




# Predicting organisational commitment: The role of line manager communication, employee trust and job satisfaction

**Authors:**

Tatiana Ndlovu<sup>1</sup>   
Emmanuel S. Quaye<sup>1</sup>   
Yvonne K. Saini<sup>1</sup> 

**Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Wits Business School,  
Faculty of Commerce, Law  
and Management, University  
of the Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Emmanuel Quaye,  
atosilva.gh@gmail.com

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**Purpose:** This study examines the influence of line manager communication (LMC) on affective organisational commitment through the mediating mechanisms of employee trust and job satisfaction. The study further investigates the moderation effect of line manager communication and employee trust to explain affective organisational commitment.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Data for the study were collected from employees at different organisational levels in the financial services sector of South Africa through an online survey hosted on Qualtrics. A covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed to assess the various hypotheses by using Mplus. The moderation analysis used the latent moderated structural (LMS) model approach, which utilises the unique capabilities of SEM.

**Findings/results:** The results show that LMC does not independently influence organisational commitment. However, LMC indirectly influences affective organisational commitment through employee trust and job satisfaction. Moreover, the findings indicate that LMC positively influences affective organisational commitment under conditions of high employee trust.

**Practical implications:** Firms should develop the communication skills of line managers to foster employee trust and job satisfaction to contribute to employee commitment. Line manager communication should be nurtured, especially in high-paced financial services firm environments, for employee trust and job satisfaction to be enhanced, and in turn, improve organisational commitment.

**Originality/value:** The findings demonstrate that LMC does not independently influence organisational trust. Instead, line managers should focus their communications on improving employee trust and job satisfaction if they seek to foster strong employee identification with firm goals and vision.

**Keywords:** line manager communication; employee trust; job satisfaction; organisational commitment; financial services; South Africa.

## Introduction

In organisational settings, employees' willingness to remain in their organisations and address organisational objectives and goals is a crucial factor in influencing organisational effectiveness (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The world of work today has evolved considerably, leading to high levels of talent mobility with employees seeking best job alternatives to satisfy their work aspirations, thus fuelling increasing concerns about how organisations can keep their best talent (Limley, Coetzee, Tladinyane, & Ferreira, 2011; Walden, Jung, & Westerman, 2017; Yao, Qiu, & Wei, 2019). Such awareness amongst executives and researchers has prompted an increased emphasis on understanding the key drivers of organisational commitment, particularly affective organisational commitment (Fischer, Hyder, & Walker, 2020; Marique, Stinglhamber, Desmette, Caesens, & De Zanet, 2012; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008). Many studies have paid attention to the factors that account for affective organisational commitment (e.g. Fischer et al., 2020; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Marique et al., 2012; Yao et al., 2019; Yousef, 2017). However, researchers are yet to pay particular attention to the role of internal line manager communications (LMCs) in predicting organisational commitment under important mediating mechanisms (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015).

Therefore, the objective of this study was to empirically investigate the mechanisms through which LMCs may shed new insights into why employees may identify with, get involved and

become emotionally invested in an organisation. Researchers explain that the effective use of communication strategies may contribute to improvements in organisational commitment (Togna, 2014; Vance, 2006). Organisational communication plays a crucial role in ensuring that employees are committed; for this to be achieved, firms must pay particular attention to internal communication practices. Continuous, trustful and transparent communication between line managers and employees helps to reinforce good relationships and, as a consequence, contributes to employee commitment (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Jha & Kumar, 2016). Yet, such linkages have not been sufficiently examined (see Johlke & Duhan, 2000; Togna, 2014; Van Vuuren, De Jong, & Seydel, 2007).

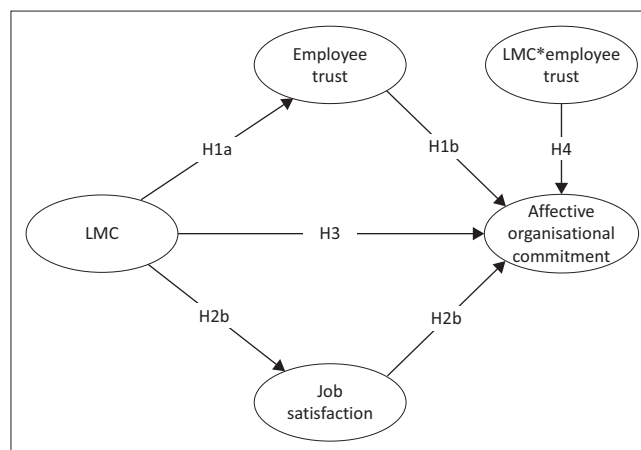
More precisely, the study examines how employees' job satisfaction and trust serve as mediating mechanisms through which LMCs proceed to contribute to a better understanding of affective organisational commitment within the financial services sector of South Africa. We also study how employee trust interacts with LMCs to account for affective organisational commitment. Based on integrative marketing communications and stakeholder perspectives, the study draws attention to employees as key stakeholders, which firms need to take care of if they want to achieve higher commitment levels and better performance outcomes (Johle & Duhan, 2000; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016; Yates, 2006; Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011).

