The Impact of Human Resource Practices, Social Support and Personality Traits on Affective Organizational Commitment

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Abstract: The current study aimed to outline how employee's affective commitment could be enhanced through HR practices including career development, financial incentives; social support and personality traits (Conscientiousness and openness to experience). Respondents were sampled from private higher education institutions in Muscat, Oman. The 181 questionnaires were distributed out of which 140 were received back, thus, resulting in 77% response rate. Through using PLS path modeling approach the study found a significant impact of HR practices including career development and financial incentives upon affective commitment. Accordingly, the study also found positive relationship between social support and affective commitment. Lastly, personality traits were also found in a significant relationship with affective commitment across respondents from higher education in Oman. The study has proposed notable implications and recommendations for future researchers in the area.

Key words: Affective commitment, HR practices, social support, personality traits, Oman, private higher education colleges

INTRODUCTION

The concept of human resource practices as Ahmad (2013) demonstrated from different perspectives such as human resource development as an academic and professional discipline as assistance to management as an economic and political conflict management between employees and employers and as raising a movement of worker's involvement which is influence of developments in social and industrial psychology (Schuler and Jackson, 1987). Many practices related to staffing and motivating employees cluster naturally into two bundles. First bundle depends on a control strategy which means philosophy of management asserts managerial control and attempt to organize production processes. The major focus of human resource practices in this bundle is efficiency and standardization. The second bundle depends on commitment strategy that purpose builds strong correlation to the organization and affirms employee empowerment. The main focus of these practices is to empower employees and build a strong feeling of commitment and loyalty (Walton, 1985). Similarly, the social support is of importance (Rousseau and Aube, 2010) for nurturing employee's to enhance their affective commitment. The current study aimed to highlight how HR practices, social support and personality traits influence across Omani private higher education institutions.

Literature review

Affective commitment: Organizational commitment is considered to be the most important aspect every business intends to acquire. The research on the idea of commitment has investigated both the perspectives, i.e., of employees as well as of employers. According to Erdheim *et al.* (2006), commitment is highly crucial for businesses. Multifold of studies and meta analysis reports (Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) could be found on the concept of organziational commitment. Allen and Meyer (1997)'s research is considered to be of prime significance in this regard, where the researchers suggest that the business can simply not achieve its objectives if there is lack or no organizational commitment amongst the employees. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) has mentioned that affective commitment has attained highest level of research attention which according to Buchanan (1974) is the emotional association of an employee towards the broader organizational objectives, goals and aims. This attachment facilitates employees to commitm more towards research and can be boosted through social support, fair treatment, rewards and recognition. According to Allen and Meyer (1997), affective commitment is the emotional connection of employees that makes them feel connected with the organzation with delight and pride and results in more efforts from the employee side.

Studies have reported that affective commitment can signifcantly help organizations in improving job perofrmance, OCB and reduce abseentism (Syafiqah and Shkuri, 2011; Meyer *et al.*, 2002).

According to Waseem (2010), workers with strong affective commitment have expressed high performance, productivity and job pleasure. They tend to stay connected with the job and remain united to the fact that there is no gap between them and the organization at large. Thus, employees with high affective organizational commitment tend to be high in energy whilst performing work tasks (Anderson *et al.*, 1994).

According to WeiBo *et al.* (2010), there are several aspects that need to be further explored particularly in academic research regarding affective commitment. Similarly, Norazizi and Mastar (2012) have asserted that numerous aspects and how they can relate to affective comitment are yet to be explained particularly by academic schoalrs. Moreover, there are mixed resutls pertainign to some of the prominent factors in connection to affective commitment. Hence, the current study aims to empirically investigate some of those concepts, respectively.

Human resource practices: Organizations need to look into HR practices through which employee's attitudes and behaviours could be enhanced (Dessler, 2003). This implies towards the need for responsive HR practices that can potentially help business in doing so. Through this, organizational policies and practices would help employees to achieve business goals and performance targets. HRM practices have attained acute importance over the past decades due to which people have started realizing the importance of it as a critical asset. But the questions arises as to what specific behaviours are the most important in order to enhance employee outcomes.

