

The Effects of Biographical Variables on Affective Commitment at the Municipalities in the Nkangala District

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Abstract: The study aimed to determine the effects of biographical variables on affective commitment in the municipalities in the Nkangala district. International literature revealed that similar studies had been conducted before in municipalities, but there is a shortage in the South African context, especially in the Mpumalanga municipalities. Therefore, this study addressed this gap. Other key findings in the literature showed that it is vitally crucial for municipal managers to have affectively committed employees because they are less likely to resign, and they support managers in achieving strategic objectives. This study was quantitative and influenced by the positivism paradigm. The population size was 2941, and 808 respondents were conveniently sampled. The response rate was 27.47%. The researchers tested five hypotheses using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and T-Test. The key findings revealed no significant difference at 0.05 or 5% in affective commitment levels regarding gender and employment status. Males have a lower affective commitment mean (M) score (M=2.65) as compared to their female (M=2.67) counterparts. Older employees (55-65: Years, M=3.09) had a higher level of affective commitment than the other age groups. Senior management (M=3.00) had higher levels of affective commitment, but the difference was insignificant at 5%. Employees with a certificate (M=3.33) had the highest affective commitment levels compared to employees with other education levels. The difference was significant at 5%. This study implies that municipal managers might find it challenging to retain younger and educated employees because they have lower levels of affective commitment.

Keywords: Affective commitment, Age, Education, Employment levels, Gender, Nkangala district

1. Introduction

Research on biographical effects on affective commitment is gaining traction in international municipalities (Qu, Jo & Choi, 2020). A municipality is the third sphere of government, and in the South African context, it is responsible render different services to the communities (Bojang & Bwando, 2018). Researchers established that municipal managers who source talent from diverse backgrounds offer excellent service delivery (Anser, Ali, Anwar & Usman, 2020). In addition, municipal employers who hire employees from different biographical backgrounds comply with transformation legislative requirements (Peng, Liao & Sun, 2020).

However, research conducted in international municipalities has found mixed and conflicting outcomes about the biographical effects on affective commitment (Coffie, Boateng & Coffie, 2021). For example, it was found that permanent and non-permanent employees express the same ability when working with co-employees for the job given. Still, the

level of affective commitment was found to be lower for non-permanent than permanent employees (Giunchi, Chambel & Ghislieri, 2015). The unintended outcome of having municipal employees with lower levels of affective commitment is that they resign, and municipal managers spend more time recruiting (Tuysuz, Doğan & Tuysuz, 2020). In some instances, Municipal employees who are not affectively committed did not offer excellent support and customer service. On the other hand, Visagie and Diedericks (2018), who conducted a study in Gauteng District municipalities, established that employees who were affectively committed supported managers to achieve their strategic objectives.

Employees in managerial positions display commitment because of the benefits and job security they have within the organisation (Giffords, 2009). Those who have been deployed in the municipal management were more likely to be affectively committed because they were paid more than other employees in the lower levels, and they were promoted (Konya, Matić & Pavlović, 2016).

The literature has revealed that female employees are more talented with a high level of commitment than male employees in organisational development (Messner, 2017). Kidron and Peretz's (2018) study conducted in Israeli municipalities found that female municipal workers had lower levels of affective commitment due to poor working conditions (Francesco & Mahtani, 2011) and were not employed permanently (Nguyen, 2020). Conversely, municipal employees who are permanently employed were highly committed due to the benefits that are part of permanent employees' contracts (Balz, 2017).

Educational level is another variable shown in the literature to display mixed effects on employees' level of commitment in municipalities. Municipality employees with higher educational levels are most likely to be affectively committed. Their commitment levels were found to be higher because they were loyal to municipal managers who had invested in their educational development. The other body of literature showed that the highly educated are mobile compared to other employees with lower educational levels because their skills are in demand (Cherian, Alkhatib & Aggarwal, 2018).

The mixed findings above show more space further to conduct the effects of biographical variables on affective commitment. This is what motivated the authors of this paper to conduct this study so that they can contribute to the biographical variable effects on affective commitment body of knowledge. In the next section of the article, the purpose of the study is propounded. Then the literature and the hypotheses are discussed, followed by the methodology used to address the research question. Elucidated in the results section are the frequencies of the sample distribution and the inferential statistics (ANOVA and T-Test) calculated to test the five ($n=5$) hypotheses. The article ends with a discussion that includes limitations and recommendations for future research and managers.

