An Exploratory Study of Job Insecurity as a Correlate of Employees’ Affective Commitment

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Abstract: The study explores job insecurity as a correlate of affective commitment among academic and non-academic staff of private universities. The study population consisted of all academic and non-academic staff of the university. In order to collect the study data, a questionnaire was designed. A correlation cross-sectional design was carried out using all staff both in the field and within various departments. A convenience sample was employed during the administration of questionnaire. The result indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between job insecurity and organizational affective commitment. The research finding conclude that staff who perceive their job as being secure are expected to exhibit high institutional affective commitment.

Keywords: Organisational Commitment, Job Security, Job Satisfaction, Turnover Intentions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are the bedrock on which most prosperous nations depend. If people are instilled with better education and skills, they will be better placed to contribute positively to the economy. The university system as one of the educational institutions need its academic staff to polish and impact knowledge on students, as students are pillars in the nations building so their importance in any country cannot be avoided. Thus, the university system in Nigeria cannot achieve its goals and objectives without an efficient and committed academic staff. The issue of academic staff commitment in our private universities has attracted the attention of the public, policy makers, educators, administrators and other stakeholders in educational sector. This is because affective commitment results in better job performance, turnover intention, organisational citizenship behaviour and effectiveness. Therefore, for the private university system to achieve the purpose of producing highly skilled labour to meet the socio-economic needs of the nation, the commitment of the academic staff must be given special attention.

Affective commitment refers to emotional attachment to the organisation, characterised by acceptance of the organisational culture, values and willingness to remain with the organisation (Buitendach & De Witte, 2005). McDonald & Makin (2000) rightly observes that affective commitment is affected by the extent to which the individual’s needs and expectations of the organisation are matched by their actual experiences, which links with the perceived reciprocal obligations of the psychological contract. They identify two distinct employee obligations, namely relational (reciprocal relationship between employer and employee) and transactional (based on economics where employees are willing to work overtime, to provide high levels of performance for contingent pay). According to Bass (1998) commitment refers to loyalty and attachment to the organization. In the university, such loyalty is seen in workers’ feelings of attachment that develop as they share values in common with co-workers (Akpan, 2013). Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) suggest that an employee, whose work experience is consistent with his/her expectations and satisfies his/her basic needs, tends to develop stronger affective attachment to the organisation. Likewise, Riketta (2002) proposes that employees who feel attached to and identify themselves with the organisation and work harder, may provide the basis for many organisational attempts to foster employees’ organisational commitment or identification.

Several factors influence academic staff affective commitment in the Nigerian university system in general and private universities in particular. One of such factor is job insecurity. According to De Witte (1999) job insecurity is based on the notion of job loss and is often applicable to a situation where the organisation is undergoing change or in crisis, where job insecurity is considered the first phase of job loss. Furthermore De Witte (1999) reports that feelings of job insecurity are only relevant to employees who are currently employed and fear that they might lose their job and become unemployed. He argues that job insecurity does not necessarily lead to unemployment and he indicates that the proportion of employees who might feel insecurity is larger than the proportion that could actually lose their jobs. The study of Sparks, Faragher and Cooper (2001) suggests that perceptions of job insecurity correlate negatively with employee well-being. Since job insecurity is experienced as a threat and implies uncertainty, it has been described as a stressor, which is often associated with powerlessness (De Witte, 1999; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2005; Näsvall, Sverke & Hellgren, 2005). Sparks et al (2001) points that employee perceptions of job insecurity may cause organisations to suffer financially due to the associated costs of absenteeism and lowered employee well-being. Other organisational concerns caused by perception of job insecurity include the increased turnover of employees, a decrease in workers’ productivity,
and lower levels of commitment, employee engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, and trust in employers (De Cuyper, Bernhardt-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte & Alarco, 2008; Smithson & Lewis, 2000). Adeniji (2011) posits that academic staff of private universities often faces many challenges in form of inadequate infrastructure, lack of enabling research environment, disparity in salary and allowances, uncompetitive remuneration, inconsistent policy implementation which affect their levels of satisfaction. In fact some of these academics are of the opinion that communication and decision making problem exist in their institutions because the management take certain decisions without involving them which in turn creates additional negative work environment. This results to constant mobility of highly skilled and talented lecturers from private universities to Federal or State Universities. Thus, as the private universities no longer guarantee lifetime employment, the job security of ordinary staff became more and more endangered (Jeon, 2009). Based on this premise, this present study is aimed at examining job insecurity as a correlates of employees affective commitment.

