

## HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGIC ORIENTATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN KENYAN MANUFACTURING FIRMS

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### ABSTRACT

*This study sought to investigate the relationship between the soft and hard strategic orientations of human resource management and three components of organizational commitment: affective, continuance and normative. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from 251 large manufacturing in Kenya. From the results of tests of six hypotheses, significant positive relationships between both the soft HR and hard HR strategic orientations and affective and continuance components of commitment were found while normative commitment was negatively and weakly associated with hard HR. Contrary to theoretical reasoning, hard human resource practices was positively associated with affective commitment. These findings support previous views that employees develop affective commitment even under hard HR practices because the satisfaction that comes with success meets their intrinsic needs. Organizations should devise HR policies and practices that retain employees covering all three areas of commitment so as to realize business success.*

**Keywords:** HR strategic orientation; soft HRM; hard HRM; organizational commitment; affective commitment; continuance commitment; normative commitment; Kenya

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational commitment plays an important role in the human resource management (HRM) philosophy. The current argument is the extent to which the nature of HRM practices supports organizational performance, and acts as a catalyst and tool for inducing organizational commitment among employees. In support of the important role of organizational commitment, Walton (1985) argues that performance improves if organizations move away from traditional, control oriented approaches to a commitment-oriented approach. While a control-oriented approach relies on establishing order, exercising control and using efficiency-enhancing methods, a commitment strategy enables workers to respond creatively by giving broader responsibilities, encouraging contribution and helping them achieve satisfaction in their work.

While most of the commitment literature has focused on the nature and outcomes of commitment, limited studies have focused exclusively on its relationship with human resource strategies and specifically the soft and hard orientations of HRM. Soft and hard typologies of HRM have been used as appropriate theoretical bases from which to discuss organizational commitment (Legge, 1995a; Truss, 1999; Kane and Crawford, 1999) and these have gained some credence with scholars who want to bridge theory and practice (Towers, 1996). Although typologies have been criticized as mere classification systems, Doty and Glick (1994) argue that typologies are complex theories that can be subjected to rigorous empirical testing using quantitative models. The underlying assumptions of the soft and hard approaches to HRM are based on two opposing views of human nature. Hard HRM is derived from the strategic management and business policy line of thought. The emphasis in this approach is on treating employees as a means to an end, the end being to achieve the organizations strategy. The soft approach, in contrast, is derived from the human relations school

of thought. It is development oriented with a humanistic focus based on explicit statements about the value of employees, where employers view their employees as active partners and core assets rather than passive inputs (Storey, 1992; Beardwell and Holden, 1997).

This study responds to deficiencies and calls for further research by analyzing the relationships among the soft and hard aspects of HR strategic orientations and organizational commitment. The study extends previous studies by including three components of organizational commitment namely: affective, continuance and normative (Allen and Meyer 1990). Finally, to address the geographical bias in previous studies and to respond to calls by scholars on Africa, specifically, (Blunt and Jones, 1992; McCourt, 2001; Kamoche, 2001b; 2002; Anakwe, 2002 and Harvey 2002), the study focused on Kenyan Manufacturing firms to make up for the gap in knowledge generated from an African setting. From these observations, the specific research objective driving this study is to establish the relationship between the hard HR strategic orientation on the one hand and soft HR strategic orientation on the other and each of three components of organizational commitment: affective, continuance and normative commitment

The study provides an insight into the types of HR strategic orientations practiced in Kenyan Manufacturing firms, and how these link with organizational commitment. The study hinges on the broad hypothesis that different HR strategic orientations adopted by organizations influence different types of organizational commitment among employees.

The practice of HRM in Kenya is a reflection of global events. Cross border organizations and revolution in communication technology has hastened the diffusion of HRM values and concepts. Citing the convergence theory, Anakwe, (2002) postulates that as developing countries industrialize and embrace free market capitalism and technology, they will adopt the ideological values of the developed industrialized world. Local and international management consultants who sell HRM and other management ideas as prescriptions for survival have also precipitated the HRM concept and practice. For example, Bae *et al*, (1998) in a study of Korean firms, found a high prevalence of HRM values and practices of country of origin among multinational subsidiaries, thus providing further evidence.

This paper has five parts. First the extant literature is reviewed, followed by the methodology. The findings, discussion and conclusions are presented and recommendations for policy, practice and future research are made.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section highlights the literature on the relationship between HR strategic orientation and organizational commitment. While most of the literature has focused on the nature and outcomes of commitment, limited studies have focused exclusively on its relationship with human resource orientations and specifically the soft and hard versions of HRM.

