Some Antecedents of Organisational Commitment: Results from an Information Systems Public Sector Organisation

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Abstract. The primary objective of this research is to be able to understand some of the major antecedents that contribute in making employees committed to an organisation (OC). Once the relationship between the antecedents and OC is established, it is appropriate to ascertain whether all the dimensions of OC are desirable, and which and how the dimensions of OC may be strengthened. The analysis of the data was checked for reliability and validity using Cronbach alpha and factor analysis. Multivariate analysis using the regression method and analysis of variance were utilised to establish whether there was a significant relationship between the selected antecedents and the three dimensions of OC. The study concludes by identifying the organisational implications of the research, and recommending appropriate human resource management policies and practices to develop the right type and level of OC. The recommendations also include appropriate management policies aimed at maintaining and possibly increasing the right type of OC.

Introduction

The topic under examination is organisational commitment (OC) at the workplace. The primary objective of the research is to be able to understand some of the major antecedents that contribute in making employees committed to the organisation. Reichheld (1996) stated: “Loyalty is by no means dead. It remains one of the great engines of business success”. Research suggests that OC may have an impact on: (a) job performance (Fukami and Larson 1984); (b) absenteeism (Steers, 1977;
Fukami and Larson, 1984); and (c) turnover (Porter et al, 1974; Fukami and Larson, 1984). Mowday et al (1982) have suggested that gaining a greater understanding of the processes related to OC has implications for employees, organisations, and society as a whole. Thus OC would appear to have potentially serious consequences for overall organisational performance.

The employees’ level of commitment to an organisation may make them more eligible to receive both external benefits, such as better wages, and psychological rewards associated with belonging. Organisations value commitment among their employees because it is typically assumed to reduce undesirable behaviours, such as lateness and absenteeism. Committed employees may also be more likely to engage in “extra-role” behaviours, such as creativeness or innovativeness, that are vital for maintaining the organisation’s competitiveness (Katz and Kahn, 1978).

**Goals of Research Study**

Research into OC has focused upon finding a relationship between various antecedents and the three components that make up OC. The primary antecedents include: age; gender; education level; marital status; position and organisation tenure; personality; and role states. A number of these relationships were subject to a detailed examination by Meyer and Allen, (1984); Grusky, (1966); Mowday et al (1982), and others.

This study is designed to contribute to the OC literature by extending the research to include two other antecedents, namely family life cycle (an extension of marital status) and personality (using Myers-Briggs type indicator).

The goals of this study are to:
- Establish if there is a relationship between the selected antecedents and OC.
- Identify the organisational implications of the research.
- Recommend appropriate human resource management policies and practices to develop the right type and level of OC.
- Recommend appropriate change management policies that would maintain and possibly increase the OC level.
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These goals have the objective of improving the effectiveness of an organisation to enable it to face challenging competitive situations.

The study will examine OC and its relationship with the following antecedents:

- Age;
- Gender;
- Educational standard;
- Position tenure within the organisation;
- Marital status;
- Family life cycle status;
- Personality characteristics using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator;
- Role states, in terms of ambiguity, conflict, overload.

The results from this study provide an added insight into the issue of OC by employees, and establish a solid basis for further research into the topic.

Organisation under Study

The organisation under study is a state owned I.T. Company, that has been established for about eleven years. An Information System Strategic Plan (ISSP) defined the development of an integrated computer systems infrastructure to better equip government departments so that they may confront future challenges.

The organisation under study has the responsibility for implementing the ISSP. The company operates and supports a wide area network connecting all government departments. Apart from supporting electronic mail, intranet and internet services, the network is the backbone for over one hundred major applications. The information systems applications range from financial management to patient administration at public hospitals.

Issue Definition and Research Objective

OC as an issue has been stimulated mainly by its demonstrated negative
correlation to undesirable traits such absenteeism and high sick leave. Committed employees have been found to be more innovative and creative, and are less likely to leave an organisation than those who are uncommitted (e.g., Porter et al., 1974). Because low job performance, and absenteeism, and turnover are costly to organisations, OC is generally assumed to be a desirable quality that should be fostered in employees.

A committed employee is perceived to be one who stays with the organisation through thick and thin, attends work regularly, puts in a full day (and maybe more), protects company assets, and shares company goals (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Viewed from an organisational perspective, having a committed workforce is highly desirable. The study of commitment in this context is important for the following reasons:

• Even though organisations are becoming leaner, they must maintain a core of people who are the source of organisational life. Those who remain, represent the “heart, brain, and muscle” of the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

• If employees become less committed to an organisation, they channel their commitment in other directions. Employees who are reluctant to develop a commitment to an organisation that cannot or will not reciprocate, might instead become committed to their profession or to the industry in which they work. These employees may start to evaluate their skills and experience in terms of their marketability outside the organisation, rather than by their implications for their current or future jobs in the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

• Outsourcing of works to other companies or individuals will become an important alternative to having a permanent resource. Therefore, the organisation’s own success will also depend on the commitment of these contractors. Understanding how commitment is developed and maintained in this scenario will become very important.

