respondents’ career preoccupations in terms of career establishment (13 items; e.g. ‘To what extent are you concerned about advancing in your job or career?’), adaptation (5 items; e.g. ‘To what extent are you concerned about making a career change?’) and work–life adjustment (6 items; e.g. ‘To what extent are you concerned about reducing your current workload?’). A five-point Likert-type scale (1 = not concerned; 5 = extremely concerned) was used for subject responses to each of the items. Research by Takawira (2017) confirmed the construct validity of the PCPS. The internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged between 0.86 and 0.93.

Research procedure

The online survey facilities of the research institution were utilised to collect the data. The participants were invited to

voluntarily participate in the study. Each questionnaire comprised a cover letter inviting respondents to participate voluntarily in the research and reassuring them that all responses would be treated as anonymous and confidential. The cover letter further indicated that by completing the questionnaires and returning them, they as participants agree to use the results for research purposes only.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients), Pearson product–moment correlations and multiple regression analysis were conducted to achieve the objectives of the study. In order to counter the probability of a Type I error, it was decided to set the significance value for interpreting the results at a 95% confidence level ($p \leq 0.05$). The threshold value for multicollinearity concerns were set at r greater than 0.90 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Following the guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), tolerance values ≤ 0.10 were set as an indication of multicollinearity in the multiple regression analysis. The biographical variables of age, race, gender and tenure were included as control variables because previous research shows that these variables significantly influence individuals’ organisational commitment (Van Dyk, 2012).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the higher distance educational institution and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the organisation.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

The reliability coefficients reported in Table 1 show acceptable internal consistency reliability of the various scale variables. In terms of the control variables, Table 1 shows that age had significant correlations with career adaptation preoccupations and work–life adjustment preoccupations, while race and tenure had significant correlations with all three of the career preoccupations ($r \geq -0.14$ and $r \leq -0.32$; $p \leq 0.05$; small to moderate effect). Race had also significant correlations with the two sacrifices, friendship opportunity and affective and normative commitment ($r \geq -0.20$ and $r \leq -0.33$; $p \leq 0.01$; small to moderate effect). Gender did not have any correlations with the variables.

Table 1 further shows that person–job sacrifice and person–organisation sacrifice had significant positive correlations with the three commitment variables ($r \geq 0.26$ and $r \leq 0.44$; $p \leq 0.001$; moderate effect) and the two workplace friendship variables ($r \geq 0.21$ and $r \leq 0.37$; $p \leq 0.01$; small to moderate effect). Person–organisation sacrifice had also positive correlations with the career establishment and work–life adjustment preoccupations ($r \geq 0.17$ and $r \leq 0.18$; $p \leq 0.05$; small effect). Career establishment and work–life adjustment preoccupations had significant positive correlations with

TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

No.	Description	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Age	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Race	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Tenure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Person–job sacrifice	4.30	1.01	0.80	0.11	0.01	0.05	0.03	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	Person–organisation sacrifice	4.56	1.04	0.67	-0.08	-0.27***	0.02	-0.005	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Career establishment concerns	3.62	1.01	0.93	-0.25	-0.45***	-0.09	-0.25***	0.03	0.18**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	Career adaptation concerns	2.80	1.05	0.86	-0.32***	-0.41***	-0.12	-0.14*	-0.06	0.13	0.64***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Work–life adjustment concerns	3.21	0.99	0.91	-0.27***	-0.49***	-0.04	-0.19**	0.01	0.17*	0.60***	0.60***	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	Friendship opportunity	3.84	0.81	0.86	-0.05	-0.20**	0.09	-0.08	0.31***	0.37***	0.06	0.03	0.05	-	-	-	-	-
11	Friendship prevalence	3.24	0.92	0.81	-0.08	-0.09	0.02	-0.07	0.21**	0.27***	-0.003	0.02	0.08	0.59***	-	-	-	-
12	Affective commitment	4.60	1.23	0.79	0.13	-0.27***	0.05	0.10	0.44***	0.39***	0.15*	0.04	0.26***	0.35***	0.26***	-	-	-
13	Continuance commitment	5.02	1.26	0.75	-0.008	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.28***	0.26***	0.04	-0.02	0.07	0.07	0.02	0.07	-	-
14	Normative commitment	4.32	1.59	0.86	0.07	-0.33***	0.03	0.01	0.41***	0.36***	0.09	-0.01	0.18**	0.24***	0.18*	0.64***	0.21**	-

$N = 200$.

SD, standard deviation; α , Cronbach's alpha.

*, $p \leq 0.05$; **, $p \leq 0.01$; ***, $p \leq 0.001$.

TABLE 2: Multiple regression results.

