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"Psychological empowerment, work engagement and organizational affective commitment in a local supermarket chain "

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ABSTRACT

To ensure the success of their operations and maintain competitive, managers expect employees to be committed to their organizations while being engaged at their work simultaneously. The purpose of this study is to investigate how psychological empowerment acts as a mechanism that affects employees' organizational commitment directly and indirectly through work engagement. Generally speaking, psychological empowerment enhances the ability to predict and understand organization-based self-esteem, commitment and satisfaction.

Partial Least Squares (PLS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used on a sample of 151 employees that are currently working for the largest and most successful local supermarket chain located in Arta. Employees received an email invitation to participate in the survey and complete a Google Form Questionnaire. This study fills the gap in the literature because according to our knowledge, psychological empowerment, work engagement and commitment had been emerged and examined separately as different constructs without consideration of a potential mediation. There is not adequate knowledge on how they are associated.

The findings show that the frontline employees who feel more empowered demonstrate higher levels of engagement and organizational commitment. Specifically PE components (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) had a strong relation with employee engagement which in turn had a positive impact on organizational affective commitment. We discuss the findings and we give suggestions on how managers can foster empowerment for retaining their workforce.

Keywords: **Psychological   Empowerment,   Work   Engagement, Organizational Affective Commitment,   Retail Industry**

1. INTRODUCTION

The increased globalised competition among businesses made workplaces more complicated and challenging. Organizations need a workforce that takes responsibilities, shows initiative and keeps high quality standards when performing its duties (Mustosmaki, Anttila, and Oinas, 2013). In the attempt to reduce turnover intentions and retain the most valuable employees who play a critical role in accomplishing organizational goals, it is essential for organizations to promote commitment-oriented practices (Becker and Gerhart, 1996). Since, organizational commitment is a strong predictor of a company's effectiveness and performance; it reduces absenteeism and turnover intentions; (Riketta, 2002) and is also a great promoter of employees' well-being (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001). It is seen as a critical factor of organizational survival and growth. In order to boost commitment managers strive to engender the feelings of empowerment and engagement that can motivate employees to deliver outstanding service. Employee empowerment represents the most recent manifestation of involvement practice that secures the missing link between employee commitment and bottom-line organizational performance. It is considered a new tendency in which businesses move away from the traditional and classical hierarchical management that requires provision of specific guidelines and directions to subordinates. Instead, it focuses in the importance of a more empowering leadership that delegates responsibilities to subordinates (Arnold et al., 2000).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) has been a popular topic for research into work attitudes and behaviors in recent years. It is a multidimensional construct which describes feelings of identification, emotional attachment or obligation of employees to their organizations (Allen and Meyer, 1990;

Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1992). It reflects employee's attitude towards the organization that is impacted by member's work experiences and other personal and organizational factors (Solinger et al., 2008). It is the extent to which employees feel a sense of belonging to their organizations and a psychological bond to their employer (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Committed employees have less turnover intentions and lower absenteeism rates (Meyer et al. 2002)

Allen and Meyer (1990) proposed that OC construct consists of 3 components: the affective, the normative and continuance dimension. Affected commitment refers to a psychological identification and attachment to the organization. It entails feelings of pride which result in the desire to remain. Normative commitment is characterized by feelings of obligation or pressure to continue employment and is based on personal beliefs of the right and moral thing to do. It can be seen as generalized value of loyalty and duty. Continuance commitment is resulted by the comparison of individual's benefits (e.g. retirement, relationships with other employees etc) versus the perceived cost of leaving from the company.

All commitment components are related to employees' work and behavioral outcomes such as performance, satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, productivity, creativeness and innovativeness (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Laschinge, 1996). Employees who are committed are critical success factors for a business (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). In this study we focus on the affective side of commitment as it is generally considered to be the main determinant of positive commitment-related behaviors at a greater degree than normative and continuance commitment (Grant et al. 2008). Another study of Jaros (1997) confirmed that turnover intentions were even more correlated with affective commitment than with the other types. This is because affective commitment as a concept emphasizes in the satisfaction people get from their jobs, excluding external factors (such as economic crisis/ lack of external opportunities/ job offers) that might foster an individual to stay employed under his current employer.

Avolio (1999) emphasized the role of empowerment as a key mechanism of building commitment to organization's goals. When employees are given opportunities to voice their opinions, to take on more challenging responsibilities while having more power to make decisions, they will feel in turn feel more empowered; and as a consequence they will remain in their organizations.

2.2. Psychological Empowerment

In the past, organizational empowerment used to reflect the HR strategy of job enrichment that aimed at making employees more involved to their jobs (Hackman and Oldham 1980). In the modern business world, empowerment has a broader role beyond delegating responsibilities. Empowerment has two perspectives, the structural and the psychological side. Many times, psychological empowerment is the outcome of structural empowerment. Structural empowerment refers to the formal exchange and sharing of power between the hierarchical structural levels within the business. According to Kanter (1993) structural empowerment is being accomplished when organizations create access of empowering conditions such as information sharing, provision of resources, development and learning opportunities and social support. In this study, we aim to focus on the psychological side of empowerment which is the direct outcome of a structurally empowering work environment. In other words, it is the result of the experienced power perceived as control, as competence and as being energized towards accomplishing the assigned goals (Menon, 2001). Psychological empowerment focuses on the informal practices that leaders do to facilitate trust and to encourage subordinates, such as corrective feedback, open communication with team members, goal setting and rewards (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

Spreitzer (1995) defines psychological empowerment as "increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to one's work role: 1) competence, 2) impact, 3) meaning and

4) self-determination". Analytically, meaning reflects the sensed fit between job requirements and personal beliefs, or the sensed value of a work objective according to an employee's values or standards (Li et al., 2018). Competence is the self-efficacy or confidence that someone feels about his abilities and skills (Gist and Mitchell, 1992). Self-determination refers to the employee's perceived control over his work. In other words, it refers to the level of autonomy that lets someone make decisions related to his job. Finally, impact is the perception of having an effect on organizational processes, practices and outcomes (Bandura, 1986; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). In order for an employee to experience a psychological empowerment, those four conditions need to be fulfilled, of course at a different level of satisfaction for each employee.

2.3 Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Affective Commitment.

Empowerment may be viewed as a motivational process that has been examined by psychological theories. Specifically, the relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment is explained by the social exchange theory which states that employees reciprocally respond to experiences of psychological empowerment with higher organizational commitment (Kraimer et al., 1999; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). Meyerson and Kline (2008) claimed that when employees feel empowered they will see themselves as more competent, more satisfied with their jobs, and more willing to perform (Bartol and Locke, 2006). In addition, they also act independently and have lower intentions to quit than those that feel less empowered (Albrecht and Andreetta, 2011). Psychological empowerment reflects the organization's ability to support and understand its employees' needs enabling in that way an intrinsic motivation which makes employees to be more committed to their organizations.

Psychological empowerment components can also be investigated independently in relation with their impact on organizational commitment.

For example, Stuart et al (2018) explored how leadership affects members' commitment in nonprofit organizations through the meaning dimension. They suggested that servant leaders who create structurally empowering working environments, make employees perceive their jobs more inspiring and meaningful and this affects how attached they feel towards their organization. They highlighted meaning component as the main antecedent of organizational commitment. In contrast, other studies that focused on areas of work-life and well-being have associated negatively psychological empowerment with turnover intentions, stress, emotional exhaustion and strain (Spreitzer, Kizilos, and Nason, 1997; Zhang, Ye, and Li, 2018). In plenty of studies the above stated outcomes (turnover, burnout and stress) have been related negatively with organizational commitment. Therefore, a potential decrease of them (as a consequence of empowerment) will have a positive impact on commitment as well. Furthermore, Cook and Wall (1980) also confirmed that the identification component of psychological empowerment influences affective commitment. Specifically, they stated when individuals identify with their organization, they are attracted by its values, they accept its norms and fit with the organizational culture and this leads to a personal desire for continued membership, in other words organizational commitment.