Career development: Prior studies have outlined career as a continuous process of an individual involving numerous work experiences and job roles (Hall and Mirvis, 1996; Baruch, 1996). The word of term career is reffered often with different meanings such as Ivancevich and Lee have defined it as defined plan involving career progressions including experience enrichment and financial stability. Greenhaus, explains career as the culmination of work concerned experiences and activities that an employees achieves over the course of his professional life.

According to Zheng and Kleiner (2001) career development is necessary for employees to gain satisfactory exposures and recognitions throughout their professional career. London (1993) suggests career development as a continual process of individual progression over the work life. Gutteridge *et al.* (1993) suggests that career development can be divided into two broader prospects the first is associated with the individual itself planning for its professional progression and second links with organziations striving to manage and develop the career of its employees. Generally, both of these aspects are critically important to enhance employee's career prospects.

Financial incentives: Denotes to monetary rewards designated for employees in exchange of their services for the business (Saleem, 2011). Financial incentives are of great significance in order to attain required employee outcomes and include wages, long ranged incentives, bonuses and other employee benefits (Hsu *et al.*, 2003). Bartol and Martin (1982) have outlines that financial incentives are important in order to retain employees otherwise, the business may face employees quitting the jobs more frequently. The researchers have also outlined that there is a need for the development of an overall financial strategy that caters to all the employee needs and expectations. Such a strategy would yield better performance prospects for the company in the long run.

Career development and affective commitment: Yeung and Berman (1997) have asserted that performance prospects can be conveniently influenced through HR practices. Meyer *et al.* (2002) has underlined that career development of employees has the potential to predict affective commitment in an individual. Studies have outlined towards the link of career development with affective commitment for instance, Niekmat (2012) investigated in the oil and gas sector and found that career development was significantly linked with organziationl commitment. Accordingly, Maheshwari *et al.* (2005) investigated to explore the link between HR practices and organziational commitment. However, there have been studies that have forwarded contrasting results. For example, Conway (2004) examined to see any relationship between employee career and commitment. The study reported no effect. Similarly, Chew and Chan (2008) also concluded insignificant relationship between career development and affective commitment amongst the employees. Bhagat and Chassie (1981) have marked negative relationship between the two. This conclusively requires further empirical attention in order to forward results that could help to generalize understanding on the relationship of career development with affective commitment.

Financial incentives and affective commitment: In the views of Armstrong (2006) effective compensation system

can make a healthy impact on predicting employee commitment. This suggests that rewards and financial incentives can be valuable in fostering commitment prospects at research. According to Allen and Meyer (1997), the rewards and appropriate financial incentives makes employee feel valued by the organziation hence enhancing their commitment levels. Studies have linked financial incentives with organziational commitment (Sendogdu *et al.*, 2013; Joarder and Sharif, 2012; Niekmat, 2012; Nawab and Bhatti, 2011).

Hence, to see how on a collective note, the HR practices including career development and financial incentives relate to employee's affective commitment, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- H_1: there is a significant positive relationship between human resource practices and affective commitment

Social support: The term social support refers to the idea of helping and supportive to other in general. Albrecht and Adelman (1987) have explained social support as the verbal or non verbal communication between the two parties on a particular issue or concern. Shumaker and Brownell (1984) on a major note have explained the concept as the exchange of resources and support features between the two individuals with the aim of promoting welfare. These definitions indicate towards the notion of two parties with understanding and positive relationship to help facilitate each other through monetary and non-monetary means.

