

Job commitment, total quality management, information communication technology adoption, toxic leadership and job demands: a conceptual framework for student retention

Job commitment and student retention

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the direct effect of job commitment (JCT) on student retention (REN), exploring the mediating roles of total quality management (TQM) and information communication technology adoption (ADT), and moderating roles of toxic leadership (TLE) and job demands (JDD).

Design/methodology/approach – The paper develops a conceptual framework along with postulations by integrating both empirical and theoretical literature in the fields of employee well-being, strategic management, information communication technology, leadership, as well as work and occupational psychology.

Findings – This paper proposes that JCT will be positively related to REN, and this positive relationship will be mediated by TQM and ADT. Additionally, TLE and JDD will moderate the direct positive effect of JCT on REN.

Research limitations/implications – This paper provides implications for both researchers and practitioners in the areas of strategic decision-making in educational institutions and behaviour management for enhancing REN by applying JCT, TQM and ADT as strategic tools, while keeping TLE and JDD under control. It also offers implications for upcoming researchers to empirically test this conceptual framework in different educational settings.

Practical implications – By boosting employees JCT, educational institutions stand the chance of improving REN via TQM and ADT. Additionally, JCT can foster REN under a working environment where TLE and JDD are kept low.

Originality/value – The paper offers unique insights into how TQM and ADT connect JCT to REN, and how JCT relates to REN under varied levels of TLE and JDD. It also highlights the theoretical contributions of the resource-based theory of a firm, affective events theory and activation theory.

Keywords Information technology, Innovation, Leadership, Organisational behaviour, Production and operations, Student retention

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has progressively turned teaching or working into an online activity, and this change in workspace has changed the work methods and processes for employees in the education sector, such that some employees work from



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home while others have adopted a rotation system where they receive minimum supervision at work ([Turkmenoğlu et al., 2020](#)). This shift in workspace, originating from the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the need for educational institutions to prioritise employees' job commitment (JCT), because, the level of employee JCT in any organisation is put to test when the organisation is confronted with external forces, such as COVID-19 pandemic. Committed employees take ownership of their work and are ambassadors of their institution, both inside and outside of office doors.

A committed employee presents benefits to the organisation ([Koomson, 2020](#)). For instance, [Koomson \(2021a\)](#) shows that a committed physician is more likely to show high citizenship behaviours at work. It is often said that cutting-edge transformations in organisations are a result of committed employees ([Koomson, 2021b](#)). In the educational setting, a committed employee is capable of improving student retention (REN), and this positive relationship is described by the resource-based theory of a firm ([Barney, 1991](#)). The theory regards a committed employee as a firm resource or asset that is able to generate value or competitive advantage by being rare and difficult to imitate by rival firms. This competitive advantage translates into positive organisational outcomes, in the form of REN for the benefit of the organisation.

An argument is put forward that the positive effect of JCT on REN can be mediated by adopting an innovative approach to management which will improve the work methods and processes in the educational setting, referred to as total quality management (TQM). Adopting and executing this continuous improvement strategy will improve work methods and processes in the educational institution to foster REN. This argument is grounded in the affective events theory ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)). This theory assumes that a committed employee would be more likely to show positive emotional events at the workplace, such as feeling of responsibility, enthusiasm and appetite for new challenges. These positive emotional events would affect the employee's willingness to be part of the team assigned with the responsibility for implementing the TQM strategy to eventually improve REN. The affective events theory ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)) is also useful in explaining the mediating influence of information communication technology adoption (ADT) in the relationship between JCT and REN. According to the theory, a committed employee would be more likely to show positive emotional events at work and these positive emotional events would affect the employee's willingness adopt information communication technology to foster organisational outcomes, in the form of REN for the well-being of the educational institution.

Aside the resource-based theory of the firm ([Barney, 1991](#)) and the affective events theory ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)), this study employs the activation theory ([Gardner and Cummings, 1988](#)) to argue for a potential moderating role of toxic leadership (TLE), a psychosocial stressor, on the direct relationship between JCT and REN, such that the direct positive relationship between JCT and REN is weakened in a working environment where the leader/supervisor shows high-TLE, but strengthened within the context of low-TLE. The activation theory ([Gardner and Cummings, 1988](#)) assumes that, too much stress in the form of high-TLE from a leader/supervisor can demoralise committed employees and negate their tendency to undertake activities that will improve organisational objectives, including retaining students. Toxic leaders abuse the leader–follower relationship. They lie frequently, are arrogant, incompetent on their job, selfish, discriminate against employees and create a toxic environment. Their actions are self-destructive and, ultimately, corporately harmful, as they subvert and destroy organisational structures.

