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## Organizational commitment: An evolving concept

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### Abstract

The concept of organizational commitment has been widely discussed and the conceptualizations of Mowday and al (1982), O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), Meyer and Allen (1991; 1996) are considered the most used basic references for its understanding and development. Likewise, it has been distinguished from several concepts that are redundant to it such as commitment to several constituents of the organization, career commitment, psychological contract, involvement, motivation and mobilization at work.

**Keywords:** Multi-component organizational commitment, career commitment, psychological contract, involvement, motivation and mobilization at work.

### Introduction

Despite the new economic situation and the trend towards job insecurity, organizational commitment has received a lot of attention from theorists and more attention from practitioners. The concern for organizational commitment is to retain and retain value-added employees who are a source of competitive advantage through their distinctive skills, productivity and efficiency (Drucker, 1999). If the conceptualizations of organizational commitment transcend for a model encompassing three affective, normative and calculated dimensions and was largely validated by the scientific community, that of Meyer and Allen (1997), it remains that its perimeter was also defined and the concept was distinguished from several close notions such as the commitment to several components, the commitment in the career, the psychological contract, the implication, the motivation and the mobilization at work. Our theoretical investigation will then attempt to answer the research problem, which translates into the following question: "Why is organizational commitment not a one-dimensional concept and to what extent is it distinguished from commitment with different components, career commitment, the psychological contract, work involvement, motivation and mobilization?"

### I- Organizational Commitment: An Evolving Concept

Organizational commitment has evolved in terms of its definition and understanding. It is presented by Mowday and al (1982) as a unidimensional concept. However, this approach was challenged by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) who added a second dimension. A third dimension was proposed by Meyer and Allen (1997) and the debate continues on the nature of organizational commitment considered today as a multidimensional concept. We then attempt to demonstrate the proliferation of different conceptualizations of organizational commitment while emphasizing the predominance of Meyer and Allen's (1997) multidimensional approach.

Organizational commitment has been well explored by Mowday and al (1982) in terms of its definition, measurement, development, and analysis of its impact on human attitudes and behaviors at work. It has been distinguished between attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment, Mowday and al (1982). We note that attitudinal commitment refers to the notion of identification, which translates into an internal process leading the individual to question his or her own relationship with the organization in which he or she works. These attitudes depend on the perception of congruence between one's own values and objectives and those of the organization, Mowday and al (1982). As for behavioral commitment, it

seems to be the translation of attitudinal commitment into action, in other words the process by which the individual is led to decide to stay in the organization and to devote his skills, time and energy to it, Mowday and al (1982). Moreover, organizations rely more on the behavioral aspect while omitting its determination by the attitudinal aspect, (Neveu, 1996; Mowday and al, 1982). On the other hand, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), Mathieu and Zajac (1990) and Simard (2000) have criticized Mowday and al (1982) for limiting organizational commitment to the affective domain and forgetting the opportunity calculations and the utilitarian sense that the employee associates with his or her commitment in the organization. A new conception of organizational commitment emerged with the work of O'Reilly and Chatman (1986), which integrated, alongside affective commitment, a new dimension they called "compliance", which translates into a commitment to conformity. Calculated commitment is then defined as "a relationship in which employees' attitudes and behaviors conform, not because they share common beliefs but rather to obtain specific rewards or avoid sanctions", (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). On the other hand, the work of O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) had the merit of demonstrating empirically that identification and internalization act negatively as a single variable on turnover behavior, while the "compliance" dimension generates an increase in turnover. Subsequently, the difficulties of distinguishing empirically between the measurement of identification and internalization led to confirmation of the two-dimensionality of organizational commitment (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Nevertheless, Allen and Meyer (1996), Meyer and Allen (1991; 1997) distinguish between the affective and normative dimensions of organizational commitment as soon as they give different empirical results and propose a model with three psychological dimensions of organizational commitment, namely the affective, normative and calculated dimensions. Subsequently, this approach of Meyer and Allen (1991; 1997) was the most used by researchers, (Kahia, 2002). The multidimensional model of organizational commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen (1997) and widely validated by the scientific community is composed of three dimensions, namely

-Affective commitment: This is the emotional attachment, identification, internalization and involvement with the organization. Employees continue to work because they want to, (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

-Calculated commitment: This is the employee's calculation of the costs of leaving and the loss of gains. He or she decides to stay because of the fear of losing gains or taking risks and costs, (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

-Normative commitment: This is the feeling of obligation to continue working out of moral duty, loyalty, and involvement in a project to be completed, (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

Furthermore, O' Reilly and al (1986), Meyer and Allen (1990; 1997) agree that the various combinations of the dimensions of organizational commitment are to be studied together, as one fact may result in various combinations of an employee's commitment to his or her organization. It is very imperative to take this into consideration because an employee could demonstrate various combinations and different levels of commitment in his or her relationship with the organization. For example, "an employee may feel

both an attachment to the organization and a sense of obligation to remain a member. Another employee may enjoy working for the organization but also recognize that wanting to leave is very difficult from an economic perspective. A third employee may feel a strong desire, need, and/or obligation not to leave the organization," (Kahia, 2002). Hence, studying organizational commitment as a multidimensional concept is paramount to better detect the nature of the employee's relationship to his or her organization and to better address his or her needs as well as those of the organization.

## **II- Positioning of organizational commitment in relation to redundant and related concepts**

In order to better define the scope of organizational commitment as a multidimensional concept according to Meyer and Allen (1997), we felt it was important to distinguish it from concepts that are potentially redundant and that also describe the employee/organization relationship, such as multi-component commitment and career commitment, the psychological contract, involvement, motivation and mobilization at work (Morrow, 1983; Mueller et al, 1992; Thévenet, 1992; Roussel, 2000).

