

People Performance Enablers in Relation to Employees' Psychological Attachment to the Organisation

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between a set of people performance enablers and psychological attachment behavioural states in a variety of South African work settings. The sample (N = 582) comprised mostly males (69%) and black Africans from organisations in the manufacturing (17%), financial services (14%), information technology (16%) and the non-profit sectors (53%). Data on employees' perceptions of performance enablers and their psychological attachment to the particular organisation were collected using the Psychological Work Immersion Scale (PWIS: Veldsman, 2013). The data were analysed using confirmatory factor analysis to reveal the structure of the people enablers and psychological attachment variables in the South African work settings. Structural equation modelling was used to predict psychological attachment from the performance enabler indicators. The findings provided evidence that employees' perceptions of performance enablers significantly explain their level of

psychological attachment (commitment, motivation and work absorption). Manager credibility appears as a key performance enabler and commitment as a strong element of psychological attachment. The research contributes to the literature on individual and organisational performance by extending research on work psychology in the South African context.

Keywords: performance enablers, psychological attachment, psychological work immersion, commitment, employee motivation, absorption

Fierce global competitive pressures in an ever-changing economic landscape continue to compel business leaders to develop strategic frameworks that increase employee productivity, client satisfaction and profitability amidst resource scarcity (Filipkowski, 2013; Mogotsi, Boon, & Fletcher 2011). People performance indicators and employees' engagement, commitment and motivation in the workplace have gained prominence in strategic decision-making (Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Mogotsi et al., 2011). Moreover, linking the factors that enable employees to achieve higher levels of performance and which also increase their psychological attachment to the organisation have now become part of the human capital strategic business value chain (Filipkowski, 2013).

This study investigated the relationship between a set of people performance enablers and psychological behavioural states that enhance employees' psychological attachment to the organisation. Veldsman (2013) operationalised these factors to comprise psychological work immersion. The term 'psychological work immersion' refers to a pervasive state of deep emotional, cognitive and physical identification with and psychological attachment to the work experience as a consequence of specific performance enabling organisational factors within a particular social-cultural context (Veldsman, 2013).

Psychological work immersion is distinguished from concepts such as job involvement, flow and work engagement. Job involvement refers to the degree to which the job situation is central to the person and her/his identity (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007), while flow and work engagement are seen to be related to the general wellbeing of the employee (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Work engagement describes an employee's sense of energetic involvement

and effective connection with their work activities (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzáles-Romá, & Bakker, 2002) while flow refers to the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Psychological work immersion captures *inter alia* Kahn's (1990; 1992) notion of psychological presence which describes the experiential state enabling organisation members to draw deeply on their personal selves in role performance. A state of psychological presence is characterised by feeling and being fully attentive, connected, integrated and focused in moments of one's work role performances. These personally engaging behaviours involve the channelling of personal energies into physical, cognitive and emotional labours (Kahn, 1992).

People performance enablers relate to a psychological behavioural state of attachment for overall performance of the business (Veldsman, 2013) resulting from the employee's emotional-cognitive identification with or psychological attachment to the work and the organisation.

<insert figure 1 approximately here>

Psychological Attachment

Psychological attachment refers to the employee's sense of organisational commitment, work absorption and intrinsic motivation (Veldsman, 2013). *Commitment* refers to the extent to which the employee identifies with the organisation and what it stands for. Organisational commitment relates to employees' belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values along with a readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and to remain a member (Oyewobi, Suleiman & Muhammad-Jamil 2012; Zeinabadi 2010). Organisational performance and success have been linked to employees' organisational commitment (Tziner 2006). Strong organisational identification has also been linked to low turnover intention (Aggarwal & D'Souza 2012).

Absorption refers to the extent to which the employee is involved in and feels attached to his/her work. Absorption is seen as an aspect of work engagement (Schaufeli et al. 2002). A supportive or enabling work environment (organisational and social support, job resources and growth opportunities) has been related to employees' work engagement and willingness to involve themselves at higher levels in their jobs (Coetzer & Rothmann 2007).

Employee motivation refers to the extent the employee feels intrinsically motivated and energised by the work and the level of enjoyment h/she experiences from being engaged in the work. The classical work of Hackman and Oldman (1980) showed that employees experience intrinsic motivation and psychological meaningfulness when their jobs are experienced as challenging, demand a variety of skills, provide autonomy, have a clear link with the overall organisational goals, and a deep level of enjoyment and personal mastery are sensed in the completion of tasks. Intrinsically rewarding or motivating tasks takes place through experiences of positive emotions (Catalino & Fredrickson 2011; Rothmann 2014).

