

Exploring Commitment-related Experiences of Black South African Managers

Matshediso MOENG, Jeremy MITONGA-MONGA*
and Nyasha MAPIRA

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

This study explores the commitment-related experiences of Black South African managers at a construction company in South Africa. Twelve Black South African managers working at a construction company in South Africa participated in this exploratory qualitative study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The study found that a majority of Black South African managers experienced positive commitment, inducing them to be psychologically attached to the construction company in South Africa. The study also found that some Black South African managers had bad committed-related experiences due to a lack of worker recognition, issues with involvement, reward system, isolation, and social identity. This study suggests that the case construction company in South Africa should consider employee recognition, worker involvement and use a fair and consistent reward system for all workers, regardless of colour, to strengthen the commitment of Black South African managers.

Keywords: *employee commitment, organisational commitment, psychological attachment, loyalty, recognition, rewards*

JEL Classification: *J22, J41, L61, M54*

1. Introduction

Organisations have been compelled by fierce rivalry to adopt efficiency human resources models and strategies which enhance employee loyalty and commitment (Mahmood et al., 2021; Yuan, 2022). Bharadwaj et al. (2022) argues that businesses must form teams of highly qualified, committed, and skilled individuals, focussing on attaining the organisation's tactical and strategic objectives. However, managing the entry and retention of highly talented, qualified, and productive individuals is a challenge that many organisations encounter in a changing business climate (Mitrofanova et al., 2021; Skelton, 2020). Because losing competent, skilled, and efficient personnel can cost the firm, employment relations managers are, therefore, required to manage employees and sustain high levels of organisational commitment (Ayodele, 2020; Al-Suraihi, 2021; Tiwari & Singh, 2014; Kurtessis et al., 2017).

*Corresponding Author:
Jeremy Mitonga-Monga, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

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In a similar vein, Rasool (2021) and Odubanjo (2015) contend that to ensure growth, organisations should implement techniques that encourage organisational commitment. Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (2020) describe organisational commitment as a single dimension, based on an attitudinal approach that includes identification, involvement, and loyalty. They further define employee/ organisational commitment as a bond with the organisation and a desire to stick with it. Similarly, Bailey (2018) defines employee commitment as the attachment that staff members have to the business of their employment. It has been demonstrated that this attachment grows as a result of the workers' experiences (Abraham et al., 2016). Several studies have investigated variables that influence organisational/employee commitment (Rameshkumar, 2020; Lim, 2021; Talukder, 2021; Talukder, 2019; Kossivi et al., 2016). There is, however, little research on the commitment-related experiences of Black South African managers who work in the construction industry.

The South African government has cautioned firms to change the way in which they attract and motivate employees considering the organisations' historically high failure to maintain Black South African workers (April 2022; Wood, 2020; Shikweni et al., 2019; Ngoma, 2019; Mayer, 2019; Van der Heyden, 2013). Considering this background, conducting this study is of paramount importance because the commitment of Black South African managers has become a strategic issue for organisations operating in South Africa. The study's question is classified as follows: *What is the commitment-related experiences of black managers at a South African construction firm?*

2. Literature Review

This study is guided by Homans's (1958) Social Exchange theory and Becker's (1960) Side Bet theory.

2.1. Homans's (1958) Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange theory is premised on the reciprocity principle, where one person's activities trigger a reaction or subsequent actions from the other side. When reciprocity is used, the transactions usually reach equilibrium (Schalk, 2019). Sharing the same sentiments is Cross and Dundon (2019) who argues that mutual connections are created through social interaction and exchange when employees take on obligations and reciprocate. Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) argue that the exchange relationship between organisation and workers is employee commitment. Additionally, Marescaux, Winne and Sels (2013) state that organisational practises establish a favourable exchange connection, which lead to good attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation. Geetha and Mampilly (2012) posit that employees perceive good organisational practises to be an organisation's commitment to them. As a result, employees respond favourably by displaying traits like commitment. Rabenu (2018) further state that as long as the parties uphold specific principles of social exchange, relationships can develop over time, fostering trustworthiness, loyalty and commitment.

