

EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR SUPPORT ON AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT: MEDIATION OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: The major aim of the study was to explore the influence of perceived supervisor support (PSS) on affective commitment (AC), and examine the mediating role of empowerment. The study was conducted based on useable questionnaires collected from 537 respondents, working in 153 private-owned companies operating in Ethiopia. A cross-sectional design was used to collect one-time data from randomly selected respondents. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the dimensionality and validity of the study variables, with the help of Amos Version 21. Regression analysis and bootstrapping through process macro were employed with the help of SPSS to test the hypothesised model. The result of regression analysis shows that perceived supervisory support in the Ethiopian corporate sector has a positive and statistically significant effect on employees' AC. Further, PROCESS macro and path analysis were applied to explore the mediated effect; the results have demonstrated that the relationship between perceived PSS and AC is significantly mediated by empowerment. Hence, the findings of the study imply that support from the supervisors, which comes in the form of recognition of employees' contribution and access to autonomy and participation in decisions, results in creating employees' affective attachment to the company. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Perceived Supervisor Support, Affective Commitment, Empowerment, Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

In order to survive and thrive in this highly dynamic and competitive business environment, organisations must have a competitive advantage over their rivals. One of the best resources that is effective in creating a competitive advantage, and hard to imitate by the rivals, is human resource (Gellatly et al., 2009). However, employees become valuable assets to the organisation only if they exhibit the right attitudes and behaviours. One of those right attitudes is affective commitment (AC) towards the organisation, which makes an employee give their best for the organisation (Simosi, 2013). Employees are affectively committed towards the organisation if they psychologically identify themselves and become involved with the organisation (Meyer & Allen,

1997). Organisations make efforts to ensure the employees' commitment towards the organisation, because committed employees are less likely to leave the organisation, feel more engaged with their jobs, exhibit high job performance, try to establish a good relationship with their customers, indulge less in counterproductive behaviours, and have high organisational citizenship behaviour (Meyer et al., 2002; Perryer et al., 2010; Purba et al., 2015). Considering the plethora of benefits of AC, organisations are not concerned about whether AC needs to be enhanced, but rather on how to do it.

The corporate sector of Ethiopia is facing the problem of high rate of employee turnover (International Growth Centre, 2020). The reason behind this dilemma can be low AC among Ethiopian employees, as shown by the previous

studies (Abebe & Markos, 2016; Mulugeta & Pandian, 2020). Thus, it is imperative to understand the mechanisms through which AC can be enhanced among Ethiopian employees. To become affectively committed towards the organisation, employees must get what they expect from the management and the organisation. One thing employees strongly expect at the workplace is support from their supervisor. Previous research has stressed that supervisor support can be an effective source of AC (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Rousseau & Aubé, 2010). However, some studies have revealed that PSS can enhance commitment towards the supervisor (Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003), but is not very effective in enhancing organisational commitment (Kidd & Smewing, 2001). The reason for these discrepancies may be the underlying mechanisms that connect supervisor support and AC. Thus, it is interesting to know how the behaviour of the supervisor can make employees more committed to their organisation.

The one variable that is supposed to intervene between this relationship is employee empowerment. The supervisor is considered a representative of the organisation by the employees, and the behaviour of the supervisor can develop attitudes and behaviours in the employees towards the organisation (Akram et al., 2018). Thus, support from the supervisor can have a strong positive influence on employee empowerment, which in turn can have a strong positive effect on AC. Perceived supervisor support (PSS), empowerment, and AC have not been studied together. The present study intends to explore the relationship among perceived organisational support, empowerment, and AC. The study proposes that empowerment works as an intervening variable that links PSS and AC.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

PSS and AC

Superiors in the organisation represent the organisation before the subordinates; subordinates develop a sense about the organisation from the behaviour of these superiors. When employees sense that they are cared for by their organisations and their superiors, their sense of attachment with the organisation is enhanced. Support from the supervisor enhances the level of satisfaction with the supervisor (Gok et al., 2015) and satisfaction with the supervisor positively influences the AC among employees (McCormack et al., 2006). Supervisors with their effective communication can enhance AC among employees by strengthening their belief in organisational efficacy and developing a sense of person-organisation fit among them (van Vuuren et al.,

2007). Supervisors are considered the representatives of the organisation and can play a major role in forming employees' attitudes about the organisation by their behaviour (Jose & Mampilly, 2015).

