Psychological Empowerment and Organisational Commitment among Academic Staff of Public Universities in Malaysia

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Abstract: The study examined the level of the Three-Component Model of organisational commitment (TCM) and its relationship with psychological empowerment. The sample was selected through a three-stage cluster random sampling among academic staff from three public universities in Malaysia. Cross-sectional survey research questionnaires were used as instruments of data collection. All variables under study have met the testing standard of reliability, validity and normality. SPSS version 22 was used to analyse the data obtained from 225 respondents of the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the levels of organisational commitment, and inferential statistical techniques such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression were used to examine the relationship between organisational commitment and psychological empowerment. The levels of organisational commitment of respondents were reported to be generally moderate but variations exist across its three different components namely the affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. The results of Pearson's correlation indicated a significant and positive relationships between all these three components of organisational commitment and overall organisational commitment with overall psychological empowerment and its four-dimensional components. The strongest relationship was identified between overall organizational commitment and psychological empowerment's dimension of impact. The multiple regression analyses indicated that more than 20% of the variance in the overall scores of organizational commitments could be predicted by the overall psychological empowerment and its four-dimensional components. In addition, the multiple regression analyses indicated that the two strongest predictors of organisational commitment were the dimension of meaning and impact. Overall, the study has provided evidence of a significant relationship between excellent empowerment practices with organisational commitment among the academic staff in public universities in Malaysia. The study has its implications towards enhancement of policies and administration in higher education in Malaysia.

Keywords: Academic Staff, Organisational Commitment, Psychological Empowerment

1.   Background of the Study

Organisational commitment is a concept that has been greatly recognised as one of the most crucial factors that influences the success of many organisations (Meyer and Allen, 1993). For almost forty years, many studies have discovered that the organisational commitment is significantly related to various factors and outcomes in the organisation (Choong, Tan, Keh, Lim and Tan, 2012). As stated by Gellatly, Hunter, Currie and Irving (2009), employee's commitment is an organisation's essential

resource that has a sustainable competitive advantage. In fact, Armstrong (2008) has argued that organisational commitment plays a crucial part in Human Resource Management in which a highly committed employee has a strong desire to remain as a member of the organisation, accept its values and are ready to perform greater effort for the organisation. In addition, research done by Hasan et al. (2019) have found that having employees with a high amount of organizational commitment is important to make sure that the workflow is successful, and the overall organizational performance is at high and satisfactory level. Thus, it is undeniably that a committed employee is one of most crucial assets of an organisation. Although extensive changes exist in the economic and social system of the world and the new definitions that have been presented in respect to the relations between the individuals and the organisation, the concept of commitment is still the main subject discussed in many management articles and studies. Considering the changes affecting the organisations in the 21st century in various aspects of globalization, information technology, cross-border networking, Meyer and Allen (1997) have indicated three reasons of why organisational commitment is important in an organization:

- Organisations are not disappearing, and they are becoming leaner and this requires greater flexibility from their employees. Since organisations have fewer managers, which means less supervision, thus employees need to be responsible for their actions. Therefore, this needs higher organisational commitment of employees.
- Organisations that outsource their work depend on the quality of temporary workers, and possibly these workers may not have the type of commitment that the permanent workers have. Thus, the commitment of these workers is important to maintain the quality of organisation's performance.
- Developing commitment is a natural process of being part of the group and organisations that do not take advantage of this response will encourage alienation that is bad for the organisation.

