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THE INFLUENCE OF WORKPLACE CONDITION AND EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION ON EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN COMPANIES

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Abstract:

Developing and maintaining a relationship with employees has become an imperative thing to do for businesses to be competitive in today's dynamic environment. Workplace conditions tends to have either a positive or negative impact on employees' behaviour and output. Satisfied employees are likely to be more productive and involved in organisational activities. Committed employees are more likely to facilitate the provision of superior service quality. Despite the increase in research focusing on workplace conditions on organisational performance, there seem to be lack of studies that have investigated the influence of workplace conditions and employee satisfaction on employee commitment in the business fraternity in South Africa. Examining the influence of workplace conditions and employee satisfaction on employee commitment will be valuable in proving useful insights for businesses on how to create strong relationships with employees in order to enhance loyalty, longevity and competitiveness in the business. Therefore, using a data set of 150 from lower level employees in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, this study examines these relationships. Smart PLS software for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to statistically analyse the measurement and structural models. The results indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between all the three hypotheses. The research paper discusses both academic and managerial implications of the results and future research directions are suggested.

Keywords:

Behavioural decision making theory, Workplace conditions, employee satisfaction and employee commitment.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Survival and success is important for any firm operating within the competitive business environment. As competition plays a major role in the business environment (Kocoglu, Imamoglu, Ince & Keskin, 2011), committed employees become critical in ensuring that organisations remain competitive (Matzler & Renzl, 2007). Commitment entails that employees are emotionally attached (Thomson, de Chernatony, Arganbright & Khan, 1999) and as such they are more likely to be more engaged (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) on organisational activities necessary for a firm's survival. While this assertion is significant or an aspiration for most firms, it is however worrisome that globally, only 31 percent of employees, appear to be engaged (Blessingwhite, 2011). It is therefore due to such predicaments that this study finds it necessary to investigate the factors influencing employee commitment. Particularly, the study seeks to identify if whether the conditions at the workplace affect employee satisfaction and hence their commitment.

While there is extensive knowledge of abundant key determinants of an organisation's success, employee commitment still remains pertinent (McGregor, 2009; Bingham & Galagan, 2009). However what is of concern is that in view of the aforementioned statistic it appears that the standard of employee commitment for most firms is by and large distressing. In developing countries such as South Africa, the importation of outdated technologies, equipment and chemicals without the accompanying of guidelines to facilitate safety during application is a known phenomenon (Mbakaya, Onyoyo, Lwaki & Omondi, 1999). These unpleasant workplace conditions may conflict with employee commitment (Wibberley, 2013) and presumably be in part, the reason employee satisfaction is a major concern for businesses today (Needleman 2011). Negative and unsupportive organisational climates decrease satisfaction, resulting in unfavourable outcomes (Wangenheim, Evanschitzky & Wunderlinch, 2007) most likely to deter commitment. It is against this mainstay that the current study is found essential.

According to Bowen, (2010), "customer satisfaction and financial success often accompany positive organisational cultures". Satisfied employees are likely to be more productive and involved in organisational activities (Yoon & Suh, 2003; Yee, Yeung & Cheng, 2008) and committed employees are more likely to facilitate the provision of superior service quality (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; de Chernatony & Cottam, 2009). It is therefore evident that satisfaction as well as commitment is vital for increasing organisational performance (Matzler *et al.*, 2007; Chena, Lee & Tseng, 2012).

As such, the academic literature is rife with studies on the drivers for employee satisfaction and commitment, respectively (e.g., Chi & Gursoy, 2009; Wallace, de Chernatony & Buil, 2013). According to Balmer, (2001) employee commitment is essential for accomplishing organisational objectives. It expresses the importance of the relationship between an employee and an organisation (Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield, 2012) as well as drives the will to sacrifice short term goals in order to realize long-term goals (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). However, satisfaction is presumed to be an influential construct of commitment (Beatson, Coote, & Rudd, 2006) but this relation has been given little attention in academic works. Also according to Chena *et al.*, (2012) workplace conditions influence employee satisfaction in some way but research on the influence of workplace condition on employee commitment remains scant as well.

