

EMPATHY AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN THE NIGERIAN HEALTH SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between Empathy and Employee Commitment in the health sector in Nigeria. The design adopted for this study is cross sectional survey design. 339 questionnaires were distributed out of which 313 were retrieved, out of which 273 were found usable. Taro Yamen's technique was used to arrive at the sample size. Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used for the bivariate analysis and partial correlation was used for the multivariate analysis with the aid of SPSS 20.0. Findings revealed that there is a high significant level of relationship between Empathy and Employee Commitment which influences positive connectivity within superiors and subordinates and also improves interaction and cooperation among workforce. Hence, consequently leading to better organisational performance.

Keywords: Empathy, Employee Commitment, Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment, Normative Commitment.

INTRODUCTION

Employees' being committed to their jobs is of much value to any organization because it is assumed that it reduces withdrawal behaviour such as absenteeism, lateness and turnover, which result to grave consequences for the overall organisational performance. Carrie et al, (2009) posited that personnel with the consciousness of commitment are less possibly to enlist in withdrawal behaviour and are extra inclined to accept modification. Improving on the level of commitment of workers has gained attention in both the private and public sectors. Attention also needs to be placed on the need for improving the employee's relationship with their colleagues and customers/clientele. If such efforts are put in place, the employee will perform optimally, thereby improving the total performance of the organization. Workers who end up without been committed to an organisation will divert their commitment to different areas, for this reason, it is necessary to build up the proper kind and degree of commitment in employees and also to make sure that right personnel are retained; employees who become highly committed to their jobs are noticeably glad and are fulfilled with their jobs.

The health sector in every country is fundamental to the people; Nigeria is no exception. The health sector provides sufficient and timely medical care, track, and monitor and curb disease outbreak. These can be effectively and efficiently carried out if the health personnel are committed to delivering these services. The healthcare sector demands for the services of many experts, semi-professional employees with particularly specialized expertise and skills (Ademola et al, 2015). The roles and responsibilities of healthcare actors within a health facility are not accomplished in isolation; it is perceivable that there are potential sources of conflicts between the diverse professionals in the hospital. The achievement of set goals depends on capable and proficient management of all assets, which includes the sustenance of favourable conditions for positive interplay within the workforce of the organization (Ademola *et al.* 2015). It has been found out that Doctors and Nurses in Nigeria are known to lack compassion and empathy, therefore people looking for help suffer when it comes to doctor-patient or nurse-patient relationship. It has also been noticed that nurses don't only insult their patients; they go ahead to embarrass patients visitors, making the patients feel unwanted.

A lot of studies and literature focus on employee commitment and other variables, but very little attention has been dedicated to empathy amongst workers as a dimension of social intelligence, especially in the health sector. For example Anwar, (2016) studied the relationship between employee commitment and sustained productivity in agricultural businesses. Erbil et al, (2017) examined workplace discrimination and employee commitment in Rivers State Civil Service, Nigeria. Okpu and Jaja, (2014) examined the relationship between quality circle and workers commitment in Nigerian Banking industry. This study attempts to fill the gap by focusing on empathy (a dimension of social intelligence) and employee commitment.

Literature Review

Empathy

According to Albrecht, (2006), empathy is the capacity to be attached to someone, which creates the foundation for useful interaction and cooperation. Albrecht notes that it goes farther the conventional connotation of empathy as having a feeling for someone else, or "sympathizing" with them. According to Hanson (2007), Empathy is feeling and discerning how it is for another individual. Empathy makes someone to sense and infer what's happening with another individual. Empathy is an emotion where individuals try to discern the minds of others and try and see matters from a different position that will explain the activities of each other (Stein and Book, 2001). Bookbinder in his paper named three key features of empathy. These include 1) Empathic accuracy: the ability to feel what the other person is going through from their internal experience. 2) Empathic compassion: the ability to be open to another's experience with compassion and tolerance and 3) Empathic interactions: the process of interacting in an empathic way. He emphasised the importance of empathic acknowledgements and the benefits to the talker and the listener, which he says improves relationships.

Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) in the Harvard Business review posited that there are things leaders do that specifically exhibit empathy and get attuned to others' moods that affect their mind chemistry and that of their followers. It has as well been observed by researchers that leader-follower dynamic isn't always a case of two or more independent brains extending consciously or unconsciously to each other. On the contrary, the persons mind get in a sense fused into a united system. Goleman and Boyatzis cited an experiment of how important and powerful cue can be; they stated that some subjects received negative feedback that was accompanied by positive cues – such as smiling and nodding, while another group received positive feedback with negative cues – such as frowning or narrowed eyes. The results were that those who received positive feedback actually felt worse about themselves than those who received negative feedback. This shows that the delivery was more important than the actual feedback because people who feel better perform more effectively, any disconnect between words and expression can send the wrong signal and cause possible serious misinterpretation.

Employee Commitment

Committed individuals adhere to the aims of their commitment. As is the case in individual life, many individuals have conflicting commitments in work life, for instance those towards profession, career colleagues, departments, and the organization in entirety. There are dissimilar forces that can compel a person to a particular line of action. Individuals may also do something because they prefer it (affective bonding), because they perceive obliged (normative conformity) and/or since humans have good motives for their commitment (rational choice) (Allen and Meyer 1990).

Employees may see continuous commitment from the angle of energy they have put into an organisation in the past and may resolve to garner the benefits of their past commitment. This does not guarantee that the employee will want to put in more energy in the future. Mcgee and Ford (1987) point out that continuance commitment is involved with sunk costs. A sunk cost is a phrase loaned from accountancy and means unrecoverable costs used previously for considerations of decisions relating to future investments. This suggests that just as shareholders can invest or withdraw their investments; employees can do the same with commitment if they choose to

withdraw or not to put in their substantial efforts. Other factors that contribute to continuance commitment are tenure, education, and age. Some employees may be tied to their organizations for reasons such as low educational level which may be to their disadvantage in terms of transferable knowledge or skills and also older employees with a long tenure may also have the same constraint (Meyer and Allen 1990).

Allen and Meyer (1990); Randall and Cote (1991) sought to differentiate normative commitment from affective and continuance commitment. Normative commitment exhibits indebtedness by an employee to remain in the employment of the organisation. Allen and Meyer, (1990) posit that people with an eminent degree of normative commitment feel that they should maintain offering their services to the company. O'Reilly and Chatman, (1986) observed that when there is compatibility between company's values and employees' values, the employee tend to exhibit a higher level of organisational commitment. This finding is in harmony with that of Mayer and Schoorman, (1992) who found that when employees accept the company's values, they exhibit increased organisational commitment. Randall and Cote (1991) posit that normative commitment exists when the employee feels indebted towards the firm which has invested in them. They further indicated that, employees feel that when an organisation has invested a lot of time and money in training and developing them, they have a moral obligation to continue to provide their services to the company. An example is when an organisation has paid for the employees' education while they were continuing their studies to better or upgrade their qualifications; they feel indebted to compensate the organisation by remaining in the organization to provide their services. Jaros et al, (1993), stated that normative commitment is found to be similar to moral commitment. Normative commitment is a feeling of obligation or responsibility towards the organisation. Normative commitment is different from continuance commitment because it is not dependent on the investment of the employees in the organisation in form of time and effort rather it is the investment that the organisation has made on the employee.

Becker et al, (1995) opined that the three aspects of organisational commitment are not reciprocally exclusive, an employee or individual can exhibit any one, or a mixture of all the three dimensions of commitment. These three variables of organisational commitment are different from each other based on their purpose and outcomes. The three-component model of organisational commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) is one of the most extensively researched in organisational commitment. Harun and Hasrul (2006) stated that Allen and Meyer's organisational measures are not culturally sensitive; they can be applied in international contexts.

Empathy and Employee Commitment

According to existing literature, for an organisation to have committed employees, the leaders or managers will have to exhibit social intelligence skills in addition to other behaviour. Managers and leaders should practice genuine empathy, being considerate about their team and co-workers; understand accurately their feelings, thoughts and intentions (Eketu and Edeh, 2015). Empathy is an experimental way of grasping another's emotional states. It is a "perceptual" activity that operates alongside logical inquiry (Halpem, 2003). Workers in the health sector will have to exercise their skills of objective reasoning to investigate empathic intuitions; absence of this may hinder trust amongst workers. Another aspect that leaders and managers need to work on is to clear the barriers that interfere with empathy such as anxiety which is usually caused by time pressure, lack of insight of others emotions and not been able to tolerate such emotions (Halpem, 2003).