2.2. Becker's (1960) Side Bet Theory

The Side Bet theory was developed to advance Social Exchange Theory (Mylona and Mihail, 2022; Chatzopoulou, 2022; Akbar, 2018). Side Bet theory assumes that employees remain loyal to the company owing to a secret financial 'side bet', which refers to a worker's work investment in terms of time, effort and money that would be deemed worthless at some perceived cost if the worker decides to leave the organization. Similarly, Al-Jabari and Ghazzawi (2019) state that a worker has more to lose if they leave an organisation because they have invested their time, effort, skills, and other personal resources in it. Supporting the assumptions of the Side Bet theory is Edey (2014) who argues that hidden investments such as a pension plan, seniority and firm-specific knowledge hinder workers' freedom and tie them to the organisation. Becker's (1960) Side Bet theory is grounded in the principle that commitment is a disposition to be attached to the organisation as a result of the accumulation of "side bets" that would be lost if the employment is terminated.

2.3. Organisational Commitment

There are many definitions of organisational commitment. O'Reilly and Chatman's (1919) definition of organisational commitment are used often, as they claim that organizational commitment is the psychological attachment to the organisation. For note is another definition given by Jehanzeb (2020), who define organisational commitment from a behavioural and attitudinal standpoint. The behavioural perspective

relates to incentives that the company offers its employees to keep them from quitting on their own (Baksi Maiti et al., 2021). Conversely, attitudinal commitment is connected to employees' desire to be a part of the organisation, whilst working towards its goals (Agyeiwaah, 2022). Dorta-Afonso (2021) provides an attitudinal and behavioural framework for organisational commitment by identifying organizational connection, affiliation, and loyalty. Similarly, Ahad (2021) and Wang (2022) contend that favourable cognitive and affective aspects of the organisation imply attitudinal and behavioural organisational commitment. Shukla (2019) contends that three independent factors, namely compliance or extrinsic rewards, identification, and internalization determine organisational commitment. It is pertinent to note that organisational commitment has been described by some authors as a psychological attachment (Vora et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2022; Haque, 2019). Despite there being numerous definitions of organisational commitment, this study used the one provided by O'Reilly and Chatman (2019), who define organisational commitment as a psychological attachment to the organisation.

2.4. Meyer and Allen's (1997) Types of Organisational Commitment

Meyer and Allen (1997), like several other authors, define organisational commitment as an individual's psychological attachment to the organization. Meyer and Allen (1997) identified affective commitment; normative commitment; and continuance commitment as the three main types of organisational commitment.

2.4.1. Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is described by Gillani (2021) as an emotional bond with the organization. Positive work attitudes, loyalty, and hard work are known behavioural indications of high affective commitment in workers (Mercurio, 2015). A high level of good interaction between the leader and members, emotional support, and attachment are also antecedents of affective commitment (Oh & Sawang, 2021; Shafiq, Hua, Bhatti, & Gillani, 2021). Additionally, Meyer and Allen's (1997) study identified a variety of factors, including role clarity, goal clarity, management openness, equity, feedback, and involvement, that affect affective commitment. Muleya (2017) posits that employees who have a strong emotional attachment desire to work for the organisation for a very long time. Employees who are affectively committed tend to view their employment relationship as a harmonious one and to take ownership of organisational goals (Ferreira & Coetzee, 2010). In addition, Khan, and Iqbal (2020) state that affective commitment increases job satisfaction and lowers high labour turnover.

2.4.2. Continuance Commitment

The foundations of continuance commitment are drawn from the Side Bet theory, which holds that the more one spends in an organisation in terms of time, effort, skill, and other personal resources, the greater the risk of leaving that company. Nawaz, Afzal, and Shehzadi (2013) define continuance commitment as the perceived financial benefit of remaining in a company as opposed to leaving it. Smith (2017) contends that continuance commitment occurs when employees consider leaving their existing organization after weighing the pros and cons. According to these scholars, continuance commitment is calculative in character since employees weigh the benefits and drawbacks of continuing to work for the organization. Van Dyk (2011) lists a number of costs associated with leaving the company, such as the danger of wasting time and effort obtaining non-transferable skills, losing enticing pension plans and perks, losing seniority and firm-specific skills and social relationships. The above identified costs show that the level of continuance commitment is influenced by the perceived costs of leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Instrumental attachment to the organization has also been linked to continued commitment (Beck & Wilson, 2000). In this case, the person's relationships and affiliation with the organization is based on an assessment of the financial rewards and favourable extrinsic incentives. Continuance organizational commitment, according to Best (1994), is believed to be at its best when there are few options and lots of "side bets. This means that voluntary resignation is represented by the financial loss experienced by leaving, and the need to stay is represented by the financial gains realized. Tetrick (1995), who supports the positive extrinsic benefit, claims that dedication to an organization, tenacity, and loyalty are exchanged for financial advantages.