As such, in order to fill the aforementioned research gap, the study has three empirical objectives, that is:

1. To investigate the influence of workplace condition on the satisfaction of employees working in Vanderbijlpark-South Africa.

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2. To investigate the influence of employee satisfaction on the commitment of employees working in Vanderbijlpark-South Africa.
3. To investigate the influence of workplace condition on the commitment of employees working in Vanderbijlpark-South Africa

This study is set to improve on our understanding of how organisational climate and employee emotional state play a role on employee commitment. In addition, a contribution of new knowledge and empirical support will be added to existing body of literature on employee commitment.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. A research model and hypotheses are provided. A discussion on the methodology, constructs and scales is to follow and the analysis and conclusion is outlined thereafter.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study will reveal literature on the four key words which are behavioural decision making theory, workplace condition, employee satisfaction and employee commitment.

2.1. Behavioural decision making theory

According to the behavioural decision making theory, employee perception of uncertainty affects their judgment significantly (Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982). Schweizer and Patzelt, (2012) suggest that the decision of an employee to continue working for a firm depends on the extent of insecurity they perceive to be related to continued commitment. As employee commitment is essential for organisations (Bowen *et al.*, 2004; Boyd & Sutherland, 2006) employees need not encounter any organisational obstacles and must be satisfied (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Yee, *et al.*, 2008) in order to encourage commitment. This suggests that when employees work in good conditions, they are more likely to be satisfied and hence be committed to their work. However, according to the behavioural decision making theory, when the organisational climate does not support employees in terms of addressing their concerns and providing necessary information and knowledge with regards to their role in achieving organisational goals (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991), employees might perceive uncertainty and as a result their level of satisfaction and involvement in the work environment decreases, leading to a reduction of commitment to the firm as well (Schweizer *et al.*, 2012). Firms therefore need to create the often preferred convenient and expected organisational structure that will minimise the perception on uncertainty (Homburg & Stock, 2004; McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), thus building employee satisfaction and encouraging commitment.

2.2. Workplace condition

“Workplace condition” is a unidimensional construct and for the purpose of this study, a definition of workplace condition will be adopted from Hills and Joyce, (2013) where they suggest that workplace condition may be considered in terms of both the physical and cultural setting that shapes the psychosocial environment in which work is organised and performed. According to Howell and Annansingh, (2013), an inadequate supply of information and lack of communication restrains employees from fulfilling their duties better. In terms of safety, lack of awareness leads to unsafe work (Mbakaya *et al.*, 1999) leading to workplace accidents that result in not only lost working time, but fatality as well (Boone, van Ours, Wuellrich & Zweimuller, 2011). More so, Barish, (2001) discovered that in some cases these fatalities are caused by other individuals in the workplace as opposed to inanimate working objects and conditions. Although Weiss, (1999) and Hills *et al.*, (2013) studied “workplace condition” within the context of teaching and medicine, it is considered as an influential component in the business environment as well (Mishima, Goto, Kubota & Nagata, 2006; Cottini, Kato & Westergaard-Nielsen, 2011)

2.3. Employee satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is defined as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976). In this study, a definition will be adopted from Robbins, (1996) where he describes the construct as an individual’s broad outlook toward his or her work that has an effect on their productivity and competence in the workplace. Previous studies have provided support on the association of employee satisfaction with customer satisfaction and firm performance (Brown & Lam, 2008; Wangenheim *et al.*, 2007; Snipes, Oswald, LaTour & Armenakis, 2005; Jung & Yoon, 2013), and as such organisations strive to endorse employee satisfaction in order to respond effectively to the pressures of the competitive environment (Yee, *et al.*, 2008). According to Lam, Zhang, and Baum, (2001) employee satisfaction is especially important in the service industry, however organisations in general need to actively promote it through discouraging issues negatively affecting employees such as low pay and limited upward mobility for example (Katzenbach & Santamaria, 1999; Osterman & Shulman, 2011; Segal, 2012). In this way, employees will be happy, displaying a pleasant attitude towards customers and thereby encouraging a positive perception of customers or clients regarding the firm and the particular services they provide (Howard & Gengler, 2001).