Research conducted in the municipalities on the effects of biographical variables on affective commitment is mixed (Nguyen, 2020; Visagie & Diedericks, 2018) and under-researched in the South African context, especially in Nkangala District. Hence, this study was conducted to address this gap. This study seeks to address this research question: which biographical variables have a higher and a significant effect on affective commitment in the municipalities in the Nkangala district?

2. Theoretical Lens and Hypotheses

Affective commitment is about employees' attachment to the employer or organisation. Employees attached to the organisations are least likely to retain and benefit by not incurring talent organisation costs (Ahmed, Kanwal & Lodhi, 2020; Brimhall, 2019; Maleka, Mpofu, Hlatywayo, Meyer, Carr & Parker, 2019). Affective commitment is the extent to which an employee identifies with the organisation's values and goals (Hodgkinson, Hughes, Radnor & Glennon, 2018). When employees have an affective relationship with the organisation, they experience internalisation in which they feel that their values and goals are aligned with that of the organisation.

The authors' theoretical approach to affective commitment is from an affective (Skosana, Maleka & Ngonyama-Ndou, 2021). Wegge, van Dick, Fisher, West and Dawson (2006) and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) are the scholars who are attributed to including affective commitment in the affective event theory (AET). AET has been used in research on organisational behaviour and human resource management (HRM) (Maleka, Mmako & Swarts, 2017). It has been found that municipalities and other workplaces render excellent customer service, are happy, and support managers in achieving their strategic objectives (Nel & Werner, 2021). Behavioural scholars influenced by AET brought scientific evidence suggesting that certain work affective behaviours such as moods, attitudes and emotions are likely to predict employees' affective commitment (Gong, Wu, Huang, Yan & Luo, 2020). Given this argument, employees evaluate their jobs and react congruent to their feelings, moods and emotions (Rosen, Harris & Kacmar, 2009). The next section is on the effects of biographical experience and affective commitment. The section highlights key findings from the literature and the authors' hypotheses.

2.1 Gender and Affective Commitment

Indeed, the distinction between the affective commitment of males and females is unclear due to the varying views of various authors (Ditlev-Simonse, 2015). One hypothesis suggests that males tend to display more affective commitment behaviours as compared to their female counterparts. Comparable to female employees, males enjoy better job involvement and career growth because of their high affective commitment levels and demonstrate better worker participation (Wang, Weng, McElroy,

Ashkanasy & Lievens, 2014). Consequently, males are more successful in their careers, while women are emotionally detached because of low career mobility. On the contrary, another view emerging uncovered that women were more committed than their male counterparts. This is due to female municipal employees' having fewer career advancement opportunities (Pala, Eker & Eker, 2008). This study formulated the below hypothesis:

H₁: Males have a higher level of affective commitment as compared to females in municipalities.

2.2 Employment Status and Affective Commitment

According to Balz (2017), permanently employed municipal employees are emotionally attached to municipalities because they enjoy job security, job stability, developmental opportunities and benefits like medical aid, provident fund, etc. As a result, permanent employees build and maintain good working relationships with other employees (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, permanent employees report fewer stress levels associated with job insecurity than part-time employees. Part-time work arrangements could lead to reduced commitment levels due to anxiety caused by a lack of job security and less favourable working conditions and treatment (Kidron, 2018; Torka & Schyns, 2010). Thus, part-time municipal employees usually experience negative attitudes towards the organisation, low levels of commitment and high probabilities of seeking alternative employment elsewhere (Chambel & Castanheira, 2007).

H₂: Employees who are permanently employed have a higher level of affective commitment as compared to employees hired on a part-time basis in the municipalities.

2.3 Age and Affective Commitment

There are different views about the effect of age on affective commitment. Younger municipal employees are likely to exit employment where future career progression and growth opportunities are not clearly defined and, in some instances, due to ill-treatment received from older employees who feel threatened by them (Hemdi & Rahim, 2011). On the one hand, more senior employees have demonstrated a high level of commitment compared to younger employees (Rubin & Brody, 2005).

The third hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H₃: Older employees have a higher level of affective commitment as compared to younger employees in municipalities.

2.4 Education and Affective Commitment

There appears to be limited research linking education level with affective commitment in the municipal context. However, scholars such as Pala *et al.* (2008:58) point out that employees with qualifications are more affectively committed than employees with lower qualifications. It has been established that they are most likely to get higher-paying positions that offer them excellent benefits.

The fourth hypothesis of the study is as follows:

H₄: Employees with higher education have a higher level of affective commitment compared to lower qualifications in the municipalities.

