

The languishment of employee commitment in the light of perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace

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Orientation: This article reports on the behaviours displayed by committed employees and the influence of perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace on employees' commitment.

Research purpose: The objective of the study was to identify organisational behaviours that are indicative of employee commitment and whether perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace influence employees' commitment.

Motivation for the study: Employees are emotionally attached to organisations and treating employees in a fair manner plays a huge role in building commitment.

Research design, approach and method: This study made use of a quantitative approach and a questionnaire was developed to collect data on employees' biographical details, their work behaviour and perceptions of how fairly they believe they were treated in the workplace. A disproportionate, stratified sampling method was used and a sample of 349 employees from a leading bank in South Africa participated. Factor analysis, correlations, *t*-tests and analysis of variance statistics were computed to achieve the objectives.

Main findings: The factor analysis identified the following four factors relating to employee commitment: obedience, job satisfaction, participation and loyalty. The results of the *t*-tests revealed that biographical factors do not have a practical significant effect on employee commitment, whereas treatment in the workplace does have a significant effect on employee commitment.

Practical/managerial implications: Committed employees engage in specific behaviours and if they do not, managers need to pay attention to the way employees are treated in the workplace.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to a better understanding of the dimensionality of employee commitment in the light of perceptions of fair treatment.

Introduction

In considering the increase in unrest and protest marches against poor service delivery, the following question inevitably comes to mind: Do employees simply no longer care or take pride in providing a good service or are there other factors, such as the unfair treatment of employees, responsible for South Africa's reputation for poor service delivery? According to the Global Competitiveness Report for 2010–2011, South Africa ranks 97th out of 139 in labour market efficiency, 135th for inflexible hiring and firing practices and 132nd for poor labour-employer relations.

Problem statement

Organisations in today's competitive world can perform at peak levels only if each employee is committed to the organisation's objectives and all employees perform as effective team members. It is no longer sufficient for employees to come to work faithfully every day and to do their jobs independently. In the past, organisations secured the loyalty of their employees by guaranteeing job security. Recently, however, many organisations have responded to competitive pressures by downsizing, restructuring and transformation, and this has fostered a less secure organisational climate. A growing number of employees, therefore, feel that they are victims of broken promises. One of the challenges facing modern organisations is to maintain employee commitment in the current business environment. Anjani and Dhanapal (2012) reported on the importance of having committed employees to carry out the day-to-day business transactions of an organisation and to enable the organisation to deal with changes emerging from the environment.

Key focus

Organisations are faced with ever-increasing competition and as they prepare for new challenges one of the key components of survival is the existence of a workforce that engages in certain

types of behaviours. According to Yaniv, Lavi and Siti (2010), employee behaviour deemed to be essential for organisational effectiveness includes employees (1) entering and remaining with the organisation, (2) meeting specific role requirements and (3) engaging in innovative and spontaneous activity that goes beyond role prescriptions. Behaviour that goes beyond role prescriptions is referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour and plays a crucial role in promoting the effective functioning of the organisation (Parayitam & Guru-Gharana, 2011). The appointment of good workers is critical but of even greater significance is the organisation's ability to create a committed workforce (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2010), hence the need for managers to understand the concept of commitment – what it is, how it operates, and most importantly, how to create a committed workforce.

Background

The importance of employee commitment is evident if one considers prior research into the relationship between commitment and other organisational phenomena such as the following:

- organisational change (Elias, 2009)
- career outcomes (Bergeron, Shipp & Furst, 2011)
- transformational leadership (Hill, Seo, Kang & Taylor, 2011)
- trust in and loyalty to the leader (Deluga, 1994)
- retention (Döckel, Basson & Coetzee, 2006; Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012)
- transformational leadership (Walumbwa, Orwa, Wang & Lawler, 2005)
- person-environment fit (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009).

However, hardly any research has been conducted to determine the relationship between commitment and perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace.

Research purpose

One of the objectives of this research was to identify the typical behaviours that committed employees engage in. Further objectives were to determine to what extent employee characteristics and perceptions of fair treatment influence their commitment. The literature review on commitment will use Meyer and Allen's three-component model of commitment as a framework (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Perceptions of fair treatment will be discussed from an organisational justice perspective.