**Literature Review**

In the last two decades, OC has received special attention and has grown in acceptance in the literature of industrial and organisational psychology, and organisational behaviour. The literature search indicates that OC is linked to various antecedents ranging from personal variables and organisational characteristics. The major objective of the literature
review is to investigate the concepts and inherent relationship between a number of dominant antecedents and OC.

OC is an important issue from both the conceptual and organisational aspect since it may be used to predict employees’ absenteeism, performance, turnover, and other behaviours. There is little consensus concerning the definition of the concept or its measurement. Most researchers conceive of commitment as involving some form of psychological bond between people and organisations, although there is little consensus as to a useful operational index of the concept. Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualised a multidimensional OC measure that drew on the early works of Porter et al (1974); Becker (1960); and Weiner and Vardi (1980). McGee and Ford (1987), and Meyer et al, (1990) offered evidence for the presence of other sub-dimensions of commitment, namely personal sacrifice and lack of alternatives. The findings by Dunham et al (1994) were consistent with the research of Steers (1977) and Mottaz (1988), that perceived job characteristics, organisational dependability, and perceived participatory management contribute to create rewarding situations intrinsically conducive to the development of affective commitment.

It is contended that the ideas put forward by Allen and Meyer (1990) tend to bring the definition of OC closer to the practical meaning of the concept. They maintain that OC is made up of three components or dimensions:
1. The affective component, referring to the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organisation.
2. The continuance component referring to commitment based on the costs that the employee associates with leaving the organisation.
3. The normative component referring to the employee’s feeling of obligation to remain with the organisation.

It is contended that the OC of managers and other employees is essential for the survival and effectiveness of large work organisations because the fundamental responsibility of management is to maintain the organisation in a state of health necessary to carry on its work. Effective management thus presupposes a proprietary concern, a sense of responsibility for and dedication to sustaining the well-being of the organisa-
tion. In the absence of ownership as a motive for such concern, modern organisations have of necessity turned to the deliberate creation and protection of committed elites (Selznick, 1957; Perrow, 1972).

Reichers (1985) contends that commitment has been significantly, negatively associated with turnover and, to a lesser extent with other withdrawal behaviours such as decreasing performance and increased absenteeism and tardiness. Some researchers have found that side bets or sunk costs increase the commitment felt by long term organisation members (Becker, 1960; Hrebiniaik and Alutto, 1972). Mowday et al (1982) distinguish between OC as an attitude and OC as a behaviour. Attitudinal commitment reflects the individual’s identification with organisational goals and the employee’s willingness to work towards them. Thus, attitudinal commitment is synonymous with OC as measured by the OC questionnaire (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Behavioural commitment, on the other hand, is represented by what is termed attributional approaches to commitment, and it results from the binding of individuals to behavioural acts. Mowday et al (1982) maintain that there is a cyclical relationship between these two types of commitment whereby commitment attitudes lead to committing behaviours which, in turn, reinforce commitment attitudes. This distinction between commitment attitudes and commitment behaviours along with the increasing use of the OC questionnaire as the major instrument used to assess commitment may lead to more consistency and coherence to studies of OC.

Commitment to one group may imply the necessary abandonment of other identifications with other groups. Reichers (1985) contends that as organisations pursue the conflicting goals of multiple subdivisions, individuals who are committed to these subdivisions may suffer from conflicts over the direction that their energies and loyalties should take. The potential conflict among multiple commitments involves the self-concept and identity of individuals, because the set of identifications and commitments an individual experiences is an integral part of the self. Thus individuals are likely to resolve these conflicts by withdrawing from the organisation, therefore continued relationships between OC and turnover could be expected. In this case however, turnover would result not from decreased OC, but from the conflict caused by too many intense organisational commitments. Finally, Morrow (1983) contended that the
concept of redundancy which has characterised OC may be decreased when commitment is conceptualised and measured as a multifaceted construct.

Research conducted by Morrow (1983) demonstrates a high statistical overlap with concepts such as job involvement, job attachment, and career satisfaction. It is reasonable to suggest that specific commitments to particular goal orientations may demonstrate less redundancy with other concepts. It is contended that a number of approaches to OC have ignored the multifaceted conceptions of the organisation. The addition of other factors such as role states (ambiguity, conflict and overload), and the personal character of the individual may present commitments in a way that may be more closely aligned to the individual’s actual experiences in organisations.

