

Workplace social programmes and Employee commitment: a literary reflection

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Abstract: This paper examined the relationship between workplace social programmes and employee commitment. The objective of the study was to examine how dimensions of workplace social programmes such as seasonal parties, event tours, and award ceremonies influence normative, affective, and continuance commitment. The method used for the study was a survey of literature. The following findings were made: well-organized seasonal parties enhance normative commitment; event tours boost and sustain affective commitment, award ceremonies also boost continuance commitment. The study concluded that regular and well-executed workplace social programmes boost and sustain employees' commitment. Consequently, the study recommends that organizations should hold well-planned award ceremonies to appreciate and boost the commitment staff, regular group tours and retreat to provide platform for interpersonal interaction among staff, and annual end-of-year parties garnished with picnics and other wholesome fun activities to enable employees ease up their stress and expand their social networks. These will lead to organizational members' bonding with the organization; and thus, enhance employee commitment.

Keywords: Affective commitment, Award ceremonies, Continuance commitment, Employee commitment, Event tours, Normative commitment, Seasonal parties, Workplace social programmes.

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I. Introduction

Man lives and works in an environment. The work environment encapsulates all physical, technical, scientific, psychological and social forces which the worker interacts with in the process of working and which are capable of influencing him one way or the other (Otamiri and Odu, 2017) [1]. While employers pay attention to the physical and technical elements of the workplace employees interact with, one of the most powerful but often ignored elements employees contend with are of the social working environment. Social working environment is often used to refer to the interpersonal relationships, social clusters, and informal attitudes a worker interacts with within an organization (Ruchi and Surrinder, 2014[2]; Gbonee, 2017[3]). However, the researchers conceptualize such working environment as informal activities organized, sponsored and/or executed under the auspices of an organization capable of influencing the behavior of employee. Variables of social working environment in this concept include social support activities, social infrastructure, and social programmes.

In the current competitive talent market, employers/managers take advantage of social programmes to give a sense of belonging, fun and social security for their employees. Some of the social programmes instituted by organizations today include end of year parties, organization-sponsored parties, send-forth parties, picnic, award ceremonies etc. The inception and entrenchment of social programmes in organizational culture today is predicated on the man's needs for belongingness. End of year parties, award ceremonies (recognition and celebration of members of staff for their landmark inputs, achievements and contributions to the organization) provide platforms for fun, relaxation, enriching interpersonal relationships, and making employees feel appreciated. The fun, excitement, ecstasy, and opportunity for relating one on one with colleagues from various departments of the organization is capable of increasing job satisfaction and commitment (Gbonee, 2017)[3]. Admittedly, it takes a happy employee to be committed. The philosophy of social programmes is to provide platform for socialization, relaxation, togetherness and bonding; with implications for employee commitment. Employee commitment basically refers to the bond or attachment an employee has with the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991)[4] conceptualized three dimensions or measures of employee commitment, viz: affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment.

With globalization, and the increasing quest for fun and socialization among employees in the 21st century, organizations may consider instituting timely social programmes in the workplace to, among other things, enhance employee commitment. However, many service firms are more interested in occupying their

staff with more targets with little or no provision for corporate social events. All work without play and social recognition accounts for boredom, work-life imbalance, absenteeism and increase in employees' intention to leave (Ameh, 2013) [5]. Google search has also shown that the relationship between social programmes and employee commitment is understudied. The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between workplace social programmes and employee commitment. The objectives of the study were to examine how:

- a) seasonal parties influence employee commitment.
- b) event tours affect employee commitment.
- c) award ceremonies influence employee commitment.

II. Concepts And Dimensions Of Workplace Social Programmes

Workplace social programmes refer to workplace celebration activities organized by management or colleagues to mark special events. Innovative organizational managers enshrine celebration activities in their corporate culture. Workplace celebrations range from monthly birthday parties to rewards for company accomplishments (Johansson, 2017)[6]. The benefits of the celebrations go beyond the enjoyment of the party itself. Employees gain intangible rewards from the group events, whether they take place during work or after hours (Frost, 2017)[7]. Understanding the benefits of company celebrations justifies the time and money spent on workplace social events. This work focuses on workplace social programmes such as award ceremonies, event tours and seasonal parties.