Empirical evidences are also in favour of a positive relationship between supervisor support and AC. Li et al.'s (2018) study of Chinese university teachers has revealed that PSS makes employees more committed to the organisation, by working as a mediator between organisational justice and AC. Meta-analysis by Ng and Sorensen (2008) has revealed that PSS is influential in forming positive work attitudes, including AC and job satisfaction. Exploration by Rousseau and Aubé (2010) of the effect of supervisor support and coworker support on AC reveals that supervisor support is way more effective in enhancing AC among employees than coworker support. Li et al. (2018) have revealed that PSS fostered through organisational justice can become very effective for AC. Samsudin et al. (2018) have demonstrated that support from the leader can enhance AC and organisational citizenship behaviour among employees.

More recently, Orgambídez and Almeida (2020) have revealed that supervisor support makes employees more affectively committed, by making them more engaged with their work. The study by Rhoades et al. (2001) has demonstrated that through the mediation of perceived organisational support, supervisor support makes a positive contribution in enhancing AC among employees. Furthermore, Kang et al. (2015) have found that supervisor support is very effective in enhancing organisational commitment and reducing turnover intentions. Based on the above arguments, we developed the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: PSS will have a positive effect on AC.

PSS and Empowerment

Efforts of the organisation may not be successful in empowering employees, unless the requisite working conditions are provided by the supervisors (Logan & Ganster, 2007). Jose and Mampilly (2015) have revealed that PSS positively enhances psychological empowerment among employees. Greasley et al. (2005) have advocated that support from the immediate supervisor is very critical in diffusion of employee empowerment in the organisation. A recent study by Ozbozkurt et al. (2021) among private healthcare employees in Turkey has revealed that there is a high correlation between PSS and employee empowerment. Exploration by Bardin et al. (2007) of the major antecedents of empowerment has revealed that supervisor social support is one of the major contributors of employee empowerment.

Employees must have the information about the organisation's vision, mission, goals, and strategies to feel empowered; this can be done in the best way by the immediate supervisor (Nifadkar et al., 2019; Thuan, 2020). Research has revealed that supervisors can induce psychological and behavioural empowerment among employees by implementing empowering management practices (Boudrias et al., 2009). When employees are sure that they can get immediate support from the supervisor in the case of any work related issues, they do not hesitate to take on the extra power and responsibilities that come with empowerment (Bordin et al., 2006). The next hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: PSS will have a positive effect on empowerment.

Empowerment and AC

Apart from supervisor support, researchers have identified another instrument that can enhance AC among employees, and that instrument is employee empowerment. Empowered employees feel that the organisation has done them a big favour by making them the owners of their job; the employees try to reciprocate this autonomy by being affectively committed to the organisation (Bin Abdullah et al., 2015). The study conducted by Hanaysha (2016) on Malaysian higher education institutions has revealed that employee empowerment is very effective in developing organisational commitment among employees. Koo et al.'s (2020) study of the Chinese hotel industry has revealed that empowerment positively influences AC of employees, by making them more satisfied with their job. Bhatnagar's (2007) study of Indian managers has revealed that developing a sense of empowerment among employees is an effective way of enhancing organisational commitment. Allen et al. (2018) have demonstrated that structural empowerment can make employees more committed to their organisation, both directly and indirectly, by enhancing meaningfulness in their job. The study conducted by Kundu and Kumar (2017) among the employees of the Indian corporate sector has revealed that empowered employees feel high AC towards their organisation. Furthermore, Ugboro (2006) has revealed that even in turbulent times of downsizing and restructuring, empowerment is effective in developing a sense of AC towards the organisation.