A summary of the findings from the literature review regarding the relationships between OC and antecedents are summarised below.

1. **Position tenure.** The research (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) indicated that there is a low positive correlation with OC (side bets). However, other research has provided inconsistent results.

2. **Age.** The full meta-analysis (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) yielded a medium positive correlation with OC.

3. **Gender.** Various research (based on bivariate analysis) has provided inconsistent results. The use of bivariate procedures may not allow one to accurately assess the gender variable when the effects of other variables are held constant.

4. **Educational Level.** The research (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) indicated that there is a low negative correlation with OC. However, other research has provided inconsistent and contradictory results.

5. **Family Life Cycle.** There has been relatively little research aimed at explaining why family life cycle status should be related to OC. The little research conducted has provided divergent results.

6. **Character of Individual.** No research is available that relates character of individual with OC.

7. **Role States.** Although the theory related to role states has been examined for many years (at least two decades), the research findings are inconclusive and inconsistent.
Research Model and Hypotheses

Figure 1 illustrates the research model to be adopted. The hypotheses the research seeks to answer are itemised below.

1. *Older employees have a higher degree of OC.* This hypothesis is based upon the premise that older employees view their past years of service to the organisation as an investment, and will have the perception that it would be more difficult for them to be job mobile. Therefore they would tend to be more committed to the organisation.

![Figure 1: Antecedents and Organisational Commitment Research Model](image)
2. **Females tend to have a higher degree of OC.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that women have to overcome more barriers than men to gain acceptance. Therefore once they gain acceptance, they tend to be more committed to the organisation.

3. **The lower the education standard the higher degree of OC.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that lower educated employees have less job options and opportunities than the more educated ones. Thus they tend to be more committed to the organisation. It is contended that the more educated employees tend to have higher expectations than the organisation may be able to provide. Hence, they tend to be less committed and therefore tend to change from one organisation to another in order to advance at a faster pace.

4. **The higher the position in the organisational hierarchy the higher the degree of OC.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that workers who have attained a high position in the organisational hierarchy tend to be satisfied with their conditions of work and pay. Thus they tend to be more committed to the organisation. It is also contended that once an employee reaches a high position, the opportunities available in alternative organisations are limited, and it would be difficult for the employee to obtain a higher position or accept an equal or lower post in another organisation.

5. **Married employees tend to have a higher degree of OC.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that married employees, as bread winners of the family unit, tend to be more sociably stable than their single counterparts. Thus they tend to be more committed to the organisation.

6. **Employees with dependent children have a higher degree of OC.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that the family life cycle status of an employee has a bearing upon OC. It is contended that, employees with dependent children tend to have more financial burdens, thus they are inclined not to risk moving from one organisation to another. They prefer a stable and steady income rather than promotional prospects.

7. **The degree of OC is dependent on personality characteristics.** This hypothesis is based upon the premise that personality preferences have a bearing upon the extent of an employee’s level of OC. It is contended that extraverted and introverted personalities tend to view their working environment differently, thus their level of OC is bound to be different.
8. The higher degree of ambiguity, conflict and overload the lower degree of OC. This hypothesis is based upon the premise that as the level of work related stress being experienced by an employee increases, the level of OC decreases. It is contended that role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload all tend to increase employee stress, leading to demotivation and less job satisfaction, thus resulting in lower OC.

Field Research Method and Population Sample

The field research was based upon a questionnaire specifically designed to collect evidence to support or refute the outlined hypothesis. This body of evidence together with the relevant literature search enabled the author to generate conclusions and envision the impact of these conclusions on the organisation under study. Hence, the recommendations suggest a way forward in resolving the identified concerns as depicted by the various hypotheses. It will also contribute to building a better recruitment policy.

The questionnaire was provided to all the employees (330) of the organisation under study. The field research sample encompasses a wide range of organisational, job, and individual characteristics represented by full-time and part-time organisational members. The majority of the subjects were technical, specialising in either systems software development or network infrastructure.

Research Procedures and Measures

The field research data was collected during paid working hours. The employees (in groups not exceeding 30) were invited to attend a workshop with the specific aim of explaining the questionnaire and how it should be filled in. The employees were requested to fill in the questionnaire anonymously, and were assured that the results of the study would be made known to them when completed.

Apart from the demographic data, the instruments utilised were based upon proven questionnaires conducted in previous research by numerous academic authors. The three dimensional Allen and Meyer (1990) instru-
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ment, incorporating the Porter et al., (1974) QC has provided measures of OC. Using a five point Likert-type format, the response categories for each item ranged from definitely agree to definitely disagree. Each question was given a score ranging from one to five depending on whether the respective question had positive or negative impact on OC. The responses for each item were then summed, and an average was calculated to yield an OC score. OC was measured on three dimensions, namely:
(a) affective;
(b) continuance; and
(c) normative.

