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Organization-Individual Linkages

By

Shojiro Takao*

Abstract

The concept of organizational commitment plays an important role in human resource management since the types of linkages which individuals develop with their employing organizations affect their behavior and attitudes and determine the benefits which firms will recoup from their investment in human resources. In this paper, the author reviews previous literature on organizational commitment and suggests that organizational commitment be measured multi-dimensionally. He also argues that these multiple dimensions represent different aspects of employee-organization linkages formulated on different grounds, such as affect toward organizations, value congruence between organizations and employees, perceived costs of turnover, and normative obligation of staying with one organization. Integrating previous research, he proposes a new four-component model of the construct which may be useful for managing a diverse workforce containing employees attached to organizations for different reasons.

Key Words

organizational commitment, literature review, multi-dimensional model, affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, value commitment, management of diversity, diverse workforce, changes in Japanese employee attitudes

Introduction¹

Measuring the degree of loyalty to the organization has been the subject of a great deal of research in the organizational literature. Researchers have associated high organizational commitment (OC) with high employee performance and low turnover. However, in the emerging information network society, the framework of 'management versus employees' is expected to change, and so new relationships between management and employees will need to be identified. Under these circumstances, the concept of organizational commitment needs to be treated as a tool for describing

*Professor Shojiro Takao passed away in March 1997 due to an illness before the publication of this special issue. Professor Yoko Sano and all the authors who made contributions to this issue regret this loss. The abstract and the key words were prepared by Motohiro Morishima.

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what specific aspects employees are committed to the organization rather than for measuring the general degree of loyalty to the organization.

Since the mid-1980s, some researchers have been arguing in favor of a multidimensional concept of OC (e.g., Allen and Meyer, 1990; Caldwell, Chatman and O'Reilly, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). After a decade of data accumulation, Allen and Meyer (1990) proposed a model of three components that, when considered simultaneously, would give a comprehensive understanding of the linkage between organizations and individuals.

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) also developed a three-component model, which was a natural outcome of their definition of commitment. They defined it as "the psychological attachment felt by the person for the organization; it will reflect the degree to which the individual internalizes or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization" (p.493) and pointed out that the multidimensional approach "calls attention to the fact that the underlying dimensions or bases for attachment may vary within and across individuals" (p.493).

In addition to these studies, some other research has proposed alternative multidimensional models and presented empirical evidence (e.g., Becker, 1992; Hackett, Bycio and Hausdorf, 1994). This multidimensional approach to commitment offers a way to explore many facets of employee commitment to the organization beyond the mere measurement of degree of loyalty because in this approach a major concern is to seek out what kinds of components exist.

From a practical perspective, because there are no good tools which describe the nature of relations between individuals and organizations, it is very difficult to diagnose problems that an organization-individual mismatch produces.

Since the mid-1970s many researchers have conducted empirical studies on organizational commitment both in the U.S. and Japan. Most of this research has focused on measuring the magnitude of commitment. These efforts have produced measures such as the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979; Porter, Crampon and Smith, 1976; Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974). However, while such measures allow researchers to describe the degree of commitment in a particular organization, this information alone seems insufficient for formulating concrete human resource strategies. If a manager were to obtain a result indicating low commitment among employees in his or her organization, with only this very general information it would be very difficult for the manager to formulate concrete strategies. More specific information could be gained by a tool measuring multidimensional commitment. For example, a manager who is able to grasp what types of commitment are important for a particular outcome can formulate strategies that might lead to the increase of desired types of employee commitment through human resource practices such as recruiting and training.

As was discussed above, the purpose of this study is to review the literature on organizational commitment to discover what types of linkages between the organization and individual will be critical in the information network society.

Definitions of Organizational Commitment

In the commitment literature, there has been little consensus regarding the meaning of the term. Researchers have proposed quite divergent definitions. One of the

most widely cited definitions of commitment is “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226). On the other hand, Stebbins (1970) defined commitment as “the awareness of the impossibility of choosing a different social identity . . . because of the immense penalties involved in making the switch” (p. 527). Obviously, different definitions focus on different aspects of the relationship between the individual and the organization. In other words, the common ground of commitment research is that it has explored the relationship between the individual and the organization.

