Participation in Decision Making and Organisational Commitment of Customer Service Representatives of Eateries

Nwulu, Chinyere Stella¹ & Ateke, Brown Walter²

¹Department of Marketing, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
²Department of Marketing, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: brown.ateke@ust.edu.ng

ABSTRACT
The present day knowledge-based business-scape makes employees the main source of competitiveness for firms; they possess the knowledge that serve as catalyst for differentiating one firm’s work from others. Committed employees thus constitute strategic assets for organizations. This study focused on determining the relationship between participation in decision making and organisational commitment of customer service representatives. The study utilised participation in decision making as a unidimensional construct while commitment was treated as a multidimensional construct consisting of affective, continuance and normative commitment. The study adopted an explanatory research design. It used a questionnaire to collect primary data and employed the P(r) as the test statistic, relying on SPSS version 20.0. The study observed that participation in decision making associate strongly with organisational commitment of customer service representatives. This is because participation in decision making posted strong, positive and statistically significant relationship with all the measures of organisational commitment accommodated in the study. The study therefore conclude that participation in decision making influences organisational commitment of customer service representatives, or that normative, continuance and affective commitment of customer service representatives depends on participation in decision making . The study recommends that firms seeking to build committed customer service representatives should engage this category of employees in making decisions, especially those that directly affect their jobs.

Keywords: Affective commitment, continuance commitment, customer service representatives, normative commitment, participation in decision making

INTRODUCTION
The first, and often, the only impression customers have of a firm is that offered by those employees through whom they make their first contact with the firm. Employees, especially those that play boundary spanning roles are therefore essential touchpoints for firms. They do not only represent the firm to customers, but are also the “image makers” of the firm (Bowen & Hallowell, 2002). Boundary spanning employees are those members of firms with whom customers make their first contact in their interaction with the firm. Other aliases by which these employees are known are customer-contact employees (Bowen & Hallowell, 2002), front-line personnel (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990), boundary spanning employees (Czepiel, 1990), customer service representatives, customer service advisors, customer service associates and customer service agents. These employees link the firm and its customers; and also manage and sustain relationships with them (Payne & Webber, 2006). They are thus expected to always
demonstrate positive attitudes, be patient with customers and be polite to all. The demonstration of these
traits enables customer service representatives to satisfy customers, and win their trust.
Customer service representatives interact with the company’s customers, providing information to address
inquiries about the firm and its value offerings, handling or resolving complaints, process orders and
generally interact with customers on the firm’s behalf. Excellent customer service relaxes customers,
makes them trust, feel secured and favourably disposed towards the firm, its products and employees.
These ideals will however, not be attained if there are no committed customer service representatives that
willingly go the extra mile to conduce the experiences that customers relish.
Firms strive to retain customer service employees in view of their roles in building, maintaining and
expanding relationship with customers. Besides, employee turnover is costly for firms. Not only does it
carry the cost of replacing lost employees, such employees also leave with their knowledge and
sometimes, the relationships they have developed with customers. Employee retention is thus a goal that
attracts managers’ attention. The achievement of this goal is better guaranteed if firms are able secure the
commitment of employees. Employee commitment is a function of myriad factors that are either
endogenous or exogenous to employees. The much a firm understand about these factors determine its
ability to retain its employees. This is because understanding the aspirations of employees and catering
for them is a sure pathway to retaining them. Participation in decision making (PDM) is one concept that
has been investigated as a possible explanatory variable for organisational commitment.
PDM has management, psychological and sociological roots, and its definition has tended to be skewed
towards the bearing of individual definers (Harcourt & Ateke, 2018). Nuances in the definition of the
concept have thus been observed to result from the leanings of definers and the field of study under which
it is defined. Noah (2008) conceives PDM as a “special form of delegation in which subordinates gain
greater control, greater freedom of choice with respect to bridging the communication gap between the
management and workers”. Kuye and Sulaimon (2011) in a related fashion, conceive it as the degree to
which subordinates are involved in the firm’s strategic planning activities. In the view of Han, Chiang,
and Chang (2010), PDM is the degree to which employees participate in organizational decision-making
through multiple approaches. PDM thus describes a process that culminates in the sharing of influence
among organisational members at various levels of the organogram (Wainaina, Iravo, & Waititu, 2014). It
represents the “combination of task-related practices aimed at maximizing employees’ sense of
involvement in their work and human resource management practices aimed at maximizing employees’
Present day economies are knowledge-based. Firms’ concern for knowledge management has thus been
upped (Han et al, 2010). Knowledge sharing is the most important knowledge management practice in
organizations. Greater knowledge sharing within an organization informs greater organizational
effectiveness (Yang, 2004). However, knowledge sharing is enhanced when employees participate in
decision making, especially those decisions that affect the performance of their duties. PDM arouses a
sense of ownership on the part of employees and lead to altruistic spirit that contributes to organizational
effectiveness (Strauss, 2006; Pierce, Kostova & Dirks, 2001). Studies on workplace behaviour identify
essential factors that promote employees’ performance, and while the quality of human resources
available to a firm has been considered a major contributor to organizational resilience (Harcourt &
Ateke, 2018; Eketu & Ogbu, 2017; Suma & Lesha, 2013), the challenge of retaining employees has
remained a phenomenal one for managers.
PDM has in recent times become a priority of successful enterprises in order to satisfy the customers and
achieve nominated objectives (Azoury, Daoub, & Sleiaty, 2013). This is in lieu of the conviction that
intellectual assets have become more important than physical assets because knowledge is the catalyst for
differentiating a firm’s work from its competitors (Stewart, 2001). However, intellectual assets are
embedded in employees. Human capital is therefore a key strategic asset (Han et al, 2010). Managers
must adopt management practices that induce employees to share important knowledge that could
enhance organizational resilience (Han et al, 2010). In the view of Anand, Gardner and Morris (2007),
“flexible mechanisms in organizations contribute to sharing and transferring of new information that leads
to new knowledge, thus contributing to innovation”. PDM influences employees’ satisfaction, gives them a perception of having influence over organizational decisions (Wood, 1972) in Harcourt and Ateke (2018) and furthers their likelihood to remain with the firm. PDM therefore, satisfies important psychological needs for responsibility and autonomy at work. The focus of this study is to ascertain how PDM correlates with organisational commitment of customer service representatives of eateries in Port Harcourt.