The study makes three important contributions. Firstly, the findings that extend our understanding by suggesting the underlying mechanism of job satisfaction and employee trust play critical roles in improving organisational commitment. Secondly, the study reports that by empowering line managers to create, drive and maintain employees' well-being through improvements in their job satisfaction and trust, their sense of identification with the firm's goals will improve greatly. Thirdly, the results show that line manager communication interacts favourably with employee trust to promote employee commitment to the organisation (Waters, Bortree, & Tindall, 2013). The study also contributes to the call to use the affective component to measure organisational commitment because it expresses better predictive validity (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Solinger et al., 2008). The conceptual framework and specific predictions tested in the study are presented in Figure 1.

## Literature review

### Stakeholder theory

From a stakeholder perspective, different groups within a firm have varying stakes, which need to be adequately addressed to achieve better organisational outcomes (Freeman, 2004, 2010). The stakeholder approach delineates stakeholders as individuals, collectives or a public who are impacted by the fulfilment of an organisation's goals



LMC, line manager communications.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework.

(Freeman, 2010). Freeman (2004) identifies line managers and employees as key stakeholders within an organisation that need special attention. Waters et al. (2013) believe that internal stakeholders are the most enthusiastic and opinionated publics of an organisation; they are not afraid to express their dissatisfaction if their needs and expectations are not fulfilled. Communication facilitates dialogue between managers and line managers as stakeholders to ensure that the mission, vision and goals of the firm are well expressed, and the needs of employees are met to achieve personal and organisational goals. Poor communication has the potential to negatively impact organisational effectiveness (Men, O'Neil, & Ewing, 2020; Van Vuuren et al., 2007).

According to Welch and Jackson (2007), internal communications occur at four levels: internal LMCs, internal team peer communications, internal project peer communications and internal corporate communications. This study focusses on internal LMCs, wherein communications emerge from supervisory levels and exchanges occur between managers and employees so that employee needs are considered, roles specified and outcomes measured (Karanges et al., 2015). The lack of attention to internal communication may be because of the focus, which is traditionally on external customers as key external stakeholders and patrons of a firm's products and services through the use of marketing communications including advertising (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014).

Firms can achieve better results when they pay attention to their workforce. Employees are the real catalysts that build the enterprise (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015); firms that invest in their internal customers, that is, employees, are viewed in a more favourable light by external publics as being employers of choice (Gill, 2010). To effectively take care of employees, firms can empower their line managers to effectively use communication strategies to address employee needs, ensuring that trust is built and job satisfaction is improved to achieve organisational effectiveness through affective organisational commitment.

## Hypotheses development

### Internal line manager communications and employee trust

Internal communications are a crucial aspect of communication management and exist as a way for managers to effectively communicate with employees and vice versa (Dolphin, 2005; Karanges et al., 2015). Internal communication serves as a conduit that helps executives build a culture of openness and transparency and engage employees around the objectives of the organisation (Men et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2014). Line managers use internal communication structures to build, sustain and drive relationships across all levels of the organisation (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Importantly, the line manager serves as a key resource that motivates and encourages employees to be committed in the workplace (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). The relationship between employees and their line manager has a major influence on levels of trust amongst organisational stakeholders.

Trust is a vital ingredient in interpersonal relationships, especially employees' trust in the organisation (Perry & Markin, 2004). Trust refers to 'interpersonal risk, expectations of another's benevolence and an attribution of positive intentions of the words or actions of others' (Fischer et al., 2020, p. 664). Levels of trust reveal employees' loyalty to organisational values and goals. Yet, there is ambiguity in the conceptualisation of trust. The object on which trust is expressed also poses conceptual challenges with some studies focussing on the immediate supervisor, whilst others explain trust in relation to a company's top executives, and still others maintain a global perspective of trust in the organisation based on the actions of role incumbents.

McAllister (1995) conceptualises employee trust as a multidimensional construct composed of affective and cognitive attributes. Affective trust describes the relationships between two exchange parties, whereas cognitive trust describes the attributions about positive workplace behaviours (Fischer et al., 2020; McAllister, 1995). Reliance and disclosure-based trust in leaders also characterises the multiplicity of the trust concept (Heyns & Rothmann, 2018). However, others take a unidimensional approach to employee trust, describing it as a generalised belief about the positive expectations about the motives and intentions of organisational actors (Kang & Sung, 2017; Wong & Wong, 2017). For this study, we use the global conceptualisation of 'organisational trust' to express trust as an aggregation of employees' opinions regarding the trustworthiness of different organisational role incumbents (Perry & Mankin, 2004). Thus, employees' overall positive expectations of organisational actors' motives and behaviour express their trust in the organisation (see Kang & Sung, 2017; Yao et al., 2019; Zeffane & Melhem, 2017). Previous studies confirm that employees' trust in their employing organisation and top management influences affective organisational commitment (Wong & Wong, 2017; Yao et al., 2019).

