

Organisational Commitment in Public and Private Universities in Kenya

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A Human Resource Management Perspective

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of employee demographic characteristics and a bundle of eight human resource management practices on multidimensional organisational commitment in a non-Western context. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from 446 academic and 486 administrative employees from three public and three private universities in Kenya. In addition, semi-structured interviews with 15 academic and administrative employees were conducted. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The results show that (a) HRM practices were stronger predictors of multidimensional organisational commitment than demographic characteristics; (b) the independent variables were stronger predictors of organisational commitment in private universities than in public universities; (c) HRM practices had stronger influence on affective and normative commitment than on continuance commitment; and (d) age, education, participation in decision making, promotional opportunities and distributive justice were the strongest predictors of multidimensional organizational commitment. This paper contributes to existing knowledge by testing the predictors of multidimensional organizational commitment in a non-Western context. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations are also discussed in the paper.

Keywords: HRM practices; affective commitment; normative commitment; continuance commitment; universities; academics; administrative employees; Kenya

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, many organisations have been confronted with an increasingly competitive global business climate. Unlike the early 1970s when organisations operated in a relatively stable environment with distinct domestic markets and minimal complexities, the late 1970s to the present has been characterised by a dynamic global economy with cut-throat competition, information technological advances, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and downsizing (Schuler, Dowling, and De Cieri, 1993; Anakwe, 2002). Therefore, as organisations strive to enhance their performance, the importance of human capital as a resource that can potentially provide competitive advantage has become more critical (Anakwe, 2002; Wright and Kehoe, 2008). Because an organisation's human resources are integral to its success, managers have to focus on different human resource management (HRM) practices as the levers through which they can develop and motivate their human capital. Various studies have stressed the benefits to organisations of a loyal and committed workforce and the central role HRM practices may play in creating and maintaining commitment (Iles, Mabey and Robertson, 1990; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Gould-Williams, 2004). Consequently, organisational commitment will be high among employees who believe that they have been treated fairly by their employers (Meyer and Smith, 2000).

This research examines the relationship between employee demographic characteristics and various HRM practices and Meyer and Allen's multidimensional organisational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997). This research is pursued to fill in a number of gaps in the existing literature. Firstly, although there are numerous research studies on organisational commitment, few have examined the impact of HR practices on multidimensional organisational commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Kipkebut, 2010). Instead most of the existing studies have focused mainly on affective/attitudinal commitment thus creating a gap in the literature (Oglivie, 1986; Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Paul and Anantharaman, 2004; Walumbwa et al., 2007). Furthermore, most of these studies have been carried out in Western contexts.

Secondly, most research studies have focused almost exclusively on managerial perceptions of HR practices (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Wood and Albanese, 1995; Wood and de Menezes, 1998). It is possible however, that the perceptions of management and employees regarding the nature of HR practices differ (Gallie et al, 2001). Furthermore, the concept of commitment depicts an individual's attitude towards the organisation and therefore commitment can only be assumed to exist if the actual commitment levels among a workforce are assessed. This means that reference to 'high commitment' HR practices based on research that is guided by managerial perceptions may be misleading. In this regard, this research will be conducted from the perspective of academic and administrative employees in different employment ranks from both public and private universities.

This study aims to fill these gaps in the literature. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the extent to which HRM practices influence multidimensional organisational commitment among employees in public and private universities in Kenya. The present paper is organised into several sections as follows: a review of the literature and presentation of the study hypotheses; presentation of the methodology; results of the data analyses; discussion of the results; limitations of the study and implications for research and practice.

2. Background to the study problem

Kenya registered positive economic growth from independence until the late 1970s enabling the government to meet the full cost of higher education (Republic of Kenya, 1999). However, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s due to poor fiscal policies and high-level government corruption, economic growth declined sharply and stood at -0.3% in year 2000 (Thakar and Cowan, 2001). Several Structural Adjustment Programmes were introduced to restore financial stability resulting in the reduction of government budgetary allocation to public universities and the implementation of cost sharing measures which were pursued through the introduction of tuition fees and the elimination of subsidies for non-instructional costs such as housing and meals (Swamy, 1994; Ng'eno, 1996; Mutula, 2002). This period of poor economic performance saw a rapid increase in the number of public universities and student enrolment through presidential decrees (Amutabi, 2003). From one public university at independence, there are presently seven public universities and seventeen private universities with an increase in student population from 452 to 112,226 in 2006/07 (Republic

of Kenya, 2007). This rapid expansion without adequate financial resources has resulted in over-congested and run down physical facilities; overcrowded library facilities with outdated books; a decline in the quality of teaching and research; increased student riots; disillusioned workforce due to poor working conditions and unsatisfactory pay, and exodus of teaching staff to the private sector or abroad in search of better opportunities (Abagi, 1998; Sifuna, 1998; Mutula, 2002; Oketch, 2003). These problems have challenged public universities ability to motivate their employees as a source of competitive advantage.

3. Literature review on organisational commitment

The area of organisational commitment has been extensively researched although there has been lack of consensus on its definition (Reichers, 1985; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Coopey and Hartley, 1991; Jaros, Jermier, Koehler and Sincich, 1993). The dimensionality of organisational commitment has also added to the confusion surrounding the definitions and conceptualisation of organisational commitment (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 1997; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Some research studies have conceptualised organisational commitment as either an attitudinal or a behavioural construct (Becker, 1960; Porter et al., 1974; Wiener, 1982; Scholl, 1981; Mowday et al., 1982) while others have conceptualised it as a multidimensional construct (Reichers, 1985; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Jaros et al., 1993).

