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ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND HRM PRACTICES; AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Studying organizational commitment and its antecedents has always been of interest for management researchers due to important outcomes such as promoting organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and reducing absenteeism and turnover. A review of organizational commitment studies within recent six decades indicates that impact of various variables on organizational commitment studied while the effects of human resource management (HRM) Practices on organizational commitment received less attention. Therefore, this research aims at investigating the impact of HRM Practices on organizational commitment aspects by taking an analytical approach. Findings indicate that organizations can influence their employees' commitment through HRM Practices. More importantly, the amount of such impact is determined by employees' perception of practices and such impact is not necessarily direct or non-situational; in other words, it may be indirect (through a mediating variable) or situational.

Keywords: attitude, organizational commitment, HRM Practices

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational commitment is important due to its remarkable outcomes in organizations. Employees' organizational commitment is vital for organizational success. Commitment persuades or enforces someone to behave (Kiesler, 1971). Various studies indicate that when someone is committed to a job, work or profession, he/she develops adaptive attitudes to such commitment (Darden et al, 1989; Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977). Likewise, studies suggest that organizational commitment has a negative association with undesired behaviors such turnover (Lambert & Hogan, 2009; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Sorensen, 1985; Porter et al, 1974; Steers, 1977), absenteeism (Sorensen, 1985; Porter et al, 1974; Steers, 1977) and delay (Sorensen, 1985) while it relates to such variables as citizenship behavior positively (Somech & Bogler, 2002). There are contradictory results on the relationship between organizational commitment and performance (Mathiu & Zajac, 1990). Although some authors have found positive associations (DeCotiis and Summers, 1987), others have found no significant relationship (Angel and Perry, 1981; Steers, 1977). Also, some have found negative association when people feel that their investment in an organization has been irrelevant and unnecessary (Sommer et al, 1996; Allen & Meyer, 1990). A cross – analysis which was conducted on organizational commitment studies in North America and fostered by a limited study in UK indicated that high organizational commitment relates to less employees' turnover and absenteeism while a clear relationship between commitment and performance is not obvious. Perhaps, it is not so rational to expect that commitment impacts on performance directly. Commitment is not identical to motivation. Commitment involves a broader concept, has



been stable overtime and has less rapid reaction to temporary aspects of an employees' job; therefore, the importance of job obligation concept which is immediate and direct can be determined. An employee may be dissatisfied with certain attributes of his job while he has high level of commitment to the organization rationally (Armstrong, 2006).

In 1970s and 1980s, two intellectual schools were shaped on the basis of organizational commitment which emphasized the importance of organizational commitment. One was "from control to commitment" school coined by Walton in 1985. The other was Japanese "excellence" school represented by authors such as Pascale and Athos (1981) and Peters and Waterman (1982). In his article titled "from control to commitment", Walton (1985) revealed the importance of organizational commitment. He asserts:

"Underlying all these (human resource) policies is a management philosophy, often embedded in a published statement, that acknowledges the legitimate claims of a company's multiple stakeholders – owners, employees, customers and the public. At the centre of this philosophy is a belief that eliciting employee commitment will lead to enhanced performance."

On the other hand, attempts to clarify the secret of Japanese business success in 1970s by authors such as Ouchi (1981) and Pascale and Athos (1981) led to the theory that the best way to motivate people for their full commitment to organizational values is through leadership and engagement. This theory may be called "hearts and minds" approach on motivation (Armstrong, 2006).

A review of organizational commitment studies since 1960s indicates that the impacts by different variables such as job, demography, and structure on organizational commitment are studied while the impacts by HRM variables are less considered.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Commitment is a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions to beliefs that sustain his activities and his own (Salancik, 1977). Commitment can be toward to different nexuses related to working behavior such as organization, profession, supervisor, team, plan, customer and union (Meyer et al, 2004). Therefore, organizational commitment is a type of commitment toward organization.

Similar to other managerial concepts, various definitions are provided on organizational commitment. Becker (1960) was among the first researchers who provided a definition on organizational commitment. He believes that commitment is tendency to continue services in an organization in order to conceive change and instability (turnover) costs (Meyer et al, 1991). Kundi & Saleh (1993) defined organizational commitment as propensity to behaviors that give priority to organizational interests than personal or collective ones. Hunt et al (1985) defined organizational commitment as the degree of employee's psychological link to organization in which he/she is hired. Mowday et al (1982) recalls that a profession or organization may be the reference of psychological link. It means that the employee may be committed to his/her job not organization; or he/she may be committed to organization not his/her job; or he may or may not be committed to both (Darden et al, 1989). Kiesler (1971) believes that commitment is the degree of being obliged to a behavior or a set of behaviors. He clarifies that commitment motivates or enforces someone to conduct a behavior; additionally, due to its obligating features, it impact on the person's response to forces which enforce us to a certain action (Kiesler, 1971). Buchanan (1974) believes that commitment is an affective attachment to organizational values and goals as the result of individual/organization values and goals consistency and compatibility (Kacmar et al, 1999). As defined by Porter *et al* (1974), commitment refers to attachment and loyalty. It is the relative strength of the individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization. It consists of three factors:

1. A strong desire to remain a member of the organization.
2. A strong belief in, and acceptance of values and goals of the organization
3. A readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.

