

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN ROAD CONSTRUCTION FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*This work examined psychological support and employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State. The objective of the study was to examine the extent to which psychological support affects measures of employee commitment such as affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. The study was anchored on Social Exchange Theory propounded by George Casper Homans. The study adopted the explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. A sample size of 248 was drawn from a population of 700 staff of 19 road construction firms in Rivers State. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha. After validation by the supervisor, 248 copies of structured questionnaire were administered while 240 copies were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis, Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used for the bivariate analysis while Partial Correlation was used for the multivariate analysis. The finding was that there is a significant positive relationship between career support and employee commitment. The study concluded that psychological support is a major motivational tool that enhances employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study recommended more deliberate effort on the part of managers and senior staff to strengthen mentoring relationships so as to promote employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria.*

**Keywords: Psychological Support, Employee Support, Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment**

### INTRODUCTION

Mentoring consists of deliberate relationships in the workplace targeted at helping less experienced workers learn from senior or more experienced colleagues in the workplace (Ayşe, *et al.*, 2013; Akpan, *et al.*, 2023). It is a human resource management intervention aimed at enabling less-experienced employees get career support, psychological support, and knowledge sharing from more experienced workers or managers in the organization. Mentors in road construction firms in Rivers State can offer guidance on project management, help mentees set career goals, and introduce them to valuable networks within the industry. This support can significantly enhance the career trajectories of mentees by providing them with insights and opportunities they might not otherwise access (Santos & Kram, 2022). For instance, mentors can advocate for their mentees during project assignments or promotions, thus facilitating their upward mobility within the firm.

Mentoring also involves psychological support and knowledge sharing. Psychological support refers to the emotional and personal support mentors provide to their mentees. This aspect of mentoring is crucial in road construction firms, where the work environment can be stressful and demanding (Ragins & Verbos, 2021). Psychological support can include offering encouragement, listening to personal and professional concerns, and helping mentees build self-confidence. In Rivers State, mentors who provide psychological support can help mentees cope with job pressures, reducing work-related stress and increasing job satisfaction. This support fosters a sense of belonging and well-being among employees, contributing to a positive organizational culture. Knowledge sharing is the transfer of technical skills, industry knowledge, and organizational practices from mentors to mentees. In the construction industry, where expertise in specific techniques and technologies is crucial, knowledge sharing can significantly impact mentees' proficiency and efficiency. In Rivers State, mentors can share insights on local construction regulations, best practices, and innovative solutions to common industry challenges. This knowledge transfer helps build a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce, which can enhance the overall performance and competitiveness of road construction firms (Swap et al., 2023). Effective knowledge sharing ensures that valuable organizational knowledge is retained and utilized, even as employees move on or retire.

Indeed, mentoring and employee commitment have been examined by previous researchers from different perspectives: Brian, et al (2008) examined the role of mentoring in promoting organizational commitment among black managers and it was found that mentoring significantly enhanced the organizational commitment among black managers. Ayşe, *et al.* (2013) examined the impact of mentoring on organizational commitment and job satisfaction of accounting-finance academicians employed in Turkey and the study revealed that mentoring increased the commitment level of academicians in Turkey; impact of coaching and mentoring in the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Company Limited Bonny (Mba & Godday, 2023). The study revealed that coaching and mentoring have significant positive influence on the organizational performance of Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Company Limited. Similarly, Ofobruku and Nwakoby (2023) studied the effect of mentoring on employees' performance in selected family business in Abuja, Nigeria and they found that mentoring showed significant positive effect on employees' performance. Akpan, et al (2023) studied the relationship between workplace mentoring strategies and sustainable commitment and a positive relationship was found between mentoring and sustainable commitment of University Teaching Hospital Staff in South-South Region of Nigeria. Another study done by Uchendu (2023) revealed that there is a relative positive relationship mentoring and job satisfaction of bank workers in Nigeria. In the same vein, Michael (2018) theoretically examined mentoring as a tool for enhancing employees' intention to stay and it was found mentoring is a veritable tool for sustaining employees' intention to stay. In another research effort, Agada (2019) examined the relationship between workplace social environment and employee commitment in road transportation firms in Rivers State. The study found that enabling workplace social environment is positively correlated with employee commitment. However, none of these studies showed how mentoring interacts with employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt. This is the knowledge gap which this study seeks to fill. This gives credence to this study. Road construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, play a vital role in the region's

