

Employee Commitment under the Challenging Circumstances of Post-Covid-19 Pandemic: The Expanded Role of Social Capital

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of relational social capital on employee commitment within Moroccan private organizations in the context of post-Covid-19 pandemic. Using non-probability snowball sampling, a total of 387 Moroccan employees participated in the study by completing an 18-item questionnaire. The instrument consisted of demographic questions and items relying on a seven-point Likert scale. Through Pearson product moment correlation and linear regression analyses, relational social capital was found to be positively and significantly associated with employee commitment dimensions, namely affective, continuance and normative. These findings suggest that organizations that create and promote trust in the workplace are more likely to ensure the commitment of their employees, which in turn can potentially allow for quick recovery from the pressing economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Further implications of the study are discussed. Moreover, research limitations and recommendations for future enquiry are addressed.*

Keywords: *Social capital, employee commitment, post-Covid-19 pandemic, Moroccan private organizations*

1. Introduction

Employee commitment is a fundamental driver of organizational prosperity. It is manifested in employees' willingness to exert discretionary efforts and act as ambassadors of their respective organizations (Bartholomeusz et al., 2021). However, the saddening rise of Covid-19 has been detrimental for employees, companies, and overall world economy (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Existing working arrangements were overturned, constituting an immense threat to the wellbeing of employees and corporations (Wong et al., 2021). Although the intensity of the virus in terms of its spread has been substantially reduced over the few months, contending with its aftermaths presents significant challenges for organizations. One of these challenges involves retaining the commitment of the most qualified and competent employees. Despite its strategic importance, drivers of employee commitment during the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of Moroccan organizations have not been investigated. To fill this void in the extant literature, the study proposes that employee commitment is largely influenced by the relational dimension of organizational social capital. The latter is associated with interpersonal relationships characterized by relational aspects that have developed through a history of interactions, including trust, mutual obligations, and reciprocity and respect (Gooderham, 2007; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In the same vein, Chow and Chan (2008) and Clercq et al. (2013) assert that organizations that are high in social capital create a competitive advantage over those low in this construct. Furthermore, García-Lirios (2021) points out that commitment can be understood in terms of a series of behaviors, roles, motifs, and expectations that generate a collaborative dynamic amongst the members of a productive organization.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to empirically examine the role of relational social capital in influencing the commitment of employees who work for Moroccan private organizations. Specifically, this research investigates three dimensions of employee commitment, viz. affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Besides, the focus on Moroccan private organizations is justified by the fact that these organizations have undergone greater challenges compared to their public counterparts amidst the pandemic. Moreover, the present study aims to provide practical evidence for Moroccan corporate managers regarding the significance of maintaining strong relational social capital as a pathways towards sustaining the commitment of employees who play a vital role in organizational success.

This paper is structured in the following manner. It begins by reviewing the literature associated with employee commitment and relational social capital. Next, the methodology adopted in this study, including research design, participants, variables and measures, and reliability analysis are detailed. Subsequently, the research results are presented and discussed. Finally, study's limitations and directions for future research are addressed.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employee commitment

Over the past two decades, the leading approach to examining organizational commitment has been the one advanced by Meyer and Allen (1984) who specified three dimensions of the construct, namely affective, Continuance, and normative. Meyer and Allen's dimensions help identify motifs and reasons for which employees opt to continue working for their organizations. Their conceptualization of commitment was grounded upon existing uni-dimensional perspectives regarding the construct (e.g. Becker, 1960; Porter et al., 1974). Specifically, affective commitment is associated with the employees' involvement and emotional attachment to their company (Kaplan & Kaplan 2018). It is emphasized as the highest and most sincere form of commitment (Cohen, 2007). "Employees with a strong affective commitment maintain employment with the organization because they want to do so" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). Continuance commitment on the other hand, is driven by an employee's perceived cost of leaving and a lack of better alternatives (Kaplan & Kaplan 2018; Mayer & Allen 1987; Baruch, 1998). Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment maintain employment because they "need to do so" (p. 67). Moreover, Cohen (2007) holds a slightly different perspective in that he believes continuance commitment emphasizes an employee's perception of the associated benefits of remaining in the organization, rather than the cost of terminating membership.