Hall et al (1970) define commitment as process which increasingly integrates or synchronizes individual and organizational goals (Meyer and Schoorman, 1992). Stevens et al (1978) regret for the lack of a concurred definition on commitment and assert that there are two distinguishing approaches on organizational commitment definition in literature: a transactional approach and psychological one. Based on categorization by Stevens et al, Morris and Sherman (1981) emphasize that theoreticians who support transactional approach consider commitment as the outcome of exchanging incentives – aids



between a person and organization while those ones who have adopted psychological approach consider a positive and intensive orientation toward organization (Meyer and Schoorman, 1992).

Some authors define commitment as a multidimensional construct that each aspect of it has different antecedents, outcomes and correlations. Allen and Meyer have provided the most reputable and widest used multidimensional conceptualization of organizational commitment. They believe that organizational commitment has three dimensions. According to them, although various conceptualizations are emerged on attitudinal commitment, each one reflects one of these three issues: affective attachment, obligation and perceived costs (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Below, these three dimensions are explained by direct citation from pages 2 and 3 of the paper by Allen and Meyer (1990):

"Affective attachment

The most prevalent approach to organizational commitment in the literature is one in which commitment is considered an affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization. This view was taken by Kanter (1968) who described 'cohesion commitment' as 'the attachment of an individual's fund of affectivity and emotion to the group' and by Buchanan (1974) who conceptualized commitment as a 'partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of the organization, to one's role in relation to the goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth'. The affective attachment approach is perhaps best represented, however, by the work of Porter and his colleagues (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Porter, Crampon & Smith, 1976; Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974) who defined organizational commitment as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization' (Mowday *et al.*, 1979, p. 226)."

"Perceived costs

For other authors, affect plays a minimal role in the conceptualization of commitment. Instead, commitment is viewed as a tendency to 'engage in consistent lines of activity' (Becker, 1960, p. 33) based on the individual's recognition of the 'costs' (or lost side-bets) associated with discontinuing the activity (Becker, 1960; Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). Kanter (1968), for example, defined 'cognitive—continuance commitment' as that which occurs when there is a 'profit associated with continued participation and a "cost" associated with leaving' (p. 504). For Stebbins (1970), continuance commitment is the 'awareness of the impossibility of choosing a different social identity ...because of the immense penalties in making the switch' (p. 527)."

"Obligation

Finally, a less common but equally viable approach has been to view commitment as a belief about one's responsibility to the organization. Wiener (1982, p. 471) defined commitment as the 'totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way which meets organizational goals and interests', and suggests that individuals exhibit behaviors solely because 'they believe it is the "right" and moral thing to do' (p. 421). Although they do not refer to it as commitment, other authors (e.g. Prestholdt, Lane & Mathews, 1987; Schwartz, 1973; Schwartz & Tessler, 1972) have identified personal norms (defined as internalized moral obligation) as important contributors to behavior, including terminating employment with an organization (Prestholdt *et al.*, 1987). The only measure of this obligation-based commitment in the literature is the three-item scale used by Wiener & Vardi (1980). Respondents are asked the extent to which they feel 'a *person should be* loyal to his organization, *should make* sacrifices on its behalf, and *should not* criticize it' (Wiener & Vardi, 1980, p. 86, italics added). Other than internal consistency, the psychometric properties of the scale are not reported."

"the three approaches outlined above were labeled 'affective', 'continuance' and 'normative' commitment, respectively. Although common to these approaches is a *link* between the employee and organization that decreases the likelihood of turnover, it is clear that the nature of that link differs. Employees with strong affective commitment remain because they *want* to, those with strong continuance commitment because they *need to*, and those with strong normative commitment because they feel they *ought* to do so."



