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Leadership and Its Correlation with Employee Affective Commitment: A Focus on LMX and OCB in Digital Transformation

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Abstract

The business landscape is undergoing rapid transformation. Recent technological advancements are reshaping how organizations operate, making digital transformation essential for maintaining competitiveness. However, implementing such change often encounters resistance and concerns related to job security. Organizations adopt new realities and run transformations with the support of effective leadership and proactive followership. The research aims to address the existing gap in understanding the connection between leadership and employee affective commitment within digital transformation. A theoretical model explores the impacts of Leader-Member Exchange and Organizational Citizenship Behavior on employee behavior. The paper discloses that LMX and OCB have a positive relationship with employee affective commitment during digital change.

Keywords   affective commitment, leader-member exchange, organizational citizenship behavior

1. Introduction

Organizational change has become a defining feature of modern enterprises (Stephen Robbins, 2018). To sustain competitiveness, nearly all companies undergo transformations at some point in their operational lifecycle. Such changes are often initiated to improve performance, meet strategic objectives, or respond to dynamic industry benchmarks, regulatory shifts, and broader environmental factors. Organizational change may involve restructuring, cultural reorientation, operational realignment, or shifts in leadership practices (Carnall, 2018). When managed effectively, change enhances efficiency, supports innovation, and fosters long-term growth through skill enhancement and new opportunities.

Both internal and external pressures drive organizational transformation. External influences such as disruptive technologies, evolving consumer preferences, regulatory changes, and global market dynamics are significant catalysts (Stephen Robbins, 2018). Internally, organizations respond to strategic reconfigurations, demographic shifts within the workforce, updated technologies, and changes in employee expectations. Managers are thus compelled to respond across four primary dimensions: strategy, structure, technology, and people. Of these, technology exerts a particularly strong force, reshaping processes, tools, and work execution models.

Once confined to IT departments, digital transformation has now expanded to every organizational domain, influencing daily operations and strategic planning alike (Westerman, 2014). Defined as the implementation of digital technologies to enhance efficiency and improve processes, digitalization is not merely the automation of existing functions but a redefinition and expansion of how organizations operate (Goswami, 2023). Despite its potential, digital transformation remains a complex endeavor. More than 60% of initiatives fail to meet expectations due to poor integration strategies, unclear objectives, and resistance at the employee level. Among the core obstacles is the human element—particularly the ability of individuals to adapt to new systems and workflows.

Technological shifts often generate anxiety among employees, especially when innovations threaten to redefine roles or reduce job security (Acemoglu, 2018). While some predict that digital transformation will create new roles, the transition period can be marked by uncertainty. Poorly managed change can lead to demotivation, elevated stress, and diminished engagement. Stress, whether triggered by personal factors or workplace dynamics, significantly influences employee reactions. Common stressors include pressure to perform without error, ambiguous expectations, or difficult interpersonal relationships (Stephen Robbins, 2018).

Amid such complexity, successful transformation depends on two central elements: effective leadership and committed employees. Leadership is widely recognized as a key factor in directing change efforts (Yue, 2019). According to the American Management Association, leadership ranks above all other predictors of successful transformation, including organizational values and communication systems (Gill, 2002). Transformational leaders are especially effective during periods of change, as they articulate compelling visions, inspire perseverance, and realign team perceptions (Sashkin, 2004; Bass, 2006). As Hacker (2003) notes, such leadership involves the conveyance of meaning through exemplary conduct and visionary communication. These leaders foster trust, encourage autonomy, and maintain strong team morale (Yukl, 1989).

Affective commitment, defined as an employee's emotional attachment to the organization, plays a critical role in the implementation of change (Meyer, 2002). Employees who are affectively committed exceed their formal duties, support transformation efforts, and contribute additional effort. However, commitment often depends on how significantly the change disrupts daily routines, workloads, and access to necessary resources (Gilbert et al., 2011). Ibragimov et al. (2023) emphasized that during complex transitions, employees require leadership that provides clarity, stability, and emotional support.

