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Table of contents

ABSTRACT	IV
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 THEORY	5
2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	5
2.2 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	5
2.3 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY	6
2.4 AMO-MODEL.....	8
2.5 EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF HRM	9
2.6 LINE MANAGERS' ROLE IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	11
2.7 ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: NORMATIVE, CONTINUANCE, AND AFFECTIVE	12
2.8 RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS	15
2.8.1 <i>Research model</i>	15
2.8.2 <i>Line manager's enactment of HR practices</i>	15
2.8.3 <i>The line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior</i>	16
3.0 METHODOLOGY	19
3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	19
3.2 MEASURES AND DATA CREDIBILITY	20
3.2.1 <i>Line managers' enactment of HR practices</i>	20
3.2.2 <i>Line managers' relations-oriented leadership behavior</i>	21
3.2.3 <i>Affective commitment</i>	22
3.3 DATA COLLECTION	23
3.4 SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE	23
3.4.1 <i>Sampling and Survey Distribution</i>	23
3.4.2 <i>Research ethics</i>	24
3.5 PRETESTING	24
3.6 DATA CLEANING	25
3.7 DEMOGRAPHICS AND CONTROL VARIABLES	25
<i>Control variables</i>	25
<i>Demographics</i>	26
4.0 DATA ANALYSIS.....	27
5.0 RESULTS	28
5.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS	28
5.2 HIERARCHICAL MODERATED REGRESSION ANALYSIS	30
7.0 STRENGTH, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	35
8.0 CONCLUSION	37
9.0 REFERENCES	38

10.0 APPENDIX.....	49
APPENDIX 1: DEMOGRAPHICS	49
APPENDIX 2: TEST FOR HOMOSCEDASTIC - SCATTERPLOT.....	50
APPENDIX 3: TEST FOR NORMALITY - NORMAL P-P PLOT.....	50
APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONNAIRE.....	51

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the employees' perception of their line manager's enactment of HR practices and their leadership behavior on one side, considering the employees' affective commitment to the organization. Therefore, based on the social exchange theory, we investigate the impact of human resource management investments, made by the line managers, on employees' affective commitment. More precisely, we analyze the impact of two independent variables, namely the line managers' enactment of HR practices and the line managers' leadership behavior. Also, we study the interaction of the mediating effect that leadership behavior has on the relationship between the enactment of HR practices and employees' affective commitment. Our research contributes to already existing literature in several ways. First, we focus on the line managers' role in HR, which has received little attention in human resource management research. Moreover, we emphasize the perceived HRM rather than the intended as this is related to the behavioral reactions of employees.

A total of 339 employees working within the field of healthcare service were examined in this study. We chose the health-care service since it is a branch where optimization of our chosen aspects could be a matter of life or death, thus giving us a better basis for contributing to society. Furthermore, according to the findings of hierarchical regression analysis, line managers may increase employees' affective commitment by effectively implementing HR practices and demonstrating relationship-oriented leadership behavior. Lastly, implications for our research are discussed.

Keywords: Line manager, social exchange theory, human resource management, HR practices, affective commitment, leadership behavior

1.0 Introduction

The only thing that seems constant in the contemporary business world is change, and the nature of competitiveness requires organizations to capitalize on how to handle change to achieve a competitive edge. As HRM indirectly affects organizational performance, and line managers are heavily involved in this process, it is interesting to study employees' perception of HRM enactment by line managers, as well as the leadership behavior executed to stay ahead of the competition. According to a Deloitte study, turnover is expected to increase, and there have been multiple studies on the cost of turnover, typically equating to somewhere between 30% to 150% of the employees' annual salary (Kwan, Neveras, Schwartz, Pelster, Erickson & Szaichler, 2020). This is unfortunate for society and the working environment and is not sustainable for shaping innovation, continuous improvement, and long-term success. Furthermore, keeping up with the changing business requires line managers to behave in a way that improves employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and extra-role behaviors (Harney & Jordan, 2008). Also, employees are one of the essential sources of competitive advantage. Therefore, to keep up with the change and nature of competitiveness, it is crucial to motivate the employees and maintain their loyalty to the organization (Ferris, Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, 1999).

Human resource management (HRM) is believed to have an indirect impact on organizational performance through a causal chain of mediating factors such as employee attitudes (e.g., commitment), employee behavior (e.g., turnover), and employee performance (e.g., productivity) in strategic HRM (SHRM) research (Becker, Huselid, Pickus & Spratt, 1997; Guest, 1997; Ramsey, Scholarios & Harley, 2000; Wright & Nishii, 2006). Also, the importance of HR practices to improve motivation and commitment is widely acknowledged (e.g., Datta, Guthrie & Wright, 2005; Huselid, 1995). Especially in healthcare institutions, there are specific peculiarities where human resource management is critical. In recent years, healthcare delivery systems have been confronted with a constant challenge brought on by various factors like technical developments, clinical advances, and rising social expectations of the sector (Miedaner, Kuntz, Enke, Roth & Nitzsche, 2018). Leaders and managers of healthcare facilities are faced with challenges in achieving the typical values of effectiveness and efficiency like all other organizations, as well as having to meet excellent clinical

standards. We find it very interesting to dig deeper into human resource management in the health sector as management in this field plays an important role because most of these employees interact with patients regularly, and medical treatment and quality are at stake. Moreover, according to previous research, burnout is common among healthcare professionals, and the causes of high staff turnover in the healthcare sector have been a topic of extensive research (Miedaner et al., 2018). It appears that the healthcare industry is presently facing a problematic scenario regarding human resource management in its workplaces, emphasizing the importance of empowering staff.

Furthermore, there is little research about the variance in individuals' perceptions of HR practices within organizations, which concerns the employees and other organizational stakeholders. This variation in perceptions of HR emphasizes our desire to study the perceived investments in HRM rather than the intended (Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Hannah & Iverson, 2004; Paré & Tremblay, 2007; Whitener, 2001). How the HR practices are perceived can vary based on several factors, such as institutional and rational influences, and the perceived HR practices rarely match the intended HR practices (Gilbert, DeWinne & Sels, 2011). Researchers such as Cunningham and Hyman (1999), Hall and Torrington (1998), and Thornhill and Saunders (1998) found that one major cause of the employees' different perceptions of HR practices is due to the implementation of HR practices by the line managers, which also is supported by Dysvik and Kuvaas' study from 2011.

In the literature on managerial roles and HR devolution literature, researchers and authors claim a long-standing responsibility of line managers for people management issues (Gilbert et al., 2011). Mintzberg (1971), known for his work on managerial theory, discussed that one of the ten defined managerial roles is the leader. In this role, the leader is set to motivate the employees, as well as develop the environment in which they work and be responsible for staffing activities. Many studies have used Mintzberg's model of managerial theory, and several authors from the HR devolution literature argue that people management responsibilities are more and more devoted to the line manager (e.g. Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Reilly et al., 2007). In contributing to an organization's strategy realization, line management responsibility for HRM is considered essential (Gilbert et al., 2011). After all, the line manager is seen as a

central position in realizing core business objectives and, by that, has a direct impact on their employees' commitment and motivation (Poole & Jenkins, 1997; Andersen, Cooper & Zhu, 2007),

More specifically, the line manager is an essential and vital actor in implementing HR practices, and the discussion on who should be responsible for HRM implementation seems to have shifted from mainly the HR department to the line managers (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). As the line manager is in close daily contact with employees in the means to motivate and manage them, it is widely argued that line managers play a vital role in implementing HR practices in conjunction with their overall people management activities (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Budhwar, 2000; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Maxwell & Wathson, 2006; Reinwick, 2000). Further, the line manager's discretionary behavior in applying HR practices is even said to be critical for factors such as improving employee commitment and job satisfaction (Harney & Jordan, 2008). This suggests that line managers are essential in establishing successful exchange relationships within the organization.

Employees' perception of the effectiveness and success of HRM implementation will arguably depend on their line managers' efforts, and these perceptions will, in turn, influence the employees' commitment (Gilbert et al., 2011). Hence, there can be a linkage between the service quality by the line managers and the positive effect on employees' affective commitment to the organization. Commitment can be divided into three categories: affective, normative, and continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Affective commitment refers to a person's emotional or affective attachment to an organization, which leads to identification with the organization and a desire to be a part of it. Moreover, Meyer and Allen (1997) suggest that affective commitment is inextricably linked to outcomes such as turnover intention. The meta-analysis of Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner (2000) confirms this assumption and posits that affective commitment is one of the best predictors of turnover intention. Thus, our research will concentrate solely on this sort of commitment.