development, contributing significantly to infrastructure growth and urbanization. These firms undertake a wide range of projects, including road construction, building residential and commercial properties, and developing public facilities. The industry is driven by both government contracts and private investments, reflecting the state's economic vibrancy. However, challenges such as fluctuating material costs, regulatory hurdles, and the need for skilled labor persist, impacting project timelines and costs. Despite these obstacles, the construction sector remains a cornerstone of Rivers State's economic landscape.

### **Research Hypotheses**

Base on the research questions, the following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State.

### **Psychological Support**

Psychological Support as one of the dimensions of mentoring denotes a situation where co-workers and supervisors are supportive of employees' psychological and mental health concerns, and respond appropriately as needed which is usually informal in nature. In road construction firms in Rivers State, the more employees feel that they have psychological support from management, the greater their job attachment, job satisfaction, job performance and job commitment in their respective dispensation. In addition, the greater the support, the stronger, the likelihood that employees will seek and receive appropriate help for mental health issues, and return to work if they have an extended absence (Gilbert & Bilske 2012). They further stressed that Psychological Support is equally important because the employees' perceptions and awareness of organizational support is greatly addressed. When employees perceive organizational support, it means they believe their organizational values and contributions, being committed in ensuring their psychological well-being and provides meaningful supports if this well-being is compromised.

Mentors engage in psychologically support when they listen and show their subordinates they care about their work-life demands. As human beings with peculiar personal issues of life which are capable of interfering with their job performance, employees feel free to share such issues with their mentors if they see them as supportive. In such moments, supportive mentors psychologically often show some level of empathy as they listen to their mentees possibly sob out their psychological burdens. Mentors who are psychologically supportive listen and use soft words to calm their worried mentees.

Ojei (2018) averred that most mentees resign from mentors not the organization is because a bad mentor can pick on a good and committed staff and destroy him/her, and also cause the best employee to flee the organization while causing the other employees to lose motivation. Thus, psychological support can be defined as the embracing of role model, friendship, counselling, acceptance, and confirmation of the mentee (Opara & Odu, 2019). This focuses more on the informal relationship that exists between the mentor and

the mentee and words of encouragement in which a mentor gives to the mentee which equally serves as a motivational tool in ensuring that employees are committed to their respective jobs in an organization, road construction firms in Rivers State are not left out. However, other scholars have also attached meaning to this term psychological support. Psychosocial support is a scale of care and support which influences both the individual and the social environment in which people live (Neil 2001). This ranges from care and support offered by caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours, teachers, health workers and community members on a daily basis. But also, care and support offered by specialized psychological and social services are likewise inclusive. In the view of Richter, Foster and Sher (2006) psychological support in organizational context mean nothing to them than the improvement of employee emotional wellbeing. This is about encouraging better connections among people especially employees in the organization and building a better sense of self and host community at large. It is expressed through caring and respectful relationships that communicate understanding, tolerance and acceptance between mentors and mentees.

Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) averred that some organizations, the most important aspect of psychological support may be that it is especially helpful in protecting against distressing situations at work. When adequate psychological support is present in organization such as road construction firms, employee's experiencing psychological distress will be more likely to seek, and receive, appropriate help. They will be better equipped to stay safe and productive at work while they recover, and, if work absence is required, will be more likely to have a quicker and more sustainable work return hence being committed to their job.