### **Organizational Commitment**

Interest in the study of organisational commitment was spurred by successful Japanese management practises where employee commitment was seen as a central driver for organisational success. Coopey and Hartley (1991), observe that markets experience labour shortages due to demographic changes and as such employers will have to put less emphasis on recruitment and more on successful retention and development of staff. In

addition, Guest (1987) attributed the popularity of organisational commitment to its central position in the design of human resource management policies, which should aim to maximize organisational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work. This popularity is evident in recent research (Gantasala et al., 2011; Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2008; Savaneviciene and Stankeviciute, 2011)

Although numerous articles have been produced on the subject of organisational commitment, there has been a lack of consensus on its definition (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Jaros, *et al* 1993; Coopey and Hartley, 1991). Meyer and Allen (1991:67) have, therefore, defined organisational commitment as a construct made up of three factors namely: affective, continuance and normative. Affective commitment refers to the extent to which an individual feels a sense of identification, involvement and emotional attachment to an organization. Continuance commitment concerns an individual's need to continue working for the organization based on the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization. Such costs are those related to personal sacrifice such as loss of advancement, promotion, training or limited job opportunities in the labour market. Normative commitment refers to commitment that is influenced by society's norms about the extent to which people ought to be committed to an organization. Put simply, therefore, people stay with organizations for three reasons: because they want to (affective commitment); because they need to (continuance commitment) and because they feel they ought to (normative commitment).

The three-component definition advanced by Meyer and Allen (1991) is used in this study because employees in an organisation may have different types of commitments tying them to the organisation, which may not necessarily be affective or psychological in nature. For instance, due to poor economic performance in Kenya, most organisations over the past decade have carried out restructuring measures, which have resulted in redundancies. This has meant that most employees are not likely to change jobs especially due to the policy of "last in, first out". Employees may therefore choose to remain in the organisation due to a lack of alternative employment or to protect their investments but not necessarily due to affective commitment (Agarwala, 2003). From a practical standpoint, it appears therefore that the bonds that form between employees and organisations can range from instrumental to emotional. Identifying the different types of commitments suggest alternative management strategies leading to desired behaviours in the workplace.

### **Soft and hard orientations of HRM**

The underlying ideas and assumptions of HRM are based on two opposing views of human nature, the human relations movements the more recent strategic management and business policy line of thought (Truss (1997; 1999), that gave rise to what Guest (1987; 1989) referred to as the 'soft' and 'hard' models of HRM respectively. Similarly, other researchers have pursued related theoretical paradigms such as best practice, advocated by Pfeffer (1994; 1998) and best fit, suggested by Baird and Meshoulam (1988). More recently the high performance, high involvement and high commitment models have captured the attention of some researchers. While the high performance work practices are derived from the strategic HRM school of Fombrun *et al* (1984) and aligned to hard HRM, high involvement and high commitment models are derived from the Harvard framework of Beer *et al* (1985) and aligned to soft HRM.

Other scholars have adopted the typologies of 'traditional' and 'progressive' HRM where, traditional HRM is derived from the scientific management school of thought. Progressive HRM in contrast, implies soft HRM. Kamoche (2000b) explains that while progressive HRM values people and invests in personal development leading to high levels of trust, participation, communication and caring, hard HRM, reflected in the traditional model, is concerned with cost minimization, tight controls and union suppression with low levels of trust and commitment.

Bae *et al* (1998) use the term high involvement HRM strategy on the one hand to denote systems characterized by high employee participation, extensive training programmes and broad job designs, which have connotations of soft HRM. On the other hand, traditional HRM strategy is used to denote hard HRM, which is characterized by low participation, limited training and highly specialized jobs. Lepak and Snell (1999), proposed the typologies of internal development and acquisition architectures similar to make-HRM and buy-HRM strategies developed by Miles and Snow (1984) and adopted by Bae, *et al* (1998) to determine the variations in human resource management orientations between multi-national and host country firms in Asian countries. Similarly, Rodriguez and Ventura (2003) used the same typologies to study the relationship between human resource management systems and organizational performance among manufacturing firms in Spain. Both studies observe that while the 'make' internal development strategies similar to soft HRM have been linked to positive employee outcomes and organizational performance, some organizations choose a 'buy' acquisition strategy, similar to hard HRM, for cost reduction and numerical flexibility.

Although some findings have shown that hard and soft HR strategic orientations are not mutually exclusive as firms tend to utilize multiple strategies (Truss, 1999; Bae & Lawler, 2000), other evidence suggests that there are more benefits in adopting one model connected to the primary business strategy of the firm (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Truss, 2001).

### **The Conceptual framework**

The three-component definition of organizational commitment advanced by Meyer and Allen (1991) is used in this study to investigate the view that employees in an organisation may have different types of commitments tying them to the organisation, which may not necessarily be affective or psychological in nature. From a practical standpoint, it appears that the bonds that form between employees and organisations can range from instrumental to emotional. Identifying the different types of commitments suggest alternative human resource management strategies leading to desired behaviours in the workplace.

The soft HRM approach is seen as more development oriented with a humanistic focus based on explicit statements about the value of employees to the organization (Storey, 1992; Beardwell and Holden 1997). Soft HRM gives a strong recognition to employee needs such as training and development, job satisfaction and job security. It would be expected, therefore, that soft HR practices will elicit emotional attachment to the organization, such that individuals identify with, are involved in and enjoy membership in the organization (Mowday 1979; 1982), thus eliciting affection. Continuance commitment refers to the type of commitment that is induced by perceived costs of leaving the organization. The costs are those associated with loss of financial benefits or image or lack of employment opportunities. The commitment comes from a need to stay with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990; 1991).