Even though macro research takes us far, and we already know a lot from there; like the line managers' position, the connection between HRM and performance, and the importance of social exchange ties, it is relevant to go deeper into the micro level to get an overview over the mechanisms. A social

exchange study will be a relevant theoretical framework in this case. The social exchange viewpoint suggests that an employee's perception of the organization's commitment to him or her influences the employee's future commitment to the organization (Gould-Williams & Davis, 2005). A long-term social exchange relationship involves a significant ongoing investment and typically emphasizes the exchange of socio-emotional resources such as trust, obligation, and commitment.

Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) claim that employees' experience of genuine people management is reciprocated to the organization through good attitudes and behavior, based on the social exchange hypothesis. Employees' attitudes and behavior likely reflect their perceptions of the organization's ability to satisfy their expectations. In their model, Wright and Nishii (2006) also reflect upon this, which shows how HR policies affect employee perception and behavior. This emphasizes the importance of the employees, being the most important sources of competitive advantage (Barney & Wright, 1998; Guest, 1997). Moreover, according to social exchange theory, perceptions of a non-committed leadership toward the employees will negatively impact employees' affective commitment (Gilbert et al., 2011).

For our master thesis, we want to emphasize the importance of healthcare organizations' ability to overcome the critical challenges they face today and thus study the line managers' role in establishing social exchange relationships related to affective commitment. We have chosen the health care sector as the workforce in these institutions is at a critical juncture with shortages of qualified staff, burnout, and job dissatisfaction all posing risks to the organization's performance and, more critically, lowering the quality of patient care (Miedaner et al., 2018). Our study will enhance the understanding of affective commitment in healthcare organizations, provide a foundation for future study, and assist healthcare executives in making HR management decisions. To study the role of line managers in establishing social exchange relationships in health institutions, we will examine the joint and independent impact of two different independent variables, namely the line manager's enactment of HR practices and the line manager's relation-oriented leadership behavior. The result will enhance our insight into the role and contribution of line managers as HR actors and provide input to align the contribution of line managers concerning implementing HR

practices. Also, this paper adds to the strategic human resource management literature by studying the employees' opinions and experiences in relation to HRM implementation by line managers. Therefore, we shift focus from the often-studied *intended* HRM to the more rarely studied *perceived* HRM (Grant & Shields 2002; Khiji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Kinnie, 2007).

The research question will be as follows:

Will employees' perception of the line managers' HRM implementation and leadership behavior influence their affective commitment to the organization?

2.0 Theory

2.1 Theoretical framework

In our study, we have used literature from various fields, and in this section, we will incorporate the relevant literature on each topic to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the different research areas and their connections. First, we will go through social exchange theory as it is significantly related to affective commitment, our dependent variable. Further follows theory and explanation about HRM practices, including an emphasis on the employees' perception, and the 'AMO' model which focuses on components that shape employee characteristics and contribute to the success of the organization. Further, we explore the line managers' vital role, drawing a line between intended, implemented, and perceived HR practices. Finally, we investigate the theory regarding commitment to the organization, more precisely, employees' affective commitment.

2.2 Human resource management

Human resource management (HRM) entails managerial decisions that strive to achieve individual, organizational, and social objectives and is a crucial part of every organization (Boselie, 2014). Therefore, HRM refers to policies, practices, and systems that affect employees' behavior, attitudes, and performance (Noe, Holmbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2006). Also, Boselie (2014, p. 106) emphasizes that HRM consists of a mutual gain proposition that builds on the notion that "*what is good for the employee, is also good for the employer, and the other way around*".

Hence, one can argue that HRM can be seen as the exchange relationship between employees and their employer, and that this relationship can translate into a continuous tension between moral values and added values (Paauwe, 2004). Further, moral values are represented by the view of employees as humans driven by feelings, personal needs, values, own opinions, and values.

On the other hand, the added values are focused on the organization's economic interests (Paauwe, 2004). Thus, in every organization, the employees play a vital role and should be seen as more than just a resource for the organization to reach its goals, and therefore, policies and practices concerning HRM are fundamental (Wright, Boxall & Purcell, 2008). Consequently, HR practices are an essential part of human resource management. They can be defined as systems that are developed with the intention to, first and foremost, develop, retain, attract, and motivate employees and induce organizational flourishing, according to Schuler and Jackson (1987).

2.3 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory (SET) is a theoretical framework that states that there is a "norm of reciprocity", which means that when a person or an organization does a favor for another, the recipient will feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The reason for this is that perceived investments in HRM can give the employees the feeling that the organization values their contributions as well as cares for their well-being, which will cause employees to respond with attitudes and behaviors that are advantageous to the organization (Gould-Williams, 2007; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Hannah & Iverson, 2004; Paré & Tremblay, 2007; Whitener, 2001). A long-term social exchange relationship involves a significant ongoing investment and typically emphasizes the exchange of socio-emotional resources such as trust, obligation, and commitment.

While social exchange emphasizes socio-emotional aspects of the employment relationship, economic exchange emphasizes the more tangible aspects. Looking back on previous research, both the commitment and the psychological contracts literature have focused on linking these two constructs with other variables (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). However, employee

perceptions of social and economic exchanges have not been explicitly measured nor impacted the employment relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Eisenberger et al. (1986), perceived organizational support is an antecedent to organizational commitment, and he used a social exchange view to emphasize this. The social exchange viewpoint suggests that an employee's perception of the organization's commitment to him or her influences the employee's future commitment to the organization. The social exchange view of commitment, in which POS is prior to affective commitment, has been shown in further research. Shore et al. (2006) show that higher levels of social exchange were associated with higher levels of affective commitment, which is consistent with Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) thesis that commitment is a two-way street. Employees must first believe that their employers/line managers are dedicated to them before they can form an affective attachment to them. Affective commitment from both the employer and the employee, in turn, signals to employees that a social exchange connection exists.

It is widely acknowledged that demotivation, turnover, absenteeism, and inefficient decision-making are all known to be adverse performance-related outcomes of inadequate understanding and interpretation of human requirements in organizations (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015; Ely, 2004; Shen et al., 2009). Maxwell et al. (2001) highlighted that line managers are essential in this case and appear to be particularly debilitated in managing diversity's organizational interpretation and implementation. Despite the importance of line managers' role in implementing organizational policies, it is unclear how social exchange exchanges impact their capacity to execute and implement procedures.

SET highlights the importance of psychological and sociological exchanges necessary to form effective relationships, including positive work attitudes and behaviors among individuals in organizations (McClellan and Collins, 2011; Aryee et al., 2002). There is theoretical and empirical agreement that line managers could effectively facilitate and enact HR policies and their delivery (Brewster et al., 2013; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). Literature suggests that organizational support shapes individual expectations and behaviors (Gigliotti et al., 2018; Wright and Nishii, 2006).

Further, Shore et al.'s (2006) study found that social exchange was consistently linked to all the performance indicators, including overall

performance, altruistic citizenship behavior, relative absence, and relative lateness. This implies the importance of social exchange for encouraging behavior that supports the organization's goals, as predicted by previous studies (Blau, 1964), and research (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The findings of Shore et al.'s (2006) study demonstrate the value of explicitly measuring the employees' perceptions of the social and economic exchanges they have with their employers (line managers), and vice versa. Better understanding the nature of the exchanges involved in the relationship between the employer (line manager) and employee appears to help predict employee behavior.

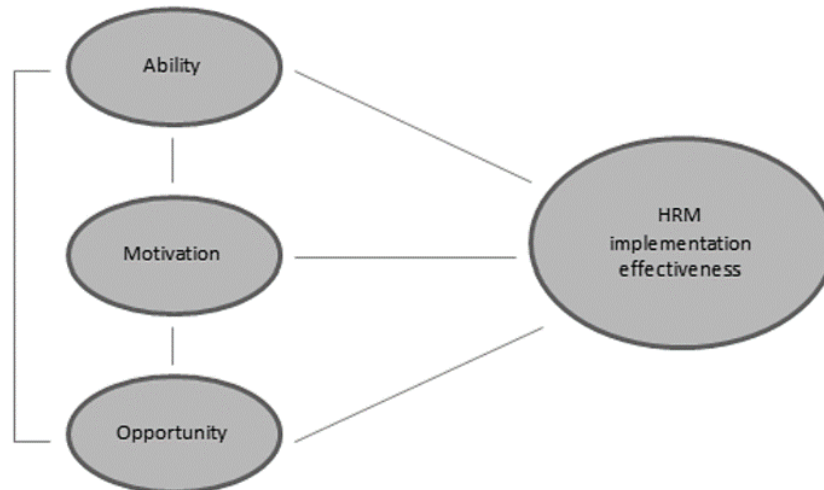
2.4 AMO-model

In recent years, HR practices have been grouped into an 'AMO model', which suggests that employee performance consists of three fundamental components: ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk & Kees Looise, 2013). Ability-enhancing HR strategies are primarily concerned with ensuring that the organization has appropriately skilled workers (Jiang et al., 2012), such as ensuring that employees in a change-oriented organization have the necessary skills and competencies to deal with changing conditions and expectations. Training and development are HR activities that increase workers' knowledge, skills, and talents. They include techniques such as continual training, hours of training, team training, and leadership training (Lepak et al., 2007).