Employee in road construction firms that lack psychological support from their organization may result to increases in absenteeism from work, withdrawal behaviours, strain, conflict and low turnover. Strain can then lead to greater issues such as tiredness, headaches, burnout and anxiety etc. to these end employees will not be productive because unbalanced employee health wise is tantamount to uncommitted employee. Exposure to violence or disaster, loss of, or separation from family members and friends, deterioration in living conditions and lack of access to services can all have immediate, as well as long-term consequences for children, families and communities' balance, development and fulfilment. Lack of psychological support can also result in loss of productivity, increased costs and greater risk of accidents, incidents and injuries (American Psychiatric Foundation, 2012).

### **Affective Commitment**

Affective commitment refers to the bond an employee has with an organization due to an affinity with or affection for the goals and values of the organization. Meyer and Allen (1997) in Zeb-Obipi and Agada (2018) described affective commitment as how much an individual 'wants' to remain in the organization. Affective commitment encapsulates the extent or degree of employee's identification with goals, acceptance of goals, and pursuance of goals. Affective commitment typifies the emotional association of an employee with its organization and objectives. It is based on (1) "faith of the employees in the organization's objectives, (2) their readiness to put forth effort in order to achieve organizational objectives, and (3) a strong wish to be a part of the organization" (Porter, et al, 1974 in Zeb-Obipi & Agada, 2018).

It entails an affective orientation of the employees towards the organization. Employees with affective commitment continue service with an organization because they want to do so and not to return a favour or for some benefits and opportunity costs. The development of affective commitment involves recognizing the organization's worth and internalizing its principles and standards (Beck & Wilson, 2000; Dixit & Bhati, 2012). Affective commitment can therefore be conceptualized as the degree to which an individual is psychologically attached to an employing organization through feeling such as loyalty, affection, worth, belongingness, pleasure and so on.

Out of the love and passion an employee has for the organization he is working for, he is proud enough to identify with, accept, and pursue organizational goals (Zeb-Obipi & Agada, 2018).

Employees who are affectively committed align themselves with policies, procedures and the achievement of set targets of an organization. Such an employee heartily accepts the culture and values of the organization. He does not allow his personal feelings or goals to interfere with organizational goals. And as such endeavours identifying with organizational goals and also accept/pursue such goals.

- i. **Identification with Goals:** affective commitment has to do with a person's emotional attachment and identification with their organization. An affectively committed worker remain in the organization because they want to; this highlights the emotional bond and identification that worker has with the organization, which is portrayed by feelings of devotion, belongingness and stability. An affectively motivated person identifies, with the goals of the organization where he works as reported by Okpu and Jaja (2013). Affectively committed employees out of their emotional attachment for the organization regularly perform assigned tasks to the best of their ability and make an extra effort to help out beyond the realms of their specified job roles and form an attachment to the goals and values of their organization.
- ii. **Acceptance of Goals and Pursuance of Goals:** Acceptance of corporate goal as a measure of affective commitment underlines the extent to which an employee loves his organization and willingly welcomes and personalizes the goals of the organization. Pursuance of organizational goals here talks about the extent to which an employee puts in extra effort just to ensure that organizational or departmental targets are met no matter how inconvenient it might be for him.

### **Psychological Support and Employee Commitment**

Employees at all levels including those in road construction firms are primarily employed to provide assistance in attainment of organizational goals and set objective. Their ability accomplishing this task assigned to them on time is of great value in ensuring organizational competency and these determine their performing ability (Sharma & Dhar, 2022). In completing these assigned tasks, it is appropriate for the more experienced employee (mentors) to give the less experienced employees (mentees) encouragement why doing the job. When the mentor is always considerate in relation to the feelings of the mentee, it makes the mentee feel loved and happier. For instance, when two (2)

employees are assigned tasks, one should be considered as senior employee and the other as junior employee, in some cases, the junior employee may be the one to do the job most seeking advice, guidelines and other words of encouragement from the senior employee. To this end, the informal relationship established by the mentor and the encouraging words giving by the mentor, makes mentee feel loved and encouraged to work even better. This is in line with the postulation of Gilbert & Bilske (2012) that the greater the support, the stronger, the likelihood that employees will seek and receive appropriate help for returning to work if they have an extended absence and depressed. This is because discouragement is the greatest tool for de-motivation, in some organizations such as road construction firms, most discouraged employee still remain in these firms because of no alternative, investment made and cost of leaving firm considering the economy of the nation. Encouraged employees are likely to keep to the norms of the organization and identifying with organizational goals.