Literature review

Employee commitment

Zeffane and Al Zarooni (2012) regard employee commitment to be at the centre of a web made up of behaviours and attitudes. According to these authors, commitment refers to the person's loyalty and intent to stay with the employer on the basis of a sense of duty and responsibility, and this extends beyond a purely personal interest in employment. Murtaza, Shad, Shahzad, Shah and Khan (2011) refer to commitment as the bond a person has with the entire organisation. According

to Meyer and Allen (1991), the concept of commitment is multi-dimensional and organisational commitment reflects at least three general themes: affective attachment to the organisation, the perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation and the obligation to remain with it. These three dispositions towards attachment to the organisation are referred to as affective, continuance and normative commitment:

- *Affective commitment* refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organisation. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organisation because they *want to* (Qaisar, Rehman & Syffyan, 2012).
- *Continuance commitment* refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation. The potential costs of leaving an organisation include the threat of wasting the time and effort spent acquiring non-transferable skills, losing attractive benefits, giving up seniority-based privileges or having to uproot family and disrupt personal relationships. Apart from the costs involved in leaving the organisation, continuance commitment also develops as a function of a lack of alternative employment opportunities. Employees whose primary link to the organisation is based on continuance commitment remain because they *need to* (Qaisar *et al.*, 2012).
- *Normative commitment* reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they *ought to* remain with the organisation (Qaisar *et al.*, 2012).

Common to these three dispositions is the view that commitment is a psychological state that characterises employees' relationship with the organisation and has implications for their decision to continue membership of it. These psychological states also have different implications for work-relevant behaviour. Affective commitment will result in employees who are prepared to go the extra mile and display organisation citizenship behaviour. In continuance commitment, employees do not contribute beyond what is needed to keep their jobs. These employees have higher absenteeism rates and greater resistance to change (Katono, Manyak, Katabaasi & Kisenyi, 2012). Normative commitment will result in employees being loyal and fulfilling their duties but will not result in the kind of behaviour that will give the organisation a competitive advantage (Khalili & Asmawi, 2012).

Commitment and work behaviour

Research conducted in the past few decades has focused on the importance of employee commitment for performance (Jaramillo, Mulki & Marshall, 2005; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Suliman & Iles, 2000). It is interesting to note that of the studies that have reported positive correlations between commitment and performance, most have used measures of affective commitment (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2010). Allen and Smith (1987) and Meyer and Allen (1984) found that measures of work behaviour correlated positively with measures of affective and normative commitment but

not with continuance commitment. Research by Randall, Fedor and Longenecker (1990) revealed that affective commitment contributed significantly to the prediction of concern for quality, sacrifice orientation and willingness to share knowledge. Normative commitment contributed only to the prediction of sacrifice orientation, and continuance commitment did not add significantly to the prediction of any of these behaviours. From the findings on the correlation between commitment and performance it is clear that the three components of commitment have different implications for work-related behaviour.

Organisations need employees who are willing to go beyond the call of duty and engage in extra-role behaviours. Hence, research continued to examine the link between the three components of commitment and a multi-dimensional measure of work behaviour known as organisational citizenship behaviour.

Organisational citizenship behaviour

Work behaviour that is in some way beyond the reach of traditional measures of job performance but holds out the promise of long-term organisational success is receiving increasing attention. The challenge of global competition, which highlights the importance of organisational innovation, flexibility, productivity and responsiveness to changing external conditions, requires work behaviour that goes beyond the call of duty. Organisational citizenship behaviour represents individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system and that promotes the effective functioning of the organisation (Bergeron *et al.*, 2011). Organisational citizenship behaviour, therefore, refers to both in-role and extra-role work behaviour that contributes to organisational effectiveness. Katz (1964) identified a third type of behaviour displayed by employees – performing tasks beyond the call of duty known as extra-role behaviour. However, it was only in the 1980s that researchers such as Organ (1998) and Smith, Organ and Near (1983) focused more on extra-role behaviour. Smith *et al.* (1983) presented two measures of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB): altruism and general compliance (conscientiousness). Organ (1998) subsequently added three more measures: sportsmanship, courtesy and civic virtue, whilst Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bacharach (2000) added another two: organisational loyalty and self-development.

According to Inkeles (Van Dyne & Graham, 1994), the organisational citizenship behaviour construct consists of the following three categories:

- *Obedience* involves respect for orderly structures and processes. It reflects employees' acceptance of the necessity for and desirability of rational rules and regulations governing organisational structure, job descriptions and personnel policies.
- *Loyalty* involves serving the interests of the community as a whole and the values it embodies. In an organisation, loyalty is identification with and allegiance to the

organisation's leaders and the organisation as a whole, transcending the interests of individuals, work groups and departments. It also includes defending the organisation against threats, contributing to its good reputation and co-operating with others to serve the interests of the whole.

- *Participation* entails active and responsible involvement in community self-governance and keeping oneself well-informed about issues affecting the community, as well as exchanging information and ideas with other people. In an organisational context, it refers to interest in organisational affairs and taking responsibility for organisational governance. It also includes attending non-obligatory meetings, sharing informed opinions and new ideas with others and being willing to combat groupthink.