Furthermore, employee motivation-enhancing strategies include HR practices like competitive remuneration, extensive benefits, career development, and incentives and rewards (Jiang et al., 2012). In addition, employee motivation and effort are improved by incentives and rewards, which include activities such as individual bonuses, profit sharing, and gainsharing (Lepak et al., 2006).

Lastly, employee participation and flexible job design are examples of opportunity-enhancing HR policies that enable workers to put their skills and desire to work toward corporate goals (Jiang et al., 2012). However, according to researchers, even if employees have the necessary skills and are motivated to work toward organizational goals, they must be given the appropriate changes to perform appropriately (Lepak et al., 2006).

Figure 1: an overview of the AMO model



2.5 Employees' perceptions of HRM

In the last decade, researchers have investigated how and why the usage of human resource practices can help organizations achieve their objectives (Jiang, Lepak, Hu & Baer, 2012). A large body of evidence suggests that HR strategies aimed at improving employees' knowledge, abilities, and skills, as well as their motivation and opportunity to contribute, are linked to a variety of good outcomes (e.g., Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin, 2009; MacDuffie, 1995; Chuang & Liao, 2010). In general, there is support for the idea that when HR procedures are adequately tailored to the organization's needs, they lead to improved performance (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008). However, there is a contrast between intended and actual HR practices, with the latter varying depending on how the practices are implemented. Furthermore, it is believed that the impact of the practices is found in the workers' perceptions of them rather than in the practices themselves (Nishii & Wright, 2008). The intended practices are those developed by HR policy makers, often the management and the HR department, to attain certain employee attitudes and behaviors to contribute to realizing the firm's strategy. The implemented HR practices, on the other hand, are those that are successfully implemented within the organization (Wright & Nishii, 2006). Nonetheless, how the HR practices are perceived can vary based on several factors, such as institutional and rational influences, and the perceived HR practices rarely match the intended HR practices (Gilbert et al., 2011).

As a result, it is necessary to investigate perceived HR practices in order to determine the impact they may have. Furthermore, both conceptually and empirically, little attention has been dedicated to determining if employees' perceptions of HR procedures are probable antecedents of employee reactions, such as attitudes and behaviors (Nishii & Wright, 2008). In reality, it is acknowledged that the influence of perceived HR practices on employees is an area where further research is needed (Macky & Boxall, 2007). Moreover, supervisor support experienced by employees is highly relevant for HRM theory and practice. Employees create beliefs about the degree to which line managers/supervisors care about their well-being, appreciate their inputs, and give them the support needed, just as they do about their worth to the organization (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988, as quoted in Eisenberger et al., 2002). This employee perception is defined as Perceived Supervisor Support (PSS).

The concept of PSS was created to explain the relationship between the employee's commitment to a supervisor via social exchange theory, assuming that social exchanges are the interchange of valuable commodities that help people form and maintain interpersonal connections (Lynch et al. 2006). In other words, PSS involves understanding individual interactions, eventually leading to reciprocity relationships. The superior in an organization should be in charge of directing and evaluating the performance of the employees, as the superior is seen as the organization's representation (Dulac & Coyle-Shapiro, 2006). This term is based on perceived organizational support (POS), which is frequently used in conjunction with PSS. Overall, employees combine how their superiors treat them to form overall impressions about how much the organization values their efforts and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

When an employee believes that their values and priorities align with the organization's mission, it is a chance that the employee experiences higher affective commitment toward the organization. Since the basic concept of social exchange theory addresses that the better interaction between the individuals, the better attitudes and behaviors towards the organization, it is compulsive to look at the context between affective commitment and PSS. As indicated above, the superior is seen as the organization's representative; thus, the supervisor's actions will affect the employees' response, which will influence the employee's attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. Good perceptions will lead to better

acceptance of the values and goals set by the organization, as well as an improved commitment. Therefore, better perceived support from the superior could lead to better affective commitment. According to the social exchange theory, trustworthiness is generally conceptualized as perceptions of ability, compassion, and integrity, which is a vital resource (Schoorman & Davis, 2007). Indeed, according to Blau (1964), because social exchange requires trusting others to reciprocate, the initial problem is to prove oneself trustworthy. Therefore, for a supervisor to prove themselves trustworthy to the employee is essential as trust is shown to have a positive effect on affective commitment (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).

2.6 Line managers' role in human resource management

Line managers (LMs) are mediators and negotiators between organizations' institutional and technical or operational levels, and many scholars now agree that line managers are vital for the HRM implementation process (Bondarouk et al., 2018; Van Waeyenberg and Decramer, 2018, as mentioned in Kuvaas et al., 2011). Line management responsibility for HRM is thought necessary to contribute to organizations' strategy realization. After all, line managers hold a prominent position in achieving organizational goals and thus may have a more significant direct effect on their subordinates' performance, like their drive, dedication, and discretion, in comparison to the HR department (Poole & Jenkins, 1997; Andersen, Cooper & Zhu, 2007).

In order to obtain an effective HRM implementation, line managers need to consider two components: a management component and a leadership component. Whereas the management component entails implementing particular formal HR processes, such as recruiting and training activities, the leadership component relates to comprehensive leadership behavior, like offering assistance and acknowledging worthy contributions (Andersen et al., 2007). Due to the importance of both components, we have chosen to study the line managers' enactment of HR practices and their relation-oriented leadership behavior.

Moreover, it is important to remember that the individuals' perceptions play a vital role, as stated earlier. The employees' perceptions of HR can vary, but LM's perceptions may also differ from those of the HR managers (Kuvaas et al., 2011). Hence, the managers' perceptions may differ from employees' perceptions.

Due to this variation in perceptions of HR, the growth of interest regarding the role of LMs in implementing HR practices has been raised. A few studies have found a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of the relational qualities of the LM and their perception of HR practices (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2011; Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2010; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007), which indicate that organizations must be selective when recruiting for line management positions, and also maybe implement HR practices more motivating for the LM's by making them more 'user friendly' (Kuvaas et al., 2011). One fundamental cause of perceived differences in HR is the implementation of HR practices by various line managers (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). The variety of implementing HR practices differs due to the varying levels of motivation, competence, and opportunity of these line managers.

2.7 Organizational commitment: Normative, Continuance, and Affective

A concept that has been increasingly considered an important variable when explaining work-related behavior due to its assumed impact on factors such as performance is organizational commitment (Bartlett, 2001). In the last decades, several researchers have provided evidence that organizations and leaders can influence employees' commitment in terms of their HR practices (Meyer & Allen, 2000). Also, Meyer and Allen (2000, p. 319) emphasize that the "(...) nature and strength of the influence might be determined by how employees perceive these practices". Hence, the purpose of the subsequent paragraphs is to elaborate on the organizational commitment theory that is required to understand better how the employee's perception of HR practices can influence their organizational commitment.

Generally, organizational commitment can be described as the attachment employees feel toward the organization in which they are employed (Bartlett, 2001). Also, Meyer and Allen (1997) explain organizational commitment by suggesting that "*a committed employee will stay with the organization through thick and thin, attends work regularly, puts in a full day (and maybe more), protects company assets, and who share company goals*" (as mentioned in Bartlett, 2001, p. 336). Hence, organizational commitment is essential to the employee's attachment to the given organization.

Moreover, according to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment can be organized into three dimensions: normative, continuance, and affective. Firstly, normative commitment refers to a perceived obligation to remain an employee within the organization and is described as the product of the individual's personal values (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Secondly, the continuance commitment emphasizes that it is the costs of potentially leaving the organization, that keep the individual committed, for example by losing attractive benefits, salary, or seniority (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Third, Meyer and Allen (1991, p. 67) define affective organizational commitment as "emotional attachment to, identification with, and engagement in the organization", and can alternatively be described as the *product* of emotional attachment to the organization. The *affective* dimension of commitment has, through empirical research, shown to have the most vital links to many organizational and employee-related outcomes (e.g., Meyer et al., 2002). Even though all three components of organizational commitment are interesting and part of the attachment an employee has towards the organization, in this study, we will mainly focus on affective commitment.

Moreover, affective commitment has been linked to various attitudes and behaviors as mentioned above, including work satisfaction, in-role and extra-role performance, absenteeism, turnover intentions, and effective turnover (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002). Eisenberger and his colleagues proposed that commitment is best conceptualized as a social exchange relationship, in which perceived organizational support (POS) represents the employer side of the exchange, and affective and continuance commitment represents the employee side of the exchange (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Continuance commitment differs from the affective commitment based on the individual's recognition of the 'costs' (or lost side bets) associated with discontinuing the activity" (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 3). While affective commitment has been tied to a social exchange framework, the continuance commitment has been linked to economic exchange (Shore et al., 2006). Thus, we focus on affective commitment in our study. Affective commitment acts as a catalyst promoting employee performance by increasing numerous abilities that benefit employees and is marked by identifying employees

with high loyalty to the organization (Ganesan et al., 2010). It is also essential in building cooperative behavior and long-term orientation in organizations.

