

Impact of Organisational Culture on Employee Commitment: A Review

*** Ms. Nidhi Sharma**

****Dr. R.K.Singh**

Abstract

Competitive global business environment has led to organizations continually seeking ways to enhance performance and ensure success in the market place. Academicians and authors have been conducting research to identify organizational parameters that can drive organizations towards this goal. A substantial amount of research on culture and employee commitment reveals that both these constructs favorably impact organizational performance. Culture and commitment have both been variously defined and elaborated in terms of various dimensions to provide measurable and repeatable parameters that practitioners can use to manage performance. Review of studies on relationship between dimensions of culture and dimensions of commitment reveal a favorable view about the empirical robustness of the relationship among academicians.

A perspective of commitment as an outcome and culture as an input provides a useful mechanism for practitioners to work towards ways of managing performance. At a more granular level, of the various types of commitment, affective commitment is deemed desirable as it stems from the employees wish to "want" to associate with the organization due to shared values and assumptions.

Keywords: Culture, Commitment, Organisational performance

*Assistant Professor, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, E-mail: nidhisharma810@gmail.com

**Professor, Department of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi
E-mail: rkvisen@gmail.com

Introduction

Organizational commitment and culture are some of the most popular constructs believed to impact organization performance as well as pre-requisites for sustaining performance and organizational success.

Organizational culture is viewed as shared beliefs, values, and assumptions. It is manifested through artifacts in the organizations. A review of literature on organization culture finds its impact on organizations' performance routed through commitment of employees.

Culture is a multifaceted construct that gives the organization its character and in a way defines it. Organizational commitment too is a multifaceted construct that requires both employees and organization to remain in focus. In this study we have attempted to understand the nuances of culture and commitment in the context of the organization, and to explore if the former could be the driving element for the latter.

Objectives

Organizations are forever exploring ways to motivate employees to deliver superior performance and succeed in a fiercely competitive business environment. Researchers have forwarded several factors that help achieve such an outcome. Our study is driven by the following objectives:

1. To conduct an in-depth review of popular constructs that impact organizational performance.
2. To identify a construct that serves as an antecedent to other constructs impacting organization performance.
3. To provide organizations with a performance impacting construct which is in their internal locus of control so they are able to effectively and efficiently deploy resources towards its adoption and propagation.

Importance of Culture

Perhaps organizational culture has caught utmost attention of academics particularly after Deal and Kennedy's (1982) pioneering work measuring impact of corporate culture on the success of organizations.

Organization culture guides employees' thoughts, actions and feelings (Hagberg & Heifetz, 1998) and impacts employee behavior. It can potentially motivate employees to self-direct their efforts to meet the needs of stakeholders (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003) leading to enhanced innovation, productivity, cost consciousness, acceptance of change, self-development, and continuous improvement within the organizations (Joshi, 2001), as well as a competitive advantage over other organizations (Sadri & Lees, 2001).

Culture can also improve organizations' capabilities and way of functioning (O'reilly, 1989; Chen, 2004; Silverthorne, 2004; Nazir 2005) including effectiveness, efficiency, and willingness or ability to change (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Denison, 1984; Denison, 1990; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Rowe, Mason, Dickel, Mann, & Mockler, 1994; Clugston, 2000; Wasti, 2003).

Organizations must understand the multifaceted perspectives of culture (Martin, 1992) and how they can use it (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999) in a culturally sensitive global business environment (Sarkar, 2002) since it impacts organization's performance and success (Howard, 1990; Denison, 1990; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Van der Post, de Coning, & Smit, 1998; Sagie & Koslowsky, 1998).

Importance of Commitment

Committed employees demonstrate organization citizenship behaviour (Shore & Wayne, 1993), loyalty and attachment towards the organization (Sommer, Bae, & Luthans, 1996), openness to accepting change (Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999), and job satisfaction (Sharma & Bajpai, 2010; Aniset. al. 2011). These qualities potentially enhance job performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Ward & Davis, 1995; Bergmannet. al., 2000; Yousef, 2000; Samad, 2007), and improve products and services of the organization (Madigan, Norton & Testa, 1999). In a globalized and dynamic market environment marked by mergers, acquisitions, downsizing and bouts of hiring (Dessler, 1999), employee commitment is "the single greatest conduit, or barrier, to full scale globalization" (Walker Information, 2001), "vital to contemporary organizational success" (Pfeffer, 1998), as well as a tool that can potentially predict trends in employee turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and overall job performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jakson, 1989; Becker & Billings, 1993).

