

A Typology of Workplace Commitment Elements and Antecedents Affecting Organizational Effectiveness

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to present a typology workplace commitment of workplace commitment illustrating levels, elements, and antecedents of organizational and individual commitment. This typology focuses on elements that can be manipulated by the human resource development (HRD) researcher and practitioner to affect organizational performance.

Performance improvement in an organization goes beyond the commonly accepted principles of good management and effective leadership by engaging the emotional commitment of the employee (Katzenbach, 2000). Commitment is the differentiating factor between top performing companies and those of average performance (Katzenbach, 2000). Emotionally engaged employees are more productive and more customer-focused. High-levels of employee commitment are positively correlated with superior financial performance in organizations demonstrated by significant increases in operating and net profit margin (International Survey Research, 2001; Gallup, 2002; Watson Wyatt Global Consulting, 2003). Individuals and teams that are committed to the values and goals of an organization have a higher morale and lower turnover, increased job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Cohen, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

Gallup (2002) estimates that employees uncommitted to their work and organization cost the U.S. economy up to \$350 billion per year. More than a third of employees worldwide admit to having low levels of commitment to the job and the company and instead are more committed to their careers (TNS Worldwide, 2002). Only one in twelve (8%) are “company-oriented” employees, predominantly committed to their company (TNS Worldwide, 2002). Levels of employee commitment in the USA are significantly lower than half of the world’s other major economies, placing USA companies at a disadvantage when competing in the global marketplace (International Survey Research, 2001). By understanding when and how commitments develop and how they shape attitude and behavior, organizations will be able to manage it more effectively (Meyer & Allen, 1997), and create a positive environment that sustains commitment. The purpose of this paper is to develop a typology that helps HRD practitioners understand and increase commitment.

Conceptual Framework

Since organization and management science emerged in the early 1900s, an evolution has occurred in concepts about the nature and functions of organizations and the criteria for organizational effectiveness (Katzenbach, 2000). There are numerous ways to conceptualize and model an organization, with profound consequences for effectiveness criteria. How an organization is designed and how it functions have important implications for how processes and people are managed and motivated. Toward the early 1970s, organizational theorists began questioning behaviorist models like Taylorism (Taylor, 1911), bureaucracy (Weber, 1946), and administrative control (Simon, 1957). Such rigid programs could easily become maladaptive, giving rise to a trained incompetence that would contribute to both ineffective and inefficient organizational performance.

The rapid pace of change and high level of competition requires a greater emphasis on engaging the hearts and minds of employees – the human relation perspective (Weick, 1979). Mayo's (1945) pivotal work demonstrating the Hawthorn Effect illustrated commitment and loyalty were often more important than self-interest and formal sanctions in increasing productivity. The human relations school gave rise to work directed at informal, normative structures; organizational cooperation, motivation, morality and commitment.

Commitment has been defined as the degree of pledging or binding of the individual to a set of behaviors and motivates one to act (Meyer et al., 1993). Once identification with the organization begins, concern with the broader interests of the organization (reputation, survival, and success) increases. This broader interest generates activity and resource exchange (reflecting enhanced concern between firm and employee) fostering further identification. Katzenbach (2000) describes an energized workforce as high performance (those that perform better than industry norms) and whose emotional commitment enables them to make and deliver products or services that constitute a sustainable competitive advantage.

Employees with strong organizational affective commitment are emotionally attached to the organization having a greater desire to contribute meaningfully to the organization, choose to be absent less, work harder (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), improving production (Randal & Cote, 1994) and overall job performance (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Managers with strong affective commitment report higher levels of compliance with strategic decisions and avoidance of budgetary slack in financial planning (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987) and are more willing to engage in organizational citizenship or extra-role performance (Meyer et al., 1993).

Method

ERIC, PsycInfo, and ABI Inform were selected with the assistance of a reference librarian as most representative of education, psychology, and business for a structured literature review. Databases were searched from the 1970s because organizational structure moved towards a human resource approach during that time. The following descriptors were used separately: workplace commitment, organizational commitment, affective commitment, employee emotional commitment, career, profession and occupational commitment, job commitment, work group and team commitment. In addition, organizational and workplace commitment, career and job commitment were each paired with commitment antecedents and consequences. Each descriptor set produced a list of records that were reviewed for relevancy. The search resulted in 3985 articles of which 567 addressed workplace issues, not general societal trends such as societal commitment or familial commitment. Articles, non-specific to the workplace, were eliminated as were duplicate articles. Articles were then examined for the antecedents or consequences of commitment in the workplace resulting in 125 articles to analyze. Abstracts were read and categorized by (a) elements of commitment, (b) antecedents to commitment, and (c) consequences of commitment.

