

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A RE-EXAMINATION OF THREE-COMPONENT MODEL IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Happy Paul, Bhajan Lal Kardam**, and Yoginder Kataria****

Abstract: Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) three-component model (TCM) which includes affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment, is by and large the most prevailing and widely used conceptualization of organizational commitment. However, the extant literature reports many concerns regarding its theory and construct validity. The two main topics of criticisms have been, (a) lack of AC-NC differentiation, and b) two distinguishable constructs within continuance commitment. Most of the studies addressing these issues have been conducted in Western and European cultures and very limited studies are conducted in Indian context. Towards this, the current study was conducted on 711 employees working in Indian organizations to confirm the dimensionality of TCM model and provide empirical evidences relevant to those criticisms. The findings provide insights into the adequacy of TCM model and relationship among its components in Indian context.

Keywords: Organizational Commitment, Affective Commitment, Normative Commitment, Continuance Commitment

1. INTRODUCTION

Amongst the several work attitude variables, Organizational commitment (OC) has received plentiful attention of organizational psychologists and scholars (Allen & Meyer, 2000). This may be attributed to the fact that organizations, in order to gain competitive advantage, are becoming increasingly reliant on a committed workforce (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Thus it is important than ever to study OC.

OC can be defined as the relative strength of an individual's satisfaction with and involvement in a particular organization (Porter et al., 1974). Meyer and Allen (1997) have asserted that having committed employees create a positive organizational climate which is conducive to effective working

* Corresponding author Assistant Professor, T.A. Pai Management Institute (TAPMI), Manipal

** Assistant Professor, Panipat Institute of Engineering and Technology (PIET), Panipat

*** Associate Professor, Panipat Institute of Engineering and Technology (PIET), Panipat

relationships. Further, the high level of OC has often been linked to decreased turnover intentions, low burnout, tardiness and absenteeism, increased extra-role behaviors, higher productivity, job satisfaction, performance and competitive advantage (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Wasti, 2003; Sinha & Jain, 2004; Bhal & Gulati, 2006; Kelidbari, Dizgah & Yusefi, 2011).

In literature, numerous models, varied theoretical perspectives and divergent approaches have been used to define and measure OC (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) three-component model (TCM) is by and large the most prevailing and widely used conceptualization of organizational commitment (Swales, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2012).

The three-component model approach views commitment as "a force that binds an individual to a target (social or non-social) and to a course of action of relevance to that target" (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006). This binding force can be experienced in different ways (i.e., can be accompanied by different mindsets), including: an affective attachment and involvement with the target; a felt obligation to the target; and an awareness of the costs associated with discontinuing involvement with the target. In their pure forms, these mindsets are referred to as affective commitment (AC), normative commitment (NC), and continuance commitment (CC) respectively (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

However, the extant literature reports many concerns regarding its theory and construct validity (Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997; Powell & Meyer, 2004; Bergman, 2006; Meyer and Perfyonova, 2010). Solinger, Olffen and Roe (2008) reports that empirical criticism is around two main topics - lack of AC-NC differentiation, and two distinguishable constructs within CC. Scholars have raised questions on the discriminability of AC and NC. Many researches (like Jaros, 1997; Ko, Price, & Mueller, 1997) argues that NC is a redundant construct and bears many similarities to AC. Similarly, the debate whether continuance commitment measures a unitary commitment construct or two separable commitment constructs i.e. continuance commitment - low alternatives (CC:LowAlt) and continuance commitment - high sacrifices (CC:HiSac), is unsettled. Since most of these studies are conducted in Western and European cultures and very limited studies are conducted in Indian context, this paper aims at providing empirical evidences relevant to these two issues in Indian context. Many scholars (like Bergman, 2006; Wasti & Önder, 2009) have asserted that the distinction between NC and AC will become clearer as more research is conducted in non-Western cultures. Thus,

this study also contributes to the existing knowledge of culture differences in commitment.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT - ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND ISSUES

Although, commitment has been defined and conceptualized in various ways (Meyer & Maltin, 2010), it is generally considered to be a stabilizing force which binds individuals to organizations (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Ng & Feldman, 2011).

