

Strong Work Ethics; The Ignored Antecedent Which Influences Employee Commitment in Public and Private Sector Organizations.

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Abstract: *Strong work ethics have the capacity to influence workforce commitment thereby ensuring organizational competitiveness and high organizational performance. Unfortunately, many core work values and guidelines are in most cases ignored and they go unmonitored in many organizations. As a result, this affects the morale, performance and level of commitment of individual employees in organizations. The aim of this paper was to assess the role of work ethics in enhancing and re-enforcing employee commitment in the public and private sector organizations. This paper specifically examined the role of good working relationships between supervisors and subordinates, and co-worker support in enhancing employee commitment in public and private sector organizations. Secondary data sources were used to collect the required data and an extensive review of the literature revealed that promoting strong work ethics and enforcing ethical guidelines related to supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support by organizations improves the work environment, increases employee job satisfaction, loyalty and commitment to their work.*

Key Words: *Work Ethics, Antecedent, Employee Commitment, Public and Private Sector Organizations.*

I. Introduction

Workforce performance and commitment can be greatly influenced by the organization's ethical culture (Sapada, Modding, Gani & Syamsu, 2017; Simonson et al, 2017) while unethical workforce behaviors affect the productivity of organizations, results into financial losses, damage the reputation of organizations as well as raising safety and customer dissatisfaction concerns (Askew, Beisler & Keel, 2015). As such, every organization needs to focus their attention on building strong work ethics and enforcing ethical guidelines to keep their employees productive and committed to their work so as to remain competitive. Employee commitment ensures the success and high organizational productivity (Adeyeye, Adeniji, Osinbanjo & Oludayo, 2015). Committed employees are linked to positive job performance (Van Ness, Melinsky, Buff & Seifert, 2010) and they also help to steer organizations to greater heights (Zivota & Milan, 2017; Vance, 2006; Venkata, Chandra & Madhu, 2015).

In this effort, work ethics have been found to be very important in this endeavor because they help organizations to attract, maintain and ensure a committed workforce. Promoting good work ethics by organizations leads to employee commitment (Herlambang, 2013; Simonson et al, 2017) and also results into a happier and productive workforce which can help organizations to compete and remain afloat. In a study by Huhtala and Feldt (2016), it was reported that ethical culture is a resource which cements the relationship between the workforce and organizations. Similarly, the views of Huhtala and Feldt (2016) are supported by number of other studies which confirm that organizations can survive, make profits, remain competitive and cultivate commitment into their employees if they come out to be defined by their strong work ethics, high moral standards and ethical principles (Sapada et al, 2017; Al-Nashash, Panigrahi, & Darun, 2018; Simonson et al, 2017; Saidi et al, 2019).

Strong work ethics are critical in improving the morale, job satisfaction, job motivation and influencing workforce commitment (Shahjehan, Afsar & Imadshah, 2019; Shim & Park, 2018). Creating moral organizations with strong work ethics where employees conduct business and behave ethically is a very critical strategy many organizations can adopt to win public trust and ensure customer satisfaction. Work ethics govern how these organizations and employees behave and conduct themselves. The study by Pinakshi (2018) showed that instilling, maintaining and promoting strong work ethics helps organizations to survive, make profits and also contributes to employee commitment to their work. The same study further reports that business

organizations which systematize, defend, recommend and do what is ethically right enjoy numerous advantages ranging from workers exerting extra effort for the sake of the organization to effective work outcomes. Similarly, Farrell, Fraedrich and Ferrell (2013) opine that building an ethical reputation among employees, customers and the general public contributes to employee commitment, investor royalty, customer satisfaction and organizational profits. Relatedly, the earlier work of Drucker as cited in Jennings (2009) posit that work ethics or values help organizations to make decisions which do not harm others, bar organizations from releasing products which have defects which can cause injury and they help organizations to be fair and decent in the working conditions they provide to employees. In the same vain, Chipunza and Bulelwa (2017) noted that promoting good work values by organizations tempt employees to stay around and get committed to the organization. This reality however is far from the understanding of managers of most organizations and they don't pay attention to it. In a study by Van Ness, Melinsky, Buff, and Seifert (2010), it was opined that values related to work provide a win-win opportunity that benefits both the employers and employees alike. Additionally, Huhtala and Feldt (2016) reported that employees feel more compatible with organizations where stronger ethical values and practices are experienced. At the same time, the study by Sapada et al (2017) indicated that work ethics affect job satisfaction, job performance and organizational commitment. Similarly, Al-Nashash et al, (2018) reported that strong work ethics can increase employee job satisfaction, increase employee work commitment, reduce employee turnover and this results into improved employee performance, and ultimately the overall organizational productivity. Likewise, Syahrul et al (2016) pointed out that high work ethics and discipline impact positively on the employees' performance and commitment to their work. Relatedly, Herlambang (2013) also opines that work ethics help employees to work in accordance with the objectives of the organization, they instill discipline in them thereby inducing them into dedicating their time and energy for the effective and efficient execution of their work.