2.4 Work Engagement

Employee work engagement is a relatively new construct that was first introduced in the academic literature in the early 1990s. It is a key priority for managers because of its consequences. Many studies have associated work engagement with employees' performance and the overall business success (Christian et al, 2002; Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter, 2011). Although its importance is admitted, people frequently misinterpret its meaning with other similar definitions such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement and workaholism because these constructs are based on positive psychology and they all describe positive attitudes towards work. However, Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) noted that commitment and

engagement are clearly differentiated constructs with specific distinctive features.

Several definitions were given but the most commonly used is the one that describes work engagement as a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al 2002; Xanthopoulou et al. 2009). Specifically, vigor refers to an emotional state of high levels of energy and mental resilience while working and of the willingness to invest personal efforts even in difficulties. Secondly, dedication is the sense of enthusiasm, inspiration and pride at work. Dedicated employees perceive their work to be important and they describe difficulties as challenges rather than strains. Thirdly, absorption refers to the degree of job involvement. Absorbed employees are deeply concentrated and happy during work. They also sense time to pass quickly (Knight et al. 2017). Kahn's (1990) most frequently referenced definition of work engagement described engaged individuals to be those that express and employ themselves cognitively, emotionally and physically while working. Different but similar approaches were given by Maslach (2001) who stated that work engagement is the antipode of burnout and it can be assessed by the opposite scores of MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory dimensions). He stated that work engagement can be described in terms of energy, efficacy and involvement which are the direct opposites of burnout dimensions namely exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness.

The most important predictors of work engagement are considered to be job / task related and personal resources (Halbesleben, 2010). These resources are linked with work engagement by a motivational process described as Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) (Demerouti et al 2001, Harter et al 2002). Job resources play a critical role in shaping employees' perceptions of the work environment and of the contextual - organizational conditions. Some job / organizational resources are: job design, task variety, level of autonomy, meaning, coworker-supervisory support, recognition and rewards. Respectively, examples of personal / psychological resources include self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism and flexibility.

Job resources foster engagement by satisfying basic socio-emotional human needs (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The satisfaction of individual's needs generates a positive state of mind allowing employees to deal with job demands more efficiently. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) stated that resources (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs (2) contribute in task accomplishment (3) stimulate personal growth, learning and development. They act as drivers and are the antecedents of work engagement that predict how much engaged a person is towards his job (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008)

2.5 Work Engagement as Mediator

Based on previous research evidence, the present study treats the four dimensions of empowerment as the essential conditions that predict employee engagement, which in turn affect positively the organizational commitment. Meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, the four components of psychological empowerment act as the needed resources, motivators or energizers that can facilitate and predict work engagement. Evidence came from May et al. (2004) who noted that meaningfulness in work tasks fosters employees' motivation and attachment to work, thus resulting in work engagement. In this study, employees were highly engaged when they had higher psychology capital. Psychological empowerment partially mediated the relationship between psychology capital and work engagement. Another example of psychological empowerment's components that has been associated with work engagement is the impact. Impact reflects the individual's perception that his actions/opinions make a difference in the organization. When an employee senses that he has the ability to influence outcomes, he will potentially become more involved to his work and more engaged to his job duties (Stander and Rothmann, 2010), confirming again that psychological empowerment's components when being fulfilled can boost work engagement (Shanshan and Yanhui, 2015).

Firstly, based on these studies, we can claim with confidence that there is a positive link between psychological empowerment and work engagement.

Secondly, previous research evidence has also depicted positive correlation between work engagement and affective commitment. Specifically, Demerouti (2001) examined the consequences of engagement and found that high levels of work engagement increased numerous organizational outcomes including organizational commitment levels of employees.

According to Shridhar and Thiruvenkadam (2014) highly engaged employees are quite aware of business context, are passionate with their jobs, most of the times put extra efforts to improve their performance simultaneously with their organization's which depicts stronger attachment and involvement to the business and its affairs. More evidence on work engagement's outcomes came from Saks (2006) who associated work engagement with job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. He stated that there is a positive correlation among these relationships. He also noted the negative impact of work engagement on employees' intentions to quit. Also, Schaufeli's and Bakker's study (2004) confirmed that high levels of engagement are positively associated with well-being and negatively with burnout. Similarly, previous research has contributed to the consequences of engagement adding that engaged employees receive higher ratings on in role and extra-role performance and depict stronger willingness to go the extra mile for the sake of their organizations (Baker and Demerouti, 2008)

According to the above statements, we expect a link between psychological empowerment with work engagement and an additional association of work engagement with affective commitment. In other words, we expect the supermarket's employees who feel more empowered to be more engaged to their jobs and due to this positive attitude towards the job employees are expected to have fewer withdrawal intentions (Harrison et al., 2006). Work engagement will be a key mechanism that promotes employee's emotional connection with the company.

In the current study we aim to examine the overall impact of empowerment on organizational affective commitment both directly and indirectly through the mediation effect of work engagement. Furthermore, we aim to specify

at which level each dimensions of psychological empowerment contribute to those impacts and how strong these relationships are. Based on all previously stated arguments, we hypothesize that:

1. Psychological empowerment has a positive impact on affective commitment which means that empowered employees tend to be more committed to the organization than those that are less empowered.
   H1: Psychological empowerment is positively related to affective commitment.

2. Highly empowered employees demonstrate stronger work engagement attitudes too.
   H2: Psychological empowerment is positively related to work engagement.

3. Employees with higher levels of work engagement are more committed to the organization.
   H3: Work engagement is positively related to affective commitment.

4. *H4: The relationship of PE and OC is mediated by work engagement*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and data collection

Survey's data gathered from the biggest local supermarket chain that is established in the district for over 20 years. We invited by email 185 employees to participate in the survey and assured them of confidentiality. A number of 151 responses were collected between November and December of 2020, reaching a response rate of 82%. This size is accepted for an equation modeling in PLS software.

Our sample comprised of 80 female and 71 male. The majority of employees (69%) belonged to an age range of '36-46' (40%) and '26-36'

(29%). A number of 30 respondents were below 25 and only 16 over 46 years old. In addition, 54% had completed high school education, 30% have a primary educational level and 15% held a bachelor or master degree. The majority of employees work in front line positions, including cashiers (28%) and salesmen (55%). The rest (17%) were occupied in warehouse positions. About 50% of the respondents have completed a long tenure over 8 years. A percentage of 29% have an employment lasting from 5-7 years and only 21% has completed tenure between 0-4 years. That means there is a long standing commitment that makes this supermarket chain suitable for our survey

Table1: Gender of participants

	GENDER	
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Female	80	52,98%
Male	71	47,02%
Total	**151**	**100,00%**