3. EVALUATING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT DEFINITIONS AND PARADIGMS

Although authors have attempted to develop organizational commitment insight through providing multidimensional models, studies indicate that commitment aspects (particularly affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment) are distinguishable, have different antecedents and have their own impact on intention to leave the organization (Lok et al, 2001; Meyer et al, 2004; Stallworth, 2004; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Allen and Meyer, 1990). In fact, each aspect of organizational commitment has a separated construction. In this vein, the importance of affective commitment is evaluated more than other aspects since it has the highest impact on intention to leave the organization. Reviewing relevant studies indicate that affective commitment has attracted more attention than other aspects (Lok & Crawford, 2001; Eby et al; 1999; Meyer et al, 1999; Meyer et al, 1991). Meyer and Allen have confirmed that commitment should be conceptualized as a psychological mood related to people's feeling toward their organizational involvements. Likewise, many authors have shown that such affective traits have the highest impact on such variables as absenteeism and turnover (Meyer et al, 2004, Stallworth, 2004; Shore & Wayne, 1993; JAros, 1995, Mathiu and Zajac, 1990). Therefore, affective commitment is the most profitable type of organizational commitment and the main measure in commitment studies (Lok et al, 2007; Somak and Bugler, 2002; Meyer et al, 1999; Mathiu & Zajac, 2000). Likewise, studies indicate that HRM practices have the strongest impact on affective commitment (Meyer & Smith, 2000).

Among different definitions (scales) on (affective) commitment, the most admired and widest used one is the definition by Porter et al (1974) and the scale by Mowday et al (Lok et al, 2007; Somak and Bugler, 2002; Harrison and Hubbard, 1998; Meyer and Schoorman, 1998; Summer et al, 1996).

4. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT; AN ATTITUDE OR A BEHAVIOR

It is for a long time that industrial and organizational sociologists and psychologists have studied on organizational commitment as communication link between an individual and organization. Although various definitions are provided, there are radically two general approaches on organizational commitment definition: commitment as an attitude and commitment as a set of behavior (Davis, 1981).

Most connoisseurs define commitment as an attitude (Lok and Crawford, 2001). In the vein, commitment is a psychological mood which reflects the relationship between a person and organization. Other authors like Becker (1960), Kiesler (1971) and Salancik (1977) emphasize on commitment as behavior. Behavioral aspect of organizational commitment emphasizes on continuance to work in an organization and not leave it (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

However, Allen and Meyer believe that Becker's insight differs from Kiesler and Salancik and consider it as an attitude. They believe that although Becker like Kiesler and Salancik considered commitment as continuing a job field, Becker's insight differs from Kiesler and Salancik since he emphasizes on the importance of turnover costs. Considering turnover costs is a psychological mood which reflects the relationship between employee and organization and, as a result, is a part of attitude (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Allen and Meyer's continuous commitment is similar to behavioral aspect of commitment and it has caused that many authors introduce Allen and Meyer's continuous commitment and behavioral aspect of commitment (e.g. Gates, 1992) while Allen and Meyer emphasize that commitment is a kind of attitude.

Almost all next connoisseurs believe that commitment is an attitude. Besides, the widest usage of organizational commitment definition (three – dimension pattern by Allen and Meyer, 1990) emphasizes on commitment as an attitude.

If we accept this three – dimension glance at attitude admired by such connoisseurs as Rezaeian (2005), we have achieved the aggregation of above two approaches. In this view, attitudes have three cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects. A cognitive aspect includes beliefs, values and information on the goal identified by a person. Affective aspect includes feelings and emotions on goals, persons, thoughts, events and objects. Behavioral aspect involves behavioral insights and behavioral intentions (Rezaeian, 2005).



5. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Employees are human assets that increase in value to the organization and the marketplace when investments of appropriate policies and programs are applied. Effective organizations recognize that their employees do have value, much as same as the organization's physical and capital assets have value. Employees are a valuable source of sustainable competitive advantage (mello,2002). Sustained competitive advantage through people is achieved if these human resources have value, are rare and unavailable to competitors, are difficult to imitate and are organized for synergy (Bohlander and Snell, 2004). Management involves setting goals and allocating scarce resources to achieve them. Management is the process of efficiently achieving the objectives of the organization with and through people. Primary Functions of Management are:

- Planning – establishing goals
- Organizing – determining what activities need to be done
- Leading – assuring the right people are on the job and motivated
- Controlling – monitoring activities to be sure goals are met (DeCenzo and Robbins, 2005)

Human resource management is defined as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. Storey (1989) believes that HRM can be regarded as a 'set of interrelated policies with an ideological and philosophical underpinning'. He suggests four aspects that constitute the *meaningful* version of HRM:

1. a particular constellation of beliefs and assumptions;
2. a strategic thrust informing decisions about people management;
3. the central involvement of line managers; and
4. reliance upon a set of 'levers' to shape the employment relationship (Armstrong,2006).