### **Theoretical Review**

This work is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Theory was propounded by George Casper Homans in the year 1958 (Olannye, 2014). Social exchange theory postulates that "give and take" forms the basis of almost all relationships though their proportions might vary as per the intensity of the relationships. The main assumptions of the theory are as follows:

- i. In a relationship, every individual has expectations from his/her partners. The extent to which such expectations are satisfied determines the strength and survival of the relationship;
- ii. Good relationships are mutually beneficial and not supposed to be one sided. An individual invests his time and energy in relationship only when he gets something out of corresponding or higher value from it (Olannye, 2014).

Young or less experienced employees have the social expectation of being guided and encouraged by superior and more experienced managers (Neil, 2018). The justification of the Social Exchange Theory as the theoretical anchor of this study lines the fact that the theory predicts that the more experienced managers and superior officers share their wisdom, experience, and provide career support to less experienced subordinates, the happier and more committed mentees become. On the other hand, dearth of meaning mentoring relationship is capable of making workers feel alienated and deprived thereby leading to dwindling commitment level (Ayşe, *et al.*, 2013; Mba & Godday, 2023; Akpan, *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the Social Exchange Theory predicts employee commitment as a reciprocal response to satisfying mentoring efforts in road construction firms.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is particularly relevant in predicting the relationship between mentoring and employee commitment in road construction firms in Rivers State, as it highlights the mutual benefits that arise from supportive work relationships. According to Antonakis and Ashkanasy (2009), mentoring facilitates a reciprocal exchange where employees receive personal and professional support, fostering a sense of obligation to the organization. This sense of obligation, as noted by Petrides *et al.* (2007), often translates into greater commitment, as employees who feel invested in through mentoring are more likely to remain loyal and dedicated to the company. Furthermore, O'Boyle *et al.* (2010) argue that the supportive nature of mentoring creates a positive

cycle of exchange, where employees, feeling valued and understood, increase their engagement and productivity, which ultimately strengthens their commitment to the firm's goals. Thus, SET underscores how mentoring not only enhances individual development but also reinforces a deeper emotional and professional connection to the organization, which is crucial for long-term retention and success in the demanding road construction sector.

**METHODOLOGY**

The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of seven thousand (700) employees of nineteen (19) accessible road construction firms in Rivers State. Information regarding the above population was obtained from the Human Resource Department of each of the companies. Details of the population is provided in the table overleaf. The sample size of the study consisted of Two Hundred and Forty-Eight (248) respondents of the road construction firms. The above sample size was obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970. Considering the disparity in the staff strength of the organizations, Bowley’s (1960) Population Appropriation Formula was applied to determine the sample unit for each of the organizations. Structured questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The data presentation and analysis of the study was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0. Descriptive statistical tools such as arithmetic mean and frequency tables were used to conduct univariate analysis (analysis of each of the sub-variables). The bivariate analysis was carried out using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Partial Correlation was used to run the multivariate analysis.