Graph 1: Gender of participants
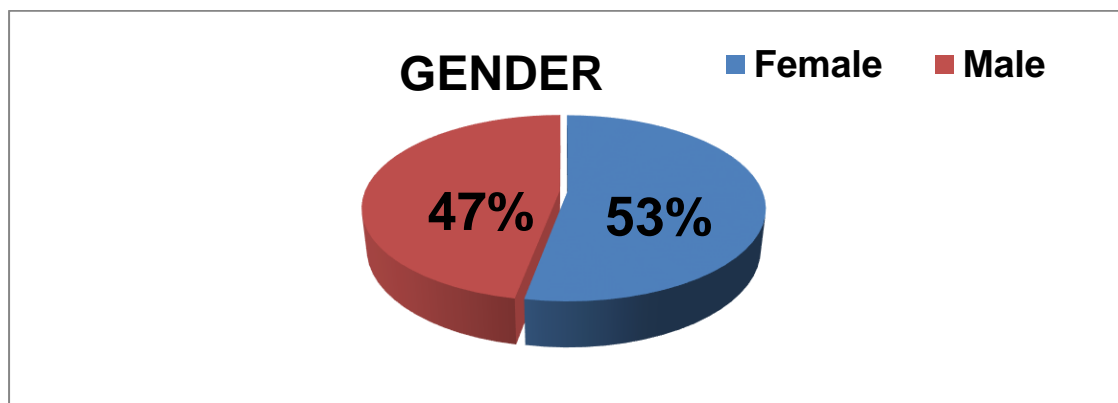
Table 2: Age of participants

	AGE	
	Frequency	**Percentage**
<=25	30	19,86%
26-35	44	29,70%
36-45	61	39,85%
46-55	16	10,59%
Total	151	100,00%

Graph 2: Age of participants
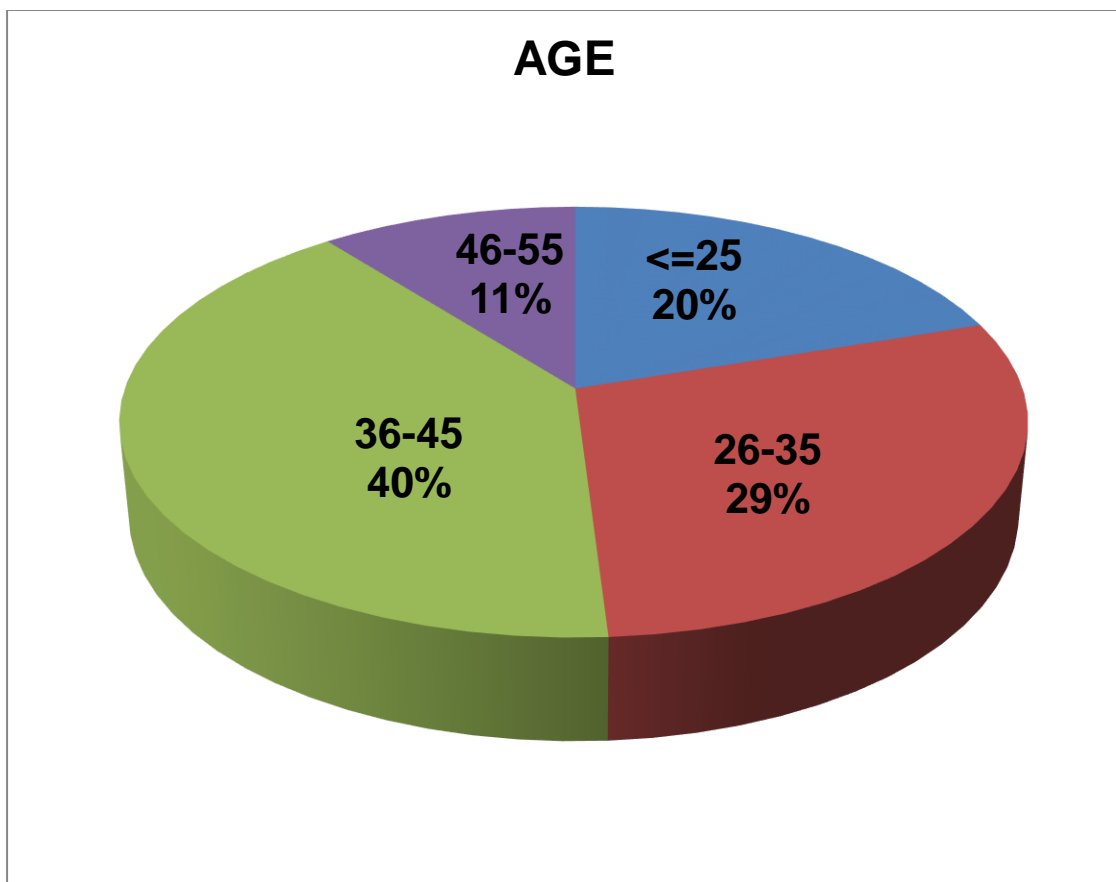
	EDUCATION	
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Primary/Secondaryschool	45	29,80%
High school	81	53,64%
Bachelor	18	11,92%
Master	7	4,64%
Total	151	100,00%

Graph 3: Level of education
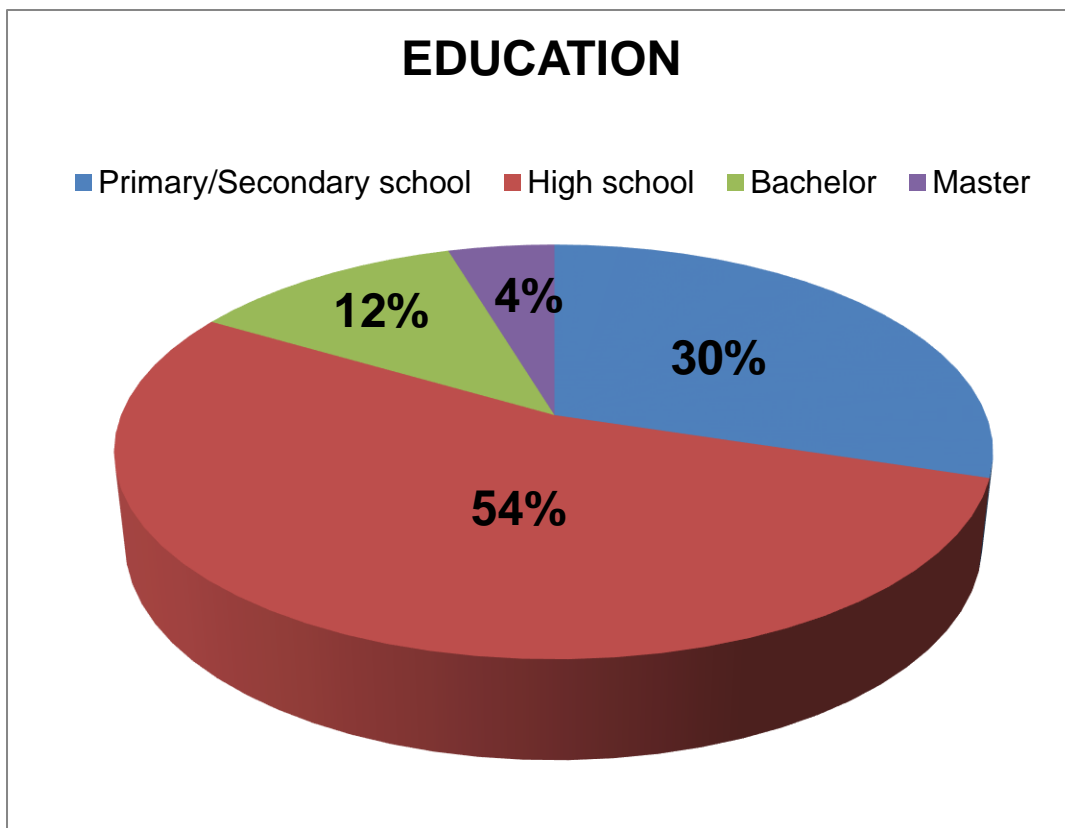
Table 4: **Job position**