Variables	Affective commitment			Continuance commitment			Normative commitment		
	β	t	Tolerance	β	t	Tolerance	β	t	Tolerance
Intercept	0.86	1.56	-	2.66	3.89***	-	1.41	1.85	-
Age	0.49	2.81**	0.73	-0.12	-0.56	0.73	0.34	1.39	0.73
Race	-0.56	-3.34***	0.67	0.21	1.00	0.68	-1.07	-4.60***	0.68
Gender	0.22	1.50	0.95	0.12	0.68	0.95	0.22	1.11	0.95
Tenure	0.20	1.25	0.71	0.38	1.85	0.71	0.22	0.98	0.71
Person–job sacrifice	0.38	4.19***	0.57	0.23	2.06*	0.57	0.51	4.04***	0.57
Person–organisation sacrifice	0.05	0.58	0.52	0.19	1.69	0.52	0.09	0.74	0.52
Career establishment concerns	-0.12	-1.02	0.36	0.01	0.08	0.36	-0.15	-0.93	0.36
Career adaptation concerns	-0.13	-1.45	0.52	-0.09	-0.78	0.52	-0.22	-1.72	0.52
Work–life adjustment concerns	0.39	3.43***	0.38	0.18	1.30	0.38	0.31	1.95*	0.38
Friendship opportunity	0.22	1.92*	0.57	0.04	0.26	0.57	0.08	0.52	0.57
Friendship prevalence	0.10	1.02	0.63	-0.10	-0.85	0.63	0.07	0.54	0.62

$N = 200$.

Affective commitment: F_p , 11.63***; R^2 , 0.37.

Continuance commitment: F_p , 2.62**; R^2 , 0.08.

Normative commitment: F_p , 8.15***; R^2 , 0.28.

β , beta.

*, $p \leq 0.05$; **, $p \leq 0.01$; ***, $p \leq 0.001$.

affective commitment ($r \geq 0.15$ and $r \leq 0.26$; $p \leq 0.05$; small effect). Work–life adjustment had also a positive correlation with normative commitment ($r = 0.18$; $p = 0.01$, small effect). Friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence had significant positive correlations with affective and normative commitment ($r \geq 0.18$ and $r \leq 0.35$; $p \leq 0.05$; small to moderate effect).

Multiple regression analysis

Three regression models were computed, one for each organisational commitment variable as dependent variable. The results are reported in Table 2. The regression model for affective commitment explained 37% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.37$; large practical effect; $F = 11.63$, $p = 0.0001$) of the variance in affective commitment. Age ($\beta = 0.49$; $p \leq 0.01$) and race ($\beta = -0.56$; $p \leq 0.001$) along with person–job sacrifice ($\beta = 0.38$; $p \leq 0.001$), work–life adjustment preoccupations ($\beta = 0.39$; $p \leq 0.001$) and friendship opportunity ($\beta = 0.22$; $p \leq 0.05$) explained a significant proportion of the variance in affective commitment. The tolerance values were all

above the threshold value of 0.10, indicating no threats of multicollinearity among the variables.

Table 2 shows that the regression model for continuance commitment explained 8% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.08$; small practical effect; $F = 2.62$, $p = 0.01$) of the variance in continuance commitment. Only person–job sacrifice ($\beta = 0.23$; $p = 0.05$) accounted for the variance in continuance commitment. The regression model for normative commitment explained 28% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.28$; large practical effect; $F = 8.15$, $p = 0.001$) of the variance in normative commitment. Race ($\beta = -1.07$; $p = 0.001$), person–job sacrifice ($\beta = 0.51$; $p = 0.001$) and work–life adjustment preoccupations ($\beta = 0.31$; $p = 0.05$) accounted for the variance in normative commitment. The tolerance values were all above the threshold value of 0.10, indicating no threats of multicollinearity among the variables.

The results provided evidence in support of the research hypothesis that sacrifice, career preoccupations and workplace friendship predict employees' commitment towards the organisation. High levels of person–job sacrifice

and friendship opportunity accounted for high levels of commitment. However, contrary to the research hypothesis expectation, high work–life adjustment concerns also accounted for high levels of commitment.

Discussion

The study explored the constructs of job-embedded sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns as potential underlying explanatory mechanisms of employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment towards the organisation. Overall, the results highlighted perceptions of person–job sacrifice, friendship opportunity and work–life adjustment career concerns as explanatory mechanisms of the participants' levels of affective commitment. Perceptions of person–job sacrifice also significantly explained participants' continuance and normative commitment, while preoccupations with work–life adjustment further explained normative commitment towards the organisation.

The results suggest that perceptions of what one will have to sacrifice in terms of the job's characteristics (i.e. freedom and autonomy to pursue goals), the respect gained from people and promotional opportunities may be important mechanisms in explaining employees' affective, continuance and normative commitment. The findings corroborate previous research by Van Dyk (2012) conducted in the ICT environment which also confirmed a significant positive link between person–job sacrifice and the three organisational commitment components. Building on the basic premises of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), the presence of job autonomy, being respected and having promotional opportunities seem to enhance employees' sense of employment security and engender the desire to remain in the organisation. Job autonomy addresses a basic psychological need that motivates and inspires employees to perform better at work (McAllister, Harris, Hochwarter, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2017) while lack of job autonomy generally functions as a source of conflict or tension between employees and their employing organisation (Hassan, 2012). Career development opportunities are seen as important for personal growth and fulfil the psychological need for developing the necessary competencies for sustained employability and expressing the self-concept at work. Employees who see a future for themselves in the organisation by means of promotional opportunities may feel more secure in terms of the employment relationship and therefore more committed to remain in the organisation (Deas, 2017). Being respected by others and being promoted may also be seen as important perks that provide a sense of employment security and that an employee may be reluctant to sacrifice in the employment relationship (Döckel, 2003).

