

# **The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement in the Relationship between Affective Commitment to Change and Employee Performance in Selected Public Hospitals in Nigeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Public hospitals in Nigeria have faced considerable challenges, particularly when compared to healthcare institutions in other countries. The performance of public hospital employees in Nigeria has been a subject of scrutiny, with stakeholders consistently criticising the nation's healthcare system for its poor performance across various indicators. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the effect of affective commitment to change on employee performance through employee engagement as a mediating variable in selected hospitals in Abuja, Nigeria. This study was conducted on 207 employees as the sample size. The data were gathered by survey method with questionnaire instruments and further analysed using Partial Least Square (PLS) techniques. The results of this study showed that there is a significant positive effect of affective commitment to change on employee performance. In addition, this study found that affective commitment to change has an indirect effect on employee performance, through employee engagement. This study recommends that healthcare management should acquire and develop great talent that will be engaged as one of the business strategies for managing change for employee performance.*

**Keywords:** affective commitment to change, employee engagement, employee performance

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Public hospitals in Nigeria have faced considerable challenges, particularly when compared to healthcare institutions in other countries. The performance of employees in

public hospital in Nigeria has been a subject of scrutiny, with stakeholders consistently criticising the nation's healthcare system for its poor performance across various indicators (Abubakar & Kathuria, 2020). Health facilities including personnel are inadequate in the country especially in the rural areas. While various reforms have been put forward by the Nigeria government to address the issues in the healthcare system, they are yet to be implemented at the state and local government areas. As part of the struggle to advance healthcare, the Nigeria senate in 2008 launched a bill for an act to provide a framework for the regulation, development and management of national health services and set standards for rendering health services in the federation and other matters connected with it. In spite of all these efforts, much is still needed to be done in the health system, particularly as it relates to retention of personnel who are going to other climes like Europe, America etc. where provision of performance based incentives such as knowledge based/research culture, medical intelligence and surveillance systems to aid their performance are obtained.

The performance of medical staff in Nigerian public health institutions significantly impacts the quality and timeliness of patient care, making it vital to understand the factors influencing their performance (Wicaksana & Mangundjaya, 2021). Two critical human resource factors, commitment to change (Kim, Im & Shin, 2021) and employee engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2017) could be affected by work environment. Brain drain, a prevalent issue in Nigeria's public healthcare system, hinders its optimal operation. In this regard, an appropriate work environment could greatly improve the situation by increasing employees' affective commitment to change and employee engagement in the public healthcare system (Akinwale & George, 2020).

Affective commitment to change, defined as the desire to support change due to a belief in its inherent benefits, plays a central role in employee support for change initiatives (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). This study focuses on affective commitment to change as it has shown the strongest positive link with desired work behaviours (Fryer, Tucker & Singer, 2018). While some previous research has explored the relationship between commitment, employee engagement, and employee performance, limited attention has been given to affective commitment to change, employee engagement, and their combined influence on performance. Even though there are empirical studies on the relationship between commitment, employee engagement and employee performance, previous studies have mainly adopted affective commitment to change (See, Raji et al., 2021). There are scarce studies on the relationship between affective commitment to change, employee engagement and employee performance, notwithstanding, that some previous studies such as Wicaksana and Mangundjaya (2021) have confirmed that change leadership has a significant and positive impact on affective commitment to change through employee engagement.

The capacity of services and the people who run them to respond to change initiatives that address the increasing requirements of service users and the environment of healthcare provision is fundamental to high-performing health systems (Figuerola et al.,

2019). Recent research from the healthcare industry shows that preparedness for change is driven by affective commitment to change (Harrison et al., 2022). Additionally, in accordance with momentum theory, the perception of good improvements is likely to inspire more vigor or excitement for the change project (Ford et al., 2021). This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance in selected hospitals in Abuja, Nigeria.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Affective commitment to Change and Employee Performance**