In the present research, I recommend, for three reasons, a very broad definition of the commitment construct, one such as “the nature of the relationship of the member to the system as a whole” (Grusky, 1966, p. 489). First, as mentioned, instead of examining merely the degree of general commitment (high or low), exploring the possible relationships between the individual and organization is more important; therefore, the definition of commitment should cover a wide range of possible organizational-individual linkages. In addition, the definition should be broad—first, because of the construct’s multidimensional nature and second, because of the issue of discriminant validity. One strategy for tackling the issue of multidimensionality of the construct would be to discover convincing subdimensions of OC under the broad definition. And one strategy for dealing with the issue of discriminant validity would be to identify OC’s unique predictive power for organizational outcomes under the broad definition. Therefore, the definition above best deals with these three current issues of the OC construct.

Traditionally, two major approaches have been argued under the OC construct (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Hulin, 1991). They have been identified as ‘attitudinal OC’ and ‘calculative OC.’ As was mentioned before, Mowday et al. (1979) defined attitudinal OC as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (p. 226). This refers to the process by which employees come to identify with the goals and values of the organization and desire to maintain membership in the organization. On the other hand, calculative OC is defined as “a structural phenomenon which occurs as a result of individual-organizational transactions and alterations in side-bets or investment over time” (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972, p. 556). In other words, this is the degree of employees’ unwillingness to leave the organization because of their awareness of the costs of leaving. Ferris and Aranya (1983) examined the difference between attitudinal and calculative OC and found a correlation of .39, which suggests their relative independence. In their meta-analytic study, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) conducted a moderator analysis of attitudinal and calculative commitment, and concluded, by using Hunter, Schmidt and Jackson (1982) criteria, that “type of commitment was confirmed as a moderator in 17 of 18 instances” (p. 177).

A major difficulty in using the OC construct (primarily attitudinal OC) is its unclear distinction from related job attitude constructs, such as job satisfaction (JS). Whether these constructs differ substantially has been a point of controversy (e.g., Bateman and Strasser, 1984; Brooke, Russell, and Price, 1988; Gerhart and Judge, 1991; Mathieu and Farr, 1991; Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982).

Research to date has not been able to present enough empirical evidence of the discriminant validity of OC as measured by the OCQ. For example, Mowday et al. (1982) stated that there are two major differences between JS and OC. First, OC is

related more to organization than to job. Second, OC is more stable than JS. Using the empirical findings of Brooke et al. (1988) and Mathieu and Farr (1991), Gerhart and Judge (1991) showed that the first hypothesis of Mowday et al. (1982) can not be supported. They also claimed that the second hypothesis would be rejected by Bateman and Strasser (1984), whose results showed test-retest correlations of .65 for OC and .68 for JS.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a conceptual difference in interpretations of high commitment and high satisfaction. Some researchers have argued that high commitment may result in some negative consequences, such as career stagnation, family strains, reduced self-development (Mowday et al., 1982), and the "organization man syndrome" (Randall, 1987). On the other hand, high satisfaction is usually regarded as a good condition with no negative consequences for employees despite its possibly negative consequences for organizations. Thus, OC seems to be a more neutral construct because it describes the state of a linkage between the individual and the organization, while JS seems to be more evaluative. Therefore, a neutral and broad definition of OC would be better than a narrow and value-bound definition.

Measurement of Organizational Commitment

Corresponding to the two major approaches to the construct, the measures of commitment can be divided into two major categories: attitudinal commitment and calculative commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

Attitudinal Commitment

Attitudinal OC has been measured mainly by using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Porter et al. (1974). Mowday et al. (1979) reported that the scale includes measures of the following three factors:

- (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values;
- (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and
- (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (p. 226).

This scale is composed of 15 items scored by a 7-point Likert scale. By using nine different work organization samples, Mowday et al. (1979) examined the reliability and validity of the scale and reported a median alpha coefficient of .90, a test-retest reliability of .72 over a two month period, and some evidence for convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity. In Japan, Hanada (1980) examined the validity of the OCQ (Porter et al., 1974) when applied to Japanese organizations and concluded that the scale is applicable in this case too.