2.4. Employee commitment

Commitment is defined as “an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners” (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987). Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé, (1992) defined the term as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship”. It is a multidimensional construct comprising of affective, continuance and normative commitment however for the purpose of this study, it will be measured as unidimensional. Adopted from Schweizer *et al.*, (2012) this study defines employee commitment as the employees’ decision to stay with a firm regardless of the organisational climate or the change therein. According to Klein *et al.*, (2012) commitment conveys the significance of a relationship between partners and their will to proceed with the relationship in the future. However when employees sense uncertainty, their will to continue working for the firm dissolves (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2009). Changes in organisational structures and working conditions arouse uncertainty (Shanley & Correa, 1992), however when a firm devotes efforts to support employees, employees become dedicated to their work duties (Berry, 2002). Dedicated and committed employees become more willing and capable of delivering higher levels of service quality (Elmadağ, Ellinger & Franke, 2008; Lee, Nam, Park & Kyung, 2006). As a result customers are more likely to be satisfied and loyal to the organisation (Beatson *et al.*, 2006).

3.0. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Drawing from the theory, the extant literature from Health Economics, Management and Operations Management aforementioned, a conceptual model is developed in Figure 1. The model consists of three constructs, that is, two predictors – workplace condition and employee satisfaction and one outcome variable – employee commitment. Conceivably, workplace condition and employee satisfaction influences employee commitment. Detailed explanations of the associations between these constructs are provided in the hypotheses developed hereafter.

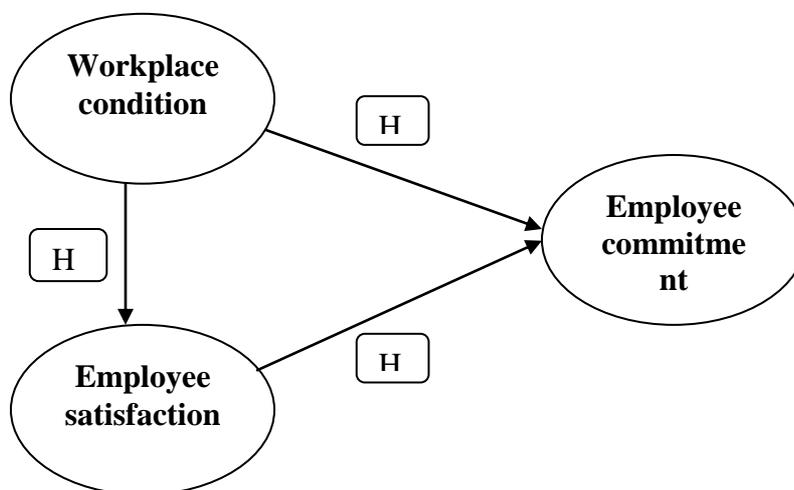


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Based on the above literature and conceptual model, the following hypotheses are developed

3.1 Workplace Condition and Employee Satisfaction

According to the behaviour decision making theory, when firms support and care for their employees' through effective communication (e.g. demonstrating safety awareness) (Schweiger *et al.*, 1991), employees are likely to be satisfied (Schweizer *et al.*, 2012). More so, the assigning of apposite workload, the provision of opportunities and training and involvement in decision making are vital for employee satisfaction (Weiss, 1999). Therefore once the overall conditions at the workplace are in accordance with the South African labour legislations, it is expected that employees will be much satisfied in their workplace. Therefore, based on such reasoning, this paper hypothesizes that:

H1: Workplace condition has a positive influence on the satisfaction of employees working in Vanderbijlpark.

3.2 Employee satisfaction and Employee commitment

In an industry survey conducted by Mercer LLC 2010, results revealed that employee satisfaction is still a major concern for customers and firms alike (Needleman, 2011). It is therefore proposed in the current study that the development of positive working climates by firms will lead to satisfied employees (Wangenheim *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, when employees are satisfied, they develop a positive attitude and become more efficient (Robbins, 1996). This suggest that when employees become satisfied, they become happy (Chena *et al.*, 2012) and as they become happy, they tend to be more dedicated and thus committed to their work (Yoon *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: Employee satisfaction has a positive influence on the commitment of employees working in Vanderbijlpark.