Content analysis is used to quantify and analyze the presence, meaning and relationships of concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the text to draw out conclusions. The text was coded and broken down into manageable categories on a variety of levels and themes. Relational analysis was used in examining the information coded. This analysis allow us to organized certain levels and factors of workplace commitment into a typology. A typology provides a mechanism for chunking or grouping, which allows large amounts of information to be collapsed into more convenient themes or categories that are easier to process, store, and comprehend (Carper & Snizek, 1980).

A Typology of Workplace Commitment

Commitment in the workplace or understanding how people become committed to an organization is multifaceted (Meyer & Allen, 1997) consisting of the elements, antecedents and consequences, and forms such as organizational (affective), job, career, team, and supervisory commitment. The results of factor analysis concluded that sufficient discriminate validity (reduction in concept redundancy) exists among affective organizational commitment, job commitment, career commitment (Chang, 1999; Morrow & Goetz, 1998; Morrow & Wirth, 1989), and group (team) commitment to consider these as independent forms of commitment in the workplace. Considering this, these independent forms of workplace commitment are reframed into two distinct levels – organizational commitment (organization and supervisor) and individual commitment (job, career, and team) to create a typology of workplace commitment including the levels, as well as the antecedents and consequences of workplace commitment. The structure of the typology identifies levels of workplace commitment, the antecedents to workplace commitment and consequences or outcomes of workplace commitment (See Table 1).

Table 1
Levels and Element to Improve Organizational Effectiveness

Antecedents to Organizational Commitment Commitment to the organization and supervisor	Levels of Commitments Antecedents to Individual Commitment Commitment to one's job, career, and team	Consequences of commitment
Congruency Interesting work Clarity of purpose Equity and Fairness Feedback Empowerment Autonomy	Congruency Interesting work Feedback Autonomy	Organizational citizenship Extra role performance Increased Accountability Increased Job Satisfaction Increased Motivation Improved Performance Improved Production Lower Absenteeism Lower Turnover

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the measure of strength of the employee's identification with the goals and values of the organization (Mowday et al., 1982) and supervisor. Committed individuals exert extra effort, desire organizational membership (Morrow, 1993), protect company assets, and share company goals and values (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Supervisory commitment includes the strength of an individual's identification with the supervisor and internalization of the supervisor's values. Identification occurs when the subordinate admires certain attributes, such as attitudes, behavior, and accomplishments. Internalization occurs when the subordinate adopts the attitudes and behaviors of the supervisor because they are congruent with the subordinate's value systems (Becker, 1992). Commitment to an organization is related positively to a variety of desirable work outcomes including employee job satisfaction, motivation, and performance, and related negatively to absenteeism and turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Organizational commitment can be measured as either attitudinal or calculative. Attitudinal, referred to as affective (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), or internalization and identification (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) is the employee's emotional attachment and identification with the organization (Cohen, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982;

Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). Employees continue with the organization because they want to do so (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al, 1982) and feel proud to be part of the organization, respecting its values and accomplishments (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). The calculative or "side-bet" (Becker, 1960), also referred to as continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and compliance (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), signifies the extent to which employees feel committed to their organization by virtue of the cost that they feel is associated with leaving it and their need to remain with the organization (Becker, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

The affective (attitudinal) commitment approach provides a clearer and more focused scale of organizational commitment (Cohen, 2003) because the correlation between antecedents and attitudinal (affective) measures are stronger than those measures of the calculated or continuance approach (Meyer & Allen, 1997; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). In addition, many existing measures of organizational commitment are attitudinal (Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997), and the construct validity of affective (attitudinal) commitment is supported, while the construct validity of continuance and compliance commitment is questionable (Ko et al., 1997).

Individual Commitment

Individual commitment is the measure of strength of the employee's identification with the values of other individuals and peers within the organization (team commitment), and his/her work (job commitment) and careers (career commitment) and encourages individuals to exert extra organizational citizenship behavior as active positive contributions and avoid engaging in harmful behaviors. Team commitment is an individual's identification and sense of cohesiveness with other members of a group. The importance of team commitment is its enhancement of social involvement that reinforces the social ties that the individual forms with the organization (Randal & Cote, 1991).