Calculative Commitment

On the other hand, calculative commitment signifies that employees accumulate some property in a particular organization (e.g., pensions and seniority) such that they cannot leave the organization (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Hackett et al. (1994) remarked, "This view of commitment has most often been measured with scales developed by Ritzer and Trice (1969), which were later modified by Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972)" (p. 15). Meyer and Allen (1984) reexamined the validity of the Ritzer and Trice scale and the Hrebiniak and Alutto scale and concluded that both scales "correlate more strongly with measures of affective commitment than a measure of continuance

commitment" (Meyer and Allen, 1984, p. 377). Then they developed an alternative scale of testing the side-bet perspective, which they called continuance commitment. This scale has become the main tool for measuring this aspect.

Multidimensional Approach

Until the mid-1980s, "the most commonly studied type of OC has been attitudinal, most often measured with a scale developed by Porter and his colleagues (Mowday et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1974)" (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990, p. 172). However, the instrument recently developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) has become the most frequently used new measure (Angle and Lawson, 1993). Meyer and Allen (1991) theoretically backed up their three-component model of commitment. They claimed that affective commitment reflects desire, continuance commitment reflects a need, and normative commitment reflects obligation to stay in an organization. They also hypothesized that different components of commitment are developed from different antecedents and have different implications for work-related behavior. O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) proposed their own three-component model of commitment. They pointed out that the confusion around commitment research can be attributed to over-simplification of the construct. In addition, other researchers have argued about the utility of multidimensional models of commitment. This issue is further discussed in the next section.

Dimensionality of Organizational Commitment

The January 1993 issue of the *Journal of Business Research* was devoted to the multi-faceted construct of work commitment. The issue included many perspectives, such as cross-cultural applicability, occupation-focused commitment, and a career stage perspective. Reading this issue suggests that two directions for studying the multi-faceted construct of commitment will be important. One is its multidimensionality and another is the multiple foci of commitment.

In 1984, Meyer and Allen summarized the early works of organizational commitment by investigators such as Porter et al. (1974) and Becker (1960), and proposed a multidimensional measure. Actually, as Sekimoto and Hanada (1987) pointed out, Mowday et al. as early as 1979 presumed three subdimensions of the OCQ. However, when they scored it, they ignored the subdimensions and paid attention only to the overall scores. This simplification resulted in not only less predictive power but also some confusion in research conclusions. For example, some researchers (Luthans, McCaul and Dodd, 1985; Near, 1989; Odagawa, 1991) used Mowday et al.'s OCQ scale to find higher commitment among U.S. workers than Japanese workers in their comparative studies. These findings completely contradict the notion that many researchers have held (e.g., Abegglen, 1958; Cole, 1971). If those researchers had used a multidimensional construct of commitment, they might have had different findings such that affective commitment was higher in the U.S. but normative commitment was higher in Japan.

Also, as Dunham, Grube, and Castaneda (1994) pointed out, the adoption of a multidimensional construct might facilitate the understanding of the nomological network among antecedents, commitment and consequences. For example, organizational dependency has been found to predict affective commitment but not continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Moreover, rated performance was positive-

ly related to affective commitment but negatively related to continuance commitment (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, and Jackson, 1989).

Finally, to motivate larger numbers of employees, a multidimensional approach seems to have an advantage. For instance, if managers identify the degree of commitment (either high or low), only high commitment employees will be focused upon and low commitment employees will be ignored. However, if managers understand how employees are committed to the organization and identify their strengths and weaknesses, they would be able to better utilize various types of employees.

From the mid-1980s, researchers have proposed multidimensional models of commitment. Those models can be grouped in three categories: two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and four-dimensional models. A summary of research according to the number of dimensions follows.

Two-Dimensional Model of Commitment

Mayer and Schoorman (1992). This research proposed a two-component model of organizational commitment: value commitment and continuance commitment. Using Schechter's (1985) two-dimensional model, they employed the confirmatory factor analysis method and concluded that their two-dimensional model showed a better fit than other models. Also, by examining partial correlations between subdimensions and other job-related variables, they found that continuance commitment had a higher correlation with turnover than value commitment did; however, performance had a higher correlation with value commitment than continuance commitment.