In contrast, normative commitment refers to the commitment that comes from the feeling of an obligation to stay with an organization because it is the right and ethical thing to do. This type of commitment comes from one's background and socialization processes where certain values and beliefs are instilled at an early age by parents or society. In normative commitment, individuals feel that they ought to stay with the organization because it is the right and moral thing to do. Their behaviours, therefore, would include loyalty, making sacrifices on behalf of the organization and supporting the organization. While these behaviours are likely to lead to improved firm performance, they will not be significantly related to the soft HR strategic orientation. This line of argument leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between soft HR strategic orientation and affective commitment
- H2: There is a positive relationship between soft HR strategic orientation and continuance commitment
- H3: There is no relationship between soft HR strategic orientation and normative commitment

While soft HR is based on collaborative and developmental practices, hard HR is associated with HR practices that emphasize cost reduction, tight controls, tight fit with business strategy, numerical flexibility and retrenchment strategies. Under this orientation, employees are likely to feel threatened with job insecurity, are under pressure to perform and do not participate in decisions that affect them. The HR climate is one that generates commitment that is based on a need to stay rather than wanting to stay. This type of commitment becomes even more necessary where job alternatives in other organizations are few. Individuals who are driven by a need to stay committed to a particular organization would not want to engage in behaviours that can jeopardize their membership. Becker (1960) observed that individuals engage in a consistent line of activity based on the recognition of the lost 'side bets' associated with discontinuing the activity. This line of argument leads to the following hypotheses:

- H4: There is a negative relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and affective Commitment
- H5: There is a positive relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and continuance commitment
- H6: There is no relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and normative commitment

These relationships are depicted in the model in Figure 1.

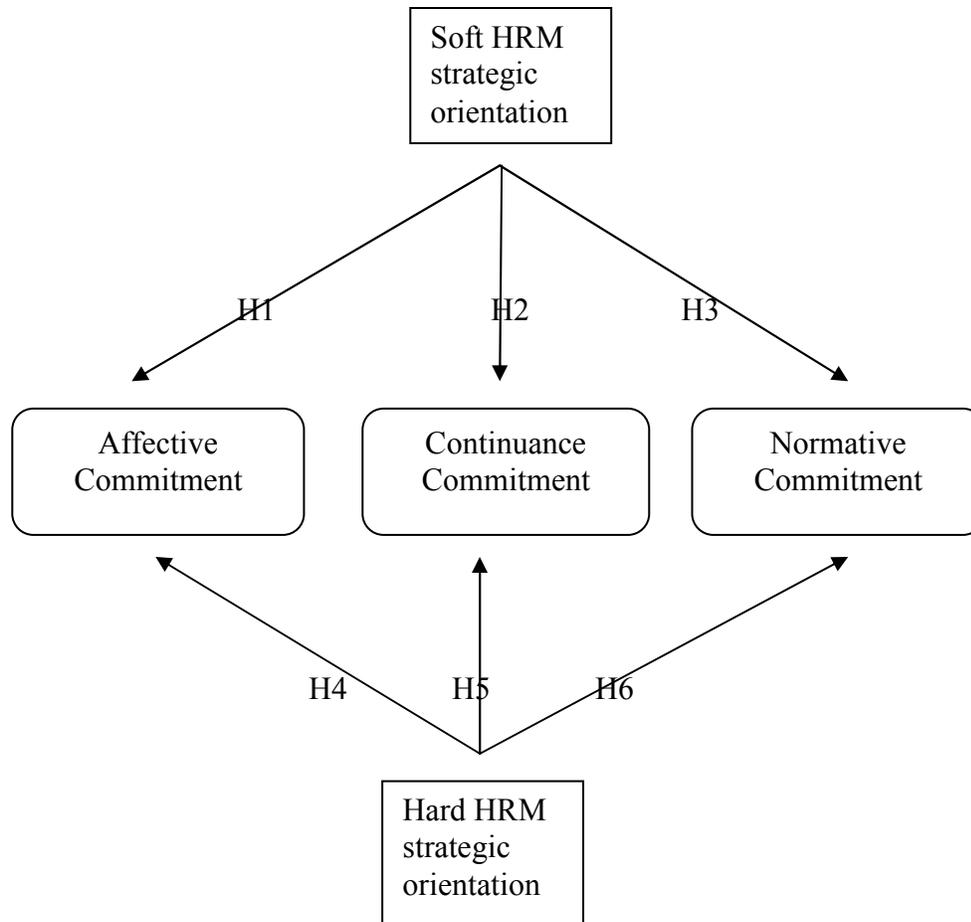


Figure 1: Relationship between HRM Strategic Orientations and Organizational Commitment

## METHODS

To test the relationships between the soft and hard orientations of HRM and each of the three components of organizational commitment, both a descriptive survey and correlational design was adopted. The data was cross-sectional gathered once over a period of one month from a sample of 148 large private manufacturing firms in Kenya. The population of large private manufacturing organizations in Kenya was defined as all those firms that employ more than one hundred employees. Number of employees for private sector firms is an appropriate indicator of size because being profit making, employees can be taken as a proxy for sales turnover, profits, capacity utilization and market share. In HRM research, large private firms with more than 100 employees are an appropriate population because they are more likely to have well-developed HR systems and specialists compared to smaller firms. Previous studies such as those by Huselid (1995), Guthrie

*et al* (2002) and Rodriquez and Ventura (2003) have used large firms with more than 100 employees. The sampling frame was drawn from the directories of Kenya Association of Manufacturers (2010), the Nation Business Directory (2010) Federation of Kenya Employers and Directorate of Industrial Training. This yielded 251 firms. Using Cochran's formula for large populations (1963:75), as suggested by Israel (1992) a representative sample of 148 firms was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. This sample size was confirmed from published tables (Saunders et al, (2003); Cooper and Emory (1995) and Sekaran (1992),

The organization was the unit of analysis and the respondent was the specialist HR manager. The basis for this choice of respondent is that HR managers are well placed to answer questions on HR strategic practices of the organization.