Thus, internal communications serve as the mechanism that allows managers to share information, foster trust, maintain relationships between organisations, line managers and employees and create a sense of belonging and community amongst employees (Hume & Leonard, 2014). Previous studies also report that the level at which employees are driven and willing to apply discretionary efforts to fulfilling activities that impact the achievement of organisational goals is linked to the strength of line managers' ability to communicate effectively (Robinson et al., 2004). Managers, who communicate in an honest, transparent and continuous manner, help to reinforce good relationships and engender employee trust and identification with the company (Men et al., 2020).

Furthermore, internal communication between managers and employees will contribute to greater employee commitment and strengthen the trust fostered between employees and line managers (Mishra et al., 2014). Thus, we hypothesise that employee trust will mediate the relationship between LMCs and organisational commitment. If a line manager's communication is deemed to be a credible and trustworthy source of information, employees will perceive this feedback as being more accurate, insightful and satisfactory. Consequently, they will commit to the affective organisation's goals. Thus, we hypothesise as follows:

**H1:** The relationship between line manager communication and affective organisational commitment is mediated by employee trust.

### Line manager communications and job satisfaction

Line managers can alleviate some of the stresses and strains that are caused by high demands associated with their job. When employees feel that their respective line managers empathise with them and receive support, they become satisfied with their jobs and remain engaged in their work (Menguc et al., 2013). Job satisfaction refers to the positive psychological state that derives from the evaluation of one's job and work experiences (Diedericks & Rothmann, 2014). Some studies conceptualise satisfaction as multidimensional by highlighting specific aspects, for example satisfaction with work conditions, pay, promotion supervisor, co-workers or security (Yousef, 2017), or some other attributes, for example autonomy satisfaction (Heyns & Rothmann, 2018). To reduce ambiguity, this study follows the unidimensional approach to job satisfaction as a 'generalised affective work orientation towards one's present job and employer' (Martin & Roodt, 2008, p. 23). Line managers who provide timely and adequate information to employees at all levels of the organisation contribute towards enhancing job satisfaction and satisfactory commitment levels (Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003; Yao et al., 2019). Previous studies find empirical support for the strong relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Diedericks & Rothmann, 2014; Widodo & Damayanti, 2020; Yao et al., 2019).

Effective LMCs are linked to many favourable outcomes, including job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Abu Bakar et al., 2010) and organisational identification (Men et al., 2020). We expect that internal LMCs that effectively convey the intentions of senior managers and expectations of employees would positively impact on job satisfaction and, in turn, organisational commitment. For example, Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) report that employees become more committed to their organisations when they are highly satisfied with their jobs and work under supervisors who encourage consultation and participatory leadership style of communication. Spagnoli and Caetano (2012) also find that employees' satisfaction with their work and HR practices mediate the relationship between a manager's personality traits and affective organisational commitment. Therefore, this study hypothesises as follows:

**H2:** The relationship between line manager communication and affective organisational commitment is mediated by job satisfaction.

### Internal line manager communications and organisational commitment

Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 301) define commitment 'as a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target'. On the other hand, organisational commitment is defined as, 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation' (Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004, p. 952). Organisational commitment is different from engagement because whilst the former emphasises an individual's mindset and attitude towards an organisation and its goals, thus encouraging membership with it, the latter emphasises absorption with one's work (Saks, 2006; Walden et al., 2017).

Meyer and Allen (1997) suggest that organisational commitment is the psychological state or mindset that motivates employees to establish membership in an organisation. Based on the three-component model, organisational commitment has three elements, namely *affective commitment* (desire to remain), *continuance commitment* (perceived cost of leaving) and *normative commitment* (perceived obligation to remain) (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, p. 475). Specifically, affective commitment refers to the willingness to identify with an organisation and establish membership in it based on strong emotional attachment to it (Yao et al., 2019). Continuance commitment is the willingness to maintain membership with an organisation because leaving it will be costly to the employee. Lastly, normative commitment is the willingness to remain with an organisation because of moral considerations and indebted obligation (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Organisations have the responsibility to encourage all aspects of commitment amongst their employees (Yao et al., 2019; Yousef, 2017).

Whilst there are many definitions of organisational commitment, this study follows Judge and Kammeyer-Muller (2012) who define organisational commitment as:

[A]n individual's psychological bond with the organisation, as represented by an affective attachment to the organisation, a feeling of loyalty towards it, and an intention to remain as part of it. (p. 137)

Hence, this study adopts affective organisational commitment as the focal outcome variable to stress the importance of emotional attachment as a better measure of organisational commitment (Judge & Kammeyer-Muller, 2012; Marique et al., 2012; Solinger et al., 2008).

Line managers have a unique role to stimulate all kinds of commitment in their subordinates (Meyer et al., 2002). It is the responsibility of line managers to communicate the company's vision, mission, values, objectives and specific job-related tasks to ensure that employees internalise the organisational values and goals and take actions that support them (Judge & Kammeyer-Muller, 2012). Quality line manager-employee relationships lead to better communication characterised by openness and job relevance. This leaves employees feeling a sense of purpose and commitment to the organisation because they are executing meaningful work (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004).