1.1 Seasonal parties

The term seasonal parties as used in this work encompass celebrations held periodically under the auspices or support of an organization. The purpose could be to mark the end of year, celebrate staff children and related personal achievements, or celebrate persons leaving the organization; and they include end of year party, children party, and send-forth party. At the end of every fiscal year, corporate organizations usually organize celebration parties to give members the opportunity to interact informally marking the completion of the regular routine for the year (Ameh, 2014)[8]. Whether the cost of hosting a year-end party is justified is cause for much debate in corporate circles. Many companies have chosen to cut back on year-end functions yet they remain a great way to strengthen ties with existing employees, emphasize and showcase company culture and celebrate the accomplishments of teams (Over the Moon Events, 2017)[9]. Especially in challenging economic times, workers deserve to be rewarded for reaching their company's and department's goals, working together and with vendors and other partners. Playing together offers staff a great way to highlight personalities and share a sense of humour. Stopping business for a moment in order to host an end-of-year party and thank the workforce is a simple but important gesture that will go a long way to visibly communicate in a fun and entertaining way: "THANK YOU! WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU" (Marie, 2017)[10].

Marie (2017)[10] identified three reasons why organizations should hold end-of-year functions. Firstly, the relaxed setting such functions provide helps staff to bond in a casual environment away from work. Employees who normally do not get to interact much with others have the opportunity to socialize and get to know their co-workers; and they also strengthen relationships between staff and management. Secondly, such functions improve morale among staff and associates. This is because it makes employees, colleagues, service suppliers and clients feel like an important part of the company's success and shared vision when they can partake in the celebrations; and they also help lift the mood and spirit of the office considerably. Thirdly, they offer a great indication of how the company appreciates the work of its employees; and creating the ideal platforms for staff and associates to network, share ideas, give feedback and voice their appreciation for each other's hard work.

Another form of seasonal parties is children party. Children's party is a special social event marking the birthday, graduation ceremony, or holiday celebration in honour of a child or children. Children have a special place in their parents' heart. Hence, parents who work in different organizations and places annually or periodically plan, organize and host parties for their children. Socially-oriented organizational managers take advantage of their staff's children party. By delegating organizational members to represent the organization during employees' children parties, managers provide a sense of belonging for their staff (Clement, 2010)[11]. In harmonious and cooperative work environments, workers attend and grace the birthday party and naming ceremonies of their colleagues' children. Children parties provide avenues for colleagues to relate and interact informally which increases bonding (Ameh, 2014)[8]. Married and unmarried workers get to meet and establish cordial relationship with families of their colleagues. Man as a social animal thrives in meaningful social networks. Children parties organized, sponsored or attended by members of an organization is a fertile ground for meaningful interpersonal relationships and bonding. Lafia (2011)[12] noted that the average Nigerian worker is facilitated and feels appreciated if his employer or colleagues attend their personal celebrations such as children birthday parties, naming ceremonies, etc.

Send-forth party is another variety of seasonal parties. The term send-forth party (formerly known as send-off) is a friendly farewell party usually organized and held in honour of person(s) graduating from an institution or a staff leaving a department, station or unit for another place (Ameh, 2014)[8]. A farewell party should be seen as an opportunity to reminisce about fond memories and appreciating the contributions of a retiring staff or colleague leaving the organization (Johannson, 2017)[6]. It sometimes includes the presentation of slide show with photos and words of the person being celebrated with music in the background. Employees can leave organizations for different reasons, but it is socially rewarding for the manager to organize a befitting farewell party for those leaving the organization. It sends a signal to the existing staff on how much their employer values them.

1.2 Award ceremonies

For the purpose of this work, award ceremonies refer to a formal celebration organized and executed under the auspices of any organization in honour of the unique accomplishments of a member of the organization. At such historical events, employees are recognized and given awards, medals, etc. for their exceptional accomplishment and contributions to the organization. The discussion will dwell principally on recognition and corporate anniversaries. Some organizations create room for recognition within their daily operations. According to Larson (2012)[13], in addition to annual events such as employee dinners or monthly events such as naming an employee of the month, more frequent recognition is needed to motivate performing employees. A service award is an opportunity for an organization to recognize an employee for his or her longevity, tenure, and significant contribution to the organization. A service award is a way to acknowledge solid performers who might not be earning the top bonus, or a spot award, or recognition for organizational accomplishment (Gbonee, 2017)[3]. For top performers, the service award is just one more way to say “thank you” for their continued astonishing performance.

