

Typology of Organisational Commitment

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Abstract: This paper presents a contemporary review of the term commitment from an organisational perspective. The paper highlights the typology of employee commitment and of organisational commitment. Organisational commitment is a subset of employee commitment, which is comprised of work commitment, career commitment and organisational commitment. Organisational commitment, in turn, can be subdivided into affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. As a combination of both attitudinal and behavioural approaches, organisational commitment is defined as employees' acceptance, involvement and dedication (AID) towards achieving the organisation's goals. It is the willingness of employees to accept organisational values, and goals, and to work towards achieving these; to be fully involved, and participate, in all the activities, both work and non-work related, of the organisation; and to dedicate time, and effort, towards the betterment of the organisation.

Keywords: employee commitment, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment

INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights the importance of understanding the meaning of organisational commitment for effective research; both researcher and respondents need a similar, and clear, understanding of organisational commitment. As we mostly base our concepts on our own perceptions, the meaning of organisational commitment, and its importance, differs from one person to another, especially when we originate from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The authors explain their concept of organisational commitment, and how organisational commitment forms a subset of employee commitment, followed by a discussion of organisational commitment itself, and its subsets.

Employee Commitment: The concept of employment commitment lies at the heart of any analysis of Human Resource Management. Indeed, the rationale for introducing Human Resource Management policies is to increase levels of commitment so positive outcomes can ensue^[1,2,3] Such is the importance of this construct. Yet, despite many studies on commitment, very little is understood of what managers mean by the term 'commitment' when they evaluate someone's performance and motivation.

The literature defines commitment as an employee's level of attachment to some aspect of work. Various authors have been instrumental in identifying types of employee commitment as critical constructs in

understanding the attitudes and behaviours of employees in an organisation. Meyer *et.al.*^[4] identify more than 25 employee commitment concepts and measures.

Arguing that conceptual redundancy exists across these, they group them into three foci, as in Fig. 1: commitment to work/job, commitment to career / profession and commitment to organisation.

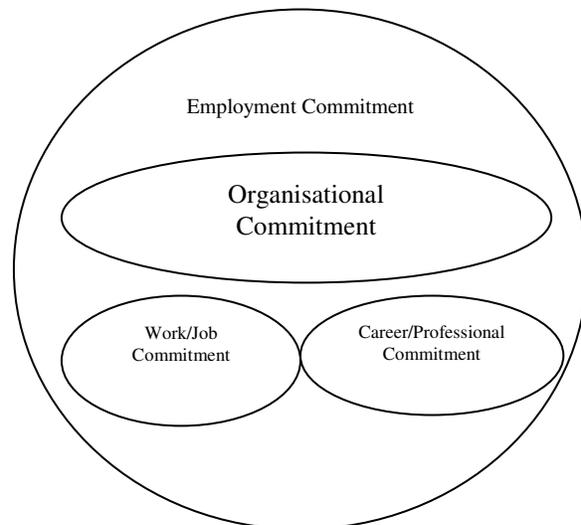


Fig. 1: Typology of Employee Commitment^[4]

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Though this study specifically addresses commitment to the organisation, or organisational commitment, it also considers work and career commitment towards clarifying the conceptual meaning.

Organisational Commitment: There are two dominant conceptualisations of organisational commitment in sociological literature. These are an employee's loyalty towards the organisation and an employee's intention to stay with the organisation. Loyalty is an affective response to, and identification with, an organisation, based on a sense of duty and responsibility.

One may use Herscovitch and Meyer's^[6] definition: 'the degree to which an employee identifies with the goals and values of the organisation and is willing to exert effort to help it succeed'. Loyalty is argued to be an important intervening variable between the structural conditions of work, and the values, and expectations, of employees, and their decision to stay, or leave.

Positive and rewarding features of work are expected to increase loyalty, which, in turn, will reduce the likelihood of leaving. Loyalty becomes stabilised with tenure, which partly explains the negative relationship typically found between tenure and turnover^[7,8,9,10].

Intent to stay is portrayed as effectively neutral, and focuses on an employee's intention to remain a member of the organisation^[11,12]. It is much closer to economists' ideas on how weighing the costs of leaving versus staying, decides the employee to leave or stay. Hagen^[12] defines this form of commitment as the employee's expected likelihood of remaining employed in the same organisation. As with loyalty, intent to stay stabilises with tenure, and helps explain the negative tenure and turnover relationship. Theoretically, it is viewed as an intervening response to structural conditions of work, as well as conditions of work elsewhere, or to not working at all^[13,14,15].

Career Commitment: Career commitment refers to identification with, and involvement in, one's occupation. Much literature refers to similar or related concepts: occupational commitment^[16], professional commitment^[6], career salience^[3], the cosmopolitan/local distinction^[17] and professionalism^[8]. Common to all these is the critical notion of being committed to one's career, or occupation, rather than to the organisation which employs one.

Work Commitment: Work commitment refers neither to the organisation nor to one's career, but to employment itself^[11,2]. Persons committed to work hold a strong sense of duty towards their work, and place intrinsic value on work as a central life interest^[19,10]. This form of commitment relates terms like work motivation^[20,6], job involvement^[5,6], work as a central life interest^[21,22] and work involvement^[17]. Although work commitment is expected to be related to

organisational commitment and career commitment, literature^[23] shows it to be empirically distinct from these two forms of commitment.

