

STIMULATING ACHIEVEMENTS: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT BETWEEN HIGH- PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

How to cite this paper:

Arubayi, D. O., & Odiri, V. I. O. (2023). Stimulating achievements: The mediating effect of employee commitment between high-performance work practices and employee engagement. *Corporate & Business Strategy Review*, 4(2), 143–150. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cbsrv4i2art13>

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ISSN Online: 2708-4965

ISSN Print: 2708-9924

Received: 08.10.2022

Accepted: 17.04.2023

JEL Classification: M1, M10, M12

DOI: 10.22495/cbsrv4i2art13

Drawing on the social exchange paradigm, this study evaluated the mediating effects of employee commitment (EC) in the relationship between high-performance work practices (HPWP) and employee engagement (EE) in Nigeria. The study used the social exchange theory and this paradigm has been previously used in the works of Blau (1964), Gouldner (1960), and Settoon et al. (1996). The study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design via questionnaire administration. Three employee engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption) and employee commitment (affective, normative and continuance) dimensions, and six high-performance work practices (employee selection process, motivational compensation, job and work design, participative decision-making, information sharing, and training/development) were employed. Data collected from one hundred and sixty-eight employees in selected ministries in Delta State were analyzed via structural equation modeling (SEM). Results showed that engagement positively affects high-performance work practices. The result also indicated that employee commitment mediated the influence of high-performance work practices on employee engagement. The results further suggest that affective commitment does not mediate the link between vigor and high-performance work practices. Notably, the theoretical and managerial inferences have been methodically discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Participative Decision-Making, Training, Information Sharing, Motivational Compensation

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — D.O.A.; Methodology — D.O.A.; Investigation — V.I.O.O.; Resources — V.I.O.O.; Writing — D.O.A. and V.I.O.O.; Supervision — V.I.O.O.; Funding Acquisition — D.O.A. and V.I.O.O.

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements: We sincerely appreciate the cooperation of employees of the sampled ministries used in our investigation. More so, we kindly acknowledge the roles played by the various ministries heads in permitting us to administer our questionnaire.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, human resource management (HRM) researchers have shown considerable relevance of the role employee engagement (EE) plays in promoting high-performance work practices (HPWP) in both developed and developing nations (Zhong et al., 2016; Grobler & de Bruyn, 2018; Balluerka et al., 2020; Aeknarajindawat et al., 2020; Donkor et al., 2021; Hauff et al., 2022). Employee engagement is an enthusiasm trait, which is cogitated in the spontaneous emergence of internal human resources as they contribute towards and/or stimulate organizational achievement via their job performance.

Arefin et al. (2019) asserted that employees of organizations actively engage in the place of work if they are contended, committed, motivated, and recognized by the organization to exhibit both in-role and extra-role behaviour and are thus unwilling to leave the organization. Predominantly, HRM researchers have assessed the multiplicity of job engagement antecedents and outcomes. Nevertheless, prior studies have acknowledged the link between employee engagement and HPWP is relatively scanty, however, they rarely assessed the mediating effect of employee commitment (EC) in the relationship between high-performance work practices and employee engagement.

High-performance work practices encompass a collection of distinct, although interrelated human resource (HR) practices like employee recruitment and selection, incessant training and development, job and work design, participative decision-making, information sharing, motivational compensation, performance appraisal, among others (Takeuchi et al., 2009; Odiri, 2016a; Arefin et al., 2019; Salin et al., 2022). These practices of HR occupy a vital synergistic place in HRM due to the fact that they increase the employee's abilities and motivation towards stimulating organizational achievement (Tawk, 2021; Balluerka et al., 2020; Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018; Isa et al., 2018).

While we acknowledge that prior studies have shown that employee commitment positively mediates the relationship between HPWP and employee engagement (Aryee et al., 2012; Isa et al., 2018; Alqudah et al., 2022), little is known about Nigeria. Consequently, this study assessed the mediating mechanisms of employee commitment via which employee engagement improves high-performance work practices.

In this paper, we proposed three dimensions of employee engagement (vigor, dedication and absorption), employee commitment (normative, affective and continuance) and six HPWP dimensions (employee selection process, job and work design, motivational compensation, participative decision-making, information sharing, training and development). This study contributes to extant strategic HR management literature, presenting why and how workforce shows engagement and commitments in rejoinder to HPWP.