Many past studies have been conducted to discover the concept of organisational commitment in order to examine the validity of the different measures of organisational commitment (example, Allen and Meyer, 1996; Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982), and to identify the relationship between organisational commitment and its antecedents and outcomes (example, Allen and Meyer, 1990). Although there have been many definitions and measures of organisational commitment (examples, Meyer and Allen, 1984, 1991; Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974; Becker, 1960), nevertheless the three components model (TCM) of organisational commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991) has been one of the most important frameworks for studies in organisational commitment in the past decade. Based on the three-component model (TCM) of organisational commitment that consists of affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, commitment is regarded as a psychological state that portrays the relationship between employee with the organisation, and this relationship influences employee's decision to continue or discontinue their membership in the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Meyer and Allen (1991) in specific have defined organisational commitment as a concept reflected in three specific extensive aspects, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

Numerous previous researches have indicated a variety of antecedents and outcomes of the organisational commitment (Mahanta, 2010). For instances, the job characteristics, organisational structure and environment, and personal characteristics are among the most common factors predicting organisational commitment (Huang and Hsiao, 2007). A study by Meyer, Stanley, Herskovits and Topolnytsky (2002) have also revealed a similar finding indicating that organisational commitment is associated with factors related to demographic and job characteristics, and organisation structural factors. In another study by Gellatly, Hunter, Currie, and Irving ((2009), it was revealed that a practice of Human Resource Management (HRM) that emphasises on these qualities of development-oriented, reward-oriented and stability oriented have significantly promoted a better commitment in the organisation.

Organisational commitment is important because a high level of affective commitment in particular is associated with a number of positive and expected consequences for the organisation and the workers. Furthermore, previous research also revealed that affective and normative commitment are positively related with factors such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational citizenship behaviour, and performance, but they are negatively related to factors such as intention to leave, and

voluntary absenteeism (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005; Meyer et al, 2002; Topolnytsky, 2002; and Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). In addition, affective commitment is also evidenced to have a relationship with employee's physical and psychological well-being (Meyer and Maltin, 2010). Nevertheless, many past research on organisational commitment has been conducted in commercial organisations but different forms of organisations for instance, public universities may have specific features that distinguish them from other types of organisations. Therefore, this study explores specific antecedents that influence the commitment of the academic staff to work for their universities.

Specifically, this study attempts to:

1. Determine the level of organisational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment and overall organisational commitment) among the academic staff of three selected public universities in Malaysia.
2. Determine the relationship between psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact and overall psychological empowerment) with organisational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment and overall organisational commitment) among the academic staff of three selected public universities in Malaysia.
3. Determine the contribution of independent variables (four dimensions of psychological empowerment that comprise of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact and overall psychological empowerment) toward the variation scores of organisational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment and overall organisational commitment) among the academic staff of three selected public universities in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organisational Commitment

The concept of organisational commitment has received significant attention in the past studies to understand the strength of employee's devotion to the organisation (Mester, Visser, Roodt and Kellerman, 2003). Past researchers and scholars have generally differentiated this particular concept into three main categories namely attitudinal, behavioural and motivational. Although there are many different definitions of the organisational commitment offered in the literature related to the concept of organisational commitment (examples by Pretorius and Roodt, 2000, Meyer and Allen, 1991, Salancik, 1977, Porter and Lawler, 1968), nevertheless a mutual thread that can be found is the fact that that commitment is basically a psychological connection between an employee and the organisation (Humphreys, Weyant and Sprague, 2003). Furthermore, great interest has been shown in the topic of organisational commitment, in particular the assertion that organisational commitment should focus on the issues of multidimensionality in recent years.

In this study, the organisational commitment is referred to the 'Three-Component-Model (TCM)' of commitment that consists of affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991, 1997) which is commonly referred as Meyer and Allen commitment model. Based on Meyer and Allen (1997, 1991) the organisational commitment in this study refers to a psychological state that indicates the relationship between employee and organisation that influences employee's decision to continue or discontinue their membership with the organisation. Specifically, affective commitment is referred to employee's emotional attachment and relationship and their involvement in the organisation, while continuance commitment is referred to employee's awareness on the costs associated if they are leaving the organization. On the other hand, normative commitment is referred to an employee's consideration on the responsibility to continue employment in the organisation.

