AN INVESTIGATION OF ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG PUBLIC EMPLOYEES IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the multi-dimensionality of organizational commitment and studies the relationships between its three components – affective (AC), normative (NC), continuance - taking into account the high personal sacrifice (CCH) and the low perceived alternative (CCL) sub-components - with the selected consequences as well as antecedent variables that are deemed to be suitable for and never been tested before in the Saudi Arabian culture (i.e. culture dimension, organizational citizen behaviour (OCB), intention to leave). It investigates how are the components are differentially associated with and mediate the relationship with the set of work behaviour. A sample of 700 employees from different organization levels from 16 Saudi ministries in Riyadh and Jeddah was used. Hypothesis testing through structural equation modeling (SEM) confirmed the fit of the proposed recursive model ACOCC. Regression paths between antecedents - opportunity for learning, impersonal bureaucratic arrangement, collectivism/individualism, power distance, masculinity/femininity - and AC, CCH and NC were significant, in which intention to leave and OCB fully mediated by commitment components. The findings reveal important issues pertaining to cultural dimensions and have significant implications for the nature and management of commitment in Saudi Arabia and GCC countries.

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1. **Theoretical Background**

As a psychological construct in organizational behaviour research, commitment has been studied for more than four decades. It is defined as an incentive that directs behaviour towards one or more objectives and is commonly conceptualised as a multidimensional construct consisting of various antecedents, correlates, and consequences that spans of multiplicity of dimensions (Meyer et al., 2001; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2002).

One common conceptualisation is Meyer and Allen’s (1997) *three-component model of commitment*, which conceives commitment as consisting of three forms: affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment (AC) is conceived as emotional attachment to an organization, continuance commitment (CC) relates to the perceived costs associated with leaving the organisation and normative commitment (NC) refers to the perceived obligation to remain in an organization (Meyer et al., 2001).

2. **Proposed Model and Hypotheses Development**

This paper proposes a model (ACOCC) inspired by Allen and Meyer three-component (1997) model to predict and explain the antecedents and consequences of the organizational commitment components among public sector employees in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The main research question is formulated as follows:

*RQ: What are the levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitment among public-sector employees in Saudi Arabia?*

Based on the research question, 11 hypotheses were formulated and tested.

3. **Subjects and Sampling**

Validated instruments were adopted to collect data necessary for empirical research. The selected items are mainly adapted from prior studies to ensure content validity. The questionnaire was originally written in English. Translation of original English language version of the questionnaire into Arabic and from Arabic to English was accomplished through a multi-stage translation procedure similar to that described by Brisilin (1983). Prior to data collection, a pilot study, aimed at obtaining high level of content validity, was undertaken in Saudi Arabia between 2nd of November 2007 and 15 of January 2008. Appropriate modifications are introduced when the need arouse to fit the nature of the organizational commitment measures to the Saudi context and ensure the clarity of the instructions, questions, and scale items.
700 survey questionnaires in 16 Saudi ministries located in Riyadh and Jeddah were distributed between 15 of January 2008 and 29 March 2008. The number of applicable questionnaires was 433. The sample comprised 398 males and 35 females, with a mean age and tenure of 38.51 and 14.16 years, respectively. The respondents were relatively educated; almost half of the respondents (49.5%) were graduates or attended higher education. They occupied different organizational levels; almost half of the respondents were from middle level (47.9% of 6-9 grades), 23.6% from lower level of organization (1-5 grades), and 27.7% from upper level (≥ 10 grade). The alpha coefficients $\alpha$ for all variables were above .6.

4. Analysis and Results

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the proposed model and general linear modelling (GLM), hierarchical regression and analysis of the structural equation model (SEM) (using AMOS 16.0). The structural model was assessed using overall model fit, and path coefficients associated with the causal effects.

CFA results for the three-dimensional Allen and Meyer (1997) scale are presented in Table 1. CFA and the comparative fit index were used to assess the model fit (Bollen, 1989).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$P &lt; .0$</th>
<th>CMIN/DF</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>AGFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>NFI</th>
<th>PNFI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Null</td>
<td>2162.036</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>14.131</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>.415</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Factor</td>
<td>829.090</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.008</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>.730</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>.556</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 factor</td>
<td>614.050</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.515</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 factor</td>
<td>551.824</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.149</td>
<td>.857</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>.647</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 factor</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.236</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.844</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>.685</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.078</td>
<td>.964</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td>.666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Goodness of alternate factor model specification of organizational commitment.