It is important to honour esteem and experienced employees for their knowledge and continuing contribution (Heathfield, 2017)[14]. The service award ceremony is an opportunity for such honour as company members reminisce about the organization’s history and founding. Recognition can take various forms such as in contests, reward or point programs, or advancement opportunities (Dykstra, 1999[15]; Nelson 1994[16]). In a formal approach to recognizing employees, it is important to create a ritual, a way for everyone to become involved and develop an appreciation for that particular reward program (Dykstra and Gustafson, 1999)[17]. When formal recognition programmes exist, supervisors and managers have important roles in informing employees about the programmes, encouraging participation, and deciding if the formal recognition program will be competitive or noncompetitive. Competitive recognition events may include rewarding the employee with the fewest documentation errors or the best attendance record. Noncompetitive formal recognition events include giving an award for average tenure at the organization, providing recognition for completing orientation or probation, and so forth. Recognition may also be provided through less formal means such as an organization’s annual banquet, by the authorization of additional time off (Nelson, 1994)[16]. Organizations do to take advantage of the positive employee feelings that are generated with a service award. By thanking staff and assuring them that their effort is appreciated, the human resource manager is investing, not only in staff, but also in the future of the entire organization (Larson, 2012)[13].

Sometimes awards and recognitions are offered during achievement and corporate anniversaries. Corporate anniversary is a celebration of a firm's continued existence after a particular number of years (Ameh, 2014)[8]. Such celebrations mark corporate achievements, celebrate organizational image and boost employee morale and socialization (Kevin, 2011)[18]. Corporate anniversaries are platforms for celebrating past accomplishments and consolidating relationships with employee and other stakeholders. Corporate organizations as legal entities mark milestone achievement on quarterly or annual basis just as individuals mark milestone achievements. Corporate anniversaries are wonderful opportunities for an organization to communicate with stakeholders: clients, employees, creditors, suppliers, and beyond and a perfect time to share their story (Paul, 2014)[19]. It is a chance to talk about how a business started in the first place, the current position of the organization, and an opportunity to thank employees and clients who have helped you reach this milestone. Sheree (2017)[20] asserted that promoting achievement anniversary could, among other things, help with employee morale (recognizing their hard work shows they mean more to you than just filling seats).

Celebrating anniversaries and achievements shows the staff that management appreciates them as much now, as it did when they started, and the successes of the business is a shared success amongst everyone in the company. Achievement anniversaries are not only an ideal time to celebrate, but also to reminisce and reflect. They are perfect for remembering the fun times, sharing some laughs, and reflecting upon not just the achieved goals, but also the ones that failed because they demonstrate an ability to learn from mistakes and adapt. This increases bonding in the workplace. Paul (2014)[19] suggested the ways of celebrating corporate anniversaries in the following ten clusters: (i) Content, (ii) Legacy Piece, (iii) Webpage, (iv) Video, (v) Public Relations, (vi) Sponsorship, (vii) Donation, (viii) Logo, (ix) Sale or Promotion, and (x) Celebration. The tenth

cluster of ways of celebrating anniversaries is of immediate importance to this study. Here Paul (2014)[19] opined that the company should not only host a party for its clients, but should also order a cake to share with its employees; and concluded that organizations should create meaningful anniversary traditions and then make a point of repeating them every year (or at a set interval).

1.3 Event tours

Event tours here is used by the researchers to refer to travelling programmes planned, organized and sponsored by corporate organizations for their workers in groups. In simple terms, group tour refers to a number of people travelling together. Organizations today incorporate vacation group tours to give the workforce the opportunity to meet and travel together outside the tight work schedule. The process of planning, organizing and embarking on corporate tours can be demanding but it brings together workers from different departments, units and geographical locations (Bruce, 2012)[21]. Irrespective of the distance and transportation mode, group tour is a meaningful social adventure that provides a platform where individuals, who have never met in the corporate environment, sit together and share experiences. Bruce (2012)[21] also identified group tour as a major factor influencing team cohesiveness. He maintained that the best way to build stronger connections between team members is to get them out of the everyday office environment on group tour.

When employees meet together outside of the day-to-day routines and predictable patterns of the workplace setting, they form stronger bonds and develop a better understanding of each other's strengths and abilities. As part of spicing up the social experiences in the corporate life some employers even offer group paid vacations as a perk of the job, much like a bonus program; instead of handing out cash bonuses each year, they send employees on a paid vacation to a destination of their choice (Alton, 2016)[22]. Group tours are time off from jobs and co-travelers have the opportunity of building new relationships, consolidating on existing interpersonal relations and tightening the bond amongst them.