Alkhatari, Abuelhassan and Khalifa (2018) find that supervisor support has greater impact on organisational commitment to avert employee turnover intentions. Appreciation, respect, feeling valued at the workplace and the personal touch of management will help motivate employees to commit fully to organisational goals (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Walden et al. (2017) find that organisational commitment is enhanced when information flow is improved, and interactions between managers and subordinates occur in supportive environments. Thus, previous studies find that companies that use internal communication effectively experience more significant employee commitment (Goodman & Truss, 2004; Sias, 2005; Walden et al., 2017; Yates, 2006). Thus, this study hypothesises as follows:

**H3:** Line manager communication has a positive influence on affective organisational commitment.

### Moderation effect

Thus, employees with trusting relationships with their line managers have a higher likelihood of being committed to the achievement of organisational goals. Continuous communication in the face of high employee trust is more likely to lead to organisational commitment. When employees have high trust in the organisation, its systems and its process, line managers who foster a culture of receptivity to ideas and feedback as well as encourage positivity amongst employees will also improve commitment levels. We expect that in situations where employees consider the organisation to be fair in its dealings with employees and say what it says it will do and show goodwill to do what it promises (Waters et al., 2013), it makes line manager communication easy and

achieves strong bonds between employees and organisational goals. Togna (2014) explains that trust is a key ingredient in generating commitment because the employees' decision to commit to organisational goals is influenced by the level of trust they assume and the organisation conveys towards them. This can be demonstrated through the role of the line manager who, through effective communication, can improve trust levels (Zeffane et al., 2011). Therefore, we hypothesise that LMCs will interact with employee trust to influence organisational commitment:

**H4:** There will be a positive interaction effect between line manager communication and employee trust to predict affective organisational commitment.

## Methods

### Data collection and participant characteristics

A cross-sectional design was deemed appropriate for addressing the research questions because it allows covariation amongst several variables and is useful in ruling out other explanations and establishing mediating mechanisms (Spector, 2019). They are relatively cost-effective, efficient and capable of accommodating many research questions at once. The population for this study comprised of respondents who are professionals working in financial service organisations (i.e. banking, insurance and investment) in South Africa. South Africa's financial services institutions have advanced organisational systems with well-established structures that make them suitable for research enquiry. Participants were employees working in various roles across all levels of their respective companies. The study respondents were purposively targeted based on the assumption that they can reasonably contribute to the objectives of the study. Data were collected through an online survey, the link to which was generated in Qualtrics and emailed to contacts working in financial services organisations in South Africa. After cleaning the responses of incomplete data, and those who either did not work in financial services or had less than 6 months experience in their current role, 148 completed responses were used for the data analysis. The respondents were 56% females and 35% males. About half the respondents (47%) were aged 25–34 years, whilst the other 42% respondents were 35–44 years old. Only 2% respondents were younger than 25 years, and 3% respondents were 55 years or older. More than 70% of respondents had been with their current employer for more than 3 years. The difference in the demographic profiles represents missing data.

### Measures

The scales used in this study were obtained from well-established scales used in previous studies and are presented in Table 1. *Line manager communication* is viewed as the transfer of timely, adequate and complete information and influence between internal line managers and employees. Line manager communications were measured with eight items by Johlke and Duhan (2000). This study draws on the

**TABLE 1:** Measurement items.

Items	$\lambda$
<b>Line manager communications (Johlke &amp; Duhan, 2000)</b>	
Communication from my line manager is complete.	0.76
Communication from my line manager is accurate.	0.86
Communication from my line manager is adequate.	0.78
My line manager and I discuss the best actions for me to take in my role.	0.87
At work, an open line of communication between me and my line manager is encouraged.	0.79
At work, communication flows two-way (e.g. from my line manager to me, and from me to my line manager).	0.77
Discussions with my line manager go beyond mere direction about how to do my job.	0.82
Communication from my line manager is timely.	0.80
<b>Employee trust (Kang &amp; Sung, 2017)</b>	
This organisation can be relied on to keep its promises.	0.84
Whenever this organisation makes an important decision, it will be concerned about me.	0.92
I believe that this organisation takes my opinions into account when making decisions.	0.75
<b>Job satisfaction (Kang &amp; Sung, 2017)</b>	
I am happy with this organisation.	0.92
In general, I like working here.	0.80
Both the organisation and I benefit from the relationship.	0.78
All in all, I am satisfied with my job.	0.82
<b>Affective organisational commitment (Saks, 2006)</b>	
I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organisation.	0.74
I feel personally attached to this organisation.	0.83
I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to this organisation.	0.80
I am proud to tell people that I work for this organisation.	0.89
Working at this organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	0.91
I feel that the problems faced by this organisation are also my problems.	0.97
I am willing to put in extra effort for this organisation.	0.83
I would be happy to work at this organisation until I retire.	0.80