Actually, although they called one of their components 'value commitment,' the items they chose did not really reflect the component name. Most of these items came from the OCQ and represent mainly emotional attachment instead of value congruence. Only two out of nine items are on value congruence.

Three-Dimensional Model of Commitment

McGee and Ford (1987). This research examined the two scales (the affective and continuance commitment scales) developed by Meyer and Allen (1984) and found that continuance commitment can be divided into two subdimensions. They are 'low alternatives,' which refers to few existing employment alternatives and 'high personal sacrifice,' which refers to personal sacrifice associated with leaving the organization.

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986). O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) questioned the unidimensionality of psychological attachment to the organization. Instead of a simple unidimensional model, they presented three subdimensions for psychological attachment: compliance, identification, and internalization. They defined compliance as attachment which is produced when employees try to gain specific rewards. Identification was defined as "involvement predicated on a desire for affiliation" (p. 493) and internalization was defined as value congruence between individuals and organizations. Using university employees (N=82) and students (N=162), they found that identification and internalization predicted prosocial behavior and turnover but compliance did not.

Allen and Meyer (1990). Allen and Meyer (1990) proposed a three-component model of commitment. They defined the three components in the following way:

The affective component of organizational commitment, proposed by the model, refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement

in, the organization. The continuance component refers to commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization. Finally, the normative component refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. (p. 1)

In their first study, they developed three scales from 66 pooled items, including 15 OCQ items. From factor analyses, they obtained three 8-item scales for affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The correlation between affective commitment and continuance commitment was .06, between continuance and normative commitment was .14, and between affective and normative commitment was .51. Since the affective commitment scale showed a fairly high correlation (.83) with the OCQ, they concluded that there is convergent validity between these two scales. In their second study, they examined the relationship among antecedents and the three components.

Becker (1992). Using O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) model, Becker (1992) found that three subdimensions (compliance, identification, and internalization) of commitment result in different organizational outcomes. In 440 subjects from a military supply company, identification and internalization were negatively correlated with intent to quit and positively correlated with satisfaction and prosocial behavior. However, compliance was positively correlated with intent to quit and negatively correlated with satisfaction and prosocial behavior.

Hackett, Bycio, and Hausdorf (1994). This research reexamined Allen and Meyer's (1990) three-component model of commitment. By using three samples—one of nurses and two of bus operators, they performed confirmatory factor analyses. They found better fit with the four-component model which was suggested by McGee and Ford (1987) than with the three-component model. However, since there were no different component-correlate patterns between the three-component and the four-component models, they concluded that the Allen and Meyer model (1990) made more sense than McGee and Ford's (1987) model.

Four-Dimensional Model of Commitment

Sekimoto and Hanada (1987). Based on the OCQ (Porter et al., 1974), Sekimoto and Hanada (1987) developed a 24-item scale. They pointed out three problems with the OCQ. First, it includes only employees' positive attitudes towards organizations; however, they argued that employees must have more passive attitudes towards organizations, such as reluctance to change organizations or the unavailability of alternative jobs. Second, the OCQ ignored subdimensions of commitment, and finally some reverse scales might influence the interpretation of the results of the factor analysis.

They incorporated these issues to develop their 24-item scale and found four subdimensions of commitment. They named the four subdimensions 'desire to work,' 'desire to remain,' 'value internalization,' and 'utilitarian.' In the Allen and Meyer (1990) framework, the desire to work component corresponds to affective commitment, and the desire to remain component corresponds to continuance commitment. Also, the value internalization component corresponds to the internalization concept of O'Reilly and Chatman (1986). The utilitarian component, which is different from any subdimensions that other researchers conceptualized, represents the give-and-take relationship between employees and companies.

Takao (1991). Takao (1991) examined the four-component model of Sekimoto and Hanada (1987) for Japanese white-collar workers and found the same factor solution. Moreover, by using cluster analysis, he grouped subjects into five clusters: stable, partnership, hard worker, utilitarian, and uncommitted, and found that different types of commitment exist in different businesses. For example, in the Japanese banking industry, employees of the stable type (32%) and the partnership type (33%) were predominant, while in Japanese security companies, the hard worker type (39%) and the uncommitted (33%) were the majority.

