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Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in a Digitally Transforming South African Higher Education Institution

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Abstract:

Higher education institutions in South Africa have changed after the COVID-19 epidemic. The global pandemic significantly disrupted academic operations, affecting employee morale, working conditions, and institutional loyalty. In the post-COVID-19 era, South African higher education institutions are in the process of digital transformation, which imposes a critical need to understand employees' perceptions of their changing roles, satisfaction and commitment levels. This study investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic employees at a digitally transforming higher education institution. Data was collected from 67 academic employees using a standardized self-administered questionnaire, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) to measure academic employees' job satisfaction and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) to measure academic employees' organizational commitment. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were used to analyse collected data. The findings show that there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The study recommends devising mechanisms that would contribute towards enhancing employee satisfaction to increase organizational commitment during the digital transformation process. The study recommends further research into the employees' perceptions and experiences in higher education settings during the digital era.

Keywords:

Digital Era, Digital Transformation, Job Satisfaction, Higher Education Institution, Organizational Commitment, Post-COVID-19

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Introduction

Higher education institutions in South Africa have undergone significant changes following the COVID-19 epidemic, compelling to them to embrace digital transformation. As institutions navigate through the aftermath of the pandemic in the digital era, understanding the dynamics of organizational commitment among faculty and staff have emerged as paramount concerns (Delali et al., 2024). Organizational commitment, defined as the degree of an organization mindset in which an organization member owns or wishes to devote their identity to the organization, was reported to be useful in assisting employees to adapt to organizational change (Lee & Kim, 2023). On the other hand, employees' adaptability to the changes in their work environment is influenced by employees' satisfaction (Said, 2024). Thus, job satisfaction is a crucial variable in determining organizational commitment among employees in a digitally transforming higher education settings. Digital transformation in higher education setting involves the adoption and acceptance of digital technology in teaching and learning, requiring a pedagogical shift from traditional to technology-driven strategies (Chomunorwa et al., 2023).

Digital transformation processes in the post-COVID-19 era exposed higher education institutions to a number of problems that called for organizational commitment from employees in order to ensure institutional resilience, academic quality, and employee well-being. A study conducted by Msuya (2022) revealed the need for higher education institutions to devise strategies that can be used by human resource (HR) professionals to carry out relevant human resource management policies and effective interventions to promote academic employees' organizational commitment and resilience. This means that understanding how factors such as workload, technological adaptation, support systems, and personal circumstances interact to influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment among employees in digital transforming higher education institutions is important.

Higher education institutions are facing difficulties because of the hybrid mode of work, which combines in-person and remote work arrangements (Delali et al., 2024). In this hybrid work environment, academic employees are compelled to balance personal and professional obligations while adapting to new technologies and workflow modifications. The most pressing problem is the increased workload and burnout experienced by faculty members as they navigate the demands of hybrid teaching and remote work environments. Academic employees in higher education institutions face increased workload and stress due to the demands of remote work and online teaching, which often cross work boundaries, resulting in work obligations encroaching on personal boundaries (García-Morales et al., 2021). Organizational commitment is crucial for addressing workload issues associated with the digitalisation of education services, promoting work-life balance, and supporting employee well-being.

Thus, there seems to be a dearth of studies that specifically focus on the influence of employees' satisfaction on organizational commitment among academic employees in the midst of digital

transformation, and this study assists to address this gap. The study's overarching research questions is: "What is the influence of job satisfaction on organizational commitment of academic employees in a digitally transforming higher education institution in South Africa?" Addressing this question may eventually contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of the higher education sector.

Literature Review

This section of the paper will present literature related to the study.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most highly valued concepts in Human Resource Management. One well-known definition of job satisfaction is: "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences, which can stem from both intrinsic factors related to the work itself and extrinsic factors such as pay, benefits, and working conditions" (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). Although phrased differently, Mathis and Jackson (2011) gave a similar description. In their literature analysis on job satisfaction components, Abdullahi et al. (2025) said that job satisfaction represents the attitude of employees towards their employment. The concept of job satisfaction is critical in understanding employee motivation and organizational performance. Silva et al. (2023) alluded that employees who are satisfied are less likely to willingly leave the organization, and they will complete their obligations.