**Justification of the Study**

Many job insecurity and commitment studies have been conducted across a range of industries. Yet little academic study of job insecurity and commitment in the tertiary institution in Southeast Nigeria has been undertaken to explore the relationship between the constructs. Therefore, the rationale for chosen the geographical location for the study is because the institution was the first private university that got licensed and started operation before other private universities.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

**Job Insecurity**

Researchers have shown that job insecurity affects commitment of workers. Job insecurity is often conceptualised as either a global or a multidimensional concept (De Witte, 1999). On the global point of view, job insecurity is defined as the threat of job loss or job uncertainty (De Witte, 1999). Job insecurity consists of two dimensions, namely a cognitive and an affective dimension (De Witte, 2000). Cognitive job insecurity relates to perceptions of possible job loss, whereas affective job insecurity relates to the fear of job loss. Job insecurity is one of the most distressful aspects of the work situation (De Witte, 1999). It is related to mental health complaints, lower levels of commitment, lower levels of job involvement, decreased trust and engagement and increased intention to leave (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2005). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) emphasise that the sense of powerlessness experienced by employees intensifies the experienced threat of job insecurity. Ashford, Lee, & Bobko (1989) states that job insecurity can only exist when people detect a threat of overall job loss, loss of any dimension of their job and/or the erosion of any conditions of employment such as loss of income, promotion opportunities, location and colleagues.

Other distinctions with regard to job insecurity relate to quantitative job insecurity and qualitative job insecurity, which correspond to a large extent with the global and multidimensional definitions of job insecurity respectively (Hellgren, Sverke & Isaksson, 1999). Quantitative job insecurity refers to concerns about the future existence of the present job, while qualitative job insecurity refers to perceived threats of impaired quality in the employment relationship (Hellgren et al., 1999). Ashford et al (1989) have found a negative inverse relationship between perceived job insecurity and both employee satisfaction and commitment. They proposed that job insecurity would be positively related to both employees’ dedication and their trust in a firm. These relationships occur primarily because insecure employees lose faith in the dependability of their organizations, and their attachment to these firms may diminish accordingly. Yousef (1998) found that satisfaction with job security affects dedication to the organization in his study of expatriates. Organizations might exchange short-term performance of their employees at the expense of losing trust and employees’ dedication if it leads to the long-term success of the organization (Tyler, 2003).

De Witte (1999) argues that whenever employees feel that their needs have been threatened by a perceived insecure job situation, they will, in turn, also experience a threat to their economy, social contact as well as personal growth and development. That is, when employees can no longer expect lifelong job security and because the labour market has been gradually individualised, their focus is directed away from the organisation towards their own career development. When served with a notification of possible retrenchment employees are confronted with a stressful environment and they may struggle to cope with uncertainties surrounding the security of their job within the organisation. Similarly, employees who feel insecure and uncertain after receiving information of possible retrenchment cannot adequately prepare themselves for the future, because they have no clarity about which actions should be undertaken (De Witte, 2005). In a study conducted among managers, Roskies & Louis-Guerin (1990) report that the prospect of demotion, deterioration in working conditions, or even the long-term prospect of eventual job loss is associated with decreased well-being and work commitment. De Witte (2005) notes that job insecurity influence various organisational attitudes and behaviours that have profound negative and positive consequences for organisations. In addition Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984) posit that the attitudinal and behavioural consequences of job insecurity threaten the survival of the organisation, in the form of impaired productivity, increased turnover and barriers to adaption which according to them reduce organisational effectiveness. Holm & Hovland (1999) points out that
job insecurity results in an increased employee turnover rate. Leaving the organisation in search of more secure career opportunities is common among employees who feel insecure about their jobs (Ashford et al., 1989). This appears to be true, especially among high performers who typically have an easier time securing new employment. The result of increased turnover is an increased cost in terms of the recruitment and training of new employees. Organisations may consequently lose their most valuable employees, the ones they most want to retain (Ashford et al., 1989).

The commonly researched consequence of job insecurity for employees is that job security may have detrimental effects on their well-being, such as physical and mental health (Burchell, 1994; De Witte, 1999). Longitudinal studies have reported that survivors’ health has consistently decreased as a result of accumulated uncertainty, whereas job losers’ health has consistently increased after job loss (Burchell, 1994; Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). These results suggest that negative effects on mental health of long-term job insecurity are more serious than job loss itself.