Note: Please see the full reference list of the article, Ndlovu, T., Quaye, E.S., & Saini, Y.K. (2021). Predicting organisational commitment: The role of line manager communication, employee trust and job satisfaction. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 52(1), a2355. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v52i1.2355>, for more information.  $\lambda$ , Standardised factor loadings.

work of Saks (2006) to measure the affective components of *organisational commitment* with eight items. Many previous studies adopt a unidimensional approach because affective commitment is reported to have better predictive validity than continuance or normative commitment (cf. Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Solinger et al., 2008). *Job satisfaction* is viewed as an evaluative state that reveals a person's contentment and positive feelings about his or her job and job experiences (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Lastly, *employee trust* is viewed as employees' feelings of confidence in the employer on account of their positive expectations and beliefs about the firm actors' intentions to promote mutual interests. Job satisfaction and *employee trust* were measured by using items by Kang and Sung (2017). Three items measured employee trust and four items measured job satisfaction. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

## Analysis and results

### Measurement validation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first used to examine the psychometric properties of the measurement

model by using Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). The CFA followed the procedure recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), where the reliability and validity of the scales were assessed by using the fit of the measurement models. The CFA was configured using the maximum likelihood parameter estimates with standard error (MLR). We used modification indices to achieve a better fit of the CFA model. Overall, the results demonstrate that the model had overall adequate fit to the data, as evidenced ( $\chi^2 = 337.23$ ,  $df = 222$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.52$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.94, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = 0.94, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.05 and standardised root mean square residual [SRMR] = 0.06).

As depicted in Table 1, all the factor loadings were large (ranging from 0.75 to 0.97) and significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and loaded on their respective constructs. Construct reliability was assessed by using composite reliability coefficients and average variance extracted (AVE). All the construct reliabilities exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.70 (ranging from 0.90 to 0.95), and all the AVEs for all the constructs exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.50 (ranging from 0.66 to 0.72) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), evidence of convergent validity. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients (composite reliabilities) and intercorrelations for the study constructs. Finally, the square root of each constructs' AVE was greater than correlations between any paired constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), providing sufficient evidence of discriminant validity.

## Hypotheses testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test our hypotheses by using Mplus 8.3. The whole model produced a satisfactory fit to the data, as evidenced ( $\chi^2 = 586.57$ ,  $df = 343$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.71$ ; CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06 and SRMR = 0.07; see Table 4).

To establish mediation effects, direct effects were first examined. Table 3 shows the results of the direct effects. The results showed that internal LMCs had a positive and significant influence on employee trust ( $\beta = 0.55$ ,  $t = 7.99$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.51$ ,  $t = 6.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thus supporting H1a and H2a, respectively. To further investigate the direct effect of employee trust and job satisfaction on affective organisational commitment, we found a positive and significant influence of employee trust on affective organisational commitment ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $t = 2.69$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and a

positive influence of job satisfaction on affective organisational commitment ( $\beta = 0.75$ ,  $t = 8.93$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), in support of H1b and H2b, respectively. Contrary to expectation, we did not find a significant relationship between internal LMCs on affective organisational commitment ( $\beta = -0.04$ ,  $t = -0.44$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). However, this finding is appropriate, as for mediation to be established, the direct relationship between the antecedent and outcome ought to be nonsignificant and the mediators significant (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). Overall, the model explains 0.77% variance in affective organisational commitment. Figure 2 highlights the structural path model results.

*Test of Mediation.* Based on the above findings, we proceeded to perform additional analysis to assess whether employee trust and job satisfaction mediated the relationship between LMC and affective organisational commitment. We tested the mediating mechanism proposed in our conceptual model shown in Figure 1, by using the traditional procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) and the advanced bootstrapping procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). As shown in Table 4, the findings suggest that both employee trust ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 2.69$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $t = 4.94$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) fully mediate the relationship between LMCs and affective organisational commitment (see Table 4), thus confirming H1 and H2, respectively. These findings were supported based on the bootstrapping method used (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Overall, the results showed the total indirect effect of LMC through job satisfaction and employee trust to be significant, with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. Therefore, the mediation model is supported.

*Test of moderation.* To determine whether internal LMCs interact with employee trust and job satisfaction to explain levels of affective organisational commitment, we used the latent moderated structural (LMS) method (Maslowsky,

**TABLE 3:** Structural coefficients.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised path analysis	$\beta$	$t$
H1a	LMCs → employee trust	0.55	7.99**
H2a	LMCs → job satisfaction	0.51	6.43**
H1b	Employee trust → affective organisational commitment	0.32	2.69**
H2b	Job satisfaction → affective organisational commitment	0.75	8.93**
H3	LMCs → affective organisational commitment	-0.04	-0.44
H4	LMCs*Employee trust → affective organisational commitment	0.14	3.22**

LMCs, line manager communications.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