Allen and Meyer (1990) who reviewed several organisational commitment studies found that it consisted of at least three general themes, namely; affective attachment to the organisation, perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation and obligation to remain with the organisation. According to Allen and Meyer, "the 'net sum' of a person's commitment to the organisation ... reflects each of these separable psychological states" (p.4) since an employee can experience each of these psychological states with varying degrees, for instance, a strong need and obligation to remain in the organisation but no desire to do so. These themes became known as affective, continuance and normative commitment respectively.

Affective commitment: This aspect of commitment involves some form of psychological bond between employees and the organisation (Kanter, 1968; Brown, 1996; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Buchanan (1974, p.533) defined commitment as "a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organisation ..." while Meyer and Allen (1991, p.67) defined it as "employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organisation because they want to do so".

Normative commitment: This form of commitment is based on the view that employees' identification with the organisation's goals and values are a result of personal moral standards, cultural or organisational socialisation and not rewards or punishments. Employees with strong normative commitment may feel a deep-seated obligation "to act in a way which meets organisational goals and interests" (Wiener, 1982, p. 421). Marsh and Mannari (1977, p. 59) describe an employee with lifetime commitment as one who "considers it morally right to stay in the

company, regardless of how much status enhancement or satisfaction the firm gives him over the years". Meyer and Allen (1991, p.67) referred to normative commitment as "a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organisation".

Continuance commitment: This view of commitment sees it as a force tying an employee to an organisation because the perceived cost of doing otherwise is likely to be high (Becker, 1960; Kanter, 1968). Kanter (1968, p.504) referred to this type of commitment as "profit associated with continued participation and 'cost' associated with leaving". Meyer and Allen (1991, p.67) defined it as "an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation. Employees whose primary link to the organisation is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so". McGee and Ford (1987) found that continuance commitment was a bi-dimensional construct consisting of perceptions of high personal sacrifice and limited alternative job opportunities associated with leaving one's organisation.

4. Literature review and hypotheses

Several studies based on Western research (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Malhotra, Budhwar and Prowse, 2007) have identified various demographic characteristics and human resource management practices as major determinants of organisational commitment. These factors are discussed below:

4.1 Demographic characteristics

Employees' demographic characteristics are some of the most commonly used variables in relation to organisational commitment. The most frequently investigated characteristics are age, gender, tenure, education and marital status (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Some studies have found that these employee personal variables play a significant role in enhancing employee's sunk costs or side bets which would be lost if the employee considered terminating membership with the organisation (Becker, 1960; Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978). Although these employee characteristics have been linked to organisational commitment, the relationships are neither strong nor consistent (Angle and Perry, 1981; Bateman and Strasser, 1981; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Al-Qarioti and Al-Enezi, 2004). Gender has been found to be weakly correlated to organisational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Although some studies have found women to be more committed than men (Mowday et al., 1982; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990; Morris et al., 2001), other studies have found women to be less committed than men (Harrison and Hubbard, 1998) while others have found no relationship between gender and organisational commitment (Aven, Parker and McEvoy, 1993). Studies have found a positive relationship between marital status and organisational commitment with married employees being more committed than single employees (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Taormina, 1999; Cetin, 2006).

Age and tenure have also been found to be positively related to organisational commitment (Angle and Perry, 1981; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). As individuals get older and remain with an organisation longer, alternative

employment opportunities tend to decrease while personal investments in the firm tend to increase (side bets), thus enhancing the employees continuance commitment. Finally, education has been found to be negatively related to organisational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Mowday et al., 1982; Angle and Perry, 1981). This inverse relationship may result from the fact that more educated individuals have higher expectations that the organisation may be unable to meet resulting in the loss of commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). Based on the literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, marital status, tenure and education) will be significantly related to affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment.

4.2 Human resource management practices

Most HRM researchers in the recent years have focused on the identification of HR practices that enhance employee commitment. These practices have been loosely labelled as 'high commitment' or 'high involvement' practices which are thought to motivate employees by increasing organisational commitment, participation and involvement (Gould-Williams, 2004). Wood and de Menezes (1998, p. 485) suggest that employers who use 'high commitment' HRM practices see their employees as "assets or resources to be developed". Similarly, MacDuffie (1995) reports that high commitment management will only be successful if workers believe that their interests are aligned with those of the organisation and if the organisation makes a reciprocal investment in their wellbeing.

Studies have identified several HR practices which are likely to lead to positive HR outcomes such as higher quality employees, higher flexibility and higher levels of commitment (MacDuffie, 1995; Pfeffer, 1998; Delery and Doty, 1996; Ichniowski, Shaw and Prenzushi, 1997). These practices include job security; recruitment and selection; extensive training and development; employee involvement and information sharing; self-managed teams and decentralisation of decision making; performance-related rewards; reduction of status differences and internal career opportunities among others.

Studies have found a significant link between HRM practices and employee commitment (Oglivie, 1986; Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Meyer and Smith, 2000; McElroy, 2001). These studies suggest that particular HRM practices will elicit various forms of commitment to specific targets within the organisation. For example, Oglivie (1986) in a study of 67 American agricultural managers, found that pay, accuracy of merit rating and fairness of promotional procedures were major contributors of organisational commitment as compared to personal and job characteristics.