Perceptions of workplace friendship opportunities address employees' psychological need for relatedness which could explain the association with higher levels of affective commitment. Attachment theory views connectedness as beneficial for human development because it engenders positive feelings of belonging within a particular social group

or situation (Schultheiss, 2003; Yuen & Yau, 2015). Affective commitment is also seen to originate from feelings of belongingness in the workplace (Jaros et al., 1993). Building on the premises of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), workplace friendships also serve as a source of intrinsic reward, support and information which may lead to employees feeling more secure in the employment relationship. The social support engendered by workplace friendships serves to form a holding environment for employees in which they feel safe and supported as members of the group (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2011; Kahn, 2001). The results suggest that perceptions of workplace friendships may be important emotional reasons why employees desire to remain with the organisation. The findings corroborate the notion that friendship and co-worker relations are some of the emotional reasons that explain employees' affective commitment (Colquitt, LePine & Wesson, 2017).

Contrary to the expectation that strong career concerns would explain lower levels of commitment, the results showed that high preoccupations with balancing one's work and life, reducing one's workload and settling down explained higher levels of affective commitment (i.e. feeling a strong sense of belonging to the organisation, desiring to remain with the organisation the rest of one's career) and normative commitment (i.e. feeling obliged to remain because a sense of loyalty for what one gained from the organisation). The finding could be attributed to the premise that career concerns can either function as challenge appraisals (i.e. perception of a situation as having potential for growth) of the career situation or hindrance appraisals (i.e. frustrations because of being obstructed in pursuing self-relevant goals; Searle & Auton, 2015). It appears that in the context of the present study, work–life adjustment concerns functioned as challenge appraisals of the employment relationship. Research indicates that organisational retention practices that address employees' need for work–life balance and flexible work schedules enhance their organisational commitment (Döckel, 2003). Seen through the theoretical lens of organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000), such working conditions may be seen to strengthen the employment relationship, which in turn explain the higher levels of affective and normative commitment. Research also shows that work–life balance considerations by the organisation enhance employees' job and career satisfaction (Takawira, 2017).

Implications for theory and practice

The findings extend organisational attachment theory (St Clair, 2000) by utilising organisational attachment theory as theoretical framework in explaining the role of sacrifice, workplace friendship and career concerns in employees' organisational commitment. Exploring perceptions of person–job sacrifice, friendship opportunity and work–life adjustment concerns as explanatory mechanisms of participants' levels of commitment, the findings offer deeper insights into why employees feel psychologically attached to and desire to remain in the organisation. Practically, addressing the underlying psychological needs espoused by employees'

perceptions of person–job sacrifice, friendship opportunity and work/life adjustment concerns are important to consider in human resource talent management practices. The constructs speak to employees' sense of employment security which influences their organisational commitment. Human resource practices that support formal discussions with employees regarding their feelings about their jobs (i.e. offering adequate autonomy), relatedness with others (i.e. respect, workplace friendships and social support) and work–life balance policies and practices may facilitate commitment towards the organisation.

Limitations

The study should be seen as an exploratory study because of the non-probability convenience sampling procedure applied. The findings are limited to the higher educational institution and the demographics of the sample who participated in the study and cannot be generalised to other occupational and demographical contexts. Because of the cross-sectional quantitative research design, no cause–effect relations could be established. Future longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes in various occupational contexts that provide a broader demographic representation of the South African population are recommended. Single-source, self-report data can further introduce common method bias into the results. Future studies should assess for common method bias. However, certain procedural remedies were followed to mitigate the effects of common method bias such as using various scale formats, unrelated measures and protecting the anonymity of the respondents.

Conclusion

Employees' psychological attachment to their organisation remains an important topic of inquiry for organisations concerned about improving their talent management practices. Drawing from organisational attachment theory, the findings of the study offer new insights into how employees' perceptions of person–job sacrifice, workplace friendship opportunity and work–life adjustment concerns allude to their sense of employment security in the organisation which in turn accounts for higher levels of organisational commitment. Human resource practitioners and managers could utilise the findings to inform the organisation's talent management practices for the purpose of retaining valuable staff members.

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Competing interests

The authors hereby declare that they have no conflict of interest and that the manuscript has not been submitted elsewhere for either review or publication.

Authors' contributions

All three authors coordinated the data collection, conducted the data analysis and made a substantial contribution to the writing of the article.

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