EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT TO THEIR SUPERVISORS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SUPERVISORY SATISFACTION AND CAREER SATISFACTION

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-Abstract-

The objective of this study was to examine the association between supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction among employees in a manufacturing organisation.A cross-sectional survey was utilised to gather data from employees in a manufacturing company in Gauteng. These employees were selected by means of a non-probability convenience sampling method. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 150 employees. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the biographical information of respondents and to compute the means and standard deviations of supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction, and career satisfaction. Correlation analysis was performed between supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction. Regression analysis was conducted between supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction. Positive correlations were noted between supervisor related commitment and supervisor satisfaction and between supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction. Similar positive correlation was observed between supervisor related commitment and career satisfaction. It was also noted that supervisor related commitment contributed to the occurrence supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction. In similar vein, supervisor satisfaction contributed to the incidence of career satisfaction. Recommendations for the study included, among others, an improvement of the trust relationship between supervisors and employees to enhance supervisor related commitment; fair and consistent application of company policies; and the application of work-life balance practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of employee commitment to a supervisor, known in commitment literature as supervisory commitment, recently has attracted attention from researchers (Polston-Murdoch, 2013). Supervisory commitment occupies prominence in commitment literature because supervisors are considered to play a critical role in the working lives of subordinates. They are the first people subordinates come into contact with at the first point of entry in the organisation, therefore, acting as agents for the organisation (Wasti & Can, 2008). The quality of the exchange relationship between the supervisor and those they supervise determines the willingness of supervisees to reciprocate to the organisation in various ways (Wasti & Can, 2008). Supervisory commitment has been linked positively with low turnover intention, job performance and job satisfaction (Polston-Murdoch, 2013).

The commitment literature has identified that there are various foci of commitment, which include occupation, union, customers, top management, supervisor and co-workers (Polston-Murdoch, 2013; Neves & Caetano, 2009; Vandenberghe, Bentein & Stinglhamber, 2004). This study focuses particularly on employee commitment to the supervisor. While ample research has been conducted on these foci, few studies have examined the employee commitment to the supervisor (Polston-Murdoch, 2013; Landry & Vandenberghe, 2009). In addition, the relationship between supervisory commitment and supervisory satisfaction is under-researched (Polston-Murdoch, 2013). Interestingly, research on subordinates' commitment to the supervisor is scant and is considered theoretical rather than empirical (Cheon,Blumer, Shih, Murphy & Sato, 2008). Lastly, there is little research that has attempted to explicate the relationship between supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction. In this context the current study focuses on the relationship between supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction among employees in a manufacturing company in South Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

2.1 Supervisory related commitment

Supervisory commitment is an indication of the extent to which employees are attached emotionally, and want to identify with, the supervisor (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2009). Polston-Murdoch (2013) consider supervisory commitment to constitute dual dimensions, namely identification with the supervisor and internalisation of the supervisor's values. Identification with the supervisor connotes the subordinate's admiration of supervisor's attributes such as attitude, behaviour, personality, or accomplishments. Landry and Vandenberghe (2009) argue that the admiration of the supervisor's attributes imbues subordinates with a pleasant feeling of hankering to associate with the supervisor and, eventually, becoming loyal to the supervisor. Identification with the supervisor is argued to enhance the proclivity on the part of subordinates to interpret the supervisor's interests as their own. Shared interests have been found to reduce the incidences of conflicts between subordinates and the supervisor (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2009).

On the other hand, internalisation is conceived as the adoption of the supervisor's attitudes, behaviours and value system (Becker, Billings, Eveleth & Gilbert, 1996). McCormack, Casimir and Djurkovic, (2006) amplify that similar attributes, values and aspirations between the supervisors and subordinates engenders a sense of belonging and strong supervisor-subordinate relations.

Neves and Caetano (2009) contend that supervisory commitment is generated by factors in the work environment, which could include treatment by the supervisor, supervisory support, trust in the supervisor and supervisor competence. All these factors are considered to play a prominent role in the sustenance of the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships. With regard to treatment of employees, Latif and Sher (2004) assert that the supervisor's treatment of subordinates determines, to a large extent, the sense of obligation and emotional attachment that subordinates ultimately will have towards their supervisor, including the possibilities of similar behavioural reciprocation.

Empirical evidence supports the conception that supervisor support is correlated positively with supervisory commitment (Neves 2011). The supervisory practices, characterised by looking after the well-being of subordinates and valuing their efforts, infuse them with a sense of emotional bond to their supervisors (Neves 2011). Latif and Sher (2004) further posit that lack of supervisor support has a

great possibility of generating turnover intentions and burnout among subordinates.