A standard Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test was used to measure and identify the employees’ personality. Each individual was classified according to one of the sixteen Myers-Briggs Types indicators. Role states of ambiguity, conflict and overload were measured using an extraction of the organisation diagnostic survey developed in Carnall (1990). Using a five point Likert-type format, the response categories for each item ranged from definitely agree to definitely disagree. The Role States were measured on three dimensions, namely: ambiguity; conflict; and overload. The family life cycle was measured by using a combination of demographic information. In deciding the family life cycle of an individual, the person’s marital status, number of children, and age of the youngest and oldest child were taken into consideration. A respondent was classified in one of nine states, ranging from bachelor stage to solitary survivor. All the other antecedents were based upon demographic data and therefore were self-reported. All the data from the questionnaires was entered onto a database ready for the necessary statistical analysis.

Analysis and Results from Field Research

The analysis of the data was based upon multivariate analysis using Cronbach alpha tests, factor analysis, and regression analysis to establish whether there was a significant relationship between the antecedents and the three dimensions of OC. The data was analysed using SPSS statistical package. These techniques ensure that the measuring scales and data are reliable and valid.
Field Research Response

Three hundred and thirty (330) questionnaires were distributed, of which two hundred and forty five (245) were returned. Two questionnaires were invalid. The overall response rate was just under 74%, the response rate for males was 76% and for females 68%.

Organisation Structure Position of Respondents

70% of respondents occupy technical related functions and are regarded by management as being highly trained and specialised in IT.

Years of Service of Respondents

The mean years of service for the respondents was 3.31 years with a standard deviation of ±2 years, and with 18.52% having been employed with the company for one year or less.

Age and Gender of Respondents

Over 50% of the respondents are below the age of 26 years and only 10% of the workforce have an age above 40 years. The major reason for this is that the IT industry in Malta has a relatively short history, not exceeding twenty five years. The data illustrates that the organisation under study as the major IT employer, is male dominated.

Education Level of Respondents

52% of the respondents have a University qualification, which confirms the data that the respondents are highly trained and specialised in their respective fields.

Marital Status of Respondents

60% of respondents are single. This is consistent with the data regarding the relatively young age of the respondents.

Family Life Cycle Status of Respondents

The data illustrates that 76% of respondents are single or young married couples with no children.
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Personality of Respondents

The information illustrates that out of the possible sixteen personality type indicators, four indicator types dominate the respondents’ personality (86.5%). The data also demonstrates that only a relatively small number (0.9%) of respondents may be regarded as having innovative personalities using the Meyer-Briggs scale.

Overall OC Level of Respondents

The overall mean commitment level for the respondents is 2.8 with a standard deviation of 0.48. This indicates that the company’s workforce commitment level is between committed and neutral.

Overall Role State Level of Respondents

The overall role state level for the respondents is 2.43 with a standard deviation of 0.57. This indicates that the company’s workforce role state level is inclined to being fairly tranquil.

Ambiguity, Conflict and Overload Role State Levels of Respondents

The data indicate that the company’s workforce had a clear defined role within the organisation, the level of harmony between the various divisions and sections is fairly calm, and that just enough resources are provided to complete various tasks.

Reliability of Instruments

The instruments utilised in the questionnaire relating to OC and Roles States were tested for reliability. The reliability analysis for the OC and Role States scales using Cronbach’s alpha obtained 0.8 and 0.81 respectively, therefore both scales are deemed reliable. The Myers-Briggs instrument has a very long history dating about 30 years. Its extensive use in industry and various documented studies have shown it to be valid and reliable.

Validity of Instruments

The instruments used in the questionnaire relating to OC and Role States were tested for validity. The validity analysis for the OC construct,
using principal component factor analysis with a VARIMAX rotation confirm the dimensional structure of the OC construct (refer Table 1). The discriminant validity analysis for OC and Role States constructs combined confirms the dimensional structure of the constructs and depicts the constructs and dimensions as being distinct and separate (refer Table 2).

Table 1
Validity Analysis:
Organisational Commitment Construct Principal Components
Factor Analysis with a VARIMAX Rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
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Table 2
Discriminant Validity Analysis:
Organisational Commitment and Role States Constructs
Principal Components Factor Analysis with a VARIMAX Rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
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<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
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The results show (refer Table 3) that there is a low correlation between the variables.