The activation theory ([Gardner and Cummings, 1988](#)) is also useful in understanding the moderating role of job demands (JDD), a physical and psychological stressor, on the direct relationship between JCT and REN, such that the direct positive relationship between JCT and REN is weakened under high JDD, but reinforced under low JDD. The activation theory

(Gardner and Cummings, 1988) holds that too much stress in the form high work pressure and emotional demands can demoralise a committed employee to perform, particularly for complex and difficult task (Gardner, 1990), and negate their tendency to undertake in activities that will foster organisational goals. JDD are physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills. They are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Examples are work pressure and emotional demands. The consequences of continuous job strain are depletion of energy and health problems.

However, literature addressing the relationship between JCT and REN is in dearth. Close existing studies have focused on the relationship between JCT and citizenship behaviour (Koomson, 2021a), job satisfaction and citizenship behaviour (Abdullah, 2018; Koomson and Opoku Mensah, 2020), creatively and REN (Alsharari and Alshurideh, 2020), emotional intelligence and REN (Alsharari and Alshurideh, 2020), and learner autonomy and REN (Alsharari and Alshurideh, 2020). Besides, there is paucity of literature addressing the mediating effects of TQM and ADT (independently and jointly) between JCT and REN. Existing studies in the area used creatively (Ismail *et al.*, 2018), job satisfaction (Al-dalahmeh *et al.*, 2018) and organisational job embeddedness (Kapil and Rastogi, 2019) as mediators. Also, literature addressing the moderating effects of TLE and JDD between JCT and REN is hard to find. The close studies found employed psychological contract breach (Koomson, 2021c), transformational leadership (Beatrice, 2020), and abusive supervision (Teng *et al.*, 2021) as moderator variables. To this end, this paper aims to examine the relationship between JCT and REN, exploring the mediating roles of TQM and ADT, as well as moderating roles of TLE and JDD.

Research questions

The purpose of this paper is to explore six research questions:

- RQ1. How does employee JCT improve REN?
- RQ2. How does employee JCT affect TQM to foster REN?
- RQ3. How does employee JCT affect ADT to improve REN?
- RQ4. How does employee JCT affect TQM and ADT jointly to improve REN?
- RQ5. What is the moderating effect of TLE between JCT and REN?
- RQ6. What is the moderating role of JDD between JCT and REN?

To explore the above-stated research questions, this paper uses theoretical and empirical issues to assess how JCT improves REN, how JCT affects TQM to foster REN, how JCT affects ADT to improve REN, how JCT affects TQM and ADT jointly to improve REN, and the moderating effects of TLE and JDD between JCT and REN.

Theoretical development

Employees' job commitment (JCT) and student retention (REN)

Employee JCT is the employee's enthusiasm to exercise the best and maximum efforts and potential, just for the sake of his/her organisation (Mowday *et al.*, 1982). It is the feeling of responsibility that a person has towards the goals, mission, and vision of the organisation he/she is associated with (Koomson, 2021b). There appears to be a possible positive relationship between employee JCT and REN, and this positive relationship is grounded in the resource-based theory of a firm (Barney, 1991). The resource-based theory regards a committed employee as a firm resource or asset that is able to generate value or competitive advantage by

being rare and difficult to imitate by rival firms. This competitive advantage converts into positive organisational outcomes, in the form of REN, for the benefit the educational institution.

The proposed positive relationship between employee JCT and REN is also supported by the findings of earlier researchers. For example, [Koomson \(2021a\)](#) shows that a committed physician is more likely to show high citizenship behaviours at work. [Abdullah \(2018\)](#) reveals a direct positive effect of job satisfaction on organisational citizenship behaviour of teachers drawn from public vocational high schools in Indonesia. [Koomson and Opoku Mensah \(2020\)](#) find a direct positive connection between job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviours of medical doctors in Ghana. [Alsharari and Alshurideh \(2020\)](#) also report that creatively, emotional intelligence and learner autonomy positively affect REN. REN is of increasingly importance to college and university administrators, as they try to improve graduation rates and decrease a loss of tuition revenue from students that either drop out or transfer to another school ([Tight, 2020](#)).