Organisational commitment is the criterion variable of this study. Various conceptualisations of organisational commitment exist. What is however, common to them all is the notion that organisational commitment reduces turnover. The importance of organisational commitment is thus demonstrated in the cost of employee turnover (Silverthorne, 2004). Organisational commitment represents the relationship employees have with their organizations (Wei & Tai, 2010). Research on how to create competitive and profitable business organisations has been an ongoing exercise. Results from studies so far conducted on enablers of organisational success suggest that employee commitment is among the core features shared by high-flying firms.

An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that organizations benefit immensely from having a committed workforce (Wainaina et al, 2014). Committed employees are more likely to be retained, perform effectively, work compatibly, productive and be good organizational citizens (Saygän, 2011; Mayer & Martin, 2010). Meyer, Stanley, and Vandenbergh (2013) viewed organisational commitment as a psychological state involving varying levels of affective attachment to the organization, perceived costs of leaving the organization, and the felt obligation to stay with the organization; and represents three reasons an individual may have for remaining with a firm. This postulation falls into three kinds of commitment-affective, continuance and normative commitment—according to Allen and Meyer (1996). This study therefore adopts affective, continuance and normative commitment as dimensions of organisational commitment.

Affective commitment represents an individual’s identification with, and involvement with the organization and its goals (Saygän, 2011). Employees with strong affective commitment remain with the firm because they want to. This stems from employees feeling that the organization is responsible towards them. Positive attitudes toward the organization via affective bonds and show of loyalty is thus their way of reciprocating the firms “goodness” to them. Continuance commitment represents a balancing of the perceived costs of leaving the organization with the perceived benefits of staying. It is a willingness on the part of the employees to remain with the firm because of the perceived high cost of quitting and the benefits of staying. Normative commitment on the other hand, represents an employee’s sense of obligation to stay with the organization (Saygän, 2011). It is based on the personal ethical consideration of employees that they have to remain with the firm. In view of the foregoing, the study proposes that:

**H1**: PDM significantly correlates with affective commitment of customer service representatives.

**H2**: PDM significantly correlates with continuance commitment of customer service representatives.

**H3**: PDM significantly correlates with normative commitment of customer service representatives.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study focused on ascertaining the association between PDM and organisational commitment of customer service representatives. The study adopted an explanatory research design, and was conducted in a natural setting, without any form manipulation of the research elements. The population of the study consisted of customer service representatives of eateries in Port Harcourt. Information obtained from the Port Harcourt Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicates that a total of twenty-one (21) eateries are registered with the Chamber. Even though a cursory look at Port Harcourt Town reveals that there are more than twenty-one (21) eateries operating in the town, this study opts to work with the information obtained from the Chamber, being the most accessible repository of business information. The total number of customer service representatives in each of the twenty-one eateries could however not be ascertained. Therefore, the study opted to sample a total of eighty-four (84) customer service
representatives, on sample frame of four (4) per eatery. The accidental sampling technique was employed to select the test units. The final analysis of the study however, was based on usable data gleaned from seventy-eight (78) customer service representatives through questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was confirmed through jury opinion. The jury comprised of experts from the academia and industry with adequate knowledge of the subject of the study. The internal consistency of the measurement items was determined through a test of reliability using the Cronbach’s alpha with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). Refer to Table 1 below for the summary of the results of test of reliability.