The concept of organisational commitment by Meyer and Allen (1997) was an adaptation of the principle of organisational commitment at a specific situation of the organisation, namely during the organisational change. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) developed the concept of commitment to change from this idea. According to a model of organisational commitment created by Allen and Meyer (1990), commitment is made up of three different elements: affective, normative, and continuous. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002, p. 475) define affective commitment to change as emotionally driven commitment toward change ‘based on a belief in its inherent benefits’. Given that affective commitment to change is employees’ voluntary desire to advocate the organisational change, it is more likely to reinforce employees’ positive evaluation of their work by viewing the changes as a process of improving both the behavioural and outcome aspects of their job performance. Accordingly, employee performance is the result obtained from the function of work performed. It refers to the behaviour and attitudes that employee demonstrate in carrying out organisation’s work assigned to them. In this regard, healthcare professionals are expected to be humane, respectful, reliable, consistent, and thorough in carrying out their responsibilities (Ehioghae *et al.*, 2020).

Empirical evidence has shown that some studies such as Arina and Yulianti (2018) have found that affective commitment to change has no significant effect on performance; most studies have reported that the connection between affective commitment to change and desirable employee job outcomes is positive. For instance, Kim *et al* (2021) examined the effect of affective commitment to change on quality of work life among full-service restaurant employees in the United States and found that affective commitment to change has a significant and positive effect on employees’ quality of work life. Similarly, Chen et al (2012), Neves et al (2018), Nugraheni et al (2019) and Tsai and Harrison (2019) found that affective commitment to change has a positive effect on behavioural support for change. In addition, Pellegrini *et al* (2018) found that affective commitment to change for sustainability has a positive effect in-role and extra-role sustainable behaviour. These outcomes largely underpin the view of this study that the effect affective commitment to change has on employee performance would be positive. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Affective commitment to change has a significant effect on employee performance at the selected public hospitals in Abuja.

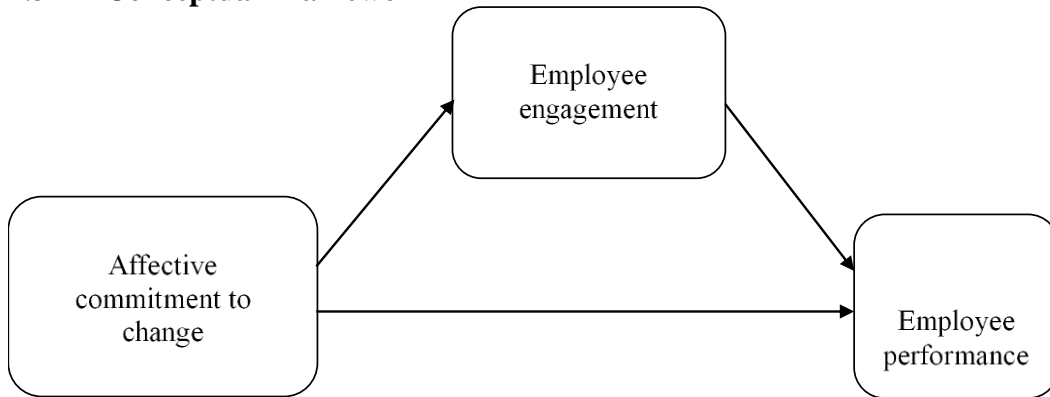
## **2.2 Mediating effect of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, p. 74). Employees that are engaged are aware of and interested in their workplace. They will exert a great deal of effort to complete the tasks associated with the transformation programme. Greater awareness of the aim of change proposals and the potential benefits suggests that employee involvement in decision-making about change processes has been connected with people having more positive feelings toward change proposals (Harrison *et al.*, 2022b).

Debates have been on-going on whether employee engagement is an antecedent or consequence of commitment of which less studies have examined commitment as a predictor of engagement (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Among these few studies, Raji *et al* (2021) found that work engagement mediated the relationship between affective commitment and nurses’ job performance. With a random sample of 455 respondents selected among the non-managerial employees of Nigerian Universal Basic Education System Administration, the study also reported that work engagement mediated the relationship between affective commitment and employee competency. Prayitno *et al* (2022) also used a sample of 87 respondents to establish that work engagement partially mediated the positive effect of affective commitment on organisational citizenship behaviour. Moreover, Cesário and Chambel (2017) have revealed that work engagement displays a strong relationship with affective commitment to the organisation. This suggests that affective commitment to change could be a means of achieving both employee engagement and employee performance. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance at the selected hospitals in Abuja.