The coefficient of determination ($R^2$) for the overall OC is 18.92%, indicating that the change in OC is explained by only 18.92% resulting from a change in the antecedents. The $R^2$ for the three dimensions of OC, namely Affective, Continuance and Normative commitments is 24.65%, 19.81% and 10.25% respectively. This indicates that the relationship in a linear sense is medium for the Affective OC dimension, and small for the other two dimensions since the values for $R^2$ are approaching zero. The $F$ ratio for OC and its three dimensions are 5.4130 ($p < 0.001$), 7.5875 ($p < 0.001$), 5.7323 ($p < 0.001$), and 2.6486 ($p < 0.01$) respectively. This confirms a statistically significant relationship between the independent variables and OC.
and dependent variables. When examining the Beta values of OC and its three dimensions, one may notice the magnitude of each variable’s contribution to $R^2$. The 18.92% explained variance in $R^2$ for the overall OC may be attributed to Position Tenure (Grade) with $p < 0.001$; Personality (Meyer-Briggs type indicator) with $p < 0.001$; Role States with $p < 0.01$; and Education Level with $p < 0.05$. The 24.65% explained variance in $R^2$ for the Affective OC may be attributed to Role States with $p < 0.001$ and Personality (Myers-Briggs type indicator) with $p < 0.01$. The 19.81% explained variance in $R^2$ for the Continuance OC may be attributed to Role States with $p < 0.001$. The 10.25% explained variance in $R^2$ for the Normative OC may be attributed to Role States with $p < 0.001$ and Personality (Myers-Briggs type indicator) with $p < 0.05$.

Findings Regarding Individual Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1.** Older employees have a higher degree of OC: There is no evidence to support the premise that age makes a significant difference in OC and its three dimensions (F probability for overall OC, affective, continuance and normative equal 0.317, 0.646, 0.110, and 0.167 respectively). It should be noted that although the firm under study is fairly young, a significant number of employees were seconded from an established I.T. Organisation.

**Hypothesis 2.** Females tend to have a higher degree of OC: This hypothesis is rejected for the overall OC, and the Continuance and Normative dimensions. The two tail significance test shows no significant difference between gender classes (two tail significance for overall: 0.800, 0.819; continuance: 0.325, 0.3370; normative: 0.337, 0.369). However, the two tail significance test for the Affective OC dimension shows a significant difference between the gender classes (0.141, 0.212).

**Hypothesis 3.** The lower the education standard the higher the degree of OC: This hypothesis is accepted for the overall OC, and the Continuance and Normative dimensions. There is a significant difference between the educational standard in these dimensions (F probability for overall OC, continuance and normative equal 0.0185, 0.0001, and 0.0378 respectively). However, the hypothesis is rejected for the Affective OC dimension (0.8975).
Hypothesis 4. The higher the position tenure in the organisation the higher the degree of OC: The hypothesis regarding hierarchical position is accepted for the overall OC, and the Continuance and Normative dimensions. There is a significant difference between the position (grade) an individual occupies in the company for these dimensions (F probability for overall OC, continuance and normative equal 0.0025, 0.0001, and 0.0117 respectively). However, the hypothesis is rejected for the Affective OC dimension (0.0615). The hypothesis regarding years of service is rejected for the overall OC, and its three dimensions. There is no significant difference between years of service for these dimensions (0.972, 0.110, 0.543, and 0.780 respectively).

Hypothesis 5. Married employees tend to have a higher degree of OC: This hypothesis is rejected. There is no evidence to support the proposition that an individual’s marital status makes a significant difference in OC and its three dimensions (F probability for overall OC, affective, continuance and normative equal 0.979, 0.575, 0.073, and 0.223 respectively).

Hypothesis 6. The family life cycle status of an employee tends to have a bearing upon the degree of OC: This hypothesis is rejected. There is no evidence to support the premise that an individual’s family life cycle status makes a significant difference in OC and its three dimensions (F probability for overall OC, affective, continuance and normative equal 0.174, 0.599, 0.168, and 0.102 respectively).

Hypothesis 7. The degree of OC is dependent on the personality of the individual: This hypothesis is accepted for the overall OC, and the Continuance dimension. There is a significant difference between the OC level and the personality of the individual (F probability equal 0.023 and 0.000 respectively). However, the hypothesis is rejected for the Affective and Normative OC dimensions (F probability equal 0.0577 and 0.1968 respectively).