The remaining part of this paper is sectioned as follows: a review of related literature is presented in Section 2, Section 3 provides research methods, Section 4 is dedicated to results and discussions, conclusion and recommendations are proposed in Section 5.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Employee engagement (EE)

Employee engagement has been broadly defined in the HRM literature and alternatively is taken to mean employee attitude (Boxall & Macky, 2009). EE refers to the positive feeling and work-related state of employee mindset characterized by vigor, absorption and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employee engagement is anchored on the employee's ability to exert both physical and mental energies in the work environment.

First, *vigor* refers to the physical and mental willingness to work, regardless of the challenges faced in the work environment (Balluerka et al., 2020). *Dedication* is being solidly involved in the work environment and experiencing a feeling of enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride among others (Aeknarajindawat et al., 2020) while *absorption* is the feeling of full involvement and engrossment in the place of work, such that the employee feels undetached from the work environment (Balluerka et al., 2020).

In this study, the three attributes of EE were employed — vigor, dedication, and absorption — which broadly incorporate the physical and mental attitude of employees while working. The choice of the dimensions is based on the fact that when employees are engaged while working, they have high energy levels (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

2.2. High-performance work practices (HPWP)

In HRM literature, there has been no universally accepted definition of HPWP; thus, several meanings are attributable to the concept. Fu (2013) sees HPWP as an integrated scheme of HR practices that promote employees' skills and knowledge about the work responsibilities towards developing organizational capital, leading to organizational competitiveness. Becker and Gerhart (1996) categorize HPWP into two types, namely alternative work and high-commitment work practices.

First, alternative work practices include job enrichment, quality circles, and job rotation while high-commitment work practices entail advanced training and development and a behavior-related appraisal system (Alqudah et al., 2022; Donkor et al., 2021; Arefin et al., 2019). In recent times, HPWP have been expanded to include such dimensions as the employee selection process, motivational compensation, job and work design, participative decision-making, information sharing, and training/development (Odiri, 2016b; Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018; Isa et al., 2018; Arefin et al., 2019; Balluerka et al., 2020).

According to Boselie (2010), employees will perform efficiently when they are aware of the motivational incentives available to them, involvement in decision-making, training and development, information sharing, etc. In this regard, employees will be willing to support the organization to the fullest. In this study, six (6) HPWP dimensions were employed in order to see whether they have effects on employees' commitment and employee engagement.

2.3. Employee commitment (EC)

Over the years, the concept of employee commitment has received considerable attention in HRM literature. Porter et al. (1974) see employee commitment as the level of feeling and loyalty toward the organization. Reichers (1985) contend that employee commitment is the extent to which employees are involved within the organization. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) find that committed employees are employees who cooperate with each other in order to realize the common goals of the organization.

One of the reasons employees are committed to the scheme of things in the organization, according to the views of Mowday et al. (1982), is best explained by the theory of exchange. Theory of exchange proposes that employees are committed when they perceive a social exchange between them and the organization. However, due to lack of consensus on employee commitment meaning, it becomes more cumbersome to measure it.

Employee commitment has been broadly measured in terms of short-term, medium-term and long-term quest by the organization and interpreted as the maintaining principle why employees are loyal to the organization. HRM literature sees the measurement of employee commitment to include affective, normative and continuance commitments (Takeuchi et al., 2009; Alqudah et al., 2022). These three dimensions of commitment articulate the psychological state of the relationship between the employee and the organization and the retention of organizational members (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Affective commitment is comprised of personal, structural, job-related, and experience-related attributes (Zhong et al., 2016); *continuance* implies the persistence and ability of employee and organization to maintain a social exchange relationship (Grobler & de Bruyn, 2018); while *normative commitment* is the organization's willingness to provide incentives for employees (Grobler & de Bruyn, 2018).

2.4. Theoretical underpinning

The study is centered on the social exchange theory and contends that positive and valuable actions targeted at the workforce by the management can result in the creation of high-quality exchange relationships generating obligations for the workforce, which in turn will lead to positive benefits for the employee and employer. (Blau, 1964;

Gouldner, 1960; Settoon et al., 1996). The implication of social exchange theory is that when employees realize a high level of quality exchange between them and the management, they are more probable to feel gratified to give back for what the organization has given to them by increasing their commitment and being more engaged to assist the organization in stimulating achievement (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003).