2.5 Employment Levels and Affective Commitment

The hierarchical level of employment has proven to affect affective commitment in municipalities. Employees at the higher level of the organisational hierarchy are empowered to make decisions that contribute positively to the corporate strategic goals (Giffords, 2009). For instance, scientific evidence suggests that managers are more emotionally committed than subordinates. Amongst other reasons, higher salaries and better benefits have improved their level of affective commitment (Ditlev-Simonse, 2015).

The fifth hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H₅: Managers have a higher level of affective commitment than lower-level employees in municipalities.

The methodology followed to address the research question is elucidated in the next section.

3. Methodology

The quantitative approach and positivism paradigm influenced the research methodology deemed appropriate for this study. It was influenced by quantitative and positivism because the researchers tested hypotheses using statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Studies influenced by

quantitative and positivism are deductive because there is a relationship between theory and empirical results (Bryman, 2012).

3.1 Population and Sampling

The Nkangala District has six (n=6) municipalities. The authors collected the data from four (n=4) in

this study because they were only given ethical clearance. Hence, the population (N) of this study is 2941. The researchers did not have a sampling frame; therefore, they used non-probability sampling, known as convenience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The sample (n) size of the study was 808. The proportions of the samples are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Biographical Distribution

Municipality	Gender	Frequency	Percent
Municipality A	Male	364	65.8
	Female	189	34.2
	Total	553	100.0
Municipality B	Male	25	34.7
	Female	47	65.3
	Total	72	100.0
Municipality C	Male	53	41.1
	Female	76	58.9
	Total	129	100.0
Municipality D	Male	21	38.9
	Female	33	61.1
	Total	54	100.0
Municipality	Employment Status	Frequency	Percent
Municipality A	Employed full-time	405	73.2
	Employed part-time	148	26.8
	Total	553	100.0
Municipality B	Employed full-time	57	79.2
	Employed part-time	15	20.8
	Total	72	100.0
Municipality C	Employed full-time	56	43.4
	Employed part-time	73	56.6
	Total	129	100.0
Municipality D	Employed full-time	50	92.6
	Employed part-time	4	7.4
	Total	54	100.0
Municipality	Employment Levels	Frequency	Percent
Municipality A	Non-management	481	87.0
	Management	52	9.4
	Senior management	20	3.6
	Total	553	100.0
Municipality B	Non-management	71	98.6
	Management	1	1.4
	Total	72	100.0
Municipality C	Non-management	106	82.2
	Management	16	12.4
	Senior management	7	5.4
	Total	129	100.0

Table 1 Continued: Biographical Distribution

Municipality D	Non-management	48	88.9
	Management	5	9.3
	Senior management	1	1.9
	Total	54	100.0
Municipality	Education	Frequency	Percent
Municipality A	Grade 12	294	53.2
	Certificate	80	14.5
	Diploma	15	2.7
	Degree	52	9.4
	Postgraduate	9	1.6
	Other	103	18.6
	Total	553	100.0
Municipality B	Grade 12	40	55.6
	Certificate	13	18.1
	Degree	3	4.2
	Other	16	22.2
	Total	72	100.0
Municipality C	Grade 12	63	48.8
	Certificate	19	14.7
	Diploma	4	3.1
	Degree	19	14.7
	Postgraduate	1	.8
	Other	23	17.8
	Total	129	100.0
Municipality D	Grade 12	27	50.0
	Certificate	7	13.0
	Degree	6	11.1
	Postgraduate	1	1.9
	Other	13	24.1
	Total	54	100.0
Municipality	Age	Frequency	Percent
Municipality A	18 - 24 years	3	.5
	25 - 34 years	84	15.2
	35 - 44 years	129	23.3
	45 - 54 years	231	41.8
	55 - 65 years	106	19.2
	Total	553	100.0
Municipality B	25 - 34 years	12	16.7
	35 - 44 years	15	20.8
	45 - 54 years	29	40.3
	55 - 65 years	16	22.2
	Total	72	100.0
Municipality C	18 - 24 years	1	.8
	25 - 34 years	16	12.4
	35 - 44 years	27	20.9
	45 - 54 years	58	45.0
	55 - 65 years	27	20.9
	Total	129	100.0
Municipality D	18 - 24 years	1	1.9
	25 - 34 years	6	11.1
	35 - 44 years	13	24.1
	45 - 54 years	23	42.6
	55 - 65 years	11	20.4
	Total	54	100.0