II. Problem statement

Although many scholars attest to the fact that strong work ethics contribute to improved workforce morale and commitment (Huhtala & Feldt, 2016; Al-Nashash, et al, 2018; Sapada, et al, 2017) and many public and private sector organizations have ethical guidelines in their human resource manuals, many of those which regulate the way employees relate with one another are in most cases taken for granted as they continue to go unmonitored and unenforced. To be more specific, ethical guidelines and moral standards regulating relationships between supervisors and the subordinates and those relating to relationships among co-workers as they execute their duties continue to be given lukewarm attention as such, they are not monitored and enforced in many organizations. Askew, Beisler and Keel (2015) opine that it is not enough for organizations to have a code of ethics but rather they have to be enforced. Failure to enforce the guidelines results into employees losing morale and becoming dissatisfied with their jobs thus contributing to low workforce commitment. Additionally, public and private sector organizations are denied the opportunity to enjoy the numerous advantages that come with working with an organization where strong work ethics are promoted. Advantages such as high employee commitment (Simonson et al, 2017; Syahrul et al, 2016; Pinakshi, 2018; Zivota & Milan, 2017) and competitiveness cultivated by promoting strong work ethics and enforcing ethical guidelines are missed by organizations as their employees develop counterproductive behaviors such as coming late for work, absenting themselves, conflicting with one another and increasing employee turnover, among others, which affects the performance of organizations.

III. Overall Objective of the Study

This paper therefore assessed the relationship between work ethics and organizational commitment. The findings of this study can help to re-awaken employers and to re-echo the importance of implementing and enforcing the established ethical guidelines which promote ethical culture and behaviors in organizations as a tool for cultivating employee commitment in organizations.

Specific Objectives

- a) This paper specifically assessed the role of good working relationships between supervisors and subordinates in influencing employee commitment in public and private sector organizations.
- b) The influence of co-worker support on employee commitment in public and private sector organizations.

IV. Methodology

A systematic review of literature connecting work ethics to organizational commitment and more specifically, literature on supervisor/supervisee relationships and organization commitment, and co-worker support and organizational commitment was conducted. Evidence linking those two constructs to organizational commitment was extensively collected from both published and unpublished research reports evaluating, discussing and analyzing the role of work ethics in influencing organizational commitment.

V. Literature Review

Organizational Commitment

Contemporary organization challenges call for more robust strategies which can aid organizations to stay afloat and competitive. As such, recent years have seen a surge in researchers, academicians and practitioners picking interest and paying extra attention to the concept of organizational commitment (Vance, 2006; Huhtala & Feldt, 2016; Pinakshi, 2018; Zivota, Vesna & Milan, 2017). Extensive research relating to organizational commitment in the recent past is attributed to its central role in enhancing and aiding employee job satisfaction, motivation and employee attachment to organizations and these are behaviors which aid the success of organizations (Zeffane, 2003; Younis, Akram, & Naseeb, 2013; Zahra, Iram & Naeem, 2014; Tung, Khoung & Phuong, 2014; Too, Chepchieng & Ochola, 2015; Umamaheswari & Jayasree, 2016; Titi & Zeb-Obipi, 2018). Conceptually however, there is no uniformity in the meaning of the concept organizational commitment and this has resulted into individual perceptions being pushed forward thereby leaving many people confused and failing to fully comprehend the concept. To Allen and Meyer (1990), commitment is a force which stabilizes and maintains behavioral direction in organizations resulting from the failure to meet equity conditions or when they do not function. Kanter (1968) defined commitment as the willingness of individual employees to give energy and loyalty to a social group. At the same time, Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian as cited in Mehwish, Abeera, Aideed and Tania (2019) looked at commitment in three major dimensions; firstly, employees being in position to help their organizations to achieve their objectives; secondly, readiness and willingness by employees to exert extra effort for the good of their organizations and thirdly, the willingness and readiness to stay in an organization.

