

## **Commitment Elements Reframed (Antecedents & Consequences) for Organizational Effectiveness**

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*This structured literature review of commitment in the workplace provides a new way to look at commitment through levels, elements, antecedents and consequences of organizational and individual commitment.*

**Keywords:** Organizational Commitment, Workplace Commitment, Commitment Antecedents

Performance improvement in an organization goes beyond the commonly accepted principles of good management and effective leadership by engaging the emotional commitment of the employee (Katzenbach, 2000). Commitment is the differentiating factor between top performing companies and those of average performance (Katzenbach, 2000). Emotionally engaged employees are more productive and more customer-focused. High-levels of employee commitment are positively correlated with superior financial performance in organizations demonstrated by significant increases in operating and net profit margin (International Survey Research, 2001; Gallup, 2002; Watson Wyatt Global Consulting, 2003). Individuals and teams that are committed to the values and goals of an organization have a higher morale and lower turnover, increased job satisfaction, and increased productivity (Cohen, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

Gallup (2002) estimates that actively disengaged workers cost the U.S. economy up to \$350 billion per year. Even though employee commitment has a positive impact on organizational and individual performance and job satisfaction, low levels of commitment exist in most industries. More than a third of employees worldwide admit to having low levels of commitment to the job and the company and instead are more committed to their careers (TNS Worldwide, 2002). Only one in twelve (8%) are 'company-oriented' employees, predominantly committed to their company (TNS Worldwide, 2002). Levels of employee commitment in the USA are significantly lower than half of the world's other major economies, placing USA companies at a disadvantage when competing in the global marketplace (International Survey Research, 2001).

### **Problem Statement**

By understanding when and how commitments develop and how they shape attitude and behavior, organizations will be in a better position to anticipate the impact that change will have and to manage it more effectively (Meyer & Allen, 1997). By knowing what drives the commitment of employees, a positive environment can be created to deliver tangible results quickly. The purpose of this paper is to identify theories of commitment in the workplace to develop a framework that helps the field create higher levels of commitment, productivity, and satisfaction. The paper is organized into five main sections: the method, commitment in the workplace, mapping workplace commitment, and the implications for HRD and future research.

### **Method**

A structured literature review was conducted. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycInfo and ABI Inform and were selected with the assistance of a reference librarian as most representative of education, psychology and business. We started with 1980 because early in the 1980s organizational downsizing and restructuring became a trend ending with 2003. Databases were searched for the following descriptors: workplace commitment, organizational commitment, affective commitment, employee emotional commitment, career, profession and occupational commitment, job commitment, work group and team commitment. Each term was searched individually. In addition, organizational and workplace commitment, career and job commitment were each paired with commitment antecedents and consequences. Each descriptor set produced a list of records that were reviewed for relevancy. The search resulted in 3985 articles of which 567 addressed workplace issues, not general societal trends such as societal commitment or familial commitment. Articles, non-specific to the workplace, were

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eliminated as were duplicate articles. Articles were then examined for the antecedents or consequences of commitment in the workplace resulting in 125 articles to analyze.

A content analysis was conducted. Abstracts were read and categorized by (a) elements of commitment (b) antecedents to commitment (c) consequences of commitment. Tables were created to organize themes and patterns that emerged as the elements, antecedents and consequences of commitment in the workplace. Cognitive mapping was used to create a mental model of the overall meaning of the text. A graphic map depicts the relationships between concepts. Cognitive mapping lends itself to the comparison of semantic connections across texts and attempt to represent the relationship(s) between ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and information available to an author within a text. These relationships can be represented as logical, inferential, causal, sequential, and/or mathematical relationships (Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997).

## **Commitment in the Workplace**

Commitment has been defined as the degree of pledging or binding of the individual to a set of behaviors and motivates one to act (Kiesler, 1971). Once identification with the organization begins, individuals are likely to become concerned with the broader interests of the organization including its reputation, survival, and continued success, that generates activity and resource exchange (reflecting enhanced concern between firm and employee) fostering further identification (Rousseau, 1998). Katzenbach (2000) describes an energized workforce as high performance (those that perform better than industry norms) and whose emotional commitment enables them to make and deliver products or services that constitute a sustainable competitive advantage.

