

A three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v6-i12/2464>

Published Date: 01 December 2016

Abstract

This paper is a conceptual based paper which gives theoretical evidence to support the idea. The paper also gives a brief overview model proposes that organizational commitment is experienced by the employee as three simultaneous mindsets encompassing affective, normative, and continuance organizational commitment. Affective Commitment reflects commitment based on emotional ties the employee develops with the organization primarily via positive work experiences. Normative Commitment reflects commitment based on perceived obligation towards the organization, for example rooted in the norms of reciprocity. Continuance Commitment reflects commitment based on the perceived costs, both economic and social, of leaving the organization. This model of commitment has been used by researchers to predict important employee outcomes, including turnover and citizenship behaviors, job performance, absenteeism, and tardiness (Meyer et al., 2002). Meyer and Allen (1997) provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical lineage of this model.

Keywords: Organizational Commitment, Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, Continuance Commitment.

1. Introduction

Employee is the main resource for the organization. Once the organization wants to meet its objectives, first it has to meet the employee requirement up to reach the obligation level. Thus, when they are in that stage, the organization can easily access and can compete in the market, with good service and product as well as high performance.

Organizational commitment is considered as the most important construct of employee attachment (Sommer et al., 1996). Meyer and Allen (1997) define organizational commitment as the desire of employees to remain employed with their organization. Organizational commitment has strong connection, with employee behavior and performance (Benkhoff, 1997)

2. Literature Review

The three-component model of commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) arguably dominates organizational commitment research (Meyer et al., 2002). This model proposes that organizational commitment is experienced by the employee as three simultaneous mindsets encompassing affective, normative, and continuance organizational commitment. Affective Commitment reflects commitment based on emotional ties the employee develops with the organization primarily via positive work experiences. Normative Commitment reflects commitment based on perceived obligation towards the organization, for example rooted in the norms of reciprocity. Continuance Commitment reflects commitment based on the perceived costs, both economic and social, of leaving the organization. This model of commitment has been used by researchers to predict important employee outcomes, including turnover and citizenship behaviors, job performance, absenteeism, and tardiness (Meyer et al., 2002). Meyer and Allen (1997) provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical lineage of this model

2.1 Organizational Commitment

The definitions of organizational commitment are varying in studies. Meyer and Allen (1997) suggested organizational commitment as a multidimensional concept that has been understood in different ways. Organizational commitment appears to be behavioural (Staw, 1980), normative (Allen & Meyer, 1990), calculative (Becker, 1960; Ritzer & Trice, 1969) and attitudinal (Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Porter et al. (1974) attitudinal concept has been widely accepted to measure the employee's commitment, measuring through attitudes and feeling toward his employing organization.

2.2 Three-Component Model

Allen and Meyer (1990), Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997), Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) developed the three-component model of organizational commitment. The three dimensions of organizational commitment identified are affective, continuance and normative