### *Data Collection*

A survey questionnaire consisting of mainly ordinal and interval scales was chosen as the data collection instrument.

### *Measures*

Variables were measured using both objective and perceptual indicators. The use of perceptual measures is not unique in HRM studies and findings have shown little difference between objective and subjective data (Huselid, 1996; Guest, 1997; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Rodriquez and Ventura, 2003). The three components of organizational commitment were measured using Allen and Meyer's (1991) scales, while a scale adapted from Kane and Crawford (1999) with a reliability coefficient of 0.82 for soft HR and 0.85 for hard HR orientations was used. The scales contained several items to be rated on a 7 point and 5 point Likert scales.

### *Data Analysis*

Initially, means, frequencies and standard deviations were computed to compress the data and this was followed by tests of hypotheses using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

## **FINDINGS**

This section reports the means, standard deviations and reliability coefficients and correlations among variables. The soft and hard HR strategic orientation were measured using thirty-eight items developed across seven HR practices namely: internal career opportunities; retention plans; appraisal; training and development; reward strategies; employee relations and overall HR strategies. A five point Likert scale was used to measure the variables. 1 represented 'not at all' and 5 'to a great extent'. The objective was to measure the extent to which certain HR practices are used by large private manufacturing firms in Kenya. Of the thirty eight items, seventeen items measured the hard HR strategic orientation, while twenty one items measured the soft HR strategic orientation. The selection of the measurement items for each variable was informed by both theoretical considerations and descriptions of various typologies of human resource orientations found in the literature.

Items in the scale measuring soft HR strategy were expected to elicit positive responses thus a rate of 4 or 5 denoted a soft HR strategic orientation, while a rating of either 1 or 2 representing a negative response denoted a hard HR strategic orientation. A rating of 3 was neutral. Questions that were worded negatively were reversed before computation. To confirm the pattern of the scores, a ranking of the mean scores for all the items showed that items initially categorized as soft HR had means above 3.5 while those categorized as hard HR had means below 3.5. The cut off point between the two variables was then placed at 3.5. Of the thirty-eight items, twenty-one had positive responses above 3.5 and this represented the sub-scale for soft HR orientation. The mean score was 3.83 and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.82. The remaining seventeen items had mean scores of less than 3.5 and this represented the sub-scale for hard HR strategic orientation. The mean score for the sub-scale was 2.94 and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.85. Since the alpha values were above the threshold of 0.60, the scales represented a stable measure of the variables of interest.

Aggregation of the data into mean scores for both soft HR and hard HR was carried out to obtain statistics for further analysis. This method of data aggregation is consistent with past studies involving typologies of human resource practices; for example, Arthur, (1994); Bae and Lawler, (2001) and Rodriques and Ventura, (2003).

Table 1 shows the results for the measurement scale for soft HR strategic orientation. Theoretical understanding and empirical findings suggest that a soft HR approach is implemented through practices that support the developmental and human aspects of people. Item 1, for example, sought to find out the extent to which recruitment occurs at the job entry level. The mean score was 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.96. This result indicates that the majority of the firms preferred to recruit at the job entry level so that they can train and develop their own employees. Thus a 'make' approach to recruitment is prevalent. Item 16 sought to establish the extent to which feedback is used mainly for developmental purposes and a mean score of 4.01 was achieved. This shows that feedback is highly linked to employee development.

**Table 1: Means and standard deviations for soft HR strategic orientation items**

Item no.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	n
1	Recruitment occurs at job entry level	4.13	0.959	95
4	Jobs are designed to maximize skill variety, autonomy and learning	3.64	1.172	94
5		3.96	1.169	93
7	Opportunities for growth and development exist	4.01	1.011	90
8	Leadership style is people oriented	4.35	1.055	94
12	Work environment is pleasant	3.79	1.172	94
15	Management development is linked to both individual and organizational needs	4.07	1.178	95
16	Management development is linked to managerial succession	4.01	1.043	92
19	Feedback is mainly for developmental purpose	3.91	1.186	93
20	Appraisal is aimed at weeding out poor performers (R )	3.82	1.352	94
21	The appraisal process is not participative (R )	4.07	1.205	95
24	Pay practices are based on ability and performance	3.60	1.326	92
25	Pay practices are based on quantifiable results only ( R)	3.57	1.485	95
26	Limited use of non-cash incentives such as profit sharing, insurance	3.60	1.298	94
28	schemes or paid holidays ( R)	3.95	1.164	93
29	Communication is open and transparent	4.05	1.025	93
32	Management style is participatory and consultative	3.84	1.273	94
33	Management practices are fair and just	3.61	1.315	95
34	HR policies and practices have a long term perspective	3.69	1.247	95
35	HR policies and practices help employees to develop to their maximum potential	4.30	1.046	94
38	HR policies and practices treat all employees fairly and equitably	3.51	1.352	95
	HR policies and practices support the overall organizational strategy and objectives			
	Top management gives low priority to HR issues (R )			
	<i>Alpha Coefficient = 0.82</i>			
	<i>Composite mean score for soft HR scale = 3.83</i>			
	<i>(R) Indicates that the item was scored in reverse</i>			

