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# The Multidimensional Nature of Organizational Commitment Among Information Systems Personnel

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**Abstract**

Two distinct views of organizational commitment are examined in this study. Affective commitment describes an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Continuance commitment is a behavioral view of commitment and describes an attachment to an organization based on "side-bets," or extraneous interests, such as pensions and seniority, which create costs in leaving an organization. These two dimensions are empirically examined for the case of 312 information systems (IS) employees. These findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between commitment based on a desire to stay in an organization and commitment based on a need to stay because of other factors, as well as the importance of fostering affective commitment in organizations.

## The Multidimensional Nature of Organizational Commitment Among Information Systems Personnel

Organizational commitment has recently been studied in the IS literature primarily in order to assess its relationship with employee turnover. For example, Igarria & Greenhaus (1992) found that committed employees are less likely to leave an organization than those who are less committed.

Two views of commitment have dominated the organizational behavior literature: attitudinal (or affective) commitment and behavioral (or continuance) commitment (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). Affective commitment is defined as an emotional attachment to an organization characterized by strong links (Mowday, Steers & Porter,

1982). Other studies have described affective commitment similarly (Buchanan, 1974; Etzioni, 1975).

Continuance commitment and the Side-Bet Theory of Commitment were popularized by Becker (1960). According to this theory, employees make certain investments or side-bets in their organizations, for example, tenure toward pensions, promotions, and work relationships. These investments are sunk costs which reduce the attractiveness of other employment opportunities. Commitment is, therefore, an outcome of inducements or exchanges between an individual and an organization.

Both types of commitment reflect links between an organization and an employee, and the presence of either reduces the chances of employee turnover. However, the nature of these links is quite different. Employees with strong affective relationships with an organization can be expected to not only remain in an organization, but also to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization. Employees with continuance ties, those who feel compelled to stay in an organization, are, on the other hand, more likely to put in the minimum required effort to retain their tenure.

The IS literature, to date, has focused on the affective commitment dimension. While studies such as those by Igarria & Siegal (1992) have examined the impact of role stressors on commitment, only one component of commitment has been studied.

In this study we propose to empirically differentiate between affective and continuance commitment among IS employees in order to clarify the nature of the construct. Thus, the specific objective of this study is to empirically examine the dimensions of the organizational commitment construct among IS professionals.

## **Research Study**

The study involved 89 firms located in five metropolitan areas (two midwestern, three eastern). The IS directors of these organizations were contacted. Questionnaires were handed to those who agreed to participate for distribution to their employees. This resulted in a total sample of 312 responses. The study sample included organizations from a variety of industries. Job titles of individual respondents included system programmers (13%), project leaders (8%), application programmers (17%), systems analysts (20%), IS managers (8%), software engineers (13%), consultants (12%), and other (13%). Sixty-one percent of the respondents were involved in system development activities and 31% performed end-user computing support. The average age of the 312 respondents was 31 years; average tenure in the organization was 4 years; and average tenure in the IS area, 5.3 years.

Commitment was measured by the eight-item affective and the eight-item continuance commitment scales used by Meyer & Allen (1984). Responses were measured on 7-point strongly disagree-strongly agree scales and scale scores were computed by averaging across items. Internal consistency of these scales has been reported previously to be in the

range of 0.84 to 0.88 for affective commitment and 0.70 to 0.84 for continuance commitment scale (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989).

## **Results**

Dimensionality of the commitment scales. In order to assess the dimensionality of the commitment scales, the 16 items comprising the two commitment scales (affective and continuance) were factor analyzed using maximum likelihood estimation followed by varimax rotation. A two factor solution is shown in Table 1.

The eight affective commitment scale (ACS) items loaded on the first factor. Six of the eight continuance-commitment (CCS) items loaded on the second factor. Two items - CCS7 and CCS8 - did not load. These results mirror previous analysis conducted by McGee & Ford (1987). The factor analysis suggested deleting the two CCS items and recomputing the remaining six items as one scale. The reliability estimates for the ACS scale were 0.88 (8 items) and 0.84 for the CCS scale (6 items).

## **Discussion**

The idea that one view of commitment is not likely to encompass the meaning of the construct has been the motivating force behind commitment research. An increasing number of studies have been based on this "more than one type of commitment" view. The current study is also motivated by this idea. Two dimensions of commitment - affective and continuance - are examined. This study provides evidence for the generalizability of the two-component model of organizational commitment in the IS context.

Adequate support for two distinct components of commitment as theoretical constructs was found. This supports previous research by Meyer & Allen (1984) and suggests that both these components should be included in future IS research. The value of commitment to an organization is unquestionable. However, this study has found that this value may well depend on the nature of the commitment.

Various propositions can now be made regarding the differentiation between the two distinct types of commitment. The two types of commitment should be differentially related to variables considered to be antecedents or consequences of commitment. Affective commitment should be related to positive experiences; e.g., job-satisfaction. It should also be negatively related to undesirable behaviors; e.g, intention to quit, burnout and lower self-esteem.

When commitment reflects an identification with and an involvement in an organization, the organization may benefit due to reduced turnover, increased productivity, and higher satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and reduced burnout among employees. In contrast, when an employee's commitment to an organization is primarily based on a recognition that there are costs associated with leaving, the organization may realize reduced turnover

at the expense of reduced job satisfaction, higher burnout and a sense of reduced self-esteem.

This study suggests that organizations need to re-examine policies related to building commitment. Commonly employed strategies such as rapid promotions, non-vested pension plans, participation in stock-options, and the development of organization-specific skills may, in fact, be working against the organization. Although these steps undoubtedly make it difficult for employees to leave, they may not encourage them to contribute. Instead, some employees may find themselves in a position where they may want to quit, but may not be able to afford to do so. Some employees may be motivated to do just enough to maintain their jobs. In these cases, commitment-fostering steps may actually be counter-productive. Affective commitment may be harder to foster but is strongly related to the results that organizations value - higher job satisfaction and a desire to contribute to the organization's effectiveness.

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**Table 1 Rotated Factor Loadings for Organizational Commitment Items**

Item	Rotated Factor Loadings	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
ACS1	0.816	
ACS2	0.818	
ACS3	0.768	
ACS4	0.837	
ACS5	0.629	
ACS6	0.582	
ACS7	0.608	
ACS8	0.500	
CCS1		0.550
CCS2		0.627
CCS3		0.804
CCS4		0.726
CCS5		0.740
CCS6		0.630
CCS7		0.420
CCS8		0.331

Only factor loadings above 0.50 are shown except in the case of CCS7 and CCS8.