	JOB POSITION	
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Cashiers	43	28,47%
Sales men	83	54,97%
Warehouse	25	16,55%
Total	**151**	**100,00%**

Graph 4: **Job position**
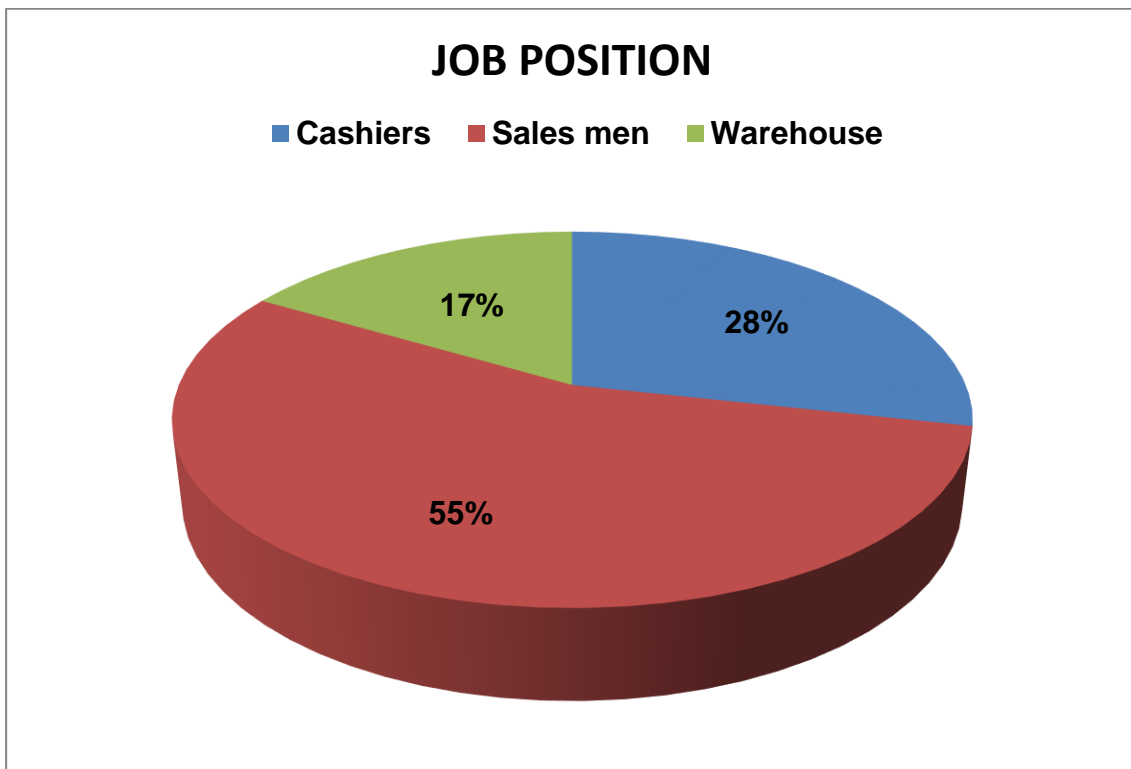
Table 5: Tenure of participants

	TENURE	
	Frequency	**Percentage**
0-4 years	31	20,53%
5-8 years	46	30,46%
>8 years	74	49,00%
Total	151	100,00%

Graph 5: Tenure of participants
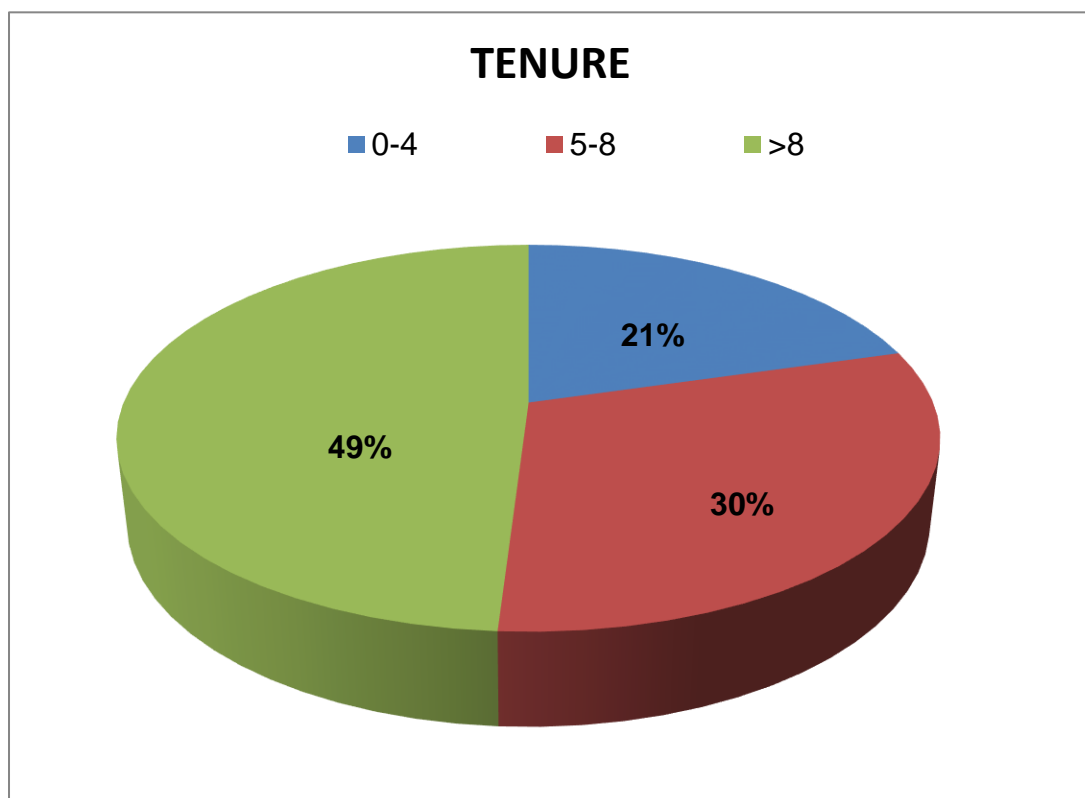
3.2 Measures

For all measurements, we used a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (5). The respondents evaluated specific statements regarding how much they agree or disagree with those.

To measure the overall psychological empowerment we used Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item survey that is grouped in 4 components namely: meaning, competence, impact and self-determination. Example of the meaning sub-scale include: "The work I do is very important to me". Respectively: "My impact on what happens in my department is large" (impact sub-scale); "I am confident about my ability to do my job" (competence sub-scale); "I have significant autonomy in determining how to do my job" (self determination sub-scale). All items were included on each dimension and loaded to it satisfactorily. Cronbah Alphas for the subscales in this study were: competence $\alpha=0.895$, impact $\alpha=0.822$, meaning $\alpha=0.912$ and self-determination $\alpha=0.852$. The Cronbach α for the single index psychological empowerment measure was 0.870.

Work engagement was measured by the shortened version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006), consisted of 9 items grouped into three subscales. Examples include ''At my work, I feel bursting with energy' for Vigor ($\alpha = 0.840$), "My job inspires me" for Dedication ($\alpha = 0.875$) and ''I am immersed in my work" for Absorption ($\alpha = 0.820$). The Cronbach's α for the single index work engagement measure was 0.850.