**RESULTS**

**Psychological Support and Employee Commitment**

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

**Correlations between Psychological Support and Employee Commitment**

			Psychological Support	Affective Commitment	Normative Commitment	Continuance Commitment
Spearman's rho	Psychological Support	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.665**	0.741**	0.671**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	240	240	240	240

	Correlation	0.665**	1.000	0.665**	0.665**
Affective Commitment	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
	Correlation	0.741**	. 0.741**	1.000	0.741**
Normative Commitment	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	240	240	240	240
	Correlation	0.671**	0.671**	0.671**	1.000
Continuance Commitment	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	240	240	240	240

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2024

Column two of table 1 above shows r value of 0.665 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating psychological support and employee commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) which states that there is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. This implies that there is a significant strong/high positive relationship between psychological support and employee affective commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

Column three of table 2 above shows r value of 0.741 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating psychological support and normative commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) which states that there is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. This implies that there is a significant strong/high positive relationship between psychological support and employee normative commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

Column four of table 1 above shows r value of 0.671 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating psychological support and employee commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) which states that there is no significant relationship between psychological support and employee continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt was rejected. This implies that there is a significant strong relationship between psychological support and continuance

commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. These results show that there is a significant positive relationship between psychological support and employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

### **Psychological Support and Employee Commitment**

The test of hypotheses one to three revealed that there is a significant strong relationship between psychological support and employee commitment in terms of affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This implies employees who are supported psychologically will go a long way in ensuring that organizational goals and set objective are achieved by identifying with the goal, reciprocating to organizational activities and will choose to stay because of investment made.

The findings are in consonance with the findings of Gilbert and Bilske (2012) that the greater the support, the stronger, the likelihood that employees will seek and receive appropriate help for returning to work if they have an extended absence and depressed. This is because discouragement is the greatest tool for de-motivation, in some organizations such as road construction firms, most discouraged employee still remains in these firms because of no alternative, investment made and cost of leaving firm considering the economy of the nation. Encouraged employees are likely to keep to the norms of the organization and identifying with organizational goals.

Mentor's ability in ensuring that he or she have an informal relationship with their mentee, go a long way in maintaining committed employees in their respected organization. Road construction firms in Port Harcourt are not left out. Formal relationship between a mentor and the mentee is usually seen to be more advantageous than informal relationships. This is true to an extent, because formal relationships are grounded and focused on official related matters, free of frivolities and unwarranted activities. Comparatively, it is unbiased to assert that both formal and informal relationship holds a promising end for mentees even if some people tend to glorify the formal above the informal. Informal relationship (friendship) with mentee is relevant because, It creates an enabling ground for the mentee to express his/her out-of-work life challenges to the mentor, Informal relationship (friendship) permits unofficial activities such as games and talks which are capable of building the mentee's cognitive or imaginative ability and It enables the mentee have a sense of belonging and feel loved by so doing such employee will not relent achieving the organizational goals and set objective, hence being committed.

Moreso, mentees' intension to stay may be driven from those words of encouragement from mentors. These words support the mentees psychologically because it serve as a great motivational tool or strategy in ensuring individuals achieves their set goals and objectives. In this context, employees (mentees) are prone to having a bad day if they are discouraged which will lead to un-commitment. Mentors can offer support and encouragement by creating a healthy workplace environment and taking the time to understand any problems or difficulties the employees (mentee) may be having.

All of the above traits combined are what makes mentors that mentees can look up to. Working in such firm leads employees to strive to do better themselves and their betterment affects the firm at large positively because of how committed they will be.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the analyses of data and discussion of findings, the study concluded that mentoring is a major motivational tool that enhances employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria. Psychological support enhances employee commitment in road construction firms in Port Harcourt.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Managers should foster a work environment that promotes psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable voicing concerns and ideas without fear of negative consequences. This builds **affective commitment** by creating trust and emotional security.
2. Managers should provide psychological support through stress management programs or counselling services. Employees who feel emotionally supported are more likely to develop **normative commitment**, believing that staying with the firm is the right thing to do due to the company's care.
3. Managers should create an open culture where employees are encouraged to share knowledge and expertise across different departments. Peer-to-peer learning increases **commitment**, as employees develop connections with colleagues and feel responsible for the success of the team.

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