

# Continuance in organizational commitment: The role of emotional intelligence, work-life balance support, and work-related stress

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## Abstract

The study uses the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory to examine the effects of work-related stress, life-work balance support, and emotional intelligence on the organizational continuance commitment of workers in under-resourced organizations. Quantitative cross-sectional survey data were collected from 212 workers at selected independently owned schools in western Zimbabwe. Correlation and multiple-regression analyses techniques were used to analyze the data. Positive significant relationships were found between all three independent variables (work-related stress, work-life balance support and emotional intelligence) and organizational continuance commitment. Hayes' PROCESS analyses results demonstrated that emotional intelligence significantly moderated the effect of work-related stress on organizational continuance commitment, and that of work-life balance support and organizational continuance commitment. The results highlight the importance of factors including work-related stress, work-life balance support, and emotional intelligence in efforts to help inadequately resourced entities retain employees.

## KEYWORDS

cross-sectional survey, emotional intelligence, job demands-resources, staff retention

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Committed employees are crucial to organizational success in today's demanding economic environment where workers are encouraged to exceed expectations to help their employers to compete more effectively (Rubel et al., 2021; Shabir & Gani, 2020). Such workers usually identify with and have a deep understanding of their organizations' aims and ideals (Lambert et al., 2017). Due to its practical significance, the concept of organizational commitment, which refers to a psychological attachment that employ-

ees may have to their specific organizations, is common in management and organizational studies literature, particularly that which concerns developed countries (Choi et al., 2015; Fischer et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2020; Meyer & Allen, 1984). Of note, many of the previous studies rely on Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-components of organizational commitment, namely affective organizational commitment (a favorable emotional connection to an organization), normative organizational commitment (perception that an individual is inextricably linked to the organization once he or she joins), and continuance

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organizational commitment (the perceived cost or reward of leaving an organization).

The purpose of this study is to decipher the dynamics underlying the continuance organizational commitment variable which has been neglected in previous organizational and human resource management research (Farukh et al., 2017). This is a deficiency in the current corpus of research about organizational commitment, given the centrality of the idea of continuance organizational commitment in management practice. The study recognizes that despite the trivialization of the continuance organizational commitment variable, some researchers affirm that it aids organizational performance and success in (1) entrepreneurial entities (Abdul Rashid et al., 2003), (2) situations where workers are less unionized and institutional leaders are dominant, and (3) where workers believe that working harder for organizational success will enhance their long-term personal interests (Suliman & Iies, 2000). In the current study, the focus is exclusively on this variable due to its relevance to the unique condition of workers in under-resourced institutions functioning in contexts with few better alternative job prospects. In such circumstances, an individual's decision to quit or remain in an organization is heavily influenced by the payoffs associated with leaving or remaining. Thus, leaders of such organizations cannot afford to discount the continuance organizational commitment variable's relevance. In addition, previous studies have focused overwhelmingly on the affective and normative dimensions with scant regard for continuance organizational commitment.

The present study draws on the views of a sample of employees of selected independent but non-trust funded schools in western Zimbabwe. Many of these schools are severely under-resourced, struggle to retain staff, and occasionally provide subpar services to students (Mangwaya et al., 2014; Mhandu & Dambudzo, 2016; Nyagadza & Mazuruse, 2021; Tichagwa, 2012). It is worth noting that managers and leaders in these organizations struggle to reduce high staff turnover, even though departing employees have few job options in the Zimbabwean labor market. According to the Zimstats (2021), only 26% of the country's employed population worked in the formal sector, highlighting the country's ongoing job problem.

A key gap in the literature, which this study addresses, is the insufficient explanation of how psychosocial factors such as employees' emotional intelligence, work-related stress, and work balance support intersect to influence continuance organizational commitment. To our knowledge, no previous research has examined the intricate dynamics underlying the relationships between these factors in a single study. Such dynamics clarify, partially, the various ways in which individuals' emotional qualities, job-related pressures, and employee support structures

influence employee commitment. By utilizing a novel conceptual model based on the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory to examine the moderating effect of the emotional intelligence variable on the relationships between work-related stress and continuance organizational commitment on the one hand, and work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment on the other, this research contributes to the body of literature on organizational commitment.

More precisely, while it is accepted that organizations benefit from employees who have high emotional intelligence (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020; Koubova & Buchko, 2013; Sahoo & Sia, 2015), there is minimal research on how the variable influences the continuance organizational commitment of the workers. Although emotional intelligence has previously been connected to beneficial personal emotional reactions, task performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Alferaih, 2017; Latif et al., 2017), organizational studies have only lately begun to explain the psychological process by which it influences such results. Understanding such processes sheds light on the impact of emotional intelligence on desired organizational outcomes. According to Varshney and Varshney (2020) and Zysberg et al. (2017), emotional intelligence can give a helpful coping mechanism in response to difficult work situations. As a result, we speculate in this study that the emotional intelligence variable affects the impact of work-related stress and work-life balance support on continuance organizational commitment.