People Performance Enablers

Employee performance enablers include: manager credibility, appreciative feedback, strategic connection, intrateam effectiveness, enabling environment and individual congruence.

Manager credibility refers to the extent to which managers are able to connect employees psychologically to the organisational purpose by treating them in a respectful, fair and consistent manner and establishing a trust relationship. Research has shown that trust in work relationships has important implications for job performance, organisational citizen behaviour, organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Roussin & Webber, 2012). The behaviour of managers and how they treat their employees shape the perceptions of employees regarding the climate in their team or business unit (Jiang, Lin, & Lin, 2010; Roussin & Webber, 2012). Manager credibility and trustworthiness help create a psychologically and morally safe work climate in which innovation and risk-taking can be facilitated (Jiang et al., 2010). Caldwell and Dixon (2009) view leader trust as an empowering organisational construct that is vital to enhancing employee self-efficacy.

Appreciative feedback refers to the perceived meaningfulness of performance discussions and the extent to which employees receive feedback on their performance and strengths. Performance feedback has been related to enhanced employee self-efficacy, problem solving behaviour and motivation (Jordan & Audia, 2012). Performance management has also been found to enhance employees' organisational commitment (Lin, Lin, & Lin, 2012). Performance feedback is an important motivational aspect of the performance management system as it helps to identify problems, facilitates a search for solutions and greater risk tolerance and increases the propensity of employees to implement changes to activities (Jordan & Audia, 2012). Risk-taking

behaviour and innovation are regarded as important for business growth and sustaining a competitive edge (Pandey & De, 2013).

Strategic connection refers to the perceived connection between the organisational goals and the expected contributions of employees. People are seen to be the promoters of excellent organisational performance (Mafini & Pooe, 2013). Alignment of organisational and team goals and values and the employee's performance goals and values are therefore deemed crucial for psychological identification and engagement with the work and organisation (Aggarwal & D'Souza, 2012; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2013). The classical work by Hackman and Oldham (1980) on job characteristics emphasizes the importance of perceived task significance which flows from the link between the employee's work and the overall organisational goals.

Intrateam effectiveness refers to the extent to which the employee perceives co-workers as competent, being treated with dignity and respect and being supported by members of the team in achieving goals. Research shows that individual team member behaviours affect the manner in which team members will interact and approach required tasks. Team members who possess high levels of self-efficacy generally help to facilitate positive team-level performance outcomes (Dierdorff & Ellington, 2012). Being treated with dignity and respect is regarded as important for creating cooperative relationships in teams. Perceptions of trustworthiness generally develop over time as co-workers exhibit degrees of competence, benevolence and integrity towards one another (Roussin & Webber, 2012). Positive team interactions and relations relate to stronger psychological identification with the workplace, the job, co-workers and the organisation as a whole (Rothmann, 2014).

Enabling environment refers to the extent to which the employee perceives the policies, procedures and physical environment in the organisation as enabling for work performance. The perceived proper implementation and management of HR policies and procedures have been shown to increase organisational commitment and low turnover intention (Juhdi, Pa'Wan, Milan, Hansaram, & Othman, 2012).

Individual congruence refers to the employee's perceived fit between her/his strengths, competencies and skills and the requirements of the job. Work role fit and the sense of being able to master one's work are associated with positive work experiences and positive individual and organisational outcomes (Rothmann, 2014).

Goals of the Study

This study sought to examine how organisational people performance variables relate to employees' levels of psychological attachment (commitment, work absorption and motivation) in the South African organisational context. The specific research question was as follows: How and to what extent do people performance enablers explain individuals' level of psychological attachment in a predominantly non-profit organisational setting?

Method

Participants

The participants were a non-probability sample (N = 582) of employees employed across various industries including manufacturing (17%), financial services (14%), information technology (16%) and the non-profit sectors (53%). The sample was predominantly represented by 69% males and 67% black Africans. In terms of age, the majority of the sample was in the early career phase (59%: 21 to 35 years) and establishment career phase (39%: 36 to 50 years). In terms of organisational tenure, the sample was predominantly represented by participants who had less than a year to 2 years work experience (41%) and those who had 3 to ten years (54%) work experience.

