

WORK RELATED STRESS AND EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT: A CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: *The paper investigates the impact of work related stress on employees' commitment. Its' objective is to determine if there is a relationship between work stress and employees' commitment to the investigated organization. The research, which is cross-sectional, made use of questionnaires to elicit data from 162 staff of Benson Idahosa University. These data were analyzed using the regression statistical technique. The analyses revealed that work stress was negatively correlated to affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The findings underscore the importance of reducing and managing work overload, lack of autonomy and role conflict which are antecedents of work related stress as a way of improving employees' commitment to the organization.*

KEY WORDS: *work stress, employees' commitment, continuance commitment, affective commitment, normative commitment.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M, M1, M5, I31.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With today's fast changing business environment and hard-hitting global competition, organizations are focusing on operating at their optimum level (Gul, 2015); therefore, commitment is now acknowledged as a necessity for effectiveness of both employees and the organization at large (Armstrong, 2005). Organizations are determined to maintain high commitment in their employees and have begun to use diverse means and methods to enhance employee's commitment.

Employees have different attitude towards the work that they do. These attitudes, to a large extent, affect their behavior at work and determine whether or not they would be committed to their work and to the organization. Employee commitment

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reveals the degree wherewith an individual identifies with an organization plus is being committed to its objectives and inclined to maintaining membership in the organization (Igbinomwanhia, 2011; Luthan, McCaul, & Dodd, 2017). Various researches have been done on employee commitment (Salancik 1997; Mathieu & Zajac, 2000; Dixit & Bhati, 2012). However, more attention needs to be given to factors or variables that reduce or have a negative effect on employee commitment such as work stress.

The work place is presently predisposed to changes like intensified competition, innovation, quality and improvement in the rate of doing business etc. One major topic which has received amassed devotion especially in the area of industrial well-being for over a period of thirty years is work stress (Swanepoel, 2001; Ziauddin, Khan, Jam & Hijazi, 2010; Weaver & Allen, 2017). Work-related stress is an increasing concern for employees in organizations globally. Tsui and Ajala (2007) aver that work stress is an individual's contrary reaction to undue pressure or other types of work demand placed on them. Omolara (2008) describes work related stress in terms of the adverse emotional and physical reaction which occurs in an individual. Consequently, they are unable to deal with the demands placed on them.

It is believed that stress has adverse psychologically and physically effects on individuals and is a key factor in cases of high absenteeism rate, high accident rate, low employee morale, increased employee turnover rate in addition to increased medical cost of many employees (Wahab, 2010; Brauchli, Bauer & Hamming, 2011).

Work stress often causes high displeasure among employees. It leads to fatigue, job mobility, poor work performance and poor interpersonal relationship in the workplace (Manshor, Rodrigue & Chong, 2003; Chen, & Chen, 2012). It has also been linked to some antecedent factors such as work overload, role conflict and lack of autonomy (Bashir & Ramay, 2010). Several organizations design jobs with unrealistic demand. Such demands cannot be matched with the employees' skills and abilities. It is against this backdrop that this work intends to ascertain the impact of work overload, role conflict and lack of autonomy, the three antecedents of work stress, on affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, the three dimensions of employee commitment

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate the impact of work-related stress on employee commitment towards the organization. The specific objectives are:

- i. To determine the effect of work overload on employees' affective commitment towards the organization
- ii. To examine the impact of lack of autonomy on employee continuance commitment towards the organization
- iii. To ascertain the impact of role ambiguity on employee normative commitment towards the organization.

1.2 Statement of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

H0: There is no significant relationship between work stress and employee affective commitment to the organization

Hypothesis 2:

H0: There is no significant relationship between work stress and employee continuance commitment to the organization

Hypothesis 3:

H0: There is no significant relationship between work stress and employee normative commitment to the organization.

1.3 Research Framework

In scope, the study is streamlined to three antecedents of work stress which are: work overload, lack of autonomy and role ambiguity and the three dimensions of employee commitment which are: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

Commitment is a state of mind of an employee whereby he becomes certain about his or her actions and beliefs towards his or her involvement to an object or activity. Commitment is what makes an employee prefer the job he or she is doing even when the payoffs are not evident (Bashaw & Grant 2004; Ponnu & Chuah 2010). Consequently, employee commitment is a psychological involvement of an employee with his organization through a sense of belonging, acceptance of organizational objectives in addition to his willingness to take on challenges and to readily exert more energy towards the growth of the organization (Dolan, Tzafir, & Baruch, 2005; Gbadamosi, 2010; Ogundele, 2012).