Literature on organizational commitment widely suggests three major dimensions of commitment namely; (a) affective commitment, (b) continuance commitment and (c) normative commitment. (Kanter, 1968; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Randall, 1990; Allen, 2003; Vance, 2009; Zehra, 2016; Faridi, Baloch & Wajidi, 2017; Mehwish, 2019). According to Allen and Meyer (1990), affective commitment is defined in terms of employees' high emotional connection to the organization. They opine that employees who are affectively committed highly identify with the values and goals of the organization, they are ready to exert extra effort for the sake of the organization and they show high intentions and willingness to remain with it. Continuance commitment on the other hand is defined as commitment engineered by reduced employee chances and the fear of failing to get similar opportunities elsewhere if they left the job, well as, normative commitment is defined in terms of the strong employee feelings that it is morally right and an obligation for them to stay in an organization. The above three dimensions of commitment demonstrate different levels of employee commitment to the organization and the variations in how organizations benefit from each level of commitment. Employees who are affectively committed exhibit behaviors which benefit organizations more than those who normatively committed and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

VI. Work Ethics

Although intensive research has been done in the area of ethics mostly by Psychologists and Sociologists because of its relationship with many social constructs that influence behavior and society, among many other issues which shape their disciplines, several studies show that work ethics on the other hand are equally important in the management of the human resource and for the success of organizations (Huhtala & Feldt, 2016; Al-Nashash, et al, 2018; Sapada, et al, 2017). Marri, Sadogai, Zaman, Yousufzai and Rama (n.d.) in their study of the effect of Islamic work ethics on work commitment and turnover intentions reported that work ethics have a positive impact on employee commitment and turnover intentions. In the same study, it was asserted that work ethics enhance character and that workers who exhibit high work ethics are always hardworking, reliable and self-driven. Positive work ethics mean coming to work on time, doing your work diligently, respecting one another, supporting one another and generally doing the right things at the right time and place. Building strong work ethics and ethical organizations therefore is a moral requirement given its tremendous advantages. Work ethics according Sapada, et al (2017) refer to the normative rules containing a system of values and moral principles as a guideline for employees in performing job duties within the company. Similarly, Tasmara (2000) defined work ethics as the attitudes, outlook, habits and traits or attributes which regulate how persons, who in this case may be employees of an organization, a group or groups of employees or a nation work. It is also defined as a belief in the moral benefits of work.

VII. Supervisor/Subordinate Work Relationships

This is one of the constructs said to affect employee engagement and loyalty in organizations today. Several studies show that work ethics influence employee commitment (Simonson et al, 2017; Saidi et al, 2019). As such, supervisor/supervisee relationships, one of the dimensions of work ethics, affects employee commitment in organizations (Wongboonsin et al, 2018). Unethical working relationships between supervisors