Organizational Commitment

The concept of organizational commitment has been deemed essential to business research, organizational behaviour, and management behaviour because of its psychological underpinnings and associated effects on corporate success (AL-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019, cited in Cassim et al., 2024). Hu et al. (2020) defined organizational commitment as the degree to which employees are committed to their organization, including their willingness to put in a lot of effort, their desire to stay members, and their acceptance of the organization's principles. This implies that organizational commitment is defined more clearly by focusing on the tri-component model, which focuses on three components: affective component (emotional attachment), normative component (awareness of costs associated with living) and continuance component (sense of obligation).

The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

Several studies have examined the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, both within higher education institutions and across various sectors (Asutay et al., 2022; Masale et al., 2021), although the majority of them were conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies employed quantitative surveys and statistical analyses to examine the strength

of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Bashir and Gani (2020) found a significant impact of job satisfaction on organizational commitment. They conducted a study on university teachers in higher education institutions in India, using a structured questionnaire to measure job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Their findings revealed a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This indicates that employees who reported higher levels of job satisfaction were more likely to exhibit a stronger commitment to the organization. Moreover, the study highlighted the importance of leadership and communication in fostering employee engagement and commitment within higher education institutions (Bashir & Gani, 2020).

According to Mahmood Aziz et al. (2021), there is a perceived association between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Thus, when employees are happy in their jobs, their commitment level rises. Contented employees are perceived as joyful employees who are more likely to be dedicated and productive in completing their tasks. In a study conducted in comparison of Generation X and Generation Y, it was discovered that job satisfaction positively related to organizational commitment. Employees are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of devotion to the organization when they are satisfied in their jobs (Wijaya & Basit, 2024). Similarly, Mwesigwa et al., (2020) investigated job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff in public universities, employing multivariate regression analysis to examine the predictors of organizational commitment. Their research revealed that job satisfaction affect how committed academic staff members are to their organizations in public universities.

In their studies, Babalola and Genga (2024) as well as Yusuf and Dickson (2021) conclude that by enhancing job satisfaction, institutions can positively influence organizational commitment, which in turn contributes to greater overall stability. In a study conducted within the flight attendant profession, Dalkrani and Dimitriadis (2018) found that job satisfaction and organizational commitment were key factors influencing employee outcomes. Thus, higher levels of job satisfaction were associated with stronger organizational commitment among flight attendants. Hence, it was hypothesised that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

The Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and the Components of Organizational Commitment

This section presents previous findings in relation to the relationship between job satisfaction and its components, namely, affective, normative and continuance commitment.

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Affective Commitment

The relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment, is well-established in the literature. According to a study by Astuty and Udin (2020), employees who feel recognized, engaged, and valued by their employers are more likely to develop strong emotional ties to the organization. This affective commitment stems from the satisfaction employees derive from their work environment, where they feel supported and empowered to contribute to organizational objectives. Research by Meyer and Allen's (1991) supports this by showing that job satisfaction plays a crucial role in fostering affective commitment. They found that work experiences that create a sense of ease and fulfilment, such as organizational dependability and challenging job roles, are strong predictors of affective commitment. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to stay with an organization because they want to, driven by emotional attachment rather than necessity.

Further research by Mwesigwa et al. (2020) suggests that job satisfaction also plays a role in the affective commitment of employees over time, particularly in higher education institutions. As employees age and their length of service increases, their satisfaction with the organization tends to grow, leading to stronger emotional bonds. This is consistent with Meyer and Allen's (1997) assertion that longer tenured employees develop greater affective commitment due to prolonged exposure to and identification with the organization's values and culture. Moreover, leadership styles that enhance job satisfaction, such as transformational leadership, have been shown to significantly impact affective commitment. Astuty and Udin (2020) demonstrated that when employees experience leadership that energises and inspires them, their job satisfaction increases, which in turn strengthens their emotional attachment to the organization.

Aisyah et al. (2021) and Soelton (2023) found that employees who successfully manage their personal and professional lives report higher levels of job satisfaction, which enhances their affective commitment to the organization. Soelton (2023) maintains that employees with low affective commitment are likely to leave the organization, while those with high affective commitment will decide to stay longer with the organization because they believe in its mission. The results of the study conducted by Gregoriou, et al., (2024) demonstrated that affective organizational commitment and job satisfaction have a positive association, which regression analysis supported. This indicates that job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment are directly related, and that satisfied employees are more likely to remain with their organizations than dissatisfied ones.