Gaertner and Nollen (1989) found that employees' commitment was enhanced by favourable perceptions of the organisation's HRM practices, such as internal promotion, training and development and employment security. On the basis of these findings, Gaertner and Nollen report that "psychological commitment is higher among employees who believe they are being treated as resources to be developed rather than commodities to buy and sell" (p. 987). Meyer and Smith (2000) found that affective commitment and normative commitment

had significant positive correlations with all the HRM practices (i.e. performance appraisal, benefits, training and career development) while continuance commitment did not have a significant correlation with the same HRM variables. Meyer and Smith concluded that fair and supportive HRM practices denoted the organisation's support for the employees, which in turn, fostered a reciprocal attachment and loyalty by the employees. Other studies have found that the use of high-involvement work practices was associated with increase in productivity, motivation and employee retention unlike firms that were control-oriented whereby increase in employee retention was associated with a decrease in productivity (Huselid, 1995; Guthrie, 2001).

Based on such previous studies, this study proposes a bundle of eight HRM practices which are likely to influence and produce different forms of organisational commitment depending on how they are perceived by the employee.

Among the rewards given by organisations in return for employee contribution to the achievement of organisational goals, pay is thought to be a critical factor (Vandenbergh and Tremblay, 2008). In pure economic terms, monetary compensation has been perceived as fundamental to the exchange relationship between employers and employees because pay can be measured more objectively (Singh, Fujita and Norton, 2004). Employee satisfaction with pay may result in the individual feeling valued, recognized and fairly treated by the organisation resulting in higher commitment levels (Tekleab, Bartol and Liu, 2005).

Promotional opportunities refer to the degree an employee perceives his or her chances to grow and be promoted within the organisation (Lambert, Hogan and Jiang, 2008). Provision of promotional opportunities and mobility up the organisational ladder is likely to enhance employee loyalty and attachment while absence or blockage of opportunities for advancement is likely to result in lower organisational commitment and other negative work attitudes and behaviours (Iles et al., 1990; Kalleberg and Mastekaasaz, 1994).

Training opportunities are investments in the relationship between organisations and individuals which can contribute to employees' organisational commitment (Farrell and Rusbult, 1981; Tannenbaum et al., 1991; Randall and O'Driscoll, 1997; Taormina, 1999; McElroy, 2001). Employees may perceive these activities as an indication of the organisation's commitment to its human resources resulting in strong psychological bonding and a willingness to work hard to increase the organisation's effectiveness (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Wood and de Menezes, 1998).

Job security is "the perceived stability and continuance of one's job as one knows it" (Probst, 2003, p.452). Therefore, an employee is considered to enjoy job security when he/she remains employed by the same organisation without a reduction of seniority, pay, pension and other benefits (Yousef, 1998). In the current era of downsizing and rationalisation, many employees are feeling insecure regarding the nature and future existence of their jobs, leading to negative employee work attitudes, increased job dissatisfaction, low organisational commitment and increased withdrawal behaviour (Buitendach and De Witte,

2005; Cully et al., 1999). Therefore, provision of employment security may suggest commitment by the employer to its employees (Pfeffer, 1994).

Performance appraisal is among the most important human resource practices because of its ability to provide valuable performance information to a number of HR activities such as allocation of rewards, promotion, decisions related to training and career development, human resource planning and redundancy programmes (Taylor et al., 1995; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003; Kuvaas, 2006). Therefore, employee participation in the appraisal process, perceptions of equity, fairness and justice will influence organisational commitment (Field and Holley, 1982; Allan, 1994).

Participation in decision making is the degree to which employees are allowed to provide meaningful input into major decisions that guide and shape the organisation (Lambert et al., 2008). Therefore, organisational commitment is expected to be higher among employees who perceive that they have input into decision making because it allows them to shape the organisation and also shows that they are valued by the organisation (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2007; Lambert and Hogan, 2009). The extent to which management is perceived to be receptive to employee ideas has been positively associated with high levels of organisational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990; McElroy, 2001).

Previous studies have found career development as the best predictor of organisational commitment (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Taormina, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003; 2004). Developments in the global economy have affected organisational careers which are changing from the traditional full-time jobs with clearly chartered career development programmes to becoming "portable" and "boundaryless" (Cappelli, 1999; Sturges, Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 2000). As such, career development programmes are critical in preparing employees for a future in the organisation (Taormina, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000). Therefore, employees who perceive that they have good career opportunities in their organisations are likely to develop strong emotional attachment, loyalty towards their organisations and perceive a high cost associated with leaving the organisation (Sturges et al., 2000; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003).

Distributive justice is the degree of perceived fairness in the distribution and allocation of outcomes within an organisation based upon inputs (Greenberg, 1987; Mueller, Iverson and Jo, 1999). Organisational commitment is likely to be high if employees perceive the organisation as being fair in terms of their inputs (effort, education, skills) and outcomes (salaries, promotions, training among others). However, employee perception that the organisation is being unjust, unfair and untrustworthy will lead to frustrations and resentment resulting in loss of loyalty and attachment to the organisation (Greenberg, 1990; Lambert, Hogan and Griffin, 2007).