3.3 Workplace Condition and Employee Commitment

According to Barish, (2001) many occupations are inherently risky. As such many workers are likely to be involved in a workplace accident (Boone *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, it has been found that unsupportive workplace conditions are the primary reason why employees tend to leave their work (Yee, 1990; Cottini *et al.*, 2011). It is therefore submitted in the current study that safety awareness programmes and supportive

workplace conditions must be arranged within organisations in order for employees to be contented (Yee, 1990; Mbakaya *et al.*, 1999). Accordingly, when employees work under such a positive working climate, they are likely to be more committed to their work. Thus, based on such reasoning, this paper hypothesizes that:

H3: Workplace condition has a positive influence on the commitment of employees working in Vanderbijlpark.

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Sample and data collection

The target population for the study was South African companies in Gauteng province. The sampling unit was the individual employees who are not in managerial positions. This method has the advantage of speed, is less costly and the researcher has control over respondent type. Students from the Vaal University of Technology were recruited as research assistants to distribute and collect the questionnaires. Of the total of 200 questionnaires distributed, 150 usable questionnaires were retrieved for the final data analysis, representing a response rate of 75 per cent. To eliminate differences in response patterns due to different reference points, all respondents were prompted to answer the questionnaires with reference to companies they work for.

4.2 Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire Design

Research scales were operationalized on the basis of previous work. Proper modifications were made in order to fit the current research context and purpose. “Workplace conditions” measure used four-item scales adapted from Gule (2009). “Employee satisfaction” used four-item scale measure all adapted from Chinomona, Lin, Wang and Chen (2010). “Employee commitment” used five-item scale measure adapted from Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993). All the measurement items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scales that was anchored by 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree to express the degree of agreement.

4.3 Respondent Profile

Table 1 presents the description of the participants. The respondents were asked to report their demographic information, including gender, age, position in the company and type of employment. The respondents were predominantly females (86%). The mode age group of the respondent was that of less than 36-45 years (50%). 70% occupy the junior level positions. 75% of the respondents were part-time employees.

Table 4.1 Sample Demographic Characteristics

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 64 | 43 |
| Female | 86 | 57 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |
| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
| 18-25 | 20 | 13 |
| 26-35 | 30 | 20 |
| 36-45 | 50 | 33 |
| 46-55 | 35 | 23 |
| 56 and above | 15 | 11 |

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| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Total | 150 | 100 |
| Position in the company | Frequency | Percentage |
| Trainee entry level | 15 | 10 |
| Junior level | 70 | 47 |
| Senior level | 55 | 37 |
| Others (Specify) | 10 | 6 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |
| Type of employment | Frequency | Percentage |
| Casual | 20 | 13 |
| Contract | 35 | 23 |
| Part-Time | 75 | 51 |
| Permanent | 20 | 13 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

5.0 Data Analysis

In order to statistically analyze the measurement and structural models, this study used Smart PLS software for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique (Ringle, Wende & Will 2005). In SEM, the measurement model refers to the linkages between the latent variables and their manifest variables and the structural model captures the hypothesized causal relationships among the research constructs (Chin & Newsted, 1999; Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder & Van Oppen, 2009). Unlike AMOS and LISREL which are covariance based approaches, Smart PLS is a regression based technique that originates from path analysis. Smart PLS has emerged as a powerful approach to study causal models involving multiple constructs with multiple indicators (Chinomona & Surujal, 2012). Smart PLS - a component-based method, has an ability to model latent constructs that are uncontaminated by measurement error under conditions of non-normality. It has the ability to handle complex predictive models in small-to-medium sample sizes. Since the current study sample size is relatively small (150) Smart PLS was found more appropriate and befitting the purpose of the current study. In this respect, Bootstrapping resampling method was used to test the statistical significance of the relationships. This procedure entailed generating 200 sub-samples of cases randomly selected, with replacement, from the original data. Below is Table 5.1, presenting evidence on the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

5.1 Measurement Model

To ensure convergent validity, the researcher checked if items loaded on their respective (a priori) constructs with loadings greater than 0.6, while discriminant validity was checked by ensuring that there was no significant inter-research variables cross-loadings (Chin, 1998). As can be seen (Table 5.1), all items have loadings greater than 0.6 (i.e. ranging from 0.640 to 0.891), with no cross-loadings greater than 0.903, while t-statistics derived from bootstrapping (200 resamples) suggest all loadings are significant at p value, 0.001. As such, this confirms that all the measurement items converged well on their respective constructs and therefore are acceptable measures.