A workplace social programme related to event tours is company retreats. Company retreat simply refers to a time intentionally set aside from work with staff members under the auspices of management to re-energize, re-bond workers without outside intrusions (Repario, 2016)[23]. Depending on the needs and nature of the company, management can plan for a retreat to a mountainous area, resort centre in a remote part of the country or outside the country, etc. to enable the members spend quality time together. Corporate retreats are valuable opportunities for companies to connect on new levels with their team and improve communication and camaraderie. The goal is to promote a more positive culture and bring your employees together to have some fun while discussing on the possible ways forward for the organization.

A new project launch or a change in company direction is not accomplished in a bubble. Corporate retreats allow for brainstorming as a group, as well as important one on one time in a relaxed atmosphere outside of the office. It also promotes friendly relationships and bond amongst colleagues (Fire, 2015)[24]. Company retreats are great ways to discover about a team. Maybe a leader is also an incredible chef or a developer or actually an accomplished musician. Getting away from the daily grind gives team members the chance to unwind and discover more about one another. Colleagues see every day but spending a couple of days away with them, talking, eating and sharing a couch (or a pillow) brings them so much closer (Kelsey, 2014)[25]. It creates that special feeling similar to gathering with an extended family on thanksgiving. A team that acts like a family tends to have better communication, enhanced trust and appreciation for one another and increased productivity. Creating this tight-knit environment does not only strengthen internal relationships, it also filters into interactions with customers, which can make them feel like part of the team (Kelsey, 2014)[25].

III. Concepts And Dimensions Of Employee Commitment

The concept of employee commitment derives from an article titled "The organization Man" written by Whyte in 1956 (Dixit and Bhati, 2012)[26]. It refers to the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations, which are seen as self-expressive (Dixit and Bhati, 2012)[26]. Brown (1969)[27] describes commitment as (a) something of the notion of membership; (b) it reflects the current position of the individual; (c) it has a special predictive potential, providing predictions concerning certain aspects of performance, motivation to work, spontaneous contribution, and other related outcomes; and (d) it suggests the differential relevance of motivational factors (Ledum, 2016)[28]. In his own view, Salancik (1977)[29] described commitment as a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his action and through these action to beliefs that sustain the activities of his own involvement. Mowday (1979)[30] defined commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization".

Allen and Mayer (1990)[31] claimed that commitment is "a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization". Seven years later they described it as a "psychological state that characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization and has implication for the decision to continue membership in the organization" (Meyer and Allen, 1997)[32]. Daan (2013)[33] described employee's commitment in

multiple terms: (a) extent to which an employee is being bound to a goal or the determination in respect of a goal, regardless of the origin of the goal in his/her organization, (b) extent to which a staff believes in a goal and wants to achieve it as long as it has to do with the organization, (c) a psychological state that binds an individual to the organization, (d) connection to a job with the probability that someone continues to work in that job and feels psychologically bound to it regardless of whether it is fulfilling or not, and (e) someone's attitude towards work.

Committed employees actually show high level of consistency in their participation and dedication to organizational activities. They do not give flimsy excuses why a task or goal cannot be accomplished. Employees who are usually absent from meetings, and ongoing projects cannot be said to be committed. Committed staff has some sense of binding link; an obligation to remain and contribute unsparingly to the success of the group they belong. A committed employee is perceived to be one who stays with the organization even in turbulent times, attends work regularly, protects company's assets, and expends his time and energy, willing to help achieve group goal.

From the above definitions, employee's commitment can be described as a sustainable binding force or mind-set that propels an employee to stay with an organization. It is synonymous with employee bond with the organization. Employee commitment is of a critical importance for the success of an organization since it influences the key employee related variables such as absenteeism, low productivity, low morale, labour turn over and other negative tendencies. Meyer and Allen (1997[32], 1991[31], 1984[34]; Allen and Meyer, 1990[4]) identified three components of employee commitment: (1) Affective, (2) Continuance, and (3) Normative Commitment.