Table 2 provides the results for the hard HR strategic orientation measurement scale. The items were drawn from theoretical and empirical literature on HR practices that seek to instill controls and efficiency among employees. Hard HR practices are indicated by practices that seek to enhance efficiency and put organizational needs first. Such practices would leave the onus of career development to employees. Job security is not assured and investments in formal training are not encouraged. The hard HR variable was measured using a seventeen item scale with a composite mean score of 2.94.

Item 2, for example, sought to find out the extent to which vacant managerial and higher technical positions are exclusively filled from within. It yielded a mean score of 3.2, implying that firms that practice hard HR prefer a 'buy' recruitment strategy, where experienced people are poached from other organizations to fill higher positions. It also means costs on training are minimized. The extent to which the firms support career development was measured using item 3 and a mean score of 3.16 was obtained. This indicates that under hard HR, career development is an employee's responsibility. This is consistent with current practices in strategic HRM. The shift of responsibility from the organization to individuals has been occasioned by the rapid change in technology, working methods and the importance of a multi-skilled workforce.

**Table 2: Means and standard deviations for hard HR strategic orientation items**

Item No.	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	Vacant managerial and higher technical positions are filled exclusively from within	95	3.20	1.419
3	Career development is highly supported (R)	92	3.16	1.439
6	Job security is assured	93	3.14	1.457
9	Rewards are not competitive relative to those offered by other firms in the industry (R)	93	3.29	1.307
10	Extensive formal training is offered to all employees	95	2.44	1.471
11	Great amount of socialization and induction of new employees is practiced	95	3.06	1.457
13	Innovative management development methods such as stress management and adventure training are used	95	2.56	1.427
14	Only job specific skills are supported by the organization	94	2.46	1.419
17	The appraisal process is participative, open and transparent (R )	94	3.03	1.527
18	Performance is measured by quantifiable output (R )	94	2.20	1.178
22	Employee stock ownership plans are used	91	1.89	1.090
23	Regular conduct of salary surveys	95	2.99	1.341
27	Collaborative and cooperative relations between unions and management exist	93	3.41	1.520
30	Limited formal information sharing programmes such as newsletters	94	3.48	1.276
31	Low participation of employees in decision making	94	3.11	1.477
36	HR policies and practices are aimed at cost reduction	94	2.21	1.277
37	Top management has a short term view because of financial problems	95	3.35	1.464
<i>Alpha coefficient = 0.85</i> <i>Composite mean score for hard HR scale = 2.94</i> <i>(R ) indicates that the item is scored in reverse</i>				

Three components of organizational commitment were measured and the results are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5. A 7-point Likert scale was used to collect the responses. 7 indicated “strongly agree” and 1 “strongly disagree”. 3.5 was taken as the midpoint so that mean scores above this point were considered as representing agreement with the given statement. The scale was adopted from Allen and Meyer (1991).

**Table 3: Means and standard deviations (SD) for affective organizational commitment**

SN	Item	N	Mean	S.D.
	I talk about this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for	94	5.18	1.659
	I do not feel like part of the family in my organization (R)	93	4.62	2.111
	I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization (R)	94	4.50	2.015
	I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization (R)	95	5.24	1.616
	This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	95	5.73	1.511
	I do not feel a great sense of belonging to this organization			
	<i>Composite mean score for affective commitment scale = 5.05</i>			
	<i>Alpha coefficient 0.85</i>			
	<i>(R ) Reverse scored</i>			

Item 1, for example, sought to find out the extent to which the respondents talk about their organization to their friends. A mean score of 5.18 was obtained implying that the majority has a high regard for their organizations and talk about it to their friends. Item 2 was reversed and it read ‘I do not feel like part of the family in my organization’. The mean score was 4.62. This implies that most respondents felt accepted and had a sense of affiliation to their organizations. Item 5 measured the extent to which the respondents felt a sense of belonging to their organization. The mean score was 5.73. This indicates that the majority feel a great sense of belonging to their organization.

**Table 4: Means and standard deviations (SD) for continuance commitment**

SN	Item	N	Mean	S.D.
	I would not leave this organization because of scarcity of available job alternatives	95	4.27	2.180
	I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without another one lined up (R)	95	5.45	1.773
	It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now even if I wanted to	95	4.00	2.016
	Leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice because another organization may not match the benefits here	95	4.94	1.861
	Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now	95	4.71	1.873

It would not be too costly for me to leave my organization now (R) <i>Alpha coefficient = 0.62</i> <i>Composite mean score for continuance commitment scale = 4.63</i> <i>(R) Reverse scored</i>	94	4.40	1.903
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The continuance commitment scale contained six items. The means ranged between 4.00 and 5.45 and standard deviations between 1.861 and 2.18. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.62. This indicates a moderate reliability. Past studies that have used this scale have reported alpha coefficients above 0.70. However, since 0.60 is considered acceptable, though on the lower end, the results were accepted and used for further analysis.

