Organizational Commitment

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Organizational commitment has an important place in the study of organizational behavior. This is in part due to the vast number of works that have found relationships between organizational commitment and attitudes and behaviors in the workplace (Porter et al., 1974, 1976; Koch and Steers, 1978; Angle and Perry, 1981). Furthermore, Batemen and Strasser (1984) state that the reasons for studying organizational commitment are related to "(a) employee behaviors and performance effectiveness, (b) attitudinal, affective, and cognitive constructs such as job satisfaction, (c) characteristics of the employee's job and role, such as responsibility and (d) personal characteristics of the employee such as age, job tenure" (p. 95-96).

Organizational commitment has been studied in the public, private, and non-profit sector, and more recently internationally. Early research focused on defining the concept and current research continues to examine organizational commitment through two popular approaches, commitment-related attitudes and commitment-related behaviors. A variety of antecedents and outcomes have been identified in the past thirty years (Angle and Perry, 1981; Mowday et al (1979; Hall, 1977).

Definition of Commitment

Multiple definitions of organizational commitment are found in the literature. Bateman and Strasser state that organizational commitment has been operationally defined as "multidimensional in nature, involving an employee's loyalty to the organization, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, degree of goal and value congruency with the organization, and desire to maintain membership" (p.95). Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) identified commitment-related attitudes and commitment-related behaviors. Porter et al. (1974)

discuss three major components of organizational commitment as being "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership". Sheldon (1971) defines commitments as being a positive evaluation of the organization and the organizations goals. According to Buchanan (1974) most scholars define commitment as being a bond between an individual (the employee) and the organization (the employer), though his own definition of commitment

Meyer and Allen (1991) and Dunham et al (1994) identified three types of commitment; affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Normative commitment is a relatively new aspect of organizational commitment having been defined by Bolon in 1993. *Affective commitment* is defined as the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement that an employee has with its organization and goals (Mowday et al, 1997, Meyer& Allen, 1993; O'Reily & Chatman). Porter et al (1974) further characterize affective commitment by three factors (1) "belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, (2) a willingness to focus effort on helping the organization achieve its goal's, and (3) a desire to maintain organizational membership". Mowday et al (1979) further state that affective communication is "when the employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals in order to maintain membership to facilitate the goal" (p.225). Meyer and Allen (1997) continue to say that employees retain membership out of choice and this is their commitment to the organization.

Continuance commitment is the willingness to remain in an organization because of the investment that the employee has with "nontransferable" investments. Nontransferable investments include things such as retirement, relationships with other employees, or things that

are special to the organization (Reichers, 1985). Continuance commitment also includes factors such as years of employment or benefits that the employee may receive that are unique to the organization (Reichers, 1985). Meyer and Allen (1997) further explain that employees who share continuance commitment with their employer often make it very difficult for an employee to leave the organization.

Normative commitment (Bolon, 1993) is the commitment that a person believes that they have to the organization or their feeling of obligation to their workplace. In 1982, Weiner discusses normative commitment as being a "generalized value of loyalty and duty". Meyer and Allen (1991) supported this type of commitment prior to Bolon's definition, with their definition of normative commitment being "a feeling of obligation". It is argues that normative commitment is only natural due to the way we are raised in society. Normative commitment can be explained by other commitments such as marriage, family, religion, etc. therefore when it comes to one's commitment to their place of employment they often feel like they have a moral obligation to the organization (Wiener, 1982).

Meyer, Allen, & Smith (1993) say that the three types of commitment are a psychological state "that either characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization or has the implications to affect whether the employee will continue with the organization". Meyer et al (1993) continue to say that generally the research shows that those employee's with a strong affective commitment will remain with an organization because they want to, those with a strong continuance commitment remain because they have to, and those with a normative commitment remain because they fell that they have to. Meyer & Allen (1997) define a committed employee as being one "stays with an organization, attends work regularly, puts in a full day and more,

protects corporate assets, and believes in the organizational goals". This employee positively contributes to the organization because of its commitment to the organization.

Antecedents

The literature shows that there are two significant variables that are studied in terms of commitment-related attitudes and commitment-related behaviors, the variables being antecedents and outcomes. There are numerous studies on both the antecedents and the outcomes of organizational commitment and both of these variables offer highly desired information to managers, and others studying organizational behavior. Often research examines one or two types of commitment. Affective and communicative commitment has been studied much more then normative commitment. All three types of commitment have been studied in both the public, private, and nonprofit sector, though there is much more research completed on employees in the private and public sector.

The literature shows that affective commitment antecedents are studied in the form of personal characteristics or what the employee contributes to the workplace. There have been mixed findings regarding what characteristics influence greater commitment. DeCotis and Summers, 1987, argued that a commitment profile does not exist therefore there can be no connection between one's personal characteristics and their commitment to an organization. However though, Mowday et al (1992), Steers (1977), all investigated the role of personal characteristics and found that the characteristics and experiences that a person brings to an organization can predict their commitment to the organization.

Furthermore, Allen & Meyer, 1993,: Buchanan, 1974, and Hall et al. (1977) have found there to be a positive relationship to between an employee's age and time with the organization and their level of commitment. Studies have also found that employee traits such as leadership

and communication styles have an affect on organizational commitment (Decottis & Summers, 1987).