Table 5.1 Accuracy Analysis Statistics

| Research Construct | Sample Mean | Standard Deviation | Standard Error | T-Statistics | Cronbach's α value | C.R. Value | AVE Value | R-Square | Factor Loading |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------------|
| WC | WC 1 | 0.405 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 4.606 | 0.875 | 0.914 | 0.727 | 0.777 |
| | WC 2 | | | | | | | | 0.798 |
| | WC 3 | | | | | | | | 0.743 |
| | WC 4 | | | | | | | | 0.744 |
| ES | ES1 | 0.482 | 0.102 | 0.102 | 3.748 | 0.7647 | 0.850 | 0.586 | 0.812 |
| | ES2 | | | | | | | | 0.843 |
| | ES3 | | | | | | | | 0.891 |
| | ES4 | | | | | | | | 0.864 |
| EC | ECI | 0.408 | 0.120 | 0.120 | 3.193 | 0.738 | 0.818 | 0.500 | 0.750 |
| | EC 2 | | | | | | | | 0.645 |
| | EC 3 | | | | | | | | 0.640 |
| EC | EC 4 | | | | | | | | 0.655 |
| | EC 5 | | | | | | | | 0.748 |
| | | | | | | | | | |

Note: EC=Employee Commitment; ES=Employee Satisfaction; WC=Worplace Condition; C.R.: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Reliability; * Scores: 1 – Strongly Agree; 3 – Neutral; 5 – Strongly Disagree

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According to Chin (1998), research variables should have an average variance extracted (AVE) of more than 0.5 and a composite reliability of more than 0.8 (convergent validity), and inter-construct correlations should be less than the square-root of the AVE (discriminant validity). As can be seen (Table 2), all constructs exceed these criteria, with AVE and CR generally equal or greater than 0.5 and 0.8, respectively. All in all, these results confirm the existence of discriminant validity of the measurement used in this study.

Table 5.2 Correlations between Constructs

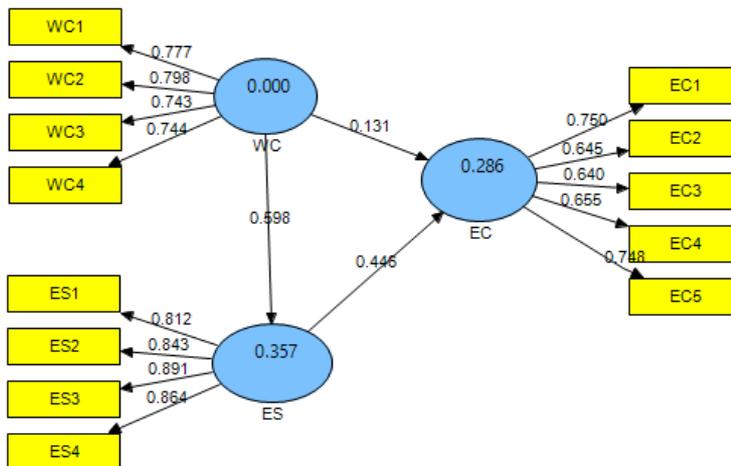
| Research Constructs | EC | ES | WP |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| EC | 1.000 | | |
| ES | 0.460 | 1.000 | |
| WP | 0.334 | 0.400 | 1.000 |

Note: EC=Employee Commitment; ES=Employee Satisfaction; WP=Worplace Condition.