Additionally, in strategic human resource management, affective commitment is seen to indirectly affect firm performance, primarily through a causal chain of variables such as employee behavior and attitudes, as well as their performance (Gilbert et al., 2011). Also, in the meta-analysis study on the antecedents, correlations, and consequences of commitment, Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnitsky (2002), indicate that work experiences are strongly related to affective commitment and that employees who experience a supportive work environment will in fact, be more attached to the organization. Also, affective commitment can be said to be a significant factor in the employees' loyalty and dedication, influencing the employee's eagerness to pursue the organization's goals (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Thus, affective commitment is an essential factor within human resource management.

Furthermore, in relation to HR practices and HRM implementation, affective commitment is seen as an aspect important to consider. For example, Guest (1999, as mentioned in Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018), found that the employees' perception of the implementation of HR practices is strongly associated with employee outcomes such as affective commitment, which, in turn, reflect the social exchanges within an organization. This is also supported by other researchers within the field (e.g., Conway & Monks, 2008; Gould-Williams & Davis, 2005), who emphasize that the employee's perception of HRM will influence their commitment to their organization. For example, if the employees understand the presence of HR practices as a personalized commitment to them from the organization, the employees might reciprocate through an affective commitment to the organization (Alfes et al., 2013; Whitener, 2001). Hence, the presence and implementation of HR practices might be understood by the employees as a long-term investment in employees, which will oblige employees to respond with something valuable for the organization, such as affective commitment (Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018).

2.8 Research model and hypothesis

2.8.1 Research model

In this part, we present our overall research model (figure 1) to illustrate what we will investigate in our study. In this model, we have included all relevant variables for our research. In the following, we will detail each of our hypotheses.

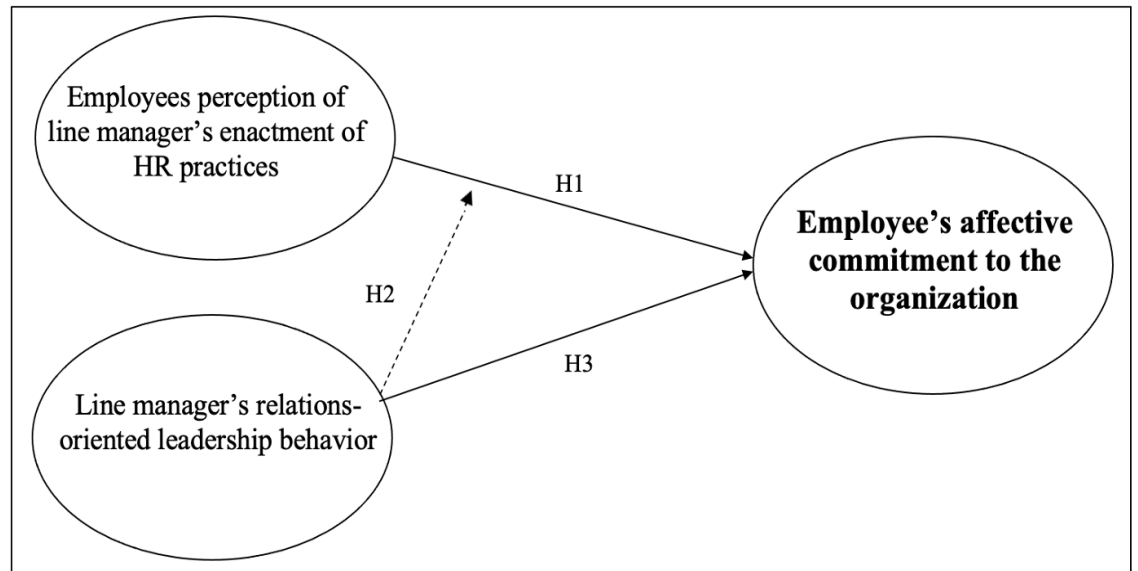


Figure 2: Research model

2.8.2 Line manager's enactment of HR practices

It has been observed that there is a disparity between what is formally required in HR policy and what is delivered by the line managers (Wright and Niishii, 2006). How line managers carry out their HR responsibilities of hiring, evaluating, developing, communicating, and involving employees is inextricably linked to a broader set of what is increasingly referred to as leadership behaviors, which aim to influence employee attitudes and behavior provide direction. Further, there is a distinction that can be made between intended, implemented, and perceived HR practices. HR policymakers devise intended HR practices makers to achieve desired employee attitudes and behaviors contributing to the organization's strategy realization. However, due to political, institutional, and logical forces, actual HR practices rarely match the intended HR practices. The enactment of HR practices by diverse line managers is one of the critical causes of perceived disparities in HR practices (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Hall & Torrington, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Line managers' approach to

implementing HR practices will vary depending on their (changing) skill levels, motivation, and opportunity. Moreover, the employees' perception of the effectiveness of the HR implementation will depend on the line manager's effort, and these perceptions may influence their affective commitment to the organization.

Over the past 20 years, researchers have agreed that the construct of affective commitment can be described as the emotional attachment to an organization as manifested by an individual's identification with and involvement in that organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002). Employees must first believe that their line managers are dedicated to them and supported by them before they can form an affective attachment to them (Kuvaas, Dysvik & Buch, 2014). Employees that work in a supportive atmosphere are more likely to stay with the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Supportive leadership is associated with affective outcomes, according to theorists, since it improves good affect and happiness in the workplace, and it conveys to the employees that they are welcomed and liked (Wofford & Liska, 1993). In this instance, people feel obligated to respond reasonably to the organization's or its representatives' commitment (Blau, 1967). The line manager's ability to effectively implement HR practices may contribute to a positive work environment (Macky & Boxall, 2007; Meyer & Smith, 2001; Wu & Chaturvedi, 2009). Employees will feel supported and motivated to execute their jobs successfully now and, in the future, if their line manager properly executes performance reviews, gives feedback, offers training to execute the work more precisely, and provides backup when a colleague gets sick. They will demonstrate excellent attitudes and behavior in exchange.

As feeling supported by line managers is connected to affective commitment, which relates to the perceived enactment of HR practices we, therefore, hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: A positive relationship exists between the employee's perceived enactment of HR practices and affective commitment.

2.8.3 The line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior

Over the last decade, several authors have made an effort to categorize existing collections of leadership behaviors and the effect of the different

behaviors (Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 7). Overall, there are mainly two meta-categories regarding leadership behavior that are commonly distinguished in the literature: task-oriented leadership behavior and relation-oriented leadership behavior. While the former leadership behavior concerns the collective group goals within an organization and the means how to achieve those set goals, the latter emphasizes the human relations within an organization where maintaining supportive relations with the followers are highly relevant, according to Bass (2011, as mentioned in Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 7). Even though the two leadership behaviors are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive, meaning that it is possible, and to some extent also preferable in terms of effectiveness - according to Blake and Mouton (1982), for a leader to score high in both of the categories (Yukl et al., 2002; Yukl, 2008). However, as mentioned, the two leadership behaviors are theoretically distinct, especially regarding their objectives. The primary objective of task-oriented leadership behavior is to reduce costs and improve productivity, while relations-oriented leadership behavior aims more at building and developing commitment and cooperation among the subordinates. For our master thesis, we have chosen to focus on the line managers' influence on the employees' affective commitment. Therefore, we concentrate on the relations-oriented leadership behavior of the line managers.

Moreover, the relations-oriented leadership behavior emphasizes the human aspect within an organization and includes five different components relevant to leadership behavior (Gilbert et al., 2011). According to Yukl, Gordon, and Taber (2002), the specific relations behavior includes (1) supporting, (2) developing, (3) recognizing, (4) consulting, and (5) empowering. The first behavior, supporting, is defined as "(...) showing consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of other people" (Yukl et al., 2002, p. 20). Also, supporting others can be seen as the core of consideration and supportive leadership, according to several researchers (Fleishman, 1953; Stogdill, Goode & Day, 1962). In addition, supportive leadership is indicated to build and maintain effective interpersonal relationships, and there is strong evidence that support is related to follower satisfaction with the given leader (Yukl et al., 2002). As for the next leadership behavior relevant for relations-oriented leadership, developing, coaching is seen as the core construct, for example, by providing employees advice, learning opportunities, or simply helping employees improve their skills

(Yukl et al., 2002). Further, recognizing, according to Yukl et al. (2002), involves giving praise and showing appreciation to others for specific achievements or effective performance. The two last leadership behaviors are consulting and empowering. The former emphasizes encouraging participation in making decisions and involving the employees in making important decisions. Empowerment includes delegating and providing subordinates more autonomy (Yukl et al., 2002).