Social support and affective commitment: Studies have outlined empirical link between social support and organizational commitment with the explanation that to the extent, an individual perceives positive help and support from its immediate supervisor and co-workers; it can enhance their commitment at work (Hammer *et al.*, 2009; Thompson *et al.*, 2005). Although, there is a severe paucity of research on the relationship between social support and employee's affective commitment yet, the understanding could be developed (Benson, 1998). Rousseau and Aube (2010) from their study have concluded that supervisor and coworker support can have a varied influence on employees and their affective organziational commitment. The researchers have stated that some employees may view supervisor support as a more formal assistance compared to coworkers and thereby respond differently. On the other hand, co-workers engaging in simialr tasks may be considered of more value compare to supervisors and their support by some of the employees (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008).

Keeping this variance beforehand, limtied studies could be highlighted that have examined the impact of social support including supervisor and co-workers on affective commitment (Joiner and Bakalis, 2006; Thomas *et al.*, 2005; Rousseau and Aube, 2010); hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- H_2: there is a significant positive relationship between social support and affective commitment

Personality traits: Robbins (1991) has explains personality concept as the aspects in which a person behaves or reacts. Wagner has referred personality traits as critical behaviors, feelings and personality dynamics that make the person different from others. Personality in the literatures has been denoted to 4 different aspects and the first one of them is social aspect whereby, the indivdual expresses how it conencts with the local community, family, business and with people at the workplace. According to Saputra, all these aspects contribute and mark an influence on the personality of an individual. The second aspect is the cultural arena whereby the norms, values m practices and customs act as an improtant aspect of individual personality (Feist and Feist, 2008). Accordingly, the third aspect is biological which caters features, appearance, and heredity, skin, colour and so on. The last aspect in this regard is economic whereby the family financial background influences how a person behaves at the workplace (Feist and Feist, 2008).

Personality traits and affective commitment: According to Kumar and Bakhshi (2010), the personality traits and dimensions holds a great deal of influence on how people behave at work. Thus, personality can expose as to how an individual will behave with colleagues, respond to higher authorities and perform (Luthans, 2010). Studies like Ahmadi *et al.* (2012) and have outlined positive influence of conscientiousness and openness on individual's organizational commitment. Moreover, Abedi *et al.* (2009) has reported the significance of managerial enthusiasm towards new experiences as critical for enhancing personality traits to boost organizational commitment.

On the contrary, Spagnoli and Caetano have argued on the significance of these traits with organizational commitment. According to them, there is a lack of significant relationship between personality traits and organizational commitment. This confirms and strengthens the assertion of Daneshfard that conscientiousness personality types of managers hold no association with organizational commitment. Similarly,

Erdheim *et al.* (2006) has remarked the same for openness and affective commitment and Panaccio and Vandenberghe (2012) concluded a significant negative relationship between conscientiousness and affective commitment. Hence, the current study hypothesized the following:

- H₃: there is a significant positive relationship between personality traits and affective commitment

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Instrumentation: About 6 item scale by Niekmat (2012) was deployed to assess career development and 3-item scale by Deckop *et al.* (1999) was used to examine financial incentives. The 7-item scale was used to test social support and 19-item scale on personality traits was adapted from John and Srivastava (1999), respectively. Affective commitment was assessed through 6-item scale by Meyer *et al.* (2002). The respondents were asked to rate questions on the scale of 1-5 whereby, 1 denoted to strongly disagree and 5 to strongly agree.

Sampling: Krejcie and Morgan, technique was used in order to sample for the data across the private colleges in the Western zone of Muscat, the capital of Oman. The table outlined 181 as the minimum number of sample for the study for the total population of 380. Cluster random sampling was further deployed to distribute the questionnaires.

Respondent's demographics: Information concerning age, gender and matiral status was collected from the respondents. Table 1 highlights the details in this regard.

Assessing measurement model: Smart PLS 2.0 was used to assess the path coefficients andtest the hypothesized relationships (Hair *et al.*, 2013, 2012). According to Henseler *et al.* (2009), measurement model is assessed in order to verify individual item reliability and consistency, convergent and discriminant validity. In order to ensure responsive discriminant and convergent validity, item with lower than 0.5 loadings were deleted, following the recommendations by Chin (1998). Figure 1 outlines further details in this aspect.