Organisational Commitment: The issue of organisational commitment within the private sector, has, generally, received significant research focus over the past 25 years^[24,7,23,17]. This review further describes the past development of organisational commitment, and its relevance in the future.

Development of Organisational Commitment : Two major theoretical approaches emerge from previous research on commitment:

Firstly, commitment is viewed as an attitude of attachment to the organisation, which leads to particular job-related behaviours. The committed employee, for example, is less often absent, and is less likely to leave the organisation voluntarily, than are less committed employees^[4].

Secondly, one line of research in organisations focuses on the implications of certain types of behaviours on subsequent attitudes. A typical finding is that employees who freely choose to behave in a certain way, and who find their decision difficult to change, become committed to the chosen behaviour and develop attitudes consistent with their choice^[17].

One approach emphasises the influence of commitment attitudes on behaviours, whereas the other emphasises the influence of committing behaviours on attitudes. Although the 'commitment attitude behaviour' and 'committing behaviour attitude' approaches emerge from different theoretical orientations, and have generated separate research traditions, understanding the commitment process is facilitated by viewing these two approaches as, inherently, inter-related^[4].

Rather than viewing the causal arrow, between attitudinal and behavioural commitment, as pointing in one direction or the other, it is more useful to consider the two as reciprocally-related over time. It is equally reasonable to assume that (a) commitment attitudes lead to committing behaviours that subsequently reinforce and strengthen attitudes; and (b) committing behaviours lead to commitment attitudes and subsequent committing behaviours.

The important issue is not whether the commitment process begins with either attitude or behaviour. Rather, it is important to recognise the development of commitment may involve the subtle interplay of attitudes and behaviours over a period of time. The process through which commitment is developed may involve self-reinforcing cycles of attitudes and behaviours that evolve on the job, and, over time, strengthen employee commitment to the organisation.

Meyer and Allen^[25] present these three approaches, as shown in Fig. 2, and define their three-

dimensional constructs as affective, continuance and normative commitment.

Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organisation [based on positive feelings, or emotions, toward the organisation]. The antecedents for affective commitment include perceived job characteristics [task autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety and supervisory feedback], organisational dependability [extent to which employees feel the organisation can be counted on to look after their interests], and perceived participatory management [extent to which employees feel they can influence decisions on the work environment and other issues of concern to them].

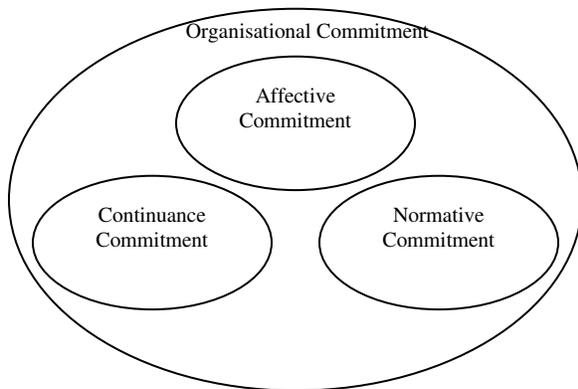


Fig. Typology of Organisational Commitment [25]

The use of these antecedents is consistent with findings by researchers, such as Steers [26], Mottaz [19] and Rowden, [22], that these factors all create rewarding situations, intrinsically conducive to the development of affective commitment. In addition, age and organisational tenure are considered to be positively associated with affective commitment. It is hypothesised that employees with low affective commitment will choose to leave an organisation, while employees with a high affective commitment will stay for longer periods, as they believe in the organisation and its mission.

Continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the costs that the employee associates with leaving the organisation [due to the high cost of leaving]. Potential antecedents of continuance commitment include age, tenure, career satisfaction and intent to leave. Age and tenure can function as predictors of continuance commitment, primarily because of their roles as surrogate measures of investment in the organisation [27].

Tenure can be indicative of non-transferable investments [close working relationship with co-workers, retirement investments, career investments and skills unique to the particular organisation]. Age can also be negatively related to the number of available alternative job opportunities. Career

satisfaction provides a more direct measure of career-related investments, which could be at risk if the individual leaves the organisation. In general, whatever employees perceive as sunk cost, resulting from leaving the organisation, are the antecedents of continuance commitment.

Normative commitment refers to an employee's feeling of obligation to remain with the organisation [based on the employee having internalised the values and goals of the organisation]. The potential antecedents for normative commitment include co-worker commitment [including affective and normative dimensions, as well as commitment behaviours], organisational dependability and participatory management. Co-workers' commitment is expected to provide normative signals that influence the development of normative commitment [28,29]. Organisational dependability and perceived participatory management are expected to instil a sense of moral obligation to reciprocate to the organisation.

CONCLUSION

There is progress in our understanding of commitment and organisational commitment, both conceptually, and, more practically, in terms of the positive consequences for organisations of having committed employees [30,15]. Finding the relationship between human resource management practices, employee commitment and the financial performance of firms has important implications for improved integration of research across several business school disciplines.

Evidence clarifies that investments in employees can have positive financial consequences for firms and their shareholders, and may help broaden their narrow view of the world. From the literature review on organisational commitment, the authors identify that employee perception is the foundation of employee motivation, leading to higher organisational commitment, and that employee perception forms the antecedent of organisational commitment.

Positive employee perception leads to improved employee motivation, which, in turn, leads to higher organisational commitment. As upbringing, race and religion are key factors influencing employee perception, a clear understanding of the meaning of organisational commitment among all persons concerned, such as researchers, respondents, practitioners and academicians, is vital.

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