## 2.3 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Research model

## 3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws its theoretical foundation from Social Exchange Theory (SET), a framework widely recognised for its relevance in understanding employee behaviour, including affective commitment to change and employee engagement. According to SET, employees become committed and engaged, or conversely, uncommitted and disengaged, as a result of exchanges involving emotional, economic, social, and material resources (Kahn, 1990). In the context of healthcare institutions in Nigeria, the provision of competitive salaries and additional fringe benefits can be seen as a form of exchange. When healthcare organisations offer such rewards, it can generate affective commitment to organisational change among employees. This sense of commitment, in turn, can lead to increased employee engagement and a heightened sense of duty to perform effectively in order to contribute to the achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

## 4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Study Design

The study applies quantitative cross-sectional research approach, which provides the opportunity for testing hypothesis in order to answer the research questions and establish causal relationships among variables. Hence, this method is used to examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance in selected hospitals in Abuja, Nigeria.

### 4.2 Population and Sample Size

Medical personnel in hospitals were selected for this study. These personnel include doctors, nurses and laboratory technicians. These personnel were particularly important as they represent the frontline personnel during the COVID19 pandemic. Hospitals were chosen as the survey area as there has been a scarcity of empirical studies in relation to affective commitment to change, employee engagement and employee performance.

Through simple random sampling, 280 medical personnel were collected from a population of 350 using Taro Yamane formula. Online questionnaire for data collection was used. This method was necessary because medical personnel have a busy schedule, hence google form online questionnaire made it possible to collect timely data. 227 responses were collected out of which 207 were used for further analysis, the remaining copies of questionnaire were rejected for outlier problems.

#### 4.3 Measurement and Operationalisation of Study Variables

The Herscovitch and Meyer's (2002) scales were used to develop the items for affective commitment to change. The Khoreva and VanZalk's items that were created and validated as measures of employee engagement were also used (2016). The Rodwell, Kienzle, and Shadur's scale for measuring employee performance was also used (1998).

#### 4.4 Method of Data Analysis

For the empirical evaluation of the proposed model, clever PLS 3.0 software was used in this study, which used the Partial Least Square, Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method. Convergence validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability were also determined using PLS-SEM.

### 5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 5.1 Demographic Profile

**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	122	27.73
Female	85	19.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Graduate	87	19.77
Postgraduate	104	23.64
Others	16	3.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Work Place</b>		
Garki General Hospital, Abuja	28	6.36
Kelina Hospital, Abuja	4	0.91
Zanklin Medical Center, Abuja	4	0.91
Asokoro General Hospital Abuja	13	2.95
Federal Staff Clinic Abuja	2	0.45

Wuse General Hospital Abuja	15	3.41
Ikorodu General Hospital Lagos	19	4.32
Lagos University teaching Hospital	71	16.14
Lagos state University Teaching Hospital	51	11.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Staff Category</b>		
Clinical staff	161	36.59
Non-Clinical staff	46	10.45
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>100</b>

The respondents in this study consisted of 207 individuals. As shown in Table 1, in terms of gender distribution, approximately 27.73% were male, while 19.32% were female. Regarding educational qualifications, the majority held postgraduate degrees, accounting for 23.64% of the respondents. Graduates comprised 19.77% of the sample, and a smaller percentage, 3.64%, had other educational qualifications.

When considering the workplace of the respondents, various healthcare institutions were represented. The highest number of respondents, 16.14%, worked at Lagos University Teaching Hospital, followed by 11.59% at Lagos State University Teaching Hospital. Other healthcare facilities had varying percentages of respondents, with Garki General Hospital in Abuja having 6.36%, and Kelina Hospital and Zanklin Medical Center in Abuja each having 0.91%. Other hospitals, such as Asokoro General Hospital, Federal Staff Clinic, Wuse General Hospital in Abuja, Ikorodu General Hospital in Lagos, and others, also had varying proportions of respondents.