Based on the above review of the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Pay satisfaction will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance

commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees from public and private universities.

Hypothesis 3: Promotional opportunities will be significant positive predictors of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 4: Training opportunities will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 5: Job security will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 6: Performance appraisal will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 7: Participation in decision making will be a stronger positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 8: Career development will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

Hypothesis 9: Distributive justice will be a significant positive predictor of (i) affective commitment (ii) continuance commitment and (iii) normative commitment for employees in public and private universities.

5. Method

This research is based on a cross-sectional study from a random sample of academic and administrative employees from three public and three private universities in Kenya. Questionnaires were distributed to 1200 employees from public universities and 415 from private universities through a 'drop and pick' method. The response rate from public universities was 62.6% (751 respondents) while private universities was 57.8% (240 respondents). Screening of the data reduced the sample to 723 respondents from public universities and 209 respondents from private universities. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out among 15 academic and administrative employees. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The description of the respondents is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Occupational groups		
Academic	446	47.85
Administrative	486	52.15
University sector		
Public	723	77.6
Private	209	22.4
Age		
Below 30	83	8.91
30-39	308	33.05
40-49	364	39.06
50 and above	177	18.99
Gender		
Male	607	65.13
Female	325	34.87
Marital status		
Unmarried	171	18.35
Married	761	81.65

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percent (%)
Job tenure		
4 years and less	191	20.49
5 - 10	224	24.03
11 - 15	266	28.54
16 and above	251	26.93
Position tenure		
Below 1 year	67	7.19
1 - 4	421	45.17
5 - 10	237	25.43
11 and above	207	22.21
Education		
Certificate	65	6.97
Diploma	153	16.42
Bachelor	166	17.81
Masters	295	31.65
PhD (on-going)	86	9.23
PhD	167	17.92

Out of the 932 respondents, 446 were academics and 486 were administrative employees. 65% of the respondents were male while 35% were female. 33% were aged between 30 to 39 years while 39% ranged from 40 to 49 years. In terms of the level of education, 23% were certificate and diploma holders, 18% had undergraduate degrees, 32% had masters, 18% had PhDs while

9% were undertaking their PhD studies. Most of the females had lower levels of education than their male colleagues. The data shows that 55% of the female respondents had first degrees and below as compared to only 34% of the male respondents. On the other hand, 66% of the male respondents had Masters degrees and above as compared to 45% of the female respondents.

6. Measurement of the variables

6.1 Dependent variables: Organisational commitment was measured as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of affective, continuance and normative commitment. These items were adopted from Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer et al. (1993). Each dimension had six items and were measured on a five-point likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The cronbach reliability coefficients were as follows: affective commitment ($\alpha = 0.879$), continuance commitment ($\alpha = 0.786$) and normative commitment ($\alpha = .772$).

6.2 Independent variables: The demographic characteristics are as follows: age, gender (coded as a dummy variable, where Male = 0, Female = 1), marital status (coded as a dummy variable where Unmarried = 0, Married = 1), tenure (job), tenure

(position), education and occupation (coded as a dummy variable where Academic = 0, Administrative = 1). The items for HRM practices were developed from various sources in the existing literature. The cronbach reliability coefficients are as follows: Job security ($\alpha = 0.794$), Promotional opportunities ($\alpha = 0.672$), Training and development ($\alpha = 0.749$), Pay satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.765$), Distributive justice ($\alpha = 0.856$), Performance appraisal ($\alpha = 0.844$), Participation in decision making ($\alpha = 0.806$) and career development ($\alpha = 0.779$). Responses to these statements were measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree.

7. Results

This section will present both descriptive and analytic results. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and coefficient alpha are provided in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and t-ratios for HRM practices and organisational commitment among employees from public and private universities

	Public universities		Private universities		t
	Means	Standard Deviation	Means	Standard Deviation	
Job security	14.94	3.87	15.99	3.83	-3.445***
Promotional opportunities	11.51	3.08	12.70	2.99	-4.956***
Training opportunities	16.17	3.91	17.76	3.50	-5.291***
Pay satisfaction	10.42	3.66	13.44	4.14	-10.209***
Distributive justice	14.16	4.94	17.73	4.87	-9.229***
Performance appraisal	7.20	2.70	8.97	2.80	-8.261***
Participation in decision making	12.21	4.13	15.66	3.49	-10.998***
Career development	9.49	2.75	10.64	2.49	-5.432***
Affective commitment	19.52	5.43	22.00	4.81	-5.968***
Continuance commitment (high personal sacrifice)	8.93	3.05	9.27	2.69	-1.451ns
Continuance commitment (low perceived alternatives)	9.22	2.83	8.49	2.76	3.293***
Normative commitment	18.43	4.77	20.06	4.29	-4.435***

Significance level: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents from private universities had significantly higher mean scores for the HRM practices, affective and normative commitment than respondents from public universities. This suggests that employees from private universities had higher commitment levels and were more satisfied with their HRM practices than employees from public universities. On the other hand, respondents from public universities had significantly higher mean scores for continuance commitment (high personal sacrifice) than respondents from private universities. This suggests that employees from public universities perceived a high cost associated with leaving their universities.