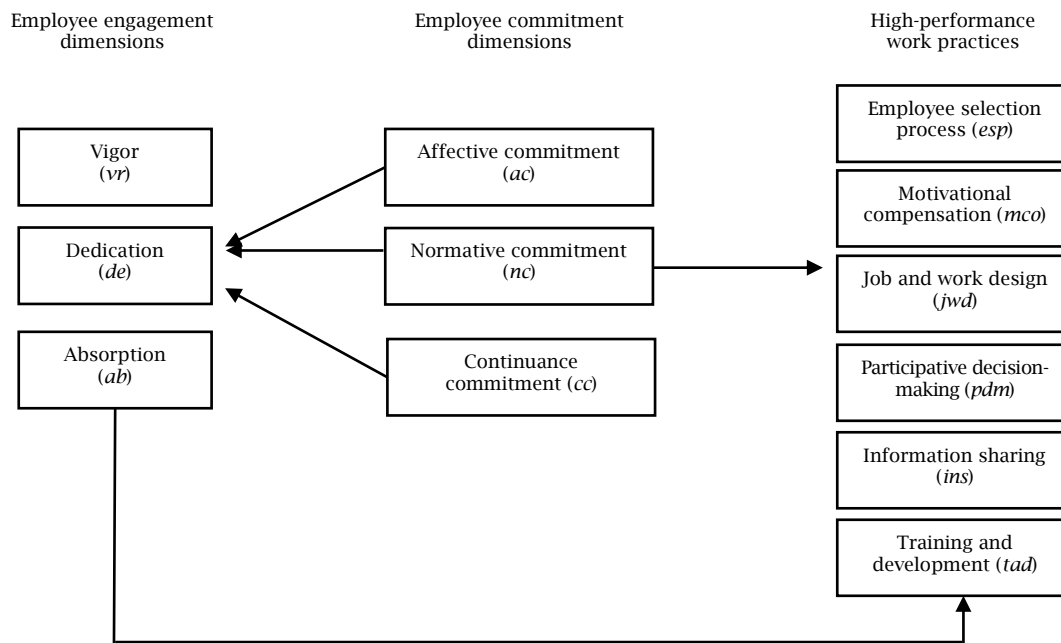
On the basis of the social exchange theory and extant literature (Donkor et al., 2021; Aeknarajindawat et al., 2020; Takeuchi et al., 2009), high performance is positively related to employee commitment and engagement; however, in this study, employee commitment is the mediator in the link between employee engagement and HPWP.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design via the administration of the questionnaire, which was met out to two hundred and eighty-eight (288) employees of two (2) government ministries in Delta State of Nigeria. Out of these, one hundred and sixty-eight (168) were fully retrieved by the researchers. Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula was used in arriving at the sample of the study. The questionnaire draws on a long practice of dynamics that is responsible for stimulating work achievements in human resource management research and those extensively used in prior studies (Donkor et al., 2021; Balluerka et al., 2020; Aeknarajindawat et al., 2020; Grobler & de Bruyn, 2018) in assessing the complementarities between HPWP and employee engagement.

The questionnaire was designed on a 5-point scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree and administered on a face-to-face basis to employees of some selected ministries in Delta State, Nigeria. Respondents had a timeframe of 14 days to complete the instrument. This study used the three dimensions of employee commitment which are affective, normative and continuance commitments. Firstly, to assess employee engagement three dimensions, vigor (*vr*), dedication (*de*), and absorption (*ab*), were employed. Secondly, to measure high-performance work practices, six (6) dimensions, employee selection process (*esp*), motivational compensation (*mco*), job and work design (*jwd*), participative decision-making (*pdm*), information sharing (*ins*), training/development (*tad*), were employed. Thirdly, to measure employee commitment, three dimensions, affective (*ac*), normative (*nc*), and continuance (*cc*), were used.