Normative commitment is related to an employee's desire to stay in the organization because of a feeling of obligation and debt owed to a co-worker, superior or the organization as a whole. Employees with a level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organization. Wiener (1982) points out that individual's normative commitment is likely to be influenced by his or her experiences before and after joining the organization. In this regard, Cohen (2007) suggests that commitment developed over two stages, namely pre-entry and post-entry. With respect to the former, it is proposed that employees enter the organization with their previous experiences and already establish personal beliefs, values and expectations pertinent to the job before their engagement in the organization. These particular attitudes are widely referred to as commitment propensity (e.g. Pierce et al., 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Cohen 2007). Post-entry commitment, on the other hand, is related to the employee's actual experience with the specific organization he or she already entered (Pierce et al., 1987). Hence, continuance commitment was constructed in response to factors and conditions that expand the cost of leaving; affective commitment was expected to be specifically sensitive to work experiences; while social pressure was believed to help develop normative commitment (Powell et al., 2004, p. 159).

2.2 Relational social capital

Several attempts to conceptualize organizational social capital have emphasized the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the term. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) suggest that organizational social capital consists of three important dimensions. The first dimension concerns “configurations of linkages between people or units” which facilitates access to a wide network of individuals (p. 244). The second dimension refers to aspects that enhance quality of relationships amongst people within the organization such as trust, reciprocity norms and commitment to one another. Lastly, the third dimension involves the collective actions that are associated with the organizational members’ shared understanding and interpretation. Ko (2019) indicates that Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s dimensional model has also been respectively referred to as the structural (level of connectedness), relational (mutual trust) and cognitive (shared organizational vision) social capital.

The relational dimension of social capital is associated with interpersonal relationships that are characterized by a number integral aspects, including trust, obligations, reciprocity and respect (Gooderham, 2007). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), the relational dimension of social capital focuses on the kind of personal relationships that individuals have developed with one another as a result of a history of interactions. Muniady et al. (2015) point out that that the nature of actions and interaction dynamics between two individual actors who occupy similar positions in a relationship network will largely depend on their history of trustworthiness and bonds. Santos and his colleagues (2015) indicate that the extent to which individuals trust their superiors and peers influences their knowledge sharing propensity, which may facilitate (or hinders) access to restrictive knowledge. Besides, the authors point out that norms of cooperation such as team work, appreciation of diversity and tolerance of failure are vital components of an environment that encourages sharing and collaboration, rather than competition. These norms enhance social relations and help strengthen the foundation of knowledge creation.

Therefore, the current study set out to examine the following hypotheses:

H₁ There is a positive association between relational social capital and affective commitment of Moroccan employees.

H₂ Relational social capital positively predict continuance commitment of Moroccan employees.

H₃ Relational social capital is positively associated with normative commitment of Moroccan employees.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study was carried out with a quantitative design. In particular, Pearson product-moment correlation was initially performed so as to investigate the association between relational social capital and dimensions of employee commitment, namely affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Subsequently, linear regression was implemented in order to examine the effect of relational social capital on commitment of employees of Moroccan private organizations. Moreover, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was utilized to run both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

3.2 Participants

This study targeted particularly employees who currently occupy temporary or permanent positions in different corporations across multiple economic sectors. Snowball sampling was deployed so as to reach participants. It is one of the non-probability sampling methods where respondents assist in locating other respondents by contacting people who may be willing to take part in the study (Kothari, 2004). This sampling method is widely used by researchers in the social sciences for its cost-effectiveness and convenience. It is also adopted for its capacity to help obtain a high response rate.