Table 3 presents the correlations among the variables for the entire sample of Kenyan university employees. The results show that age, marital status and tenure had statistically significant

positive correlations with affective, normative and continuance commitment. Education had significant, negative correlations with normative and continuance commitment. Gender had non-significant correlations with the commitment dimensions. With the exception of CC: LALT, sector had significant correlations with the organisational commitment dimensions. The positive correlations suggest that affective and normative commitment was higher in private universities. The negative correlation suggests that CC: HPS was lower in private universities and higher in public universities. With the exception of CC: LALT, all the HRM practices had statistically significant positive correlations with affective commitment, normative commitment and CC: HPS. On the other hand, CC: LALT had statistically significant correlations with demographic characteristics and non-significant correlations with HRM practices.

Table 3: Pearson's correlations among the study variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1. Age	1.00																		
2. Gender	-0.22**	1.00																	
3. Marital status	0.37**	-0.22**	1.00																
4. Job tenure	0.60**	-0.16**	0.33**	1.00															
5. Position tenure	0.43**	-0.05	0.21**	0.53**	1.00														
6. Education	0.29**	-0.23**	0.16**	0.12**	-0.10**	1.00													
7. Sector	-0.14**	0.16**	-0.23**	-0.30**	-0.18	-0.08*	1.00												
8. Job security	0.05	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.11**	1.00											
9. Promotional opportunities	-0.11**	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.22**	-0.24**	0.12**	0.16**	0.42**	1.00										
10. Training opportunities	0.00	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	-0.09**	0.07*	0.17**	0.36**	0.55**	1.00									
11. Pay satisfaction	0.01	0.04	-0.10**	-0.12**	-0.11**	0.00	0.32**	0.31**	0.37**	0.36**	1.00								
12. Distributive justice	0.01	0.03	-0.09**	-0.10**	-0.11**	-0.05	0.29**	0.33**	0.41**	0.37**	0.70**	1.00							
13. Performance appraisal	-0.02	0.00	-0.05	-0.14**	-0.09**	-0.02	0.26**	0.32**	0.48**	0.44**	0.51**	0.56**	1.00						
14. Participation in decision making	0.01	0.01	-0.10**	-0.14**	-0.11**	0.00	0.34**	0.29**	0.43**	0.43**	0.53**	0.56**	0.68**	1.00					
15. Career development	-0.04	-0.01	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.10**	0.06	0.17**	0.34**	0.49**	0.62**	0.39**	0.46**	0.46**	0.47**	1.00				
16. Affective Commitment	0.06*	0.01	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03	0.19**	0.34**	0.39**	0.42**	0.39**	0.44**	0.42**	0.47**	0.44**	1.00			
17. CC (HPS)	0.13**	0.02	0.07*	0.06	0.09**	-0.11**	0.05	0.25**	0.21**	0.18**	0.25**	0.33**	0.27**	0.25**	0.22**	0.42**	1.00		
18. CC (LALT)	0.10**	0.06	0.08*	0.12**	0.09**	-0.15**	-0.11**	0.06	-0.04	-0.03	0.01	0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01	0.05	0.50**	1.00	
19. Normative commitment	0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.03	-0.04	-0.11**	0.14**	0.33**	0.37**	0.35**	0.32**	0.39**	0.36**	0.38**	0.42**	0.65**	0.47**	0.13**	1.00

Notes: ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05

Separate multiple regression analyses were carried out to determine the impact of the demographic characteristics and HRM practices on multidimensional organisational commitment, with affective, continuance and normative commitment as the dependent variables, as shown in Table 4 below. Multicollinearity was ruled out as a problem in this study. The variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics was much lower than

the recommended cut-off threshold of 10 (Hair et al., 1998; Pallant, 2005) thus suggesting the absence of multicollinearity in the data. Further, the correlation matrix on Table 3 indicates that the highest correlation among the independent variables was 0.70 which was below the suggested cut-off point of 0.90 and above (Hair et al., 1998; Bryman and Cramer, 1990).

Table 4: Hierarchical regression analysis predicting affective and normative commitment

	Affective commitment		Normative commitment	
	Public β	Private β	Public β	Private β
Step 1				
Demographic characteristics				
Age	0.096*	0.142†	0.025	0.124
Gender	0.028	0.015	0.030	-0.090
Marital status	0.050	-0.056	0.072*	0.034
Job tenure	0.001	-0.042	0.032	0.116
Position tenure	0.006	-0.055	-0.004	-0.148*
Education	-0.078	-0.018	-0.152**	-0.077
Occupational group	0.023	0.017	0.035	0.073
R-square	0.013	0.060	0.021	0.067
Step 2				
HRM practices				
Job security	0.058	0.299***	0.083*	0.325***
Promotional opportunities	0.148***	-0.140†	0.145***	0.071
Training opportunities	0.092*	0.200**	0.033	-0.039
Pay satisfaction	0.067	-0.162†	0.073†	-0.292**
Distributive justice	0.107*	0.143	0.107*	0.187†
Performance appraisal	0.033	0.090	-0.007	0.208*
Participation in decision making	0.166***	0.219**	0.116**	-0.033
Career development	0.124**	0.109	0.208***	0.119
Regression summary:				
R-square	0.326	0.405	0.308	0.310
R-square change	0.313	0.345	0.287	0.243
F (ANOVA)	22.802***	8.748***	21.024***	5.780***