Job commitment is the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his/her work and the degree to which one's work performance affects one's self-esteem and self-image (Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977). Career commitment is defined as the magnitude of an individual's motivation, attitude, affects, belief and behavioral intentions toward an occupation or vocation or the degree of centrality of one's career for one's identity (Blau, 1995; Hall, 1971).

Antecedents to Commitment in the Workplace

Understanding the antecedents to commitment allows HRD practitioners to build and maintain highly effective organization. Congruency, interesting work, clarity of purpose, feedback, equity /fairness, empowerment, and autonomy are antecedent elements that lead to organizational commitment. The antecedents that lead to individual employee commitment are congruency, interesting work, feedback, and autonomy. These antecedents produce psychological states that lead to positive consequences for the organization and individual. Understanding the antecedents to commitment allows HRD practitioners to build and maintain highly effective organizations.

Congruency is the quality of agreement that exists between the employee's values and interests and those of the organization. If congruency exists between a person's interests, preferences, abilities (Holland, 1985) and values (Katzenbach, 2000), and organizational factors in the work environment, employees become more emotionally committed to the organization leading to improved performance (Holland, 1985; Katzenbach, 2000). Congruency or "fit" between the individual and his or her job/career increases commitment to the career and/or job (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Cadwell, 1991). Designing and building employee roles that are aligned with employees' values, abilities and interests lead to organizational effectiveness (Katzenbach, 2000; Nelson, 1999).

Interesting work holds the individual's attention, is challenging and rewarding by utilizing a variety of skills and knowledge, and is significant to the organization. Job characteristics such as challenge, skill variety (different activities and talents required), task identity (doing a job from beginning to end with visible results), task significance (the impact on the lives of workers and the organization), degree of autonomy (freedom, independence and discretion in scheduling work and determining procedures) all improve commitment to the organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Nelson, 1999), to the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), and one's career (Varona, 2002). The more important a task or job component (job significance) is, the greater the level of job commitment and satisfaction, motivation and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Organizations that ensure interesting work will improve employee commitment. HRD practitioners that allow for job and skill variety, independence or discretion in sequence, methods, procedures, quality control will improve organizational effectiveness.

Clarity of purpose provides a clear identification of the intentions, ideas, goals and plans of the organization allowing employees to be informed, ask questions, share information, and have a clear sense of direction. Organizations that provide a clear sense of direction (Greenberg, 1994), adequate explanation of new policies (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Rhodes & Steers, 1981) and purposed report high levels of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), workgroup commitment and individual commitment (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991)

Equity and fairness maintains a balance between and within the organization and its employees. Affective commitment and commitment between peers and supervisor is strengthened when employees' perceptions are of a fair, trusting, and equitable environment (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Rhodes & Steers, 1981).

Feedback is the degree to which employees receive information that reveals how well they are performing on the job. Feedback that promotes continuous improvement and constant communication with employees leads to the development of organizational commitment and enhanced performance (Katzenbach, 2000; Nelson, 1999; Varona, 2002).

Empowerment gives authority to the employees to make decisions about their work. Organizational commitment is stronger among employees who are allowed to participate in decision-making and empowered to carry out their work (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Meyers & Allen, 1997; Rhodes & Steers, 1981). Empowerment, autonomy, and mutual accountability focus employees on doing a job well and encourage them to lend a hand to a co-worker or department that needs help (Katzenbach, 2000). Giving people latitude, flexibility, and empowerment to make decisions increases the chance that they will perform as desired bringing additional initiative, ideas, and energy to their jobs (Nelson, 1999).

Autonomy is the degree of freedom, independence and discretion an employee is allowed in scheduling work and determining procedures. Increased autonomy strengthens organizational commitment (Mathew & Zajac, 1990), increases job satisfaction, and contributes to job commitment (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

Implications for HRD and Future Research

HRD's principal purpose is to improve organizational performance through increased productivity, efficient work processes, and individual contributions (Swanson & Arnold, 1996). One trend effecting modern HRD practices is greater expectation of meaningful work and employee involvement (McLagan, 1989). A major focus of HRD interventions is an effort to change employee behavior to enhance performance. Commitment of organizations and individuals to each other, the process and the product, is vital to increased productivity and efficiency.

Each element in this typology can be influenced by HRD practitioners, who can manipulate the elements at both the organizational and individual level to assure that there will be an increase in positive organizational outcomes. When undertaking such manipulation, HRD practitioners can partner with HRD researchers to examine the impact of these manipulations. Such structuring of variables can lead to future research and theory-building efforts.

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