The collective effects of work-related stress, work-life balance support, and emotional intelligence on continuance organizational commitment needs closer scrutiny given their link to organizational performance-related matters. For instance, previous studies have shown that if work-related stress is not appropriately handled in organizations, it often leads to worker dissatisfaction and increases labor turnover (Ketkaew et al., 2020; H. Kim & Kim, 2021; Van Diepen et al., 2022). Other studies have demonstrated that a low level of tension between work and home roles contributes to successful employee engagement at work, career satisfaction, and organizational involvement (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015; Lambert et al., 2006). Equally significant, emotional intelligence, "an awareness and ability to regulate one's emotions" (Koman & Wolff, 2008, p. 56), is understood to be critical to individual decision-making processes relating to matters of personal and emotional significance in work environments. Against this background, the overarching research question is as follows:

What effect does emotional intelligence, work-life balance support and work-related

stress have on continuance organizational commitment?

The remainder of the article is arranged as follows. Firstly, the literature review is presented in the next section. Secondly, the research design and data collection methods then follow. Thirdly, details of data analyses and results are presented. Fourthly, the theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed. Lastly, conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future research are presented.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In this section, we present the theoretical framework of the present study and review the existing literature on continuance organizational commitment, emotional intelligence, work-related stress, and work-life balance support. We also hypothesize relationships between the four variables and present a conceptual model depicting the proposed interlinkages.

### 2.1 | Theoretical framework

The versatile JD-R theory is a useful lens for deconstructing and interpreting the inter-relationships between the variables in the current study. Demerouti et al.'s (2001) JD-R theory was originally framed for the study of the antecedents and consequences of work engagement but has in the past been used to study how job characteristics related other workplace outcomes such as employees' well-being (Mudrak et al., 2018) and turnover intentions (Carlson et al., 2017). The theory posits that a general work setting consists of job demands, ("aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs"), and job resources ("those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may be functional in achieving work goals; reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, and stimulate personal growth and development") (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). An excess of job demands over resources has detrimental consequences such as burnout, exhaustion, staff frustration, and disengagement from work, while the inverse energizes workers and generates beneficial results. Bakker et al. (2005) and Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) found that about 60% of the interactions between job demands and job resources confirmed the above-mentioned relationship. Recognizing that human behavior is the result of the combination of personal and contextual

factors, Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) successfully extended the JD-R framework by integrating the variable of personal resources (psychological characteristics or aspects of the self). Nonetheless, the literature is unclear about how personal resources should be classified within the JD-R framework (Schaufeli, 2017). To this end, this study contributes to the development of theory through this study by proposing a conceptual model guided by the JD-R model that incorporates emotional intelligence as a critical personal resource that moderates the collective influence of work-related stress (a job demand) and work-life balance support (a job resource) on continuance organizational commitment.

### 2.2 | Continuance organizational commitment

Meyer and Allen (1984, p. 289) define continuance organizational commitment as "the extent to which employees feel that they are committed to their organizations when considering the costs of leaving the organization." Workers become psychologically attached to their employers over time (Clarke, 2010). This is because workers generally invest in long-standing stays in organizations (Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2013). Ultimately, they consider these investments when contemplating leaving an organization (Lambert et al., 2015). If new job opportunities arise elsewhere, individuals make cost-benefit comparisons of quitting or remaining using opportunity costs as a criterion. Continuance organizational commitment is stronger when personal stakes in the current role surpass the perceived benefits of a new job offer (Wang et al., 2010).

Results from research on the effects of continuance organizational commitment on organizational performance are mixed. Some suggest continuance organizational commitment does not enhance performance (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2018; Rahman et al., 2015) and entrenches employee resistance to change (Genevičiūtė-Janonienė & Endriulaitienė, 2014). However, others claim that the nature of the relationship is circumstantial. For instance, results of Abdul Rashid et al.'s (2003) study of the influence of culture and organizational commitment on financial performance in Malaysian firms suggested that in corporations with entrepreneurial cultures, continuance organizational commitment has a greater influence on organizational success. Suliman and Iles (2000) also assert that where labor is less unionized and managers are powerful, workers work harder to ensure continued membership of their organizations. In such circumstances, continuance organizational commitment motivates employees to work harder and enhance firm performance to protect personal interests.

### 2.3 | Emotional intelligence and continuance organizational commitment

Different scholars interpret emotional intelligence in various ways. However, two major models (abilities and mixed) are prominent in the literature (Meisler & Vigoda-gadot, 2014). The fundamental difference between the two is that one regards emotional intelligence as a learned capability and the other treats it as an inherent human attribute (Ghuman, 2011). Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) define emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate between them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.” The definition fits the abilities model and relates emotional intelligence to competence and aptitude. According to AL-Abrow et al. (2020), emotional intelligence comprises four related sub-components, that is (1) the ability to detect emotions in oneself or others, (2) the skill to utilize emotions to one’s advantage, (3) the ability to make sense of feelings and desires, and (4) the power to control emotions. In contrast, mixed models, as represented by Goleman (1998) and Petrides and Furnham (2006), characterize emotional intelligence as an assemblage of emotional qualities based on natural personality characteristics such as drive, decisiveness, versatility, flexibility, competence, and friendliness. That said, there are questions about the legitimacy of emotional intelligence as a unique construct since it overlaps with some psychological notions such as personality and self-efficacy. The line between emotional intelligence and psychological capital, which includes mental resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, is even more blurred (Luthans et al., 2007). Both psychological constructs are multifaceted resources to workers for coping with different workplace challenges, but they have distinct characteristics. While cognitive coping capabilities are a big part of psychological capital, emotional intelligence includes additional factors such as motives, mood, self-assessment, and self-esteem (Rahimnia et al., 2013). Another distinction is that emotional intelligence is portrayed as a more solid personality attribute or set of mental abilities, whereas psychological capital is a more dynamic mental state amenable to further development (Gomes da Costa et al., 2021).