Human resource management is the policies and practices involved in carrying out the "people" or human resource aspects of a management position, including recruiting, screening, training, rewarding, and appraising. In fact personnel aspects of a manager's job include Conducting job analyses (determining the nature of each employee's job), Planning labor needs and recruiting job candidates, Selecting job candidates, Orienting and training new employees (Mentors), Managing wages and salaries (compensating employees), Providing incentives and benefits, Appraising performance, Communicating (interviewing, counseling, disciplining), Training and developing managers and finally Building employee commitment (dessler,2005). The overall purpose of human resource management is to ensure that the organization is able to achieve success through people. As Ulrich and Lake (1990) remark: 'HRM systems can be the source of organizational capabilities that allow firms to learn and capitalize on new opportunities' (Armstrong, 2006).

6. DISCUSSION; HRM PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Although many studies are conducted on organizational commitment development in past two decades, the impact of HRM practices on organizational commitment is less paid attention than what it merits. The results of a few studies in this field indicate that organizational can impact on employees' organizational commitment through HRM practices. More importantly, the findings indicate that the rate of such impact is determined by employees' perception on such practices (Meyer & Smith, 2000). Armstrong (2006) believes the policies and practices that may contribute to the increase of commitment are training, career planning, performance management, work-life balance policies and job design. The HR function can play a major part in developing a high commitment organization. The ten steps it can take are:

- Advise on methods of communicating the values and aims of management and the achievements of the organization, so that employees are more likely to identify with it as one they are proud to work for.
- Emphasize to management that commitment is a two-way process; employees cannot be expected to be committed to the organization unless management demonstrates that it is committed to them and recognizes their contribution as stakeholders.
- Impress on management the need to develop a climate of trust by being honest with people, treating them fairly, justly and consistently, keeping its word, and showing willingness to listen to the comments and suggestions made by employees during processes of consultation and participation.



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- Develop a positive psychological contract by treating people as stakeholders, relying on consensus and cooperation rather than control and coercion, and focusing on the provision of opportunities for learning, development and career progression.
- Advise on and assist in the establishment of partnership agreements with trade unions which emphasize unity of purpose, common approaches to working together and the importance of giving employees a voice in matters that concern them.
- Recommend and take part in the achievement of single status for all employees (often included in a partnership agreement) so that there is no longer an 'us and them' culture.
- Encourage management to declare a policy of employment security, and ensure that steps are taken to avoid involuntary redundancies
- Develop performance management processes that provide for the alignment of organizational and individual objectives
- Advise on means of increasing employee identification with the company through rewards related to organizational performance (profit sharing or gain sharing) or employee share ownership schemes.
- Develop 'job engagement' (identification of employees with the job they are doing) through job design processes that aim to create higher levels of job satisfaction (job enrichment) (Armstrong, 2006).
- The research carried out by Purcell *et al* (2003) established that the key policy and practice factors influencing levels of commitment were:
 - received training last year;
 - are satisfied with career opportunities;
 - are satisfied with the performance appraisal system;
 - think managers are good in people management (leadership);
 - find their work challenging;
 - think their form helps them achieve a work-life balance;
 - are satisfied with communication or company performance (Armstrong, 2006).

By referring to research evidences, Cicekli (2008) asserts it seems that HRM practices impact on organizational commitment including leadership style, conduct, training and job security, teams empowerment, contribution decision, job diversity, independence, feedback, alternative working activities, flexible working hours and HR policies responsive to family (Cicekli, 2008). Gartner and Nollen (1989) show that employees' commitment relates to both HRM practices and employees' perception on internal promotion, training opportunities and job security. Kinicki *et al* (1992) found that attitudes toward employees' commitment in two organizations with varied HRM practices were different (Meyer & Smith, 2000). Smeenk *et al* (2006) confirmed the impact by decentralization, compensation, contribution, training, job security, social networks, management style, and communication and performance appraisal as HRM practices on organizational commitment (Smeenk *et al*, 2006). Although the findings of most studies on the impact by HRM practices on organizational commitment confirm such impact, some authors have shown that this relationship is not necessarily direct or non-situational (Meyer & Smith, 2000). In other words, such relationship of impact may be indirect (i.e. through a moderator) or situational. For instance, Meyer and Smith (2000) have indicated that performance appraisal, advantages, training and job path development influence on normative and affective commitment through procedural justice and organizational support variables whereas continuous commitment has no relationship with these four HRM practice with or without procedural justice and organizational support (Meyer and Smith, 2000). In his study, Whitener (2001) indicated that HRM practices impact on the relationship between organizational support and organizational commitment perception and also on the relationship between organizational support perception and trust to management (Whitener, 2001). Likewise, Soltani (2011) showed that HR conduct practices including feedback, consideration leadership, contribution in decision making and positive discipline mediate the relationship between employees' perception on managers' behavior, trust and organizational commitment (Soltani, 2011).



Some authors have criticized HR approach in analyzing the impact of HRM practices on organizational commitment. They have focused their criticism on utilitarian assumption of this approach since they believe that this approach mitigates human being to human resources (Smeenk et al, 2006).

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