Organizational affective commitment was assessed using Meyer and Allen (1997) 8-item scale. Examples include "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization', 'I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization' (reverse coded). A coefficient alpha of 0.879 was found for this study.

Control variables

In this survey as control variables we included: *AGE RANGE* (1st = 'below 25', 2nd = '35-46', 3rd = '36 - 45', 4th = '46 - 56' and 5th = over 56 years old), *GENDER* (1 = 'male', 2 = 'female'), *TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT* (1 = 'cashiers', 2 = 'sales', 3 ='warehouse/logistics' and 4 = 'store manager'), *TENURE* (from 0 = 'Less than 1 year', 1 = '1 year', 2 = '2 years' up to 11 = 'Greater than 10 years'), *EDUCATION* (1 = 'Primary / Secondary school', 2 = 'high school', 3 ='bachelor degree', 4='master degree'. Even though, demographic variables are potential predictors of organizational commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) in this study they didn't seem to affect significantly the results.

3.3 Statistical Model

In order to test our model, we used PLS Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in SmartPLS 3.2 software. SmartPLS is a functional option also for analyzing small samples. It combines hierarchical component models with both formative and reflective constructs which in this study were the psychological empowerment and work engagement components. Specifically, empowerment was treated as 'reflective-formative' high order component, consisted of 4 variables. Each variable was measured by its reflective indicators, while it was connected with PE construct as formative indicator. In the same manner, the 3 components of work engagement, consisted of their reflective indicators were linked with "WE" in a formative relationship in which the components predicted WE. The proposed model with the reflective-formative format is depicted in (page 24) **Figure 1**

In addition, we used a two step approach model to get additional information about the indirect effects. In the original, proposed model, work engagement seemed to be predicted only by its indicators not allowing any other potential variable to explain its variance. We reduced the number of relationships in a second-order model making the PLS path

less complicated and easier to be interpreted. (Gaskin and Happell, 2014) The final model (2-step approach) is depicted in (page 25) **Figure 2**

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Before running the model, we had to assess the model's reliability and validity by measuring the individual indicator reliability, the composite reliability for the internal consistency, the discriminant validity and the convergent validity of each reflective construct (Hair's et al. 2014). According to indicator reliability, all items of each construct were above the threshold of 0.7 so were included in our model. Composite reliability was also confirmed with every construct exceeding the 0.7 threshold. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the threshold of 0.5 which means that convergent validity has been established. We demonstrate the measures in **Table 6**.

Afterwards, we had to determine the discriminant validity of our indicators to verify that they do not correlate across constructs; we used the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler et al, 2015). The maximum HTMT value was below 0.85, which is the highest HTMT value accepted. After running a "complete" bootstrapping we checked in the quality criteria the *HTMT_Inference* criterion which was below 1. Therefore, we concluded that the discriminant validity has been established for all sub-constructs in our model **Table7**

Finally, in order to assess the reliability and validity of the formative constructs (psychological empowerment and work engagement) we checked the collinearity of the formative indicators. Each indicator has a tolerance value (VIF) that should be between a range of 0.20 and 4, but ideally under the 3.3 threshold (Ringle et al, 2015). Small values indicate low correlations among variables. In our model the variance inflation factors (VIFs) were below 3.3 confirming that there is not any issue with multicollinearity.

Table 6: Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Convergent Validity

Construct (latent variable)	Composite Reliability	Loadings	T-statistics	AVE	Convergent / discriminant validity
Meaning	0.912	Min 0.815 Max 0.917	***	0.715	Yes
Competence	0.895	Min 0.803 Max 0.845	***	0.629	Yes
Impact	0.822	Min 0.704 Max 0.785	***	0.655	Yes
Self determination	0.852	Min 0.538 Max 0.612	***	0.615	Yes
Vigor	0.840	Min 0.784 Max 0.842	***	0.743	Yes
Absorption	0.820	Min 0.638 Max 0.734	**	0.669	Yes
Dedication	0.863	Min 0.813 Max 0.871	***	0.590	Yes
Affective Commitment	0.879	Min 0.601 Max 0.848	***	0.771	Yes

Notes: ns, not significant. Significant paths: *p<0.05;   **p<0.01;   ***p<0.001

Table7 Discriminant validity through the Heterotrai-Monotrait (HTMT) criterion

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Affective commitment (1)	0.578							
Absorption (2)	0.356	0.417						
Competence (3)	0.212	0.111	0.593					
Dedication (4)	0.154	0.401	0.241	0.484				
Impact (5)	0.331	0.321	0.431	0.324	0.609			
Meaning (6)	0.115	0.277	0.398	0.501	0.108	0.445		
Self_determination (7)	0.341	0.199	0.276	0.411	0.237	0.423	0.256	
Vigor (8)	0.209	0.314	0.253	0.312	0.380	0.241	0.193	0.361

Figure1 : The proposal conseptual model of Organizational Affective Commitment
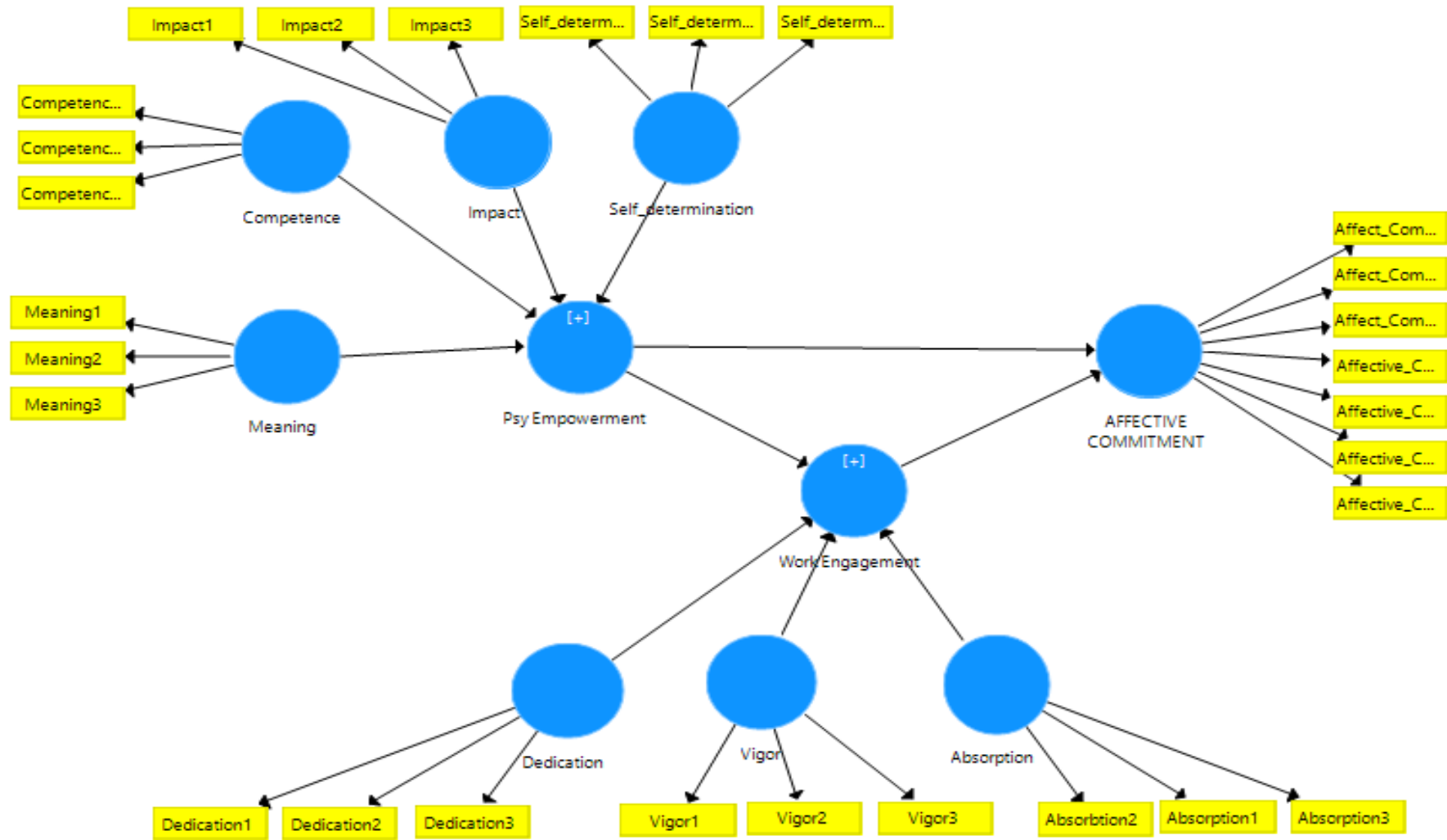
Figure2: The two step approach model of Organizational Affective Commitment