Koubova and Buchko (2013) claim that emotions are fundamental to humankind and impact behavior. For some, emotions facilitate fast thought and decision-making, and yet in others, they overwhelm and clouds rationality (Öngöre, 2020). Usually, individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to deal with emotional issues in life compared to those with lower levels (Ozor & Eze, 2018). This perception underscores Aslam et al.’s (2016) depiction of emotional

intelligence as a skill that workers can use to optimize their performance.

Emotional intelligence attracts keen interest from management scholars and practitioners due to its perceived impact on interactions in work environments. For instance, Anari (2012) highlights the importance of teachers’ emotional intelligence to successful teaching in schools. Although evidence of the effect of emotional intelligence in the educational environment is developing, previous studies showed that it improves personal performance in work and non-work environments, aids organizational performance and success (Alferaih, 2017; Koubova & Buchko, 2013), and influences leadership styles (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017). Emotional intelligence is also linked to psychological capital which, in turn, is related to greater organizational commitment in the literature (Sahoo & Sia, 2015). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Emotional intelligence is a statistically significant predictor of continuance organizational commitment.

### 2.4 | Moderating effect of emotional intelligence

Workers often experience bodily, emotional, and mental overload which if not effectively managed cause stress (Reinke & Ohly, 2021), anxiety, burn-out (Karakuş, 2013), job dissatisfaction, absenteeism (Anari, 2012; Arif & Ilyas, 2013) and other negative behaviors and attitudes at workplaces (Michael et al., 2009). People with elevated emotional intelligence deal better with emotional burdens than someone with lower levels (Carmeli, 2003; Carmeli et al., 2009; Latif et al., 2017; Zysberg et al., 2017). Hence, the ability to recognize and regulate emotional variables is a useful resource for lowering personal susceptibility to negative environments (Karakuş, 2013) and ameliorates resultant adverse attitudes and behaviors of workers (Carmeli, 2003; Carmeli et al., 2009; Latif et al., 2017).

Koubova and Buchko’s (2013, p. 706) “emotions and emotional intelligence in work-life balance” framework underscore the positive contribution of work and private life events in the progressive development of emotional intelligence in people. The framework posits that emotional skills which enable people to cope with omnipresent emotions emerge through personal dealings with family, friends, mentors, as well as interactions at work at different stages in life. Once acquired, emotional intelligence enables an individual to manage conflicting demands of the life and work domains, which otherwise could have diminished their work performance and satisfaction with

their workplace. Against this background, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H2: Emotional intelligence moderates the effect of work-related stress on the continuance organizational commitment of staff members.
- H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the effect of work-life balance support on the continuance organizational commitment of staff members.

## 2.5 | Work-life balance and continuance organizational commitment

Workers divide their time between work and family responsibilities (Stoilova et al., 2020). How they manage these demands is extensively studied by management scholars who use the term work-life balance to describe the phenomenon (Chang et al., 2010). According to Dilmaghani and Tabvuma (2019), work-life balance refers to how individuals manage and are happy with their work and personal life activities. Optimal work-life balance is not fixed and differs by the person (Wheatley, 2012). Inability to strike a balance leads to role conflict and affects one's general well-being and performance at work (Mas-Machuca et al., 2016; Mello & Tomei, 2021; Salehi et al., 2020). The outcome of Arif and Ilyas's (2013) study at selected private universities in Pakistan revealed that work-life balance impacted employees' work attitudes and behavior, job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. This resonates with other studies that link work-life imbalance to workplace burnout (Shields & Chen, 2021), job stress (Kim & Cho, 2020), career discontent and withdrawal attitudes (Shin & Jeong, 2020). Against this backdrop, we postulate the following:

- H4: Work-life balance support at work is a statistically significant predictor of the continuance organizational commitment of organizational members.

## 2.6 | Work-related stress and continuance organizational commitment

According to Guinot et al. (2014 p. 99), work-related stress is "the feeling of personal dysfunction an employee experiences as a result of perceived conditions or workplace events." Griffin (2001) describes job-related stress as a personal reaction to perceived incapacity induced by work-environment events. Similarly, George and Zakkariya (2015) depict job-related stress as mental and physical responses caused by distressing stimuli from a working environment. Guinot et al. (2014) claim work-related stress

arises when there is a disparity between an individual's expectations and their ability to fulfil such obligations. In academia unfulfilled career expectations, student misconduct, poor working environments, poor working relationships, and paucity of growth prospects are acknowledged as major causes of teacher stress (Harmsen et al., 2018).

Previous studies show a negative correlation between work stress and organizational commitment (Ngirande, 2021). Besides, there are indications that high job stress erodes workers' sense of institutional identity (Bright, 2021) and raises job dissatisfaction, leading to lower continuance organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Work stress also triggers negative workplace behavior by employees (Forster et al., 2020), frustration and attrition (Harmsen et al., 2018), and plans to exit organizations (Pogodzinski et al., 2013). However, Michael et al.'s (2009) study on the effect of work-related stress on continuance organizational commitment based on a random sample of coordinators in an educational mentoring organization found no significant association between the two variables. Considering the inconclusive findings cited above, we hypothesize that:

- H5 Work-related stress is a statistically significant predictor of continuance organizational commitment of organizational members.