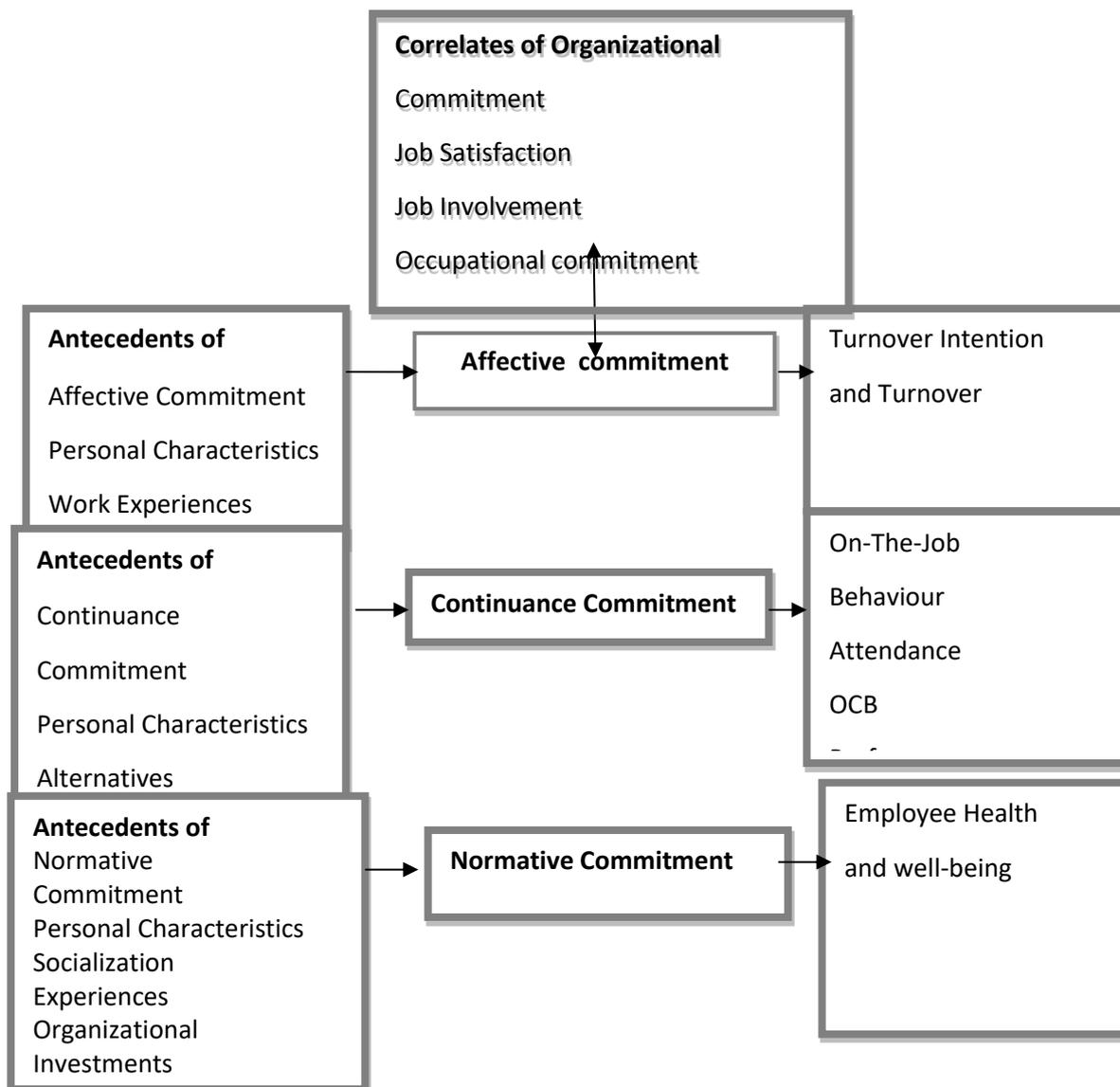


Figure 2.1 A Three-Component Model of Organizational Commitment

2.2.1 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is referred to as the individual's emotional attachment to and involvement and identification with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment takes into account three main aspects namely: (1) the development of psychological affinity to a firm; (2) association with the organization; and (3) the wish to remain as a member of the organization. Individuals, by developing emotional affinity toward a firm, tend to associate themselves with the objectives of the firm and support the firm in achieving these objectives (Allen & Meyer, 1990). When the employees' own values are consistent with the organization's values, then the employees are able to identify with the organization and this will enable the individuals to assimilate the values and goals of the organization. Affective commitment has been linked to a wide range of positive outcomes in relation to absenteeism, turnover, organizational behaviour and job performance (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Positive results can be achieved through affective commitment which can

be observed through reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, better organizational behaviour and organizational effectiveness.