Empathy is a critical component of social intelligence," it is the ability to see the world from another person's perspective, the capacity to tune into what another individual may be thinking and feeling about a situation" irrespective of how the individuals opinion might differ from their own perception (Stein and Book, 2001). It is also the process of how we interact with other minds and mostly coincide with other emotions such as caring for others (Coplan and Goldie, 2011). In other to foster mindset development and advance learning, employees will have to promote an atmosphere of inquiry and openness, patience, and encouragement, which are all components of empathy (Kouzes and Posner, 2013). Based on the foregoing the related hypotheses are stated as follows:

Ho₁: *Empathy has no significant relationship with affective commitment of employees in the health sector of Nigeria.*

Ho₂: *There is no significant relationship between empathy and continuance commitment of employees in the health sector of Nigeria.*

Ho₃: *Empathy has no significant relationship with normative commitment of employees in the health sector of Nigeria.*

METHODOLOGY

This study has been predominantly quantitative survey design with a population numbering 2220 with a sample size of 339 which was determined using the Taro Yemen's technique. Questionnaires were administered to a total of 339 respondents of which 313 were retrieved, out of which 273 questionnaires were found useable. This represents 81% of the sample size used for the study. The instrument used for the collection of data was questionnaire and it was grouped in two sections. Section A contains the demographic data while Section B constitutes respondents opinions concerning the study. The study adopted the 5-point Likert Scale Rating. Empathy was measured using the scale adapted from the work of Albretch (2006) and Goleman (2006). Employee commitment was measured using Allen and Meyer (1990) the ECQ which was adapted for this study. The variables that were drafted for this study were obtained from existing literature and had been pretested and validated in previous studies (Albretch, 2006; Goleman, 2006; Allen and Meyer 1990). The variables had construct validity. Cronbach Alpha was used to test for reliability in this study. Researchers (Bryman and Bell; Nunally 1978) recommend that an Alpha level of 0.80 is generally acceptable as a good level of internal reliability of the instrument, an Alpha of 0.70 is considered to be efficient. For test of reliability the following Cronbach Alpha Coefficient were obtained for our scales; Empathy (0.0809), Employee Commitment (0.0726).

Frequencies and percentages were used to classify our demographic data. Our variables were subjected to univariate and bivariate analysis. Inferential statistics using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to establish the association between Situational Awareness and Employee Commitment.

4 Data Analysis and Results

Table 4.1: Statistics on the Empathy

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EMP1	273	1	5	3.62	1.372
EMP2	273	2	5	3.79	1.066
EMP3	273	3	5	4.16	.768
EMP4	273	1	5	3.44	1.387
EMP5	273	1	5	3.39	1.357
Valid N (listwise)	273				

Source: Survey data (SPSS output, 2019).

The above data on table 4.1 describes the result for empathy. The results indicate substantial levels of agreement to the indicators of the construct where $x > 3.0$; hence the results show that respondents strongly affirm to the presence of empathy by workers with indicators such as: seeing things from other people point of view ($x = 3.62$); saying things that happened ($x = 3.79$); asking questions to learn more ($x = 4.16$); talking to my upset colleagues ($x = 3.44$) and considering people circumstances when addressing them ($x = 3.39$). Hence all the five indicators have high rates of affirmative response indicating the presence of empathy among the health sector workers. Furthermore the level of response dispersion is low for all indicators ($SD \leq 2.00$).

Description of the measures of employees' commitment: This section describes data on the measures of the criterion variable – employee commitment.

Ho₁: *Empathy has no significant relationship with affective commitment of employee in the health sector of Nigeria.*

Table 4.2: Relationship between Empathy and Employee Affective Commitment

			Empathy	Affective commitment
Spearman's rho	Empathy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.551**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	273	273
	Affective commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.551**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	273	273

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

Source: SPSS Ver. 20.0 Output

The statistical output on hypothesis one reveals that there is a significant relationship between empathy and employees' affective commitment (where $\rho = .551^{**}$ and $p < 0.05$) hence we find that empathy strongly associate with employee affective commitment in the health sector and based on the decision rule of $p < 0.05$ for null rejection; we therefore reject the null hypothesis and restate that empathy significantly relates to employee affective commitment.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between empathy and continuance commitment of employee in the health sector of Nigeria.