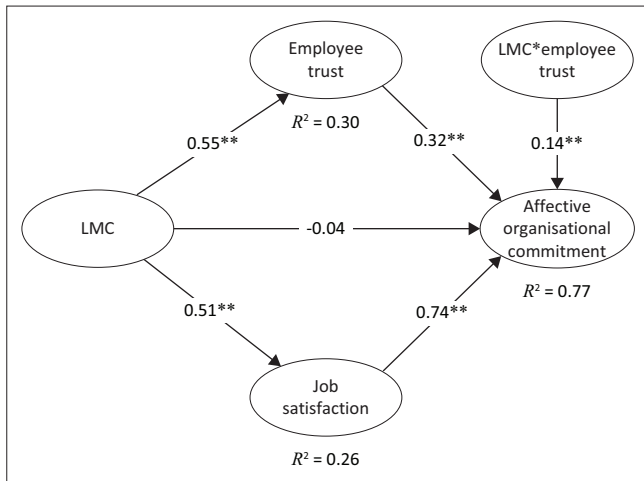
**TABLE 2:** Descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations ( $n = 146$ ).

Number	Constructs	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1	LMCs	5.26	1.70	0.93	0.66	0.81†	-	-	-
2	Employee trust	4.32	2.15	0.88	0.71	0.49	0.84†	-	-
3	Job satisfaction	5.06	2.22	0.90	0.69	0.50	0.80	0.83†	-
4	Affective organisational commitment	4.81	2.35	0.95	0.72	0.42	0.79	0.82	0.85†

SD, standard deviation; CR, composite reliability; LMCs, line manager communications.

\* $p < 0.01$ ; all correlations are significant at 0.01.

†, square root of average variance extracted (AVE).



LMCs, line manager communications.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**FIGURE 2:** Structural equation model path results.

**TABLE 4:** A mediation analysis.

Bootstrap bias-corrected method (95%)	$\beta$	SE	$t$	Lower (2.5%)	Upper (2.5%)	$p$
<b>Effects from LMCs to affective organisational commitment</b>						
Total effect	0.49	0.08	6.15**	0.32	0.63	0.00
Total indirect effect	0.58	0.10	5.75**	0.38	0.78	0.00
<b>Specific indirect effects</b>						
H1. LMCs → Trust → affective organisational commitment	0.19	0.07	2.69**	0.06	0.33	0.00
H2. LMCs → Satisfaction → affective organisational commitment	0.39	0.08	4.94**	0.25	0.55	0.00

LMCs, line manager communications.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

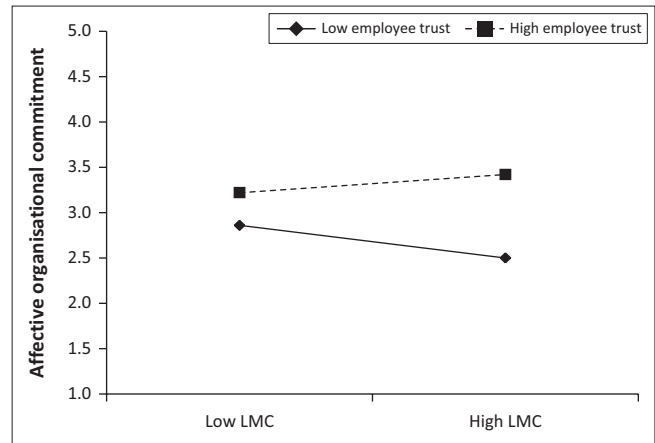
Jager, & Hemken, 2015) where the XWITH command in Mplus is applied. Latent variables interaction models in SEM are superior to other approaches as they account for measurement errors which could threaten the validity of statistical outcomes (Strasheim, 2014).

Traditional fit indices are not available with LMS. Instead, the log-likelihood ratio and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) estimates are used to assess the optimal LMS results (Sardeshmukh & Vandenberg, 2017). The following log-likelihood ratios and AIC values are used to assess the interaction models:  $D = -2[(\log\text{-likelihood for baseline model 1}) - (\log\text{-likelihood for LMS model 2})]$  (cf. Maslowsky et al., 2015, pp. 88–89). Therefore,  $D = -6311.30 - (-6307.86) = -3.44$ . Furthermore, the AIC test is obtained as  $\Delta\text{AIC} = [(\text{Base model 1 AIC}) - (\text{Interaction model 2 AIC})]$ . Thus,  $\Delta\text{AIC} = 12\,804.60 - 12\,799.72 = 4.88$ . The  $\Delta\log\text{-likelihood ratio}$  of -3.44 and  $\Delta\text{AIC}$  of 4.44 highlight loss in fit between the two models.

Hence, the fit of the model supports the latent interaction of LMC and employee trust in accounting for affective organisational commitment ( $\beta = 0.19$ ;  $t = 2.57$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), in support of H6. The simple slope approach is also used to demonstrate the interaction effects (see Figure 3) (Dawson, 2014).

## Discussion and conclusions

The main aim of this study was to determine the extent to which LMCs enhance the trust and satisfaction of organisation



LMC, line manager communications.