In terms of staff category, the majority, 36.59%, were clinical staff, while 10.45% were non-clinical staff. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of the composition of the study's respondent sample, reflecting their gender, educational qualifications, workplace distribution, and staff categories within selected healthcare institutions in Nigeria.

## 5.2 Measurement Model

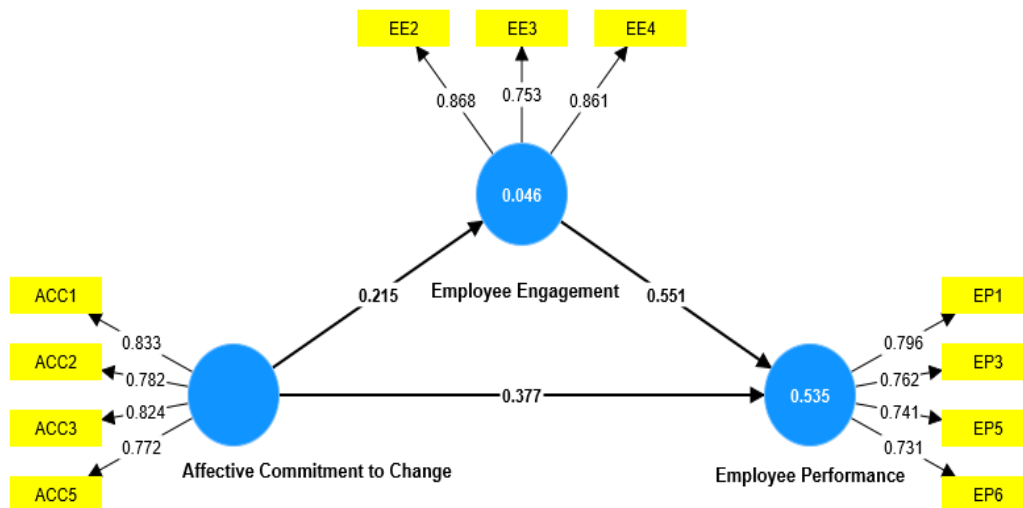
The measurement model entails that each item measuring the variables have an acceptable level of validity and reliability before proceeding for the test of relationships in the structural model. This study first evaluated the individual items reliability by assessing the outer loading of each construct in line with the PLS-SEM procedure (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt., 2014). The threshold according to Hair Jr, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011) is to retain the items having values 0.70 or above, otherwise delete the items with less than 0.70 values. Consequently, based on this suggested threshold, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, 4 indicators (ie. EE1, EP2, EP4 and ACC4) were deleted due to their low outer loading. Therefore, the results of individual items reliability testing show that four (4) indicators of affective commitment to change and employee performance and three (3)

indicators of employee engagement produced an outer loading that is greater than 0.7. Thus, these eleven (11) indicators are declared valid for more analysis.

**Table 2. Model Assessment**

Variables	Items	Outer VIF Values	Outer Loadings	Construct reliability and validity		
				CR	A	AVE
Affective commitment to change		1.818				
	ACC1		0.833	0.816	0.879	0.645
	ACC2	1.607	0.782			
	ACC3	1.762	0.824			
	ACC5	1.608	0.772			
Employee Engagement	EE2	1.848	0.868	0.77	0.868	0.687
	EE3	1.537	0.753			
	EE4	1.571	0.861			
Employee Performance	EP1	1.536	0.796	0.753	0.843	0.574
	EP3	1.509	0.762			
	EP5	1.378	0.741			
	EP6	1.403	0.731			

**Note:** CR = Composite Reliability,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach Alpha, AVE = Average Variance Extracted.