In this study, the organisational commitment is measured with the modified TCM Employee Commitment Survey (TCM) (Meyer et al., 1993). Based on the TCM scale, the three forms of

commitment are viewed as different facets, rather than different types of organisational commitment. In other words, employees can be either affectively, normatively and instrumentally committed to the organisation. These three components are different from each other and each component has different antecedents. Employees tend to be effectively committed if they feel that the organisation is supporting them, treating them fairly and respecting them. Continuance commitment develops when the employee acknowledges that they will lose investments in the organisation and feels that there are no options other than staying with the organisation. On the other hand, normative commitment develops when people receive benefits and feel that they have responsibility to reciprocate pay back to the organisation. Consequently, they will accept the terms of a psychological contract between them and the organisation (Rego and Cuhna, 2007).

2.2   Psychological Empowerment and Organisational Commitment

Previously, Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as a motivational concept of self-efficacy. On the other hand, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) as cited in Spreitzer (1995) argued that empowerment is a multifaceted concept, it acted as an increased intrinsic task motivation that manifested in a set of four cognitions namely: i. meaning, ii. competence, iii. self-determination, and iv. impact which indicates an individual's orientation to his or her work role (Spreitzer,1995). In this regard, psychological empowerment is referred to as a motivational construct that is specifically attributed in four cognitions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Spreitzer, 1995).

All together these four cognitions reflect an active orientation to a work role. Through active orientation, it means an individual is able to shape his or her work role or context (Spreitzer, 1995). Specifically, meaning is referred to a goal or purpose of the work that is specifically judged by an individual according to their own self-standards, while competence is referred to an individual's belief that she/he can perform well at work. On the other hand, self-determination is referred to an individual feeling whether they are having choice to initiate actions that will give impact to the strategic, administrative and outcomes of the work (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Deci, Connell and Ryan, 1989; Ashforth, 1989; Gist, 1987). All together these four cognitions have indicated an individual active orientation in the role of work. Based on Quinn and Spreitzer (1997), there are four common characteristics of most empowered people as illustrated below:

- Have a sense of 'determination' which means they are free to choose how to do their work without being overly supervised.
- Have a sense of 'meaning' which means they feel that their work is important, and they are really concerned about what they are doing.
- Have a sense of 'competence' which means they are confident about their ability to do their work and know they can perform well.
- Have a sense of 'impact' which means they feel they have significant influence in their organisation and that people would pay attention to their ideas.

It is recognised that the four dimensions if combined additively can create the overall construct of psychological empowerment. In other words, the lack of any single dimension will deflate the overall degree of felt empowerment. Thus, the four dimensions specify 'a nearly complete or sufficient set of cognitions' for understanding psychological empowerment (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Although the four dimensions represent the psychological perspective of empowerment, a relational perspective of empowerment was represented by the social-structural components of empowerment. Organic structure, organisation support, access to strategic information, access to organisation resources and organisational culture for instances, are the social structural antecedents of psychological empowerment. On the other hand, the behavioural outcomes of empowerment consist of, among others, innovation, upward influence, and self and managerial effectiveness.

Previous study by Liu, Fellows and Chiu (2006) and Krishna (2007) has indicated a significant and positive relationship between the work empowerment with organisational commitment. This means as when the perception of work empowerment is increased, eventually the employees' organisational commitment will also increase. Similarly, an earlier work of Bogler and Somech (2004) among school

teachers in the middle and high schools of Israel has also indicated a significant relationship between empowerment and commitment. However, the current studies by Chen and Chen (2008), Choong et. al. (2012) and Nabila (2008) have revealed that the four cognitions of psychological empowerment were not all significantly related to organisational commitment. Therefore, the undecisive findings in the past literature has triggered the present study to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and organisational commitment. Particularly, in this study psychological empowerment is determined by four cognitions consisting of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact as indicated earlier.