Measuring instrument

Participants completed the Psychological Work Immersion Scale [PWIS] (Veldsman, 2013). The PWIS is a 30 item (nine subscales) Likert-type measure (1 = never; 4 = always) of individuals' perceptions of six people performance enabler indicators (manager credibility, appreciative feedback, strategic connection, intrateam effectiveness, enabling environment and individual congruence) and three states of psychological attachment (commitment, absorption and motivation). Examples of items for the *people performance enablers*: manager credibility (3 items; e.g. “Does your manager treat everybody fairly and consistently?”); appreciative feedback (3 items; e.g. “How often does your manager give feedback on how well you are doing?”); strategic connection (3 items; e.g. “How often does management talk about what the organisation needs to be good at in order to achieve its goals?”); intrateam effectiveness (3 items; e.g. “Do the people in your section help and support each other when you have to achieve

a goal?"); enabling environment (3 items; e.g. "Do the policies and procedures in the organisation enable you to do your job?"); and individual congruence (6 items; e.g. "To what extent does the work you do help your organisation to achieve its goals?"). Examples of items for *psychological attachment*: commitment (3 items; e.g. "Do you believe in the organisation and what it stands for?"), absorption (3 items; e.g. "Do you ever find that you want to continue with your work in your free time?"), and employee motivation (3 items; e.g. "Do you feel happy and cheerful when you are doing your work?").

Exploratory Factor Analysis and Rasch analysis by Veldsman (2013) revealed acceptable construct validity and internal consistency reliability of the scale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the overall people performance enabler subscale was .90 and for the overall psychological attachment subscale it was .81. Table 1 shows that the PWIS inter-subscale correlations ranged between $r \geq .27$ and $r \leq .83$ (small to large practical effect size), suggesting acceptable construct validity according to the guidelines of Tabachnik and Fidell (2007).

<insert Table 1 approximately here>

Procedure

Permission for the study was granted by the management of the participating organisations. Participants individually consented. Data were collected at the premises of the participating organisations using a secure online platform after permission and ethical clearance for the research were obtained. Each questionnaire had a cover letter that stated the purpose of the research and explained the nature of the data to be collected. The cover letter was distributed by the senior leadership team who sponsored the research initiative internally. The cover letter invited respondents to participate voluntarily in the study and assured them that their individual responses would remain anonymous and confidential. In order to minimise possible coercion of participants by the senior leadership, individual participation was anonymous and all responses were only available to the researcher who collected the data.

Statistical Analysis

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using IBM SPSS Amos 21.0 (IBM SPSS Amos 2012), to verify the nine-factor structure of the people enabler and psychological attachment variables. Second, the hypothesised relationship between the people performance enablers and its underlying construct variables, and the psychological attachment construct and its supporting construct variables were tested using latent variable modelling. Specifically, path analysis (structural equation modelling) was used to assess the overall relationship between the factors associated with the people performance enablers construct and the factors associated with the psychological attachment construct. The CFA and SEM goodness-of-fit statistics were evaluated by using the following absolute goodness-of-fit indices: the chi-square test (CMIN), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The following relative goodness-of-fit indices were used to evaluate the model fit: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). In line with guidelines provided by Garson (2009), we assumed that an adequate fit of the structural model to the measurement data existed when we obtain a CMIN/df between 1 and 5, CFI and TLI values of .90 or higher, a RMSEA of .08 or lower, and a SRMR of .05 or lower.

Results

Structure of the People Enabler and Psychological Attachment Variables A series of confirmatory analyses were conducted to estimate the distinctness of the assessed variables. The best fit model confirmed that the nine-factor solution of the PWIS revealed a good fit of the data. The fit indices were as follows: CMIN = 868.55 (CMIN/df = 2.07; $p = .00$); RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .045, CFI = .92 and TLI = .90 (good fit), which is in line with the established joint fit criteria (Garson, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005). The CFA measurement model revealed that the PWIS comprised two second-order factors (people performance enablers and psychological attachment). The people performance enabler factor was represented by six first-order factors (manager credibility, appreciative feedback, strategic connection, intrateam effectiveness, enabling environment and individual congruence). The psychological attachment factor was represented by three first-order factors (commitment, absorption and motivation).