Hypothesis 8. The degree of OC is dependent upon the level of ambiguity, conflict and overload role states: The hypothesis overall role states is accepted for the overall OC, and the Affective dimension (F probability equal 0.000 and 0.000). There is a significant difference between the OC level and the overall role state of the individual. However, the hypothesis is rejected for the Continuance and Normative OC dimensions (F prob-
ability equal 0.321 and 0.510). A closer examination was made between each specific role state of ambiguity, conflict, and overload, and OC and its three dimensions respectively. The analysis of the Ambiguity role state indicates that the hypothesis is accepted for the overall OC, and its three dimensions. There is a significant difference between the OC level and the ambiguity role state of the individual (F probability equal 0.000, 0.000, 0.035 and 0.006). The analysis of the Conflict role state indicates that the hypothesis is accepted for the overall OC, and Affective dimension (F probability equal 0.009 and 0.000). However the hypothesis is rejected for the Continuance and Normative dimensions (F probability equal 0.636 and 0.573). The analysis of the Overload role state indicates that the hypothesis is accepted for the overall OC, and the Affective and Normative dimensions (F probability equal 0.002, 0.000 and 0.043). However the hypothesis is rejected for the Continuance dimensions (0.489).

**Discussion and Interpretation of Field Research**

Age does not seem to be an influencing factor in terms of OC in this research. The major reason for this may be attributed to the fact that being an IT company, the organisation under study has a young workforce (90% below 40 years). The full meta-analysis conducted by Mathieu and Zajac (1990) yielded a small positive correlation of 0.20 between age and OC, confirming this research. There is no indication to suggest that gender is an influencing factor in terms of the level of OC. Grusky (1966) posits that women would be more committed to an organisation because they had to overcome more barriers than men. The meta-analysis (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) yielded a small negative correlation (-0.145) between gender and OC, confirming the field research at this organisation.

Education level is a significant factor in terms of the level of OC within this organisation. It is significantly stronger for the Continuance and Normative dimensions of OC. Being an IT company tertiary and post tertiary qualifications are an important factor for attaining promotions. This may be the primary reason why the education level is stronger for the continuance dimension. The meta-analysis (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) showed that the magnitude of the relationship between education
and commitment was significantly stronger (i.e. more negative) for attitudinal as compared with calculative commitment. Mowday et al (1982) concluded “that this inverse relationship may result from the fact that more educated individuals have higher expectations than the organisation may be able to meet”. This confirms the research at the organisation under study.

Position is a significant factor in terms of the level of OC within this organisation. It is significantly stronger for the Continuance and Normative dimensions of OC. Whereas years of service is not a determining factor of the level of OC or any of its dimensions. This is an expected result since there is a close relationship between promotions (resulting in a higher grade) and the education level examined previously. The meta-analysis (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) showed that organisational tenure is likely to be a better surrogate measure of side bets (continuance dimension). The moderator analysis by type of commitment showed position tenure (years of service) to be significantly more positively related to attitudinal (affective) OC, whereas organisation tenure (grade) tended to be more positively related to calculative (continuance) OC.

The field research showed no indication to suggest that marital status is an influencing factor in terms of the level of OC. However, the analysis of variance and resulting F probability (0.0734) provided a clear inclination towards the continuance OC dimension. It seems reasonable to suggest that marital status may be related to continuance OC since married employees will in all probability have greater financial concerns. The meta-analysis (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) showed a small positive correlation (0.106) with OC. The field research showed that the family life cycle stage, is not an influencing factor to determine their level of OC. However, there is a clear inclination towards the continuance OC. It seems reasonable to suggest that as an individual moves through the different stages within the family life cycle, the individual’s financial burdens will change accordingly.

Personality is a significant factor in determining an individual’s level of OC within the organisation under study. It is significantly stronger for the Continuance and Affective dimensions. Unfortunately there has not been any research conducted with this antecedent therefore a comparative analysis cannot be conducted to confirm the results obtained.
The three dimensions of the individual’s role state, namely, ambiguity, conflict and overload role states have a significant influence on the individual’s overall OC level. Role States influence OC strongly, the ambiguity role state in particular. This is a concrete factor that can be changed by job design and job autonomy. It is not clear whether the relationship between role states and OC and its dimensions, is direct or influenced by other variables, such as stress or job satisfaction. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) show that employees who report greater levels of role strain also tend to report lower amounts of OC, thus confirming this field research.

**Consequences of the Three Dimensions of OC**

From an organisational point of view, it is important to consider whether employees who are strongly committed differ from those with weak commitment in terms of turnover, attendance at work, and job performance. These are the consequences of the three dimensions of OC. Both the field and literature research indicate that affective, continuance, and normative OC will all be related to employee retention, however in different ways. Given that an employee with strong affective OC feels emotional attachment to the organisation, then this individual will have a higher motivation level to contribute meaningfully to the organisation than would an employee with weak affective OC. Therefore, those employees with strong affective OC will choose to be absent less often and will be motivated to give a high performance. The field research has shown that the personal characteristics of individuals that are significantly related to this phenomena include gender, personality, and role states. This may not be said about those employees whose main relationship to the organisation is based upon a strong continuance OC. These employees remain with the organisation because the costs of doing otherwise are too high. It is possible that this type of OC could create feelings of resentment or frustration that could lead to inappropriate work behaviour.