March and Simon (1958) have been the pioneers to write about commitment relationships that can develop when individuals join organizations. These relationships can be in exchange for rewards. Later, the concept of OC has been forwarded with Becker's (1960) "side bet" theory of commitment. He has posited that "commitment come into being when a person, by making a side-bet, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity" (p. 32). "Side bet" can be referred to as the gain or loss which may occur depending on whether an individual stays in or leaves an organization. Becker (1960) has suggested five categories of these side bets: (1) generalized cultural expectations about responsible behavior, (2) self-presentation concerns, (3) impersonal bureaucratic arrangements, (4) individual adjustments to social positions, and (5) non-work concerns. Most of the multi-dimensional models of OC have been incorporating the tenets of this theory (Powell & Meyer, 2004).

Shortly later, Etzioni (1961) has put forward a three-form model of OC. He has suggested these three forms to be mutually exclusive and termed as: calculative, moral, and alienative. Calculative form of commitment is a lower-intensity exchange relationship based upon expectations of rewards. Moral form of commitment is a high-intensity orientation based on identification with the organization and internalization of its goals and values. Alienative form includes negative affect towards the organization such as exploited relationships.

In continuation, Kanter (1968) has also suggested a model comprising of three forms: continuance commitment (CC), cohesion commitment, and control commitment. He calls these forms as three analytically distinct problems with potentially independent solutions. According to Kanter (1968), CC is the dedication to the organization that results out of positive cognitions and is based on precious personal investments and the consideration of costs and rewards related to staying with the organization

or leaving the organization. Next, cohesion commitment is an attachment to social relationships in an organization based on positive affect towards other members. Control commitment is the attachment towards the organizational norms and obeying the authority through positive evaluative orientation. This conceptualization of OC links individual as a personality system to the social system. Later, Sheldon (1971) has supported continuance and cohesion forms referring them as an investment and social involvement components.

Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) have posited OC in terms of three factors: (1) a strong desire to remain a member of the organization, (2) a strong belief in, and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization, and (3) a readiness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization. They have asserted that OC is more than passive loyalty and posited that it involves an active relationship between an individual and organization such that the former is willing to contribute to the health of the organization.

The era of the 1970s has witnessed the use of two approaches while conceptualizing OC. This has also been referred to as attitudinal-behavioral dichotomy (Barge & Schlueter, 1988). The attitudinal approach perceives commitment as an individual's psychological bond to an organization and emphasizes on affective attachment and identification (Steers, 1977). On the other hand, behavioral approach observes commitment as the process of binding individual to organizations and focus on behavioral acts (Salancik, 1977). The behavioral approach is based on exchange theory and the side-bet theory (Becker, 1960). However, Reichers (1985) asserted that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Similar to this viewpoint, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) have also pointed that the two approaches, to some extent, overlap and are not completely distinguishable.

Next, Mowday et al. (1979) have also defined OC from two perspectives, behavioral commitment and attitudinal commitment. They have defined behavioral commitment in terms of the consequences or outcomes of commitment whereas attitudinal commitment in terms of antecedents or predictors of OC. The focus of behavioral commitment is on the processes by which employees become part of a specific organization. On the other hand, the focus of attitudinal perspective is on the processes through which employees perceive their relationships with the organization, and the extent to which their goals and values match with those of the organization (Mowday et al., 1979). Later, this viewpoint has also been supported by Meyer and Allen (1991). While, Mowday et al. (1979) have posited a cyclic relationship between attitudinal and behavioral commitment, Wiener and Gechman (1977) have contended that commitment is essentially a behavior

rather than merely an internal process or construct. They have asserted that the relationship should be explicitly expressed in order to be considered as commitment. However later, Mowday et al. (1982) have also asserted that attitudinal and behavioral commitment may not be separable concepts. They have contended that initially an individual based on some exchange relationship may be drawn to the organization but may later develop an attitude to maintain membership. Also, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) have suggested attitudinal commitment as a commitment that is internalized for organizational rewards, while Legge (1995) has proposed behavioral commitment as commitment that focuses on exchange relationship and the calculation of the costs of leaving rather than the rewards for staying with the organization.