As a result, 145 employees took part in this study by completing a 20-item questionnaire. The latter consisted of demographic questions and items relying on a seven-point Likert scale. 43% of them were males ($n=62$), while 57% were female employees ($n=83$). As to the participants' age, 25% were under 20 ($n=36$), 60% were between 20 and 29 ($n=87$), while 15% were in the 30 and 39 age range ($n=22$). Furthermore, 33% of respondents work part-time ($n=49$) in their companies, while 67% were full-time employees ($n=96$).

3.3 Variables and measures

Employee commitment: The participants' commitment to their employing companies was examined by adapting scale items originally developed by Meyer and Allen (1991) and then shortened by Elele (2010). The organizational commitment scale consisted of three subscales, each of which was aimed at measuring one of the commitment subconstructs, viz. affective, continuance and normative commitment. The affective subscale comprised of five items such as: *"I really feel as if the organization's problems are my own," "The organization has a great deal of meaning to me"* to assess participants' emotional attachment to their respective companies. Regarding the continuance subscale, it also consisted of five items which were used to measure participants' perceived cost of leaving their current companies. A sample of items includes *"Too much life interruption would happen if I decided to leave this company," "I cannot leave this organization due the scarcity of alternatives."* Finally, the normative commitment subscale was made up of four items. For example: *"I feel it is not right to leave this organization," "I feel the organization deserves my loyalty."* These items evaluated the respondents' level of feeling obligated to remain in their organizations. Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=7).

Relational social capital: Four items (e.g. *"Our organization members are usually considerate of one another,"* and *"Our organization members trust each other's intentions and actions."*) were implemented in order to measure this OSC construct. The participants were invited to answer each item utilizing a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items were utilized to assess employees' perception of the quality of the relationships among organizational members with their respective organizations.

3.3 Reliability analysis

Prior to proceeding with the data analysis, the adopted scales were analyzed for internal consistency. While the reliabilities of the scales have been confirmed in previous studies, it was considered necessary to run reliability tests since most items were slightly modified. Table 1 illustrates the number of items that made up each scale along with the Cronbach's alpha scores.

Table 1. Reliability analysis of the scales

Names of scales	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Relational social capital	.71	4
Affective commitment	.87	5
Continuance commitment	.91	5
Normative commitment	.82	4

The questionnaire comprised of 18 items in aggregate. Relational social capital was made up of 4 items, affective commitment consisted of 5 items, continuance commitment was evaluated along a 5-item scale, and normative commitment consisted of 4 items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .71, .87, .91, and .82, respectively. These results indicate that the scales complied with the required reliability standards.

4. Results

Preliminary bivariate correlation analysis was initially performed using Pearson coefficient to test the association between relational social capital and commitment dimensions among Moroccan employees. The significance value was set at 0.05. The results indicate that relational social capital was significantly and positively correlated with affective ($r = .67, p < 0.05$), continuance ($r = .66, p < 0.05$), and normative commitment ($r = .71, p < 0.05$).

Subsequently, a series of linear regression tests were performed in order to find out whether relational social capital could predict employee commitment during and post-pandemic times. Normality assumptions associated with this linear regression, including autocorrelation and multicollinearity were checked, confirming the normal distribution of data. Thus, it was safe to proceed with the examination of the three proposed hypotheses.

The regression findings reveal that relational social capital was able to predict 26% variability in affective commitment, $F(1, 377) = 154.092, p < 0.05$, with an adjusted $R^2 = .25$. Therefore, relational social capital was found to be a significant predictor of affective commitment ($B = .54, p < 0.05$), which gives credence to the first hypothesis in this study.

Similarly, relational social capital was shown to explain 43% of the variance in continuance commitment, $F(1, 376) = 288.404, p < 0.05$, with an adjusted $R^2 = .42$. This finding indicates that continuance commitment was significantly affected by relational social capital ($B = .61, p < 0.05$). Hence, hypothesis 2 was fully accepted.