1.4 Affective commitment

Affective commitment refers to the bond an employee has with an organization due to an affinity with or affection for the goals and values of the organization. Meyer and Allen (1997)[32] described affective commitment as how much an individual '**wants**' to remain in the organization. It entails an affective orientation of the employees towards the organization. Employees with affective commitment continue service with an organization because they want to do so and not to return a favor or for some benefits and opportunity costs. The development of affective commitment involves recognizing the organization's worth and internalizing its principles and standards (Beck and Wilson, 2000[35]; Dixit and Bhati, 2012[26]). Affective commitment can therefore be conceptualized as the degree to which an individual is psychologically attached to an employing organization through feeling such as loyalty, affection, worth, belongingness, pleasure and so on. Affective commitment typifies the emotional association of an employee with its organization and objectives. It is based on (1) "faith of the employees in the organization's objectives, (2) their readiness to put forth effort in order to achieve organizational objectives, and (3) a strong wish to be a part of the organization" (Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974)[36].

1.5 Normative commitment

Normative commitment is the bond an employee has with an organization based on a sense of reciprocity by which the employee feels obligated to remain with the organization in appreciation of what the organization has offered the employee. Normative commitment develops on the basis of earlier experience influenced by, for example family-based experiences such as parents that stress work loyalty or cultural experiences such as sanctions against "job-hopping" (Allen and Meyer, 1997)[32]. Normative commitment can increase through beliefs that the employees have that employers provide more than they can give. The normative aspect develops from individuals' perception that it is their moral obligation (norm) to remain with a specific organization. Normative Commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they **ought** to (as "good thing to do" –norm) remain with the organization. Normatively committed employees want to remain in the organization due to the pressures resulting from organizational obligations more than from affection for the organization or from benefits employees fear to lose or opportunity cost to incur.

1.6 Continuance commitment

Affective commitment is the bond an employee has with an organization for the benefits derived from it or for the fear of negative consequences that could arise from not remaining with the organization. When employees enter into the organization, they are bound to maintain a link with the organization or committed to remain with the organization because of lack of alternative opportunity or awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. The costs associated with leaving include losing attractive benefits, the threat of wasting the time and effort spent on acquiring, and disrupting, personal relationships. This was more appropriately defined by Allen and Meyer (1991)[31] when they noted continuance commitment develops on the basis of two factors: (a) number of investment (side – bets) individuals make in their current organization,

and (b) perceived lack of alternatives. Continuance commitment is the readiness of employees to be with an organization because of the cost associated with leaving the organization; and as such they feel it is best they just **continue** with the organization.

IV. Workplace Social Programmes And Employee Commitment

This study set out to examine how workplace social programmes in terms of seasonal parties, event tours, and award ceremonies affect employee commitment. Employee commitment was operationalized using affective, normative, and continuance commitment. These dimensions of the two study variables are laid out in the conceptual framework in Figure 1. The findings from literature revealed relationships between the dimensions of workplace social programmes and employee commitment. These will be discussed within the context of our research objectives.

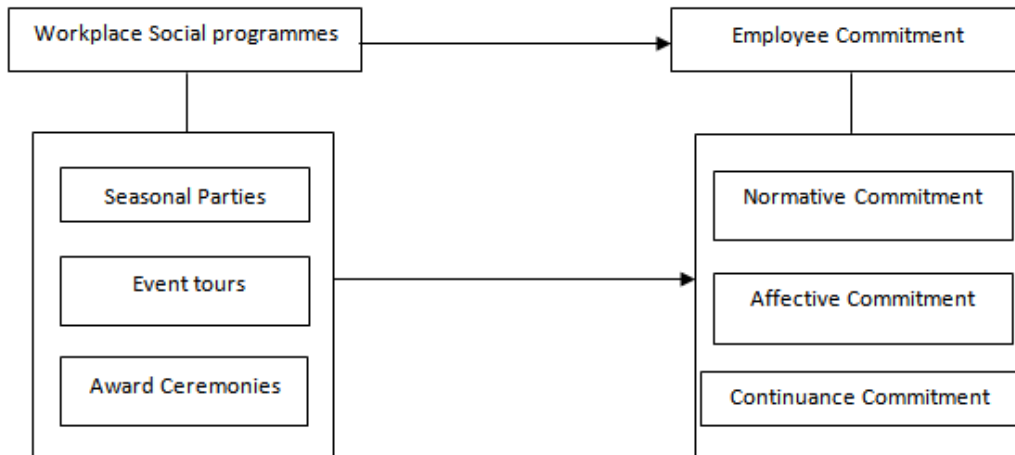


Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of Workplace Social Programmes and Employee Commitment.