**Figure 1: Modified Measurement Model**

The indicators of the three reflective constructs in Table 2 and Figure 1 revealed an internally consistent reliability, with composite reliability value above 0.70 for each



construct ranged from 0.753 to 0.816. In addition, the three constructs of affective commitment to change ( $\alpha = 0.879$ ), employee engagement ( $\alpha = 0.868$ ) and employee performance ( $\alpha = 0.843$ ) have a Cronbach alpha greater than 0.70; therefore, it can be concluded that the three variables have acceptable reliability. Furthermore, to examine convergent validity, AVE test was conducted, which the results were higher than 0.5. Therefore, all the three constructs, namely; affective commitment to change ( $\alpha = 0.879$ ), employee engagement ( $\alpha = 0.868$ ) and employee performance ( $\alpha = 0.843$ ) have a high level of convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2018). Lastly, issue of multicollinearity across the variables were examined using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and the results in Table 2 shows a value below the threshold value of 10 (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2013), with the largest VIF = 1.751. This implies that issue of multicollinearity is not a problem for this analysis.

### 5.3 Structural Model

#### Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination in Table 3 and Figure 2 presents the structural model's ability to approximate the extend of the endogenous component (employee performance and employee engagement) ( $R^2$ ), which can be determined from the independent variable (employee engagement and employee performance) for this study.

**Table 3: Coefficient of Determination (R Square)**

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Engagement	0.046	0.037
Employee Performance	0.535	0.526

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, the coefficient of determination; R Square and its associated R Square Adjusted is 0.046 and 0.037 respectively for employee engagement, and 0.535 and 0.526 respectively for employee performance. The model shows that affective commitment to change explains 4.6% of the variation in employee engagement and explains 53.5% of the variation in employee performance.

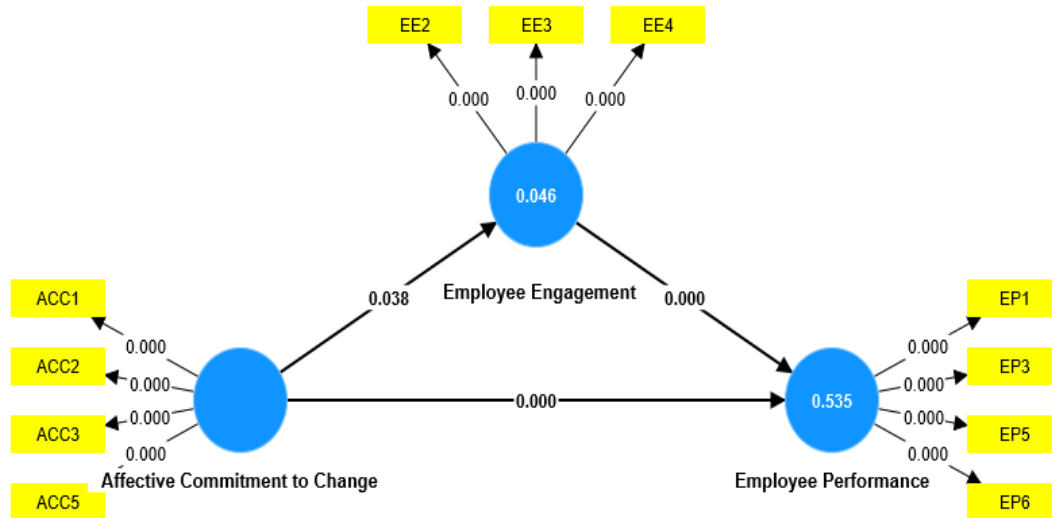
#### 5.4 Direct Effects Bootstrapping Result

Table 4 presents the structural paths coefficient from the independent variable (affective commitment to change) to the dependent variable (employee performance). H1 proposes that affective commitment to change has a significant effect on employee performance at the selected hospitals in Abuja. This hypothesis is supported by the result of this study as shown in Table 4 that affective commitment to change ( $\beta = 0.218$ ,  $p < 0.003$ ) was significantly and positively related to employee performance.