Among the six different antecedents, Soutoglou and Theriou (2020) have found empowerment to be the most effective predictor of organisational commitment. Empowerment fulfills the most basic need of employees – to control their work environment; for this, the employees try to reciprocate their gratitude to the organisation by being affectively committed to it (Murray & Holmes, 2021). Empowerment

also makes employees more satisfied with their job, which further motivates them to stay longer with the organisation (AlKahtani et al., 2021). Jha (2011) has revealed that the level of empowerment among employees is positively related to affective and normative commitment, but has no relationship with continuance commitment. In another study of Indian staff nurses, Aggarwal et al. (2018) have revealed that different dimensions of structural empowerment have a positive effect on AC through the mediation of psychological empowerment. Saleem et al.'s (2019) study has not found any direct relationship between employee empowerment and AC, but reveals that empowerment has a positive effect on AC by enhancing behavioural integrity among employees. Based on the discussion, we hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 3: Empowerment will have a positive effect on AC.

Mediation of Empowerment between PSS and AC

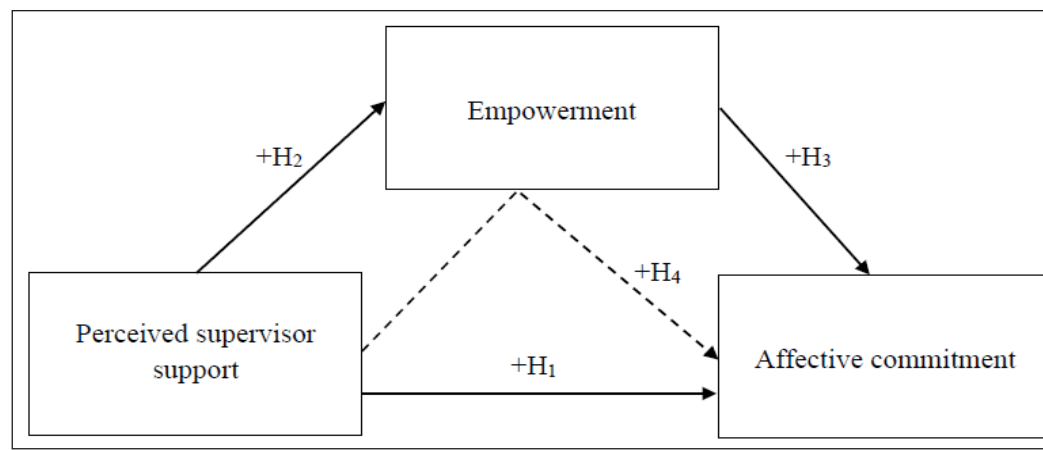
Every employee wants to stay with the organisation where the supervisor provides them the freedom and discretion to do their job (Fazio et al., 2017). Employees do not have many dealings with the organisational top management and have to deal with the supervisor regularly. Thus, their opinions regarding the organisation are formed on the basis of these supervisor dealings. Further, employees perceive the supervisors as the agents of the organisation, and any efforts by the supervisors to provide autonomy to the employees are considered to be done by the organisation (Lapalme et al., 2009). Supervisors allow the employees to make their own decisions, provide the opportunity to try new things, and consult with employees while trying new policies and procedures, which in turn enhances AC among employees (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Orgambidez & Almeida, 2020). With the support from the supervisor, employees develop a sense of ownership over their job and decide to stay with the organisation for a long time. Empowerment has been recommended by the researchers as the best tool in the hands of a leader to generate a sense of belonging with the organisation among employees (Barroso Castro et al., 2008). Avolio et al. (2004) have revealed that transformational leadership makes employees more affectively committed to the organisation, by enhancing their level of psychological empowerment. Empowered employees feel that their supervisor has trusted them with the autonomy, and thus, leaving the organisation may break the trust of their supervisor (Kidd & Smewing, 2001).

Several researchers have substantiated that empowerment works as an effective mediating mechanism through which supervisors or leaders influence the attitudes and behaviours

of the employees. Jose and Mampilly (2015) have proved that psychological empowerment intercedes between PSS and employee engagement. Dewettinck and van Ameijde (2011) have displayed that empowerment mediates the effect of empowering leadership on AC and job satisfaction. Mcfarlin and Coget (2013) have revealed that empowering leadership has a positive influence on job satisfaction, through the mediation of psychological empowerment. Analysing the antecedents and outcomes of employee empowerment in the Singaporean context, Bordin et al. (2007) find that supervisor social support has a positive effect on empowerment among

employees, and further, empowerment is very effective in developing organisational commitment among employees. Gillet et al. (2013) have demonstrated that autonomy support provided by the supervisor enhances the work satisfaction among employees and reduces their turnover intentions. On the basis of above arguments, we expect empowerment to mediate between PSS and AC. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Empowerment positively mediates the effect of PSS on AC.