Commitment in the workplace or understanding how people become committed to an organization is multifaceted (Meyer & Allen, 1997) consisting of the elements, antecedents and consequences, and forms such as organizational (affective), job, career, team, and supervisory commitment. Sufficient discriminant validity (reduction in concept redundancy) exists among organizational commitment, job commitment, career commitment (Bashaw & Grant, 1994; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Chang, 1999; Morrow & Wirth, 1989; Morrow & Goetz, 1998), and group (team) commitment (Ellemers, de Gilder, & van den Heuvel, 1998) to consider these as independent forms of commitment in the workplace. Considering this, these independent forms of workplace commitment are reframed into two distinct levels – organizational commitment (organization and supervisor) and individual commitment (job, career, and team) and will be discussed following the elements of commitment in the workplace, the antecedents and consequences.

### *Levels of Commitment - Forms of Commitment*

Commitment affects the organization and the person, making two levels. (a) Organizational commitment which is directed by organization attributes and defined as the psychological and emotional attachment of employees to their organizations (Morrow, 1993; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). (b) Individual employee commitment, guided by attributes that directly affect the person and is defined as the psychological and emotional attachment of individuals to their jobs, careers, work groups or teams, peers and supervisors (Cohen, 2003).

*Organizational commitment.* Organizational commitment is the measure of strength of the employee's identification with the goals and values of the organization (Mowday et al., 1982) and supervisor. Individuals committed to the organization exert extra effort, desire organizational membership (Morrow, 1993), protect company assets, and share company goals and values (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Supervisory commitment is defined as the strength of identification with supervisor and internalization of supervisor's values. Identification occurs when the subordinate admires certain attributes of the supervisor, such as attitudes, behavior, and accomplishments. Internalization occurs when the subordinate adopts the attitudes and behaviors of the supervisor because the supervisor's attitudes and behaviors are congruent with the subordinate's value systems (Becker, 1992; Gregersen & Black, 1993). Commitment to organization is related positively to a variety of desirable work outcomes including employee job satisfaction, motivation and performance, and related negatively to absenteeism and turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Organizational commitment can be measured as either attitudinal or calculative. Attitudinal, referred to as affective (Meyer, Allen, & Smith 1993), or internalization and identification (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986) is the employee's emotional attachment and identification with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982; Cohen, 2003; Porter et al 1974). Employees continue with the organization because they want to do so (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday et al, 1982) and feel proud to be part of the organization, respecting its values and accomplishments (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). The calculative or "side-bet" (Becker, 1960), also referred to as continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and compliance (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), signifies the extent to which employees feel committed to their organization by virtue of the cost that they feel is associated with leaving it and their need to remain with the organization (Becker, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

The affective (attitudinal) commitment approach provides a clearer and more focused scale of organizational commitment (Jaros, 1997) because the correlation between antecedents and attitudinal (affective) measures are stronger than those measures of the calculated or continuance approach (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1997). In addition, many existing measures of organizational commitment are attitudinal (Ko, Price & Mueller, 1997; McGee & Ford, 1987), and the construct validity of affective (attitudinal) commitment is supported (Ko et al., 1997), while the construct validity of continuance and compliance commitment is questionable (Ko et al., 1997).

*Individual employee commitment.* Individual commitment is the measure of strength of the employee's identification with the values of other individuals and peers within the organization (team commitment), and their work (job commitment) and careers (career commitment) and encourages individuals to exert extra organizational citizenship behavior as active positive contributions to colleagues and avoid engaging in harmful behaviors. Team commitment is an individual's identification and sense of cohesiveness with other members of a group. The importance of team commitment is its enhancement of social involvement that reinforces the social ties that the individual forms with the organization (Randall & Cote, 1991).