Competence

COMPETENCE

Self_determ...

SELF DETERMINATION

Meaning

MEANING

Impact

IMPACT

Work Enga...

WORK ENGAGEMENT

[+]

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Affect_Com...
Affect_Com...
Affect_Com...
Affective_C...
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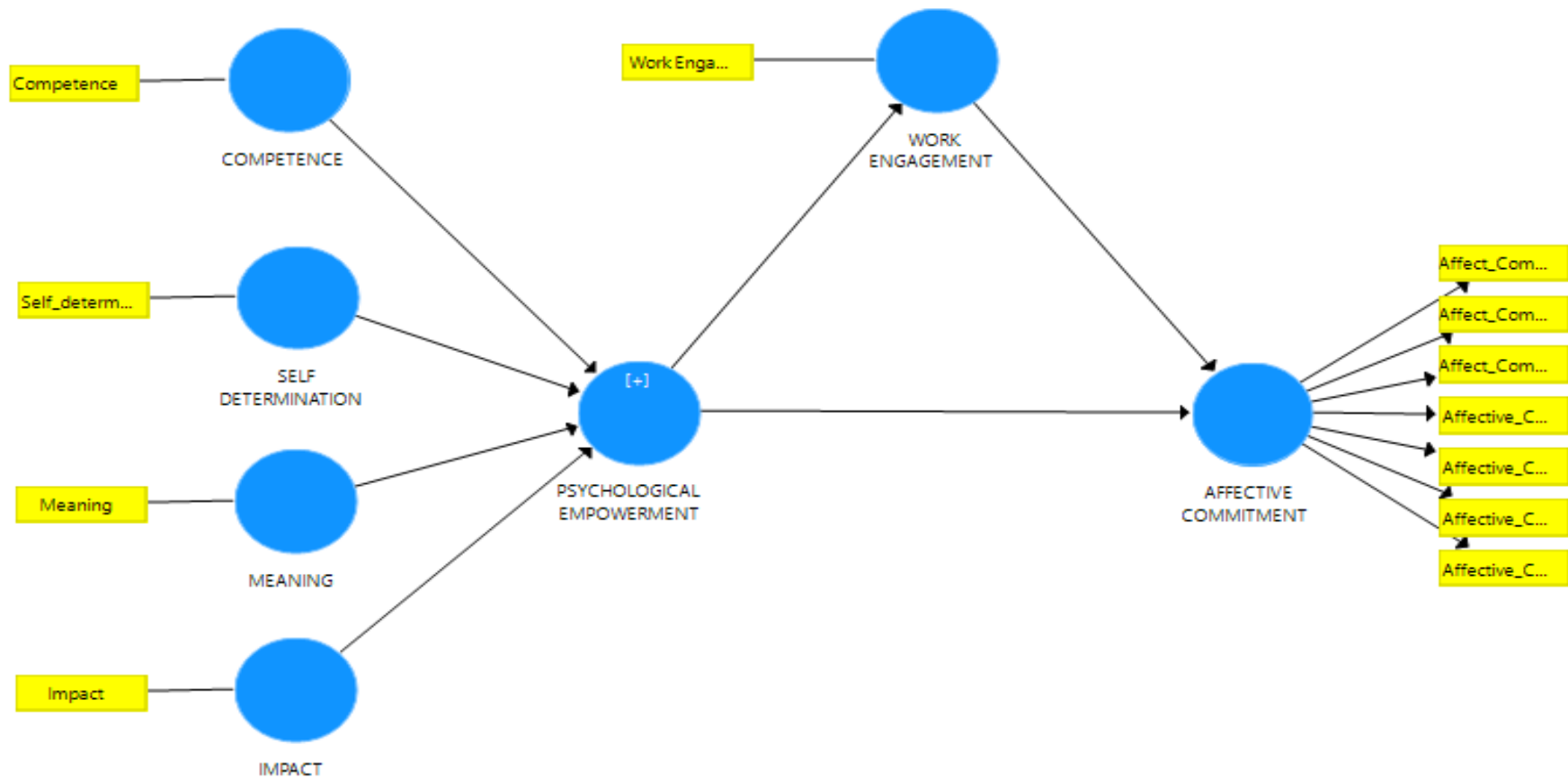
4. RESULTS

We run the two step approach model with a bootstrapping procedure with 2000 repetitions of randomly drawn samples to test the hypothesis as well as the strength and the significance of the relationships. Since there were no significant effects for the control variables, we excluded them from the analysis. In **Table 8** we include the path coefficients. The results confirm our hypotheses.

Analytically, path coefficients show that psychological empowerment is positively related to organizational affective commitment (path coefficient =0.423, $p < 0.001$) **(H1 supported)** and work engagement (path coefficient= 0.651, $p < 0.001$) **(H2 supported)**. Moreover, the correlation analysis showed that psychological empowerment's dimensions (meaning, impact competence, self-determination) are related with affective commitment and work engagement significantly at 99.9% confidence level. This is proved by 1) the p-values that reflect the percentage of the possibility of an error in the report's estimations. Additionally, by 2) the t-statistic level which reflect the relationship's significance. In order for a relationship to be significant, t-statistics should be over 1.96 thresholds. Specifically, in our model the significance of the first relationship is 4.825 >1.96 (t-statistics) and respectively, the significance of the second is 5.519 > 1.96 (t-statistics)

The above results indicate that the higher level of empowerment, the higher the level of affective commitment. Respectively, the higher the level of individual's psychological empowerment, the higher level of their work engagement levels; vice versa, the lower the level of individual psychological empowerment the lower level of work engagement.

In addition, work engagement is positively related to affective commitment (path coefficient =0.389, $p < 0.01$) **(H3 supported)**. The correlation analysis showed that the relationship of work engagement (Vigor, Dedication, Absorption) with affective commitment is significant at 99% confidence level (T-statistics = 3.612 > 1.96). That means the higher the level of

work engagement, the higher the level of affective commitment; vice versa, the lower the level of individual work engagement, the lower the level of organizational affective commitment.