2.3   Self-Determination Theory

This study is also aimed at examining the practicality of the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Deci and Ryan, 1985) that proposed the notion that behaviours can be characterized in relation to the extent to which they are autonomous versus controlled (Gagne and Deci, 2005). This specific theory helps to explain the relationship between organisational commitment with psychological empowerment. Despite being developed on a very strong research foundation, nevertheless only few studies have been carried out to test the practicality of self-determination theory within organisation context (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Therefore, this present study extends the work and proposition of Gagne and Deci (2005) to examine the practicality of this particular theory in work organisation, specifically among the academic staff in higher education in Malaysia by identifying the relationship between psychological empowerment with organisational commitment in public universities in Malaysia. As related to this study, "choice", that is one of the cognitions of psychological empowerment, is the essence of work's autonomy that reflects the degree of an individual self-determination (Deci et al., 1989), and thus is a main element of the intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Related studies by Gagne et al. (2004) and Gagne and Koestner (2002) also revealed that the affective commitment was facilitated by employees' autonomous motivation. Furthermore, Meyer et al. (2004) indicated that the human resources management practices that emphasise on the use of autonomy-supportive practices should foster a commitment mindset.

3.   Methodology

A combination of a descriptive and correlational research was used to examine the level of this three-component model of organisational commitment (TCM) and its relationship with psychological empowerment. The selection of the samples of the study was done through a three-stages cluster random sampling method among the academic staff of three faculties representing three different fields from three public comprehensive universities situated in Sabah, Sarawak, and Peninsular Malaysia. At the time of the study, the total number of active academic staff of the targeted population were about 750 and the minimum sample size for this number is about '200' (Luck, Robin and Taylor, 1987). Overall 690 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted population, a total of 250 responses were returned and 225 were complete for the final analyses. A cross-sectional survey questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. The questionnaire was in English language with three parts. Part one was on demographic data. Part two and part three consist of items for organisational commitment and psychological empowerment with a total of 30 closed-ended items adapted from the Three-Component Model (TCM) of Employee Commitment Survey (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993) and Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1995) respectively. All variables have met the standard test of reliability using Cronbach's alpha, factor analyses, and normality tests using histogram, box-plot, normal and detrended Q-Q plot, and skewness and kurtosis.

4.   Findings and Discussion

4.1   Demographic Characteristics

Most of respondents were females (58.7%), aged between 27 – 36 years (44.9%), married (72.9%), with Master's degree qualification (56.4%) and they were lecturers (47.6%) in public universities in Malaysia.

4.2 Level of Organisational Commitment

From the total score of organisational commitment, three arbitrary categories were created and given three generic levels namely low, moderate and high (See Table 1) based on the suggestion of Cheng, (2002) and Gaban (1982). The midpoint response point was assigned a value of '3'. Therefore, all scores below 3 were considered as low, and all scores between 3 but below 4 were considered as moderate, and 4 or greater were placed as high category level.

Table 1 Categories and Interpretation of Organisational Commitment

Low	Moderate	High
< 3.00	3.00 - 3.99	> 3.99

All scores for the affective commitment component were in the range of 'Slightly Agree' and 'Agree'. The item with the highest score for affective commitment was 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this university' (Mean = 3.96, Standard Deviation = 0.96) and was also the highest score's item overall. Similarly, all scores for the continuance commitment were in the range of 'Slightly Agree' and 'Agree' and the highest score' item for continuance commitment was 'Right now, staying with this university is a matter of necessity as much as desire' (Mean = 3.81, Standard Deviation = 0.94). As for normative commitment, all scores were in the range of 'Slightly Agree' and 'Agree', and the highest score' item was 'I owe a great deal to this university' (Mean = 3.72, Standard Deviation = 1.04). The mean value for the overall organisational commitment was in the range of 'Slightly Agree' and 'Agree', (Mean = 3.59, Standard Deviation = 0.68) The result signified that most of the academic staff of the study were perceived to have a moderate level of commitment to their respective working universities.