According to a study by Astuty and Udin (2020) on employee recognition as a facet of job satisfaction and attachment revealed that when employees feel that their organization values them and puts them in a position where they can help the organization to achieve its objectives, they develop a high level of

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affective commitment. Organizational support plays a crucial role in developing affective commitment. The nature of supervision or leadership style as a facet of job satisfaction was also found to influence affective commitment (Astuty & Udin, 2020). This was supported by Park et al. (2022), who discovered favourable work environment based on leadership style promotes a sense of value, resulting in employees becoming more emotionally attached to their organization. Overall, job satisfaction is a critical factor in developing and sustaining organizational commitment, particularly through its impact on affective commitment. Satisfied employees are more likely to remain with an organization out of genuine emotional attachment, contributing positively to both their own well-being and the organization's success. It therefore hypothesised that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and affective commitment.

Normative Commitment

Meyer and Allen (1991) emphasise that employees remain devoted to their organization because they have a sense of obligation or loyalty to it. This sense of duty may have a connection to job satisfaction because people who feel obligated to stay may also find satisfaction in carrying out their perceived duty (AL-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019). According to AL-Jabari and Ghazzawi (2019), employees who feel compelled to fulfil their perceived duties are likely to experience satisfaction in carrying out these responsibilities, which in turn strengthens their normative commitment. Faculty members who believe their teaching and research support broader societal goals may develop a deep sense of satisfaction, reinforcing their commitment to the organization (Pillazar, et al., 2024). Moreover, during challenging times, such as the transition to online instruction, institutions that provide support and recognition to their employees can enhance both job satisfaction and normative commitment. As faculty members feel valued and supported, their loyalty to the institution is likely to increase, further solidifying their commitment (Pillazar, et al., 2024).

The results of the study conducted by Harini et al. (2022) demonstrated that normative organizational commitment and job satisfaction have a positive association, which regression analysis supported. This indicates that job satisfaction and normative organizational commitment are directly correlated, and that satisfied employees are more likely to feel obligated to remain with their organizations than dissatisfied ones. In essence, job satisfaction serves as a key driver in strengthening normative commitment. It is therefore hypothesised that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and normative commitment.

Continuance Commitment

Employees may stay loyal to their organization because there are more advantages to staying than there are disadvantages to leaving (AL-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019). Meyer and Allen (1991) pointed out

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that this approach might ignore the emotional dimensions of commitment and oversimplify the process of making decisions. Research by Gellatly et al. (2006) indicates that high levels of continuance commitment are often associated with negative outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction and increased stress. This is because employees who stay due to necessity rather than desire may experience lower morale and engagement.

The results of the study conducted by Nalla et al. (2020), demonstrated that continuance organizational commitment and job satisfaction have a negative association, which regression analysis supported. This indicates that job satisfaction and continuance organizational commitment are inversely correlated, and that satisfied employees are less likely to remain with their organizations solely because of perceived costs of leaving (Chigeda et al., 2022). Organizational dependency plays a crucial role in developing continuance commitment. The perceived lack of alternative employment opportunities as a facet of job satisfaction was also found to influence continuance commitment (Aziz et al., 2021). This is supported by Bharadwaj et al. (2022), who discovered that when employees believe that they have few job options outside their current organization, they are more likely to stay, even in the absence of job satisfaction.

Yusuf and Dickson (2021) investigated the impact of job satisfaction on various dimensions of organizational commitment among academic staff in higher education institutions within Kaduna State's tertiary education sector. Utilising structural equation modelling, the study revealed that lower levels of job satisfaction were associated with higher levels of continuance commitment. This suggests that employees who were less satisfied with their jobs were more likely to remain with the organization out of necessity rather than a genuine desire to stay, potentially due to a lack of alternative employment opportunities. It is therefore hypothesised that:

H4: There is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment.

Methods and Data

The quantitative research design was used in this study to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in a selected South African higher education institution, Post COVID-19. The study population comprised of both male and female academic staff members at a selected higher education institution in South Africa. Furthermore, a combination of convenience sampling and quota sampling methods were employed to ensure equal representation of participants from different professional levels in the selected higher education institution due to failure to access the sampling frame. Convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants based on their availability and accessibility, allowing for the efficient collection of data.

To ensure diversity and representation across professional levels, quota sampling was implemented by setting quotas for each professional level (e.g., professors and lecturers) as well as gender and selecting

participants accordingly until each quota is filled. By combining convenience sampling with quota sampling, the researchers can achieve a balance between efficiency and representativeness in participant selection. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire on organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire -MSQ short version). International Business Machines' (IBM) Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0 was used to analyse data.