When an employee engages in obedience, loyalty and participation activities as outlined above, he or she displays commitment to the organisation. Not only does such a person do more than what is expected of him or her but he or she does not expect to be rewarded for it. Extra-role behaviours are vital for performance because organisations cannot forecast through stated job descriptions the entire spectrum of subordinate behaviours needed for achieving goals. In order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, an organisation is dependent on employees' willingness to do more than what their official job descriptions outline (Javadi & Yavarian, 2011).

It is well-recognised that organisations reap significant benefits from having employees who are willing to go above and beyond their required role behaviour. There may be situations, however, in which it is desirable to have employees broadly conceptualise their jobs so that they engage in certain organisationally functional behaviours without feeling that they are doing something extra. It becomes problematic when supervisors have to depend on employees' willingness to engage in extra-role behaviour. Supervisors need employees who see helping others as their duty so that consistent performance can be achieved.

According to Morrison (1994), a key management function may be to reduce the perception that a particular job does not fall within a designated job description with respect to activities that are critical but not formally enforced. However, this is not an easy task because employees and their managers have different ideas on defining various behaviours as either in-role or extra-role, and consequently, how broadly they define the employees' job responsibilities. Coetzee and Schreuder (2010) state that one determinant of how broadly employees define their jobs is affective commitment. Instead of believing that affective commitment leads employees to exceed their job requirements, Coetzee and Schreuder (2010) propose that affective commitment changes the way in which employees define the scope of their job. In such a case, extra-role behaviour is more likely to be seen as in-role behaviour and part of one's job.

In business, as in personal relationships, commitment is a two-way street. If employers want committed employees, they need to be committed employers. A study by Aon Consulting

in Canada in 2000, which looked at the effectiveness of various organisational practices for building employee commitment, identified the following five key areas: (1) safety and security, (2) rewards, (3) affiliation, (4) growth and (5) work/life harmony (Madigan & Dorrell, 2000). These organisational practices relate to employees' need for self-expression, prestige, challenges, responsibilities, career advancement, recognition and sense of personal importance (Gong, Law, Chang & Xin, 2009). Whilst a great deal of attention has been focused on the concept of work/life harmony, which is generally recognised by employers as important, employers need to review and adjust all practices in such a way that employees' personal needs are met. Treating employees fairly and justly is one way of interacting with employees on a personal level.

Discussing treatment in the workplace without reference to justice is impossible. According to research by Greenberg in 1987, organisational justice has three components (Murtaza *et al.*, 2011):

- *Distributive justice* refers to the perceived fairness of the outcomes or allocations that an individual receives.
- *Procedural justice* refers to fairness issues concerning the methods, mechanisms and processes used to determine outcomes (Cropanzano, 2001). In an organisational context, it refers to the methods or processes used to make a selection decision or to decide who should be promoted.
- *Interactional justice* refers to the way people are treated. In their research on workplace spirituality, Katono *et al.* (2012) identified trust, respect, meaningful work, dignity and honesty as essential for fair interactions. Keeping the principles of fairness in mind, fair treatment would mean that any decision or action taken by an employer should be based on valid reasons, proper procedures and sound interpersonal interactions.

The relationship between perceptions of fair treatment and commitment

The concern for fairness is reinforced by the presence of a fairness heuristic at work in peoples cognitions of their relationships to organisations. People need to make decisions about the extent to which they will constrain their own interests for the sake of the organisation's interests and welfare. People inevitably rely on judgemental heuristics to determine whether to entrust their interests and identity to the organisation and align their goals and behaviour with the organisation (Van Dijke, Mayer & De Cremer, 2010). Of the factors affecting this decision, fairness concerns appear to function pre-eminently. Research by Zhou and George (2001) revealed that no matter how strong an individual's positive emotions, if he or she is not fairly treated, job satisfaction and positive work behaviours will decline (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2010). Fairness suggests to people that their membership of the organisation is valued and that the organisation respects them, thereby making commitment to the organisation a viable way of maintaining one's identity and fulfilling one's interests. Fair treatment indicates to people that they are being respected as ends in themselves, and not merely

as a means to achieving the ends set by others. Research on workplace interactions has indicated that support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001) and trust (Tyler, 2003) are essential for employees to perceive their treatment as being fair. Judgements about fairness are formed quickly and constitute a key heuristic basis on which decisions are made about an individual's co-operation with and support for an organisation. A fairness judgement is a far more powerful basis than economic concerns (Van den Bos, Lind & Wilke, 2001).