Summary of Dimensionality of Commitment

Table 1 shows the summary of the studies on the multiple constructs of commitment. As shown in the table, research to date has explored commitment around four major components: emotional attachment, perceived cost, internalized obligation, and value congruence. In general, these four components are called affective commitment (AC), continuance commitment (CC), normative commitment (NC), and value commitment (VC). These components are defined in Table 2.

Table 1. Summary of Dimensionality of Commitment

	Emotional Attachment	Value Congruence	Perceived Costs	Obligation
Porter et al. (1974)	Organizational Commitment			
Mayer & Schoorman (1992)	Value Commitment		Continuance Commitment	
O'Reilly & Chatman (1986)	Identification	Internalization	Compliance	
Allen & Meyer (1990)	Affective Commitment		Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
McGee & Ford (1987)	Affective Commitment		Low Alternatives High Sac.	
Sekimoto & Hanada (1987) *	Desire to Work	Value Internalization	Desire to Remain	

* Also includes utilitarian dimension.

Emotional attachment to the organization has traditionally been measured by the OCQ and recently integrated into Meyer and Allen's (1984) affective commitment. They found that high affective commitment employees tend to work harder for their companies than other commitment-type employees (Meyer et al., 1989).

Traditionally, perceived cost was measured under the name of 'calculative commitment' using scales developed by Ritzer and Trice (1969) or Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972). Recently, Allen and Meyer's (1990) continuance commitment scale replaced these old measures, while retaining the same conceptual content. The most important concern of high continuance employees is how much they have accumulated in side-

Table 2. Definition of Each Dimension of Commitment

Affective Commitment (AC): employees' emotional attachment to the organization. High AC employees stay because they like their company.

Continuance Commitment (CC): employees' willingness to stay in the organization is associated with their perception of the costs of switching. High CC employees stay because they need to do so.

Normative Commitment (NC): employees' willingness to stay in the organization is associated with their feelings of obligation to stay. High NC employees stay because they feel they ought to.

Value Commitment (VC): employees' feelings of value congruence with the organization. High VC employees are most concerned over whether their personal values fit with the firm's values.

bets (e.g., pension dollars, career opportunities, and seniority-based benefits) in the organization. The more side-bets they accumulate, the harder it is for them to leave their company.

The third component, internalized obligation, was proposed relatively recently by Allen and Meyer (1990) and has been measured by their normative commitment scale, though Dunham et al. (1994) noted that it has received comparatively less attention. Employees with high normative commitment tend to stay in the organization whatever happens because changing organizations would make them feel guilty.

The fourth component, value congruence, has been measured in North America using O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) internalization scale and value congruence was also found as a subdimension of commitment by Sekimoto and Hanada (1987) in Japan. All the studies showed that high value-commitment employees are most concerned over whether their personal values fit with the firm's values.

These four components may be plotted along two axes: active-passive and rational-emotional (see Table 3).

Although these four components can conceptually be identified as different subdimensions of commitment, only the first three have been empirically demonstrated to be different dimensions. While stating the importance of the inclusion of value commit-

Table 3. Summary of Dimensions of Commitment along Two Axes

	Active	
	Affective	Value
	Emotional Judgment	Rational Judgment
	Normative	Continuance
	Passive	

ment, Dunham et al. (1994) suggested that “perhaps value-congruence could be treated as a subdimension of AC or as an antecedent-consequence of it” (p. 379). On the other hand, affective and value commitment seem distinguishable because, as can be seen in Table 3, affective commitment derives from emotional judgment while value commitment seems to come from rational judgment.

Concluding Remarks

As was mentioned in the introduction, in the emerging information network society, relationships between organizations and individuals are changing. Although four major dimensions of commitment were discussed in this study, more varieties of organizational-individual linkages may exist.

In industrialized society, commitment as loyalty has been most valued to heighten employee productivity; however, in a network society a linkage which is beneficial to both organizations and individuals will become most important.

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