As Jaros (2007) asserts, commitment is a fundamental condition for realizing change effectively. Leaders must remain attentive not only to organizational metrics but also to employee responses. Determining whether commitment is present—and whether it will influence engagement and persistence—remains a critical challenge (Parish et al., 2008).

Within this context, the quality of the leader–follower relationship is particularly important. Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory explains how leaders form differentiated relationships with subordinates, based on trust, respect, and mutual support (Uhl-Bien, 2014). High-quality LMX reduces ambiguity, enhances information flow, and provides emotional security—factors that are especially important during uncertain periods (Caldwell et al., 2004). Employees with strong LMX relationships tend to experience lower stress and greater confidence, contributing to more effective participation in change (Mueller, 2012).

Although digital transformation has become a prominent subject in organizational literature, much of the existing research focuses on strategic and structural implications. A growing number of studies now examine its influence on individual and interpersonal dynamics, including engagement, motivation, and well-being (Cartwright, 2003; Ibragimov, 2023). However, few investigations have explored the interrelationship between LMX, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and affective commitment in the specific context of digital change.

To better understand the complexities of employee behavior during digital transformation, this study examines the effects of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) on affective commitment. Specifically, it focuses on analyzing these impacts within the context of a Georgian natural gas distribution company. The primary goal is to offer a thorough understanding of the relationship between these variables. Addressing a gap in current research, the study seeks to answer key questions, with the central inquiry being how LMX and OCB influence employee affective commitment during the implementation of digital transformation.

Questions:

Q1. How is employee affective commitment influenced by LMX during digital transformation?

Q2. How is employee affective commitment influenced by OCB during digital transformation?

Building on these research questions, the study formulates the following hypotheses to empirically examine the relationships between LMX, OCB, and affective commitment during digital transformation. It posits that LMX and OCB have a significant impact on employee affective commitment throughout the technology-driven organizational changes.

Hypotheses:

H1: LMX is positively correlated with affective commitment during digital transformation.

H2: OCB positively influences affective commitment during digital transformation.

2. Literature Review

To frame these hypotheses within the current body of knowledge, the next section examines pertinent literature on digital transformation, leader-member exchange, organizational citizenship behavior and affective commitment.

2.1 Employee Affective Commitment

Employee commitment is of great importance during transformation. Commitment is described as a psychological bond that prevents employees from leaving the organization; it is a willingness to stay with the company and move towards high performance. (Allen, 1996). Scientists categorized commitment into three types. The first one is related to the sense of enthusiasm and a desire to be a part of the organization. This affective commitment (AC) reflects collective work and loyalty. Normative Commitment (NC) encompasses the feelings of obligation to stay, while Continuance commitment (CC) represents the recognized costs related with quitting. Employees think about the difficulties they will face after leaving their job: the bills they will have to pay, the costs associated with finding a new job (Mathieu, 1990).

Building on this model to explore a context-dependent type of commitment, (Herscovitch, 2002) brought forward a three-component construct of commitment to organizational change and proposed that it has the same privileges with those presented in previous literature discussing organizational commitment. Consequently, affective commitment to change (AC2C) relates to the willingness to contribute into change; continuance commitment to change (CC2C) reflects the costs connected with resistance to change and normative commitment (NC2C) considers the perception of obligation to be helpful (Herscovitch, 2002).

Scholars delved deeper into commitment, categorizing it into four distinct types: attitudinal, normative, behavioral, and calculative (Shepherd D. A., 2000). They posited that these categories collectively construct an employee's "commitment profile," with one type often predominating to shape their behavior. While prior research predominantly explored the individual effects of these commitment types on employee behavior, aiming to pinpoint the most influential, subsequent studies sought to comprehend the interplay among these components. For instance, an environment steeped in affective commitment (AC) might bolster the behavior of employees rooted in normative (NC) or continuance commitment (CC). Supporting this perspective, (Allen, The measurement and antecedents of

affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization. , 1990) demonstrated the combined impact of commitment components (AC, CC, NC) on various facets of employee behavior, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover tendencies