5.2 Path Model

PLS also generates the path coefficients for the relationships modelled among the constructs. The significance of these coefficients was assessed using the bootstrap procedure (with 200 sub-samples) that provided the t-values for each path estimate. Figure 5.1 and Table 5.3 presents the results of the PLS analysis on the structural model along with the path estimates and t-values. Support for the study hypotheses, which are labelled on their corresponding paths in Figure 5.1, could be ascertained by examining the directionality (positive or negative) of the path coefficients and the significance of the t-values. The standardized path coefficients are expected to be at least 0.2, and preferably greater than 0.3 (Chin 1998).

Figure 5.1 Measurement and Structural Model



Results

Note: EC=Employee Commitment; ES=Employee Satisfaction; WC=Worplace Condition

The results provide support for the proposed positive relationships between the three relationships (i.e. H1, H2, and H3). Figure 5.1 and Table 5.3 provide the path coefficients for H1 to H3 (i.e. 0.131 to 0.598).

Table 5.3 Results of Structural Equation Model Analysis

| Proposed Relationship | Hypothesis | Hypothesis | Path Coefficients | T-Statistics | Rejected/Supported |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| WC to ES | | H1 | 0.598 | 4.333 | Supported |
| ES to EC | | H2 | 0.446 | 4.836 | Supported |
| WC to EC | | H3 | 0.131 | 4.289 | Supported |

Note: EC=Employee Commitment; ES=Employee Satisfaction; WC=Worplace Condition

Following formulae provided by Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin & Lauro, (2005), the global goodness-of-fit (GoF) statistic for the research model was calculated. The calculated global goodness of fit (GoF) is 0.66, which exceed the threshold of $GoF > 0.36$ suggested by Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder & van Oppen (2009). Thus, this study concludes that the research model has a good overall fit.

6.0 Discussion of Results

The results in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.1 provide support for the three hypotheses (H1 to H3). Hypothesis 1 posited a positive relationship between workplace condition and employee satisfaction. Consistent with H1, the result in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.1, indicates that there is a significant ($t = 4.333$) positive ($\beta = 0.598$) relationship between workplace condition and employee satisfaction. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 posited a positive association between employee satisfaction and employee commitment. Hypothesis 2, results indicated that the relationship between employee satisfaction and employee commitment ($\beta = 0.446$) is positive and that relationship is significant ($t = 4.836$). This is consistent with the prediction of H2 and is therefore supported. Thus, a higher level of employee satisfaction is associated with a high employee commitment.

Hypothesis 3 posited a positive relationship between workplace condition and employee commitment. Consistent with H3, the result in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.1, indicates that there is a significant ($t = 4.289$), positive ($\beta = 0.131$) relationship between workplace condition and employee commitment. Therefore, H3 is supported.

7.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of workplace conditions and employee satisfaction on employee commitment. To achieve this objective, this paper used Smart PLS to test the hypotheses. To test the proposed hypotheses, data were collected from Vanderbijlpark in Gauteng Province in South Africa. The empirical result supported all the three posited research hypotheses in a significant way.

8.0 Implications of the study

The current study investigate this contentious issues in an often most neglected research context – the African setting. Therefore, the findings of this empirical study are expected to provide fruitful new insights and implications to both academicians and employees across the globe. In particular, the current study findings provide tentative support to the proposition that workplace conditions and employee satisfaction have an impact on employee commitment. On the practitioners' side, important influential role of workplace conditions and employee satisfaction on employee commitment in an African context are highlighted. Therefore, this study for instance submits managers should find ways to attract and please employees in order to retain them.

9.0 Limitations and Future Research

Although this study makes significant contributions to both academia and practice, it was limited in some ways, and therefore some future research avenues are suggested. First, the data were gathered from Vanderbijlpark in the Gauteng Province of South Africa and the sample size of 150 which is relatively small. Perhaps, the results would be more informative if the sample size is large and data gathered from the other eight provinces of the country are included. Therefore, future studies may be conducted by using data from other cities and other provinces in South Africa. Second, perhaps too, future studies should not be limited to South Africa, but rather consider extending this research to other African countries such as Zimbabwe for results comparison. Future studies can also extend the current study by studying the relationships in the current conceptual model in other sectors of the economy. Above and beyond, this will immensely contribute new knowledge to the existing body of literature in the African setting – a research context which happens to be neglected in academics.

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