Source: Authors

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

The data were collected by means of a close-ended questionnaire (Maree, 2016), which comprised two sections. The first section of the questionnaire consists of biographical variables (i.e. age, gender, education, employment levels and employment status). Section B comprised affective commitment scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.90. In another South African study, when Meyer and Allen's (1997) affective commitment scale was used by Makhathini and Van Dyk (2018), there was 0.76. Since this study and other South African studies are above the Nunnally (1978) threshold of 0.7, it can be argued that it is reliable. The data collection used two methods, viz., drop-off and face-to-face interviews. The latter was done with the assistance of the students for respondents who did not have a good command of English. The respondents who understood English well were given the questionnaire and dropped it off at the sealed box. The questionnaire was distributed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

As Tarbachnick and Fidell (2014) suggested, the authors used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and T-Test to address the hypotheses. The same authors are the views both statistical techniques can be calculated in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). In addition, both statistics are used when the independent variable is categorical, and the outcome/dependent variable is a scale variable (Field, 2018). Independent variables were age, education, gender and employment levels. The significance level was set at 0.05 or 5%, as Field (2018) suggested.

3.4 Ethical Consideration

The researchers were given ethical clearance (FCRE2018/FR/07/009-MS). The respondents were informed about the benefits of the study and that their participation was voluntary. In addition, no respondents were coerced to divulge any personal

information that could be traced to them. Anonymity and confidentiality were enhanced by reporting aggregated results.

4. Results

This section discusses biographical frequencies and the difference statistics (ANOVA and T-Tests). The biographical frequencies are discussed in Table 2. The gender results show that it was in Municipality A, where males were hired in the majority (65.8%). Municipality C was the one that had the highest number of employees hired on a part-time basis (56.6%). Non-managers were in the majority in the four ($n=4$) municipalities, and their distribution was as follows: Municipality A (87.0%), Municipality B (98.6%), Municipality C (82.2%) and Municipality D (88.9%). The data also showed that Municipality B did not have a senior manager. In addition, in all municipalities, the majority of the respondents had Grade 12: Municipality A (53.2%), Municipality B (55.6%), Municipality C (48.8%) and Municipality D (50.0%). Lastly, in all municipalities, the age cohort that was in the majority was 45–54 years, and the distribution was as follows: Municipality A (41.8%), Municipality B (40.3%), Municipality C (45.0%) and Municipality D (42.6%).

4.1 Hypotheses Testing

In this section, the inferential statistics (T-Test and ANOVA) that are used to test the hypotheses are discussed. Presented in Table 2 are T-test results, and they showed that males ($M = 2.65$) had lower levels of affective commitment than their female counterparts ($M = 2.67$). Since the $p = 0.77$, the difference was not significant. Hence, H_1 is not supported.

Presented in Table 3 are T-test results, and they showed that permanently employed employees ($M = 2.63$) had lower levels of affective commitment than employees hired on a part-time basis ($M = 2.73$). Since the $p = 0.28$, the difference was not significant. Hence, H_2 is not supported.

Table 2: Gender and Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment	Gender	N	M	SD	p-value
	Male	463	2.65	1.16	0.77
	Female	345	2.67	1.22	

Source: Authors

Presented in Table 4 are ANOVA results, and they showed that older employees (55-65 Years, M=3.09) had higher levels of affective commitment than other age groups (18-24 years, M=1.80, 25-44 years, M=3.00, 35-44 years, M=2.22 and 45-55 years, M=2.59). Since the $p=0.00$, the difference was significant. The post-hoc comparison was calculated using the Turkey HSD test. The data shows that no age groups differed significantly. Hence, H_3 is supported.

Presented in Table 5 are ANOVA results, and they showed that employees with a certificate (M=3.33)

had a higher level of affective commitment than other employees with different educational levels (Grade 12, M=2.53, Diploma, M=1.96, Degree, M=2.78, Post Graduate, M=2.69, Other, M=2.49). Since the $p=0.00$, the difference was significant. Turkey's HSD test showed that certificate means significantly differed from other education levels. The results show that H_4 is not supported.

In Table 6, ANOVA results showed that the results were not significant ($p=0.24$). Similarly, Turkey's HSD test results were not significant. The results show that H_5 is not supported.