Notes: _____ shows the direct relationship
 + represent the direction of relationships
 -----shows the mediating effect

Fig. 1: Proposed Model

Research Methods

Sample and Procedures

The current study applied a cross-sectional survey design based on 537 survey responses from 153 private companies operating in the Ethiopian corporate sector. A confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the dimensionality and validity of the study variables, with the help of Amos Version 21. A regression analysis and bootstrapping through process macro were employed, with the help of SPSS, to test the hypothesised model. As Amharic is the official language of commerce and administration in Ethiopia, the English version of the initial survey was translated into Amharic with the assistance of Ethiopian HR specialists who have a good command of English. To ensure its consistency and reliability, the Amharic version was translated back into English by different HR experts. So, the translated version was compared with the original to ensure accuracy (Akhtar

et al., 2008) and consistency (Brislin, 1970). Out of the total respondents, 73% of them were male and 27% were female. The majority (41%) of the respondents were found in the age range of 31 to 40. Respondents were also grouped in terms of their experience. Hence, 32.8% of the respondents had more than ten years' of experience, while 25%, 21%, and 19% of the respondents had 1-3, 4-6, and 7-10 years' of work experience, respectively. Regarding the educational background of the respondents, 80.1% of the respondents were undergraduates and the remaining 19.9% were post-graduates.

Measures

PSS: This variable was measured with Eisenberger et al.'s (2002) eight items. Sample items include: 'My supervisor holds me in high regard.' and 'My supervisor gives me the chance to make important decisions.' The response options

ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.89.

Empowerment: This factor measures the degree to which the organisations provided employees with autonomy in their jobs and permitted enough discretion in doing their work. Hence, we adopted four items from Bae and Lawler (2000). Sample items include: 'Employees are permitted enough discretion in doing their work.' and 'The organisation provides enough opportunity to employees for providing inputs on a wide range of issues.' The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.89.

AC: To measure AC, i.e. employees' affective attachment to the organisation, we relied on the six-item scale of Meyer et al. (1993) and Rego et al. (2007). Sample items include: 'I feel like "part of the family" at my organisation.' and 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation.' The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.86.

Control Variables: Four control variables, namely gender, age, work experience, and educational background of respondents were considered. Age of the respondents was categorised as: below 25 years, 26–30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, 51–60 years, and above 60 years. Gender was classified as: male and female. Work experience of the respondents were categorised as: < 1 year, 1 to 3 years, 4 to 6 years, 7 to 10 years, and > 10 years. The respondents were classified on the basis of their educational background as undergraduates and post-graduates. These variables were used to exert control on the relationships hypothesised in this study.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

The study employed statistical tools such as factor analysis and regression in order to analyse the data gathered through a cross-sectional survey. Bootstrapped confidence intervals and path analysis were also applied to see the indirect mediated effects. However, before establishing the causal effect analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the three constructs were performed, to assess the dimensionality and psychometric properties of the constructs, using Amos version 21.0. As a result, Table 1 exhibits the reliability test of the variables through composite reliability (CR), where the factor analysis resulted in a CR value of 0.89 for PSS (PSS), 0.89 for empowerment, and 0.86 for AC (AC). Given that the variables with low factor loadings could cause the possibility of leading to a biased result, some of the items (items marked with **) were deleted from further analysis. The convergent validity of the constructs was measured through their respective average variance extracted (AVE) values, which resulted in the AVE value of 0.58 for PSS, 0.68 for empowerment, and 0.52 for AC. The composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for all the three constructs were higher than the threshold of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, and the CR values for each construct were higher than the AVE value of each construct. This result ensured the convergent validity of the data (Hair et al., 2014). Further, AVE values for the three constructs were higher than their corresponding maximum shared variance and average shared variance, depicting discriminant validity among study variables.