According to a study conducted by Moorman (1991), which examined the relationship between perceptions of fairness and commitment, it is interesting to note that interactional justice was the strongest source of justice found to relate to commitment. One possible reason for this is that distributive and procedural justice refer to the organisation as a whole, whilst interactional justice focuses on the degree to which the supervisor's behaviour enacts the formal procedures fairly. Employees' impressions of the fairness of their interactions with their supervisors communicate more information about trust and equity than the presence or absence of fair procedures. The supervisor's actions are probably the most effective and compelling communicator of an employee's value. If supervisors wish to increase employee commitment, they should work to increase the perceived fairness of their interactions with employees. These findings are supported by Khan and Rashid's (2012) research which showed that when employees perceive their leader as being fair, which is shown in terms of the reward behaviour, they are more inclined to be satisfied with their supervisor and will remain committed to the organisation and display citizenship behaviour. Similarly, the research of Reychav and Sharkie (2010) revealed that trust, psychological support and opportunity for employee participation contribute to perceptions of fair treatment.

One of the objectives of this research was to identify the typical behaviours of committed employees. Further objectives were to determine to what extent employee characteristics and perceptions of fair treatment influence employee commitment. Managers should, therefore, be able to determine, by observing employees' behaviour, how committed they are. An understanding of how perceptions of fair treatment influence employees' commitment will assist managers in treating employees in an interactionally fair manner.

Research design

Research approach

This study adopted a quantitative approach and a questionnaire was developed to collect data on employees' biographical details, their work behaviour and perceptions of how fairly they believe they were treated in the workplace. Because there is only limited research on the relationship between perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace and

commitment, a complete new set of questions had to be developed in respect of fair treatment and commitment.

Research method

Research participants

The population consisted of 29 688 employees at a leading bank in South Africa and a sample of 1720 was used. A disproportionate, stratified sampling method was used. The population was separated into sub-groups referred to as 'strata', and a sample was drawn randomly from each stratum. In this study, the sub-groups were determined according to ethnicity, gender and staff category. With regard to ethnicity, employees from population groups other than White people (i.e. Black, Coloured and Asian people) were treated as a single component of ethnicity. Regarding staff category, employees from top management, middle management and supervisory level were treated as a single component. Once this process was completed, a list of employees was drawn from each group. Table 1 provides a representation of the grouping of employees, the population and sample size of each employee group, as well as the response and response rate.

Regarding the low response rate (10%) of mail questionnaires, various statisticians state that the *representivity* of the population in the response rate is of greater significance than the general response percentage (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1995; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This principle is especially important when a stratified sampling method is used. The response is in line with the composition of the sample, hence the response rate of 20% in this study was satisfactory.

Measuring instrument

The purpose of this study was to identify organisational behaviours that are indicative of employee commitment and to determine whether employees' perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace influence commitment. A complete new questionnaire comprising the following three sections was developed: biographical details (13 items), commitment (37 items) and perceptions of fair treatment (26

items). The study made use of a six-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 6 (*agree to a great extent*) in respect of the sections on commitment and perceptions of fair treatment. The items were determined by referring to the literature on commitment, workplace behaviour and fairness principles. Although Meyer and Allen (1997) developed a questionnaire on commitment, this questionnaire was not used and questions on commitment were developed based on the literature on commitment. Further inputs for the development of the questionnaire were obtained from the human resource manager of the bank, human resource experts, trade union officials and employees from different ethnic groups and genders. The assistance of a statistician was also obtained before the questionnaire was finalised.

Research procedure

The human resource (HR) manager of the bank provided a list of personnel categorised according to ethnicity, gender and job category. The size of the sample was determined by the extent to which important cross-classifications had to be made. According to Welman and Kruger (2001), the size of the sample should be in proportion to \sqrt{N} , with N representing the size of the stratum. The bank had a workforce of 29 688 employees and a sample size of 770 would have been required. A total of 1720 questionnaires were distributed to make provision for the possibility of a poor response rate. A total of 349 employees completed and returned the questionnaire, which provided a 20% response rate. A list of all permanent employees, categorised according to ethnicity, gender and job category, was obtained from the human resource manager at the bank and questionnaires were posted to the employees. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires, each questionnaire was edited and questionnaires that could distort the data were discarded. The questions were coded and the SPSS Program for Windows Statistical Package, Release 11 and 12.5, was then employed to generate diagnostic information.

The bank provided ethical clearance for the study and the human resource manager of the bank authorised the questionnaire to ensure that the questions complied with ethical considerations.

TABLE 1: Population, sample and response rate of each group.