Table 3: Employment Status and Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment	Employment Status	N	M	SD	p-value
	Employed full-time	568	2.63	1.15	0.28
	Employed part-time	240	2.73	1.26	

Source: Authors

Table 4: Age and Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment	Means (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)					F	p-value	Effect Sizes
	18-24 Years (M=1.80, SD=0.00)	25-34 Years (M=3.00, SD=1.05)	35-44 Years (M=2.22, SD=0.90)	45-54 Years (M=2.59, SD=1.25)	55-65 Years (M=3.09, SD=1.91)	15.92	0.00	0.07

Source: Authors

Table 5: Education and Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment	Means (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)						F	p-value
	Grade 12 (M=2.53, SD=1.89)	Certificate (M=3.33, SD=1.08)	Diploma (M=1.96, SD=1.05)	Degree (M=2.78, SD=1.15)	Post Graduate (M=2.69, SD=1.00)	Other (M=2.49, SD=1.18)	11.52	0.00

Source: Authors

Table 6: Employment Levels and Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment	Means (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)			F	p-value	Effect Sizes
	Non-management (M=2.64; SD=1.16)	Management (M=2.72; SD=1.33)	Senior management (M=3.00; SD=1.22)	1.42	0.24	0.00

Source: Authors

5. Discussion

This study contributed to the affective commitment body of knowledge by providing insights from an under-researched sample in Nkangala district. It showed that males had lower levels of affective commitment than their female counterparts, but the difference was insignificant. This result was not in line with previous research that showed that males had a higher level of affective commitment (Wang *et al.*, 2014). It is also noteworthy that the difference on 0.02 or 2%.

Based on previous research (Giunchi *et al.*, 2015), it was hypothesised that permanently employed employees had higher levels of affective commitment than part-time employees. Surprisingly, the data of the study was contrary, and it was not significant. A plausible reason for this finding is that part-time employees hoped they might be appointed permanently since this study was during the insourcing period. Another reason might be that their working conditions were not bad as was found by other researchers, or they were not mistreated by municipal managers (Torka & Schyns, 2010). This finding has implications for three municipalities' managers because they hired employees permanently, and only Municipality C had 56.6% of its staff complement as part-time. This showed that even when the other three municipalities invested in developing and offering their employees secured the job, they were not committed.

Regarding the age difference, the results were consistent with the literature (Rubin & Brody, 2005). Older employees had a higher level of affective commitment than other age groups. The human resource (HR) benefit of this finding is that municipal managers might still reap the benefits (i.e. less resignation and adhering to the strategic objectives) of commitment from this age group. Like other studies, municipal workers in Nkangala district in this age group, 18 to 24 years, had the lowest level of commitment. This group is known as Generation Z, and previous research showed that they had a higher propensity to quit (Hemdi & Rahim, 2011). Previous study in the public sector recommended HR strategies like developing flexible policies, structuring their reward policy to have a higher component of cash, and recognising that they are adequate to keep them affectively committed (Aggarwal, Sadhna, Gupta, Mittal & Rastogi, 2020).

Contrary to the literature (Pala *et al.*, 2008:58), the study found that employees with certificates had a higher level of affective commitment than the other groups. The results imply that investing in municipal employees' education does not lead to higher levels of responsibility. In addition, when educated municipal workers are not committed, they do not offer the customers or community members excellent service. The result is community protests or municipal workers not paying rates and taxes in one of the Nkangala municipalities (Maleka, Motsima, Matang & Lekgothoane, 2016).

Lastly, the results showed that senior managers had a higher level of affective commitment than other groups. In some instances, they are committed due to being responsible for implementing the municipality's strategic goals. This finding is consistent with previous research (Giffords, 2009).

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations

Despite this study contributing to the affective commitment body of knowledge, it had limitations. Using a non-probability sampling is one of its limitations and does not cover all the municipalities in the Nkangala district, so the results cannot be generalised. In addition, this study used a cross-sectional research design, giving a once-off picture of the effects of biographical variables on affective commitment. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that in future, probability sampling should be used. In terms of management, the following is recommended:

- In terms of Gen Z Strategies like developing flexible policies, structuring reward policy with a higher cash component should be explored and implemented; and
- A team building or workshop should be held with permanently employed employees; to establish why they had lower levels of commitment. This will include other education levels across gender, age and occupational groups.

6. Conclusion

Based on the study results, it can be concluded that females in four (n=4) Nkangala districts had a slightly higher level of affective commitment, but it is not significant. The same conclusion can be made for employees who are either permanently employed

or employed on a part-time basis. Another conclusion is that older employees had higher levels of affective commitment than other age groups, and the difference is significant. The other conclusion is that employees with the certificate were affectively committed to other employees. The other important difference was that senior managers were more highly affectively committed than lower-level employees.

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