The study of Neves and Caetano (2009) reveals a significant positive correlation between the trust in the supervisor and supervisory commitment. These authors demonstrate that the higher the trust in the supervisor the more subordinates are inclined to reciprocate through identification with the supervisor. Ellis and Shockley-Zabalak (2001) consider trustworthiness as reflective of "behavioural consistency, behavioural integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication and demonstration of concern". Becker and Kernan (2003) have argued that subordinate reciprocation for trust in the supervisor manifests in the form of increased performance and lower turnover intentions.

The occurrence of supervisory commitment can be traced to the competence of the supervisor in discharging his/her duties. Supervisors are deemed competent if they effectively observe, plan, direct and evaluate subordinates' activities and performance (Wasti & Can, 2008). Supervisors' competence is further characterised by defining subordinates' roles, and specifying and explaining expectations. These acts are conceived as acts of support by subordinates and create a stable relationship with the supervisor, hence the fervent desire to be emotionally attached to the supervisor (Neves, 2011). Supportive acts, as earlier explained, infuse a feeling of obligation to the supervisor.

Research demonstrates that affective commitment to the supervisor determines the level of enactment of organisational citizenship behaviour of subordinates (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2009). Recent research further has revealed that those subordinates who identify with the supervisor because of his/her acceptable supervisor behaviour, which is characterised by subordinate support, tend to be satisfied with the supervisor (Polston-Murdoch, 2013). This empirical finding led to the proposition of the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between supervisory commitment and supervisor satisfaction.

2.2 Supervisory satisfaction

Ladany, Lehrman-Waterman, Molinaro and Wolgast (1999) describe supervisory satisfaction as the subordinates' perception of the quality of supervision and the degree to which supervisors are able to meet their needs and encourage their growth. Supervisory satisfaction is characterised by cordial relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee (McCormack et al., 2006). Cheon et al. (2008)

assert that a cordial relationship can be generated and sustained when two parties in the supervisory relationship are able to resolve conflicts between themselves. Unresolved conflicts engender anxiety, discomfort or dissonance, loss of trust, lack of safety and health problems.

Fairness with which supervisors treat their subordinates is considered the bedrock of high quality supervisory relationship, which leads to supervisory satisfaction (Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008). In line with this argument, DeConinck and Stilwell (2004) proffer that the fair amount of rewards allocation (distributive justice) and the just manner of their allocation (procedural justice) are direct determinants of supervisor satisfaction.

Research indicates that role conflict and role ambiguity are the antecedents of supervisory satisfaction (Ladany et al., 1999). In support of this view, Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2002) emphasise that it is only when roles and expectations are clarified by the supervisor that his/her subordinates feel a sense of satisfaction with him/her. Anything to the contrary provokes negative emotions from subordinates. Role clarity minimises uncertainty and fosters competency on the part of supervisees, which has a potential to enhance their satisfaction to the supervisor. In a related observation, Gillet, Gagne, Sauvagere and Fouquereau (2013) report that the meaningful explanation by the supervisor to supervisees, for doing tasks, emboldens the relationship between the parties and ameliorates employee engagement and eventually improves the satisfaction of subordinates with their supervisors.

Research has also demonstrated that the incidence of supervisory satisfaction is directly attributable to adherence of ethical standards by supervisors (Ladany et al., 1999). These authors cite the following ethical guidelines that if adhered to generate and enhance supervisory satisfaction, namely respectful treatment, responding to ethical issues and confidentiality issues in supervision. Subordinates whose supervisors engaged frequently in ethical behaviour had more chance of instilling supervisory satisfaction than those who engaged less frequently in ethical behaviour (Keeton, Fenner, Timothy,Johnson & Hayward, 2007). This view intimates that supervisor behaviours have a tremendous influence on subordinates' experience of supervision (Ladany et al., 1999).

Latif and Sher (2004) posit that supervisory satisfaction can be attributed to the level of support supervisors provide to their subordinates. Support to subordinates creates a feeling that they are cared for and their contributions are sincerely recognised. Subordinates feel that they are appreciated as opposed to being

frustrated. These feelings of worthiness generate satisfaction with their supervisor. On the contrary, Czech and Forward (2013) demonstrate that less satisfaction with subordinates ignites turnover intentions and burnout.