Population demographics	Group	Population		Sample	Response	Response rate (%)
		<i>n</i>	%			
Ethnicity	Black people	12 007	40	688	128	18.6
	White people	17 681	60	1032	221	21.4
	Total	29 688	100	1720	349	20.3
Gender	Men	10 088	34	585	120	20.5
	Women	19 600	66	1135	229	20.2
	Total	29 688	100	1720	349	20.3
Staff category	Top management	253	-	-	-	-
	Middle management	5975	-	-	-	-
	Supervisory level	2502	-	-	-	-
	Total management level	8730	29	498	168	33.7
	Clerical staff	20 958	71	1222	181	14.8
	Total	29 688	100	1720	349	20.3

n, used as means of number.

Statistical analysis

A number of statistical techniques were used to analyse the data. The statistics that were used for nominal data included the mode, frequencies and coefficients of associations. The statistics that were used for interval data included factor analysis, correlations, *t*-test statistics (for two groups) and one-way analysis of variance (for more than two groups).

In this study, principal factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed for employee commitment. Principal factor analysis was used because it seeks the least number of factors which can account for the common variance (correlation) of a set of variables and it does not consider unique variances. The eigenvalue for a given factor indicates the variance in all the variables of that factor. For the purposes of this study, all factors with eigenvalues lower than one were ignored.

Varimax rotation was used because it yields results that make it easy to identify each variable with a single factor. The name of the factor was determined by the items with the highest factor loadings. This study considered factor loadings higher than or equal to .40 as significant. Whenever an item showed a high loading on two or more factors, the researcher decided which factor the item should belong to. In order to determine which variables to keep, this study considered the factor loadings, the cross-loading of items on more than one factor, and the reliability and importance of a variable according to the theory.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient and inter-item correlation coefficients were used to assess the internal consistency of the measuring instruments. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was above .70 for all the factors identified, thereby indicating that all the items measured the same attribute. Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) were used to analyse the distribution of the values of each item included in the different factors.

Two types of statistics, namely parametric and non-parametric, are available when deciding on the most appropriate statistical method. A parametric test is appropriate when the population score is normally distributed, the variances of the groups are equal and the dependent variable is an interval scale. In order to determine whether a factor is normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis should not be more than 2.5 times the standard error of skewness and kurtosis (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics and the results of the reliability analysis.

Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between the variables. To avoid a Type 1 error, the significance value was set at the 95% confidence level ($p \leq .05$). The practical significance levels were set at a cut-off point of $d \geq .50$ (medium effect).

Comparative statistics test for differences between groups by making use of *t*-tests when an independent variable has two categories and a continuous dependent. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for significant mean differences between a single interval dependent and one independent variable with three or more categories.

Results

Principal factor analysis

Table 2 outlines the rotated factor matrix for employee commitment. Four factors in respect of employee commitment were identified.

Factor 1: Obedience (conscientiousness)

This factor consists of ten items with factor loadings higher than .40. Obedience refers to the way employees adhere to

TABLE 2: Rotated factor matrix for employee commitment.

Employee commitment factors	Factor items	Factor 1: Obedience	Factor 2: Job satisfaction	Factor 3: Participation	Factor 4: Loyalty
Factor 1: Obedience	Treats bank property with care	0.754	-	-	-
	Obeys bank rules and regulations	0.667	-	-	-
	Concerned about the bank's image	0.613	-	-	-
	Keeps workplace clean and tidy	0.578	-	-	-
	Punctual	0.552	-	-	-
	Does not take unnecessary long breaks	0.515	-	-	-
	Helps others with heavy workloads	0.495	-	-	-
	Stays informed about the bank	0.499	-	-	-
	Prevents problems with colleagues	0.460	-	-	-
	Never absent without a valid reason	0.432	-	-	-
Factor 2: Job satisfaction	Enjoys job	-	0.793	-	-
	Pleasant work environment	-	0.618	-	-
	Sense of personal satisfaction – good work	-	0.579	-	-
Factor 3: Participation	Shares ideas for new projects or improvements	-	-	0.663	-
	Makes suggestions to improve operations	-	-	0.645	-
	Attends and participates in bank meetings	-	-	0.562	-
Factor 4: Loyalty	Not resigning – obligation to remain	-	-	-	0.736
	Not resigning – like my job	-	-	-	0.666
	Seldom think about resigning	-	-	-	0.504
	Not resigning – costs too high	-	-	-	0.413

rules and procedures and behave according to group norms. The elements of this factor include the following:

- treating bank property with care
- obeying bank rules and regulations
- being concerned about the bank's image
- keeping the workplace clean and tidy
- being punctual and not taking unnecessary long breaks
- helping others with heavy workloads
- staying informed about the bank
- preventing problems with colleagues
- having valid reasons for staying away from work.