Job commitment is the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his/her work and is the internalization of the values and the importance of work for the person's worth and the degree to which one's work performance affects one's self-esteem and self-image (Lodhal & Kejner, 1965; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977). Career commitment (professional and occupational commitment) focuses on the employee's career and the devotion to a craft or occupation (Blau, 1995; Morrow, 1983). Career commitment is defined as the magnitude of an individual's motivation, attitude, affects, belief and behavioral intentions toward an occupation or vocation (Blau, 1995; Hall, 1971) or the degree of centrality of one's career for one's identity (Gould, 1979).

#### *Antecedents to Commitment in the Workplace*

Antecedents of commitment are actions or elements that cause commitment to occur. Congruency, interesting work, clarity of purpose, feedback, equity /fairness, empowerment, and autonomy are antecedent elements linked to organizational commitment that produces psychological states that lead to positive consequences for the organization and individual. The antecedents that lead to individual employee commitment are congruency, interesting work, feedback, and autonomy.

Congruency is the quality of agreement that exists between the employee's values and interests and those of the organization. If congruency exists between a person's interests, preferences, abilities (Holland, 1985) and values (Katzenbach, 2000), and organizational factors in the work environment, employees become more emotionally committed to the organization leading to improved performance (Holland, 1985; Katzenbach, 2000). Congruency or "fit" between the individual and his or her job/career increases commitment to the career and/or job (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Cadwell, 1991).

Interesting work holds the individual's attention, is challenging and rewarding, is significant to the organization, and allows utilization of a variety of skills and knowledge. Job characteristics such as job challenge, skill variety (different activities and talents the job requires), task identity (doing a job from beginning to end with visible results), task significance (the job's impact on the lives of workers and the organization), degree of autonomy (freedom, independence and discretion in scheduling work and determining procedures) all improve commitment to the organization (Mathew & Zajac, 1990; Nelson, 1999), to the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Varona, 2002), and one's career (Person, 1997). The more important a task or job component (job significance) is, the greater the level of job commitment and job satisfaction, motivation and job performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Organizations that ensure interesting work will improve employee commitment to the organization and the job itself.

Clarity of purpose provides a clear identification of the intentions, ideas, goals and plans of the organization allowing employees to be informed, ask questions, share information, provide a clear sense of direction. Lack of clarity, about purpose, lies at the core of organizational ineffectiveness and inefficiency (Kaufman, 2000; Katzenbach, 2000). Organizations that provide a clear sense of direction (Greenberg, 1994), adequate explanation of new policy (Rhodes & Steers, 1981; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987) and purposereport high levels of organizational commitment (Mathleu & Zajac, 1990), workgroup commitment (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991) and individual commitment (Varona, 2002).

Equity and fairness maintains a balance between and within the organization and its employees. Affective commitment and commitment between peers and supervisor is strengthen when employees' perceptions are of a fair, trusting, and equitable environment (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Rhodes & Steers, 1981). Feedback is the degree to which employees receive information that reveals how well they are performing on the job. Feedback that promotes continuous improvement and constant communication with employees leads to the development of organizational commitment (Luthans, 1998) and enhanced performance (Katzenbach, 2000; Nelson, 1999; Varona, 2002).

Empowerment gives authority to the employees to make decisions about their work. Organizational commitment is stronger among employees who are allowed to participate in decision-making and empowered to carry out their work (Rhodes & Steers, 1981; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Meyers & Allen, 1997). Empowerment, autonomy, and mutual accountability focus employees on doing a job well and encourage them to lend a hand to a co-worker or department that needs help (Katzenbach, 2000). Giving people latitude, flexibility, and empowerment to make decisions increases the chance that they will perform as desired bringing additional initiative, ideas, and energy to their jobs (Nelson, 1999). Autonomy is the degree of freedom, independence and discretion an employee is allowed in scheduling work and determining procedures. Increased autonomy strengthens organizational commitment (Mathew & Zajac, 1990), increases job satisfaction (Fried & Ferris, 1987), and contributes to job commitment (Person, 1997; Hackman & Oldsham, 1975).