Predicting Psychological Attachment from People Enablers

As shown in figure 2, the path analysis showed that the data for the PWIS fit the baseline measurement model well, confirming construct validity for each of the people performance enablers and psychological attachment subscale constructs respectively, and the predictive validity of the people performance enablers construct in terms of the psychological attachment construct. The fit indices were CMIN = 124.17 (CMIN/df = 4.78; $p = .00$); RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .045, CFI = .94 and TLI = .92 (adequate fit), which is in line with the established joint fit criteria. All the items loadings were moderate to strong (>.39 - >.83) indicators of the nine second-order constructs of the PWIS.

<insert figure 2 approximately here>

Figure 2 shows that manager credibility (.74) contributes the most in explaining the variance in the people performance enablers construct. Commitment (.81) contributes the most in explaining the variance in the psychological attachment construct. The goodness-of-fit statistics further indicates the people performance enabler construct variables as significant predictors of the psychological attachment construct variables (.83; $p = .000$). The squared multiple correlations data revealed that the model explains 68% ($R^2 = .68$; large practical effect; $p = .00$) of the variance in the psychological attachment construct.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between a set of people performance enablers and psychological attachment behavioural states as measured by the Psychological Work Immersion Scale developed by Veldsman (2013). The results confirmed the multidimensional nature of the construct of psychological work immersion and the distinctness of the nine subconstructs as proposed by Veldsman (2013). The results suggest that the PWIS measured the intended underlying constructs relevant to overall psychological work immersion construct and each subscale dimension adequately. The path analysis (structural equation modelling) results confirmed the construct validity of the PWIS sub constructs of people performance enablers and psychological attachment. The results further provided empirical evidence for Veldsman's

(2013) theoretical proposition that people performance enablers are important drivers of psychological attachment in the psychological work immersion equation.

Manager credibility was shown to be the strongest contributor to the people performance enablers. It appears from the results that the extent to which managers are able to connect employees psychologically to the organisational purpose by treating them in a respectful, fair and consistent manner and establishing a trust relationship (manager credibility) contributed the most to the people performance enablers. This finding corroborate research suggesting that leader behaviour and trustworthiness have important implications for job performance, organisational citizen behaviour, organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Roussin & Webber, 2012). Employee commitment or the extent to which the employee identifies with the organisation and what it stands for also appears to have contributed the most in explaining the psychological attachment of the participants. This finding is in agreement with research showing that commitment relate to employees' belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values along with a readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and to remain a member (Oyewobi et al., 2012; Zeinabadi, 2010). The findings of the present study regarding manager credibility and commitment could be attributed to the three psychological congruency conditions of psychological work immersion outlined by Veldsman (2013) which appear to facilitate authentic signature experiences. Higher levels of engagement, commitment, satisfaction and performance have been associated with authentic signature experiences (Aggarwal & D'Souza, 2012; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2013).

Practical Implications for Managers and Practitioners

Managers and organisation development practitioners could identify the overall level of psychological work immersion of employees and the people performance enablers that may potentially contribute to high or low levels of psychological attachment. Strengthening the managerial practices and behaviours that underpin the people performance enablers and that contribute to the psychological attachment of employees, may potentially contribute to the overall business performance of the business (Veldsman, 2013). Leadership development interventions that enhance manager credibility may further help to increase employees' levels of

organisational commitment. The findings of the present study highlighted these two elements as important enablers of individuals' performance and their commitment.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Several limitations associated with the present study are acknowledged. First, the sample was skewed towards predominantly males and black Africans and cannot be generalised in terms of other gender and race groups. Future research should attempt to obtain larger representativeness regarding gender and race to reflect the multi-cultural work environment. Testing the validity of the PWIS in terms of these groups should also be initiated. Second, although the sample was obtained from various industries, the results cannot be generalised to these contexts because of the limited sample size. Further testing and refinement of the PWIS are recommended in a broad range of industries with representative samples of age, race, and gender groups. Third, the PWIS is a self-report instrument and, thus, may have produced inflated relations between the constructs. The fact that senior managers were involved with the participant recruitment may also have biased the data reporting due to possible coercion to participate in the study.

Conclusion

The results of the study provided initial evidence for the validity of the nine-factor PWIS as a useful measure of psychological work immersion. The people performance enablers were shown as positive predictors of psychological attachment. Notwithstanding the limitations of the study, the research on the validity of the PWIS as a measure of people performance enablers and psychological attachment provided insight into the construct of psychological work immersion and the association with employee and organisational performance. It is concluded that the study holds potentially important implications for organisational practice and future research. The research contributes to the literature on individual and organisational performance by extending research on work psychology in the South African context.