2.4.3. Normative Commitment

Normative commitment, according to Ali (2021), is the obligation to continue working for a company. Employees who feel that continuing to work for a company is morally and legally correct exhibit normative commitment (Muhammad et al., 2021). Muleya (2017) identifies several indicators of normative commitment namely, sense of responsibility towards the organisation, feeling of being with the organisation, devotion to the organisation and staying afloat as an obligation. Induction training, socialization that arises from family background, society, and through employee social contacts are factors that influence normative commitment (Bhatti, Farhan, Ahmad, & Sharif, 2019). Similarly, Wiener (2009) argues that family, cultural, and organisational orientations are sources of the sense of duty to stay with an organisation. In addition, Muleya (2017) argues that organisation's investment on workers through training and development causes workers to feel obligated to the organisation. The above viewpoints support the reciprocal norm provided by the social exchange theory. The social exchange theory, which is the foundation of the reciprocal responsibility, contends that a person who receives a benefit is under a strong normative duty to return the favour in some form (McDonald & Makin, 2000). This suggests that people frequently feel obligated to compensate the organisation for its investment in them through normative commitment.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Setting and Participants

According to Walia (2019), a research setting is the location where data is gathered. The current study was conducted at a construction company (Headquarters) in South Africa's Gauteng province. The case organisation also operates in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. The organisation's headquarters served as the study's location. A total of twelve individuals were selected by using the purposive sampling technique. Black South African managers, who work in the engineering and operations departments, as well as technical support services, were the basis for the inclusion criterion.

3.2. Profiles of Research Participants

"P" was used as a code to identify black South African managers who participated in the study. Table 1 below provides a summary of the profiles of the research participants and interview duration.

Table 1. Participants' profiles and interview duration

No.	Pseudonyms	Age	Sex	Experience	Highest Qualification	Interview time
1	P1	36	M	2years	Bachelor's degree	19mins
2	P2	37	M	5years	Bachelor's degree	15mins
3	P3	30	M	9months	Bachelor's degree	16mins
4	P4	33	M	1year	Bachelor's degree	20mins
5	P5	29	F	8months	Bachelor's degree	21mins
6	P6	37	M	3years	Master's degree	14mins
7	P7	41	M	6years	Master's degree	13mins
8	P8	35	M	3years	Bachelor's degree	10mins
9	P9	33	M	2years	Bachelor's degree	14mins
10	P10	31	F	2years	Bachelor's degree	19mins
11	P11	39	M	4years	Master's degree	16mins
12	P12	36	M	3years	Bachelor's degree	17mins

Source: Authors' feedback

As seen in Table 1 above, the ages of the participants ranged from 29 to 41. Only three of the research participants held master's degrees; the others had bachelor's degrees. The participants had been employed by the South African construction company for at least eight months.

3.3. Research Strategy

A South African construction company's headquarters served as the sole case study for this study. Because of limited time and resources, the researcher focused only on the case construction company's headquarters. A single case study, according to Wilkins (2011), provides thorough data and aids in the researcher's ability to comprehend phenomena better.

3.4. Data Collection

For the present study, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the participants were the appropriate method for collecting data. Etikan et al. (2016) argue that semi structured face-to-face interviews foster direct communication between the researcher and the participants, where predetermined questions are posed. Research participants were asked the same set of open-ended questions and were encouraged to respond and speak freely.

3.5. Data Analysis

The researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages of thematic analysis, as well as the NVivo computer-based qualitative analysis system to support the thematic analysis. According to Creswell (2014), NVivo software is a windows software programme that uses powerful processes of indexing, searching and theorising to efficiently manage non-numerical and unstructured data. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify important themes and patterns that regularly appears in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.6. Strategies to Ensure Data Quality

The researcher used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as trustworthiness metrics for the study (Guba and Lincoln, 1988). To ensure credibility, the communicative validity of knowledge claims was tested by engaging in discussions with the interviewees. To guarantee transferability, the researcher provided a thorough explanation of the research approach and conducted a member verification process. The researcher maintained an audit trail of the study for reliability purposes. To ensure the dependability of the present research, the motivations for choosing the research design and methodology used in this study was well explained. The present study's researcher cross-checked the correctness of the different themes identified from the participants' narratives to guarantee confirmability.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study's objectives were thoroughly explained to the participants, and their participation was completely voluntary. The researcher used pseudonyms to safeguard the participants' identities and reduce their vulnerability to becoming victims of confidentiality violations. The researcher also followed the rules of academic integrity and honesty.