Findings

This section of the paper presents findings related to the study

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson product-moment correlation (two-tailed) test was conducted to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficients (r) were calculated to measure the strength of this relationship. The test was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0 to evaluate the study's hypotheses. Pearson Correlation was specifically applied to explore the connection between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to Saunders et al., (2016), the strength of relationships in Pearson correlation coefficients can be considered low when the coefficient is less than or equal to 0.3, moderate when it falls between 0.3 and 0.7, and high when it is greater than or equal to 0.7. The presentation of the results below focuses on correlations between job satisfaction and the overall organizational commitment as well as between job satisfaction and the three dimensions of organizational commitment.

Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

The results concerning *H1: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment*, are depicted in Table 1. The results show that r = 0.322, with a p-value = 0.008 (p-value <0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted and there appears to be statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation coefficient suggests a moderate positive correlation according to Saunders et al. (2016).

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		Job satisfaction	Organizational Commitment
Job satisfaction	Pearson correlation	1	.322*
Organizational commitment	Pearson correlation	.322*	1
	Sig. (1- tailed)	.008	
	N	67	67
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			

Table 1: Correlations between job satisfaction and organizational commitment

The correlations between job satisfaction and the three sub-scales of organizational commitment are illustrated in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment

The results in relation to H2: *There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and affective commitment* are displayed in Table 2. It is evident from the table that r = -0.263 and p-value = 0.032. Given that the p-value < 0.05, there appears to be statistically significant relationship between the affective commitment and organizational commitment. The results support the above stated hypothesis. However, according to Saunders et al. (2016), the correlation coefficient suggests a low positive correlation.

		Job satisfaction	Affective Commitment
Job satisfaction	Pearson correlation	1	.263*
Affective commitment	Pearson correlation	.263*	1
	Sig. (1- tailed)	.032	
	N	67	67
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			

Table 2: Correlations between job satisfaction and affective commitment

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Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Normative Commitment

Table 3 depicts results in relation to *H3: There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and normative commitment*. The table shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient between job satisfaction and normative commitment is r = 0.300, with a p-value of 0.006. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, it is statistically significant, meaning there is evidence to support the hypothesis that a positive relationship exists between job satisfaction and normative commitment in this study. Therefore, the hypothesis (H3) is supported, although there is a moderate positive correlation as suggested by Saunders et al. (2016).

		Job satisfaction	Normative Commitment
Job satisfaction	Pearson correlation	1	.300**
Normative commitment	Pearson correlation	.300**	1
	Sig. (1- tailed)	.006	
	N	67	67
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			

Table 3: Correlations between job satisfaction and normative commitment

Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Continuance Commitment

Table 4 illustrates the results concerning *H4: There is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment*. The results show that the Pearson correlation coefficient between job satisfaction and continuance commitment is r = 0.217, with a p-value of 0.078. The correlation is positive, which represents a weak positive correlation (Saunders et al., 2016), but the p-value is greater than 0.05, implying that the results are not statistically significant. Therefore, the hypothesized relationship (H4) is rejected as there is no statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment.

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		Job satisfaction	Continuance Commitment
Job satisfaction	Pearson correlation	1	.217
Continuance commitment	Pearson correlation	.217	1
	Sig. (1- tailed)	.078	
	N	67	67
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).			

Table 4: Correlations between job satisfaction and continuance commitment

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in a digitally transforming South African higher education institution, post-COVID-19 era. The subsections below provide a discussion of the results according to the tested hypotheses.

Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

Prior research has demonstrated that the two constructs do have a positive association, which is supported by the study's current findings. Bashir and Gani (2020) found a significant impact of job satisfaction on organizational commitment when conducting a study on university teachers in higher education institutions in India during the pandemic era. Similarly, during the post-COVID-19 era, research discovered that a relationship exists between the variables under study (Al Dilby & Farmanesh, 2023; Dube & Ndofirepi, 2023). This aligns with the findings in this study, which demonstrate that job satisfaction has a direct impact on organizational commitment among academic employees. This suggests that when employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more likely to remain committed to the organization.

The current findings also support the work of Kaur et al. (2020), who highlighted the critical influence of job satisfaction on organizational commitment within higher education institutions during the COVID-19 era. As previously indicated by Kustiawan et al., (2022), job satisfaction serves as a precursor to organizational commitment, and employees who feel satisfied with their work environment tend to be more emotionally attached to their organizations. This emotional attachment is particularly important in the post-COVID-19 context, especially in the digital era, where higher education institutions are

transforming in response to digitalization while also navigating challenges related to remote work, resource constraints, and employee well-being (Babalola & Genga, 2024; Bholane, 2024).