An employee with strong normative OC is attracted to the organisation by feelings of obligation and duty. Thus, it is anticipated that normative OC will be positively related to such work behaviour as job performance, work attendance, and organisational citizenship. Normative OC might
have a particularly important impact on the manner in which the work is carried out. For example, employees who remain in an organisation primarily because of strong normative OC might occasionally resent their sense of indebtedness or obligation to the organisation.

The two antecedents that are strongly related to normative OC in the field research include the education level and organisation tenure (grade). It is incorrect to assume that any form of commitment will be sufficient to ensure a stable workforce. Employee retention must be closely linked to employee performance. Management wants more from committed employees than simply membership to the organisation. It is therefore worthwhile to see what impact OC has on performance at work (attendance and job performance). Overall, employees with strong affective OC to the organisation work harder at their jobs and perform them better than those with weak OC.

From the research conducted it appears that employees with strong affective OC are more valuable employees to the organisation. When commitment reflects an emotional link to the organisation, the organisation may benefit through a reduced turnover, increased productivity, higher job satisfaction, higher self actualisation, and reduced overload among employees. However, when the commitment by the employee is based primarily upon financial aspects (costs associated with leaving), then the organisation may experience a higher employee retention rate at the expense of reduced job satisfaction, reduced self esteem, and higher employee stress.

Organisations need to re-examine policies relating to building the right type of OC. Strategies such as rapid promotions, pension plans, participation in stock-options, and the development of organisation specific skills, all increase continuance OC that may work against the organisation. Although these may contribute to ensure that the employee stays with the organisation, they may not encourage them to contribute to the organisation’s benefit. Instead, some employees may want to quit, but may not be able to afford to do so. Some employees may be motivated to do just enough to maintain their jobs. Affective OC is much more difficult to attain but it is strongly related to the results that organisations value, high job satisfaction, and a strong motive to contribute to the organisation’s effectiveness.
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Recommendations

Perceptions have an important influence in the development of OC in employees. Employees who perceive their organisations as being supportive tend to become effectively committed. Those who perceive that they have made a substantial investment that would be lost if they leave the firm develop continuance commitment. Those that think that loyalty is expected of them become normatively committed. It is therefore important for management to influence the employee’s perceptions. OC must be managed.

How is affective OC developed? The management factors that will need to be implemented to develop employee affective OC include:

- Treating the employee with respect and consideration. The employees must feel that they are valued and appreciated.
- Organisations are to be customer oriented. Employees tend to identify with an organisation that respects them as well as its customers.
- Management must clearly define the job and responsibilities of employees. Supervisors must precisely communicate to their employees what has to be done and what their expectations are, rather than a detailed job description.
- Designing stimulating jobs. A task that allows employees to use their aptitudes, professional knowledge and judgement, offers job enrichment and employee autonomy. This significantly contributes to increasing OC.
- Providing high quality information to employees about the company’s plans and activities. This factor is extremely important during periods when the company is experiencing difficulty or a crisis, at which time employees feel insecure and uncertain about the future.
- Promoting administrative effectiveness. A company that is concerned about controlling its costs and increasing productivity is more likely to have employees that identify with it, than companies that are loosely managed.

The human resources management policies would also need to be reviewed as follows:

Recruitment and selection. Recruiting strategies may be designed to influence the potential employee’s OC. Organisations may provide prac-
tical job previews that describe both the positive and negative aspects of the task in their recruitment process. Using this approach organisations can increase the job satisfaction, (affective) OC, and job survival of new recruits, without the negative impact on productivity. When companies provide accurate information, applicants are better able to determine whether the job will meet their specific needs, therefore if successful, they are likely to find the jobs satisfying. By lowering the expectations of applicants, it is less likely that they would be disappointed once they enter the organisation. Finally, being confronted with both the advantages and disadvantages of a job option, applicants become more aware of the choice they have to make, and are likely to be more committed once the choice is made.

Socialisation and training. Reinforcing the new recruits’ sense of self-worth and providing a supportive environment tends to be a more effective strategy for ingraining a strong sense of OC. If however the organisation attempts to ignore, discourage, or attempts to change the personal characteristics of the recruit there is a likelihood that the recruit will be alienated. Training might lead to different forms of commitment. Employees who receive training, particularly training intended to provide them with the opportunity for advancement, might perceive that the organisation values them as individuals, and therefore develop a stronger affective commitment. The same training could lead to the development of continuance commitment if it is perceived as providing organisation specific skills that contribute to status or economic advantage within the company, but that it will not transfer to jobs outside the organisation.