## 3 | METHODS

### 3.1 | Respondents and settings

Respondents comprised employees of various designations at non-trust and non-religious organizations-owned educational institutions in the urban (central business district and residential) areas of western Zimbabwe. Although they are relatively under-resourced, these schools employ approximately 1500 workers in various capacities in the western region of the country (Chigeda, 2019). A convenient sample of 212 respondents was drawn from teaching and non-teaching staff at the said institutions. While teaching and non-teaching employees have distinct task and job expectations, they were included in the same sample and analyzed together since they worked under similar conditions of service and, thus, were expected to demonstrate similar response patterns to the factors examined in this study. Of the sampled respondents, 55.66% were males, 50.94% were aged between 31 and 40 years, 57.55% were single, 50.94% had dependents, 72.64% were university graduates, 80.19% occupied teaching roles, and 91.51% had served 5 years at most at current place of employment. Further details of the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1 Personal details of respondents

Variable	N = 212	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	118	55.66
Female	94	44.34
<i>Age in years</i>		
20–30	76	35.85
31–40	108	50.94
41–50	16	7.55
51–60	10	4.72
61–70	2	0.94
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	122	57.55
Married	86	40.57
Divorced	4	1.89
<i>Highest educational qualification</i>		
Certificate	10	4.72
Diploma	48	22.64
Bachelor's degree	90	42.45
Master's degree	62	29.25
Doctorate degree	2	0.94
<i>Any dependents</i>		
Yes	108	50.94
No	104	49.06
<i>Department</i>		
Sciences	54	25.47
Commercials	68	32.08
Humanities	62	29.25
Administration	28	13.21
<i>Designation</i>		
Teacher	170	80.19
Laboratory Technician	8	3.77
Secretary	10	4.72
Principal	18	8.49
Deputy Principal	2	0.94
School Administrator	2	0.94
Information Technology	2	0.94
<i>Years of service</i>		
1–5 years	194	91.51
6–10 years	16	7.55
Over 10 years	2	0.94

Determining the appropriate sample size is complicated. According to Cohen (1992), in regression analysis, a minimum sample size of 30 units is required if one expects to obtain a coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of at least 0.75 (an indicator of a strong predictive ability) for a dependent variable with a maximum of three predictors, at a significance level of 0.05 and a statistical power level of 80%.

Thus, the actual sample size of 212 satisfied this condition and guaranteed substantially high statistical power. Note that we identified 13 cases as outliers using boxplots and excluded them from the subsequent correlation and regression tests.

### 3.2 | Measuring instrument

Data was collected using a questionnaire comprising closed-end items written in the English language. There was no need to translate the questionnaire to the local languages given that members of the target population could read and write in the English language. The following constituted the five sections of the questionnaire: section A – demographic details of respondents; section B – work-life balance support; section C – work-related stress; section D – emotional intelligence; and section E – continuance organizational commitment. It took the respondents 20 min at most to complete the questionnaire.

#### 3.2.1 | Work-life balance support scale

A five-item work-life balance support scale adapted from Thompson et al. (1999) was used to elicit data from respondents. Examples of items used include “In this organization employees are encouraged to strike a balance between their work and family lives,” “In this organization, it is generally okay to talk about your family at work,” “In this organization, employees can easily balance their work and non-work lives”, “Work timetables are flexible enough,” and “My employer allows employees off-days to attend to personal issues.” Response categories for each item ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Note that some of the measuring items originally had seven response categories but, in this study, were tightened to five for parsimony. A higher score represented greater work-life balance support, and *vice-versa*. The Cronbach alpha value for the scale was 0.92.

#### 3.2.2 | Work-related stress scale

Work-related stress was measured using five items adapted from Lambert et al.'s (2006) job stress scale. Examples of the items used include the following: “There are a lot of aspects of my job that make me upset,” and “When I'm at work I often feel tense or uptight.” The response categories for each item ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). One item (“I am usually calm and at ease when I'm working”) was reverse coded before compiling the work-related stress index. A higher score represented

**EXHIBIT 2** Construct reliability and validity

Construct	Number of items	$\alpha$	$\rho$	AVE
Organizational continuance commitment	4	0.93	0.95	0.87
Emotional intelligence	10	0.88	0.92	0.75
Work-life balance support	5	0.92	0.94	0.86
Work-related stress	5	0.91	0.93	0.79

high work-related stress while a lower score demonstrated lower stress levels. Tetteh et al.'s (2020) study reported a reliability score of 0.82 for the same scale. The scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.91 in the present study.

### 3.2.3 | Emotional intelligence scale

To assess emotional intelligence, respondents completed Davies et al.'s (2010) 10-item Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS). Each item had five Likert-type response categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score depicted higher emotional intelligence, and *vice-versa*. The scale had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.76 in Ugwu et al.'s (2017) study. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha value was 0.88.