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$

a) Affective commitment model

The regression results in Table 4 indicate that the independent variables (demographic characteristics and HRM practices) accounted for 32.6% of the variance in affective commitment among employees in public universities and 40.5% among employees in private universities. The R2 change statistic shows that HRM practices contributed the highest variance. Age was the only significant demographic characteristics with older employees being more attached to their universities than younger employees. The standardised beta coefficients indicate that participation in decision making ($\beta = 0.166$, $p < 0.001$) and promotional opportunities ($\beta = 0.148$, $p < 0.001$) were the strongest predictors of affective commitment in public universities. In private universities, job security ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.001$), participation in decision-making ($\beta = 0.219$, $p < 0.01$) and training opportunities ($\beta = 0.200$, $p < 0.01$) were the strongest unique predictors.

b) Normative commitment model

The independent variables accounted for 30.8% of the variance in normative commitment in public universities and 31% in private universities, with HRM practices contributing the highest variance. Of the demographic characteristics, only marital status, position tenure and education were significant predictors. Among the HRM practices, career development ($\beta = 0.208$, $p < 0.001$) and promotional opportunities ($\beta = 0.145$, $p < 0.001$) contributed the highest variance in public universities while job security ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$) and pay satisfaction ($\beta = -0.292$, $p < 0.01$) contributed the highest variance in private universities.

c) Continuance commitment (high personal sacrifice)

The regression results in Table 5 shows that the independent variables accounted for 19.1% of the variance in continuance commitment (high personal sacrifice) among employees in public universities and 27% in private universities. Demographic characteristics contributed the least variance. Of the seven demographic characteristics, only job tenure and occupational grouping were insignificant among employees from public

Table 5: Hierarchical regression analysis predicting continuance commitment

	Continuance commitment (high personal sacrifice)		Continuance commitment (low perceived alternatives)	
	Public β	Private β	Public β	Private β
Step 1				
Demographic characteristics				
Age	0.164***	-0.008	0.148**	-0.028
Gender	0.073*	-0.034	0.097*	0.041
Marital status	0.074*	0.151*	0.044	0.155*
Job tenure	-0.008	0.027	0.050	0.089
Position tenure	0.071†	-0.132†	-0.031	-0.139†
Education	-0.204***	-0.208*	-0.161**	-0.238*
Occupational group	-0.051	-0.199*	0.037	-0.124
R-square	0.058	0.033	0.067	0.052
Step 2				
HRM practices				
Job security	0.087*	0.260***	0.094*	0.074
Promotional opportunities	0.097*	0.008	-0.069	0.146
Training opportunities	-0.038	-0.047	0.040	-0.264**
Pay satisfaction	0.068	-0.152	0.086†	-0.191†
Distributive justice	0.158***	0.353***	0.030	0.255*
Performance appraisal	0.049	0.104	-0.055	-0.029
Participation in decision making	0.027	-0.009	-0.021	-0.047
Career development	0.061	0.075	0.016	0.061
R-square	0.191	0.270	0.087	0.135
R-square change	0.133	0.237	0.019	0.083
F (ANOVA)	11.143***	4.759***	4.476***	2.015*

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; † p < 0.10

universities while marital status, position tenure and occupational groupings were significant among employees in private universities. Among the HRM practices, distributive justice ($\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.001$) contributed the highest individual variance in public universities while job security ($\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.001$) and distributive justice ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$) were strongest individual predictors in private universities.

d) Continuance commitment (low perceived alternatives)

Finally, the R2 statistics show that the independent variables accounted for 8.7% of the variance in continuance commitment (low perceived alternatives) among employees from public universities and 13.5% from private universities. The R2 change statistics indicate that demographic characteristics accounted for higher variance in public universities (i.e. 6.7%) while HRM practices contributed the highest variance in private universities (i.e. 8.3%). Of the demographic characteristics, age, gender and education were significant predictors of CC: LALT in public universities while marital status, position tenure and education were significant predictors in private universities. The beta coefficients indicate that job security ($\beta = 0.094$, $p < 0.05$) and pay satisfaction ($\beta = 0.086$, $p < 0.10$) were the only HRM practices which significantly influenced CC: LALT in public universities while training opportunities ($\beta = -0.264$, $p < 0.01$) and pay satisfaction ($\beta = -0.191$, $p < 0.10$) contributed the highest variance in private universities.

8. Discussions

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of demographic characteristics and HRM practices on the organisational commitment among employees in public and private universities. The regression models showed that with the exception of CC: LALT among employees in public universities, HRM practices were stronger predictors of multidimensional organisational commitment than demographic characteristics. Secondly, the independent variables were stronger predictors of organisational commitment in private universities than in public universities. Finally, HRM practices had stronger influence on affective and normative commitment than on continuance commitment (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Yu and Egri, 2005).

The results show that demographic characteristics were significant predictors of organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990). Age was a positive predictor of affective and continuance commitment. Unlike younger employees, older employees are probably more entrenched and involved in their jobs, have greater financial and familial obligations, have higher investments in their organisations and face greater age discrimination in seeking new jobs (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Cetin, 2006; Lambert and Hogan, 2009). *Position tenure* was a negative predictor of normative and continuance commitment among employees from private

universities. This is consistent with Stevens et al's (1978) study which found that negative perceptions or costs develop as a result of career stagnation. On the other hand, position tenure was a positive predictor of continuance commitment among employees from public universities. A possible explanation is that employees' personal investments (i.e. seniority, pension plans, family obligations, etc) and lack of alternative jobs outweighed the frustrations resulting from lack of career advancement.