Assessment and promotion. Policies and practices concerning the upward mobility of employees within the organisation may have an impact on the individual’s OC. A policy of promoting from within may be perceived by employees as an indication that the organisation is committed to them, which may lead them to reciprocate. The perception of fairness in the assessment and promotion process is also very important. Affective OC is likely to decrease when an employee fails to be promoted. If the decline in affective OC is accompanied by an increase in continuance OC, the organisation might find that it is retaining employees who are not highly motivated to do more than is required in order to keep their jobs. Therefore it is important to ensure that affective OC is maintained by
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providing these employees with assistance in gaining opportunities elsewhere.

Compensation and benefits. Employee ownership is likely to increase OC because it increases the actual or perceived influence that employees have in the decision making of the company. Being an owner is likely to make the employee identify himself with the organisation, therefore affective OC will increase. Compensation and benefits packages may be viewed in two different ways. If the employee views a compensation and benefits package from a purely financial viewpoint, then continuance OC may increase. If however, the employee perceives the organisation as one that is concerned and cares, and as being fair in its dealings with employees, then affective OC is likely to increase. Therefore management must ensure that compensation and benefits packages offered to employees must place emphasis on the non financial aspects, even though the end result may be an increase in the employees financial position.

With globalisation and new business environments, organisations are enduring enormous tension to change the way they do business so that they may remain competitive. These changes often involve the exclusion and reorganisation of jobs and functions that affect employees in many ways, including their affective, continuance, and normative OC. Therefore management of change is an important factor. In their constant drive for operational efficiency, organisations tend to downsize operations. A result of downsizing is uncertainty, and the potential for increasing responsibility among the non-managerial grades due to the reduction of management layers. Employees will tend to assess their losses should there be more reductions in staff. This reaction if not managed properly may increase the employee's continuance OC. On the other hand, survivors may feel a sense of gratitude for not being made redundant, and therefore may tend to develop a strong sense of obligation or normative OC. This sense of obligation may be channelled into making the employees work harder to justify the decision to retain them. In this scenario organisations will need to rely on those that remain, therefore they need to retain employees that are qualified and willing to take on new tasks and responsibilities. Employees will need to be more flexible, in that duties will be less defined, and employees will be expected to find innovative ways to improve their efficiency.
With a lean organisation, absenteeism, lateness, and a high turnover particularly among top performers will have serious consequences for the company. Greenhalgh and Jick (1979) found that turnover is a problem following layoff and that frequently, layoffs result in increasing turnover among the firm’s most valued employees. Mone (1994) found that those who were most confident in their abilities were most likely to consider leaving the organisation following downsizing. It is important therefore to identify how to maintain the OC of employees when re-organisations and other fundamental changes take place. The main recommendations include:

- Redundant employees are to be given adequate compensation and support. This may involve generous severance pay, aid to relocating inside or outside the company. It is important that the redundancy policy is made known to employees.
- The selection of those employees to be made redundant or relocated must be perceived by all the employees to be fair, and the action taken seen as a measure to increase the job security of those remaining.
- Management must convince the employees that the implemented changes will lead to job enrichment and greater job satisfaction.
- Management must put in place a comprehensive communication strategy prior, during, and after the changes are to take place. This will help to lower the sense of uncertainty.

The significance of the above measures is that having a committed workforce makes it easier for companies to obtain co-operation in difficult times.

Further Research

There are a number of areas where it is felt future research is likely to be of value. The areas that may prove interesting are described below.

OC and public enterprises. There is a need to examine what individuals actually perceive side bets to be and how these are linked to their organisational affiliation. Is there a difference between the OC of employees in the public enterprises when compared to private enterprises, or employee-owned companies? What type of differences exist when one considers the three dimensions of OC?
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OC and the organisation life cycle. There is a need to know if there is a relationship between an individual’s OC and the life cycle of the organisation. Does the development of an organisation from the simple structure phase to (for example) a divisionalised form alter the employees’ level of OC and the respective dimensions.

OC and the family life cycle. The field research and other studies have produced inconsistent conclusions regarding the level of OC of individuals and their position within the family life cycle. Surely there must be a significant difference in the way OC develops with a single individual and an individual who is married with a number of children. Does the partner of the married employee have an influence on the type of OC that the individual experiences at the work place?

OC and role innovation. An issue that needs to be addressed is whether OC inhibits or encourages role innovation. Studies have shown that affective OC has been linked to managers’ self reported adherence to organisational policy. This seems to suggest that employees who are highly committed tend to tow the company line, which may have a negative effect on innovation. Innovators have a tendency to take risks and deviate from normal company policy to establish new processes. Research in this area should establish ways of ensuring that role innovation and creativity within the company are complimentary to increasing the level of affective OC.

References


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