Cheung, (2000) approached commitment from the vantage point of leadership, probing how transformational leaders could pivotally influence employees' alignment with organizational objectives. The underlying argument was that an employee's commitment level is deeply influenced by the extent to which they perceive the organization and its leadership value their contributions and are invested in their welfare. Transformational leaders can fortify this commitment by fostering an inclusive environment that prioritizes employee well-being, welcomes diverse opinions, and emphasizes positive reinforcement. Further supporting this perspective, Isaksen, (2002) argued that a conducive team environment, marked by collaboration and collective endeavor, can significantly enhance team commitment.

2.2 Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

The concept of LMX, initially presented as the "vertical dyad linkage" theory (Mascareño, 2020), centers around the idea that leaders don't merely establish formal relationships with their subordinates to influence their behaviors. Instead, emphasis is placed on the interpersonal connection between the leader and the individual team members. From the outset of their interactions, leaders and followers begin to develop specific types of relationships, categorizing employees being a part of in-group and out-group. These dynamic influences both employee and overall organizational performance (Bauer, 1996). The in-group comprises followers who have established and maintained a trusting and robust relationship with the leader. Conversely, the out-group includes employees with whom the leader maintains a more official interrelation.

High quality leader-follower relationships are essential for the welfare and achievement of employees at workplace The LMX theory, as detailed by Martin, (2010) describes the relationships between managers and individual team members. Such positive interconnections produce a competitive advantage for a business entity. Previous experiential research exposed that LMX is positively correlated with various workplace outcomes. The leader-follower relationship plays an influential role during times of change and is anticipated to impact both employee and organizational performance.

Kang and Stewart (2007) explored the potency of LMX from the lens of effective leadership. They argued that the inherent attributes of a leader, along with their managerial methods, are important in forging a high-quality relationship with followers within any given context. In their perspective, the theories surrounding transformational leadership best explain the positive social exchange typified by LMX. This view is buttressed by several studies in the literature (Wang, 2005). A transformational leader, defined by four pivotal traits, articulates a vision, motivates and empowers team members, invites participation, offers feedback, demonstrates empathy, extends individualized support, enhances the knowledge and skills of subordinates, champions risk-taking, aids in navigating challenges tied to innovation, and steers all members toward accomplishing set goals and objectives.

Within the ambit of change management, employees transition from mere "recipients" to more active "contributors" (Jha, 2013). Thus, their individual perceptions, coupled with their responses (be it resistance or adaptation), behaviors, and attitudes, directly sway the transformation process and, by extension, organizational performance. An employee's "openness to change" is often deemed a paramount determinant of success or failure. Transformational leadership, in this context, emerges as a potent tool to attenuate resistance levels while bolstering the appetite for and active participation in the change process (Anand, 2011). This paper anticipates that LMX will exert a positive influence on employee motivation, their adaptability in the face of change, and overarching commitment.

2.3 Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

OCB has been a focal point in organizational behavior research over recent years (Podsakoff, 2000). The concept was initially introduced by Barnard, (1949) and Katz, (1964) and was later expanded upon by Bateman (1980), Organ (1980), and further refined by authors such as MacKenzie, (1993). Organ, (1995) described organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) as "individual behaviors that are beneficial to the organization and are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system" (cited in Chahal and Mehta, 2011). OCB is important in cultivating a supportive workplace, enhancing the sense of belongingness among team members, supervisors, and the broader organization.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior describes the positive and supportive actions shown by employees to other team members. These behaviors, enacted voluntarily, aim to assist fellow co-workers, the team, and the broader organization. This type of behavior isn't typically rewarded but bolsters the company's overall effectiveness. While there is a consensus about the importance of OCB, its dimensionality has been a subject of debate. Smith, (1953) introduced two primary components: altruism (directed at assisting others) and generalized compliance (adherence to the broader organizational rules and expectations). Subsequently, Organ, (1995) classified organizational citizenship behavior in some components: altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue, emphasizing the role of OCB in enhancing organizational outcomes.