Table 1: Measurement Variables with CFA Loadings, Reliability, and Validity Values

Factors	Factor Loadings (CFA)	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance	Average Shared Variance
Perceived supervisor support (Six items)		0.89	0.58	0.26	0.25
My supervisor holds me in high regard.	0.85				
My supervisor gives me the chance to make important decisions.	0.79				
My supervisor values my contribution to the organisation.	0.69				
My supervisor gives me the authority to try new things.	0.74				
My supervisor gives me the authority to participate in decisions that affect the entire organisation.	0.72				

Factors	Factor Loadings (CFA)	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance	Average Shared Variance
My supervisor consults me while deciding on new policies and procedures.	0.79				
If I decided to quit, my supervisor would try to persuade me to stay.	*				
Even if I did well, my supervisor would fail to notice.	*				
Empowerment (Four items)		0.89	0.68	0.49	0.37
Employees are permitted enough discretion in doing their work.	0.80				
The organisation provides enough opportunity to employees for providing inputs on a wide range of issues.	0.87				
Jobs here give employees the chance to use personal initiative in carrying out their work.	0.84				
Employees are encouraged to raise their voices when they disagree over a decision.	0.80				
Affective commitment (Six items)		0.86	0.52	0.49	0.37
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organisation.	0.74				
I have a strong affection for this organisation	0.69				
I feel like "part of the family" at my organisation.	0.74				
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation.	0.72				
I feel as if this organisation's problems are my own.	0.71				
This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	0.72				

Source: Primary data.

Notes:

All the loadings related to CFA were significant at 0.001 levels. Model fit statistics: $\chi^2/df = 2.376$; GFI = 0.949; CFI = 0.971; TLI = 0.965; SRMR = 0.035; RMSEA = 0.050.

Items with (*) symbol were excluded from CFA due to poor factor loadings.

Further, to empirically test whether the model fits the data for further analysis to produce a causal relationship among the four constructs, we performed a measurement analysis through a first-order factor analysis model. Consequently, the overall measurement model appeared to consist of good values for baseline fit model

that comes under the acceptable criteria. The values of the model indices were chi-square goodness-of-fit to degree of freedom (χ^2/df) = 2.376; goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.949; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.971; SRMR = 0.035; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.965; and RMSEA = 0.050 (See Table 2).

Table 2: First Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Generating Alternative Models

Models	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
One-factor model	1676.168	104	16.117	.608	.617	.668	.167
Two-factor model	672.406	103	6.528	.819	.860	.880	.101
Three-factor model							
(Baseline model)	239.996	101	2.376	.949	.965	.971	.050

Source: Primary data.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents means, standard deviations, alpha values, and correlations among the study variables. The calculated Cronbach's alphas were 0.89, 0.89, and 0.846 for PSS, empowerment, and AC constructs, respectively. These results ensured the reliability of the data, since they were found to be higher than the minimum criterion of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). The correlation values have supported the hypothesised positive relationship between PSS and AC ($r = 0.44$; $p \leq$

0.01) and empowerment ($r = 0.46$; $p \leq 0.01$). The results also indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable ($r = 0.61$; $p \leq 0.01$). From the controlling variables considered for the model, none were found to be significant. Further, as there is no high inter-correlation among the predicting variables considered for the study, the chance of multicollinearity is very low. This ensures that the regression model does not provide biased results.

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Items	Mean	Std. D	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	1.27	.44	-					
Age	2.86	.98	-.224**	-				
Experience	3.55	1.24	-.310**	.632**	-			
PSS	3.64	.81	-.112**	.074	.115**	(.89)		
Empowerment	3.82	.69	-.039	-.029	.036	.46**	(.89)	
AC	3.83	.68	-.014	.046	.184**	.44**	.61**	(.86)

Source: Primary data.

Notes:

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Cronbach's alpha indicated in the brackets.