According to Jaros, Jermier, Koehler and Sincich (1993), affective commitment is identified with desirable workplace behaviours, such as lower absenteeism rate, job satisfaction, increased productivity, personnel stability and organizational citizenship behaviour. There are certain variables that precede affective commitment. The variables can be classified into three main categories, namely: work experiences, organizational characteristics; and personal characteristics (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Personal characteristics are the demographic factors of the employees. It has been reported that the association between demographic factors and affective commitment is neither consistent nor significant (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is higher in employees who display a high level of confidence in what they do (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Employees with a high level of competence have the ability to choose good organizations, and this in turn will contribute towards affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

The demographic profiles that are of interest in this research are age, gender, tenure and education level. Kaldenberg, Becker and Zvonkovic (1995) reported that the age of an employee is a good predictor of commitment. According to their findings, older employees are unable to find alternative jobs; hence they tend not to leave the current job. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) revealed in their study that there is a strong and positive relationship between age and affective commitment. Other studies have shown that there is no relationship between age and organizational commitment. Hawkins (1998) conducted a study among 396 school principals and the results revealed that there was no positive relationship between age and affective commitment. Similar results were reported by Colbert and Kwon (2000). Their study was carried out among 497 internal auditors of colleges and universities. The findings revealed that there is no significant relationship between age and affective commitment. Based on these studies, the relationship between age and affective commitment seems to be inconsistent.

2.2.3 Continuance Commitment

Continuance commitment, the second construct of organizational commitment propounded by Meyer and Allen (1990), is built upon the Becker's side-bet theory. According to this theory, when an individual works for several years in an organization, he tends to accumulate investments in the form of time, job effort and organization specific skills which are too costly to lose.

According to Romzek (1990), employees tend to evaluate their investments by looking at what they have contributed towards the organization and what they would gain by remaining in the organization and what they would lose if they leave the firm. When an employee feels that he or she does not possess the necessary skills to compete for a job in any other field, then the employee tends to develop continuance commitment and becomes more committed to the organization because of the limited opportunities and alternatives (Meyer & Allen, 1990).

It has been reported that employees tend to develop continuance commitment when they perceive that the cost of leaving the organization is high. The antecedents of continuance

commitment are investments and alternative employments. Investment means the loss incurred by the employees in leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1990). Investment can be either work or non-work related. Examples of work related investments are losing a senior position and rewards associated with the position, loss of benefits and incentives.

Meyer and Allen (1997) found in their study that there is a negative correlation between continuance commitment and opportunity to be employed in another organization. Employees who perceive that they have other alternatives for employment may display a weak continuance commitment.

2.2.4 Continuance Commitment

Normative commitment is the third construct of organizational commitment. There is limited literature which has explored normative commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) and Randall and Cote (1991) attempted to differentiate normative commitment from affective and continuance commitment. Normative commitment demonstrates an obligation by an employee to continue employment with the organization. According to Allen and Meyer (1990), individuals with a high level of normative commitment feel that they should continue providing their services to the firm.

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that when there is congruence between company's values and employees' values, the latter tend to display a higher level of organizational commitment. This finding is in consonance with that of Mayer and Schoorman (1992) who found that when employees accept the company's values, they exhibit increased organizational commitment.

Normative commitment exists when the employee feels obligated towards the firm which has invested in them (Randall & Cote, 1991). According to Randall and Cote (1991), employees feel that when an organization has invested a lot of time and money in training and developing them, they have a moral obligation to continue to provide their services to the company. For example, when an organization has paid for the employees' education while they were continuing their studies to improve their qualifications, they feel obligated to reimburse the organization by continuing to provide their services.

Jaros, Jermier, Koehler and Sincich (1993) differentiated normative commitment from affective and continuance commitment. Normative commitment is found to be similar to moral commitment. Normative commitment is a sense of obligation or duty towards the organization. Normative commitment differs from continuance commitment because it is not dependent on the investments that the employees have put into the organization in the form of time and effort. According to Becker, Randall and Reigel (1995), the three dimensions of organizational commitment are not mutually exclusive. An individual can develop any one, or a combination of all the three dimensions of commitment. These three constructs of organizational commitment differ from each other based on their underlying motives and outcomes.

3. Conclusion

The three-component model developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) is one of the most widely researched models on organizational commitment. According to Meyer and Allen (1990, 1991), the three component model and measures associated with it seem to more accurately predict the concept of organizational commitment than the previous uni-dimensional conceptualizations.

Noor Harun and Noor Hasrul (2006) found that Allen and Meyer's organizational measures are equally applicable to an international setting and are not culturally sensitive. Organizational support theory and related social exchange accounts help bring order to the myriad of empirical findings on the antecedents and consequences of affective commitment.

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