Furthermore, previous findings during COVID-19 era revealed a significant correlation between job satisfaction and dimensions organizational commitment (Chanana, 2021; Hakami et al., 2020). Similar results were found during post-COVID-19 (Nina et al., 2025). The subsequent sections discuss the current study's findings in relation to the relationship between job satisfaction and the three dimensions of organizational commitment, namely, affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment.

Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment

The results of this study confirm that a significant positive correlation exist between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which is consistent with previous studies' findings. For example, a study by Karem et al., (2019) revealed that there is an existence of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and affective commitment while Chordiya et al. (2017) found that among the dimensions of organisation commitment, affective commitment was mostly influenced by jo satisfaction. Similarly, a study conducted by Almasradi et al. (2020) in higher education context revealed job satisfaction as an important precursor of affective commitment of employees. During post-COVID-19 era, a study conducted by Gessesse and Premanandam (2023) among higher education institutions discovered that job satisfaction significantly influences affective commitment positively. This means that higher education institutions should devise strategies to enhance employees' positive emotions or feelings towards their jobs as this is more likely to enhance their emotional attachment to their organisation, especially during digital transformation era.

Job Satisfaction and Normative Commitment

The findings of the current study confirm that there is a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and normative commitment, which is consistent with previous findings. A study by Karem et al., (2019) revealed that there is an existence of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and normative commitment. Furthermore, a study conducted by Harini et al. (2022) post-COVID-19 revealed that job satisfaction positively relates to normative commitment. This implies that employees who perceive the various aspects of their jobs positively and have positive feelings towards their job, they are more likely to feel indebted to their organization and therefore remain loyal to their organizations. Furthermore, a study conducted in the digital era, Pillazar, et al. (2024) found that higher education employees who are satisfied with their jobs and feel valued by their organizations, they are more likely to become loyal to their institutions, which is crucial in minimising challenges related to digital transformation.

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Job Satisfaction and Continuance Commitment

The current study's findings reveal that there is no statistically significant relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment. These findings are inconsistent with the findings of previous studies (Hakami et al., 2020; Saputra & Riana, 2021) during the COVID-19 era (Abubakar, 2023) post-COVID-19, who found a positive significant relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment. The results of the current study imply that employees who are satisfied with the various aspects of their job may not really feel that they should remain in their organisation because of the possibilities of losing certain benefits but they would rather remain based on their strong positive attachment to their organization.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored the intricate relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment within a transforming South African higher education institution in the digital era. The findings highlight that the pandemic has significantly altered the work environment, with long-lasting effects on employee morale, expectations, and engagement. While some employees have adapted well to new hybrid or flexible working models, the process of digital transformation of higher education institutions impose challenges such as increased workloads, limited resources, and emotional fatigue. The research confirms a strong link between higher levels of job satisfaction and increased organizational commitment. Employees who feel valued, supported, and meaningfully engaged are more likely to remain committed to the institution's goals and vision. Thus, in the midst of digital transformation, enhancing higher education employees' job satisfaction may assist to increase their commitment to the organisations' transformation processes. In the context of South Africa's evolving higher education sector, this study underscores the importance of responsive leadership, well-being initiatives, and inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of academic and support staff.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve job satisfaction and organizational commitment at in higher education settings:

- Firstly, the university should enhance its recognition and reward systems, ensuring that staff contributions are acknowledged not only through financial rewards but also through professional development opportunities and public recognition.
- Secondly, work-life balance support should be strengthened by maintaining and expanding flexible work arrangements, particularly in light of the ongoing challenges posed by the post-pandemic environment.
- Thirdly, addressing concerns about job security is crucial, and the institution should ensure transparent communication about the long-term stability of staff positions. Additionally, the

university should make efforts to improve the availability of resources and support, enabling academic staff to perform their duties effectively without unnecessary stress.

- Finally, fostering emotional engagement through initiatives like team-building activities and improved communication of the university's vision can help to boost affective commitment among employees.

Although this study contributes to the body of knowledge, there are limitations. The study used non-probability sampling methods (convenience and quota sampling) inhibited the true representation of the target population, which reduced the generalizability of this study's findings. Furthermore, the sample size is also small. Therefore, future research should consider larger probability sample. The quantitative nature of this study made it impossible to understand specific job satisfaction precursors or job satisfaction factors influencing employees' commitment to their organization in the digital era. Qualitative research focusing on specific job satisfaction features that influence higher education employees' commitment in the digital era is recommended.

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