Finally, the regression results have demonstrated that 51% of the variance in normative commitment was predicted by relational social capital, $F(1, 376) = 379.217, p < 0.05$, with an adjusted $R^2 = .5$. Hence, the third hypothesis which states that relational social capital is significantly associated with normative commitment was retained ($B = .68, p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of relational social capital on employee commitment in the context of post-Covid-19 pandemic. Although the association between organizational social capital and employee commitment has been established in previous studies, whether or not this relationship persists during and after the Covid-19 pandemic requires further examination. Therefore, the present study adds to the literature by investigating the effect of social

capital, particularly its relational aspect, on affective, continuance and normative dimensions of commitment amongst employees who currently work for Moroccan private organizations.

To begin with, it was found that relational social capital had a positive impact on affective commitment of employees. Managers who establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships with and amongst organizational members based on resilient trust that transcends contractual and short-term outcomes are more likely to ensure employees' emotional attachment to their respective organizations. This finding is consistent with previous research results (e.g. Parzefall & Kuppelwieser, 2012; Lombardi et al., 2019). Hence, the rise and aftermaths of the Covid-19 pandemic demand high levels of employee affective commitment in order to recover from such unprecedented crisis. In this sense, relational social capital is an asset that organizations can develop and expand to the address and attract the affectivity of their employees. In addition, employees who are able to emotionally relate to their organizations tend to consider company problems to be their own, especially when those problems directly threaten their wellbeing and job stability. According to Filimonau et al. (2020), employee affective commitment may change favorably towards the organization if the latter is faced with a crisis caused by an external event. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, employees choose to sustain employment and be active participants in the process of recovering from the global health and economic crisis partly due their positive affective affiliation to the companies for which they work.

Moreover, the results of the present study have shown a positive association between relational social capital and continuance commitment. This is in line with previous findings in the literature. For instance, Ellinger et al. (2013) demonstrated that organizational investments in social capital positively impact employee (continuance) commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance. Although other factors, such a lack of job opportunities and perceived scarcity of alternatives as caused by the pandemic, might mandate that employees remain in their current organizations, employees are likely perceive the positive interpersonal relationships that are predicated on trust and reciprocity as a benefit of maintaining employment. In this case, terminating employment implies dispensing with these favorable relationships that have been developed throughout a history of interactions (Muniady et al., 2015). Similarly, a positive association was reported between relational social capital and normative commitment. This finding is consistent with Kroll et al.'s (2019) study which concludes that employees tend to demonstrate a higher propensity to be committed to organizations that operate through trust, collaboration and shared mission. Employees feel it is their moral obligation to remain in an organization for which they have developed mutual trust. Furthermore, normative commitment might, in fact, increase substantially amid crisis circumstances. Adler and Kwon (2002) point out that relationships that are orchestrated by loyalty, trust, and obligation are expected to promote solidarity among organizational members in the workplace. Therefore, it is critical for corporate managers to capitalize on the vast benefits of maintaining advanced levels of relational social capital as a pathway towards ensuring employee commitment, which is, in turn, crucial for Moroccan private organizations to recover from the pressing crisis brought by the saddening pandemic.

6. Conclusion

Although the connection between social capital and employee commitment has been established by several studies in the literature, little is known about whether or not such link persists under the challenging circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the majority of such studies have been widely contextualized in the West; however, the context of Moroccan private organizations has not been examined. Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by investigating the association between relational social capital and affective, continuance and normative commitment of Moroccan employees. The study concludes that organizations that focus their efforts on increasing

trust amongst their workforce are more likely to produce committed employees. Such commitment enables organizations to more adequately manage the aftermaths of the global health crisis.

Important limitations and recommendations for future research should be addressed. First, the sample is not sufficient to safely generalize the findings of this research. Future research may consider increasing the number of participants to obtain a more representative sample. Second, the scope of this study was limited to only examining the relational dimensions of social capital. It is recommended for researchers to control for the other social capital dimensions, namely structural and cognitive. Finally, the present study was purely quantitative. It is important that future studies use qualitative semi-structured interviews in order to obtain more comprehensive conclusions.

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