*Consequences of Workplace Commitment*

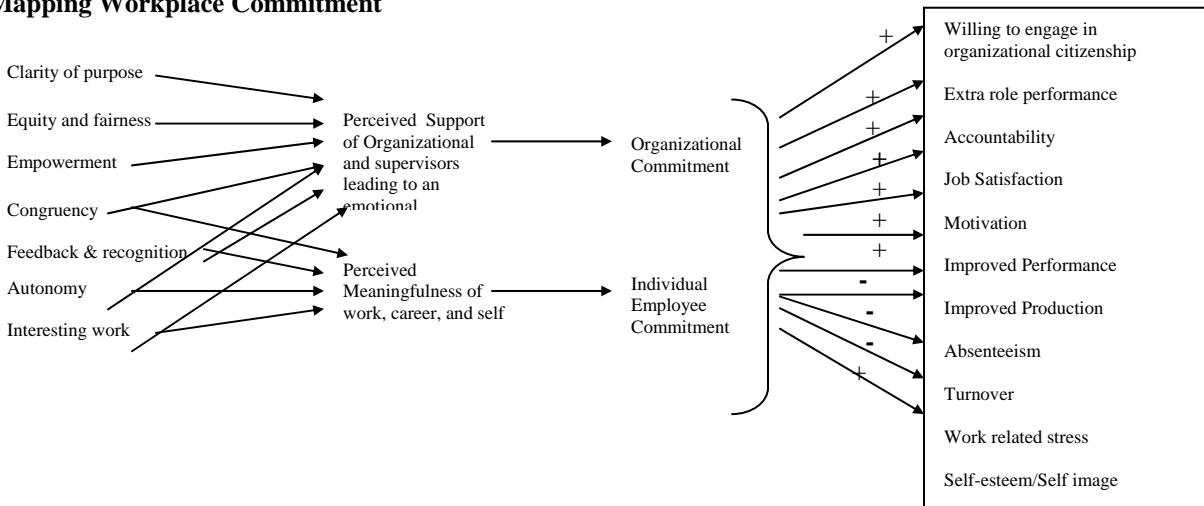
The consequences of workplace commitment are the effects and outcomes that result from organizational and individual employee commitment. Employees with strong organizational affective commitment are emotionally attached to the organization having a greater desire to contribute meaningfully to the organization, choose to be absent less, work harder (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), improving production (Randal & Cote, 1994) and overall performance on the job (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Managers with strong affective commitment report higher levels of compliance with strategic decisions and avoidance of budgetary slack in financial planning (Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987), are more willing to engage in organizational citizenship (Nouri, 1994) or extra-role performance (Meyer et al, 1993). The willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty (extra-role performance) include things such as providing extra help to coworkers, volunteering for special work activities, being particularly considerate of coworkers and customers, arrive early to work and/or leave late, and make suggestions when problems arise (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Affective commitment leads to increased competitiveness, accountability and the desire to improve overall performance of the job (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991).

Affective organizational commitment is beneficial to the employee as well. Employees that have high levels of affective commitment, experience lower stress levels even though they work longer and harder than those not committed. Affective commitment encourages motivation (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and lower psychological physical, work-related stress (Reilly & Orsak, 1991), less emotional exhaustions and depersonalization (Jamal, 1990). Employees committed to the organization, their jobs and careers appear happier, and are able to exert more quality time to their families and hobbies (Reilly & Orsak, 1991).

Individual employee commitment and commitment to work groups improves team performance, pro-social behavior and group cohesion enhancing individual job performance and satisfaction (Bishop and Scott, 1997). Those committed to their jobs and/or careers are absent less and have lower intentions to quit (Bishop & Scott, 1997), increased job satisfaction, and increased intrinsic motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Job characteristics or interesting work such as task identity, skill variety, task significance and autonomy increases motivation, job satisfaction and job performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Career commitment and job involvement affect professionals' job satisfaction, turnover intention, role stress, productivity, and job migration (Aranya & Ferris, 1984; Gunz & Gunz, 1994).

