

A Study of Organizational Commitment of Manufacturing Workers in Singapore

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Abstract

This exploratory study discusses the three components of the Allen-Mayer's framework of organizational commitment, namely the affective, continuance and normative aspects. It reports the behavioral outcomes of a pilot study and investigates the relationship between two instruments measuring affective commitment, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) and the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS). The results indicate the unidimensionality of the OCQ and suggest that the ACS may not be as homogeneous as it is commonly assumed.

1. Introduction

The last few decades have seen a proliferation of organizational commitment studies, where the concept of organizational commitment has received considerable attention in the literatures of industrial/organizational psychology and organizational behavior as reflected by the large number of theoretical and empirical works devoted to it. Much of the attention in the literature has been directed at exploring the various definitions of the organizational commitment construct, and at identifying the determinants and the consequences of organizational commitment. As a consequence, organizational commitment has been linked to both personal attributes and organizational characteristics (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Steers, 1977). As an antecedent, organizational commitment has been positively associated with motivation and involvement (Farrell and Rusbult, 1981; Stumpf and Hartman, 1984), enhanced job performance (Angle and Perry, 1981; Larson and Fukami, 1984; Mowday, Porter, and Dublin, 1974; Steers, 1977), and the individual's nonwork and career satisfactions (Romzek, 1989). Organizational commitment has also been negatively associated with behaviors such as absenteeism, tardiness and turnover (Angle and Perry, 1981; Bateman and Strasser, 1984; Chelte and Tausky, 1986; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Hom, Katerberg, and Hulin, 1979; Parasuraman, 1982; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Porter, Crampon, and Smith, 1976; Van Maanen, 1975; Wiener and Vardi, 1980). Longitudinal studies and studies on the effects of moderators on organizational commitment and its antecedents and outcomes have also added to the wealth of research concerning organizational commitment.

2. Organizational Commitment

Despite the substantial number of studies on organizational commitment, little consensus exists with respect to the definition of the term. Organizational commitment has been defined in at least 10 different ways (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982; Reichers, 1985). The most commonly studied types of organizational commitment are attitudinal (Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974) and behavioral commitment (Becker, 1960). Meyer and Allen (1984) named them affective and continuance commitment respectively. Other forms of commitment that have been studied include normative commitment (Wiener, 1982) and organizational identification (Hall, Schneider, and Nygren, 1970). Allen and Meyer (1990) tested and confirmed the existence of a three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment comprising of affective, continuance and normative commitment and that each component was conceptually and empirically separable.

AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Affective or attitudinal commitment is the most frequently studied form of organizational commitment in which commitment is considered an affective or emotional attachment to the organization. It is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization and is characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982). Affectively committed employees remain with the organization "for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth" (Buchanan, 1974, p.533).

CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT

Much of the initial work on continuance or behavioral commitment was done by Becker (1960) who postulated that individuals become bound to an organization as the result of the "side bets" that they have made over time in the organization. Side bets, which may include the time and effort spent in developing a job skill or organizational status, increase the employee's accumulated investments or sunk costs in the organization. As a result, the employee perceives that he/she cannot leave the organization, as doing so would result in the loss or forfeiture of these investments. The perceived cost of leaving may be further augmented by a perceived lack of alternatives to make up for the foregone investments. Hence, while an affectively committed individual remains in an organization because he/she wants to, a behaviorally committed individual remains because he/she needs to.

NORMATIVE COMMITMENT

Normative commitment refers to the employee's feelings of obligation to remain in the organization. These feelings of obligation are the result of the individual's experiences both prior to entry into the organization (familial or cultural socialization) and following entry into the organization (organizational socialization) (Wiener, 1982). Individuals could be expected to develop generalized loyalty or duty attitudes towards their organizations if significant others, like parents, have stressed the importance of organizational loyalty, or if they perceive through various organizational practices that the organization expects their loyalty. Hence, individuals remain in the organization because they believe it is the "right" and moral thing to do (i.e. they feel they ought to do so). Some researchers have identified personal norms, for example internalized moral obligation, as important contributors to behavior, including terminating employment with an organization (Prestholdt, Lane, and Mathews, 1987; Schwartz, 1973; Schwartz and Tessler, 1972).

3. Measurement of Organizational Commitment

Affective commitment has traditionally been measured using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). The psychometric properties of the OCQ have been well established by Cook, Hepworth, Wall, and Warr (1981) and Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979). The OCQ, developed by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979), is widely used and is supported by extensive psychometric data (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979). This study used the shorter 9-item version of the OCQ. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Sample items include "I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization".

Meyer and Allen (1984) tested and developed alternative scales, the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS) and the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS), for the measurement of affective and continuance commitment respectively, and introduced the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS) for the measurement of normative commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The psychometric properties of the ACS, CCS and NCS have been established by a number of researchers (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Cohen, 1996; Dunham, Grube, and Castaneda, 1994; Hackett, Bycio, and Hausdorf, 1994; McGee and Ford, 1987; Vandenberg and Self, 1993).

The original 8-item measure by Meyer and Allen (1984) with a reported Cronbach's alpha of .87 was used. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). An example of a scale item is "I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization".

