

General Summary

In today's fast moving and highly competitive business environment organizations are looking for new ways to implement and utilize organizational resources strategically to enhance organizational value and achieve a firm-level competitive advantage. However, due to the changing nature of work as a consequence of globalization and technological influences, the definition of a job in a more traditional sense and the concept of a '*job for life*' are steadily dying out. This has consequences for how organizations create value and the role human resources play in the value creation process. Strategic Talent Management and Organizational Behavior have therefore become a key focus area for business leaders today to boost organizational effectiveness and ensure its competitiveness in an ever-changing marketplace.

Investigating the psychological relationship between the individual and the organization has been an important contributor towards understanding how human capital affects performance. Organizational Commitment is a psychological concept that serves as a foundation for work relationships guiding career and organizational development. The concept reflects the extent to which an employee is attached to an organization through identification with an organization's goals and values, and through one's involvement in the organization. Empirical evidence has repeatedly shown that employees with a high level of commitment in the workplace contribute to better performance, increased citizenship behaviors, less absenteeism and less turnover than employees who have a low level of commitment. By identifying factors and interventions that enhance employee organizational commitment, organizations will be in a better position to create value for its stakeholders through strategic and sustainable utilization of its human capital.

Organizational commitment has been one of the most investigated concepts within the organizational behavior literature in the past 50 years. As organizational commitment research has evolved to address new working conditions, global environments, and strategic activities, there appears to be a need to re-evaluate existing conceptualizations of the organizational commitment construct. Moreover, the sheer complexity and diversity of research in organizational commitment are demanding parsimonious approaches and integrated models to reflect organizational commitment in a modern world.

The aim of this research is to respond to such calls for improvement by 1). addressing key issues pertaining to the most dominant model used to measure organizational commitment, 2). propose an integrated model of organizational commitment based on organizational theories reflecting attachment, and 3). explain the practical relevance of the proposed model of organizational commitment to organizational life and value creation. Seeing the multi-sided approach of this research study, this thesis takes the form of a collection of research papers as the core part of this study. The following will describe the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 is the first research paper and explores the literature on psychological attachment within the employee – organizational relationship. This positioning paper provides a review of the development of organizational commitment since its inception up to Meyer & Allen's three-component model of organizational commitment, which is currently considered the most dominant view of organizational commitment. Consequently, the paper addresses the main issues pertaining to Meyer & Allen's model and proposes a new theoretical framework of organizational commitment based on Social Exchange and Social Identity to help overcome these issues and to provide an enriched perspective to commitment development in today's workplace. Propositions accompany the newly proposed framework of organizational commitment and are further investigated in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 re-establishes the importance of normative commitment within the commitment literature by reconceptualizing normative commitment as a base commitment mindset and investigates the development of normative commitment over time. Research findings provide evidence that normative commitment acts as a default commitment mindset, which takes form long before organizational entry and is influenced by critical incidents as well as familial and cultural factors. This default commitment mindset is an indicator of actual organizational commitment upon organizational entry, which is often referred to as a commitment propensity. Research findings further suggest that normative commitment acts ambivalently in the initial months after entry, indicating its reflective nature to adapt. Reconceptualizing normative commitment as a commitment propensity suggests that norms, values and beliefs carried over from the past are core to one's base commitment upon organization entry and influence how social exchange- and social identity-based work experiences affect the further development of a base commitment mindset.

Chapter 4 investigates the impact of organizational exchange- and organizational identification-based factors on work attitudes and behavior. More specifically, this study investigates how organizational commitment and employee citizenship behaviors are affected by the quality of the relationship between employees and their managers (often referred to as leader-member exchange) and by one's identification with the organization. Research findings from this study highlight the critical role normative commitment plays as a base commitment mindset, which fully mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange and affective commitment, and partially mediates the relationship between organizational identification and affective commitment. Affective commitment was found to fully mediate the relationship between normative commitment and citizenship behaviors. These findings uncover the unique underlying pathways of the psychological – performance link by which social exchange and social identity affect attachment to the organization and induce performance.

Chapter 5 tests the proposed model based on social exchange- and social identity-based factors and the key propositions of this study. This evaluation resulted in an improved model of organizational commitment which identified specific personal characteristics that affect commitment development and work performance through both social exchange and social identification work experiences. The improved model further indicates that a default commitment mindset affected through personal characteristics not only affects organizational commitment upon organizational entry, but also affects organizational identification. This suggests that cultural and familial factors play an important role in how employees attach to the organization. This attachment was found to affect organizational citizenship behaviors along the lines of altruism (e.g. helping others, providing support) and general compliance (e.g. following organizational rules, being punctual).

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the research by providing a discussion of the empirical findings from the research papers and uses the metaphor of a moral compass to explain the role of normative commitment, social exchange and social identity to put forth a new model of organizational commitment, which better reflects attachment in a modern workplace than existing conceptualizations of organizational commitment. Chapter 7 addresses limitations of the current study and suggests future research approaches, and Chapter 8 makes managerial recommendations based on the research findings from this study.