As relations-oriented leadership behavior emphasizes and implies a supportive, developing, and empowering relationship between the leader and the employee, we find the role of line managers highly relevant in this case as the line managers act as organizational representatives and thereby also care for their subordinates' well-being (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). Further, as mentioned, Bass (1990) argues that a relations-oriented leadership will imply a supportive and friendly work environment for the employees, we argue that when employees perceive a relations-oriented leadership behavior from their line manager, it will have a positive impact on the employee's affective commitment.

Hypothesis 2: *There is a positive relationship between the line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior and employees' affective commitment*

Furthermore, based on the implications and theory presented and by following that line of reasoning, we argue that the employees' perception of their line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior will have a moderating role in the enactment of HR practices and affective commitment, and the more the employees perceive that their line manager has a relations-oriented leadership behavior, the more positive will the relationship between the enactment of HR practices and affective commitment be. Hence, we developed the subsequent hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: The employees' perception of their line manager's leadership behavior, moderates the relationship between the enactment of HR practices and affective commitment.

3.0 Methodology

As for this chapter, we will, based on the theoretical ground presented, elaborate on the methodological choices in the study. We will explain the research design, our approach, measures, data credibility, and data collection. Also, the methodology concerning reliability, validity, and ethical considerations will be evaluated.

3.1 Research design

In the following sections, we will elaborate on the methodology relevant to our research, and we will start by presenting our research design. According to Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022), a research design works as a framework for collecting and analyzing the data. Also, the choice of design will reflect decisions about the priority given to the dimensions of the whole research process.

Moreover, there are different choices to make when performing a study and research, and one of those choices is which approach will be most suitable for the research. Saunder et al. (2019) emphasize that the choice of approach most likely depends on the nature of the study, as well as on the amount of existing theory regarding that specific sensation. The most common view regarding theory and research is a *deductive* approach (Bell et al., 2022). The deductive approach is used to conduct research when the study utilizes existing theory in order to formulate the research goal, objectives, and hypothesis (Bell et al., 2022). In contrast, in the inductive approach, data is collected before exploring it to develop theoretical notions (Saunders et al., 2019). For our study, we have used a deductive approach as we have used existing theory and what is already known about a domain to formulate our research goals and objectives.

Additionally, the quantitative research method is the most typical method associated with the deductive approach. Also, quantitative research has been the dominant approach to business research, and it is described as “entailing the collection of numerical data and exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive” (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 150). Thus, we will use a quantitative method to test our hypothesis about the connection between line managers’ enactment of HR practices and affective commitment and between line managers’ relation-oriented leadership behavior and affective commitment.

Further, as for our research design, a cross-sectional design is the most suitable for our study and is by many considered to be the preferred design in quantitative research. For example, Bell et al. (2022, p. 59) define the cross-sectional design as the “(...) collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time, in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association”.

3.2 Measures and data credibility

In order to ensure a valuable and successful study, we focus on data credibility. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), data credibility is established by both data reliability and validity. According to Bell et al. (2022, p. 48), “reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are reportable”, and it concerns the consistency, stability, or repeatability of the results of a study. Further, “validity is concerned with the integrity of conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” and also emphasizes the correctness or truthfulness of the inference that is made from the results of the study (Bell et al., 2022, p. 49; Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 279).

As for our measures, there are multiple ways to ensure they are credible. In our research, we have only used previously validated measures to ensure credibility, and all the included measures have a Cronbach’s Alpha greater than .70, which is considered satisfactory. Also, to ensure both reliable and valuable responses across our measures, we used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) in all measures in this particular study, as this way of structuring has been demonstrated to be trustworthy in a variety of contexts (Cummins & Gullone, 2000). Further, in the subsequent paragraphs, we will elaborate on the measures used.

3.2.1 Line managers’ enactment of HR practices

The employee’s perception of their line manager’s enactment of HR practices was measured based on Gould-Williams and Davies’ (2005) HRM practices scale. The reason why we chose this specific scale is that it is found to demonstrate high validity and reliability in previous studies that are relevant to

HRM practices and employees' perceptions of such practices (Gould-Williams, 2003; Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005; Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2013).

However, for that scale to fit into our study, we modified and rewrote the items so that it would make sense to measure the employee's perception of their line manager's enactment of HR practices. For example, one of the original items was "*I am provided with sufficient opportunities for training or development*", however, we formulated it as "*My line manager provides me with sufficient opportunities for training or development*" (Gould-Williams & Davies, 2005, p. 11). Another example of a modified item is "*This department keeps me informed about business issues and how well it is doing*". This item was modified to "*My line manager keeps me informed about business issues and about how well it is doing*". The Cronbach's Alpha for the modified HRM practices scale used in this study is ($\alpha = .846$).

3.2.2 Line managers' relations-oriented leadership behavior

In order to measure the line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior, we investigate the five components Yukl et al. (2002) described: supporting, developing, recognizing, consulting, and empowering. For each of the dimensions, we used an existing and validated leadership behavior scale, as suggested by Gilbert et al. (2011). All the scales used to measure the five relations-oriented leadership behaviors (Yukl et al., 2002) have high coefficient Alpha's (α) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The supporting leadership behavior was investigated using the 3-item supervisor support scale, developed by House in 1981. Yoon and Thyne later modified the scale in 2000. One sample item is "*My line manager considers my personal needs*". To measure developing leadership behavior, we relied on the developmental leadership scale by Rafferty and Griffin (2006). One example is: "*My line manager suggests training to improve my ability to carry out my job*". Finally, we adapted the scale developed by Gilbert, De Winne, and Sels (2011) to measure the recognizing leadership behavior. A sample item for recognizing leadership behavior is, e.g., "*My line manager pays attention to my efforts at work*".

Further, consulting leadership behavior was represented by two items of the participative decision-making scale developed by Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, and Drasgow (2000). A sample item for the consulting leadership behavior is “*My line manager encourages me to express my ideas and suggestions*”. Finally, empowering leadership behavior was assessed based on the “Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ)” developed by Stogdill, Goode, and Day (1962). We chose two items from the “tolerance and freedom” dimension in the questionnaire. For empowering leadership behavior, an example item is “*My line manager permits us to use our own judgments in solving problems*”.

Also, it is worth commenting that in all of the presented scales, we have chosen to change the terms such as “supervisor”, “direct supervisor”, “front line manager”, and “direct leader”, to “line manager” in each of the included items, in order to make the questions more precise and more directed to our study.

Furthermore, as mentioned, to ensure our study’s credibility, we used previously validated measures. All the scales relevant for the relations-oriented leadership behavior measures used in this study have an alpha greater than .70. According to Cortina (1993, p. 99), measures with alpha greater than .70 are considered adequate, and the Coefficient Alpha indicates the reliability of all the mentioned variables in our study. The Coefficient Alpha’s for the relations-oriented leadership behavior scales used in this research is respectively; supporting leadership behavior ($\alpha = .76$), developing leadership behavior ($\alpha = .83$), recognizing leadership behavior ($\alpha = .90$), consulting leadership behavior ($\alpha = .85$), and empowering leadership behavior ($\alpha = .86$) (Yoon & Thyne, 2000; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Gilbert et al., 2011; Arnold et al., 2000; Stogdill, 1962). Hence, the scales used in this research are reliable regarding the Cronbach Alpha.

3.2.3 *Affective commitment*

In our study, the dependent variable “affective commitment” was measured using the revised affective commitment scale developed by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). We used six items from their scale. The six items revolve around how strongly committed the employees feel to the organization they are employed in. Two example items are: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career within this organization” and “I do not feel “emotionally

attached” to this organization (reversed)”. For this specific scale, the Coefficient Alpha is .83 (Meyer et al., 1993).

3.3 Data collection

Saunders and colleagues (2019) claim that questionnaires are a standard data collection method when using a quantitative technique. To test our hypothesis, we designed a questionnaire through Qualtrics. Hence, our data was collected through a standardized questionnaire and distributed electronically through a web page called “Prolific” (See 3.4.1 for further explanation of the survey distribution). Furthermore, the questionnaire was formulated in English as we distributed the survey to many participants worldwide; therefore, we avoided any misinterpretations by conducting the questionnaire in English and strengthened the construct validity (Bell et al., 2022). Overall, based on our research approach, design, strategy, research goals, and objectives, using a questionnaire to collect data is an acceptable way of retrieving data (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.4 Sample and procedure

3.4.1 Sampling and Survey Distribution

Bryman and Bell (2011) define sampling as the process of selecting a segment of a population to investigate. Data collection is a crucial part of the research process, and for us to study our variables and collect the necessary data, we chose to use a sample survey. A sample survey is “a study involving a subset (or sample) of individuals selected from a larger population” (Levy & Lemeshow, 2008, p. 3).