Employee commitment is the extent to which workers agree with the values and goals of organization and are willing to maintain their membership with the organization, it is seen as the degree or level at which the employee is attracted to the organization (Jaros 2003; Bashaw & Grant, 2004; Ponnu & Chuah, 2010).

Okpara (2004) claims that employee commitment is reflected in employees' readiness to contribute to the attainment of the organization's goals. An employee's level of binding with an organization increases when employees are certain that they will be nurtured and progress in their field as the organization matures. This emotional attachment of the employee prevents him from leave the organization (Habib, Khursheed & Idrees, 2010).

2.1 Types of Employee Commitment

The three variants of employee commitment are: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment (Allen & Meyer, 2000).

2.1.1 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is the poignant and sentimental link between the employee and the organization (Allen & Meyer, 2000). It represents satisfied and pleased feelings of employees towards their jobs that make them willingly identify with and get involved with the organization (Dixit & Bhati, 2012; Luthan, McCual & Dodd, 2017). It involves recognizing the worth of an organization and adopting its ideologies, values and standards (Beck & Wilson 2000; Irefin & Mechanic, 2014).

2.1.2 Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment is defined as a supplementary cost paid by the employee when leaving the organization. An employee with strong continuance commitment maintains membership with an organization because he needs to (Meyer & Allen 2000; Zheng, Sharan, & Wei, 2010). When an employee enters into the organization, a link is created between the employee and the organization. He is committed to stay in the organization not because of the desire to do so but because of the absence of substitute jobs and the consciousness of the charge that comes with leaving the organization.

The absence of employment options upsurges the price associated with exiting the organization. Some other costs connected with leaving an organization includes loss of attractive benefits, the threat of wasting time, disrupted personal relationship, loss of pension plans, loss of status etc. (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). The attractive benefit the employee might lose by leaving the organization will make the employee stay with his or her current employer. This is the calculative form of commitment where an employee is aware of the expenses or fears accompanying leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen 1997; Ogundele, 2012).

Somers (1995) proposes that continuance commitment is divided into two parts; the high-sacrifice commitment which is the individual's sacrifice paid by the employee by leaving the organization and low-alternative commitment which is associated with scarce employment opportunities. While Kanter (2000) conceptualized continuance commitment as a "cognitive – continuance commitment".

According to him, this type of commitment ensues if there be a benefit that comes with sustained participation and a price linked with exiting the organization. Continuance commitment falls in line with the "exchanged-based definition" or "side-bet" theory (Powell and Meyer, 2004). The theory postulates that people will maintain their commitment towards their employing organization so long as they retain their positions in that organization, notwithstanding the stressful circumstances they experience. However, they are willing to leave the organization if they can get an alternative employment.

2.1.3 Normative commitment

Normative commitment is seen as the state in which an employee feels obliged to remain with an organization. An employee can be normatively committed towards an organization because such organization had sponsored his education. The management of the organization may have been of help to the employee, and as a result, the employee feels obligated to stay with the organization and contribute his or her quota to the growth and progress of the organization despite other favorable alternative jobs outside the organization (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014). Normative commitment is a value where a match between the values of the employee's and the values of the organizational take place (Igbinomwanhia, 2011).

Normative commitment develops through the employee beliefs that employer offer more than should be given. As this belief grows, the employee's perception of moral responsibility to keep working with an organization, notwithstanding the extent to which the organization improves the employee's status or achievement over time (Daxit & Bhati, 2012).

3. Work stress

Stress relates to employees in both large and small scale organizations and it is unhealthy for the organization and its members (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snock, & Rosenthal, 2000). So many aspects of life cause stress; work life is one of these aspects. The viable nature of some professions causes staff members to be concerned and devote maximum time to their job; this is seen as one of the reasons for stress. Stress is the opposing response people get when they are under extreme pressures or when other kinds of demands are placed on them (Bashir & Ramay, 2010; Gignac, Lacaille, Beaton, Backman, Cao, & Badley, 2014).

According to Bashir and Ramay (2010) work stress has a positive effect on workers up to the degree that the worker can handle it. Once it surpasses the tolerable limits, it could have an undesirable consequence on employees. Cooper (2011) differentiates between stress and pressure. Pressure could be positive and help to improve performance if correctly managed while stress always has a negative effect on employees (Bashir & Ramay, 2010). Employees may sometimes require a little amount of pressure to perform well.