and subordinates in organizations pollutes the work environment and affects employee commitment (Saidi et al, 2019). Various studies opine that working relationships between supervisors and the supervisees have the potential to improve or decrease employee commitment in organizations (Chepchieng & Ochola, 2015; Umamaheswari & Jayasree, 2016; Titi & Zeb-Obipi, 2018). The study by Tianan Yang et al (2015) reported that employees whose working relationships with supervisors is good are productive at work. The same study asserted that employees get committed to their work when supervisors get their complaints addressed and help them to obtain the necessary resources. At the same time, Ariani (2015) in her study of relationship between supervisor and co-workers and employee engagement in the workplace and reported that employees who get appreciated by the co-workers and supervisors feel safe in the workplace and their commitment to their jobs get enhanced. The same study indicates that paying attention to the needs and feelings of the worker and providing positive feedback to them by their supervisors enhances their skills development and problem-solving abilities in the place of work. Lin and Kellough (2018) in their study of the supervisors' perception of performance appraisal problems in the public sector reported that whenever supervisees feel that they have not been fairly appraised by their supervisors, their morale decreases. This makes supervisees to lose interest in the job and increases employee turnover intentions. Relatedly, in their study about sustaining employees through co-worker and supervisor support, Wongboonsi et al (2018) confirmed that a good supervisor/supervisee relationship positively correlates with employee commitment. However, in many organizations, there is a loose connection between supervisors and subordinates which affects employee job satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Bonilla (2018) investigated the impact of employee psychological contract on employee engagement and turnover intentions. Results showed that support given to employees by their supervisors leads to higher levels of employee engagement and reduced turnover intentions. However, although this is a known fact, many supervisors in many organizations don't give it due attention and when subordinates fail to get support from their supervisors, they develop attitudes which affect their loyalty. Additionally, Karam (2017) after investigating the effect of organizational socialization and stereotypes on organizational commitment, it was indicated that employees who get properly socialized get committed to their jobs. Unfortunately, although this is a key aspect, it is neglected by supervisors and it is not given priority. Karam (2017) further observes that a socialized employee appreciates work and this leads to increased employee job satisfaction, an attribute associated with employee commitment. In the same vain, Said et al (2019) reported that support from supervisors ensure positive work environment and enhances employee loyalty. Many supervisors in organizations however don't create such enabling environments but they engage in activities which complicate the life for those they supervise difficult. Consequently, this kills the morale of employees and increases their turnover chances. Furthermore, after investigating the impact of organizational socialization on employee commitment, Hewawaduge and Pavithra (2018) asserted that providing clear information to employees, normally done by supervisors, increases their psychological attachment of to the organization. If the information and instructions given by supervisors to subordinates are clearly understood by their recipients, they will love their jobs and this will lead increased job commitment. Likewise, Huhtala and Feldt (2016) indicated that supervisor/supervisee work relationships contribute to building a good person-organization fit and this enhances employee engagement and loyalty. In other words, helping an employee to fit in an organization increases their loyalty and they try to keep in the organization since such employees feel appreciated and loved. Relatedly, Bottoya (2018) noted that whenever employees feel that they are unjustly being treated, their morale will decrease. Such scenarios increase the employees' turnover intentions and reduce their levels of attachment to the organization. Al-Nashash et al (2018) pointed out that work relationships contribute to strong work ethics which enhances employee job satisfaction and work commitment. In addition, Chowdhury (2017) opined that interpersonal relationships have a significant relationship with employee commitment and turnover intentions. In other words, if there are no good interpersonal relationships between supervisors and subordinates, the levels of commitment will be low and turnover intentions high. Similarly, Oswald (2012) as cited in Wongboonsi et al (2018) observed that junior employees can easily complete their tasks, further develop and perform better in their roles, behaviors associated with commitment, when someone skilled and experienced provides support to them. In this case, employee performance and commitment to their jobs will greatly depend on support provided to them by their seniors or their supervisors. In the same vain, Wiemann, Meidert and Weibel (2018) opined that there is a significant relationship between performance evaluation systems used to evaluate employees and their trust in the employer. Evaluation systems in organizations seen to be unfair by employees negatively impact their trust in their employers thus affecting their relationships with such employers. Additionally, Odoardi, Battistelli, Montani and Peiro (2019) in their study indicated that listening to subordinates and giving them a chance to voice their opinions, as well as, encouraging work groups by their supervisors increases their job satisfaction, innovativeness and commitment. Similarly, Adeyeye et al (2015) contended that failure to uphold ethical behavior within a framework of employment relationships affects employee productivity and commitment. Filabi and Bulgarella (2018) observed that unfairness in organizations, managers who are abusive, retaliation as well as selfish attitude among workers negatively impacts their moral engagement and affects their

attachment to the organization. Wang and Brower (2018) in their study reported that relationships between work groups and supervisors significantly influence employee job satisfaction. Meaning if the relationship between work groups and their supervisors is good, the employees' job satisfaction will be increased thereby leading to high commitment to their jobs and if supervisors do not provide an enabling environment to the supervisees, they will not be committed to the organizations.