Furthermore, “Prolific”, a well-known tool for recruiting volunteers for academic research worldwide, was used to deliver our sample survey. Using this online platform, we sampled many employees. We also ensured that the employees answering our survey had a line manager by requiring this through Prolific. Moreover, we wanted to get answers from a variety of organizations within the health care sector. We chose the health care sector because we think it gives us a better basis for contributing to society as this sector is in a complex

situation concerning the management of human resources in minimizing problems of staff turnover, productivity, and job satisfaction. If the line managers fail to enact HR practices in a good way, it will affect the organization's performance and pose a risk of lowering the quality of patient care.

We also required that the participant was a current health sector employee and reported to a line manager/supervisor. We did not specify that the employee needed to be a nurse or a doctor but could be everything from the cleaning staff to surgical, as we find every part of the organization in this branch highly necessary. As a result, replies from a broad range of employees within health care organizations should offer us greater diversity in the data obtained and sufficient sample size. When a sample is homogeneous, the sample size is less of a problem than when the sample size is heterogeneous (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, we had a total of 339 answers to our survey.

3.4.2 Research ethics

In order to comply with ethical standards in social science research, various ethical considerations should be made (Johannessen et al., 2016). Thus, our study was entirely optional (Jacobsen, 2015), and all the participants gave informed consent. Informed content is a crucial feature of conducting ethical research since it demands that participants be given enough information about the study to make an educated decision about whether to participate (Crow, 2006). Therefore, the participants in our survey were required to read an informal message at the beginning of our survey regarding the study and how the data would be handled before answering whether they granted their agreement as participants. Furthermore, our survey was likewise anonymous, with no personal information available at any moment. To ensure that no personally identifying information was available, we used Qualtrics anonymization software. We also grouped the demographic characteristics into broad classifications so it would not be possible for any identification of individuals.

3.5 Pretesting

Before we began the formal data collection procedure, we pretested the measuring items on five test subjects from various backgrounds, all of whom were

within the scope of the study's target demographic. According to Bryman & Bell (2011), pre-testing may be used to reduce errors. We got good results on our pre-test. We got feedback from the pre-test participants that our survey was understandable, not vague, and that the questionnaire was simple to complete. Due to this, we felt ready to send the study to our intended audience, employees with a line manager working in the health-service sector. The results from the pre-test will not be included in the actual research, as the pre-test was mainly used to ensure that the questionnaire was understandable.

3.6 Data cleaning

The dataset needed to be cleaned and prepared before it could be analyzed. We started with 339 people who completed the Qualtrics survey, which was then exported to SPSS. Further, using a set of criteria, we began cleaning the data. Firstly, we made sure to eliminate any replies with missing values, including responses that did not finish our complete survey or skipped some of the answer options. Secondly, we thoroughly evaluated all responses with an unusually long or short completion time to find responders with logical faults in their replies. Finally, certain items had to be re-coded to obtain the right values for our study. On a 5-point scale, we re-coded some reverse-scored items as "same variable" (1 = 5, 2 = 4, 4 = 2, 5 = 1). Four of the eight questions regarding affective commitment were re-coded in this way. After our cleaning, we were satisfied with the dataset and ready to begin with the elemental analysis.

3.7 Demographics and control variables

Control variables

Respondents were asked demographic questions before moving on to the more theoretical variables in the questionnaire. Our demographic questions comprised age, gender, education level, organization service length, and employment type. These five variables were included as they have been argued to influence affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2002; Sanders, Dorenbosch & de Reuver, 2008). To protect anonymity, the control variables were grouped into broad categories. For example, we grouped "age" into approximately 10-year

intervals and “length of service within organizations into five-year intervals”. In total, we received 339 respondents for our survey. In the following section, we will present demographics.

Demographics

As we can see from *Demographics* (Appendix 1), our study recruited a few more females (50.3%) than men (49%), and the remaining 0.7% to “other”. As for the age category, we can see that the majority of the participants were between 25 and 34 years old (N=138, 46%), followed by the age group 18 to 24 years (N=105, 35%). Respondents between the ages of 35 to 44 constituted a minor part (N=38, 12.7%), and the respondents between 45 to 54 (N=11, 3.7%) and 55 to 64 (N=8, 2.7%) were even more minor. The last group (older than 65 years) was not represented by any participants, which can be explained by the fact that we limited our survey through Prolific only to be distributed to participants who are currently working full- or part-time, and in most countries, the retirement age is around 65 years (Schroders, 2017).

Further, out of all the 300 participants, most are currently employed in a full-time position (N=205, 68.3%), while the rest are employed in a part-time position (N=95, 31.7%). We also asked the participant to answer what their educational level was. As mentioned, we limited our survey to be distributed to employees working in the healthcare industry, which includes many positions requiring different educational levels. Our study recruited most participants with an educational level equal to a bachelor’s degree or three years of studying (N=137, 45.7%). Respondents with an educational level equal to a master’s degree (5 years of studying) constituted a reasonably large part of the participants with an educational level below a bachelor’s degree, respectively 26% and 25.5%. Only 3% of the participants had an educational level above a master’s degree. Lastly, the participants were also asked to state the length of service with their current organization, and, not surprisingly, given that most of the participants were between 25 and 34 years old, most of the respondents have been working within their organization for between 1 to 5 years (N=160, 53.3%). Furthermore, 27.7 percent of the respondents have been in their current organization for under one year. The next group for this item (i.e., 5-10 years, 10-15 years, >15 years) was represented by, respectively, the frequency of N=32, N=18, and N=7.

4.0 Data analysis

The statistics program IBM SPSS 28.0.1.0 was utilized to explain, summarize, and evaluate the data collected in the questionnaire. First, we used Cronbach's alpha to assess measures for internal reliability. We used the standard rule of thumb to have a Cronbach's alpha above either .70 or .80, even though lower values may also be adequate (Kline, 1999, as cited in Field, 2018, p. 823). Second, for us to retrieve more comprehensive information from our dataset, we computed descriptive statistics and used Pearson's correlation coefficient to look for correlations between all variables included in our study.

Additionally, we tested the dataset for multicollinearity, normality, and homoscedasticity. In SPSS, we ran a regression and made sure to retrieve collinearity diagnostics. As for the multicollinearity, all our VIF values are below 10, indicating no issues with multicollinearity (Field, 2018). The VIF values range between 1.023 and 3.023. Also, the fact that there are no multicollinearity issues in our results is supported by the tolerance values in the collinearity statistics, which are over .10, ranging from .331 to .977. Thus, overall, our study and results did not find any multicollinearity.

Further, when checking the normality and homoscedasticity, we found promising results for this as well. We checked for normality by investigating the normal P-P plot of the regression, which indicated that our sample is drawn from a normally distributed population (see Appendix 1). The scatterplot was used to investigate the assumption of homoscedasticity, and we found that this was good as well (See appendix 1). Also, as mentioned, we removed responses with missing values, thoroughly evaluated all responses for outliers, and checked for logical faults in their replies. For example, we removed the results from some participants who used under one minute to complete our survey, as we assumed the participants would use at least four minutes to answer all questions.

Further, we used SPSS to carry out a hierarchical linear regression analysis to address our research question. The enactment of HR practices and the line managers' relation-oriented leadership behavior were examined as independent factors in the regression analysis to determine how well our dependent variable 'affective commitment' could be predicted. Additionally, hierarchical regression was applied to our hypotheses to evaluate the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables while considering the effect of pertinent

control factors. Using SPSS, we performed hierarchical regression analyses with affective commitment as the dependent variable, enactment of HR practices as the predictor, leadership-oriented behavior as the mediator, and age, gender, education level, length of employment, and type of employment effect as the control factors.

5.0 Results

5.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

As mentioned in 4.0 Analysis, we retrieved descriptive statistics from SPSS, and *Table 1* presents the means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), which are presented in parentheses for all our included variables in our research model. Also, we included the control variables in *Table 1*. As for the reliability of the Cronbach's Alpha, we see that all our variables have high internal consistency, with the value being greater than .70. The Cronbach Alpha's for the enactment of HR practices is $\alpha = .846$, for the relations-oriented leadership variable $\alpha = .901$, and for affective commitment $\alpha = .846$. Hence, every study variable included had high internal consistency.

Also, as for the Pearson's correlations, we see that the independent variables had a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable, affective commitment, respectively (.568, $p < .001$) and (.520, $p < .001$). Both are high correlations. Thus, we can establish a positive relationship between the line manager's enactment of HR practices and employees' affective commitment, as well as between the line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior and affective commitment to the organization. Additionally, the line manager's enactment of HR practices and the relations-oriented leadership behavior of the line manager is strongly correlated. We can see that the two independent variables correlate positively with each other, with a correlation of .817, $p < .001$, meaning that when the employees experience that their line manager implements the HR practices pleasingly and satisfactorily, it will strengthen the positive experience about their line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior.