Continuance commitment studies two antecedents: investments and alternatives. These studies often look at investments such as time, money, or effort. Florkowsi and Schuster, 1992, found a positive relationship between profit sharing and job satisfaction and commitment. Meyer and Allen (1997) recognize that in order for there to be continuance commitment between the employee and organization, the employee must be able identify alternatives.

Studies examining different types of work sectors have found that government employees have higher levels of continuance commitment then other sectors (Perry, 1997; Meyer & Allen, 1997). This is due to the antecedents of public service motivation. Because public sector employees in the past have high levels of commitment to the organization and its goals because it is argued hat they are a different type of employee, with strong ethics as well as job security (Perry, 1997). Lio (1995) states "facing today's difficult times, many public employees appreciate the relatively secure job situation associated with public employment and consider it a major reason for their organizational commitment" (p.241).

Normative commitment because it is the more recently defined type of commitment does not have a lot of research identified. Meyer & Allen (1997) began to examine normative commitment in their most recent research. They look to understand the development of the psychological contract between the employee and the organization. Psychological contracts are the beliefs that a person has about what will be exchanged between them, the employee and the organization, therefore influencing their obligation to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Outcomes

Research on commitment outcomes examines whether the different components of commitment have certain consequences. Employee retention, attendance, organizational citizenship, and job performance are commitment outcomes that are widely studied. Reichers (1985) says that "though the literature is fairly clear with respect to the outcomes of commitment, the antecedents of commitment seem to be much more varied and inconsistent…due to the several different ways in which commitment has been defined and operationalzed" (p. 467). Various research studies take place examining the outcomes of employee commitment.

Employee attendance is the most positively related outcome to affective commitment. Steers (1997) found that employee commitment was highly related to the attendance of workers. Gellatlly (1995) found that continuance commitment was related with the how often an employee was absent. In a study examining a group of nurses Somers (1995) found those nurses with lower levels of commitment had higher levels of absences. Blau and Boal (1987) studied a group of insurance workers and found also found that those employees who had higher levels of commitment had lower levels of absenteeism and turnover.

Retention of employee appears to be one of the most studied outcomes of organizational commitment. This is due to the numerous studies which have found a correlation between turnover and commitment (Porter et al, 1974; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Porter et al (1974) found that employees with lower levels of commitment were more likely to leave then their counterparts. Meyer and Allen (1997) argue that the different components of commitment relate to different types of outcomes, therefore continuance commitment may or may not relate to employee performance.

In regards to employee performance, the research is mixed on finding relationships between employee performance and their levels of commitment. Meyer et. Al (1993) and Baugh & Roberts, (1994) both find that committed employees had high expectations of their performance and therefore performed better. However, Meyer & Allen (1997), continue to describe reasons why performance and commitment may not be related. Some of the factors include the seriousness with which supervisors value the appraisal process, the value of job performance by an organization and the amount of employee control over outcomes. Research has also found that those employees who are committed to their profession also have higher levels of commitment to the organization. Baugh and Roberts (1994) found that those employees who were committed to both their organization and their profession had high levels of job performance.

Citizen behavior, or extra-role behavior, has also been studied in regards to organizational commitment. Once again the research is inconclusive about the relationship between citizen behavior and organizational commitment due to the contradicting findings. For example, Meyer et al (1993) found a positive relationship between commitment and extra role behavior, while Van Dyne & Ang, (1998) found no significance between the relationships. Other studies have found that there was a negative relationship between commitment and citizen behavior (Shore and Wayne, 1993).

Roles of Managers

Throughout the workplace employees must be given numerous opportunities to feel committed to the organization. Meyer & Allen, (1997), found that employees that have a good relationship with their immediate work group have higher levels of commitment. They discuss they idea that if employees are directly committed to their group, their commitment to the overall

organization will be higher. Lio (1995) concluded that "workers' organizational commitment is significantly correlated to their perceived job security" (p.241).

Management styles can influence the commitment level of employees. Koopman (1991) studied how leadership styles affected employees and found those employees who favored their manager's style also favored the organization more. Though there was no direct connect between commitment, it could be argued that this would then affect their levels of commitment to the organization. Nierhoff et al (1990) found that the "overall management culture and style driven by the top management actions are strongly related to the degree of employee commitment" (p. 344). These correlations bring to light the importance of having strong managers and their roles in the overall organization.

Eisenberger et al (1990) discuss that those employee's who feel that they are cared for by their organization and managers also have not only higher levels of commitment, but that they are more conscious about their responsibilities, have greater involvement in the organization, and are more innovative. Managers and organizations must reward and support their employees for the work that they do because this perceived support allows for more trust in the organization.

Further Research

Overall, there have been numerous studies of organizational commitment. From the early stages of definition to now, identifying antecedents and outcomes. This topic does not lack in the amount of literature, but it does lack in the subtopics, meaning there is not enough variation. With the professionalizing of the nonprofit sector, it would be interest to examine organizational commitment in this sector. Nonprofit employees may have different motivations and outcomes as well as commitment and this would be interesting to see what the research would find.

Furthermore, I feel that there needs to be some kind of consensus in the literature about the definition of organizational behavior and the antecedents and outcomes by which to study it. Not every research study examining organizational commitment used the same variables which often lead to contradicting or inconclusive support for previous studies. Organizational commitment though should continue to be studied in all sectors, public, private, and non-profit both domestically and internationally.

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