In summary, this study has been able to re-establish organizational commitment as a key attachment device in organizations today by uncovering underlying mechanisms within the psychological – performance link. These findings have resulted in the development of a socio-cognitive model of organizational commitment and provide a new definition of organizational commitment to better reflect organizational attachment in modern times. Study findings have important implications for organizational practice and provide organizational managers and leaders with new and effective approaches to talent management and business continuity in a rapidly changing and diversified business environment.

The following will be a summary of the major contributions this study has made to theory and management practice.

Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contributions made by this paper are plentiful and will be listed in order of importance.

1. This study has re-established the role of normative commitment as an important commitment component. Previous studies have rejected the value of normative commitment in future studies due to discriminant validity issues compared with affective commitment. This study provides evidence that normative commitment is a stand-alone commitment mindset which affects other commitment mindsets.
2. In line with the above, the role of normative commitment as a unidimensional model and a base commitment mindset suggests that organizational commitment researchers re-examine their existing organizational commitment research data to further confirm the proposed propositions.
3. Surprisingly, little research has focused on the development and the role of commitment propensity in organizational attachment research. This research provides further understanding on how personal and social attributions affect one's commitment propensity and how such a commitment propensity is related to actual organizational commitment.
4. Findings from this research provide insights to the underlying linkages of using an integrated approach in organizational commitment research and its unique effects on work behaviors. The study's proposed socio-cognitive model provides a better understanding of organizational commitment in modern times and identifies improved ways how organizational commitment can be defined and conceptualized.

5. Moreover, the role of normative commitment as a *default* and *base* commitment mindset, based on normative beliefs and values, argues for an improved measurement scale which better reflects the normative dimensions underlying both organizational role and work interaction. Future research could focus on creating new measurement instruments which better reflect the normative grounds of organizational commitment.
6. This paper has paved the path for future research in organizational commitment, by advancing existing theoretical notions of the role of social exchange and social identification in employee – organization work relationships. Future research would do well to continue investigating the corroborating effects of integrative psychological concepts on attitudinal outcomes at the micro-level. For example, researchers could also focus on concepts such as psychological ownership, job embeddedness, and deep listening to investigate effects on work attitudes and behaviors.
7. In line with the macro-perspective, the strategy literature could benefit from more understanding of engagement, commitment, and retention as human capital is believed to be instrumental in creating organizational value and firm-level competitive advantage. Findings from this research help build the bridge from the micro-perspective to the macro-perspective.

Contribution to Management Practice

The contributions of this study to management practice span various organizational stakeholders and provide tools and critical insights to organizational managers and leaders to better serve their people and society. This highlights the role of organizations in today's world as an interconnected social enterprise.

1. An organization's role in and for society is becoming more important than ever before. Organizations and leaders are no longer only evaluated upon financial performance, but also on how they treat their key stakeholders. The way organizations and their leaders serve their people, give back to society, and protect the natural environment are paramount to organizational survival. This study suggests that a new social contract is required that is grounded in core values, sustainable by nature, and aims to serve others. Transcending from an 'I' perspective to a 'WE' perspective has various benefits as shown in this study.
2. This study also highlights the importance of ethics in organizations. With organizations facing so much change, it is clear that futures are uncertain, and leaders are challenged on which direction to take. If anything, moral judgement and responsibility to society play a critical role to guide organizational behaviors, especially those of organizational leaders.

3. The study provides evidence that organizations need to recognize culture as an asset. As culture is a driving force within organizations to help employees align, engage, and connect in a modern world. Culture is a hard to imitate organizational resource which governs the norms and values underlying the organization and is an effective asset to attract and retain talent.
4. This study suggests that employee – employer interaction affects work behaviors in various ways. Positive work experiences promote work performance through emotional attachment. Positive work experiences from an exchange perspective reflect balanced exchanges between employee and manager, which help set expectations, build trust and create a safe environment. Equally, managers facilitate employee attachment through identification. Managers are an embodiment of the company’s values, goals, norms and rules, which if expressed coherently should spill over to the echelons below to help others understand the norms governing accepted group behavior and organizational life. This study provides evidence that the role of management affects employee performance through both exchange and identification.
5. The changing nature of work and evolving attitudes towards work and work-life balance are demanding a new social contract. A social contract which looks beyond ‘pay’ to provide meaning, belongingness, mastery, purpose, pride, and impact. Connecting employees to the bigger picture, by helping others understand how they contribute to the organization’s overall goals and direction, promotes employee loyalty, commitment and engagement. Moreover, as physical boundaries within organizations are steadily disappearing, organizations need to look for attachment approaches from within. Understanding the value of such intrinsic (cognitive) motivators, and its exchange potential to younger generations will help HR partners and supervisors create more effective organizational attraction and retention practices.
6. As employee well-being is becoming a key performance indicator in many organizations as a way to contribute to sustainable human resource management and firm-level competitive advantage, using a socio-cognitive model of organizational commitment will help improve the vitality and attachment of employees. The proposed model not only engages employees through meaningful encounters, but also provides a sense of belongingness and shared reality which is core to enhancing employee pride and self-esteem.
7. The traditional horizontal leadership pipeline advancement is not what many younger generations in the workforce are looking for, often interested to work in different departments to gain relevant skills and to improve one’s future employment chances in a fast changing labor market. Managers supportive of either vertical or horizontal career moves will be in a better position to provide better direction to their workforce, retaining critical talent within the organization and promoting employee performance.