CFA results are consistent with previous studies (Hackett et al., 1994; McGee and Ford, 1987; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999; Culpepper, 2000; Snape and Redman, 2008). A model with four separate scales that is proposed in the present study exhibits a significant improvement in explanatory capacity (Frutos et al., 1998; cited in González and Guillén, 2008). The results suggest that a four-factor model provides the best fit for the data, supporting a two-dimensional CCS structure. To further improve the model, the model’s four factors were modified by discarding the items that cross-loaded among commitment latent variables and any item with low-factor loading. The modified model showed a modestly improved fit of the Saudi sample and was used for subsequent analysis and hypothesis testing. The adapted measurement model support discriminate and convergent validity. The first hypothesis is
supported and the three-component model demonstrates construct validity in the Saudi context.

Several analyses were undertaken to answer the main research question, including structured means model analysis, latent means estimates, and an evaluation of the goodness-of-fit between the commitment measurement model and the data, and MANOVA test.

5. Correlation between the commitment components across the three groups

The strongest correlations between the components of commitment in the lower-level group occurred between AC and NC ($r = .673$, $p < .05$), followed by CCH and CCL ($r = .552$, $p < .001$), and CCH and NC ($r = .310$, $p < .05$). In contrast, a negative significant correlation was found between AC and CCL ($r = -.514$, $p < .05$). Within the least senior group, no significant relationship was found between NC and CCL. Within the most senior group, correlations existed between AC and NC, NC and CCH, and CCH and CCL ($r = .588$, $p < .001$; .382, $p > .01$; .375, $p < .05$, respectively). These correlations were expected, as they reflect higher levels of AC and NC associated with higher levels of seniority.

The findings also show that AC and NC are stronger at the higher organization levels; whereas CC, particularly high-sacrifice (CCH), is stronger at lower levels in the organization. No significant differences in CCL exist among the employees in the organization level. Most importantly CCL is almost identical at the three organizational levels. In other words, the higher the hierarchical position the employees occupy, the stronger their affective and normative commitment, whereas, at lower level the hierarchy, the stronger is continuance commitment. The results provide sufficient evidence to support hypothesis 2.
Results of SEM for the ACOCC hypothesised structured model, broadly confirm the hypotheses and are consistent with those documented in the literature.

Path analysis between independent antecedent variables and mediating variables revealed a significant relationship between work experience (opportunity of learning (Ler), communication management (Com) and affective commitment (AC) and normative commitment (NC). H3a and H3b partially supported.

The findings provide strong support for one of the side-bet theory indices (Powell and Meyer, 2004). Bureaucratic arrangement (Bur) is related significantly with high-sacrifice continuance commitment (CCH). H5 is fully supported.

CFA confirms the multidimensionality of culture dimension and suggests that the cultural dimensions are significant predictors for the components and the consequences of the commitment. Specific significant results include: 1) Power distance (PD) relates negatively to AC and NC; 2) Uncertainty avoidance (UA) relates to both sub-dimensions of CC (CCH and CCL). Hypothesis 6 and 7 are supported, whereas, H8a, b rejected.

3) Collectivism is related to NC and AC. In other words, hypothesis 8 partially supported.

4) The masculinity/femininity dimension has significant effect on CCH. This might be attributed to the cultural changes occurring over time, i.e. “masculinity/femininity” dimension may no longer have strong tendencies towards masculine values based calculative relationship, whereas, feminine cultural values lead to affective commitment. The results also show that all three forms of commitment affect negatively the intention to leave. Finally, most OC studies found that there is a positive and significant relationship between OCB, IRB and AC and NC and no effect or negative effect between CC and OCB. Our results reveal that AC has no relationship with OCB and IRB, and NC has a significant positive effect only on OCB. However, CCL has significant positive effect on (IRB and OCB). This surprising but important finding may reveal the cultural values differences among Saudi public employees. Results obtained from additional hierarchical regression analyses using AC, CCH, CCL and NC and the outcome variables are also consistent with our SEM results.

6. Conclusion

The CFA of the proposed model revealed that organisational commitment is indeed a multidimensional construct. Such result is congruent with our objective of examine the
multidimensional nature of organisational commitment for Saudi Arabian public-sector employees.

As regards the main research question, affective commitment and normative commitment are significantly different at more senior levels, whereas continuance commitment, especially, high sacrifice commitment, is stronger for less senior employees. No significant differences exist regarding perceived weakness of alternatives among employees across all levels. Instead, CCL is almost identical at all levels. In other words, the higher the seniority, the stronger is the employees’ affective and normative commitment and the lower the employees’ seniority, the stronger is their continuance commitment.

After control of the demographic variables, the results of hierarchical regression analysis support the assertion that cultural characteristics - namely masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism/collectivism - significantly impact AC, NC, CCL and CCH. The only cultural dimension that appears to have negative effect is power distance. These results are fundamentally consistent with our SEM findings.

7. References