Table8 Summary of path coefficients and significance levels

Hypotheses & corresponding paths	Path coefficient	T-statistics	Hypotheses support
Psychological empowerment → affective commitment	0.423	4.825***	H1 supported
Psychological empowerment → work engagement	0.651	5.519***	H2 supported
Work engagement → affective commitment	0.389	3.612**	H3 supported
Meaning → Psychological empowerment	0.544	4.003**	
Impact→ Psychological empowerment	0.322	3.677***	
Self-determination → Psychological empowerment	0.346	3.965**	
Competence → Psychological empowerment	0.473	4.968***	

Notes: ns, not significant. Significant paths: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Finally, in order to explore the mediating effect of work engagement, we used the Baron and Kenny's (1986) 3-step method that is described as it follows.

Firstly, we regress the dependent variable on the independent variable which means that the independent variable (psychological empowerment) should be related to the dependent variable (affective commitment) significantly without the presence of the mediator. Our findings confirm this positive relation (β = 4.825, path coefficient =0.593).

Secondly, regress the mediator on the independent variable. In other words, confirm that the psychological empowerment is related to work engagement. If the mediator is not associated with the independent variable, then there is not potential for mediation existence.

Thirdly, regress the dependent variable on both the mediator and independent variable. Specifically, confirm that the mediator (WE) is a significant predictor of the dependent variable (AC), **while controlling** for the independent variable (PE). This step involves both the mediator and the independent **simultaneously** to predict the dependent variable.

Our findings showed that when adding the mediator in our model, psychological empowerment had a significant effect on work engagement (β = 5.519, path coefficient = 0.651), while work engagement had a significant effect on affective commitment (β = 3.612, path coefficient = 0.389). However, with the mediator the total effect of empowerment (independent variable) on affective commitment (dependent variable) was lower but still significant (β = 2.519, path coefficient = 0.423). Due to this, we can conclude that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between empowerment and organization affective commitment. Finally, **H4 was supported.**

Table9. Summary of path coefficients & significance levels for mediation hypotheses

Mediation hypotheses/ corresponding paths	Path coefficient	T-statistics	Mediation type	Hypothesis support
Psych. Empowerment → affective commitment (**without mediator**)	0.593	4.825 ***	Partial	*H4* supported
Psych. Empowerment → work engagement	0.651	5.519 ***		
Work engagement → affective commitment	0.389	3.612 ***		
Psych. Empowerment → affective commitment (**with mediator**)	**0.423**	**2.519 *****		

Notes: ns, not significant. Significant paths: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to evaluate how empowerment affects organizational commitment through the work engagement perspective. The findings of this paper indicated that psychological empowerment has a strong effect on employees' work engagement, which in turn mediates (partially) the relationship between psychological empowerment and affective commitment. Our research not only validates the findings of previous studies that have associated psychological empowerment with employees' work and behavioral attitudes, specifically with organizational affective commitment

(Cho et al. 2006; Aggarwal et al. 2018; Lee and Nie, 2014) and work engagement (Kimura, 2011), but also provides evidence that organizational commitment can be achieved through motivating and engaging employees at their job roles by empowering them (Tillott et al. 2013).

We should mention that many managers see empowerment as not being applicable to every employee. There are plenty of companies which exclude non-managerial employees from empowerment (Cunningham et al, 1996), because they consider bottom line positions to have great deal of automation and repetitive work and are occupied by semi-skilled employees (Thakre and Khubalkar, 2012).

However, there are small details that should be addressed in order to investigate which predictors are more correlated with commitment, so we will be able to identify the kind of psychological empowerment employees experience, and later on provide some practical advices to foster commitment.

Analytically, in the supermarket's reported results we saw that employees do consider their jobs to be meaningful. The meaning component contributed proportionally more to psychological empowerment than the other components with a path coefficient=0.544 which was quite significant (t-statistics=4.003) and expected. According to Humphrey et al., (2007) experiencing meaningfulness in a job is the most important antecedent of employee's behavioral and attitudinal outcomes in comparison with any other job characteristic. The company might have communicated effectively its culture, vision, goals and values; making employees believe that they contribute to the society by providing high quality services.

We also saw that the competence component had a great impact on psychological empowerment and was the second most important predictor of it. This confirms that employees sense a self-efficacy about their skills and knowledge. According to our knowledge, senior managers of this supermarket chain organize in a regular base, trainings in areas such as planning, problem solving, teamwork, role-playing that new comers and older employees attend. Trainings develop skill sets and increase

subordinates' confidence, making employees more able to catch goals and receive a positive feedback for their achievements.

Another point that should be addressed is that self-determination which reflects the authority in decision-making had a satisfactory but weaker impact on empowerment (path coefficient=0.346). That could be explained by the job design that does not allow many employees' initiatives, interventions, and regulations over their jobs which are quite specific in retail industry. However, having control over a job is an essential condition that can increase affective commitment (Cohen et al., 1996).

The last thing to mention is that impact did not contribute as much as the other empowering factors. It predicted empowerment almost at the same level with self-determination component. We can assume that there must have been times that the company had not counted on its employees' opinions when making decisions that probably had affected their lives.

To conclude, empowerment can be translated into the needed resources that employees can use at the task level in order to carry out their job demands. When the work environment is resourceful and fulfills socio-emotional needs, employees feel empowered; they love their jobs in which they become dedicated. Due to this, they may demonstrate higher commitment to their organization.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the survey's results, we can propose suggestions that can cultivate commitment through empowerment and engagement perspectives.

Firstly, more educational opportunities could be provided to employees, which will highlight the meaning, the purpose and the impact their roles have on the quality of service and on customer's satisfaction. It is quite essential for the business to communicate effectively and convey consistent

messages to specify its mission and core values. Line managers need to act in accordance with these values and also guarantee that these values align with employees' personal identities and interests (Wiersma, 2002). Particularly for the new entries, a cultural-fit is required for an easy and quick adaption since the old employees had already depicted a long lasting commitment. So, managers should consider a *P-O* fit (person-organization) and a *P-J* fit (person-job) when recruiting employees. Either for the new comers or the old employees, a sense of meaningfulness will spark their enthusiasm and inspiration. Consequently, employees may become more engrossed to their roles by paying more attention towards tasks. By realizing the importance and the meaning of their roles they may become more psychically energized end mentally engaged at their jobs (Allan et al., 2019).

Secondly, regarding the self-determination component, employee's perceived autonomy can be increased by delegating more responsibilities with reasonable supervision's control. In doing so, managerial interventions such as frequent trainings are required. These trainings that should be confidence - building oriented, will update and master employees' skills and will also enhance self-efficacy. In that way, employees will be trusted to take on various tasks and more responsibilities under their sphere of control. As long as employees gain trust regarding their ability to respond to and deal with different situations efficiently, senior managers will possibly let them determine the way they want to work. However, extremely increased autonomy might be threatening for work engagement because dealing with numerous responsibilities and complex decision-making can exhaust employees (Warr, 1994). Therefore, managers need to be careful not to overdo with the autonomy levels they provide.

Additionally, employees will comprehend these training programs as an investment the firm makes on them, and automatically this will reduce their insecurity and uncertainty for the future. According to Yousaf and Sanders (2012) when employees believe in their strengths and in their "employability", they will become more committed to their employer when they are satisfied with their jobs. Employability refers to the personal perception of the ability to remain the current employment. Employers who strive to increase the

employability of their employees are seen as caring and supportive. Hence, affective commitment is a potential outcome of this perception which has been cultivated by the employer's learning-oriented practices.

Furthermore, self-determination and autonomy should be supported by an adoption of a 'no blame culture' that accepts human errors and experiments and encourages individuals' initiatives (Cunningham et al, 1996). Within this culture-frame, when it comes on facing organizational problems, employees will react with a problem-solving mindset instead of finger pointing and accusing each other. In this supportive culture everyone wins because everyone learns by his or others mistakes.