Table 1: Summary of Result of Reliability Analysis on Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Affective Commitment</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Continuance Commitment</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Normative Commitment</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The study used the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) as the test statistic and relied on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for all analyses. In addition to assessing the strength of relationships, the study also evaluated the nature of relationship between the variables in focus. The Pearson correlation is the technique used to quantitatively measure this phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The coefficient of correlation was assessed from the ranges of -1.00 to 1.00. -1.00 represent a perfect negative relationship, 1.00 represent a perfect positive relationship; while 0 denotes no relationship. A higher correlation coefficient indicates stronger relationship between the variables (Shiu, Hair, Bush, & Ortinau, 2009).

RESULTS

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of the Link between PDM and Affective Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>PDM</th>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.608**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Commitment</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.608**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


Table 2 above indicate a positive correlation between PDM and affective commitment. The test produced a P(r) of 0.608**, which means that the relationship between the variable is a strong one. The positive sign of the result indicates a positive relationship between the variables, while the PV of .000 which is less than .05 indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The study
therefore accepts the alternate hypothesis, meaning that there is a positive significant relationship between PDM and affective commitment of customer service representatives of eateries.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of the Link between PDM and Continuance Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>PDM</th>
<th>Continuance Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.659**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuance Commitment</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.659**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

As Table 3 indicates, a strong relationship exists between PDM and continuance commitment. This is in view of the P(r) value of 0.659** generated by the test. The positive sign of the result indicates a positive relationship between the variables, while the PV of .000 which is less than .05 indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The study therefore accepts the alternate hypothesis. This means that PDM and continuance commitment of customer service representatives of eateries has positive significant relationship.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of the Link between PDM and Normative Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>PDM</th>
<th>Normative Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.693**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normative Commitment</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>.693**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Table 4 above shows that the P(r) coefficient of the relationship between PDM and normative commitment is 0.693**. This value is high, and implies that a strong relationship exists between the variables. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient implies that a positive relationship exists between PDM and normative commitment, while the PV of .000 which is less than .05 indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The study therefore accepts the alternate hypothesis. It therefore holds that PDM has a positive significant relationship with organisational commitment of customer service representatives of eateries.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
The aim of this study was to examine the nexus between PDM and organisational commitment. Based on the empirical tests conducted, the study observed that PDM and organisational commitment have strong, positive and statistically significant correlation. This finding corroborates the position that PDM improves employee retention; and that “performing employees” when allowed to partake in decision making assists leaders to create excellent organizations (Kuye & Sulaimon, 2011). PDM provides employees with the opportunity to utilize personal information and skills to enhance the organisation’s interest (Williamson, 2008). The findings also support the finding of Wainaina et al (2014) that PDM significantly influence University academic staffs’ organizational commitment. It also supports the statement that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance (Saks, 2006). PDM is a form of employee engagement.
Additionally, the findings of the current study supports the position of Meyer and Martin (2010) that engaged employees tend to remain with the firm and help in building organisational processes. The assertion that PDM informs employee retention, and leads to high performance for firms (Azoury et al, 2013) is also supported by the findings of this study. Furthermore, the findings cohere with the contention of Shmailan (2016) that having a participative work environment is important to employee commitment. Other managerial practices that informs employee commitment includes effective training, sharing of power, sharing information and reward systems for good performance (Shmailan, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Organisational commitment is a construct that has attracted wide interest among researchers. This is in view if its importance in orchestrating sundry favourable organizational outcomes. This study focused on determining the link between PDM and organisational commitment. Based on the results of the empirical analyses and the discussion of findings in the preceding sections, the study concludes that a significant relationship exists between PDM and organisational commitment of customer service representatives; and that normative, continuance and affective commitment of customer service representatives depends on how well these employees participate in making decisions that affect the performances of their job. The study thus recommends that eateries that seek to build committed customer service representatives should precipitate PDM with their customer service representatives, especially those that directly affect their jobs.

REFERENCES