Aside from the organization as a whole, the employee may have a different commitment to its constituents such as the work group, the line manager or the management. This commitment depends on the employee's perception of the congruence between his or her values and objectives and those of each constituent of the organization. This results in several organizational commitment profiles, such as:

- Single-constituent commitment: It means that the employee identifies with only one constituent of the organization, Meyer and Allen (1996)

- Multi-constituent commitment: It describes an identification with various constituents of the organization at the same time such as the line manager, work group and/or management without generating a commitment to the organization, Meyer and Allen (1996).

Nevertheless, when each of the subgroups that make up the organization is nested within each other and there is some compatibility between the values and goals they convey, membership in one may lead to membership in the other, i.e. being a member of a specific team often requires being a member of the unit of work, the division of work and the organization as a whole, Meyer and Allen (1996).

When an employee identifies with and becomes involved in an occupation, he or she is committed to the career without necessarily being committed to the organization, which may make it easier for him or her to leave (Morrow, 1983; Mueller and al, 1992). However, meeting the employee's expectations and goals may make career commitment compatible with organizational commitment.

The psychological contract is an immaterial contract based on promises and reciprocal obligations between the employee and the organization, unwritten, subjective and constantly changing as the employee interacts with the organization. It takes two forms, a transactional form characterized by obligations of an economic nature and a second relational form characterized on the employee's side by obligations of loyalty to the employer and on the employer's side by an obligation to ensure job security, (Rousseau, 1990; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; McDonald and Makin, 2000). These two types of contracts

are not mutually exclusive, but they represent the two extremes of a continuum, (McDonald and Makin, 2000; Rousson et Turansky, 2003).

A link between the psychological contract and the affective and normative type of commitment appears where exchanges linked to affective commitment are concerned with the relational obligations of the psychological contract while exchanges linked to normative commitment are concerned with transactional obligations, (Rousseau, 1990; Rousson et Turansky, 2003).

If involvement is defined according to Bellier-Michel (1989) as "personal pleasure where the employee invests an effort and is absorbed in the activity he or she is doing and experiences a feeling of accomplishment and personal fulfillment" and if organizational commitment integrates the individual/organization relationship, then involvement is the interest that the individual gives to work as a value in itself. Similarly, Meyer et al (2002) have demonstrated a positive correlation between work involvement and organizational commitment. The link is strong between, on the one hand, work involvement and affective commitment, and on the other hand, weak with calculated commitment, Meyer et al (2002).

If motivation describes the force that drives people to act in their work (Roussel, 2000), then organizational commitment reflects the strength of the ties that bind employees to their organization. The feeling of motivation seems to be momentary and circumstantial, i.e. it is triggered by one or more internal or external stimuli that push the individual to mobilize energy and make efforts to achieve a specific goal (Louart, 1990; Lévy-Leboyer, 1999). On the other hand, organizational commitment tends to become stronger over time, i.e., it is consolidated in a long-term relationship, unlike motivation, and reflects attitudes that develop over time and become more and more static, thus resembling personality traits. These attitudes are translated into actions, i.e. the decision to stay in the organization or to leave it, (Kahia, 2002). However, this relationship remains controversial. For Bourcier et Palobart (1997), organizational commitment is only one cause of motivation. For Louart (1990), organizational commitment is a consequence of motivational efforts on the part of the organization, such as the satisfaction of needs and expectations, work characteristics and representation systems. Thévenet (1992), on the other hand, stresses the difficulty of disentangling them and concludes that there is a causal relationship between these two concepts. Bourcier et Palobart (1997) see that these two concepts are complementary in the sense that they emanate from the will of the human being and are developed through the perceptions and representations of individual and organizational determinants.

If motivation is of the order of dispositions and attitudes, describing the force that pushes people to act in a certain direction, commitment and mobilization are more of the order of action, translating intention into observable acts (Kahia, 2002). Wils et al (1998) consider that a mobilized person is "a person who is willing to make above-average efforts on behalf of one or more entities (organization, work, work group) to which he or she is linked, and these links may be emotional, calculated or moral in nature". This definition confuses the distinction between mobilization and organizational commitment. It is the amount of effort that the employee would be willing to

provide that makes the distinction between commitment and mobilization, since a mobilized employee would be willing to provide greater amounts of effort than those provided by a committed employee (Kahia, 2002). For Thévenet (1992), Wils et al (1998) and Roussel (2000). Mobilization then describes the individual's predisposition to provide efforts beyond the normal for the organization (Tremblay et al, 2005). Finally, organizational commitment reflects the nature of the relationship with the organization and mobilization reflects the amount of effort to be expended towards the organization.

### Conclusion

The wise manager is called upon to clearly identify the nature of the relationship he or she is building with employees, while at the same time being able to identify the nature of the bond they have with the organization. Not only is it a matter of distinguishing organizational commitment from several other redundant and related concepts describing the employee/organization relationship, such as multi-component commitment, career commitment, psychological contract, motivation and mobilization, which, according to Louart (1990), can lead to better performance, but it is also a matter of knowing how to segment employees into categories. There is a category of competent employees seeking evolution, better working conditions and better remuneration. It is then possible either to stimulate an affective attachment based on the pleasure of staying and working or to stimulate an instrumental attachment based on an opportunistic calculation of the benefits and costs of leaving. A second category of precarious employees where it is possible to apply a simple administration that is not likely to generate an organizational commitment only to ensure compliance with the clauses of the employment contract. A third category, here we are talking about a new generation, namely the Z population, always connected and in constant search of opportunities (McCrandle et al, 2014; Brillet et al, 2012). This would undoubtedly be a threat to the company seeking to preserve its portfolio of skills.

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