Figure 1. Commitment Mapped

**Mapping Workplace Commitment**



Cognitive mapping was used to create a model of the relationships between the elements, antecedents, and consequences of workplace commitment, which lead to organizational commitment and/or individual employee commitment (See Figure 1). The antecedents to organizational commitment (clarity of purpose, equity & fairness, empowerment, congruency, feedback & recognition, autonomy and interesting work) lead to an employee’s perception of organizational and supervisory support creating an emotional attachment to the organization (organizational commitment). The antecedents to individual commitment (congruency, feedback & recognition, autonomy and interesting work) lead to meaningfulness of work, career, peers, and self, creating an attachment to ones job, career, and work teams (individual commitment). Organizational and individual commitment results in positive outcomes and implications for the organization and the individual (consequences of commitment).

**Commitment in the Workplace Reframed and Performance Implications**

If commitment behavior is not transferred from individuals and subgroups to the total organization, dysfunctional behavior can exist among individual employees whose goals are in conflict with the goals of the total organization (Cohen, 2003; Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1994). One example of this is the possible inverse relationship between career commitment and organizational commitment. If the organization is not in line with the employee’s career goals, it may cause the employee to be more committed to his or her career rather to the organization, which would have an inverse effect on organizational performance (Cohen, 2003). Commitment in the workplace reframed (See Figure 2) illustrates this issue of conflict which is explained by the extent to which organizations engaging in activities (antecedents) that enhance both organizational commitment (committed to the organization and supervisor) and individual employee commitment (committed to their jobs, careers, work groups) consequences will occur, leading to outcomes of maximization of organizational and individual performance. When the employee is committed at all levels, optimal organizational and individual performance occurs as well as individual employee satisfaction. In organizations where employees are neither committed to the organization nor to their job, careers, and/or work groups, or the organization, distress within the organization may occur leading to organizational performance problems and low performing workers.

Organizations where employees may either be committed to the organization, but not committed at the individual level (i.e. to their jobs or careers) or committed at the individual level, but not committed to the organizational level may experience conflict between organizational values and goals of the employee leading to a status quo performance situation or performance lower then expected.

*Figure 2. Reframing of Workplace Commitment*

<b>HIGH</b>  <b>Organizational (Affective) Commitment</b>	<b>CONFLICT</b> Low individual job performance, low satisfaction and motivation. High organizational performance	<b>OPTIMIZATION</b> High individual job performance, High organizational performance, High satisfaction and motivation
	<b>DISTRESSED</b> Low job performance, Low satisfaction, motivation. Low organizational performance	<b>CONFLICT</b> High individual job performance, satisfaction and motivation, Low or average organizational performance
<b>LOW</b>	<b>Individual Employee Commitment</b>	
	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH</b>

**Implications for HRD and Future Research**

Lower levels of commitment may indicate a lack of coherent strategies linking human resource development interventions to increasing commitment in the workplace. Human Resource Development’s (HRD) principle purpose is to improve organizational performance through increased productivity, efficient work processes, and individual contributions (Swanson & Arnold, 1996). One trend effecting modern HRD practices is greater expectation of meaningful work and employee involvement (McLagan, 1989). A major focus of HRD interventions is an effort to change employee behavior to enhance performance. Commitment of organizations and individuals to each other, the process and the product, is vital to increased productivity and efficiency.

Potential spill over into other areas such as commitment to one's family and nation may provide affects on society at large (Cohen, 2003). If the quality of an employee's attachment to work organizations were low, this would carry certain implications for the basic fabrication of society (Cohen, 2003). Without employee commitment, individuals would lose one very basic source of identity and belonging. When quality of membership status linkages is low in a number of work organizations, the level of productivity and the quality of products and service would be affected (Cohen, 2003, Mowday et al., 1982). The identification of people with the organization can create a larger whole that is often a driving force behind a firm's performance, and its employees' well being (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

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