**Table 4: Direct Effect Bootstrapping Result**

Hypotheses	Construct	Direct effect	t-value	p-value
H1	ACC -> EP	0.377	5.370	0.000

**Note:** ACC= Affective commitment to change, EP = Employee performance



**Figure 2:** Structural Model

H2 proposed that employee engagement would significantly mediate the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance in the selected hospitals in Abuja. The results in Table 5 and Figure 2 indicates that affective commitment to change was significantly related to affective commitment to change when employee engagement was included in the model as a mediating variable ( $\beta = 0.119$ ,  $t = 2.154$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 5: Indirect Effect of ACC on EP Through EE**

Hypotheses	Construct	Indirect effect	t-value	p-value
H2	ACC -> EE -> EP	0.119	2.154	0.031

**Note:** ACC= Affective commitment to change, EP = Employee performance, EP = Employee performance

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of affective commitment to change and employee engagement on employee performance. First, this study examined the direct effect of affective commitment to change on employee performance whereby, it was revealed that affective commitment to change has a significant and positive effect on employee performance. This implies that emotional attachment to an organisation serves as a resource for effective performance during organisational change. The finding is in agreement with the study of Pellegrini *et al* (2018) who found that the effect affective commitment to change has on employee performance was significant and positive. However, the finding is not in alignment with Arina and Yulianti (2018) who reported that affective commitment to change has no significant effect on sales performance.

The finding that affective commitment to change has a significant and positive effect on employee performance aligns well with the principles of SET. SET posits that the employment relationship is essentially an exchange between employees and their employers, where both parties engage in a reciprocal give-and-take. In the context of this study, when employees develop affective commitment to change within their organisation, they are emotionally invested and motivated to contribute positively. This commitment represents the employees' willingness to reciprocate the support and resources provided by the organisation, which can include efforts made toward implementing change initiatives. In return, the organisation benefits from employees' increased performance and dedication to their roles.

This positive relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance supports the idea of a social exchange where employees, feeling a sense of obligation, put in extra effort to fulfill their roles effectively. In essence, SET underscores the importance of trust and reciprocity in the employment relationship, and the finding reinforces that employees who feel committed to organisational change are more likely to engage in favourable work behaviours, ultimately enhancing their performance.

This study also examined the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance whereby, it revealed a significant mediating effect of employee engagement from the analysis. Using the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the theoretical foundation of this study, there is a theoretical implication from the results of this study. The mediating effect of employee engagement, which was established from the findings of this study, highlights that involvement of employees in the decision-making system for change has been associated to people experiencing more positive feelings toward change initiatives. These emotional responses, in turn, are related to an increased probability that employees will apply the behavioural changes necessary for changes to be implemented and maintained (Harrison *et al.*, 2022b). Therefore, this study advances the organisational change literature by addressing the mechanism mediating the affective commitment to change- employee performance relationship. Given that affective commitment to change is employees' voluntary desire to advocate the organisational change, it is more likely to reinforce employees' positive evaluation of their work outcome. Consequently, this study supports the findings of Raji *et al* (2021) who found that work engagement mediated the relationship between affective commitment and nurses' job performance. Similarly, this study also supports the study of Prayitno *et al* (2022) also found that work engagement partially mediated the positive effect of affective commitment on organisational citizenship behaviour.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study seeks to investigate the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance in selected hospitals in Abuja. Based on the empirical findings, the study concluded that there is a significant positive effect of affective commitment to change on employee

performance. In addition, the study concluded that affective commitment to change has an indirect effect on employee performance, through employee engagement.

Theoretically, empirical studies have examined the relationship between affective commitment and employee work behavioural outcomes. However, studies on the mediating effect of employee engagement on affective commitment to change- employee performance relationship is scarce. In terms of managerial implications, the healthcare industry is characterised by shifts and unprecedented change. With the knowledge from this study, healthcare management should adopt promoting employee engagement as one of the business strategies for managing change. Not only does engagement have the potential to significantly affect employee retention, productivity and loyalty, it is also a key link to customer satisfaction, company reputation and overall stakeholder value. High levels of engagement promote retention of talent, foster customer loyalty and improve employee performance.

This research had several constraints. The measurement tool is a questionnaire and interpretation of the results is limited to this survey tool. Therefore, the content of this research is limited to the understanding of clinical staff from the items in the questionnaire. Future research may consider other sectors and the public at large using appropriate sampling techniques that may provide a large sample. This study used employee engagement as a mediating variable in the relationship between affective commitment to change and employee performance. Further research should be done to investigate the effect of other factors that serve as intervening variables which may not have been conceptualised in this study.

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