Specifically, the findings show that the level of both affective commitment and normative commitment were mostly at the moderate level. In terms of the affective commitment, the results indicated that most of the academic staff in the study were perceived as being emotionally dedicated to their respective working universities. In the context of continuance commitment, this means that the academic staff involved in the study were aware of the profit that they can enjoy with continued participation, and the cost involved should they leave their current working university. On the other hand, the results on the normative commitment implies that the majority of the academic staff in the study were perceived to have a good level of obligation to continue employment with their respective working university. The varying scores on different components of organisational commitment suggest agreement with the theoretical thrust used in the study that indicated a multidimensionality of the organisational commitment construct.

Table 2 Mean Scores of Organisational Commitment of Lecturers

Organisational Commitment	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this university.	3.96	0.96
2. I really feel as if this university's problems are my own.	3.36	1.06
3. I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to this university.	3.92	0.98
4. I feel "emotionally attached" to this university.	3.76	1
5. I feel like "part of the family" at this university.	3.72	1.03
6. This university has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	3.82	0.88
7. Right now, staying with this university is a matter of necessity as much as desire.	3.81	0.94
8. It would be very hard for me to leave this university right now, even if I wanted to.	3.76	1.06
9. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave this university now.	3.75	1.05

10. I feel that I have too few options for consideration to leave this university.	3.32	1.11
11. If I had not already put so much of myself into this university, I might consider working elsewhere.	3.09	1.15
12. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this university would be the scarcity of available alternatives.	3.17	1.21
13. I feel it is my obligation to remain with this university.	3.39	1.11
14. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right for me to leave this university now.	3.53	1.13
15. I would feel guilty if I left this university now.	3.31	1.22
16. This university deserves my loyalty.	3.6	1.04
17. I would not leave this university right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.	3.69	1.04
18. I owe a great deal to this university.	3.72	1.04
Overall	3.59	0.68

4.3 Relationship between Organisational Commitment and Psychological Empowerment

As illustrated in Table 3 all correlation coefficients between the scores of the overall organisational commitment and the three components with the scores of overall psychological empowerments and each of its four dimensions were statistically positive and significant. The results revealed that *r* values were ranging from 0.13, *p* value < 0.05 to 0.49, *p* value < 0.01. Based on the criterion recommended by Elifson et al. (1998), the magnitude of these linear relationships ranged from weak to definite. The strongest correlation was identified between the score of the overall organisational commitment with the impact dimension of psychological empowerment where *r* = 0.49, *p* value < 0.01. However, the weakest relationship was identified between the normative commitment with the competence dimension of psychological empowerment where *r* = 0.13, *p* value < 0.05. It is important to note that the relationships between each component of organisational commitment with the impact dimension of psychological empowerment were slightly bigger as compared to others dimension of psychological empowerment. For instance, on the relationship between overall organisational commitment, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment with the impact dimension of psychological empowerment, the results have indicated that r = 0.49, *p* value < 0.01; *r* = 0.46, *p* value < 0.01, *r* = 0.30, *p* value < 0.01; *r* = 0.43, *p* value < 0.01, respectively.

The findings of the present study were similar to past research (Liu et al., 2006; Krishna, 2007; Bogler and Somech, 2004) that revealed a significant and positive relationship between empowerment and organisational commitment. This means that as when the perception of work empowerment increases, eventually the employees' organisational commitment will also increase. However, several past studies on psychological empowerment and organisational commitment for instances, Chen and Chen (2008), Choong et. al. (2012) and Nabila (2008) have revealed that the four cognitions of psychological empowerment were not all significantly related to organisational commitment. Interestingly, the findings of this study revealed that all four cognitions of psychological empowerment and overall psychological empowerment was significantly related to affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment and overall organisational commitment. In the other perspective, the findings supported the notion explained by the self-determination theory thus extended the proposition of Gagne and Deci (2005) to examine the practicality of this theory in work organisation, specifically among the academic staff in Malaysian public universities by identifying the relationship between psychological empowerment with organisational commitment.