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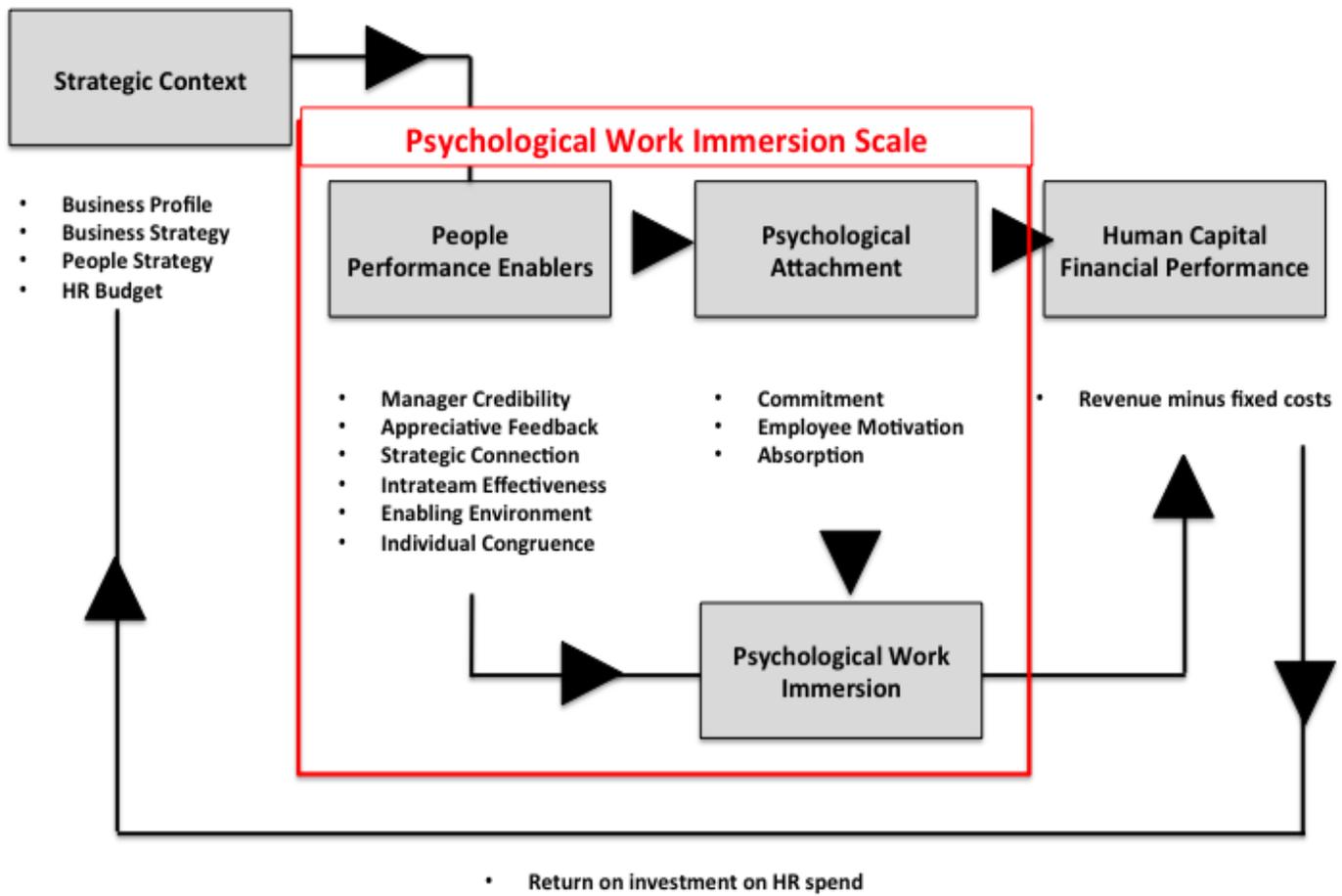


Figure 1. Conceptual overview of the theoretical constructs underpinning the concept of 'psychological work immersion'