Discriminant validity: Discriminant validity refers to the extent the variables are unique from each other (Duarte and Raposo, 2010). As per Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant is the square troot of AVE which should be high in all other compared values. The study has achieved sufficient level of discriminant validity and Table 2 outlines details in this regard.

Assessment structural model: Bootstrapping approach was used where the model was run with 5000 bootstraps to outline the significance of the hypothesized path coefficients (Hair *et al.*, 2013). Table 3 explains further details in this regard.

According to results in Table 3, the study has concluded with significant results across all its hypothesized relationships. The result have found that HR practices are significantly related to affective commitment ($\beta = 0.254$, p<0.10); making the hypothesis 1 supported. Accordingly, the second hypothesized relationship between social support and affective commitment has also been found significant ($\beta = 0.236$, p<0.015). Lastly, relationship between personality traits and affective commitment has also been found supported, resulting in all 3 hypothesis supported.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
<25	60	4.7
25-30	18	14.0
31-35	35	27.0
36-40	42	32.6
41-45	17	13.2
>45	11	8.5
Gender		
Male	73	56.6
Female	56	43.4
Marital status		
Single	23	17.8
Married	101	78.2
Divorced/separated	30	2.4
Widowed	20	1.6

Table 2: Latent constructs correlations and square roots of average variance extracted

Latent variables	AC	CD	FI	PTC	PTO	SS
AC	0.709					
CD	0.395	0.781				
FI	-0.027	0.171	0.869			
PTC	0.402	0.108	-0.028	0.728		
PTO	0.388	0.149	-0.049	0.588	0.713	
SS	0.443	0.439	0.052	0.164	0.306	0.741

Table 3: Hypothesis rrsults

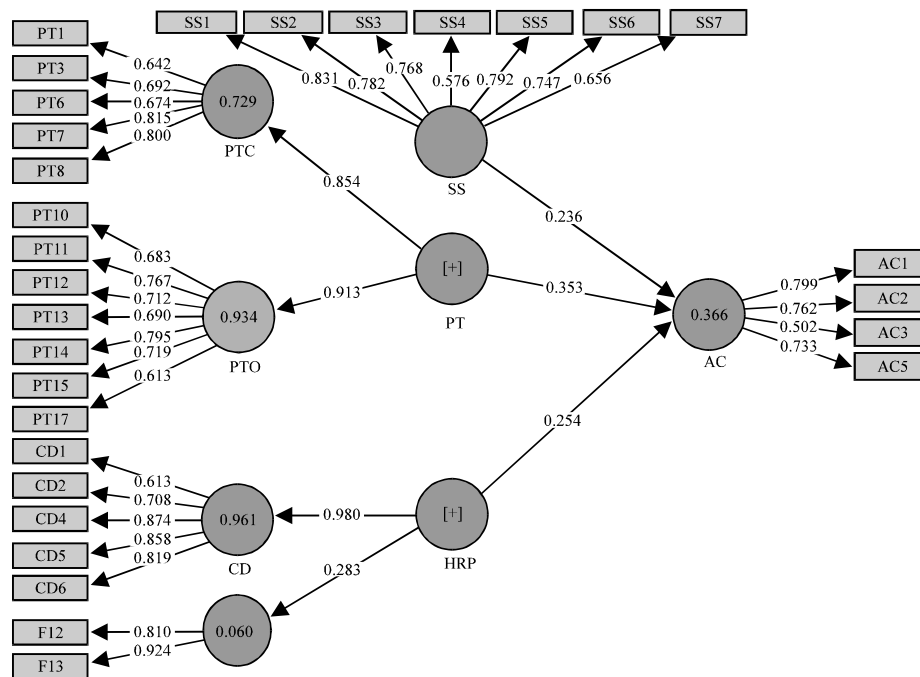| Hypotheses	Relations	β	SD	t-values	p-values	Decisions
H₁	Human resource practices+>Affective commitment	0.254	0.109	2.335	0.010	Significant and supported
H₂	Social support+>Affective commitment	0.236	0.108	2.179	0.015	Significant and supported
H₃	Personality traits+>Affective commitment	0.353	0.091	3.882	0.000	Significant and supported