Thirdly, a slight increase of impact dimension can be achieved by letting employees participate in decision-making. Impact is change-oriented and implies that a person can influence things happening in the organization. Employees need to feel that their opinions are valued in order to sense job safety. Probst (2005) has stated that the direct participation in the decision making process reduces the employees' psychological distress that results from the perceived job insecurity. Moreover, according to Deci's and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination-Theory, individuals satisfy their need for relatedness when they feel included in company's affairs. In doing so, building a climate characterized by trust, transparency, openness and top-down communication is critical to foster these feelings of connectedness, belongingness and acceptance that trigger work engagement and promote employee's affection with the company. Managers need to encourage the direct participation of their employees' in the company's scheduled meetings because this will elevate employees' voice and will cultivate the perception of fairness in the business. Therefore, a sense of inclusion will have a positive impact on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and well being (Gallie et al., 2017)

As for reinforcing work engagement, empowering employees might be a good option, however there are practices associated with the job itself and if they will be implemented they can increase engagement as well. More specifically, Oldham's and Hackman's job characteristic theory (2010) states that job characteristics including task variety, task identity, task

significance, autonomy, knowledge of results and feedback can motivate individuals and increase job involvement. When employees have the right to modify aspects of these characteristics, they develop an attachment to the job because it becomes more compatible to their work attitude. These modifications considered to be a customized, smart way of working which focuses on seeking new available resources to minimize job demands. Job crafting is a concept developed by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2013) and refers to this ability of employees' to redesign autonomously their jobs.

It is considered to be more efficient than other job design concepts such as job enrichment and job enlargement, due to the active role of employees in the designing process. In the past, companies used to focus on designing the optimal jobs with the best working conditions and place their workforce in accordance with the firm's needs. Even though they paid great attention in designing "ideal" jobs, this could not guarantee employees' motivation. Job crafting moves away from the concept of just matching employees to positions related to their skills. Placing individuals to the "optimally" designed jobs implies that when the jobs need to change, people need to change too. There is no flexibility in change or crisis moments. On the contrary, job crafting has flexibility and is a great strategy during organizational change (Petrou et al., 2012). It takes advantage of the individual's personality that adds value to the organizational performance. Individuals are encouraged to craft their jobs and change work environment proactively, in their own-designed manner, in order to align their strengths and needs with the job's objectives. Employees act as agents that always ensure a person-job fit. This generates a strong intrinsic motivation which is the reason why job crafting has a great impact on work engagement.

Alternatively, based on the Job Demands Resources model that predicts engagement (Demerouti et al., 2001), a potential decrease of demands (e.g. work overload, task complexity, role conflict, interpersonal conflicts etc) will act positively on engagement. However, in this study we did not use that model to measure engagement; we focused only in the aspect of job resources which are the empowering conditions that positively affect work engagement. Nevertheless, we had to mention that companies need

to take into account the impact of demands when designing a job that needs to be challenging with realistic goals, expectations and time frames.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are definitely and in this study specific limitations that need to be taken into account. To begin with, it is hard to measure concepts such as commitment or engagement because it requires the assessment of complex and multiple feelings. There are numerous factors that are related to personal goals, values, personality traits that influence jointly one's perception of how engaged or committed he is at his job / employer respectively.

One more issue that arises is associated with self-reported instruments (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Employees' perceptions were the only source of data. Employees who feel disengaged and are not interested in the firm's affairs might have completed the survey giving congruent responses. On the contrary, engaged employees might have start their own value scale at a higher level. Therefore, response bias might have influenced the reliability of responses. Alternatively, it would be preferable to combine self-reported measurement with other objective measures such as managers' ratings in order to replicate the results.

Furthermore, the design of the study was cross-sectional and the analysis of the data relied on a specific point in time. There is a need for a longitudinal study which will pin out the cause-and-effect relationship between variables over the time. Surveys need be conducted in multiple waves with time lags between the measurement points. In that way we can generalize the results on the long run.

Moreover, our model relied only on the subjective, perceived experiences of empowerment and that might at some point seem incomplete. Contextual work settings (practices / policies) need to be investigated and linked with psychological empowerment in order to spot causality between the managerial

interventions and individual's reactions. Therefore, we recommend a future research to extend the current model by adding HR practices as well. By incorporating structural empowerment (e.g. rewards, access to information, social support, feedback, etc) as a latent variable, we will have an advanced understanding of which HR practices explain better the individual's sensed psychological empowerment. We will spot the practices that have a real impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Given that, the company can modify a strategic empowerment scheme according to employees' needs and exclude practices that will have not really added value.

Finally, in this study we examined the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship of psychological empowerment and organizational affective commitment. It will be especially interesting for a future research to identify additional mediators or moderators in order to understand further the causal path and the potential factors that operate in this relationship. For example, job satisfaction, could be a mediator since it has been a predictor of affective commitment and an outcome of empowerment. Moreover, we should examine if the company's policies support employees' work-life balance. Demonstrating sensitivity regarding employees' personal life and needs could be a critical moderator in the relationship of empowerment and organizational affective commitment. Generally speaking, the provision of flexible work arrangements (e.g. flexible hours, compressed work week, career paths, telecommuting, parental leave, on-site childcare facilities) generates a positive bonding with the company. On the contrary, the lack of organizational concern in employees' non-work domains can make employees believe that they run aimlessly on the proverbial treadmill which is threatening for commitment. Companies that provide means by which employees can manage work and non work domains will be seen as supportive and caring. So, the perceived organizational support in areas of work-life balance needs to be investigated closely in accordance with empowerment-focused, organizational practices.

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9. APPENDIX

Dimension	Item	Loading
Meaning	The work I do is important to me	0.815
	My job activities are personally meaningful to me	0.863
	The work I do is meaningful to me	0.917
Competence	I'm confident about my ability to do my job	0.803
	I have mastered the skills necessary for my job	0.826
	I am self assured about my capabilities to perform my job activities	0.845
Impact	My impact on what happens in my department is large	0,704
	I have great deal of control over what happens in my department	0,746
	I have significant influence over what happens in my department	0.785
Self determination	I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job	0.538
	I can decide on my own how to do my job	0.569
	I have considerable opportunity for freedom in how to do my job	0.612
Dedication	I am proud on the work that I do	0.813
	My job inspires me	0.841
	I find the work that I do full of meaning & purpose	0.867

Dimension	Item	Loading
Vigor	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	0.842
	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous	0.801
	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	0.784
Absorption	Time flies when I'm working	0.638
	I am immersed in my work	0,699
	I feel happy when I am working intensely	0.734
Affective Commitment	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.	0.848
	This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	0.803
	I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization ®	0.601
	I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.	0.794
	I do not feel like part of the family at my organization ®	0.750
	I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization ®	0.656
	I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.	0.744
	I think that I could easily become as attracted to another organization as I am to this one.	0.809

Σας ευχαριστώ θερμά για τις προσφορές σας στο τμήμα
και την γνώση που μας χαρίσατε.

Προσωπικά, θεωρώ πολύτιμη την εμπειρία που αποκόμισα
με το μεταπτυχιακό αυτό. Διευρύνθηκαν οι γνώσεις μου, έμαθα
να δουλεύω σε διαφορετικά projects και ομάδες. Γεγονός που
με προετοίμασε στη διεκδικήση μίας θέση πρακτικής άσκησης Erasmus
στην Πολωνία πάνω στο αντικείμενο των σπουδών μου.
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Με εκτίμηση.

Κατερίνα Μπουραντά