As for the control variables, we can see that not all significantly impact our dependent variable, affective commitment. However, as shown in *Table 1*, the significant control variables were age ($r = .197$, $p < .01$) and length of service in organization ($r = .170$, $p < .01$).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Age	1.93	.928								
2 Gender	1.52	.514	.055							
3 Education level	2.07	.794	.133*	-.076						
4 Length of service in organization	2.02	.914	.554**	.035	.021					
5 Type of employment	1.32	.466	-.289**	.083	-.148*	-.243**				
6 Line manager's enactment of HR practices	3.60	.774	.059	-.021	.014	.122*	-.105	(.846)		
7 Line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior	3.69	.722	.064	.016	.006	.121*	-.114*	.817**	(.901)	
8 Affective commitment	2.99	.807	.197**	.046	.030	.170**	-.033	.568**	.520**	(.846)

Note: N = 300. Cronbach's Alpha values are reported in parantheses.

* Correlations are significant at the .05 level ($p < .05$)

** Correlations are significant at the .01 leves ($p < .01$)

5.2 Hierarchical Moderated regression analysis

The first step in the hierarchical regression analysis revealed information about the included control variables (age, gender, education level, length of service in the organization, and type of employment). As Table 2 showcases, we only found age significantly related to affective commitment ($\beta = .151, p < .05$). However, in step two and three we also found the control variable “type of employment” to be significantly related to affective commitment, respectively $\beta = .084, p < .01$ and $\beta = .093, p < .01$.

Further, for the second model, R was reported to be .605, which indicates that the model explained 60,5% of the variation of affective commitment. The R square is .367, which means that the enactment of HR practices and line managers’ relations-oriented leadership behavior explains around 37% of the variation in affective commitment. The model had an F value of 24.142, which is significant on a .001 level. Hence the model is seen as valid and can be used to predict affective commitment. Also, the second step in the regression analysis revealed that the perceived enactment of HR practices positively predicted affective commitment ($\beta = .564, p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Also, further findings in model 2 revealed that there is significant evidence for the second hypothesis as well. The employees’ perception of their line managers’ relations-oriented leadership behavior positively affects the employees’ affective commitment to the organization ($\beta = .163, p < .05$). Lastly, in order to test our last hypothesis, we included an interaction between the two independent variables (enactment*leadership behavior) in model 3. For the third model, R was reported to be .607, which indicates that the model explained 60,7% of the variation of affective commitment. Additionally, the stated value for the R square change is .368, which states that a 36.8 percent differential of affective commitment was explained by the moderation of relation-oriented leadership behavior to the enactment of HR practices. Hence, models 2 and 3 are quite similar concerning the R and R square values. The third model had an F value of 21.185, which is significant on a .001 level. Thus, the third model is also seen as valid and can be used to predict affective commitment. Further, hypothesis 3 suggests that employees' perception of the line manager’s leadership behavior will mediate the relationship between the enactment of HR practices and affective commitment. The hierarchical regression analysis revealed a non-significant

relationship ($\beta = .042$, $p = .41$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not significantly supported. In sum, we found significant support for hypotheses 1 and 2. Hypothesis 3, however, was not supported.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression Analysis

Variable	Standardized Coefficient (β)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Age	.151*	.169*	.166*
Gender	.033	.036	.032
Education level	.015	.015	.017
Length of service in organization	.092	.022	.026
Type of employment	.032	.084**	.093**
Line manager's enactment of HR practices		.433***	.437***
Line manager's relations-oriented leadership behavior		.162*	.173*
Enactment*leadership behavior			.042
R	.215*	.605*	.607
R square	.046*	.367*	.368
F	2.854*	24.142***	21.185***

Note: N = 300; Standardized regression coefficients are shown. *p < .05; ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Dependent variable = Affective commitment

6.0 Discussion

As previously noted in this study, there has been much research about the importance of HRM and the line managers' role in the organization. However, little research has been done on the differences in individuals' perceptions of HR procedures and organizational leadership behavior concerning affective commitment. This study aimed to examine the relationship between the line managers' relations-oriented leadership behavior and HR practices as seen by the employees on the one hand and the employees' affective commitment to the organization on the other, in establishing social exchange relationships. For Hypothesis 1, we expected a positive relationship between employees' perception of their line manager's enactment of HR practices and affective commitment. Our study supported this assumption, where the enactment had a positive standardized beta coefficient of .433 significant at ($p < .001$) level. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. In prior research, we also find support for this relationship (Gilbert et al., 2011). The result indicates that if the employees perceive that their line manager implements HR practices well, it will positively influence their affective commitment to the organization. The relation between these two variables supports the theory from Meyer & Smith (2001) about the line manager's ability to effectively implement HR practices and how this influences the employees' behavior towards the organization. The result supports our theoretical expectation that an employee's emotional attachment to the organization depends on the line managers' role in managing HR practices well and emphasizes the importance of line managers' position when speaking of social exchange ties.

Furthermore, from our results, line managers' enactment of HR practices seems to have the most substantial influence on affective commitment, as the enactment ($\beta = .433$, $p < .001$) is higher compared to relations-oriented behavior ($\beta = .162$, $p < .05$). However, as we can see, the line manager's leadership behavior affected employees' affective commitment. This finding follows our presumption that relation-oriented leader behavior plays a vital role in creating social exchange ties. Furthermore, Shore et al. (2006) research show that higher levels of social exchange were associated with higher levels of affective commitment. Moreover, the relations-oriented leadership behavior emphasizes the human aspect within an organization and is about supporting, developing,

recognizing, consulting, and empowering as well as the social exchange is a metric designed to determine the effort poured in by an individual in a relationship and focuses exclusively on the emotional/affective process, it makes sense that we got support for our hypothesis.

Moreover, our findings showed a statistically insignificant effect regarding the mediated relationship between enactment and affective commitment, as the beta was .042 and not significant at any level (neither .05, .01, or .001). Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported. Due to this, we cannot with certainty state that the observed effect did not occur because of random errors or other confounding variables. Other variables may have affected the result; hence we cannot conclude that line managers' leadership behavior moderates the relationship between the employees' perception of their line manager's enactment of HR practices and affective commitment. The reasons for these outcomes can be several, for example not including factors that could be important to determine in the study. In addition, we used a cross-sectional design with its weaknesses, which can also be one of the reasons for the insignificant result. A longitudinal design might be more sensitive but less efficient concerning data collection.

We chose to narrow our selection of organizations to the health sector due to healthcare facilities facing obstacles to achieving the typical values of effectiveness and efficiency like all other organizations and needing to fulfill high clinical requirements. Thus, our findings need to be interpreted within the context of the health care sector. For the control variables, some were found as significant predictors in the regression analysis. For example, we noticed that the employees' age significantly affected our dependent variable, 'affective commitment'. This is in line with earlier research findings (e.g. Meyer et al., 2002; Sanders et al., 2008). Also, the length of service in the organization was a significant predictor of affective commitment. The fact that this significant predictor makes sense as the employees' willingness to stay within the organization may be influenced by their emotional attachment to their workplace.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, it is widely acknowledged that line managers play a vital role in motivating and managing the employees as they are in daily contact (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Budhwar, 2000; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Maxwell & Wathson, 2006; Reinwick, 2000). Therefore, we argue that the line managers are crucial in enacting HR practices and that this, in

turn, will lead to positive outcomes for the organization, such as employees showing affective commitment. Also, according to Harnett and Jordan (2008), the line manager's discretionary behavior in applying HR practices is said to be critical for factors such as improving employee commitment and job satisfaction. Based on the previous discussion and our research results, line managers are essential in establishing successful exchange relationships within the organization. Further, the result from our study correspondingly shows the impact a line manager can have on the employees' affective commitment.

Also, according to our findings, if employees perceive their line manager to be relations-oriented in their leadership behavior, it will positively affect the affective commitment to the organization. Hence, one can argue that the line manager's role in people management activities such as implementing HR practices is significantly related to affective commitment. Therefore, based on Eisenberger et al. 's (1986) theory about commitment being a two-way street, the social exchange relationship between the line manager and employee will increase if the affective commitment increases. The link between higher levels of social exchange and increased affective commitment is also supported by Shore et al. (2006). Regarding the research discussed, it was logical/not that surprisingly our first two hypotheses were significant. However, it would be interesting to look further into the mediating effect.

7.0 Strength, limitations, and directions for future research

We will now examine the most important strengths and limitations of the methods and processes used to better inform the reader about the background of our study.