**FIGURE 3:** The interaction between line manager communication and employee trust to influence affective organisational commitment.

members to improve their affective commitment to their organisations. Furthermore, the study examined the interaction between LMCs and employee trust to influence affective organisational commitment. The study makes key contributions to the literature regarding LMCs and organisational commitment and furthering our understanding of organisational functioning. The implications for theory and practice are discussed in the following sections.

## Theoretical implications

The results demonstrate that both employee trust in the employing organisation and job satisfaction are appropriate predictors of affective organisational commitment expressed as affective attachment, identification with and involvement in the organisation (Spagnoli & Caetano, 2012; Wong & Wong, 2017). Previous studies report the importance of employee trust and job satisfaction in generating commitment amongst employees (Limley et al., 2011; Srivastava, 2013). Moreover, whilst previous studies suggest that LMCs may independently influence organisation-level commitment (e.g. Ellemers et al. 2004; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Meyer et al. 2002), this study makes a unique contribution, which demonstrates that line manager communication on its own does not improve employee commitment to organisational goals and objectiveness. Instead, communication emanating from line managers that engender trust and satisfaction amongst employees improves favourable organisational attitudes towards committing to firm goals and aspirations. Effective task-

related communication is crucial to creating job satisfaction whilst effective non-task-related communication is crucial to creating employee trust. This, in turn, influences feelings of personal identification and attachment to the organisation (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Previous studies report that organisational trust serves as the basis for key outcomes such as employees' motivation, effective teamwork, open communication and job retention (Srivastava, 2013). This study contributes to managerial communication dynamics by demonstrating that, under conditions of high employee trust, LMC is effective in improving affective organisational commitment. When trust is high in organisational processes, there is also a high potential that managerial communication will impact employees' commitment to their jobs and the organisation. Previous studies conclude that internal communication creates organisational trust (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Webster & Wong, 2008). Togna (2014) also observed that organisational commitment is deeply related to employee trust. However, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to consider the moderating effect of LMCs and employee trust on organisational commitment. Again, this study supports the previous finding that trust is an important precursor and condition for organisational commitment (De Ridder, 2004; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Managerial communications stimulate employee relationships based on trust as trust is at the centre of a triadic relationship; that is, between trust and communication, and between trust and commitment (Zeffane et al., 2011).

Given the important role of accountability for organisational success, communication efforts between line managers and employees must be timely, adequate, open and honest to improve trust and, in turn, organisational commitment (Johlke & Duhan, 2000; Karanges et al., 2015). Thus, effectively utilising LMCs to build employee trust and achieve organisational success can contribute to the importance of communications to organisations (Van Vuuren, De Jong, & Seydel, 2007). Previous studies corroborate the view that when managers maintain effective communication strategies that enhance trust, employees tend to apply themselves through discretionary effort to achieve organisational goals (Robinson et al. 2004).

Moreover, effective LMCs influence job satisfaction as an important mediator to influence organisational commitment. Job satisfaction is identified to reinforce organisational commitment (Abdallah, Obeidat, Aqqad, Al Janini, & Dahiyat, 2017). The working environment of financial services firms are noted to be extremely stressful and demanding, leading to burnout and high probability of quitting (Aqeel & Sher, 2016). Workplace burnout is assumed to be influenced by workplace factors instead of personal factors. The findings support previous studies, which suggest that line managers have an important role to play in alleviating workplace stress and strain by supporting employees through timely and adequate communications (Kacmar et al., 2003; Menguc et al., 2013).

Financial services firms are high-paced work environments. Therefore, line managers who are readily available to clarify employees' confusion about their jobs and work expectations tend to produce satisfied employees who contribute towards organisational success (Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2013). Thus, LMCs offer important avenues through which job satisfaction can be improved and ultimately enable employees to accept organisational goals and the desire to remain in their organisations (Marique et al., 2012; Walden et al., 2017). Whilst financial incentives are assumed to improve motivation and job satisfaction, the study shows that effective managerial communications – such as providing honest feedback about employees' jobs and engaging in empathetic listening – enhance employees' satisfaction with their jobs, thereby improving commitment towards the organisation (Ellemer et al., 2004; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Van Vuuren et al., 2007).

### Practical implications

The findings of the study can assist managers to understand how they can use managerial communication to build trust and satisfaction, in turn, contributing to affective organisational commitment – especially in financial service firms. Although communication serves an important role in disseminating vital information throughout an organisation, line managers should be trained to exploit the benefits of effective communication to foster trust and contribute to improving favourable attitudes towards employee job responsibilities and commitment. Line managers should be supported to effectively deploy communication strategies and tactics that will improve communication efforts, especially during job supervisions, job appraisals and building support for organisational missions, visions and goals.