OCB plays a crucial role in mitigating workplace stress, fostering a collaborative environment, enhancing colleague interactions, motivating employees, and boosting their performance. Previous studies have highlighted the positive correlation between OCB and various employee outcomes (Smith, 1953; Graham, 1991) accentuated the favorable influence of individuals' proclivity to assist others (a hallmark of OCB) on collective task accomplishments. Concurrently, Podsakoff (2014) explored OCB's overarching influences on teamwork and the broader organizational strata. Their research underscored the constructive correlation between the multifaceted dimensions of OCB, individual, and organizational performance.

In today's dynamic landscape, organizations are continually adapting. As market dynamics shift, traditional operations might lose their efficacy. Addressing these new challenges often requires organizations to overhaul their modus operandi, strategies, and objectives. Employees, endowed with firsthand knowledge of the organization's strengths and weaknesses, play an instrumental role in these transformation processes. Seppala and colleagues (2010) spotlighted the concept of Change-Oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior (COOCB). Here, committed employees proactively present innovative ideas, suggest enhancements, and implement change initiatives.

Change-committed employees often rally behind processes, exerting additional effort, and aligning with organizational strategies. A nurturing environment, bolstered by mutual support, often propels individuals to surpass expectations, benefiting both the individual and the organization. Thus, the author posits that a robust OCB framework will indubitably amplify employee commitment in the context of digitalization (See Figure 1.).
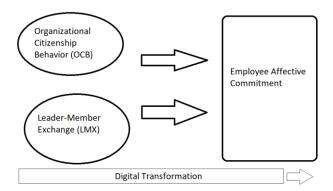

Figure 1.

3. Methodology

The study utilizes a quantitative research design to thoroughly examine the potential relationships between variables. Data were collected from 411 respondents via an online survey, which was distributed to 678 employees across various divisions and departments of a gas distribution company involved in or overseeing digital transformation processes in Georgia. Each participant received a link to a survey consisting of 15 questions, created in Microsoft Forms, designed to assess the impact of LMX and OCB on employee affective commitment.

The variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." To analyze the data, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to interpret the relationships between the variables. This statistical method was selected to confirm the model's significance in investigating the relationships between the variables. Data analysis was performed using Statistical Software for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical

model aims to explore the relationship between affective commitment, LMX, and OCB within the context of digital transformation.

4. Results / Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to assess how leadership influences employees' affective commitment during digital transformation, using a Georgian gas distribution company as a case study. Specifically, the study examined the effects of leader-member exchange (LMX) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) on employee commitment during workplace innovations.

To ensure the appropriateness of the data for further analysis, several assumptions were tested, specifically checking for missing responses (Table 1), multicollinearity (Table 5), normality (Table 2) and homogeneity of data variance (Table 3,4). The Case Processing Summary describes the total number of respondents fully answering the questions provided in the survey. The Shapiro-Wilks test revealed a deviation from normal distribution. In addition to that, Levene's tests for LMX and OCB accommodated the analysis of group differences and variance across categorical survey responses. Given these results, an ANOVA test was selected to go through further analysis.

The ANOVA results demonstrated that both LMX and OCB exerted a statistically significant impact on affective commitment, with a p-value of .000 (Table 6,7). This finding allows for the rejection of the null hypothesis at a 95% confidence level, affirming that the observed group means differ significantly. These results underscore the critical roles of high-quality leader-member relationships and discretionary citizenship behaviors in fostering employees' emotional attachment and commitment during periods of organizational change.

5. Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged in the study. First, the self-assessment nature of the employee questionnaires may introduce biases, such as socially desirable responding. Respondents may provide answers they perceive as more favorable or expected, rather than reflecting their true feelings or experiences. Additionally, the leader-member exchange (LMX) or social exchange relationships between employees and managers could create a sense of obligation, encouraging employees to respond positively in a manner that aligns with their relationship with leadership.