4. Findings of the Study

The study's results were organised into themes and sub-themes, which emerged during data analysis. Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Presentation of themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Commitment	-Social identity -Identification -Involvement -Psychological attachment -Loyalty -Desire to remain

Source: Authors' feedback

Table 2 above shows the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. Sub-themes that emerged include social identity, identification, involvement, psychological attachment, loyalty and desire to remain.

4.1. Discussion of the Findings

The primary goal of the study was to explore commitment-related experiences of Black South African managers at a construction company in South Africa. The participants' responses revealed six subthemes, namely social identity, involvement, identification psychological attachment, psychological attachment, loyalty and desire to remain. The next sub-section presents a discussion of the theme and sub-themes that emerged from the study.

4.1.1. Psychological Attachment

Under the sub-theme of psychological attachment, quotes were collected from participants pertaining to emotional connexion. The study's finding that relates to psychological attachment to the organisation uncovered participants' experiences and level of commitment to the organisation. When asked about their experiences and willingness to remain with the construction company, the participants' responses showed elements of psychological attachment to the construction company. In this regard, P3 said: *'100% for me, having the opportunity to build relationships with people as high as the Managing Director. It showed me that my hard work was recognised at higher levels. One opportunity that I got was to attend the award ceremony by invitation. It was such an honour'*.

P7 revealed that the working environment at the construction company was conducive, which is good for those who are there to stay. The participant's sentiments show that a conducive work environment fosters a positive commitment-related experience, which makes workers to become psychologically attached to the construction company. P7 has this to say; *"The working environment is inclusive, maybe it is because most of the time, I worked with one manager, and it made it easier. I wouldn't want to leave. It is very enabling in the sense that when there was CCS, then someone organised training, and he led by example, and he was not biased'*.

When asked about his commitment-related experiences with the construction company, P11 alluded to the good relationship that he had with his line manager, which enhanced the psychological attachment he had with this construction company. In this respect, he claimed: *"A good relationship with the line manager fosters emotional attachment"*.

The above study's findings correspond with the views of Bailey (2018), who argue that the degree to which workers feel psychologically attached to their workplace has been shown to relate to various crucial outcome variables like motivation on the job, satisfaction, performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, turnover intention, and absenteeism. Supporting the above sentiments, Rameshkumar (2020) posit that if workers trust their employers and are happy with the work and conditions of employment, then they will become attached to the organisation and will desire to continue to work for that organisation. Similarly, Lim (2021) avers that psychological attachment is demonstrated by a firm acceptance of and belief in an organization's goals and ideals, the desire to exert significant effort on behalf of one's business, and a strong desire to remain attached to one's business.

4.1.2. Loyalty

Some of the participants revealed that the case construction company in South Africa has offered them the opportunity to grow and, in return, they showed some level of loyalty to the organisation. The following participant responses attest to this.

'I still have room for growth in this company, and this company gives me opportunity to grow in all areas, so I will make use of the opportunities before I leave'(P10).

'I would say, to an extent, our company looks for ways to improve the skills of workers' (P12).

"I do see myself growing in this company because the company allows me to make decisions. But, like, I said, this is to a certain extent, and it is not for everybody" (P9).

"It depends on the level you are in, but the good thing about this company is that there is a belief in growing their employees than to recruit from outside. The company would rather take a site clerk and bring that site clerk into an office and groom them into HR clerk or something" (P1).

The above participant responses support Scott's (2013) assertion that employees show loyalty if an organisation provides an environment that fosters employee development. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2015) claim that loyal workers are committed to the success of an organisation and believe that working for the organisation is their best option. In contrast, a few participants expressed that the frustrations that they experience at work owing to a toxic work environment impacted their dedication to the organisation negatively. One of the participants remarked: *"people are constantly looking for a better work opportunity outside because the company does not provide adequate technical training and development" (P2).*

4.1.3. Desire to Remain

Some other participants expressed a desire to remain at the case construction company in South Africa though they indicated that the case organisation should implement some changes. One participant mentioned that the organisation must give them both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Below are the responses of a majority of the participants concerning a desire to remain with the construction company.