Regression Analysis Results

As is indicated in Table 4, regression analysis was conducted to test hypotheses 1-4. Model 1 consists of only the control variables, namely gender, age, and work experience of the respondents. Of all the control variables, age and work experience in the company were found to be significant. In model 2, empowerment was regressed on PSS to test the second hypothesis; it was found significant and positive ($\beta = 0.46$, $p \leq 0.001$), and 21.4% of the variance in the empowerment was found to be explained by PSS. Thus, this finding supported the second hypothesis. The regression result in model 3 revealed a statistically

significant positive relationship between empowerment and AC ($\beta = 0.61$, $p \leq 0.001$), where 41.0% of the variation in AC was explained by empowerment. So, hypothesis 3 was supported. As indicated in model 4, the first hypothesis that examined a significantly positive effect of PSS on AC was supported, with a value of $\beta = 0.43$, $p \leq 0.001$. Finally, the result in model 5, where AC was regressed on PSS and empowerment simultaneously, and the effect PSS had on AC with the introduction of the mediating variable in the model, was significant but reduced to $\beta = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.01$. This implies that the link between PSS and AC was partially mediated by empowerment. These results supported hypothesis 4.

Table 4: Regression Results Testing the Mediating Effect of Empowerment

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables				
	Empowerment		Affective Commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	.044	.005	.064	.081*	.078*
Age	.115*	.086	.062	.113*	.069
Experience	.270**	.039	.221***	.231***	.211***
PSS	—	.460***	—	-.435***	.196**
Empowerment	—	—	.607***	—	.518***
R2	.044	.214	.410	.229	.440
Adjusted R2	.039	.208	.406	.223	.435
F-Statistic	8.263***	36.668***	93.811***	40.071***	84.679***
N	537	537	5537	537	537

Source: Primary data.

Notes: *** $p \leq .001$, ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$.

Bootstrap Results

In order to strengthen the hypotheses test done through regression, we performed bootstrapping through PROCESS macro Model 4 of Hayes (2018), to test the significance of the mediating role of employee empowerment on the causal relationship between the PSS and AC. Accordingly, Table 5 indicates the indirect relationship between PSS and AC through empowerment, as the mediator was estimated using a bootstrap procedure. Bootstrap results with 5,000 re-samples, bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa), suggested that the indirect effect of PSS on AC was significant at 95% confidence interval as recommended by Hayes and Rockwood (2020); it did not contain zero at all (lower level = 0.1497; upper level = 0.2520). This effect was significant ($\beta = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

Table 5: Indirect Effect of PSS on AC through Empowerment

Indirect Effect	Effect	Standard Error	BootLLCI	BootULCI
PSS→ EMP→ AC	.2001	.0261	.1497	.2520

Notes: PSS – Perceived supervisor support; EMP – Empowerment; AC – Affective commitment.

BootLLCI – Bootstrapped accelerated lower limit confidence interval.

BootULCI – Bootstrapped accelerated upper limit confidence interval.

Source: Primary data.

Path Analysis Results

Table 6 shows the structural path results. PSS was found to have a statistically significant direct effect on AC ($\beta = 0.50$, $p \leq 0.001$). So, H_1 was reconfirmed. PSS also had a significantly positive effect on the mediating variable, i.e. empowerment ($\beta = 0.51$, $p \leq 0.001$). Hence, H_2 was reconfirmed. Empowerment was found to have a significant positive effect on AC, with a standardised coefficient and p -value of ($\beta = 0.60$, $p \leq 0.001$). Thus, H_3 was reconfirmed. Further, the results show that the indirect effect of PSS on AC through empowerment was significant, but reduced, to $\beta = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.001$. Therefore, we concluded that empowerment partially mediated the effect of PSS on AC. So, H_4 was reconfirmed.

Table 6: Path of Structural Model

Model	Direct Effect Model	Partial Mediation Model
Perceived supervisor support → Affective commitment	.501***	
After mediator variable (Empowerment) enters into the model		
Perceived supervisor support → Empowerment		.506***
Empowerment → AC		.600***
Perceived supervisor support → Empowerment → Affective commitment		.197**

Source: Primary data.

DISCUSSION

The major aim of the study was to explore the influence of PSS on AC, and examine the mediating role of empowerment. The results of the study show the support for all the established hypotheses, and a detailed discussion of the study findings is provided.

The first noteworthy finding of the study is the confirmation of the positive relationship between perceived organisational support and AC. Perceptions of supervisor support are very effective in enhancing sense of emotional attachment among employees towards the organisation. As Li et al. (2018) have stressed, supervisors are considered the agents of top management by the employees and they perceive their behaviour is guided by the top management. This finding of the study confirms the notion of previous studies, that behaviour of the supervisor can play a big role in forming attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Fazio et al., 2017; Jose & Mampilly, 2015). The results of the present study contradict the findings of Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe (2003), which supports that the supervisor can enhance the commitment of the employees towards the supervisor, but not the organisation.