Another limitation pertains to the clarity of some survey questions. Although the survey was translated into Georgian, certain terms such as 'organizational citizenship behavior,' 'affective,' 'commitment,' and 'leader member exchange' may not have direct equivalents in the local language, potentially leading to misunderstandings among respondents.

Furthermore, some participants may have had limited knowledge about the transformation process, the shared organizational vision, and the potential benefits of digitalization. This lack of information could affect the accuracy and depth of their responses, especially regarding their perceptions of change-related organizational behaviors.

Additionally, while the sample size was adequate, the methodology relied on a broad employee pool. This could lead to random answering behavior, which may affect the validity of the data. A more targeted approach, such as utilizing focus groups of employees with a deeper understanding of the digital transformation process, could yield more insightful and reliable information. Judgmental sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria, could be particularly beneficial in this context.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of this study presents another limitation. The data were collected at a single point in time, which may not fully capture the dynamic nature of employee affective commitment and organizational changes. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies or repeating the survey at different stages of the digitalization process, which is expected to conclude by 2027. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how employee commitment evolves as the transformation progresses.

6. Future Research

Given the importance of the impact of digital transformation on employees, further research is needed to explore the direct effect of perceived job characteristics and employee self-esteem on their affective commitment during the change. Employees with a transformed mindset are likely to be more engaged and will show positive results.

Moreover, assuming that transformation will be a long-term process, future research should investigate the influence of employee satisfaction and motivation on employee performance once digital integration is completed.

Considering the advancement of digital technologies in different business areas such as healthcare, hospitality, retail, finance, and manufacturing, future investigations could focus on one of these environments. For instance, digitalization in healthcare aims to minimize the organizational burden and other monotonous jobs that healthcare employees currently execute. Consequently, these professionals could devote more time to working with and observing patients. In the hospitality sector, digital processes help to organize operations, allow customization, and extract valuable insights from collected data for proactive decision-making. In manufacturing, digital tools enhance efficiency, improve quality control, and enable the design of more desirable goods and services.

Finally, a comparative study could be conducted within other countries rich in oil and gas, integrating digital technologies to increase customer satisfaction. The focus would be to analyze how cultural attitudes toward innovation influence future organizational commitment. Employee perceptions and openness to change, combined with leadership personality traits, could also be examined for their role in enhancing leader-member exchange and organizational citizenship behavior, supporting individuals' confidence during transitions.

Future studies could explore how the dynamics of leader-member exchange differ between public and private organizations. Public sector organizations, characterized by bureaucratic structures and regulatory constraints, may foster distinct LMX patterns compared to the flexibility and merit-based systems typical of private companies. Investigating how organizational type influences LMX quality, and its subsequent effect on employee commitment and performance, could provide valuable insights for both sectors during digital transformations.

7. Implications

The research contributes to the understanding of how organizational change, team member and leader support, along with employee commitment intersect, offering valuable insights for both academia and industry practitioners. The study's findings highlight the crucial role of employee motivation in fostering affective commitment during periods of digital transformation. The practical implications are significant for consultancies and training organizations, providing guidance for companies preparing for technological changes. By understanding the interplay between leadership, team effectiveness, and employee commitment, organizations can better navigate their transformation efforts. Additionally, the study lays the groundwork for future research into digital transformation, raising new questions about the relationship between employee engagement and technological change, which can shape subsequent investigations in this field.

8. Conclusion

Digital transformations present both challenges and opportunities for organizations seeking to remain competitive in a rapidly changing market. To harness these opportunities, businesses must adapt their traditional models, embracing innovation and improving product and service quality. However, the success of these transformations is not solely dependent on technological advancements; it also hinges on employees' willingness to adopt change. Employee resistance or openness critically shapes the outcome of the transformation process.

Research has highlighted the importance of motivating employees to achieve goals, particularly in times of change. The internal drive to exceed expectations fosters a connection to organizational goals, which in turn strengthens affective commitment to transformation efforts. The study has explored how leader member exchange and team member support impact emotional commitment during digital transitions.