The term OC is often confounded with partially redundant, but not equivalent constructs like job, career and work commitment (Morrow, 1983). Similarly, Reichers (1985) has also asserted that employees might have a number of commitments - commitment to the organization, to the occupation, to the union, and to the workgroup. Occupational commitment is defined as the psychological link between an individual and his occupation (Goswami, Mathew & Chadha, 2007). However, work commitment has been studied as a much broader concept (Cohen, 1999) and includes specific commitment objects such as organization, work group, occupation, union, and job (Randall & Cote, 1991). Morrow (1983, 1993) has identified five basic foci of work commitment and termed them as universal forms of work commitment. These are: (1) protestant work ethic or work ethic endorsements (part of the individual belief system that implies work itself to be an important value such that other consideration systems are derived from it; Mudrack, 1999), (2) career commitment (extent to which an individual is willing to develop and continue in his/her career; Blau, 1985), (3) job commitment or job involvement (creation of a strong relationship between the individual and his/her job, and the willingness to put in personal resources in the current job; Kanungos, 1982), (4) AC (the attachment a worker has to the organization's goals and values; Mowday et al., 1982), and (5), CC (intention to remain with the organization on the basis of cost of leaving the organization or the rewards for staying in the organization; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Further, these forms have a reciprocal influence on each other (Morrow, 1993) and some may as well be antecedents and consequences of others (Cohen, 1999). Also, some of these forms overlap, but OC is relatively independent and distinguishable (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Apart from the side-bets theory, the concept of OC also draws from the theories of motivation (Udechukwu, 2009) and social exchange theory (Mitchell & Cropanzano, 2005). These theories suggest that employees define their relationship with employers based on the perception of how well their needs (psychological and/or social) are fulfilled. Drawing from these theories, OC research has grown in popularity since Allen and Meyer (1990), and Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed a three component model of the construct with attitudinal perspective. Meyer and Allen (1991) and Dunham, Grube and Castaneda (1994) have identified three types of commitment; AC, CC, and NC. However, Meyer and Allen (1991) have preferred to call them as the components of commitment rather than the types of commitment. These components are also referred to as three 'mindsets' (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). AC has been defined as the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement that an employee has with his/her organization and goals (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). In the opinion of Buchanan (1974), AC to an organization is the emotional attachment to the goals and values of the organization, as well as to the employee's role in relation to those goals and values. Thus, AC can be understood as (1) an affective attachment and involvement with the target, (2) the degree to which an individual accepts and demonstrates belief in the values and goals of the organization, and (3) the willingness of an individual to exert efforts on behalf of the organization. On the other hand, CC has been associated with the intention to remain with the organization due to the cost of leaving the organization or the rewards for staying in the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Rashid et al. (2003) have argued that fewer possible job alternatives employees have at various organizations, the stronger their CC will be. Thus, CC can be understood as acknowledging the costs associated with terminating involvement with the target. Next, NC has been defined as the commitment where employees stay in the organization because of their feeling of obligation to their workplace (Wasti, 2003). Also, Wiener (1982) has defined NC as "the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way which meets the organization's goals and interests" suggesting that employees stay with the organization because they believe it to be the right and moral thing to do. He has also called NC as "generalized value of loyalty and duty". Thus, the TCM links each of OC components to specific behaviors exhibited by employees. However, Cohen (2007) and Adzeh (2013) have asserted that the TCM lacks predictive validity because of the strong relationship between AC and NC and also due to the ambiguity of CC. Generally, CC is majorly studied with cost perspective (Carson & Carson, 2002). Many researchers have corroborated and suggested two factors of CC-

(1) perception of lack of alternatives, and (2) perceived sacrifices of leaving the organization (Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002). Penley and Gould (1988), in their three dimensional model of OC, have proposed two separate dimensions of the concept of CC - calculative and alienative commitment. Their conceptualization of calculative commitment has its foundation in the benefits and inducements which an employee receives from the organization. On the other hand, alienative commitment has been linked to lack of alternatives. In the same direction, one important contribution of Cohen's (2007) work has been the conceptualization of CC in terms of benefits that employee perceives of staying in the organization rather than on the basis of costs associated with leaving the organization. The benefit perspective on CC may lead to some interesting findings such as a positive relationship of CC with employees' work outcomes.