### 3.2.4 | Continuance organizational commitment scale

Continuance organizational commitment was measured using four measuring items adapted from Barksdale Jr et al. (2003). In the above-mentioned study, the scales had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.77. For the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.93.

## 3.3 | Data collection procedure and ethical issues

Access to research respondents was granted by the management of the various educational institutions in the earlier mentioned locality. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents had a right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process. To assess the suitability of the research instrument for the present study, ten copies of the questionnaire were pilot tested using respondents selected from an independent school in the city of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe). These respondents did not partake in the main study. The responses obtained showed that the respondents did not encounter any challenges with the questionnaire thereby confirming the instrument's appropriateness. Data for the main study was

collected between May and July 2019. The drop-and-pick method was used to administer the questionnaire. The co-authors travelled to different institutions distributing questionnaires to respondents and then collecting them after they had been completed. Cases of non-response were minimal and were resolved using the mean replacement technique where omissions on an indicator variable are substituted with the average of valid values of that indicator.

## 3.4 | Reliability and validity

As part of the reliability and validity tests, we calculated the following: the internal consistency of indicators, factor loadings, communalities and discriminant validity for the variables. Internal consistency is assumed when both Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and Dillon-Goldstein's rho ( $\rho$ ) values are high ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$  and  $\rho \geq 0.7$ , respectively). Researchers prefer Dillon-Goldstein's rho ( $\rho$ ) to Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) as a measure of composite reliability because it leads to "higher estimates of true reliability" (Garson, 2016 p. 63). Like the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) approach, the minimum cut-off point for acceptable reliability using Dillon-Goldstein's rho ( $\rho$ ) is 0.7. The results for the two tests confirming the internal consistency are summarized in Exhibit 2. Further, also presented in exhibit are the average values extracted (AVE), all of which are greater than 0.5, demonstrating convergent validity of the indicators measuring all four latent constructs.

Additional information confirming the convergent validity of all the latent constructs is contained in Exhibit 3. Convergent validity is established when factor loadings for indicator variables measuring a latent construct exceed 0.7 and communality values are higher than 0.5 (Chin, 2010; Henseler et al. 2009).

We tested for discriminant validity among the four continuous scale variables using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). This novel approach measures the uniqueness between variables. It highlights pairs of variables which are different and those which are not. Discriminant validity is established if the HTMT ratio for a pair of variables is less than one. For this study, all pairs of variables were discriminant valid as the HTMT ratios

EXHIBIT 3 Factor loadings and communality

Indicator	Construct	Loading	Communality
CC1	Organizational continuance commitment	0.93	0.87
CC2	Organizational continuance commitment	0.95	0.90
CC3	Organizational continuance commitment	0.92	0.85
CC4	Organizational continuance commitment	0.90	0.81
EI1	Emotional intelligence	0.74	0.55
EI2	Emotional intelligence	0.94	0.88
EI3	Emotional intelligence	0.93	0.86
EI4	Emotional intelligence	0.84	0.71
EI5	Emotional intelligence	0.91	0.83
EI6	Emotional intelligence	0.78	0.61
EI7	Emotional intelligence	0.86	0.74
EI8	Emotional intelligence	0.74	0.55
EI9	Emotional intelligence	0.92	0.85
EI10	Emotional intelligence	0.85	0.73
WLB1	Work-life balance support	0.92	0.85
WLB2	Work-life balance support	0.94	0.88
WLB3	Work-life balance support	0.90	0.81
WLB4	Work-life balance support	0.94	0.88
WLB5	Work-life balance support	0.94	0.88
WS1	Work-related stress	0.85	0.72
WS2	Work-related stress	0.86	0.74
WS3	Work-related stress	0.93	0.73
WS4	Work-related stress	0.94	0.88
WS5	Work-related stress	0.95	0.90

EXHIBIT 4 HTMT test results

Pairs of variables	HTMT ratio
Emotional intelligence - Organizational continuance commitment	0.650
Work-life balance support - Organizational continuance commitment	0.511
Work-life balance support - Emotional intelligence	0.824
Work-related stress - Organizational continuance commitment	0.486
Work-related stress - Emotional intelligence	0.552
Work-related stress - Work-life balance support	0.304

obtained were less than 0.85. The results for the test are presented in Exhibit 4.

## 4 | RESULTS

Correlation and regression tests were conducted to verify the hypothesized relationships. The computer software

IBM SPSS 27 with the PROCESS add-on for moderation analysis was used to run the tests electronically. Detailed outcomes are presented next.

### 4.1 | Correlation analysis

A Pearson's correlation test was performed to evaluate the association between respondents' gender, age, marital status, level of education, whether they had dependents, designation, tenure, emotional intelligence, work-related stress, work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment. Note that this test is also appropriate for ascertaining the point biserial correlation between continuous and categorical scale variables. Exhibit 5 summarizes the results of the test. According to Cohen's criteria, coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 depict a small effect size, those from 0.30 to 0.49 represent a moderate effect size, and lastly, values bigger than 0.50 suggest a large effect size. From Exhibit 4, the correlation coefficients for the associations between the four continuous scale variables were all statistically significant, positive, and ranged in strength from moderate to strong.