"The organisation recognises workers and provide fair rewards, I can stay here because the company treat us as asserts not liabilities" (P4).

"Yes, I am here to stay" (P5).

The Social Exchange theory, which states that a person who receives a benefit is under a strong normative obligation or rule to repay the favour in some manner, supports the afore-mentioned points of view (McDonald & Makin, 2020). This suggests that people frequently feel obligated to compensate the organisation for its investment in them through normative commitment. Allen and Meyer (1997), who define normative commitment as the employee's moral feelings of obligation to remain with the organisation, express a similar viewpoint.

4.1.4. Social Identity

Social identity is the process by which people compare themselves to other people and the things that they share in common. Having a social identity may provide people with a sense of self-worth and a framework for socialising, and it may impact their personalities and how others see them. The majority of the interviewees reported having bad experiences with their sense of social identity at work. The afore-mentioned sentiments contradict the behavioural approach to organisational commitment, which contends that socialisation and team spirit foster a unit approach and sense of belonging (Morrow, 2015; Reichers, 2018). Similarly, Clerki (2017) argues that social identities are influential because people categorise one another and themselves according to social identities. Presented below is one of the participant's responses in this respect.

"You would believe that we get these positions because of triple BEE requirements of the law on equity, and you do not feel that you are there on merit" (P6).

"You tend to feel black by the way you are treated by fellow white managers, maybe it's because of historical background" (P8).

4.1.5. Identification and Involvement

The study's findings show that the construction company in South Africa does not value and involve workers on issues concerning them. Their responses point to feelings of being rejected and a lack of enthusiasm the case construction company. The above viewpoints contradict extant literature. It has been shown that workers who identify with their workplaces perceive their employer in a positive light (Nappi et al., 2020). In

addition, Avanzi et al. (2014) argue that workers' involvement leads to productivity increases and overall growth within the organisation. In this respect, the participants responded, as shown below.

"I am just there to maintain the company's BEE rating status quo, and I will be important again when the BEE certificate needs to be renewed" (P7).

"I was the first person to be a senior manager in this company. You will find yourself isolated because they have secret fishing trips and so on" (P3)

"Going on strategic sessions with them as the only black person ended in discussions with references to what "we discussed at the braai", and I was not there, so I will just be there and listening to conclusions made at the braai without my input. For me, their private braai sessions seemed to be one way they used to exclude me" (P9).

5. Contribution of the Study

Conducting this study is crucial because, in light of the pressure that the South African government places on firms to transform, employee commitment has emerged as a strategic concern for organisations operating in South Africa. This study provided a significant theoretical contribution by filling the research gap regarding commitment related experiences of Black South African managers at a construction company in South Africa. Employers can also gain from the study because it sheds awareness on the commitment related experiences of managers, allowing them to design strategies to manage and monitor workers and their commitment.

6. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

Theories that guided this study were limited to Homan's social exchange theory (1958), Becker's side bet theory (1960) and Meyer and Allen's organisational commitment model (1997). Other organisational commitment theories and models were mentioned but not considered in this study owing to methodological boundaries. This study considered commitment-related experiences of Black managers at a single construction company in South Africa; hence, the findings cannot be applied to all construction companies in South Africa. Another limitation of this study relates to the issue of qualitative methodology used by the researcher. Application of a mixed method approach could assist to gain a broader and better understanding of the commitment related experiences of Black South African managers.

7. Conclusion

The study's results show that most of the participants had positive commitment-related experiences, which attached them psychologically to the construction company in South Africa. Generally, their commitment-related experiences induced them to remain with the construction company. However, a few individuals identified negative commitment-related experiences, namely a lack of recognition, isolation, social identity issues, unfair treatment and unequal remuneration practices as factors that hinder their desire to be committed to the construction company in South Africa. Overall, it can be said that the commitment-related experiences of Black South African managers induced them to be loyal and psychologically attached to the construction company in South Africa. This study recommends that the construction company in South Africa should consider employee recognition, worker participation, whilst it should reduce social isolation and utilise a fair and consistent reward system for all workers, irrespective of colour.

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