Favouring hypothesis 2, the findings of the study reveal that PSS enhances the level of empowerment among employees. Employees' sense of autonomy over their job is enhanced, if their supervisor behaves in a supportive way. Previous research has also demonstrated a positive association between PSS and employee empowerment (Bordin et al., 2006; Jose & Mampilly, 2015). Jose and Mampilly (2015) have claimed that PSS is effective in enhancing empowerment among employees. Menon (1995) has revealed that the behaviour of the immediate supervisor, including consulting, mentoring, inspiring, and recognising, leads to higher empowerment among employees.

Further, the findings have revealed that empowerment has a significant effect on AC among employees. Thus, the study supports the claims of previous studies, that empowerment is highly effective in making employees more committed to the organisation (Islam et al., 2014), and rejects the findings of those studies (Saleem et al., 2019) that have demonstrated that there is no effect of empowerment on organisational commitment. In the context of educational institutions, Ahadi and Suandi (2014) reveal that empowerment is very effective in intensifying organisational commitment among employees. Bordin et al. (2006) have elaborated that empowerment is very effective in developing commitment to the work and the organisation among employees.

Our mediation analysis has revealed that a sense of empowerment among employees partially mediates the effect of PSS on AC. This finding reveals that perceived support from the supervisor not only has a direct effect on effective commitment, but also an indirect effect, by making employees more empowered. When a supervisor starts to support the autonomy of employees, the latter start to feel a sense of identification with the organisation (Gillet et al., 2013). The study findings reveal that empowerment is an effective intervention through which supervisors can enhance AC among employees. Most of the previous studies have stressed that only efforts of the organisation enhance the sense of AC among employees. This study reveals that PSS can positively increase AC among employees by making them more empowered.

IMPLICATIONS

On a theoretical level, this is first study of its kind, exploring relationship among PSS, empowerment, and AC in the Ethiopian context. The level of AC among Ethiopian employees is not satisfactory, as shown by the previous studies (Abebe & Markos, 2016). Thus, the present study is an attempt to explore the ways through which AC can be enhanced. The study not only explored the effect of PSS on AC, but also examined the way through which this relationship takes place. The study reveals that PSS positively affects employee empowerment, which further contributes to AC.

On practical grounds, the results of the present study have revealed that supervisors play a major role in making employees more empowered and affectively committed to the organisation. Managers of the organisation should be aware that perceptions of supportiveness from the supervisor has a positive effect on the sense of empowerment and AC among employees, and should modify their behaviour and actions accordingly. To enhance empowerment and AC among employees, managers and supervisors must provide the employees with opportunities to make important decisions, should involve them in decision making, and provide them the freedom to try new things. Organisations can strengthen supportive behaviour among supervisors by providing them with training in human skills, interpersonal communication, and psychological aspects. Leaders should create an empowering work environment by providing employees the freedom to do their work, taking inputs from employees on important issues, encouraging employees to take initiatives, and raise their voice when they disagree with any organisational decision. Organisations can play a major role by hiring employees with a helping attitude for

authoritative positions, or training supervisors in supportive behaviours.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Results of the current study should be interpreted with caution, by taking the study limitations into consideration. First limitation of the study is the cross-sectional design, which is not suitable for establishing causal relationships. It is possible that employees with high AC with the organisation seek support from their supervisors. Experimental or longitudinal designs can be more suitable to shed light on the relationships among study variables. Further, taking one mediating variable may not be able to provide a complete picture of the process supervisor support that enhances AC among employees. Some other mediating variables such as supervisor trust, organisational trust, employee engagement, and job satisfaction can provide a clearer picture about the association between PSS and AC. One more limitation that can reduce the generalisability of the study findings is the collection of data from a single source for all variables. Employees may undermine the supervisor's efforts to support employees or organisational efforts to empower them, and overstate their own AC. Future studies can strengthen the findings validity by measuring the actual steps taken by the supervisor or organisation to support or empower employees, and evaluating AC by measuring actual behaviour of employees towards the organisation.

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