EXHIBIT 5 Variables' correlations matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	–										
2. Age	0.06	–									
3. Marital status	0.102	–0.295 <sup>b</sup>	–								
4. Level of education	–0.164 <sup>a</sup>	0.284 <sup>b</sup>	–0.196 <sup>b</sup>	–							
5. Any dependents	0.014	–0.367 <sup>b</sup>	0.600 <sup>b</sup>	–0.221 <sup>b</sup>	–						
6. Designation	0.048	–0.200 <sup>b</sup>	0.11	0.001	0.105	–					
7. Tenure	0.042	0.326 <sup>b</sup>	–0.13	–0.08	–0.08	–0.303 <sup>b</sup>	–				
8. Emotional Intelligence	0.018	–0.07	0.05	0.200 <sup>b</sup>	–0.06	0.276 <sup>b</sup>	–0.271 <sup>b</sup>	–			
9. Work-related stress	–0.07	–0.162 <sup>a</sup>	0.02	0.087	–0.01	–0.033	–0.359 <sup>b</sup>	0.501 <sup>b</sup>	–		
10. Work-life balance support	–0.07	–0.09	0.03	0.183 <sup>b</sup>	–0.150 <sup>a</sup>	0.147 <sup>a</sup>	–0.291 <sup>b</sup>	0.488 <sup>b</sup>	0.405 <sup>b</sup>	–	
11. Organizational continuance commitment	–0.05	–0.139 <sup>a</sup>	0.05	–0.03	0.076	0.229 <sup>b</sup>	–0.261 <sup>b</sup>	0.588 <sup>b</sup>	0.455 <sup>b</sup>	0.476 <sup>b</sup>	–

Note:  $N = 199$ .

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically significant correlations were also observed between some of the demographic and continuous scale variables. As a result, all the variables tested in the correlation analysis were incorporated in the multiple regression model which tested the statistical significance of the proposed predictors of continuance organizational commitment.

## 4.2 | Multiple regression analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to assess whether respondents' gender, age, marital status, whether a respondent had dependents, level of education, designation, tenure, emotional intelligence, work-related stress, and work-life balance support significantly predicted continuance organizational commitment. The results of the linear regression model were significant,  $F(12,105) = 2.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.484$ , indicating the predictors explained a significant proportion of variation in continuance organizational commitment. Exhibit 6 depicts the results of the regression analysis, showing the contribution of each predictor to the overall model.

Exhibit 6 indicates that emotional intelligence, work-life balance support, work-related stress, and designation (information technology) were the only significant predictors of the continuance organizational commitment variable in the regression model. Specifically, emotional intelligence accounted for the largest variance and had a posi-

tive influence on continuance organizational commitment (regression coefficient = 0.307,  $p < .001$ ), thus confirming hypothesis 1. This was followed by work-life balance support (regression coefficient = 0.245,  $p = .001$ ), work-related stress (regression coefficient = 0.20,  $p = .0080$ ). Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5 were also supported. The demographic variable designation (information technology) accounted for the least change in continuance organizational commitment, regression coefficient =  $-0.107$ ,  $p = .050$ .

## 4.3 | Moderation test results

Two moderation models were tested using the PROCESS procedure for SPSS which calculates the interaction effect of an independent and moderator on an outcome variable. Model 1 specified in Hayes PROCESS procedure manual was used to derive both moderation models (see Hayes, 2017). The first model considered work-related stress as the predictor variable, emotional intelligence as the moderator, and continuance organizational commitment as the outcome variable. The results from PROCESS procedure demonstrate that the overall moderation model had significant effects,  $R^2 = 0.4979$ ,  $F(6,191) = 31.57$ ,  $p = .000$ . The interaction effect (work-related stress x emotional intelligence) was also statistically significant, (regression coefficient =  $-0.0185$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Exhibit 7 shows line plots depicting the nature of the interaction effect. These line plots suggest that at lower levels of emotional intelligence

EXHIBIT 6 Multiple linear regression analysis results

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.463	1.313		1.876	0.062
Age=20-30 years	-0.019	0.379	-0.003	-0.049	0.961
Age=41-50 years	-1.105	0.768	-0.081	-1.439	0.152
Age=51-60 years	-0.481	0.729	-0.044	-0.66	0.51
Age=61-70 years	1.215	1.752	0.041	0.694	0.489
Designation=Principal	-1.244	0.755	-0.117	-1.648	0.101
Designation=Deputy Principal	-1.98	1.643	-0.066	-1.205	0.23
Designation=School Administrator	-1.622	1.614	-0.054	-1.005	0.316
Designation=Secretary	0.824	0.764	0.06	1.078	0.283
Designation=Lab Technician	1.814	1.021	0.104	1.777	0.077
Designation=Information Technology	-3.198	1.633	-0.107	-1.959	0.050
Years of service=6-10 years	0.447	0.808	0.04	0.553	0.581
Emotional intelligence	0.21	0.053	0.307	3.968	<0.001**
Work-related stress	0.081	0.029	0.2	2.844	0.005**
Work-life balance support	0.113	0.03	0.245	3.692	<0.001**

Note:  $N = 199$ .

\*\*means p-value was less than 0.01.