Figure 1. Theoretical model



In specific, the independent variable is *employee engagement*, while *high-performance work practices* is the dependent variable. Also, *employee commitment* is the mediating variable. Data gathered were analysed via descriptive (simple percentages, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson correlation), post-estimation (confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and variance inflation factor (VIF)), and inferential (structural equation modeling (SEM)) statistical techniques. The statistical test was performed via STATA 13.0 version.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics revealed that out of 168 respondents, 42.26% are males while 57.74% are females. The majority of the government ministries employees have job experience between 3-5 years (72%) and 6-10 years (17%), while the remaining 1-2 years (11%). About 52% of the employees had

obtained Bachelor's degree, 22% and 26% had obtained NCE/ND and postgraduate degrees respectively, and 31% of them are single while 59% are married. Comparing the results with the tenure of employment of these employees, one can conclude that employee engagements (vigor, dedication and absorption) are frequently used in the government ministries in Delta State of Nigeria (Table 1).

Furthermore, for the purpose of data analysis, it is vital that all items of a research instrument (a questionnaire) are reliable. For this reason, a reliability test on the basis of Cronbach's alpha was done to show the level of reliability of the research instrument. A research instrument as opined by Okoro and Okoye (2016) is considered reliable when the Cronbach's alpha of an item is greater than 0.05. Table 2 shows the results of the reliability tests.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic variables	Categories	Percent = 100%
Gender	Male	42.26
	Female	57.74
Marital status	Single	31.0
	Married	59.0
	Unmarried but living with a spouse	9.00
	Divorced	1.00
	Separated	-
	Widowed	-
Level of education	WASC/SSCE/GCE	-
	NCE/ND	22.0
	B.Sc./HND	52.0
	PGD/M.Sc./PhD	26.0
Tenure of employment	< 1year	-
	1-2 years	11.0
	3-5 years	72.0
	6-10 years	17.0
	> 10 years	-

Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

In Table 2, Alpha values for all items on employee engagement, employee commitment and high-performance work practices beat the 0.5 threshold as recommended by Okoro and

Okoye (2016); hence, the items of the research instrument are considerably consistent and can be relied upon to conduct further statistical tests.

Table 2. Reliability results

Variables	Sign	Alpha
<i>Dimensions of employee engagement</i>		
Vigor (<i>vr</i>)	+	0.8065
Dedication (<i>de</i>)	+	0.8129
Absorption (<i>ab</i>)	+	0.8110
<i>Dimensions of employee commitment</i>		
Affective (<i>ac</i>)	+	0.7990
Normative (<i>nc</i>)	+	0.8025
Continuance (<i>cc</i>)	+	0.7997
<i>Dimensions of high-performance work practices</i>		
Employee selection process (<i>esp</i>)	+	0.8247
Motivational compensation (<i>mco</i>)	+	0.8181
Job and work design (<i>jwd</i>)	+	0.8148
Participative decision-making (<i>pdm</i>)	+	0.8164
Information sharing (<i>ins</i>)	+	0.7987
Training and development (<i>tad</i>)	+	0.7942

Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

On the basis of the average variance extracted (AVE) linked with the outer loadings, an outer loading should be 0.6 or higher to attain at least 50% variance, particularly for cross-sectional survey research (Hulland, 1999). The result indicated that all the outer loadings were within the ceiling value. Again, the cross-sectional survey research design is

probable to face a multi-collinearity problem. Hence to avoid this, the VIF was done for all independent variables. The mean VIF = 1.38; an indication that the independent variable is not redundant, since the mean VIF did not exceed 10.0 as recommended by Kline (2011); thus, there is evidence of a lack of multicollinearity problem in the model of the study.

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Employee engagement (EE)	Vigor (<i>vr</i>)	0.695		
	Dedication (<i>de</i>)	0.743		
	Absorption (<i>ab</i>)	0.732		
			0.815	0.530
Employee commitment (EC)	Affective commitment (<i>ac</i>)	0.623		
	Normative commitment (<i>nc</i>)	0.816		
	Continuance commitment (<i>cc</i>)	0.758		
			0.811	0.536
High-performance work practices (HPWP)	Employee selection process (<i>esp</i>)	0.752		
	Motivational compensation (<i>mco</i>)	0.740		
	Job and work design (<i>jwd</i>)	0.803		
	Participative decision-making (<i>pdm</i>)	0.781		
	Information sharing (<i>ins</i>)	0.775		
	Training and development (<i>tad</i>)	0.677		
			0.817	0.531

Note: Mean VIF = 1.38.

Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

The Pearson correlation result (Table 4) revealed that employee commitment (affective — *ac*; normative — *nc*; continuance — *cc*) in the relationship between HPWP (employee selection process — *esp*; motivational compensation — *mco*; job and work design — *jwd*; participative decision-making — *pdm*; information sharing — *ins*; training/development — *tad*) and employee engagement (vigor — *vr*; dedication — *de*; absorption — *ab*) were positive.

Impliedly, when the management of

organizations engages employees in the right magnitude (*vr* = 0.0632, *de* = 0.1702; *ab* = 0.0943), it breeds increased commitment on the part of the employees, which in turn results in high-performance work practices. Notably, Pearson correlation coefficients exceeded the 0.8 threshold as recommended by Gujarati (2003, as cited in Okoro & Ekwueme, 2021); thus, there is a nonexistence of multicollinearity among the pairs of the independent variables (*vr*, *de*, *ab*).

Table 4. Pearson correlation matrix

	<i>esp</i>	<i>mco</i>	<i>jwd</i>	<i>pdm</i>	<i>ins</i>	<i>tad</i>	<i>vr</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>ab</i>	<i>ac</i>	<i>nc</i>	<i>cc</i>
<i>esp</i>	1.000											
<i>mco</i>	0.165	1.000										
<i>jwd</i>	0.203	0.451	1.000									
<i>pdm</i>	0.074	0.332	0.275	1.000								
<i>ins</i>	0.256	0.197	0.281	0.306	1.000							
<i>tad</i>	0.167	0.224	0.304	0.253	0.539	1.000						
<i>vr</i>	0.063	0.164	0.162	0.145	0.297	0.374	1.000					
<i>de</i>	0.170	0.036	0.119	0.048	0.353	0.343	0.453	1.000				
<i>ab</i>	0.094	0.219	0.126	0.202	0.365	0.261	0.351	0.487	1.000			
<i>ac</i>	0.013	0.207	0.233	0.300	0.331	0.565	0.403	0.235	0.238	1.000		
<i>nc</i>	0.130	0.153	0.163	0.213	0.342	0.458	0.340	0.233	0.214	0.598	1.000	
<i>cc</i>	0.152	0.216	0.234	0.287	0.381	0.395	0.430	0.276	0.292	0.436	0.528	1.000

Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

The SEM was applied to assess the path relationship among the constructs (employee engagement, employee commitment and high-performance work practices) (Table 5). Results showed that the empirical model offered absolute fit to the data with the goodness of fit statistics = 0.97; adjusted goodness of fit statistics = 0.92; comparative fit index = 0.94, root mean residual = 0.04, and root mean square error of approximation = 0.08.

Impliedly, the fit indicators beat the recommended threshold of 0.90, and the root mean square error of approximation value is not above the benchmark of 0.08, suggesting that the approach used in modeling the mediating effect of employee commitment as against high-performance work practices and employee engagement fits properly; the structural path result is further captured in Figure 2.

Table 5. Fit indicators of employee commitment, employee engagement and high-performance work practices

The fit indicators	Coefficients	Outcome
Goodness of fit statistics	0.97	Well fitted
Adjusted goodness of fit statistic	0.92	Well fitted
Comparative fit index	0.94	Well fitted
Root mean square residual	0.04	Well fitted
Root mean square error of approximation	0.08	Well fitted

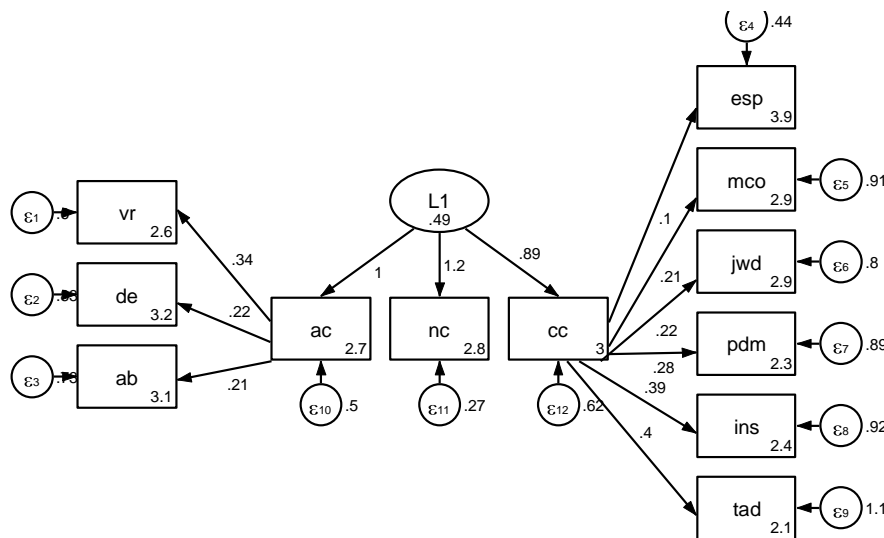
Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