4. Pilot Study

In order to determine how organizational commitment is expressed among employees, respondent-generated outcomes were used for this study. Pilot interviews were conducted in two of the companies where 15 employees from each company were randomly selected and asked to brainstorm and to come up with as many behavioral outcomes as they would expect a committed employee to have. The pilot groups generated a list of 32 behavioral outcomes, of which 13 behaviors were most frequently cited and were judged to be relatively different from each other. These behavioral outcomes were then formulated into statements and incorporated into the questionnaire. An example of such a statement is "I take on extra work responsibilities beyond what is expected of my job". Respondents in the actual survey were asked to indicate the extent to which the behavioral outcomes were characteristic of them. Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale.

Employees in the pilot study were asked to complete this sentence "A committed employee is one who..." A list of 32 behavioral outcomes was generated. Following are some of the most cited:

- a. is willing to use his/her personal time to help company meet deadlines (20 times)
- b. takes initiative to volunteer for work (12 times)
- c. tries to build good interpersonal relationships with colleagues (10 times)
- d. is willing to take extra work responsibility beyond his/her job scope (8 times)
- e. is supportive of the company's policies or goals (8 times)

4. Data and Methodology

Questionnaire was used to investigate the relationship between the OCQ and the ACS. Of the 387 questionnaires distributed, 223 questionnaires were returned and 217 were usable, giving an effective response rate of 56%, which is considered adequate for analysis and reporting (Babbie, 1990).

The sample included employees from the operative to the managerial levels. Males made up 48.8% of the sample. About 40.6% of the respondents were between 21-30 years of age and 75.1% had an education level of 'O' Levels or below. Organizational tenure ranged from a minimum of half a year to a maximum of 30 years; the average tenure is about 9.4 years. Initial tests revealed that only the OCQ and ACS had internal consistency reliability estimates of at least 0.70. A correlation analysis shows that the ACS is highly correlated with the OCQ, thus providing evidence for the convergent validity of the ACS with other affective measures. The high inter-correlations between the NCS and the affective measures of ACS and OCQ reiterated the findings by Allen and Meyer (1990). Their explanation was that feelings of obligation to maintain membership in the organization, though not identical to feelings of affective attachment towards the organization, might be meaningfully linked to the latter. The CCS correlated strongly with the affective measures, though it correlated more strongly with the ACS than with the OCQ. This suggests that the relationship between continuance and affective commitment may be closely linked as well.

5. Behavioral Outcomes of Organizational Commitment

To assess common factors underlying the behavioral outcomes, the items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (principal component method) and rotated to a varimax criterion. Interpretable factors had to have two or more items and each item's factor loading should be at least .15 greater than its loading on any other factor (Randall, Fedor, and Longenecke, 1990).

An examination of the items suggested that factor 1 reflected characteristics of a favorable work attitude; factor 2 described acts of showing support for the company; while factor 3 gave examples of a willingness to sacrifice personal time and effort for the company. On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being most frequently), respondents indicated that they demonstrated favorable work attitudes most frequently (Mean = 3.97, S.D = .641); followed by support for company (Mean = 3.28, S.D = .847); and personal sacrifices (Mean = 2.95, S.D = .923). To assess the internal consistency of the items in these three scales, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The three scales had Cronbach's alphas of .7695, .7626 and .5481 respectively.

However, a point of interest is that this study did not confirm the unidimensionality of the ACS. Findings in this study revealed that the items in the ACS loaded strongly on two separate factors (Factors 1 and 4). This suggests that the ACS may not be as homogeneous as it is commonly believed.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study had set out to investigate a three-component model of organizational commitment among manufacturing workers in Singapore. Factor analytic results confirmed the conceptual distinctiveness of affective, continuance and normative commitment among the employees sampled. The high correlations among all three components of organizational commitment implies that although affective, continuance and normative commitment are distinct constructs, they are not experienced exclusively from each other, and employees may exhibit all three dimensions of organizational commitment at varying degrees at the same time.

This study did not confirm the unidimensionality of the ACS, but instead showed the scale to contain two distinct dimensions. The reliability and discriminant validity of the ACS with the continuance and normative measures were also not as superior to those of the OCQ. This suggests the need to subject the dimensionality of the ACS through further scrutiny, especially in the context of cross-cultural implications before the ACS could be used confidently as a substitute for the OCQ.

7. Limitations of this Study

As with most self-administered survey methodology, response bias was an important consideration. This is especially so in employee surveys. Employees may be concerned about the confidentiality of their answers and that by disclosing negative feelings about their organizations; they may risk jeopardizing their jobs. This fear can be especially strong when organizational downsizing and retrenchments are prevalent. As a result, employees might have answered in a more socially desirable way. Such bias can be reduced by emphasizing the confidentiality of responses and that the researchers conducting the survey are independent of the employees' organization.

Another limitation could be the effect of common method variance that resulted in the high scores and the unexpectedly high correlations among the organizational commitment components. This could be the result of measuring all antecedents, organizational commitment and behavioral variables in the same self-administered questionnaire.

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