Factor 2: Job satisfaction

This factor consists of three items with factor loadings higher than .40. Job satisfaction refers to employees' satisfaction with their jobs. According to this factor, employees are satisfied with their jobs when they:

- enjoy working
- have a pleasant work environment
- experience a sense of personal satisfaction when they perform well.

Factor 3: Participation (civic virtue)

This factor consists of three items with factor loadings higher than .40. An important aspect of employees' commitment is the extent to which they participate and are involved in work-related issues. The elements of this factor include:

- the opportunity employees are afforded to share ideas or make suggestions on new projects or changes
- whether they attend and participate in bank meetings.

Factor 4: Loyalty

This factor consists of four items with factor loadings higher than .40. Loyalty plays a vital part in employees' commitment and is often measured by their attitudes towards remaining with the organisation. According to this

factor there are various reasons why employees remain with the organisation:

- They feel they have an obligation not to resign.
- They like their job.
- They cannot afford to resign because the costs are too high. Resigning would, in such instances, mean losing accumulated leave days and retirement contributions.

Descriptive statistics

Table 3 provides the means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis and internal consistency reliability coefficients and inter-correlations for the employee commitment variables. The results show that the reliability of the factors, as measured by alpha, are all above .70, which confirms the internal consistency of the items in a factor. In order to determine whether a factor is normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis should not be more than 2.5 times the standard error of skewness and kurtosis. In this case, the skewness of a factor should be less than .32 and the kurtosis should be less than .65 to be regarded as normally distributed. A closer look at the skewness and kurtosis of factor 1 (obedience), factor 2 (satisfaction) and factor 3 (participation) indicated that the skewness and kurtosis did not meet these requirements, hence these factors were not normally distributed and non-parametric statistics were used.

Correlation statistics

This study also made use of correlational statistics to determine the relationship between employees' perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace and commitment. As indicated in Table 4, there is a significant relationship between the way employees are treated and their commitment.

The correlation coefficients in Table 5 indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship ($r > .30$) between the treatment of employees and commitment. According to this table, the autonomy employees receive, plays a major role in their commitment when it comes to obedience ($r = .34$),

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis in respect of employee commitment.

Commitment factors	Mean	Variance	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Number of participants	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Obedience	52.87	32.25	5.67	-.975	1.143	349	10	.8400
Satisfaction	14.46	8.37	2.89	-.873	-.885	349	3	.7602
Participation	14.42	7.46	2.73	-.853	-.858	349	3	.7364
Loyalty	14.55	20.63	4.54	-.151	-.297	349	4	.7040

TABLE 4: Correlations between perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace and commitment.

Treatment in the workplace	Non-parametric correlations	Commitment			
		Obedience	Satisfaction	Participation	Loyalty
Autonomy	Correlation coefficient	.340*	.398*	.404*	.201*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
Respect	Correlation coefficient	.351*	.391*	.348*	.205*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
Responsibility	Correlation coefficient	.228*	.281*	.299*	.203*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
Expectations	Correlation coefficient	.300*	.371*	.327*	.173*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.001

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

satisfaction ($r = .40$) and participation ($r = .40$). There is also a positive and significant relationship ($r > .30$) between respect shown and obedience ($r = .35$), satisfaction ($r = .39$) and participation ($r = .35$). Employees appear to be more satisfied ($r = .37$), obedient ($r = .30$) and participative ($r = .33$) when the employer has realistic expectations of them.

***t*-tests and analysis of variance**

Table 5 provides an analysis of the relationship between employee demographic characteristics of gender, marital status and staff category and employee commitment. The most important findings include the following.

Gender

Men and women differ, although not of practical significance ($d \leq .50$), with regard to obedience ($p \leq .05$) and loyalty ($p \leq .05$). According to the mean scores, women are more inclined to adhere to rules and regulations and display greater loyalty towards the bank.

Ethnicity

This research indicated that there were no significant differences between the various ethnicity groups regarding their commitment.

Marital status

Married and single employees differ with regard to work satisfaction ($p \leq .05$) and participation ($p \leq .05$). Married

employees are more satisfied and more participative than single employees.

These differences, however, are not of any practical significance ($d \leq .50$).

Staff category

There are significant differences between management and clerical staff in respect of satisfaction ($p \leq .05$) and participation ($p \leq .05$). Management appear to be more satisfied and more participative than clerical staff. Clerical staff, however, are more loyal than managerial staff although this difference is not of practical significance ($d \leq .50$).