As financial services firms seek to remain relevant and maintain exceptional skills, building trust amongst employees for the organisation is vital. A line manager who communicates promptly provides honest feedback and relates fairly with employees will build trust amongst employees. Such a line manager will also improve employee satisfaction with their jobs because they will not feel overwhelmed and confused because of the availability of their managers to support them. Thus, line managers should aim at improving trust and job satisfaction by exploiting the benefits of honest, timely and adequate communication with their employees if they seek to enhance commitment to their organisation and its causes. Line managers should continuously involve their staff in the decision-making process to promote ownership of decisions and emotional bonds to improve organisational commitment (Li & Tan, 2013).

Knowledge sharing amongst employees, which involves the exchange of ideas, experiences, skills or technology, should be encouraged by line managers. Organisational systems should empower line managers to institute knowledge-sharing platforms within their immediate work units or teams (Wang, Ahmed, & Rafiq, 2008). This should also be



replicated throughout the organisation to encourage peer-to-peer learning and the dissemination of ideas. These platforms can be enhanced by exploiting the benefits of digital technologies such as emails, intranets or team-dedicated social media to improve internal communication. Creating greater opportunities for increased employee collaboration should improve the fulfilment of employee expectations, thereby improving trust and job satisfaction and ultimately commitment (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Kang & Sung, 2017).

Furthermore, line managers have a responsibility for effectively demonstrating how organisational values should be practised. They should utilise their interaction with the employees under their supervision to convey organisational values, explain how they should live the values and teach the exemplary efforts from outstanding employees to others. All this should be done as they strive to persuade organisation-wide commitment towards the realisation of company goals and emotional attachment to the organisation as a whole. Employees work on the assumption that they can trust their employer to take care of their jobs and ensure that they are satisfied. This can best be achieved when managers effectively engage in two-way exchanges, where, on the one hand, line managers serve as a conduit through which information from top managers flows to sub-work units, and, on the other hand, line managers serve as information providers to subordinates. Ultimately, line manager communication ought to be used to offer direction, inform and rationalise expectations, provide feedback and ensure active participation in organisational processes so that the trust and satisfaction of employees are enhanced, in turn, strengthening commitment (Men et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2019; Yousef, 2017).

In conclusion, communication from line managers to employees should be encouraged and monitored as a key organisational strategy for increasing productivity and job satisfaction, generating employee trust and ultimately building loyalty and commitment. Efforts aimed at building relationships with employees can begin with the line manager who wields much influence over their subordinates. When a line manager–employee relationship becomes toxic and counterproductive, the outcome will be negative: lack of trust, decreasing satisfaction and decreased commitment. Because employees are the most important stakeholders in the organisations, all efforts that improve their well-being – including fully functional communication channels between themselves and their line managers – should be promoted by executives of the business (Freeman, 2010; Mishra et al., 2014; Waters et al., 2013). Advances in digital applications and social media usage are allowing managers to enrich their communication practices with employees and organisational actors (Men et al., 2020). Therefore, a culture that celebrates effective communication should be promoted (Thakor, 2016).

### Limitations and direction for future research

Similar to other studies, this study has limitations which should be recognised. This study focussed on financial services employees. It would be beneficial to expand this study by

using more varied service-oriented industries that require employees to frequently interact with both external and internal customers. Future research may also account for whether LMCs influence employee performance and, in turn, on customer experience as external stakeholders. Furthermore, levels of employee commitment could be determined inter-departmentally to foster and optimise cross-company understanding.

Moreover, interdepartmental learning harnesses the success of internal communications and promotes activities that improve employees' affective attachment and involvement in firms (Mishra et al., 2014; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Such efforts enable the business to develop and maintain institutional alignment and promote shared value, resulting in a positive impact on organisational culture. These areas should be explored concerning managerial communications to enrich work experiences in manager–employee relations within and across departments.

Research focussing on generational mindsets reveals differences in prevailing generations, that is, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y or millennials and Generation Z (Walden et al., 2017). Given the considerable opportunities afforded by the gig economy and distractions of social media, many organisations find it extremely challenging to keep younger employees in employment for longer. Thus, there are merits in conducting research that explores differences in millennials and older employees concerning line manager–staff relational exchanges and how communication impacts on this process. The effects of both traditional and digital communication tools in online manager–employee communications should also be explored to determine how they impact on different generational cohorts (Men et al., 2020).

Lastly, the current study utilised a cross-sectional research approach, which proves optimal in many research situations (Spector, 2019). Use of appropriate control variables can prove beneficial. For example, trust as a trait of the trusting person may be controlled to improve findings. Future research may also utilise experimental or longitudinal designs to determine the potential influence of LMCs on employee engagement over time as well as determine which conditions produce the most significant impact. Workplace variables such as length of experience, expertise, age group, gender, position, etc., could be manipulated.

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## Authors' contributions

T.N. conceived the idea, collected the data and contributed to the literature review. E.S.Q. performed the data analysis and wrote the introduction, literature review, method and conclusion. Y.S. supervised the project and contributed to shaping the article to ensure that the ideas are properly presented.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to in this study, as set out for conducting research by the University of the Witwatersrand Ethics Committee.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings in this study are available from the corresponding author, E.S.Q., upon reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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