Marital status was a positive predictor of normative and continuance commitment among employees in public and private universities, with married employees having higher commitment levels than unmarried employees. Consistent with previous studies, married employees are not likely to risk quitting their jobs because of the great financial burdens they have due to family responsibilities (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Taormina, 1999; Carson and Carson, 2002; Cetin, 2006).

Contrary to findings by Aven et al. (1993), *gender* was a significant positive predictor of continuance commitment among employees from public universities. A possible explanation is that most female employees, particularly in the non-teaching cadres, have lower levels of education than their male colleagues. These employees are therefore less likely to compete effectively for available jobs in the labour market. In addition, since women have had to overcome more barriers to attain their positions in the organisation, they may place greater value on their organisations and jobs than do their male counterparts (Grusky, 1966; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990; Wahn, 1998).

Finally, *education* was a significant negative predictor of normative and continuance commitment. These results are consistent with previous studies which have found, unlike employees with lower levels of education, highly educated employees were less committed to their universities because they had not only more employment opportunities but also higher expectations that their universities may be unable to meet (Mowday et al., 1982; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Taormina, 1999; Meyer and Allen, 1997).

Consistent with previous studies, HRM practices were found to be significant predictors of organisational commitment (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Oglivie, 1986; Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Malhotra et al., 2007). The regression results showed sector differences in the direction of the relationship between *Pay satisfaction* and multidimensional organisational commitment. In public universities, pay satisfaction was a significant positive predictor of normative commitment and CC: LALT. This is consistent with previous studies which have shown that pay was an important determinant of organisational commitment (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Mowday et al., 1982; Agarwala, 2003; Singh et al., 2004). Satisfaction with pay is likely to signal to the employee that he/she has received a fair amount of resources from the organisation, hence engendering feelings of indebtedness resulting in high normative commitment (Vandenberghe and Tremblay, 2008). In addition, the cost associated with leaving increases for employees who are satisfied with their compensation leading to perceptions of limited alternative attractive employment opportunities, especially during the

current period of economic crisis. On the other hand, pay satisfaction was a negative predictor of affective, normative and continuance commitment in private universities which suggests that pay was not a motivator among employees in private universities. It is possible that individuals working in these universities may not be typically motivated by monetary incentives, suggesting that these universities are attracting employees with different personality profiles.

Participation in decision making was a significant positive predictor of affective and normative commitment for employees in public and private universities. This suggests that employees who participate in the decision making process became psychologically attached and loyal to their universities and vice versa. This supports previous studies which indicated that involving employees in the decision making process resulted in high organisational commitment (Arthur, 1994; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999). Organisations that share information on key organisational matters are likely to convey to their employees that they were trusted, thus creating a sense of obligation and emotional attachment on the part of the employees (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999; McElroy, 2001; Malhotra et al., 2007). However, data from the interviews showed that employees from public universities were dissatisfied with the decision making process. A line's manager remarked:

The decision is made first and then communicated down to the rest of the people and that is not satisfactory. We should have a bottom-up approach. The university should consult first, get stakeholders views and opinions ... The current practice of management making all decision is not acceptable to employees. The impact of that decision may not be felt... people don't own the decision and do not feel part of the decision making process. Sometimes decisions made may not be the best decision and therefore won't work. As a line manager, you are left to get your people to fit into a decision that was made elsewhere, which you also don't understand. It therefore becomes difficult to get people to pull together.

Further, a senior administrative officer of a public university remarked:

The management of this university ... has not allowed for participatory management ... we saw situations where teaching staff alone were being treated as if they were the only employees of this university, hence no mutual respect between teaching and non-teaching staff. No effort was being made to inculcate teamwork. Relations are not conducive for team working and the university actually awards HODs of teaching departments' enhanced commuting, responsibility, telephone, and entertainment allowances and left out HODs of non-teaching departments.

Job security was a significant positive predictor of affective and normative commitment for employees from both public and private universities. Studies have shown that employees who are provided with high employment security are more committed to their organisations than employees who perceive a threat to their employment (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Hallier and Lyon, 1996; Buitendach and De Witte, 2005). Employees who are provided with job security will expend extra

effort and are likely to develop stronger identification with the values and goals of the organisations (Pfeffer, 1999; McElroy, 2001).

Promotional opportunities had an inverse relationship with affective commitment in private universities which was quite surprising. This suggests that satisfaction with promotions did not result in high commitment levels and vice versa. On the other hand, promotional opportunities had a significant positive influence on affective, continuance and normative commitment in public universities. This suggests that satisfaction with promotional opportunities had a positive effect on organisational commitment (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Iles et al., 1990; Grusky, 1966; Kalleberg and Mastekaase, 1994; McElroy et al., 1996). However, the interviews indicated that employees from public universities were dissatisfied with the promotion process. According to a Middle Management employee of a public university:

This is not good. For instance, when one has completed additional training and forwarded the certificates to personnel, one is told that they will be considered when an opportunity arises and this sometimes takes years, and yet one has spent time and money to obtain the additional qualification. A policy should be set up which clearly states the progression upon completion of specific qualification. This lack of progression has made employees to be discontented... in some cases, employees with lower qualifications have higher grades than people with additional qualification who are told to wait.