The contention of McCormack et al. (2006) is that supervisory satisfaction increases affective commitment to the supervisor and is related positively with job satisfaction and employee performance. Empirical evidence confirms that supervisory satisfaction enhances employee career satisfaction and diminishes job stress (Harter et al., 2002). In light of the evidence cited, it was hypothesised that:

H2: There is a positive significant relationship between supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction

2.3 Career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is defined as "work related or positive psychological achievements that an individual achieves as a result of work experience" (Kong, Chueng & Song, 2012:78). It is employees' feelings about their career-related roles and accomplishments and is perceived to be employees' long-term satisfaction with their careers. Baggerly and Osborn, (2006) add that career satisfaction intimates the degree to which employees believe their career progress is compatible with their goals, values and preferences.

Career satisfaction is a concept that is viewed to comprise extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes and can be measured utilising objective and subjective indicators. Objective indicators of career satisfaction include pay, advancement/promotion and development opportunities (Joo & Park, 2010). It can be noted that these outcomes are external, as they naturally require a third party to dispense the rewards. On the other hand, internal indicators of career satisfaction connote the feeling of pride and accomplishment for the goals that employees achieve over the span of their careers (Van Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere & Schouten, 2006). Employees make an internal evaluation with regard to progress or accomplishment they have made in pursuit of their career goals or aspirations (Shanafelt, Gradishar, Kosty, Satele, Chew, Horn, Clark, Hanley, Chu, Pippen, Sloan & Raymond, 2014).

Barnett and Bradley (2007) argue that career appraisal has a positive significant correlation with career satisfaction. These authors contend that employees are more likely to have career direction if they discuss their career with superiors. Through career appraisals, employees are mentored and receive relevant feedback
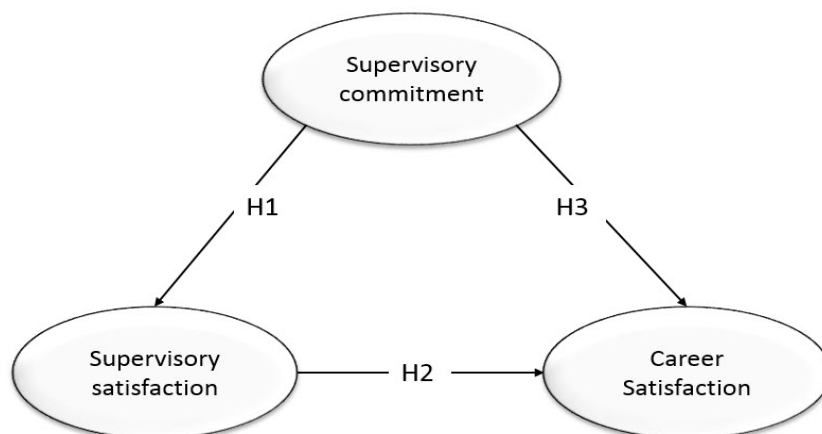
about their career aspirations. These sessions provide opportunities for career development, career training and career advice. All these career enhancing initiatives contribute immensely to career satisfaction. Joo and Ready (2012) highlight that characteristic features embedded in a supervisory commitment such as supervisor support and sharing of common goals are considered antecedents of career satisfaction. The empirical evidence led to the postulation of the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a positive significant relationship between supervisor related commitment and career satisfaction

3. RESEARCH MODEL

Figure 1 depicts a research model, which postulates the prevalence of a positive relationship between supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction. In the model, supervisory commitment is an independent variable. Supervisory satisfaction is both an independent variable and a dependent variable, whereas career satisfaction is a dependent variable.

Figure 1: Research Model

4. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative survey was utilised to obtain responses on supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction from research participants. The use of a survey was preferred because it had the potential to yield reliable data as the units of analysis responded to the same questionnaire statements. Using a survey was advantageous in this study because responses were

obtained from a large sampled population (n=150), which could not have been possible through other means.

4.1 Population and sampling

The study is located in a manufacturing company in Gauteng province of South Africa. The identity of the manufacturing company could not be divulged for ethical considerations. All employees of every race, except supervisors and managers, participated in the study. Years of service in the study was not used as a discriminatory measure to exclude participants. The inclusion of every employee, regardless of years in service, was to increase the sample size. A non-probability convenience sampling method was utilised to draw units of analysis from the target population. The convenience sampling method was considered appropriate because data could be obtained from employees who were present at work in a week's period. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 250 participants of which 150 were returned and completed, thus generating a sufficient response rate of 60 per cent.

4.2 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the biographic information. Data was captured using Excel spread sheet which was then imported to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24 for Windows. This statistical software was used to compute frequencies. The same statistical software was utilised to compute the means and standard deviations of the variables, namely supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction.