Digitalization reshapes job roles by introducing new skills and knowledge requirements, which can strengthen self-esteem and a sense of competence. Trust within the organization also plays a pivotal role in facilitating this transformation. When employees feel secure in their roles and supported by colleagues, supervisors and leaders their motivation to contribute increases, leading to greater emotional attachment to the organization's goals. Therefore, the strong leadership is essential in guiding employees through the change process, as leaders' motivations influence their followers' engagement. Effective leadership, communication, and resource allocation are critical to the success of digital transformations.

For sectors like manufacturing, retail, and healthcare, digitalization is integral to enhancing efficiency, innovation, and customer service. In the natural gas distribution industry, digital tools improve operational performance and customer experience. This research utilized a quantitative survey, gathering responses from 411 employees out of

687. Despite some issues with normal distribution, the data passed homogeneity tests and were analyzed using ANOVA. The results revealed significant relationships between leader member exchange, organizational citizenship behavior, and employees' commitment to organizational change.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

Ethical Approval: The authors affirm that this manuscript is entirely original and free from plagiarism. All sources and references have been duly cited. The authors acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools (ChatGPT by OpenAI) strictly for language enhancement and formatting suggestions. These tools were not employed to generate substantive content or research analysis. The intellectual and analytical contributions remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Lamara Kadagidze, a distinguished Professor and Doctor of Education Sciences with a demonstrated track record in education management, pedagogy, professional communication, and the tourism sector, earned her Ph.D. in 2004. In 2009, she was awarded a U.S. State Department Junior Faculty Development Program (JFDP) grant and completed her fellowship at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. A holder of CELTA, TESOL, and TELC certifications, currently, she serves as an Affiliate Professor at Caucasus University, a Professor at Grigol Robakidze University, an Associate Professor at New Vision University, and an Invited Lecturer at East-West University. Professor Kadagidze actively contributes to the international academic community as a moderator and scientific expert at numerous conferences and forums. She has delivered over 40 conference presentations and authored more than 120 academic publications across diverse fields, including educational administration, leadership and management, English language teaching (ELT), linguistics, professional communication, social and cultural studies, finance, and tourism.

Table 1: Checking for missing data

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Employee Affective Commitment	490	100.0%	0	0.0%	490	100.0%
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	490	100.0%	0	0.0%	490	100.0%
Leader Member Exchange	490	100.0%	0	0.0%	490	100.0%

Table 2: Test of Normality

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Employee Affective Commitment	.130	490	.000	.919	490	.000
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	.157	490	.000	.881	490	.000
Leader Member Exchange	.137	490	.000	.883	490	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3: Levene's Tests: LMX variable

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Employee Affective Commitment	Based on Mean	1.321	14	473	.191
	Based on Median	1.109	14	473	.346
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.109	14	419.547	.347
	Based on trimmed mean	1.328	14	473	.186

Table 4: Levene's Tests: OCB variable

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Employee Affective Commitment	Based on Mean	1.435	12	474	.146
	Based on Median	1.050	12	474	.401
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.050	12	401.830	.402
	Based on trimmed mean	1.321	12	474	.203

Table 5: Checking for Multicollinearity

Correlations

		Employee Affective Commitment	Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Leader Member Exchange
Employee Affective Commitment	Pearson Correlation	1	.580**	.562**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	490	490	490
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.580**	1	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	490	490	490
Leader Member Exchange	Pearson Correlation	.562**	.550**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	490	490	490

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: ANOVA analysis LMX- AFFCOM

ANOVA

Employee Affective Commitment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	98.541	16	6.159	20.355	.000
Within Groups	143.115	473	.303		
Total	241.656	489			

Table 7: ANOVA analysis OCB AFFCOM

ANOVA

Employee Affective Commitment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	87.725	15	5.848	18.009	.000
Within Groups	153.931	474	.325		
Total	241.656	489			