Training opportunities was a significant positive predictor of affective commitment and a negative predictor of CC: LALT for employees from private universities. Organisations that provide adequate training opportunities send a clear message to their employees that they are committed to the development of their people leading to high affective and low perception of limited alternative employment opportunities (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Tannenbaum et al., 1991; Taormina, 1999; McElroy, 2001). In addition, employees who receive support from their universities in developing their skills and knowledge, become more committed to their universities, as their chances of getting promoted improves, resulting in better pay and improved status in their universities.

Performance appraisal was a significant positive predictor of normative commitment among employees in private universities. Consistent with the norm of reciprocity, employees who perceive that the organisation values and treats them fairly through fair and timely appraisal, will feel obligated to "pay back" or reciprocate these good deeds with positive work attitudes and behaviours (Aryee et al., 2002; Gould-Williams and Davies, 2005; Parzefall, 2008). However, if performance appraisal is carried out merely to attain organisational objectives or the process is perceived as unfair, employee commitment will decline (Oglivie, 1986; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003; Kamoche et al., 2004; Kuvaas, 2006).

Career development was found to be a significant positive predictor of affective and normative commitment among employees from public universities. This is consistent with previous studies which found career development as the best predictor of affective and normative commitment because they

were critical in preparing employees for a future in the organisation (Taormina, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003). It is possible that employees with good career opportunities in their universities were more likely to feel a moral obligation to and also develop a strong emotional attachment to their universities.

Consistent with previous studies, *distributive justice* was a significant predictor of affective, normative and continuance commitment among employees in public and private universities. This supports studies which suggest that employees are likely to perform better and have higher organisational commitment if they feel that they are being treated fairly and justly (Mueller and Price, 1986; Greenberg, 1990; Lambert, 2003; Lambert et al., 2007). However, if they are treated unfairly they will try to restore justice by holding back performance and lowering commitment to their organisations.

Finally, consistent with previous studies, employees from private universities had higher levels of affective and normative commitment than employees from public universities (Buchanan, 1974b; Rainey et al., 1976; Solomon, 1986; Baldwin, 1987; Zeffane, 1994; Goulet and Frank, 2002; Obeng and Ugboro, 2003). Studies have found that public sector organisations are too bureaucratic, and deficient in goal clarity, have ambiguous and conflicting goals, lower levels of job autonomy, task variety and feedback, unlike private sector organisations which have greater autonomy and enriched jobs (Rainey et al., 1976; Balfour and Wechsler, 1991; Bourantas and Papalexandris, 1992; Flynn and Tannenbaum, 1993; Mulinge, 2000). Further, public sector organisations in sub-Saharan Africa have been found to be afflicted by poor infrastructure, political interference, poor incentives while employees perform jobs which lack clear objectives, and have unclear job descriptions and job evaluation (Mulinge, 2000; Jackson, 2002).

On the other hand, employees from public universities had higher levels of continuance commitment than employees from private universities. This can be explained by the recruitment procedures of the two sectors. Due to political patronage and ethnicity, top management of public universities have often been compelled to employ more people than they require, some of whom may not possess the necessary skills (Cohen, 1995; Abagi, 1998; Mwiria and Ngethe, 2007). In this regard, most of the non-teaching employees are not likely to get alternative jobs due to their uncompetitive skills in the labour market. In addition, public university employees enjoy certain benefits (i.e. job security, secure pension plans, medical cover and paid study leave) which they are likely to lose if they were to quit their jobs. On the other hand, private universities are business entities which strive to efficiently utilise their human resources so as to cut down their staff costs through competitive recruitment (Wesonga, Ngome, Ouma-Odero and Wawire, 2007).

9. Limitations of the study

The findings of this study should be considered with a few limitations in mind. Firstly, self-report measures were used, which relied upon the honesty of the respondents and their emotional state at the time of filling the questionnaire. Secondly, during the data collection, academic staff from public universities went on a three-month strike over pay dispute. This

may have had a negative influence on their responses. Since this was a cross-sectional study, the research was unable to test the long term impact of the strike on the academics commitment levels. A longitudinal study may have revealed whether there were any changes in commitment over time. Lastly, the surveyed employees were from one sector, i.e. higher education. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot necessarily be generalised to other sectors of the economy such as the manufacturing, banking, health services or the civil service.

10. Implications for practice and conclusions

The findings of this study have important implications for Kenyan universities, especially public universities. The results of this study suggest the HRM practices, not personal characteristics, are critical in helping shape the organisational commitment of university employees. Various studies have shown that specific HRM practices (e.g. participation in decision making, pay, promotional opportunities, and career development among others) promote high levels of commitment (Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Oglivie, 1986; Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Paul and Anantharaman, 2004; Malhotra et al., 2007). It is therefore critical for university management to provide a supportive work environment and effective HR practices and policies which will demonstrate their commitment to their employees and thus enhance organisational commitment.

In order to improve perceptions of organisational justice, there is a need for honest and open communication between management and employees. Therefore, employees must be able to voice their concerns and opinions to the management without fear of retaliation (Mulinge and Mueller, 1998). Furthermore, management must be consistent in their decisions regarding employee outcomes with no perception of favouritism in the distribution of rewards among different groups of employees (Lambert, 2003).

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