The accuracy of research model was tested using rho's correlation and regression. The analyses were aimed at examining the correlational relationships and predictive associations between variables. Statistical analyses were performed using the

4.3 Measures

The questionnaire comprised four sections. Section A elicited responses on biographical information relating to gender, number of years in the current position and number of years in the current company. Respondents' opinions on the extent they were committed to their supervisor were captured in Section B through a scale adopted from Becker et al. (1996). Section C utilised a measuring instrument on supervisory satisfaction adopted from Scarpello and Vandenberg (1987). Lastly, participants' views on their career satisfaction were assessed by

means of the career satisfaction scale adopted from Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990).

4.4 Reliability and validity

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilised to test the reliability of the measuring instrument. The alpha values for the variables were as follows: supervisory commitment (α=0.805), supervisory satisfaction (α=0.737) and career satisfaction (α=0.859). The alpha values exceeded the satisfactory benchmark of 0.7 (Pietersen & Maree, 2008). These alpha values are reflected in Table 1.

To test if the research instrument measured what it was supposed to measure, validity tests were utilised. The validity tests relevant for this study were content validity, construct validity, convergent validity and predictive validity. To affirm the content validity, three academic experts in the field of organisational behaviour perused the questionnaire and confirmed the items in the questionnaire were relevant. Construct validity of the variables were tested using exploratory factor analysis, which confirmed the existence of variables with no under-loadings or cross-loadings. Correlation analysis and regression analysis were conducted and they confirmed variables to be correlates and predictors.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Results

Biographical properties of a sample

The number of respondents was 150, the bulk of which were males (73%; n=110) with females constituting the minority of the sample (27%; n=40). With regard to the number of years in the current position, the sample was represented as follows: less than a year – 13% (n=20); between 2-5 years – 31% (n=46); between 5-10 years – 43% (n=64); over 15 years – 13% (n=20). For the number of years in the current company the respondents were constituted in the following manner: less than a year – 14% (n=21); between 2-5 years – 38% (n=57); between 5-10 years – 36% (n=54); over 15 years – 12% (n=18).

Correlations

To test the strength and direction of relationships between supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used. This type of statistical analysis was deemed appropriate as convenience sampling tends to skew data and, therefore, making data not to comply with the principle of normality.

Table 1 reflects strong correlations between supervisor related commitment and supervisor satisfaction (r=0.553; p<0.01); supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction (r=0.474; p<0.01); and supervisor related commitment and career satisfaction(r=0.494; p<0.01).

Table 1: Correlations, means, standard deviations and alpha values

Variables	SRC	SS	CS	Means	SD	α-value
Supervisor related commitment (SRC)	1			3.159	0.715	.805
Supervisor satisfaction (SS)	.553**	1		3.100	0.774	.737
Career satisfaction (CS)	.474**	.494**	1	3.084	0.915	.859

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

Regression analysis

Regression analysis was performed to establish the predictive relationship between three variables in the study, namely supervisory commitment, supervisory satisfaction and career satisfaction. In Table 3, three regression models were generated through the performance of regression analysis. In Model 1, supervisor related commitment was entered as the predictor variable and supervisor satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Table 2: Regression analysis

Models (Constant)	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
1. SRC (Independent variable)	0.562	0.026	0.519	7.377	.000*
Dependent variable: Supervisor satisfaction; *Adjusted R Square=0.264; df=1; F=54.424*					
2. SRC (Independent variable)	0.582	0.094	0.455	6.209	.000*
Dependent variable: Career satisfaction ; *Adjusted R Square=0.207; df=1; F=38.549*					
3. SS (Independent Variable)	0.585	0.84	0.495	6.931	.000*
Dependent variable: Career satisfaction ; *Adjusted R Square=0.240; df=1; F=48.041*					

Model 2 reflects supervisor related commitment as the independent variable in the regression equation, whereas career satisfaction was the dependent variable. In Model 3, the regression equation expresses supervisor satisfaction as the predictor variable with career satisfaction as the dependent variable. The adjusted R square values were as follows: Model 1 – 0.264; Model 2 – 0.207; and Model 3 – 0.240. The coefficients for the three models were as follows: Model 1 – β=0.519 (p<0.01); Model 2 – β=0.455(p<0.01); and Model 3 – β=0.495(p<0.01).