Item 6, for example, asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I would not leave this organization because of scarcity of available job alternatives'. The mean score obtained was 4.27, which is above the threshold of 3.5. This implies that employees value employment security and would not leave one employer without an alternative job. Item 4 sought to establish the extent to which respondents would sacrifice benefits they get from their organization. A mean of 4.71 was obtained indicating that the majority feels they would not leave their present organization because another may not match the benefits they are receiving presently. The responses, therefore, indicate a general agreement with all the statements hence a high level of continuance commitment.

**Table 5: Means and standard deviations (SD) for normative commitment**

SN	Item	N	Mean	S.D.
1	I think that these days people move from organization to organization too often	94	3.06	2.052
2	I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization	95	4.97	1.842
3	Moving from one organization to another appears unethical to me	93	4.14	1.943
4	If I got a better job offer elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization	95	3.38	1.863
5	One of the reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	95	4.83	1.939
6	I was taught the value of remaining loyal to one organization	95	4.12	1.934
7	I do not think it is sensible to be loyal to one organization anymore <i>Alpha coefficient = 0.56</i> <i>Composite mean score for normative commitment scale = 4.20</i>	95	4.82	1.676

The normative commitment scale contained seven items. The means ranged from 3.06 to 4.97 with standard deviations between 1.68 and 2.05. This indicates a wide dispersion from the mean. With a reliability coefficient of 0.56, the scale reliability was just moderate. Previous studies have also obtained low reliability coefficients for this scale hence its failure to correlate well with other variables. Item 1 read: 'I think these days people move from organization to organization too often'. The responses yielded a mean score of 3.06, which is below the mid-point of 3.5. This implies that most respondents did not agree that turnover is high. This result is a reflection of the limited employment opportunities in the labour market in Kenya. Item 5 asked the respondents to indicate if their stay in their organization is out of a sense of moral obligation and the response was affirmative with a mean of 4.83. However, when asked in item 4 if they feel it is right to leave their organization if they got a better job offer, the majority said they would as reflected by the low mean score of 3.38. This implies that ethical and loyalty issues would be disregarded if better pay was the alternative choice.

### Tests of hypotheses

Six hypotheses were tested to establish the relationship between HR strategic orientations and the components of organizational commitment. The relationships between the soft and hard HR strategic orientations and the three components of organizational commitment: affective; continuance and normative are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Matrix**

		Hard HRM	Soft HRM	Affective Commitment	Continuance commitment	Normative Commitment
Hard HRM	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.				
	N	95				
Soft HRM	Pearson Correlation	.768(**)	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.			
	N	95	95			
Affective Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.503(**)	.472(**)	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.		
	N	95	95	95		
Continuance commitment	Pearson Correlation	.709(**)	.598(**)	.380(**)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	
	N	95	95	95	95	
Normative	Pearson	-.225(*)	-.034	-.137	-.178	1

Commitment	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.743	.186	.084	.
	N	95	95	95	95	95

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Soft HR strategic orientations and organizational commitment

*Hypotheses 1: Soft HR strategic orientation will be significantly associated with affective organizational commitment*

Data used to test this hypothesis were collected using a set of statements that measured the degree of emotional attachment or commitment to an organization. For example, “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization” The respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a statement on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 represented strongly disagree and 7 strongly agree. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation and Linear regression. The r coefficient for soft HR and affective commitment was  $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). A simple linear regression analysis was also done to establish how much of the variation in the dependent variable, that is affective commitment, can statistically be explained by the independent variable, that is soft HR strategic orientation. The hypothesis therefore is substantiated. It appears, therefore, that the presence of affective commitment among employees in large private manufacturing firms in Kenya is attributed to the use of soft HR practices to some extent.

*Hypothesis 2: Soft HR strategic orientation will be significantly associated with continuance commitment.*

Six items were used to solicit data to test this hypothesis. The statement in each item measured the degree of commitment to the organization arising from the attractiveness of the benefits offered by the organization. For example, one statement read: “leaving this organization would require considerable personal sacrifice because another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here”. The respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a scale of 1 to 7. The correlation results show a significant positive relationship between soft HR and continuance commitment ( $r = 0.598$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Though normative commitment has not shown any significant relationship with other variables in previous studies, its relationship with soft HR was nevertheless envisaged and tested. Normative commitment arises when employees maintain membership with an organization because they feel an obligation to do so for moral and ethical reasons. From a theoretical point of view, people who stay because they feel they ought to are not likely to respond to changes in management practices. It is envisaged therefore that normative commitment does not have a significant relationship with a soft HR strategic orientation. The following hypotheses was stated:

*Hypothesis 3: Soft HR strategic orientation will not be significantly associated with normative commitment*

Data to test this hypothesis was generated from six items in the questionnaire. The items consisted of statements that measured the degree of commitment due to moral or ethical reasons. One statement read as follows: “one of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain” The Pearson correlation coefficients indicate no significant relationship between soft HR strategic orientation and normative organizational commitment (-0.034). This finding shows that the type of HR practices an organization adopts are not related to the moral or ethical obligations to stay. It appears, therefore, that employees who stay simply because it is ethical to do so are indifferent to the type of HR practices used by an organization. As a result, hypothesis three is substantiated.