However, problem may arise when the source of pressure turns out to be too recurrent without sufficient time to recuperate, or when the source of pressure is too excessive for an employee to handle (Robbins, 2004; Ganter & Rosen, 2013). This supports Anderson's (2003) view that employees have a propensity towards high level of stress with respect to time. For example, working for long hours may diminish the employees' urge to improve their performance. Besides time some other forces are used as an antecedent of stress, they are: work overloads, lack of autonomy and role conflict.

Work overload refers to the degree of stress that the individual experiences due to the awareness that he is incapable of coping productively with the amount of work

assigned to him (Amponsah-Tawiah, Annor, & Arthur, 2016). When people are expected to do more work as compared to what the available time and resources permit them to do, there is high tendency for them to experience strain (Martin, 2005; Kashif, , Braganca, Awang, & De Run, 2017).

Lack of autonomy is when an employee does not have control and cannot make decisions with regards to his job (Kasl, 2003). The experience of stress in lack of autonomy is strongly associated with perception of control and authority in decision making. This may be due to the job constraints. When there is enormous interdependence between an employee's tasks and the tasks of other workers within the organization, the person is expected to feel stressed (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002; Wood & Michaelided, 2016).

Role conflicts occur when a worker is required to perform a role that conflicts with their value. This is when supervisors place contradictory demand on the subordinates (Chung, Jung, & Sohn, 2017). According to Amponsah-Tawiah, et. al., (2016), role conflict refers to a mismatch of expectations and demands connected to a role. The effect of role conflict are individual personality conflict and interpersonal relations conflict.

Other causes of stress are unclear job description, lack of interpersonal relationship, inability to get things done, poor time management, feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, poor communication, quality and complexity of task to be done, lack of interpersonal relationships etc. (Michac, 2009).

3.1 Theories of Work Stress

Several theories explain the rationale behind work stress, this include the Lazarus psychological stress theory, job demand-control (support) theory, Person-Environment fit theory, transactional model and effort-reward Imbalance model. However, two of these theories are summarized below:

3.1.1 Psychological Stress: Lazarus Theory

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1986) stress refers to the relationship that an individual has with his environment which he appraises as significant to his or her well-being and to which the demands tax exceed the available coping resources.

There are two main concepts in this theory: firstly, appraisal. This is the employee's assessment of the implications of what is on-going for their well-being, and secondly, coping, which is the employee's actions to manage the exact demands. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1986) stress is seen as a relational concept and as an affiliation ('transaction') between the individual and his environment.

There are two processes pointed out as central intermediaries between the individual and the environment. They are cognitive appraisal and coping ability. In this theory, work place stress is described as conflict between an employee and his perception of an acceptable workplace environment. If the workplace environment is unacceptable by the employee, there is a possibility that the employee's commitment to the organizational goal will fall.

3.1.2 Person Environment Fit Theory

The Person-Environment Fit (P-E fit) emanates from the primary studies of Lewins (1935). Lewin theorized in his work that “the optimal fit between an individual and his environment is necessary for effective human operation. In his ‘work stress and well-being’ study, the fit concept has two components:

The degree of equivalence between the demand faced by an employee at work and their abilities to fulfil those demands, this is said to be the demands–ability fit.

The congruence between the individual’s needs (physical and psycho-social needs) and the existing resources. This is seen as needs–supplies fit.

The theory focuses on the amount of “stimulus” (for example, less work overload, defined role) that the employee wishes to have, and the level of the several stimuli he received.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study was on the employees of Benson Idahosa University, Benin City. There are 185 academic and 221 non-academic staff in the university. These 406 employees constituted the target population of the study. Therefore, this is essentially a cross-sectional study whose temporal scope covers the period from October, 2017 till February 2018.

The TCM Employee Commitment Survey developed by Meyer and Allen (2004) was adopted and slightly modified to suit the private university work environment in order to measure employees’ commitment to the organization. Work stress questionnaire stating questions on role ambiguity, lack of autonomy and work overload was adopted for this work also.

Employees’ responses to various aspects of employee commitment and work stress respectively were measured on a five point Likert scale. These are: Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Indifferent (IND), Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA).

Using SPSS, simple regression was used to correlate data and test hypotheses. The level of significance used was 0.05.

Using the Yamane (2002) formula for our sample size determination given:

$$n = \frac{N}{[1 + N(e)^2]} = 201 \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{406}{1 + 406(0.05)^2}$$

The sample size is computed to be 201.