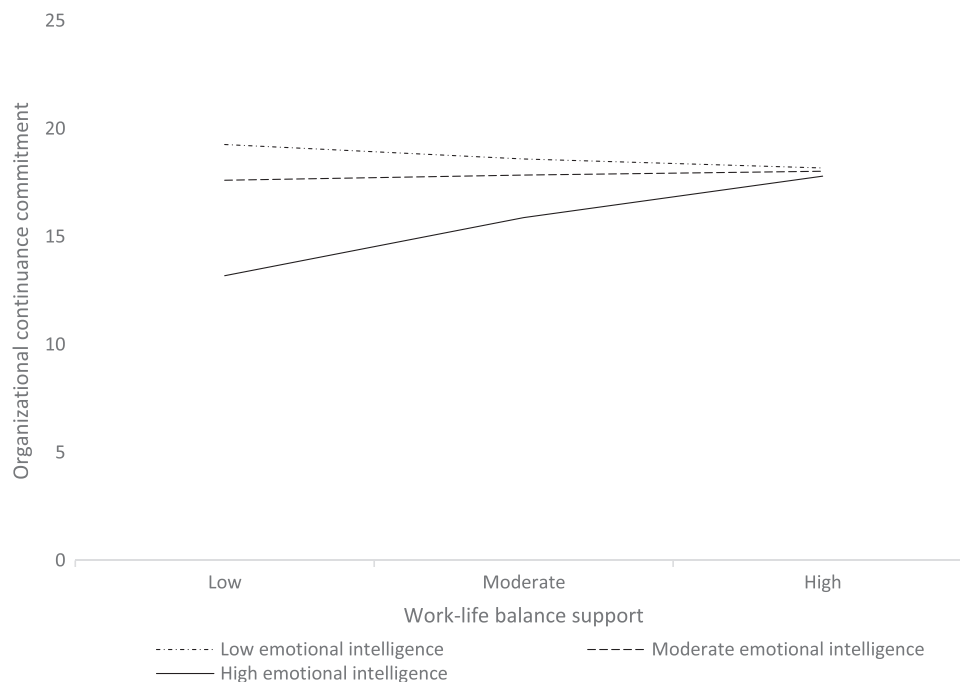


EXHIBIT 7 Line plot for the moderation effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between work-related stress and organizational continuance commitment

the positive relationship work-related stress and continuance organizational commitment is strengthened, while at higher levels of emotional intelligence the relationship is weakened.

The second regression model considered the effect of the interaction between work-life balance support and emo-

tional intelligence on continuance organizational commitment. The overall moderation model was statistically significant,  $R^2 = 0.584$ ,  $F(6,192) = 44.916$ ,  $p = .000$ . The interaction term accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in continuance organizational commitment,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.1048$ ,  $\Delta F(1,198) = 48.37$ ,  $p = .000$ , regression



**EXHIBIT 8** Line plot for the moderation effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between work-life balance support and organizational continuance commitment

coefficient = 0.0308,  $p = .000$ . Examination of the interaction plot presented in Exhibit 8 shows that at lower levels of emotional intelligence the strength of the positive relationship between work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment weakened. At higher levels of emotional intelligence, the positive relationship between work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment increased in strength. From the foregoing, both hypotheses two and three were supported.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to scrutinize some of the possible interrelationships between work-related stress, work-life balance support, emotional intelligence, and continuance organizational commitments using evidence from employees of independent educational institutions in western Zimbabwe. It contributes to theory by proposing a conceptual model based on the links between emotional intelligence, work-life balance support, work-related stress, and continuance organizational commitment. Besides, it confirms the pertinence of the JD-R theory to the study of precursors to continuance organizational commitment in a low-income context. The findings are discussed below.

Firstly, the demographic information of the respondents revealed that 92 percent of the respondents had less than 5 years of tenure at their respective organizations, while

only one percent had served for at least 10 years. Furthermore, only 13% of those polled were above the age of 41. These findings suggest a challenge with retaining key personnel and obtaining long-term commitment from the staff at the institutions studied. Despite the harsh operating climate, the findings pointedly highlight the need for organizational leaders and administrators to take steps to retain personnel notwithstanding the difficult operating environment.

Secondly, the results obtained proved the hypothesis that emotional intelligence positively predicted continuance organizational commitment. The results corroborate claims by Latif et al. (2017) that workers with higher emotional intelligence were inclined to work harder and showed greater commitment to their current organizations.

Thirdly, the results also evidenced the positive and statistically significant predictive effects of work-life balance support on continuance organizational commitment. From the outcome, it can be concluded that the respondents recognized some care from their respective organizations, and, because of that, they thought it sensible to persist in their current jobs irrespective of hostile circumstances than to venture outside into unfamiliar terrain. These results validate previous research which postulated a close association between employees' perception of supportive human resource practices and organizational commitment in general (Choo et al., 2016; Johari et al., 2018; Rubel et al., 2021). They also lend credibility

to the calls for organizational policies and practices that promote employee work-life balance, job quality and well-being for the ultimate good of employees and organizations (European Commission, 2017; Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007).

Fourthly, a positive and statistically significant direct relationship between work-related stress and continuance organizational commitment was also proved. This demonstrates that respondents were disposed to stay in their present jobs notwithstanding the pressure which they underwent. The result resonates with Lambert et al.'s (2015) postulation that continuance organizational commitment may be a kind of stressor, hence the close affinity between the variables observed in this study. The outcome, however, contradicts previous studies which proposed that overwhelming pressures at work generated negative reactions such as demotivation, job dissatisfaction (Johari et al., 2018), and withdrawal attitudes and behavior (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007). The result seems logical in the location of the respondents where other job opportunities are rare. Thus, the respondents elected to stick with their current employers not out of any emotional affinity to their employers or belief in the values espoused by the employer, but because of a careful consideration of the trade-offs involved if they were to leave.