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Psychological Work Immersion Scale

| | Scale variable | M | SD | α | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|----|-----------------------------|------|-----|----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| 1 | People performance enablers | 3.07 | .46 | .90 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Manager credibility | 2.97 | .90 | .84 | .74*** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Appreciative feedback | 2.71 | .93 | .78 | .68*** | .52*** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Strategic connection | 2.97 | .74 | .73 | .69*** | .51*** | .51*** | - | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Intrateam effectiveness | 3.04 | .66 | .66 | .56*** | .34*** | .34*** | .29*** | - | | | | | | |
| 6 | Enabling environment | 2.69 | .76 | .58 | .66*** | .45*** | .28*** | .42*** | .28*** | - | | | | | |
| 7 | Individual congruence | 3.30 | .44 | .67 | .71*** | .40*** | .32*** | .42*** | .36*** | .37*** | - | | | | |
| 8 | Psychological attachment | 3.10 | .56 | .81 | .83*** | .50*** | .40*** | .42*** | .36*** | .48*** | .56*** | - | | | |
| 9 | Commitment | 3.14 | .78 | .69 | .75*** | .50*** | .40*** | .43*** | .32*** | .41*** | .41*** | .87*** | - | | |
| 10 | Absorption | 3.02 | .55 | .52 | .60*** | .29*** | .30*** | .29*** | .29*** | .43*** | .40*** | .75*** | .50*** | - | |
| 11 | Motivation | 3.14 | .71 | .72 | .68*** | .42*** | .29*** | .29*** | .27*** | .32*** | .47*** | .83*** | .55*** | .45*** | - |

Note: N = 582. *** $p \leq .001$ – statistically significant.

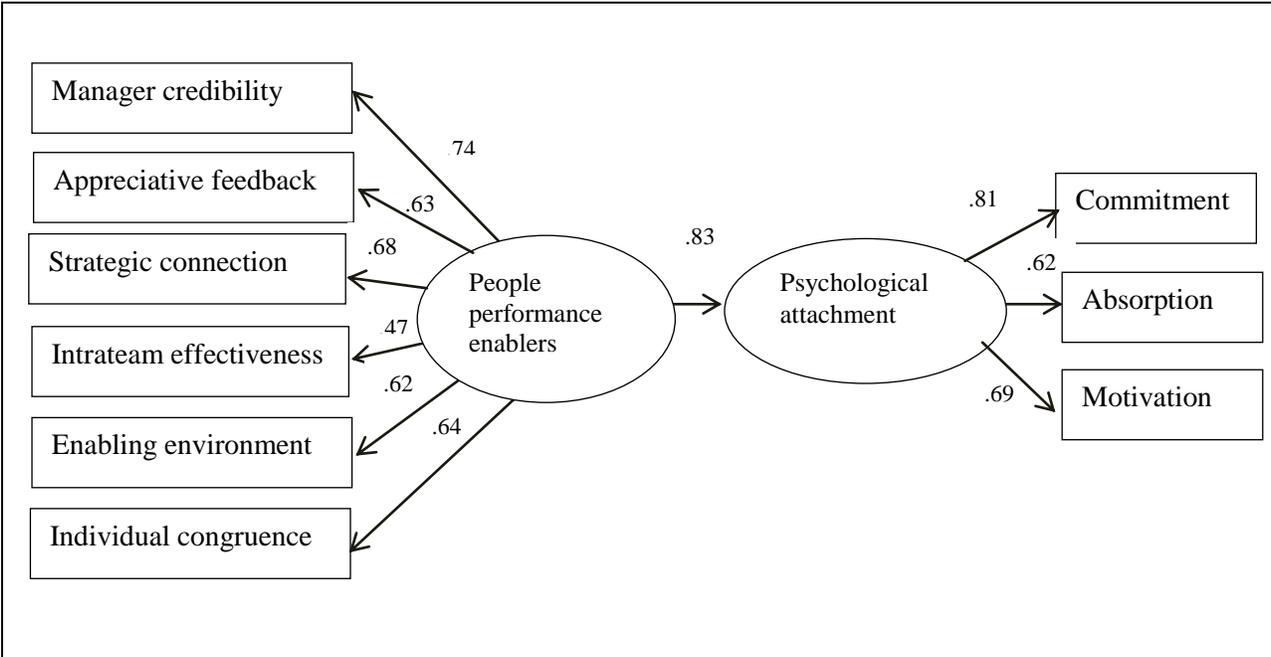


Figure 2. Data fit between the people performance enablers and psychological attachment constructs of the Psychological Work Immersion Scale. Notes: Entries represent standardised regression weights. Structural pathways are significant at the *** $p = .001$ and ** $p = .01$ levels.