From an organizational perspective, job insecurity may have negative consequences for employees’ attitudes, such as organizational trust and commitment, ranging from moderately to strongly negative (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). From a social exchange perspective, employees might withdraw their loyalty and attachment to organizations that do not provide job security in order to maintain balance in an exchange relationship (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

Organisational Commitment

Newstrom & Davies (2007) define commitment as the degree to which employees identify with the organisation and want to continue actively participating in its successes. They pointed out that organisational commitment often reflects the employee’s beliefs in the mission and goals of the organisation, willingness to expend effort in their accomplishment and intentions to continue working in the organisation.

According to Steers (1977), organizational commitment is defined as the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization. It can be characterized by at least three factors: (1) a strong belief in the organization’s values; (2) a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. Mowday et al. (1982) defined organizational commitment as a psychological state that characterizes employees’ linkages with an organization and has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization.

Meyer & Allen (1997) suggested a multidimensional concept, which constitutes a three-component model, namely affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organization. They are committed to the organization because they want to be. Continuance commitment refers to a rational aspect of commitment and concerns the needs of employees. Put differently, it is referred to as calculative or cognitive commitment and is based on a consideration of the costs and benefits associated with organizational membership, which is unrelated to affect (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Finally, normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees are committed to an organization because they feel they ought to remain with it (Allen & Meyer, 1991). Meyer & Herscovitch (2001) argued that each component is contingent on a different mindset and is developed on different conditions. First, the mindset of desire develops when individuals become involved in the value-relevance of, or derive identity from, an entity or the pursuit of a course of action. Second, the mindset of perceived cost develops when individuals recognize the possibility of losing investments and perceive that there are no other alternatives. Third, the mindset of obligation develops as a result of the internalization of norms through socialization, the receipt of benefits that induces a need to reciprocate, and the acceptance of the terms of a psychological contract.

According to McDonald & Makin (2000) affective commitment is affected by the extent to which the individual’s needs and expectations of the organisation are met by their actual experiences, which links with the perceived reciprocal obligations of the psychological contract.

Meyer & Allen (1997) suggested that employees with strong affective commitment to an organization work harder at their jobs and perform them better than do those with weak commitment. In addition, a significant positive relationship has been reported between employees’ affective commitment and their supervisors’ ratings of their potential for promotion, along with their overall performance on the job (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Meyer et al., 1989).

Empirical review on the relationship between job insecurity and affective commitment

Previous research has confirmed that job security induces employees’ organizational commitment, while job insecurity reduces such commitment (Jeon, 2009). Brockner et al. (1994) argued that optimal levels of job insecurity produce the greatest level of work effort of survivors. Frequently, survivors of mass downsizing showed more commitment and loyalty toward their organization because they wanted to continue to survive by showing strong organizational commitment and attachment toward their team (Mankelow, 2002; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002).

Ashford et al. (1989) examined the impact of job insecurity on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance. Even though it is questionable whether job insecurity has an impact on job
performance, it is certain that job insecurity has led to reduced commitment and reduced satisfaction. Abbeglen (2001) maintained that a high commitment level of Japanese workers was due to a strong sense of job security, which originated from the unique Japanese employment system, such as lifetime employment and the seniority system.

For expatriate workers, job security could be the most important factor to reinforce their commitment toward their organization (Yousef, 1998). Foreign expatriates would be more committed to their organization if they were satisfied with their job security because they strongly need such security. Yousef (1998) stated that satisfaction with job security was positively related to both organizational commitment and job performance.

Moshoeu (2011) explores the relationship between job insecurity, organizational commitment and work engagement amongst staff in a tertiary institution. The research was conducted through computer-aided telephone interviews and self-completion techniques. Three instruments were administered among the survey participants, namely the Job Insecurity Scale (JIS), the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The results revealed that a statistically significant relationship exists between JIS and OQC as well as UWES, although the relationship is positive and weak (r=.286** for OCQ; r=.270** for UWES). The results imply that as participants feel insecure about the various job features and the job as a whole, they simultaneously express their commitment and energy as well as dedication to their work responsibilities and the organisation.

Jeon (2009) investigated the impact of organizational justice and job security on organizational commitment through the mediating effect of trust in top management. The sample consisted of 337 Korean employees who were drawn from six Korean firms. The results suggest that both organizational justice and long term job security affected trust in top management and organizational commitment significantly. All hypotheses were supported; however, the mediating effect via trust in top management was not strong enough to link two predictors with organizational commitment. The result of this study suggests that organizations should take care of employees’ personal and social needs in order to increase their trust and commitment toward the organization. Especially, social needs (organizational justice) should be maintained, as well as personal and economic needs of employees (job security).

III. METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional was adopted for this study. This design is suitable to study the relationship between different variables. Questionnaires were used to gather primary data in a non-random field survey. A convenience sample consisting of employees from Madonna University, Nigeria was used in this study. The population included workers from all levels, ranging from non-academic to academic staff. The lowest-level employees had a literacy level adequate to allow for the valid completion of the questionnaires. Two modified questionnaires were used in the empirical study – namely, the Job Insecurity scale (JIS) developed by Ashford et al. (1989) and Affective Commitment scale (ACS) (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

All the items in the two scales, JIS and ACS were measured using a 5-point response option which ranged from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, and Uncertain to Agree and Strongly Agree. The instrument was trial tested by administering it to selected employees that were not part of the study. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The modified version of JIS yielded reliability coefficients of 0.83 and ACS yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.71. The instrument was administered to the respondents in their various organisations with the help of two research assistants.

IV. STATISTICAL TEST AND RESULTS

The inferential statistical tool used was Pearson product moment correlation statistics. This was used to find out if there is any significant relationship between job insecurity and affective commitment.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant positive relationship between job insecurity and employees affective commitment.

The result of the analysis is presented on table below:

| Table 1: Test of Significance of Pearson's Correlation between Job Insecurity and Employee Affective Commitment |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| N       | Job Insecurity | Employee Affective Commitment | P-value | Decision |
| Job Insecurity | 138 | 1 | .580 | .000 | Significant |
| Employee Affective Commitment | 138 | .580 | 1 |
Table 1 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between job insecurity and employees affective commitment among academic and non-academic staff in Madonna university, r. (138) = .580, P<0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which indicated no significant positive relationship between variables was rejected.

Discussion of findings

Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation of job insecurity, and affective commitment for the total sample. Result indicates that there is a significant positive correlation, although not very strong, between job insecurity and organizational affective commitment (0.58). This simply means that the more the employees are unsatisfied with the security of their jobs, the more uncommitted they are to their organization. As a result, employees always feel insecure about their job status and are constantly having a mind of changing the job when they have appropriate opportunity. So, even when they show commitment, it is pseudo commitment in the organization. However, the result found in this study with respect to the linkages between job insecurity and affective commitment is in line with previous studies (e.g., Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2005; Sverke & Hellgren, 2001; Sverke et al., 2002; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).

Moreso, people feel a threat to their highly valued resource of employment and therefore might withdraw from activities that further demand their resources (Maslach et al., 2001). This behaviour might affect their job performance. As a result, employees might attempt to minimise effort investment in their work roles/activities and rather switch to activities that are less demanding on their resources. In addition, if people reduce their efforts in their regular work behaviour, they are very likely to also reduce investments in any type of contextual performance, such as OCB (Mosshoeu, 2011).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study explores the role of job insecurity as a correlate of affective commitment. The empirical result indicates that there is a significant positive correlation, although not very strong, between job insecurity and organizational affective commitment. Management of tertiary institutions can get an insight from the findings of the study by providing conditions that can enhance job insecurity and staff affective commitment to their jobs. This makes it possible to know where attention needs to be directed, as most studies emphasized global and composite organisational commitment which obscures the specific areas for administrative attention. Therefore, it would be deduced that staff who perceive their job as being secure are expected to exhibit high institutional affective commitment. Thus, job insecurity is related to employee’s affective commitment in an organisation.

Limitations of the Study

The present study findings are only suggestive for they rely solely on the use of questionnaires that might not capture the full nature and all the facets of job insecurity and affective commitment. Moreover, it might be difficult to generalize the findings of the present study given the brevity of our sample which was restricted to a stable business environment. A cross-sectional design was used and therefore it was not possible to control for confounding variables. Therefore, a longitudinal study might be more suitable to capture the changing nature of the relationship between job insecurity and employees affective commitment.

Directions for further Research

Future research can replicate the methodology adopted in the present study to other sectors. Secondly, since Job Insecurity is one of the factors that influence employees’ affective commitment, the other influencing factors can be explored. The present study does not investigate the antecedents of job insecurity. Review of related literature shows that affective, normative and continuance commitments are component models of organisational commitment and are dependent on job insecurity. A future initiative can therefore, explore these three aspects of commitment. Finally, the development of scientific and practical tools and techniques to implement the above findings can be a future initiative.

VI. REFERENCES


