

Organizational Commitment

Worker commitment is an integral concept in the study of organizational behavior as indicated by the myriad studies conducted relative to this subject. Its importance lies on its effect to the overall efficiency of the organizations. This paper discusses the importance of organizational commitment to companies. Moreover, it provides an overview of the factors affecting the level of commitment of workers to their respective companies. These points are discussed vis-à-vis the research and studies conducted previously.

The Concept of Commitment

Organizational commitment is generally defined as the extent of an individual's dedication or devotion to an organization to which he/she is affiliated ("Economic Expert"). As quoted by Williams (2003), Meyer and Allen posit that organizational commitment describes the employee's relationships with the organization which has significant implications with regard to his/her decision to continue being a member of a particular organization.

There are three common classifications of organizational commitment recognized by researchers in general, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment pertains to employees' view of their emotional attachment to the organization (Williams 2003). It describes the level of commitment in terms of employees' identification with the organizational goals and their desire to stay with their companies ("Economic Expert").

On the other hand, continuance commitment refers to the employees' perceived loss or entailed cost of leaving the organizations (Williams 2003). With this type of commitment, employee may choose to remain with the company since he/she believes that substantial effort or

great deal of time has already been invested in the company (“Economic Expert”). Normative commitment is associated with the employees’ desire to remain in the organization because of their belief that it is their obligation to do so. This is exhibited when, for example, an individual prefers to stay with the company because of the perception that he/she is indebted to the company because of some favor or benefit extended by the company (Williams 2003).

Importance of Commitment

Studying organizational commitment is an important undertaking since the concept is deemed to be directly related to the strength or stability of a company’s workforce (Williams 2003). Commitment is perceived as instrumental in determining the performance of workers. A company comprising of committed employees is likely to reap benefits due to good performance of workers and reduction in turnover and absenteeism (Abrahamsson 2002). Its importance stems from its relationship with these work-related outcomes, i.e. performance, absenteeism and turnover among others (Cho & Kwon 2005).

However, various studies have mixed findings with regard to the relationship of work-related outcomes to organizational commitment. As cited by Abrahamsson (2002), some studies conducted show that there is no evidence of a systematic relationship between organizational commitment and those work-related outcomes. On the contrary, other studies like that of Meyer and Allen supports the idea that a committed person stays with the organization whatever prevailing conditions are and accomplishes tasks which may even be beyond what is expected. Furthermore, an employee who is committed shares company’s goals and beliefs as well as protect the company’s assets and interest (Abrahamsson 2002).

Such differences may result from the fact that commitment is such a broad term subject to different interpretations. But when one comes to think of it, it is evident that a person who is

committed or dedicated to a specific cause can be observed to work hard. In addition, a committed individual is determined to work towards the attainment of the purpose or goal to which he/she is dedicated.

Factors Affecting/Determinants of Organizational Commitment

In order to foster employees' commitment to their companies, there are numerous research undertakings which tackle the determinants of organizational commitment or the factors that substantially influence people's decision to stick with or leave organizations.

In a study conducted by Meyer and Allen, as cited by Abrahamsson (2002), organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment, is developed by factors such as job challenge, degree of autonomy, variety of skills used, participation in decision-making, fairness of policy and treatment, personal fulfillment and personal competence among others. They also noted that personal characteristics including gender, age, marital status and level of education do not substantially contribute to the development of affective commitment (Abrahamsson 2002).

The findings of the research undertaken by Lingard and Lin (2004) are in line with the factors enumerated above. The study, which examined the relationship between career, family and work environment variables on women's organizational commitment, showed that satisfaction with career progression, job involvement, supervisory support and perception of organizational diversity were correlated with the organizational commitment of respondents composed of women in construction industry in Australia.

There are still other factors affecting organizational commitment. For the purpose of this paper, factors namely professional tenure, leadership behavior and organizational values are highlighted. These factors are summarized as follows:

Career Stage and Professional Tenure

Studies conducted about the influence of career stage on work attitudes mostly concluded that work attitudes, specifically organizational commitment, increased as an individual's career advanced. However, these studies are said to differ relative to the career stage. This means that some studies considered the age of workers while others the specific career stage (Van der Velde, Bossink & Jansen 2003).

As reviewed by Van der Velde, Bossink and Jansen (2003), a study by Ornstein et al posited that workers who were in the initial stage felt relatively less committed to the organization as compared to those in their middle and final career stages. Moreover, another study by Morrow and McElroy found that workers in the last stage of their career were the most committed.