Given the SEM path diagram (Figure 2), it was found that employee commitment mediates the relationship between high-performance work practices and employee engagement. In terms of pathway coefficients, vigor (*vr*) is 0.34, dedication (*de*) is 0.22 and absorption (*ab*) is 0.21 respectively. The finding suggests that employee commitment and employee engagement are fundamental in attracting high-performance work practices. As for the level of support, vigor is the highest, followed by dedication and lastly, absorption.

high-performance work practices, as mediated by employee commitment. The result revealed no indirect mediating effects of affective commitment (*ac*) and continuance commitment (*cc*) in the relationship between all dimensions of high-performance work practices and employee engagement. On the other hand, no indirect mediating effect of affective commitment (*ac*) in the relationship between vigor (*vr*) and all dimensions of high-performance work practices was found; these results thus call for some policy recommendations.

Table 5 showed the indirect effect of the integrative model of employee engagement and

Figure 2. The structural model



Source: Researchers' computation via STATA 13.0 version.

Realistically, the interests of organizations are geared towards stimulating achievement. In Nigeria, government ministries have made a rigorous effort towards this direction via the use of high-performance work practices and employee commitment, which are reckoned to be vital means for the organization's survival and attainment of goals. In fact, there is a widespread viewpoint that when employees are well engaged and committed, it will result in high-performance work practices (Ogbonnaya & Valizade, 2018; Arefin et al., 2019;

Balluerka et al., 2020). While this view abounds in the management literature, there are other claims that employee commitment positively mediates the relationship between HPWP and employee engagement (Aryee et al., 2012; Isa et al., 2018). In line with the viewpoint of extant studies, this study established the SEM effect of employee engagement on high-performance work practices moderated by employee commitment.

This research is relatively unique given the lack of empirical evidences in this area in Nigeria.

Remarkably, the result showed that while a direct effect was found for employee commitment, high-performance work practices and employee engagement, no indirect mediating effect was found for affective commitment, vigor and all the dimensions of HPWP. Noteworthy is the fact that when employees are adequately engaged and committed in the work environment, HPWP ensue. Thus, employee commitment plays a key mediating role between HPWP and employee engagement in stimulating achievement.

5. CONCLUSION

This study assessed the mediating role of employee commitment as against high-performance work practices and employee engagement in Nigeria. SEM results indicated that employee engagement (dedication and absorption) significantly and positively affects high-performance work practices, particularly with the mediating role of employee commitment. The results imply that the management of an organization can enhance high-performance work practices by adequately engaging employees by way of integrating them into the decision-making process, providing them with motivational incentives that can stimulate high-performance work practices *vis-à-vis*, employee commitment

In view of the results, the study recommends that in order for organizations' achievement to be stimulated, there is the need to put in place mechanisms aimed at making employees more dedicated and engaging them in the decision-making process. Furthermore, management should emphasize normative and continuance commitment with the aim of promoting HPWP in the organization. The research contributes to academic knowledge by establishing that employee commitment mediates the relationship between HPWP and employee engagement. Again, the study confirms that while normative and continuance commitments mediate the link between HPWP and employee engagement (particularly dedication and absorption), the same is not so for affective commitment, vigor and all dimensions of HPWP.

The study was limited to a sample size of one hundred and sixty-eight employees in selected ministries in Nigeria; hence future researchers may consider increasing the number of respondents as well as investigating the phenomenon in other ministries, agencies and more importantly, for publicly listed companies that may have employees whose work practices, commitment and engagement are inadequate to stimulate high-performance work practices.

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