VIII. Co-Worker Support

By definition, workplace relationship refers to the exchange of information between individuals and groups in an effort to accomplish their tasks and goals. TiananYang et al (2015) reported that strong work support from co-workers improves work environment, relieves stress and enhances job satisfaction and performance. At the same time, Saidi et al (2019) observed that there is a positive relationship between co-worker relations, peer support and job satisfaction, and commitment. In the same study, it was revealed that co-worker relations and support motivate workers to engage in jobs beyond their job description and they are always comfortable in those organizations. Relatedly, Khoa, Phuong and Tran (2018) found out that health workplace relationship affects employees' working behaviors and performance. It is further observed in the same study that co-worker relationships and social support contributes to employee commitment. At the same time, in a study by Cox and Mainiero (2017), it was observed that displaying team spirit and helping one another improves the work environment. To the contrary however, workers in many organizations have clicks based on trivial differences and these have killed the power to team spirit/team work in organizations. Similarly, Colon-Emeric et al (2016) in their study pointed out the existence of a positive relationship between co-worker cooperation and reduced turnover intentions. In other words, when co-workers cooperate with one another, their level of commitment will increase and such employees reluctantly think of leaving the organizations. Furthermore, Makera, Nasidi, Kamaruddeen and Jemaku (2019) reported that these constructs can lead to employee withdrawal from the workplace. It was also observed that high work relationships among co-workers helps them to have shared goals and knowledge which makes their work more satisfying and enjoyable thus, increasing their work commitment. In a study by Anggraeni, Dwiatmadja and Yuniawan (2017), it was observed that emotional support to employees increases employee commitment. This kind of support can be got from co-workers or supervisors and if provided, it has the potential to improve the employees' work environment. In addition, Bodjrenou, Xu, and Bomboma (2019) posited that organizational level factors including co-worker support are closely associated with organizational effective commitment. Similarly, Moore and Moore (2014) in their study indicated that caring work environments affect the members of organizations positively and this in turn leads to increased employee morale and attachment to the organization. Likewise, Imani, Saadati, Rezapour., & Bashirzadeh (2017) reported that support from colleagues and supervisors positively impact on organizational commitment. Furthermore, Fu, Hsieh and Wang (2018) in their study reported that fostering cooperation among employees within an organization increases their morale, work performance and ultimately their attachment to the organization increases. Additionally, Samak (2017) noted that respect for rules and regulations, in other words, respect for and promoting strong business ethics, improves work performance. In organizations where regulations relating to interactions among co-workers are respected, their performance and commitment levels always improve and this enhances the employees' appreciation of their jobs and attachment to the organization. In their investigation of the current trends of unethical behavior in organizations, Askew et al (2015) reported that abusive treatment leads to job dissatisfaction and low staff morale. In other words, decreases the employees' appreciation of the job and this affects their attachment to the organization. In a study by Choi (2017) which investigated the effect of institutional and managerial support in managing flexible work arrangements, it was pointed out that support of any form within an organization brings benefits to both employees and the organizations. Such gestures help employees to appreciate their work and reduces their turnover intentions and increased employee commitment to the organization.

IX. Summary of the Findings

In summary, this paper was out to analyze the role of work ethics and more specifically, the role of supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support in enhancing employee commitment in public and private sector organizations. This paper therefore, highlights the role of work ethics in enhancing employee job commitment. Many experts and studies revealed that good working relationships between supervisors and supervisees, and co-worker support, the two constructs under investigation in this paper, have the potential of greatly influencing employee organizational commitment.

Findings of this paper revealed that promoting, monitoring and enforcing strong work ethics related to supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support by organizations improves the work environment and increases employee job satisfaction. Additionally, cordial supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support help employees to have shared goals, enhances the morale of workers and reduces their turnover intentions. Furthermore, the review revealed that good supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support promotes team work, helps employees to love their jobs, encourages employees to engage in jobs beyond their job description, aids employees to complete their tasks quickly and to perform better in their roles. It was also found out that good supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support contributes to building a good person-organization fit and last but not least, findings also revealed that promoting work ethics related to relationships between supervisors and the supervisees, and co-work support all helps employees to appreciate their work, reduces work stress and enhances the employees' skills development and problem-solving abilities. All the above benefits which may come as a result of organizations promoting strong work ethics and ethical behaviors have the potential to re-enforce and enhance employee loyalty and attachment to organizations.

X. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, a review of the literature confirmed that there is a positive relationship between supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support, and employee commitment. Researchers described the different dimensions in which work ethics and specifically, the two above constructs (supervisor/supervisee relationships & co-worker support) influence work commitment. Promoting strong work ethics was found to have the potential to increase employee commitment which helps organizations to achieve their goals and objectives. Ignoring or failure to promote and enforce ethical guidelines and ethical standards by organizations affects the morale of employees and their levels of commitment. This paper therefore, presents useful data which public and private sector organizations can use to re-focus their attention to promote and enforce ethical guidelines, and to build ethical organizations given the capacity of strong work ethics to enhance work commitment every 21st century organization is yearning for so as to remain competitive. Paying attention to incentives such as salary, promotion, welfare benefits as well as training and development, among others, which induce work commitment should be supplemented with enforcing ethical guidelines and building ethical organizations.

XI. Direction for Future Research

The aim of this paper was to establish the role of work ethics and specifically, the role of supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support in enhancing employee commitment. Future researchers therefore can consider undertaking a comparative analysis of the same constructs so as to give a holistic view of these constructs by comparing the role of supervisor/supervisee relationships and co-worker support in enhancing employee commitment in the public and private sector organizations.

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