However, a research conducted by Van der Velde, Bossink and Jansen (2003) using a large sample size comprised of both men and women in high-level jobs in the same organization bears a different result. They found that professional tenure has a negative effect on organizational commitment. They explained this using the current trend of moving through different jobs or organizations for career advancement purposes. This means that presently workers consider it impractical or imprudent to stay in the same job and/or organization for a lengthy period of time.

Leadership Behavior

One study conducted analyzed the relationship between the types of organizational commitment and styles of leadership. The styles of leadership discussed were relations-oriented leadership and task-oriented leadership. To differentiate, relations-oriented leadership involves building trust, inspiring a shared vision, encouraging creativity, emphasizing development and

recognizing accomplishments. On the other hand, task-oriented leadership involves ignoring problems or waiting for problems to become serious before taking action (Brown 2003).

Findings of the study conducted by Brown (2003) suggest that relations-oriented leadership explains some of the variation in the affective commitment of employee sample population. The same is observed between normative commitment and the said leadership style. As cited by Brown (2003), Meyer and Allen posited that these findings are not at all surprising considering that many of the work experiences similarly affect affective commitment and normative commitment.

Given the same study, Brown (2003) also found out that neither styles of leadership affect continuance commitment due to the absence of correlation. Continuance commitment is observed to be affected by other factors such as transferability of skills, education, retirement money, status, job security and availability of alternative employment opportunities.

Another study conducted by Humphreys, Weyant and Sprague examined the relationship between the behavior of leader, commitment of subordinates and both their emotional and practical intelligence. Findings of this study show that those employees deemed to be highly committed rated their leaders as relatively more transformational compared to their less-committed counterparts. According to the proponents of this study, the conclusion suggests that the relationship between the attributes of leaders and follower outcomes might not be as unidirectional as often described by previous studies conducted.

The same subject has been studied by Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bathia (2004). The study they conducted focused on psychological empowerment and structural distance as components of transformational leadership. Consistent with the above findings and previous studies, they

concluded that there is indeed a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational leadership.

However, they noted that the relationship between transformational leadership at the direct immediate level was only diffidently related to the level of commitment and empowerment of the subordinates. They explained that this may be attributed to the possibility that close followers or direct subordinates are more likely to witness the inconsistencies in their leader's behavior. This may have substantial effect on the feeling of empowerment and commitment towards the organization. In this regard, they observed that transformational leadership at the indirect senior level had a greater degree of positive relationship with employees' level of commitment.

In the same study, they also found out that, given their sample population comprising of hospital nurses, differences in the level of organizational commitment of employees may be partly explained by the differences in their feeling or perception of how empowered they are relative to working with their more senior and indirect supervisor. This is in line with previous studies suggestive of the positive relationship between employees' levels of empowerment and organizational commitment.

Organizational Values

Organizational commitment is also said to be affected by the employees' perception of organizational values. This is an important finding of the study conducted by Finegan (2000) which explored the relationship between personal or organizational values and organizational commitment where the participants comprising of employees of a large petrochemical company were asked to rate indicated values and their importance to the organizations as well as complete

a Meyer and Allen's commitment scale. This study highlights the importance of recognizing the multidimensionality of values and how they affect behavior (Finegan 2000).

Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the notable strengths of the above studies reviewed is that their findings have scientific support. Most of them were able to gather relevant information through a sizable sample population. Furthermore, they also provided a comprehensive review of literature. This means they were able to substantially compare their findings with previous studies. They indicated whether their conclusions are in line or contradictory to the findings of research previously undertaken.

In addition, they were able to come up with conclusions that have significant policy implications for companies who value organizational commitment. For instance, with the findings pertaining to the relationship between professional tenure and organization commitment, the companies, through their human resources department, may devise schemes to foster commitment between those who have stayed with the company for long instead of concentrating only on newly-hired employees. Another example is the change in leadership style. In view of the above findings, managers may consider changing their management styles should they want to enhance organizational commitment of their staff.

On the contrary, the primary weakness of these studies may lie on the sample population used. It should be noted that commitment and its determinants are not the same for all people. People have different views of commitment and how they are triggered depending on their culture and demographic characteristics. In a study conducted by Hult (2003), which compares organizational commitment in six Western countries including Great Britain, USA, New Zealand, Germany, Norway and Sweden, he found that the existence of conflicting norms has

implications for organizational commitment. As such, there can be differences in the factors affecting organizational commitment across different cultures. In the same way, organizational commitment of men and women may have varying determinants.

In this regard, it is difficult to account for diversity in the sample population utilized by these studies. Therefore, it is equally hard to come up with an encompassing theory as to the general factors or determinants of organizational commitment.

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