Ethical considerations

The selected employees were asked to participate voluntarily in the research by completing the questionnaire. Questionnaires were sent to the employees via the normal postal services. A covering letter, which explained the purpose of the study and emphasised the confidentiality of the research project, accompanied the questionnaire. This letter was co-signed by the human resource manager of the bank. The letter also explained that the researchers would use all information for research purposes only. The participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

The participants completed the questionnaire anonymously. The participants returned the questionnaires to the researcher via the postal service. The researcher was available for any questions and concerns and kept the completed questionnaires secure.

TABLE 5: Students' *t*-test – Comparison of mean scores of gender, marital status and staff category in respect of employee commitment.

Employee commitment	Demographics category		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene's test for equality of variances		t	df	Sig. 2-tailed) p	Practical significance d
						F	Sig.				
Gender	Obedience	Male	120	57.303	6.267	0.174	0.677	-1.999	347	0.046	0.22
		Female	229	58.688	6.088	-	-	-1.981	235.710	0.049	-
	Satisfaction	Male	120	14.204	2.901	0.047	0.829	-1.216	347	0.225	-
		Female	229	14.600	2.888	-	-	-1.215	240.791	0.226	-
	Participation	Male	120	14.783	2.488	2.137	0.145	1.784	347	0.075	-
		Female	229	14.236	2.839	-	-	1.859	270.971	0.064	-
Loyalty	Male	120	13.589	4.080	1.910	0.168	-2.912	347	0.004	0.31	
	Female	229	15.064	4.696	-	-	-3.042	272.917	0.003	-	
Marital status	Obedience	Single	132	57.742	5.944	0.003	0.956	-1.090	346	0.276	-
		Married	216	58.486	6.321	-	-	-1.106	290.183	0.269	-
	Satisfaction	Single	132	13.804	3.289	7.065	0.008*	-3.375	346	0.001	-
		Married	216	14.869	2.556	-	-	-3.179	226.673	0.002	0.32
	Participation	Single	132	13.898	2.985	3.987	0.047*	-2.809	346	0.005	-
		Married	216	14.738	2.524	-	-	-2.698	242.267	0.007	0.28
Loyalty	Single	132	14.321	4.820	2.399	0.122	-0.788	346	0.431	-	
	Married	216	14.717	4.373	-	-	-0.770	256.423	0.442	-	
Staff category	Obedience	Management	168	58.460	5.630	4.449	0.036*	0.722	347	0.471	-
		Clerical	181	57.982	6.650	-	-	0.727	344.150	0.468	-
	Satisfaction	Management	168	14.799	2.402	15.015	0.000*	2.090	347	0.037	-
		Clerical	181	14.154	3.262	-	-	2.114	330.247	0.035	0.2
	Participation	Management	168	14.985	2.351	10.650	0.001*	3.765	347	0.000	-
		Clerical	181	13.904	2.955	-	-	3.796	339.193	0.000	0.37
Loyalty	Management	168	14.171	4.241	3.208	0.074	-1.532	347	0.126	-	
	Clerical	181	14.915	4.789	-	-	-1.539	346.253	0.125	-	

N, used as means of number; F, variance; Sig., significance of variance; t, *t*-test; df, degrees of freedom; p, probability value; d, practical significance.

Discussion

Outline of the results

The objective of the study was to identify organisational behaviours that are indicative of employee commitment. A further objective was to determine to what extent perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace influence employees' commitment.

This study made use of a completely new questionnaire to identify behaviours indicative of commitment. By means of factor analysis, the following four factors relating to commitment were extracted: factor 1: obedience, factor 2: satisfaction, factor 3: participation and factor 4: loyalty. These factors relate to the model on commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). *Obedience* relates to continuance commitment. Employees who are very obedient do so because they need to, which relates to Meyer and Allen's component of continuance commitment (Qaisar *et al.*, 2012). *Satisfaction* and *participation* refer to positive feelings about the organisation and relates to Meyer and Allen's component of affective commitment. *Loyalty* reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. According to Meyer and Allen's model, loyalty forms part of normative commitment (Qaisar *et al.*, 2012).

Factor 1: Obedience

This factor referred to employees':

- willingness to treat bank property with care
- to adhere to rules
- promote the bank's image
- keep the workplace clean and tidy
- be punctual without taking unnecessary long breaks
- help others with their work
- stay informed about the bank
- prevent problems with colleagues and avoid absenteeism.

The results revealed that the difference in obedience between men and women was not significant. Research by Khalili and Asmawi (2012), however, showed that women have a greater level of normative commitment than men.

Factor 2: Satisfaction

Employees' satisfaction was measured by the extent they enjoyed their jobs, worked in a pleasant work environment and had a sense of personal satisfaction. Regarding marital status and staff category, married employees and members of management were slightly more satisfied than their counterparts but this difference was not of any practical significance.