The relatively high internal consistency reliability of the widely recognized measures chosen from earlier research is one of our study's key strengths. Furthermore, using validated scales when forming our survey makes it less sensitive to common method bias (Doty and Glick, 1998). In addition, we have a sample size of 300 respondents, which is a decent size in this case (Field, 2018). The application of moderation analyses is another strength. Moderation studies may help us comprehend individuals' circumstances for whom a variable most accurately predicts a result (Hayes, 2017). Hall and Rosenthal (1991)

emphasize the value of investigating moderation and contend that they are the core of all scientific research.

However, our data were collected at a single point in time which is a considerable limitation of our study as without conducting at least two surveys at various points in time, and it is difficult to measure changes in the population. Also, when using 'Prolific' to gather data, we do not have deep insight into what roles the individuals belong to or in which organization they are employed. However, having responders from different backgrounds can also be viewed as good due to the results' generalizability (Field, 2018).

Moreover, because our analysis was cross-sectional, we cannot completely rule out the potential of reversed causality: employees with more substantial emotional commitment could be more complimentary of their line manager's use of HR procedures and relational leadership behavior (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). To conclude causal relationships safely, longitudinal data on the subject is necessary (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011).

Although our study included various control factors (gender, length of service, education, etc.), additional explanations for the degree of affective commitment may exist. Individual personalities and attributes have been found to impact people's attitudes and responses to affective commitment. For example, traits like agreeableness, conscientiousness, and intellect are highly correlated to affective commitment (Basnet & Regmi, 2019). Thus, future research may include some personality qualities when investigating the relationship between affective commitment and leadership behavior and the line managers' enactment of HR practice.

Lastly, our study focuses on the employee's perspective without linking the employee to the line manager. Thus, we suggest that looking at our study from a leader's viewpoint would be an intriguing angle for future research since it would help researchers better understand the motivations and factors behind it.

8.0 Conclusion

Our study adds to the body of knowledge regarding line managers' vital role in organizations and how to facilitate affective commitment. Especially in a sector where one mistake can lead to severe consequences, it was intriguing to get support for our two hypotheses regarding the connections between the facilitation of line managers' tasks and abilities to foster affective commitment. Furthermore, our research strengthens previous literature that emphasizes the importance of social exchange ties and how the employees' perception of their line manager influences their affective commitment to the organization. Due to this, organizations within the health care sector should emphasize training and support to their line managers. Also, arrange for them to improve their relation-oriented behavior as well as their way of enacting HR practices to keep up with the technical developments, clinical advances, and rising social expectations of the sector. Lastly, referring to our research question, and based on the results provided in our study, previous research, and theoretical implications, it is safe to say that employees' perception of the line managers' HRM implementation and leadership behavior *will* influence their affective commitment to the organization.

9.0 References

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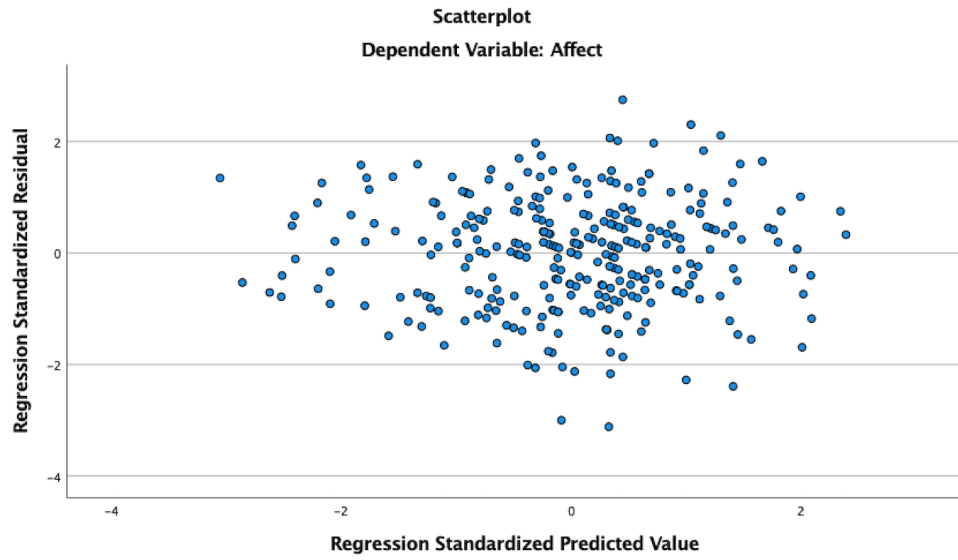
10.0 Appendix

Appendix 1: Demographics

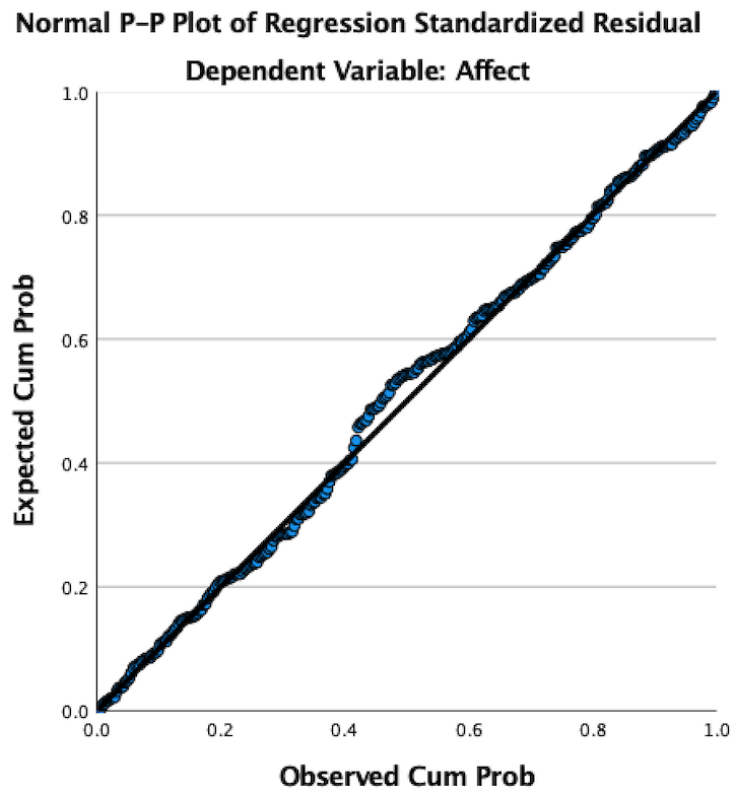
Demographics:

Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	147	49
Female	151	50.3
Other	2	.7
Total	300	100
Age		
	Frequency	Percent
18-24	105	35
25-34	138	46
35-44	38	12.7
45-54	11	3.7
55-64	8	2.7
65+	0	0
Total	300	100
Length of service within organization		
	Frequency	Percent
< 1 year	83	27.7
1 - 5 years	160	53.3
5 - 10 years	32	10.7
10 - 15 years	18	6.0
> 15 years	7	2.3
Total	300	100
Type of employment		
	Frequency	Percent
Full-time	205	68.3
Part-time	95	31.7
Total	300	100
Educational level		
	Frequency	Percent
Below bachelor level	76	25.5
Bachelor level (3 years)	137	45.7
Master level (5 years)	78	26
Above Master level	9	3
Total	300	100

Appendix 2: Test for homoscedastic - Scatterplot



Appendix 3: Test for normality - Normal P-P Plot



Appendix 4: Questionnaire

Control variables:

Age

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

Country of residence

- UK
- USA
- Other

Education level

- Below bachelor level
- Bachelor level (3 years)
- Master level (5 years)
- Above master level

Length of service in the organization

- < 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- > 15 years

Type of employment

- Full-time
- Part-time

The following items are about your line manager's* enactment of HR practices. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

* With line manager we mean your direct supervisor.

	(1) Strongly disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neither agree nor disagree	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly agree
1. My line manager provides me with sufficient opportunities for training and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My line manager keeps me informed about business issues and about how well it is doing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My line manager is strongly encouraging teamwork in our department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. My line manager involve me when making decisions that affects me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. My line manager fairly rewards me for the amount of effort I put into my job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. My line manager makes me feel secure in my job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following items are about your line manager's* relation-oriented leadership behavior. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

* With line manager we mean your direct supervisor.

	(1) Strongly disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neither agree nor disagree	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly agree
1. My line manager encourages employees to improve their job-related skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My line manager suggest training to improve my ability to carry out my job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My line manager permits me to use my own judgments in solving problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. My line manager trust me to exercise good judgement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. My line manager encourage me to express my ideas and suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. My line manager listens to my ideas and suggestions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. My line manager considers my personal feelings when implementing actions that will affect me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. My line manager takes into account my personal needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. My line manager tells me when I perform well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. My line manager pays attention to my effort at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following items are about affective commitment. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	(1) Strongly disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neither agree nor disagree	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly agree
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I really feel as if this organization's problem are my own	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I do not feel like part of the family at my organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I do not feel emotionally attached to this organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>