Table 3 Correlation between Organisational Commitment and Psychological Empowerment

Psychological Empowerment	Organisational Commitment Scores			
	Overall Organisational Commitment	Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Meaning	0.30**	0.30*	0.26**	0.18**
Competence	0.26**	0.31**	0.20**	0.13*
Self-Determination	0.23**	0.24**	0.19**	0.15*
Impact	0.49**	0.46**	0.30**	0.43**
Overall Psychological Empowerment	0.43**	0.44**	0.31**	0.31**

Note:
** p value < 0.01 (two-tailed).
* p value < 0.05 (two-tailed).

4.4 Factors Contributing to the Variance of Overall Organisational Commitment

A standard (simultaneous) regression analysis using an 'Enter' method was performed to identify the best predictors of the organisational commitment. The ANOVA result in Table 4 shows that the model is significant where F = 21.161, R = 0.527, R^2= 0.278, Adjusted R^2= 0.265, p = 0.000, Durbin-Watson = 2.070. These values show that the slope of the estimated regression is linear. Consequently, the findings confirmed the existence of a linear relationship between the overall organisational commitment with the independent variables in the study. Furthermore, the R^2 = 0.278 entails that a set of independent variables (the four dimensions and overall psychological empowerment) jointly were explaining about 28 % of the variance of overall organisational commitment. Nevertheless, based on the significant values as indicated in Table 4 only two dimensions of psychological empowerment namely meaning and impact that have significantly contributed to the variance of the overall organisational commitment. In addition, it is pertinent to note that the overall psychological empowerment was excluded from the model in Table 4.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis of Psychological Empowerment and Overall Organisational Commitment

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients *B*	Standardized Coefficients *B*	t	Sig.
Constant	1.727		5.411	0.000
Competence	-0.031	-0.028	-0.308	0.758
Meaning	0.301	0.249	2.815	0.005
Self-Determination	-0.139	-0.143	-1.905	0.058
Impact	0.375	0.503	7.368	0.000

Dependent Variable = Organisational Commitment in Overall
F = 21.161 , R = 0.527, R^2= 0.278, Adjusted R^2= 0.265, p = 0.000, Durbin-Watson = 2.070
Note:
p value < 0.05 (two-tailed).

5. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

The level of overall organisational commitment and the three components were experienced from moderate to high levels. This augurs well with literature that organisational commitment is closely related to many factors such as organisation justice, job insecurity, employees' trust in management,

perceived organisational support and as well as perceived organizational prestige (Li, 2014; Carver, Candela, and Gutierrez, 2011; Chughtai and Zafar, 2006; Fuller, Hester, Barnett, and Relyea, 2006). Thus, the findings suggest that relevant approaches related to the above practices should be considered by the public university's management in their effort to boost the organisational commitment of academic staff. Besides, the findings of the study have also provided a compelling evidence on the multidimensionality or components of the organisational commitment in which it contributes to a better understanding of this particular construct more comprehensively

Thus, the current research findings have contributed to the relevant related literature. Obviously, the present study will help to strengthen the existing literature of organisational commitment particularly by identifying its relationship with psychological empowerment among the academic staff in public universities in Malaysia. The results indicated psychological empowerment has a stronger relationship with the affective commitment as compared to the relationship with continuance and normative commitment. Therefore, the conclusion derived from the present study provides some insights, particularly to the administrators, deans of faculties and human resource personnel in drafting various strategies and methods on how to enhance the commitment of the academic staff toward their institutions. Thus, specific programmes, approaches and strategies should be designed and implemented to enhance the level of organisational commitment. In addition, giving better recognition and making available intrinsic and extrinsic support to the academic staff are useful steps to increase the level of organisational commitment among the academic staff. Taking these proactive steps would also likely increase the effectiveness of the academic staff particularly with regards to their commitment level to their working universities. As a whole, this study has revealed the importance of organisational commitment among the academic staff in the public comprehensive universities in Malaysia and has suggested several ways to enhance the commitment of academic staff in Malaysian higher education settings particularly.

6.   References

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