### **Hard HR strategic orientation and organizational commitment**

A hard HR approach is based on efficiency-enhancing practices such as appraisals, cash incentives and performance targets. The style of management under hard HR is instrumental and detached. Commitment under hard HR is more likely to come out of the need to stay rather than affection. Under hard HR, employees stay in the organization because they have to and not because they want to. Theoretically, the use of hard HR practices is not expected to induce affective commitment among employees. To this end, the following hypothesis was tested.

*Hypothesis 4: Hard HR strategic orientation will have a negative significant relationship with affective commitment*

The Pearson’s correlation coefficient yielded an unexpected significant and positive relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and affective commitment ( $r = 0.503$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). As explained above, this finding was not originally anticipated as past studies and theoretical reasoning have not supported a positive relationship. Based on these findings, therefore, the hypothesis is not accepted.

Hard HR practices are associated with the need to stay rather than wanting to. Employees stay because the cost of living is too high, they have too much to lose by quitting, or there is no alternative employment. The anticipated relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and continuance commitment is a positive one. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis was tested:

*Hypothesis 5: Hard HR strategic orientation is positively and significantly associated with continuance commitment*

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients show a strong positive and significant relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and continuance commitment ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Correlations above 0.70 are considered very strong. The hypothesis is substantiated.

Normative commitment comes from an obligation to stay for moral or ethical reasons. It is expected that employees will stay irrespective of the type of HR practices, hence there would be no significant relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and normative commitment. Hypothesis six was tested in this respect.

*Hypothesis 6: Hard HR strategic orientation will not be significantly associated with normative commitment*

Although previous studies have yielded no relationships between normative commitment and other variables such as culture (Clugson *et al*, 2000), the correlation between hard HR strategic orientation and normative commitment ( $r = -0.225$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) showed a weak but negative relationship. This finding indicates that as the hard HR strategic orientation intensifies, employees feel less inclined to stay on moral and ethical grounds. The hypothesis is rejected.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This study set out to establish the relationship between the soft and hard strategic orientations of human resource management and three components of organizational commitment: affective; continuance and normative. The results supported the hypothesized relationships except in the case of hard HR strategic orientation and affective commitment. Initially, based on empirical and theoretical reasoning, no relationship was anticipated, but the Pearson correlation yielded an unexpected moderately strong, positive and significant relationship ( $r = 0.503$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

This finding suggests that the use of hard HR practices is positively related to affective commitment. While this contradicts most evidence in this area, there are, however, several alternate explanations. One is related to what Browning (2006) calls 'self-justification'. To diminish feelings of being stuck in a control system, employees rationalize that the system is not as tight as it seems, hence the perceived affective ties are based on rationalization rather than genuine affection for the organization. This feeling is exacerbated, especially in situations of limited job opportunities. Alternatively, in situations where choice of jobs is scarce, employees are only too grateful to be retained by an employer and a commitment which may have developed as a result of fear of lost employment evolves into an emotional attachment. This is even more likely where the organization has downsized and laid off employees. The survivors compensate by sub-consciously identifying with the organization and verbalizing their gratefulness for being retained Sett (2004).

This finding can also be explained by the nature of the respondents which may also be seen as a limitation of this study. Managers have responsibilities that include the development and implementation of performance controls and tight targets, which must be achieved by employees. Thus, their perception of hard HR practices is different from that of workers. They see it as a source of achievement and recognition. This meets high order needs such as status, self-esteem and self actualization. Their relationship with the organization would be one of affection and emotional attachment. The findings would probably have been different if the study had included rank and file employees.

An alternative explanation is related to the adoption of cost reduction measures, which include downsizing. According to Sahdev *et al.*, (1999), downsizing raises the profile of HR professionals by providing them with a chance to take a lead role with corporate management teams and also a platform to address HR issues. Downsizing and retrenchment appear to present new opportunities for HR managers to entrench themselves and exercise greater power and influence. Sahdev *et al.* reports that the profile of HR managers rose from 65% to 70% after downsizing. It is possible that in the process of downsizing, HR managers are also involved in counseling and providing an emotional safe landing for those retrenched, thus raising their professional credibility. This further enhances their caring role, which may be seen as part of job enrichment. It appears, therefore, that during periods of downsizing and tight controls, HR managers feel a sense of emotional attachment to their organizations because of the role they play. It should be noted, however, that soliciting data from only HR specialists, may have biased this finding.