Improving REN is central to the existence of higher education institutions. REN is manifested in students' improvement in grade point average ([Alsharari and Alshurideh, 2020](#)). REN is a positive antecedent of student loyalty. A loyal student is likely to recommend the school or university to his/her friends and family. He/she is less likely to drop out or transfer to another university ([Tight, 2020](#)). Consequently, employee JCT can be a strong cornerstone resource or capability for enhancing REN. In the light of this discussion, this paper proposes that employee JCT has a direct positive relationship with REN.

P1. JCT is positively related to REN.

Mediating roles of TQM and information communication technology ADT between employee JCT and REN

This paper argues that, the direct positive relationship between JCT and REN is mediated by TQM, and this argument is explained by the affective events theory ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)). This theory assumes that a committed employee would be more likely to show positive emotional events at the workplace, such as feeling of responsibility, enthusiasm and appetite for new challenges. These positive emotional events would affect the employee's willingness to be part of the team assigned with the responsibility for implementing the TQM strategy to eventually improve REN. Adopting and executing this innovative and creative approach to management will improve work methods and processes in the educational institution to foster REN. This argument is supported by a closely-related empirical study by [Ismail et al. \(2018\)](#), in which the authors disclose that creatively fully mediated the direct relationship between employee engagement and job performance.

The affective events theory ([Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996](#)) is also beneficial in clarifying the mediating influence of employee ADT in the relationship between JCT and REN. According to the theory, a committed employee would be more likely to show positive emotional events at work and these positive emotional events would affect the employee's willingness adopt information communication technology to foster organisational outcomes, including REN for the well-being of the educational institution. This argument is backed by closely-related empirical studies. To exemplify, [Al-dalahmeh et al. \(2018\)](#) reveal that job satisfaction partially mediates the direct relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance. [Kapil and Rastogi \(2019\)](#) discover that employee's organisational job embeddedness partially mediates the employee engagement–citizenship behaviour nexus. [Ahad and Khan \(2020\)](#) also find that employees' experience partially mediates between employee engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour.

To guarantee successful implementation of REN strategies, JCT, TQM and ADT are all required in every process of the higher educational institutions business model. Without these three activities, the quest to ensure and improve REN will be difficult to accomplish. Hence, this paper expects TQM and ADT to mediate between JCT and REN.

- P2. TQM will positively mediate the relationship between JCT and REN.
- P3. ADT will positively mediate the connection between JCT and REN.
- P4. TQM and ADT will jointly and positively mediate the connection between JCT and REN.

Moderating roles of TLE and JDD between employee JCT and REN

This study employs another influential theory: the activation theory (Gardner and Cummings, 1988) to argue for a potential moderating role of TLE, a psychosocial stressor, in the direct relationship between JCT and REN, such that the direct positive relationship between JCT and REN is weakened in a working environment where the leader/supervisor shows high-TLE, but strengthened within the context of low-TLE. The activation theory (Gardner and Cummings, 1988) assumes that too much stress in the form of high-TLE from a leader/supervisor can demoralise a committed employee and negate the employee's tendency to undertake in activities that will improve organisational objectives, including retaining students. Toxic leaders abuse the leader-follower relationship. They lie frequently, are arrogant, incompetent on their job, selfish, discriminate against employees and create a toxic environment. Their actions are self-destructive and, ultimately, corporately harmful, as they subvert and destroy organisational structures.

The activation theory (Gardner and Cummings, 1988) is also useful in understanding the moderating role of JDD, a physical and psychological stressor, in the direct relationship between JCT and REN, such that the direct positive relationship between JCT and REN is weakened under high JDD, but reinforced under low JDD. The activation theory (Gardner and Cummings, 1988) holds that too much stress in the form high work pressure and emotional demands can demoralise a committed employee to perform, particularly for complex and difficult task (Gardner, 1990), and negate the employee's tendency to undertake in activities that will improve organisational goals. JDD are physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort or skills. They are associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs. Examples are work pressure and emotional demands. The consequences of continuous job strain are depletion of energy and health problems.

The argument for the moderating role of TLE and JDD between JCT and REN is backed by closely-related empirical studies. To illustrate, Beatrice (2020) reveals that more-transformational leadership strengthens the psychological capital-employee engagement relationship than less-transformational leadership. Teng *et al.* (2021) find that high-abusive supervision weakens the obsessive passion-job embeddedness relationship than low-abusive supervision. Koomson (2021c) also discovers that psychological contract breach demoralises satisfied physicians from showing organisational citizenship behaviour. Thus, this paper postulates that TLE and JDD will negatively moderate the JCT-REN relationship.