Solinger, van Olffen and Roe (2008) have proposed a reconceptualization to the TCM of OC based on standard attitude theories - the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and the attitude-behavior model by Eagly and Chaiken (1993). Solinger et al. (2008) have posited that the TCM does not represent a general model of OC and although, AC can be considered to be an attitude towards the organization, NC and CC are attitudes regarding specific forms of behaviors. Later, Hoang (2012) has developed an alternative to the TCM by extending the Eagly and Chaiken's work. He has included the intention component, while excluding the habit component present in the original model suggested by Eagly and Chaiken (1993). However, this conceptualization needs further empirical evidences using more general behaviors.

Despite the incongruity regarding the dimensionality of OC, TCM is the most valued and used multidimensional model of OC in recent work (Ng & Feldman, 2011). With this background the present study aims to examine the dimensionality of TCM and provide empirical evidences for AC-NC differentiation and sub-dimensions of CC in Indian context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The study sample comprised employees (N = 711) working in manufacturing and service Indian organizations both public and private. Data were collected with the help of self-administered questionnaires through convenience and snowball sampling technique. Of the 711 employees who

participated in the study, 614 (86.35%) were male and 97 (13.65%) were female. The age of participants ranged from 23 years to 70 years with an average age of approximately 37 years. Further, 552 (77.63%) participants were married and 159 (22.37%) were single. The highest educational qualifications of respondents were also recorded. 378 (57.4%) participants were found to be either graduates or with educational qualifications below the bachelor's degree. 333 (42.6%) respondents were postgraduates. Further, 343 (48.25%) participants had less than 10 years of work experience while 368 (51.75%) had experience above 10 years.

3.2 Measures

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment was measured with organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) given by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993), and Meyer and Allen (1997). The questionnaire contained 18 items (6 items for each dimension) measured on a 7 point Likert scale. The sample items include: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" (AC); "Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire" (CC); "I would feel guilty if I left my organization now" (NC).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to confirm the three-dimensional factor structure of OC (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer et al., 1993), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted using AMOS 21.0 statistical package. The CFA resulted in a poor fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (132) = 1452.163 at $p < .01$, CMIN/df = 11.001, GFI = .781, NFI = .557, TLI = .510, CFI = .577, RMSEA = .119, PCLOSE = .000, SRMR = .116).

Further, we employed a series of CFA to see if other factor structures would fit the data or not. We tested for (a) uni-dimensional factor structure, (b) four-component factor structure with CC subscale further divided into CC - Low Alternatives (CC-LowAlt) and CC - High Sacrifices (CC-HighSac), and (c) Second-order factor structure. The CFA for uni-dimensional factor structure resulted in poor fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (135) = 1674.068 at $p < .00$, CMIN/df = 12.401, GFI = .752, NFI = .489, TLI = .442, CFI = .507, RMSEA = .127, PCLOSE = .000, SRMR = .122). Similarly, The CFA for a four-dimensional factor structure with CC subscale further divided into CC - Low Alternatives (CC-LowAlt) and CC - High Sacrifices (CC-HighSac), resulted

in poor fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (129) = 1422.536 at $p < .00$, CMIN/df = 11.027, GFI = .785, NFI = .566, TLI = .509, CFI = .586, RMSEA = .119, PCLOSE = .000, SRMR = .116). Also, CFA for second-order factor structure resulted in poor fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (132) = 1452.163 at $p < .00$, CMIN/df = 11.00, GFI = .781, NFI = .557, TLI = .510, CFI = .577, RMSEA = .119, PCLOSE = .000, SRMR = .116).