Fifth, the results also established that emotional intelligence negatively moderated the positive effects of work-related stress on continuance organizational commitment. In other words, higher levels of emotional intelligence negated the positive relationship between work-related stress. This relationship is complex and, therefore, difficult to explain. It could be that respondents with higher levels of emotional awareness and capabilities were better placed to rationalize and cope in a stressful environment to the extent that they did not see themselves as being miserably stuck in their respective organizations. Nevertheless, the relationship between work-related stress and continuance organizational commitment was stronger at lower levels of emotional intelligence. Hence, respondents with lower emotional intelligence felt obliged to stay on in their respective workplaces regardless of a negative work environment than to leave for uncertain scenarios. This is a reasonable option in Zimbabwe's poorly performing economy where alternative employment prospects are very limited if one was to opt to leave present employment (Mtemeri & Mashavira, 2019). Perhaps the lower levels of emotional intelligence enabled the respondents to endure the strain of job stress but did not weaken the feeling of entrapment. Given the existing evidence which supports emotional intelligence as a beneficial resource for analyzing environmental inputs and managing the emotional reactions that follow in some organizations (Martinez-Monteaugudo et al., 2019;

Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017), the outcome was not surprising.

Lastly, the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment was positive and statistically significant. In other words, the respondents' higher levels of emotional intelligence levels enhanced their appreciation of positive workplace assistance measures, and *vice-versa*. This result is expected given that more emotionally competent individuals are better prepared to leverage supportive work environment policies to make tough decisions and to stay optimistic in a hostile setting even if the choices may not have long-term economic benefits.

## 5.1 | Managerial implications

This research highlighted that retaining qualified staff was critical to the success of insufficiently funded organizations that could not afford to pay the same level of salaries as well-resourced organizations. It was proved that certain psychological factors may contribute to this endeavor. Bearing in mind that emotional intelligence emerged as a key determinant of continuance organizational commitment, leaders of poorer organizations should incorporate emotional intelligence tests as a selection criterion when recruiting new members of staff. In other words, preference should be accorded to applicants with some level of emotional intelligence as this study suggested that such individuals adjust to stressful work environments better and that they demonstrate lesser inclination to exit an organization when faced with adversity.

Furthermore, the administrators should design and implement coaching and training sessions for both leaders and workers to enhance the emotional intelligence levels and continuance and other forms of commitment of the workforce as part of human capital development efforts. Developing such capabilities not only helps employees to devise strategies to cope with their own and other people's emotional difficulties but is also a resource that enhances overall team effectiveness and performance and lessens adverse outcomes. In this regard, institutions can use emotional competence training as a tool for enhancing employee well-being and efficacy. This is important, particularly, in the hostile and uncertain economic environment in which many Zimbabwean organizations operate and struggle to keep their employees motivated.

This study unraveled a positive interlinkage between work-life balance support and continuance organizational commitment of employees. This means when the respondents perceived greater work-life balance support from their employers, they saw more advantages in staying than

leaving their current place of employment. Since many of the organizations studied struggled to pay competitive financial rewards to their employees, they could motivate their employees by enhancing the work-life balance support interventions such as *inter alia* mental health and well-being initiatives, flexible working patterns and generous leave (annual, emergency, paternal, maternal, study or sick) policies. For the staff members, such measures will serve to facilitate positive workplace behaviors and accentuate the costs of leaving compared to staying with the organization, notwithstanding their loyalty and belief in their respective organizations.

## 5.2 | Limitations and recommendations for further research

Despite its merits, this study had the following limitations. Firstly, its respondents were selected using a convenience sampling approach based on individuals' willingness to take part. This had adverse implications on the characteristics of the data derived from them, which in turn restricted the range of tests which could be applied to the data. Moreover, it undermined the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings from it. Secondly, the composition of the sample of respondents was dominated by teaching staff (80%) such that stratifying the respondents into non-teaching and teaching staff for comparison purposes would not be meaningful. Future studies on the same topic should preferably include wide-ranging and unbiased samples that permit classification of respondents to yield more nuanced insights concerning the hypothesized relationships. Thirdly, the study focused on the western part of Zimbabwe only and therefore omitted other provinces. Consequently, the sentiments presented here might not reflect those of the whole country. Lastly, in terms of demographic characteristics, the age and years of service variables were measured using a categorical, rather than a continuous scale. This limited the range of statistical analysis techniques that could be applied to the data and, as a result, delivered little information about the sources of variation in the data. Should comparable studies be undertaken in the future, the research instruments to be used should be designed in a way that they elicit more detailed information on the subject under study.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

No funding was obtained from a specific body this project.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.


### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Felicity Vimbai Chigeda: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. Renier Steyn: Methodology; Writing – review & editing

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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**How to cite this article:** Chigeda, F., Ndofirepi, T. M., & Steyn, R. (2022). Continuance in organizational commitment: The role of emotional intelligence, work-life balance support, and work-related stress. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.22172>