Factor 3: Participation

Employees' commitment in terms of participation included their willingness to share ideas for new projects, make suggestions to improve operations, and attend and participate in bank meetings. Regarding marital status and staff category, married employees and members of management

were slightly more participative than their counterparts but this difference was not of any practical significance.

Factor 4: Loyalty

Questions on employees' loyalty referred to a decision to remain with the bank:

- on account of an obligation
- because the employee liked his job
- because resigning did not cross the employee's mind
- because a resignation would have resulted in too high a cost.

Regarding gender, marital status and staff category, there were no differences in respect of loyalty.

Consistent with the findings of previous research by Coetzee, Schreuder and Tladinyane (2007) and Metcalfe and Dick (2002), employee demographics such as gender, ethnicity, marital status and staff category do have an influence on employees' commitment, but the differences are not of any practical significance. According to research by Allen and Meyer (1990) and Mathieu and Zajac (1990), factors such as age and job tenure tend to vary with an individual's position in the organisation and relate positively to continuance commitment (Khalili & Asmawi, 2012). Contrary to the findings of this research that revealed ethnicity does not influence commitment, Vallabh and Donald's (2001) research on White and Black managers suggests that Black managers tend to report significantly higher job satisfaction than White managers. According to Coetzee and Schreuder (2010), Black managers appear to have a significantly lower commitment level than White managers. The contrasting findings on whether ethnicity does have an influence on commitment could be a result of differences in the conceptualisation of commitment.

Treatment of employees in the workplace

Another aim of this study was to determine whether perceptions of fair treatment influence employees' commitment in respect of *obedience*, *satisfaction*, *participation* and *loyalty*. The way employees are treated has an impact on their commitment (work behaviour). According to Coetzee (2004), fair treatment in the workplace involves:

- giving employees autonomy
- treating them with respect
- giving them responsibility
- having expectations of employees.

This study shows that perceptions of fair treatment are positively correlated with commitment (obedience, satisfaction, participation and loyalty). Hill *et al.* (2011) confirm that the treatment of employees has an influence on employee commitment.

Practical implications

Regarding employee characteristics, the research identified three biographical factors that influence employees'

commitment (although not significantly), namely, gender, marital status and staff category. Organisational commitment, however, is also affected by numerous other factors, including the type and variety of work, the autonomy involved in the job, the level of responsibility associated with the job, the quality of the social relationship at work, reward and remuneration, and chances for promotions and career advancement in the organisation (Riggio, 2009). Managers should therefore not make any assumptions about the commitment of employees on the basis of their membership of a particular employee group.

This study indicated that treatment in the workplace in terms of task autonomy, respect, responsibility and expectations are crucial components of fairness. Not only does it convey a message of importance and value to an employee but it also encourages an employee to move from being an ordinary employee to being a committed one.

Limitations of the study

Overall, the results suggest that the measures of commitment are sufficiently reliable and valid to capture the behaviours associated with employee commitment. However, elements that influence employee commitment may depend on various personal, situational and organisational factors and support Greenberg's (1987) concerns about the context sensitivity of behaviour and attitudes. Not limiting the sample to a single organisation could have resolved some of the problems relating to the context sensitivity.

The commitment behaviours that were investigated represent a subset of the many types of behaviours found in organisations. Perceived injustices produce a range of responses including psychological distress, sabotage, withdrawal and theft (Greenberg, 1987), hence the need for future research to explore contextual moderators in order to improve the measurement of employees' commitment.

The researcher feels that better items could have been selected for the questionnaire. This may explain why the distribution of scores of the factors for commitment was not normal and did not yield significant results. This is also reflected in the low practical significance values (effect sizes) of the multiple regression models. More significant results might have been obtained if clarification about the meaning of commitment had been provided in the questionnaire.

Conclusion

This study identified four categories of behaviour displayed by committed employees, namely, obedience, satisfaction, participation and loyalty. When employees do not engage in these kinds of behaviours, managers should investigate the lack of commitment. One possible explanation could be the manner in which employees perceive their treatment in the workplace to be fair. This study did support previous research findings in that biographical factors such as gender, ethnicity or age do not influence commitment significantly.

One could not, for example, argue that men are less or more committed than women. However, the results did reveal that perceptions of fair treatment in the workplace do have an influence on the commitment of employees.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that no financial or personal relationship(s) would have inappropriately influenced them in writing this paper.

Authors' contributions

M.C. (University of South Africa) was responsible for the statistical analysis, findings and results and J.B. (University of South Africa) conducted the literature review.

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