This sample size was proportionately allocated to the different academic and non-academic staff respectively depending on the proportion of the entire population using the Kumar (1976) proportional allocation formula as given by

$$N_x = \frac{n.N_h}{P} \quad (2)$$

- ACADEMIC (185 persons)
92 = $\frac{201(185)}{406}$ =
- NON-ACADEMIC (221 persons)
109 = $\frac{201(221)}{406}$ =

201 copies of questionnaires were distributed to respondents. The respondents were given copies of the questionnaire based on random sampling to ensure that the various departments, divisions and sections in the school were adequately covered. 162 questionnaires were returned.

4.1 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Twenty copies of the questionnaires were administered to staff member of Benson Idahosa University. The data collected from the retrieved questionnaire were tested with the Cronbach alpha reliability test to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The result is shown below:

Table 1. Validity and Reliability of Instrument

S/N	Variable	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha value
1	Work Overload	9	0.708
2	Lack of Autonomy	7	0.614
3	Role Conflict	5	0.687
4	Affective Commitment	8	0.681
5	Continuance Commitment	8	0.767
6	Normative Commitment	8	0.631
7	Total	45	0.844

Source: Researcher's field work (2017)

The result shows that the questionnaire items are reliable and can be depended upon to elicit the necessary information from the respondents (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1997).

4.2 Model Specification

The model statistical or technique to be used is the regression model. The regression model having a functional form which is given as follows:
For Hypothesis One:

$$AC = F(WO, LA, RC) \tag{3}$$

The econometric form of the model is specified as follows

$$AC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WO + \beta_2 LA + \beta_3 RC + e \tag{4}$$

Where
AC= Affective commitment
WO = Work overload
LA = Lack of Autonomy
RC = Role conflict
e = error term.

For Hypothesis Two:

$$CC = F(WO, LA, RC) \tag{5}$$

The econometric form of the model is specified as follows

$$CC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WO + \beta_2 LA + \beta_3 RC + e \tag{6}$$

Where
CC= Continuance commitment
WO = Work overload
LA = Lack of Autonomy
RC = Role conflict
e = error term.

For Hypothesis Three:

$$NC = F(WO, LA, RC) \tag{7}$$

The econometric form of the model is specified as follows

$$NC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WO + \beta_2 LA + \beta_3 RC + e \tag{8}$$

Where
NC= Normative commitment
WO = Work overload
LA = Lack of Autonomy
RC = Role conflict
e = error term.

4.3 Regression Analysis

The result from the regression analysis shows that work overload has an insignificant relationship with affective commitment. However, lack of autonomy and role conflict have an inverse relationship with affective commitment and is significant at $p = 0.000$ and 0.001 respectively. The regression line for affective commitment is:

$$\text{Affective commitment} = 4.840 + 0.119(\text{work overload}) + 0.175 (\text{lack of autonomy}) - 0.704 (\text{role conflict}) + e.$$

The regression line for continuance commitment is: Continuance commitment = $6.873 - 0.277 (\text{work overload}) - 0.381 (\text{lack of autonomy}) + 0.418 (\text{role conflict}) + e.$

Table 2. Coefficient Table

Dependent Variable	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
Affective Commitment	Constant	4.840	0.680		7.115	0.000
	Work Overload	0.119	0.074	0.105	1.604	0.111
	Lack of Autonomy	-0.175	0.053	-0.222	-3.332	0.001
	Role conflict	-0.704	0.084	-0.563	-8.362	0.000
Continuance Commitment	Constant	6.873	0.738		9.316	0.000
	Work Overload	-0.277	0.080	-0.237	-3.452	0.001
	Lack of Autonomy	-0.381	0.057	-0.465	-6.663	0.000
	Role conflict	-0.418	0.091	0.322	4.574	0.000
Normative Commitment	Constant	14.282	1.163		12.277	0.000
	Work Overload	0.013	0.126	0.005	0.106	0.916
	Lack of Autonomy	-1.629	0.090	-0.836	-18.089	0.000
	Role conflict	-1.003	0.144	-0.325	-6.962	0.000

The result shows that there is a significant inverse relationship between work overload and continuance commitment, lack of autonomy and continuance commitment as well as role conflict and continuance commitment with a p value of 0.00 .

The regression line is for normative commitment is:

$$\text{Normative commitment} = 14.282 + 0.013(\text{work overload}) - 1.629 (\text{lack of autonomy}) - 1.003 (\text{role conflict}) + e.$$

The result shows that there is no significant relationship between work overload and normative commitment, while there is an inversely significant relationship between lack of autonomy and continuance commitment with a p value of 0.000. Role conflict and continuance commitment are inversely related and it is significant with a p value of 0.000.

Testing Hypothesis One:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between work stress and affective commitment.