5.2.Discussion

From the correlation results, it was clear that there was a positive correlation between supervisor related commitment and supervisor satisfaction. In addition, the regression results tacitly indicated that supervisor related commitment was the predictor of supervisor satisfaction. In fact, the results highlighted that supervisor related commitment contributed 26 percent to the occurrence of supervisor satisfaction. Hence, the support for the hypothesis, *there is significant positive relationship between supervisor related commitment and supervisor satisfaction (H1)*. The previous finding of Polston-Murdoch (2013) corroborates that supervisees who view their supervisors in a favourable light, emanating from the admiration of their supervisor's attitude, behaviour and accomplishment, have the propensity to develop a sense of obligation to the supervisor, something that serves to strengthen the supervisory relationship. The author argues that the relationship is characterised by mutual beneficence, which tends to make supervisees satisfied with their supervisors.

It was notable that supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction were related positively and that supervisor satisfaction was a predictor of career satisfaction. Supervisor satisfaction contributed 24 percent to the incidence of career satisfaction. The hypothesis, *there is a positive significant relationship between supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction (H2),* was supported. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that subordinates who hold similar values (internalisation) with their supervisors tend to be satisfied with their supervisors. These supervisors are identified with because they implement fair pay policies and create equitable promotional opportunities (Vandenberghe, Bentein & Stinglhamber, 2004). Yang, Wu, Chang and Chien (2011) contend that the high quality supervisor relationship characterised by developing supervisors' skills, confidence, encouragement and support generates a feeling of support and,

ultimately, the sense of role clarity and certainty, thereby infusing career satisfaction in the supervisees.

In a similar vein, the correlation analysis data demonstrated that supervisor related commitment was related significantly with career satisfaction. Additionally, it was observed that supervisor related commitment had a predictive association with career satisfaction. In fact, supervisor related commitment explained 20 percent variance in career satisfaction. Thus the hypothesis, *there is a positive significant relationship between supervisor related commitment and career satisfaction was accepted (H3)*. Previous research has similarly demonstrated that supervisory support (social support, support with material resources and information) aimed at career development is a supervisory behaviour that induces supervisor related commitment. These supervisory efforts contribute to the supervisees' satisfaction with their careers (Joo & Ready, 2012). The authors maintain that supervisees' careers are enriched by supportive relationships with their supervisors, which is the bedrock of supervisor related commitment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the commitment of subordinates to supervisors it is imperative that supervisors be trained on effective communication. An effective communication with subordinates has the potential to invigorate the supervisory relationship and enhance feelings of self-worth and trust in the supervisor. Further training and development could encapsulate conflict management techniques, issues pertaining to ethical leadership and decision making. The more adept supervisors are on these issues, the more opportunities for identification with the supervisor and the greater the chances of internalisation of supervisor' attitudes, behaviours and accomplishments.

Career satisfaction could be enhanced by introducing work-life balance practices that could implant the perception among supervisees that supervisors care about their well-being. Flexible work schedules could instil satisfaction and, therefore, love and commitment to supervisees' careers. Introduction of flexible work schedules could be interpreted as an act of compassion to subordinates, which could concretise the emotional cord between supervisors and supervisees.

7. Limitations and future research

As with many researches, the current study had several limitations. The study relied on honesty of respondents' feedback, which could have been riddled with bias. Some supervisors may not have desired to paint a bleak picture of their

supervisors. The larger sample size in comparison with the one utilised in the study could have provided a more accurate picture. The use of convenience sampling technique hindered the possibility of generalising the study to the target population. The involvement of subordinates with less than a year of service in the company was unavoidable because their exclusion could have reduced the sample size further. Their inclusion created the possibility of a scenario that could have been different if they were in supervisory relationship for a longer period.

This study, located in the manufacturing company, aimed to garner supervisees' opinions in relation to supervisory practices. Similar research could be focused on supervisors' views or opinions on the same variables in order to compare supervisor and supervisees' feedback. Future research could replicate the study to government departments or specific industry in the private sector. Inter-industry comparisons could be another area of research to be explored. The current research was a cross-sectional study, which could be improved by conducting a longitudinal study to obtain a more accurate picture of the phenomena under study.

8. Conclusion

All the hypotheses postulated in the study were supported, thus affirming the research model proposed. The findings in the study evinced significant positive relationships between supervisory related commitment and supervisor satisfaction; supervisory related commitment and career satisfaction; and supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction. Further noted in the study were predictive association between supervisor related commitment and supervisor satisfaction. It was observed further that supervisor satisfaction was a predictor of career satisfaction. Finally, satisfactory levels of supervisor related commitment, supervisor satisfaction and career satisfaction were prevalent among supervisees, which could still be improved.

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