However, in the initial CFA, it was observed that many items i.e. OC3 (.19), OC4 (.19), OC5 (.17), OC7 (.46), OC10 (.48), OC11 (.41), OC13 (.07) and OC14 (.48) had corresponding loadings of less than 50. Scholars (like Gellatly et al., 2006; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007) have used truncated versions that comprised of three items from each scale that had the highest factor loadings in their data set. These 3-item scales reported higher reliabilities than the reliabilities for the full scales reported in the Meyer et al. (2002) meta-analysis. Therefore, in order to test whether three-component factor structure would fit the data or not, we again conducted a CFA taking only the three items (with highest loadings) each from AC, CC and NC. The resulted statistics revealed a better model fit (chi square χ^2 (24) = 84.705 at $p < .01$, CMIN/df = 3.529, GFI = .974, NFI = .934, TLI = .927, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .060, PCLOSE = .115, SRMR = .036).

We again conducted CFA for checking the presence of uni-dimensional factor structure and second order factor structure considering only three-items from each subscale. The CFA for uni-dimensional factor structure with three items each for AC, CC and NC, resulted in relatively poor fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (27) = 155.865 at $p < .00$, CMIN/df = 5.773, GFI = .952, NFI = .878, TLI = .862, CFI = .897, RMSEA = .082, PCLOSE = .000, SRMR = .051). However, CFA for second-order factor structure considering only three-items from each subscale, resulted in a better fit statistic (chi square χ^2 (24) = 84.705 at $p < .00$, CMIN/df = 3.529, GFI = .974, NFI = .934, TLI = .927, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .060, PCLOSE = .115, SRMR = .036).

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the three-factor structure holds true only with three items in each subscale. Also, the reliability of this scale (three-items on each subscale) has marginally increased from .76 to .78. Hence, in Indian context, although the TCM model is established, but with changes to the number of items.

Interestingly, with three-item subscales, the second-order factor structure also exists and CFA reported a good fit. This indicates that employees also perceive organizational commitment as a general broad construct or binding force which is the impression of AC, CC and NC

collectively. This corroborates the assertion from Allen and Meyer (1990), the authors of TCM model, and later, Solinger, van Olffen and Roe (2008) that a person's total commitment would reflect the "net sum" of the three psychological states - AC, CC and NC.

Another issue pertains to the relation between AC and NC. Although CFA shows that AC and NC items load on different factors, the latent factors are highly correlated. The correlation between AC and NC was found to be .86, suggesting a substantial overlap between the two constructs. These results corroborates the previous findings that reported moderate to high correlation (Bergman, 2006). In their meta-analytic study, Meyer et al. (2002) have reported .63 to be the corrected correlations between AC and NC, however, at the same time they reported the said correlation to be higher for the studies conducted outside North America. Thus, the criticism for AC-NC differentiation holds true for Indian context as well. However, this suggests that AC and NC are quite closely related in Indian culture and that the difference between desire and obligation is less distinct. Alternatively, it is also possible that Indian population identifies organizational values and goals as part of their own moral obligations.

However, interestingly, the correlations, AC-CC and CC-NC are found to be .66 and .69 respectively. These results are in contrast from the findings of Meyer et al. (2002), which reported modest correlation of .5 for AC-CC and .18 for CC-NC. However, it is important to note that in their meta-analysis of 153 independent samples, there was no study conducted in Indian context. Scholars (like Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007; Vohra & Goel, 2009) have reported moderate correlation for AC-CC and CC-NC. This difference in correlations may be accounted as the influence of culture. The extant research supports that the cultural values and practices influence the level and nature of commitment especially NC (Bergman, 2006; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Wasti & Önder, 2009). India is a collectivist country and expected to have people high in AC and NC (Gupta, Ramamoorthy & Kulkarni, 2005; Ramachandran & Krishnan, 2009). Also, the population and unemployment levels are likely to contribute towards increasing CC (Devecea, Palacios-Marqués & Alguacil, 2016). Therefore, it is recommended to formulate the culture-specific items which could differentiate AC, CC and NC scale.

5. CONCLUSION

The study provides empirical evidences for three-component model of OC in Indian context. The study offers insights on its dimensionality, no. of items in subscales, and relation among the components. Although the three-

component factor structure was confirmed in CFA, but the no. of items were reduced to three. The study also highlights the potential differences in results obtained in different cultures and hence it becomes an important avenue for future research to explore culture specific items for OC components. More qualitative research is warranted to examine the individual items and their adequacy to explain the construct in Indian context.

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