Regression coefficients represent the mean change in the response variable for one unit of change in the predictor variable while holding other predictors in the model constant.

The coefficient table reveals the impact of the work stress on affective commitment. Based on the analysis in table 3, the relationship between affective commitment and work stress is significant at 0.01.

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.542	0.727		4.875	0.000
	Work stress	-0.497	0.153	-0.248	-3.238	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: affective commitment

This shows that there is a negative or inverse significant relationship between affective commitment and work stress. It also shows that an increase in work stress brings about a decrease in affective commitment. It implies that one unit of increase in affective commitment is as a result of 49.7% decrease in work stress while holding other dependent variables in the model constant.

Testing Hypothesis Two:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between work stress and continuance commitment.

Table 4 shows that the relationship between continuance commitment and work stress is significant at 0.000.

This shows that there is a negative significant relationship between continuance commitment and work stress. This shows that an increase in work stress brings about a decrease in continuance commitment. It implies that one unit of increase in continuance commitment is brought about by 1% decrease in work stress while holding other dependent variables in the model constant.

Table 4. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.857	0.665		10.311	0.000
	Work stress	-1.070	0.140	-.516	-7.625	0.000

a. *Dependent Variable: continuance commitment*

Testing Hypothesis Three:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between work stress and normative commitment.

Table 5 shows that the relationship between normative commitment and work stress is significant at 0.000.

This shows that there is a negative significant relationship between normative commitment and work stress. This shows that an increase in work stress brings about a decrease in normative commitment. It implies that one unit of increase in normative commitment is accounted for by 3.25% decrease in work stress while holding other dependent variables in the model constant.

Table 5. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.609	1.390		12.668	0.000
	Work stress	-3.258	0.293	-0.660	-11.106	0.000

a. *Dependent Variable: normative commitment*

4.4 Discussion of Findings

A total of 3(1.9%) participants who are employees in Benson Idahosa University were less than 21 years old, 64 (39.5%) participant were between the age bracket of 21-30 years; 62 (38.3%) were of the 31-40 age bracket, 26(16%) were between 41-50 age bracket, 4 (2.5%) were between the age bracket of 51-60 years, 3(1.9%) were above 61 years of age.

The study recorded 91 (56.2%) male participants and 71 (43.8%) female participants. 52(32.1%) of the respondents of the employee were academic staff, 110(67.9%) were non-academic staff.

In terms of employee duration, a total of 75 (46.3%) participants who are employees in Benson Idahosa University have worked in the organization for less than 5 years, 66 (40.7%) participants were between the bracket of 5-10 years; 20 (12.3%) were in the bracket of 11-15years, 1(0.6%) was in then bracket of 16-20 years.

Overall, high level of work stress was reported by the respondents in this study. In addition, it is important to note that there is a significant relationship between work stress and employee commitment. This suggests that work stress creates an overall negative impact on employee commitment. The results also show that most employees strongly agreed to role conflict, work overload and lack of autonomy which are the variables used to measure work stress and most of the respondent disagreed to be committed to the organisation.

Result from hypothesis 1 shows that there is a significant and negative relationship between work stress and affective commitment.

Result from hypothesis 2 indicates that there is a significant and negative relationship between work stress and continuance commitment.

Result from hypothesis 3 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between work stress and normative commitment.

Work stress was a significant predictor of respondents' level of affective commitment continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Employee commitment towards the organisation was affected by work stress. Employees who experience work overload, lack of autonomy and role conflict reported less on affective, continuance and normative. This study also falls in line with findings from previous study by Somers (2009) who found out that there is relationship between work stress and affective commitment, and a relationship between work stress and normative commitment.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Work stress antecedents used in this study made an important contribution because it increased the generalisability of our knowledge of the effect of work stress on employee attitudes and behaviours. This study shows that employees' commitment decreases as work stress increases. The study also reveals that as employees' experience work stress, they begin to nurse the intentions of leaving the organisation if they get a better opportunity outside.

In conclusion, this study makes an important contribution to the growing literature on work stress and employee commitment. The results suggest that work stress indeed do influence key work related behaviours and attitudes.

Work stress situations can be remedied when managers redesign work to ensure it meets employees' expectations of a conducive work environment void of work overload. Training should be provided for employees and managers on stress management.

To reduce lack of autonomy, managers should decentralize authority. There should be adequate delegation of authority. There should also be open communication between management and employees. The organization should provide adequate resources for the employees in order for them to perform their job effectively and efficiently.

Management should provide career growth opportunities for the employees and reduce deadlines for completion of task as a way of managing work overload.

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