Fig. 1: Measurement model

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate how HR practices, social support and personality traits relate to employee's affective commitment. The study has found that employees positive and healthy about HR practices including career development and financial incentives were significantly high in affective commitment. This is parallel to the findings by Agba *et al.* (2010), Paul and Anantharaman (2004). In connection to career development, the study findings are also in parallel with the study results of Maheshwari *et al.* (2005) who found that employees positive about their career development and opportunities provided to them in this regard were high in affective commitment. Similarly, Anvari *et al.* (2011) had also, reported signifcant relationship between compensation and affective commitment. So, the results of the current study have confirmed and strengthened the postive and signifcant relationship between affectiev relationship. HR practices can make a considerable impact on fostering employee's affective commitment to further the performance prospects.

Furthermore, the study has also reported significant relationship between social support and affective commitment whereby, the study has revealed that positve association, facilitation and support from supervisor sand coworkers can enhance employees1 affective commitment at work. The results consistent with the findings of Rousseau and Aube (2010) who reported important and postive influence of supervisor and coworker support on affective commitment.

Parallel to this, the findings of the current study marks that social support is also valued in Oman and the respondents appreciate support and facilitation from supervisor and coworkers. The findings also help us to understand what Leveson and Joiner (2006) explained concerning to the importance of social support to boost employee's emotional attachment with the organization. Benson (1998) and Thomas *et al.* (2005) have also reported similar findings thus concluding social support as an important aspect for increasing employee's affective commitment.

Accordingly, the study has also found that personality traits are also of importance when it comes to affective commitment. The results have outlined that good personality can help employees to develop affective commitment. Hence, organizations can research on learning about their employee's personality traits and harness them to boost their affective commitment with the organziation. These findings are in parallel to what Abedi *et al.* (2009) and Kumar and Bakshi (2010) outlined in their studies, suggesting strong influence of perosnality traits and affective commitment.

CONCLUSION

The current study was designed to investigate the relationship between HR practices, social support, personality traits with affective commitment in private higher education colleges in Oman. The findings in a nutshell have highlighted paramount significance of all three factors in enhancing affective commitment across higher education colleges in Oman. The results have suggested that organizations aiming to induce higher affective commitment amongst their employers need to develop responsive HR strategies with effective career development opportunities, financial incentives, social support and personality traits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study forwards several recommendations. On a pratical note, the study recommends businesses to work on HR practices in order to boost employee's affective comitment. On the grounds of the current study findings, the first recommendation for future researchers is to conduct the same study with longitudinal means in order to forward more generalizable results.

Accordingly, future studies may consider undertaking research on the same variables eith wider target audience. Accordingly, future studies may also consider investigating other HR practices and their relationship with affective commitment. Similarly, how management support could add further value towards affective commitment may also be an area of interest for future researchers.

This would further add and strengthen the results and educate how the three factors influence affective commitment in other geopgrphical locations as well. Since, the model explains 37% of the vairance, further study is encouraged to outline oter costructs and variables that could potentially influence and facilitate affective commitment.

Talking about implications, th study has strived to contrivute towards the theoricial arena of affective commitment through strengthening the contribution and signifncance of HR practices, social suport and personality traits. The study has strived to theoritically add towards the body of knowledge on affective commitment and how these factors could help businesses foster it, respectively.

Moreover, the study has practically contributed through investigating the impact of these factors on the affective commitment in the private higher education institutions in Oman. The study has outlined that for organizations particularly in educational institutions in Oman, affective commitment could be enhanced and predicted through launching responsive HR practices, creating a conducive social support environment and nurturing healthy employee's personality traits. The results have highlighted specific areas for top management to consider and focus in order to enhance commitment prospects at the organizational level for exceptional performance and productivity.

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