Source: Desk Research, 2017.

With respect to our first research objective as to how seasonal parties influence employee commitment, an empirical study conducted by Alikhani, Fadavi and Mohseninia (2014)[37] revealed that young employees have high intention to stay in an organization that provides regular social events. Seasonal parties create rooms for relaxation and interpersonal bonding among colleagues which enhance employee commitment. Michael (2011)[38] in his study on the impact of end of year parties on job satisfaction revealed that end of year parties and picnics for members of staff increase feelings of job satisfaction and bonding amongst members of staff.

Our second research objective deals with how event tours influence employee commitment. Bruce (2012) pointed out that the best way to build stronger connections among staff of an organization is to get them out of the everyday office environment on group tours. Such outings help them to form stronger bonds and develop a better understanding of each other. As part of spicing up the social experiences in the corporate life some employers offer group paid vacations as a perk of the job, much like a bonus program. Instead of handing out cash bonuses each year, they send employees on a paid vacation to places that avail them the opportunity to learn more as regards the operations of their organization while having a good time (Alton, 2016)[22]. Thus, event tours are viable avenues for relaxation, rejuvenation, and sharing of ideas capable of revitalizing the organization which promotes employee commitment.

The third research objective has to do with how award ceremonies influence employee commitment. Social programmes, such as award ceremonies, as Mathieu and Zajac (1990)[39] research found, have a strong correlation with employee commitments. Dawis (1992)[40] argued that employees are more committed only when there is a good match between what he gets and what the organization provides. Award ceremonies make employee feel appreciated and boost employee commitment. In line with a research conducted by Bin, Ahmed, Shafi, and Shaheen (2011)[41] which revealed that recognition programmes increase employees' job satisfaction and intention to stay, this research asserts that award ceremonies influence employee commitment. Similarly, Nyetu (2014)[42] found that corporate anniversaries and merit awards are effective morale boosting strategies for workers in organizations; and a morale booster is a sure means of attaining employee commitment.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

Organizations desire employee commitment. This is the bond mindset of an employee to remain with an organization, manifest in the employee's identification, and involvement with, and loyalty to the organization. Such a mindset entails either an affinity with, or affection for, the organizational goals and values (affective commitment), or a moral obligation to reciprocate what the organization has done for the employee over time (normative commitment), or a desire to continue with the organization for benefits being enjoyed and avoid losing out on such benefits by leaving the organization (continuance commitment).

One of several possible ways of attaining employee commitment, in the view of this study, is workplace social programmes such as seasonal parties, event tours and award ceremonies. Based on theoretical evidences and content analysis, it is the conclusion of this study that regularly and well-executed workplace social programmes boost and sustain employees' commitment. By extension, the absence of award ceremonies, end of year parties and other social events in a work environment makes work boring and alienating; and these would negatively affect employee commitment. These celebrations provide an enjoyable break from the regular routine of the workplace, providing an additional morale booster. When morale is high at the office, employees are more likely to be committed to their work and the company.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are apt:

- i. Organizations should hold seasonal parties such as annual end-of-year parties, children parties garnished with picnics and other wholesome fun activities to enable employees ease up their stress and expand their social networks which will lead to organizational bond through an increase in the moral obligation to stay.
- ii. Management should organize regular group retreats and group tours as platforms for relation or interpersonal interactions among staff as this will raise, not only the moral obligations on employees to stay, but also the employee side-bets and opportunity cost of leaving.
- iii. Award ceremonies, achievement and corporate anniversaries should be regularly organized as ways of recognizing milestone achievements of employees and the organization at large as these will enhance employee affinity with, and affection for, the organizational goals.

There is no doubt that the aforementioned recommendations are useful to business organizations desirous to enhance their employees' commitment to their organizations. Yet another advantage derivable from this study is the theoretical assertion of the existence of a relationship between workplace social programmes and employee commitment. It serves as a forerunner to an empirical study that could explain the impact of each of the dimensions of workplace social programmes on the dimensions of employee commitment. This is because such a study would now be formalized enough to facilitate the generation of primary data from any organization, sector or society to test clearly stated hypotheses. The results from such tests have the potential to contribute to theory building and validation. It is therefore the intention of the researchers to extend this study to field work subsequently.

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