Table 4.3: Relationship between Empathy and Employee Continuance Commitment

			Empathy	Continuance commitment
Spearman's rho	Empathy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.485**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	273	273
	Continuance commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.485**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	273	273

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

Source: SPSS Ver. 20.0 Output

The bivariate output on the second hypothesis reveals that empathy positively relates to continuance commitment of employee (where $\rho = .485^{**}$ and $p < 0.05$) hence we find that empathy has strong influence on employee continuance commitment and going by the decision rule of $p < 0.05$ for null rejection; we therefore reject the null hypothesis and restate that empathy has significant relationship with continuance commitment of employee in the health sector.

Ho₃: Empathy has no significant relationship with normative commitment of employee in the health sector of Nigeria.

Table 4.4: Relationship between Empathy and Employee Normative Commitment

			Empathy	Normative Commitment
Spearman's rho	Empathy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.509**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	273	273
	Normative Commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.509**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.

	N	273	273
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** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Ver. 20.0 Output

The last bivariate output which was tested to examine the positive linkage between empathy and normative commitment of employee revealed that ($\rho = .509^{**}$ and $p < 0.05$) hence empathy was found to strongly influence employee normative commitment and standing by the decision rule of $p < 0.05$ for null rejection; we therefore reject the null hypothesis by restating that empathy significantly relates to employee normative commitment in the health sector of Nigeria.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The study investigated the relationship between empathy and employee commitment in the health sector. The result of the analysis which comprised of 273 participants revealed a higher percentage of respondents to be female; it also shows that majority of the participants are within the age of 31-50 years and hold first degree certifications and its equivalent which probably is the prerequisite for recruitment in the sector of study (health). Furthermore, greater percentage of participants proves to have been in the service for about 1-10 years and also, it was discovered that nursing officers dominate among other category of workers. The first hypothesis states that empathy has no significant relationship with affective commitment of employee in the health sector. The statistical output reveals that there is significant relationship between empathy and employee affective commitment, that empathy strongly indicates that commitment of workers in the health sector is determined by the organisations ability to connect with their employees positively. The second hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between empathy and continuance commitment of employees in the health sector. The bivariate output reveals that empathy positively relates to continuance commitment of employees. When superiors are able to connect with subordinates positively in a manner that takes into consideration of workers intentions and feelings, employees' commitment improves. The third hypothesis states that empathy has no significant relationship with normative commitment of employees in the health sector of Nigeria

The bivariate output reveals that empathy strongly influences employee normative commitment. Eketu and Edeh (2015) argued that as an experimental way of understanding individual's emotional state, organisations need to create the basis for positive interaction and co-operation among its workforce if commitment of employee is to be increased. The emphasis in their argument is on the total understanding of employees' mindset towards his/her organisation in order to explain co-employees actions.

1. It was found that Empathy positively relates to affective commitment. Employee's commitment is determined by the organizations ability to connect with their employees positively.
2. The study revealed that Empathy positively relates with Continuance Commitment of employees. When Superiors are able to connect with Subordinates positively in a manner that regards workers intentions and feelings.
3. It was also revealed that empathy strongly influences employee normative commitment. Positive interaction and cooperation among workforce is the basis of understanding individual emotional state, therefore there is need of understanding of employees mindset towards his/her organisation this will help to explain co-employees actions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the study found that empathy influence employee commitment and thus enhances outcomes such as mutual trust, maintenance of high performance standards and achieving high performance goals. It also enables employees to be emotionally attached to their jobs by creating atmosphere for positive attitude as well as maintenance of high performance standards for the attainment of high performance goals in the organization. Based on these we conclude that health sector management need to build employee's confidence as it give rise to mutual trust among the

workforce that creates an atmosphere for greater commitment, productivity and performance through thorough transmitting of information.

RECOMENDATIONS

1. As a means of survival, employee's commitment is dependent on the earnings and welfares received from their employing organization, therefore health management should endeavour to be up to date on their employee's financial benefits.
2. In order to increase continuous affection of employees in the health sector, management should ensure that workers feelings and intentions are taken into consideration by creating atmosphere that would make employees feel comfortable.
3. Considering the critical role health workers play in improving the wellbeing of its patients, government should ensure to treat these categories of workers with caution as ill treatment meted on them would aggravate a reciprocal tendencies towards their job performance, which will not be good for our society.

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