In addition, since high levels of efficiency and effectiveness usually accompany control systems, managers interpret these outcomes as a direct result of their own individual performance. They feel they have lived up to the task and delivered results. Although employees show resistance in the initial stages of introduction of control systems, they become more positive and accepting once they begin to connect their own achievements and the efficiency of the system. They also develop a sense of pride in the more efficient system especially when they compare their outcomes with those of other organizations. Employees who work for highly efficient and effective organizations feel highly valued in the labour market. They feel confident, competent and competitive. From this line of argument it can be concluded that control systems associated with hard HR practices can also result in affective commitment to the organization. This is consistent with Browning (2006) and Kipkebut (2010).

From the continuance dimension of commitment, these findings can largely be explained by the lack of alternative employment in the Kenyan economy. Majority of employees would leave their organizations if they could. An analysis of the continuance commitment measurement items indicated that most respondents could not leave because of lack of alternative jobs. Employees would, therefore, not leave a job under difficult prevailing economic conditions. They would prefer to tolerate unpleasant working conditions than leave. An alternative explanation that has been cited in both the theoretical and empirical literature is the high cost of leaving Wright, *et al.* (2007). This is especially so for employees, who have taken advantage of benefit packages such as subsidized medical cover, mortgage loans and sponsored training. In such cases the employee need not necessarily be satisfied with the benefits. The cost becomes high because they have to pay back the loan at higher interest if they leave or pay the employer training costs if they are bonded.

Another dimension of continuance commitment is the age and gender of the employees. Research has shown that women and senior employees perceive greater costs of leaving than younger men and newer employees (Meyer and Smith, 2001). In this study the demographic data showed that women were 16.8% and men 81.1% while 72.6% were above thirty-five years old. In terms of education, 40% were diploma holders while the rest had university degrees. The number of women and age of the respondents may not have a significant effect on this relationship. However, the high number of diploma holders most of whom are also older may perceive greater competition for similar jobs in the labour market from degree holders. As such they are not

likely to risk leaving their present employer. This may partly explain the strong positive relationship between hard HR strategic orientation and continuance commitment.

Soft HR practices are associated with human capital enhancing strategies that require investments by the organization. According to Becker (1964) any investment on employees including training entails a risk on the part of the employer because there is no guarantee that the employee will maintain membership long enough for the results to be realized. Feur *et al* (1994), however, suggest that investing on certain aspects of employee development, say general training, can provide effective insurance for specific training. The same argument can be advanced for the employer's investment in soft HR practices where it act's as insurance against turnover and a safeguard for employees' continued membership in the organization. Soft HR practices also create a pleasant working climate, which appeals to the human needs of affiliation, acceptance and a sense of belonging. Individuals who would like to quit would first have to consider the opportunity cost involved in leaving such an organization.

### **IMPLICATION FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Results reported in the current study have several policy and practical implications for management. The decision to remain with a firm is largely determined by an employees' level of commitment to the firm. Management can formulate policies that would make termination of organizational membership costly to employees such as competence pay, skill based pay and knowledge based pay. Pay level and pay structure policies should be designed to achieve both external and internal consistency. The frequent use of salary surveys will guide the organizations on what their pay levels are relative to those of others in the industry. Systems that discriminate fairly such as performance related pay, piece rate system and pay on commission can enhance equity. Management should avoid decisions that employees would perceive as violating the psychological contract. Money is a proxy for other motivational needs such as status and esteem because its power is in what it can buy.

Management can also provide transformational leadership, which can inspire people with a vision for the future and develop processes and an organizational climate that encourages people's growth in terms of skill and higher levels of achievement. Use of team briefings, cascading of information through the management chain, staff newsletters, emails through the intranet, notice boards, short message service using mobile telephones and staff meetings are some practical ways of communicating with employees. Management should also be able to receive and use employee ideas and a suggestion scheme would be appropriate practice.

Training and development has a significant impact on organizational commitment. Employees tend to interpret training and development activities as an indication of the organization's commitment to its human resources resulting in a strong psychological bonding and a willingness to contribute more to the organizations objectives. Company-specific skills are likely to induce continuance commitment rather than affective commitment because such skills constitute sunken costs in terms of time and effort that an employee stands to lose if they leave the organization.

Perceived opportunities for internal mobility have major implications for work attitudes such as commitment. Perceptions of unfair promotional opportunities result in negative attitudes towards work or the organization. Managers should formulate and disseminate policies on promotion and career paths. HR should promote an internal labour market policy which outlines progression from entry point and development as one acquires skills and knowledge in their working life. Employees who work in organizations with internal labour market policies are likely to exhibit greater loyalty and attachment to the organization. Organizations, therefore, must reconsider programmes for career growth in order to gain employees' commitment to remain for longer periods.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the objectives of this study were successfully accomplished, several areas remain unclear and require to be addressed by future research. First, this study focused only on the concept of organizational commitment but commitment to an organization may be impossible as employees have different loyalties to different stakeholders within the organization such as their own workgroup, department, supervisor, union, occupation or profession. The concept of multiple and even conflicting commitments is more plausible than the concept of a single commitment to the organization. Future research, therefore, should consider the effect of HR practices on these different commitments. Secondly, the data was collected from a single source that is the HR managers. Future research should be triangulated by incorporating multiple sources such as line managers, workers and other stakeholders and combine both qualitative and quantitative approach to obtain a more robust data set and results.

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