- P5. TLE will negatively moderate the relationship between JCT and REN.
- P6. JDD will negatively moderate the connection between JCT and REN.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework originating from the above discussion is demonstrated in Figure 1. The postulations are symbolised as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6. The postulations explaining the positive effect of JCT on REN (P1), the positive mediating effects of TQM (P2) independently, ADT (P3) independently and TQM + ADT (P4) jointly between JCT and REN

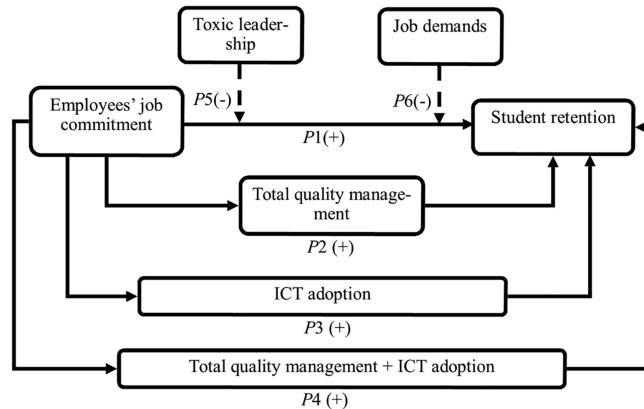


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

are symbolised by solid lines; while the dotted lines symbolise the negative moderating effects of TLE (P5) and JDD (P6) on the positive direct relationship between JCT and REN. Here, P1 explains how JCT improves REN. Likewise, P2 explains how JCT affects TQM to foster REN. Similarly, P3 explains how JCT affects ADT to improve REN. In a similar fashion, P4 explains how JCT affects TQM and ADT jointly (TQM + ADT) to improve REN. The remaining postulations explicates the working environment or condition (TLE, JDD) under which JCT–REN relationship can either be strengthened or weakened.

Discussion

This paper contributes in diverse ways. In the first place, it integrates and lengthens the literature on five independent fields of study: JCT, TQM, ADT, TLE and JDD, the first being an employee well-being tool, the second being a strategic management tool, the third being an information communication technology tool, the fourth being a leadership tool, and the fifth being a work and organisational psychology tool. Thus, the present study exceeds a single discipline, making interdisciplinary. Second, to the best of my knowledge, this is the only study that addresses the indirect effects of TQM and ADT on the direct relationship between employee JCT and REN, using the resource-based theory (Barney, 1991) and affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) as theoretical foundations. Third, as much as I am aware, this study is unique because it illustrates the working environment or condition (TLE, JDD) under which the employee JCT–REN relationship can be enhanced, with theoretical support from resource-based theory (Barney, 1991) and activation theory (Gardner and Cummings, 1988).

Research implications

Upcoming researchers may empirically test this conceptual framework and postulations in different higher educational settings. Specifically, they may empirically test how JCT affects REN, since there is a dearth of literature in this area. A close study found was the research by Alsharari and Alshurideh (2020). Furthermore, they could examine how TQM and ADT will independently and jointly mediate between employee JCT and REN, since earlier researchers have found empirical support for the mediating roles of other variables, namely creativity (Ismail *et al.*, 2018), job satisfaction (Al-dalahmeh *et al.*, 2018) and organisational job embeddedness (Kapil and Rastogi, 2019) on a similar direct path. Additionally, future researchers may empirically test the working environment or condition (TLE, JDD) under

which the employee JCT–REN relationship can be strengthened or weakened, following the findings of closely-related existing studies (Beatrice, 2020; Koomson, 2021c; Teng *et al.*, 2021).

Conclusions

This paper explored the direct relationship between employee JCT and REN. Again, it addressed the effect of employee JCT on TQM and its subsequent impact on REN. In addition, it explored the effect of employee JCT on ADT and its resulting effect on REN. Also, it addressed the effect of employee JCT on both TQM and ADT (TQM + ADT) and their subsequent impact on REN. It further explored the working environment or condition (TLE, JDD) under which employee JCT–REN relationship can be enhanced or weakened by proposing a conceptual business model with testable postulations. This paper highlighted the role of employee JCT as an employee well-being tool, TQM as a strategic management tool, and ADT as an information communication and technology tool for enhancing REN in higher educational institutions. In addition, this paper informed higher educational institutions on the essence of creating a fit between employee JCT and working conditions (TLE, JDD), which had implications for REN. Along with implications for both practitioners and researchers, this paper also recommended directions for further research to enrich the fields.

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