Mullins (1999) cautions that commitment is a "two way street" in which organizations must also provide for the professional and personal aspirations or needs of their employees viz. learning and development, work-life balance, career growth, as well as health and well-being (Madigan, Norton, & Testa, 1999; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

Thus we find overwhelming congruence of views on the significance and contribution of culture and commitment to organization success. While it is relatively easy to comprehend commitment intuitively, culture seems more nebulous.

Understanding Commitment

Academicians explain commitment in terms of individual traits as well as in transactional terms. Commitment has been severally defined as employee attitude or behavior (Lok & Crawford, 2004), a psychological bonding

(Buchanan, 1974), a "binding force" between employee and organization (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001), as well as aspects of relationship between employee and organization (Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012) such as attachment and loyalty (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Buchanan, 1974; Etzioni, 1975; Romzek & Hendricks, 1982; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Elizur & Koslowsky, 2001),

A more refined view of commitment is based on the intensity with which an individual identifies and feels involved with the organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Newstrom & Davis, 2002; Andolsek & Stebe, 2004), displays loyalty to an organization manifesting in the form of congruence with its goals, and exhibits a desire to remain with the organization and exert efforts on its behalf (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Bateman & Strasser, 1984).

Commitment in transactional terms is explained as a process (Hall, Schneider, & Nygfren, 1970) that manifests in different ways and ultimately culminates in the convergence of individual and organization values (Iverson R., 1996). The stages of the process include compliance, identification and internalization (Mullins, 1999). The initial stage, compliance, is the result of an individual's attempt to seek benefits in return for loyalty and has been referred to as "side-bets" or "investing in a course of action" (Becker, 1960; Sheldon, 1971; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Salancik, 1977). Over a period of time the relationship grows yielding first to "identification" with the organization arising from a need of pride and belongingness of relationship, and ultimately "internalization" of organization values.

Meyer and Allen (1990) emphasize that commitment is a multi-dimensional construct and not all manifestations of commitment are equally desirable. They argue that people stay in organizations for different reasons and proposed three dimensions of commitment - affective, continuance, and normative. Meyer and Allen (1991) further elaborated on affective commitment as an employee's "emotional attachment to identify with and involve in the organization," continuance commitment as an employee's "awareness of the costs associated with leaving the present organization," and normative commitment as an employee's "feeling of obligation to the organization based on personal norms and values." The three dimensional construct of commitment was later explained simply by Roberts et al (1999) as reasons for people wanting to stay in organizations because they "want to," "need to," or "feel they should." The first reason was endorsed as the most desirable from an organization's point of view by Eby, Freeman, Rush, & Lance (1999) and Bartlett (2001).

Understanding Culture

Culture is an immensely researched construct that makes for its richness as well as complexity due to the multiplicity of views. The basic building blocks of culture - "shared assumptions, cultural values, behaviors, and cultural symbols" proposed by Hofstede (1990) provide some structure to this otherwise subjective concept. Many of the explanations of culture provided by authors and academicians are variants of these four blocks.

Culture is widely viewed as shared values or assumptions dear to an organization (Spender, 1983). These are differently referred to as organization's core values (O'Reilly, 1983) or more expansively as "unique attitudes, beliefs, norms and assumptions of employees" in an organization (Eldridge and Crombie, 1974; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Schein, 1992; Furnham & Gunter, 1993; Armstrong, 2009) that guide employee actions (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995) or determine ways of doing things (Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975).

Academicians allude to culture as "particular ways of doing things in an organization (Bower, 1966; Drennon, 1992), a "master contract" of rules that "organize beliefs and actions" (Harris & Cronen, 1979), symbols, ceremonies, and myths that communicate the organization's beliefs and values to its employees (Ouchi, 1980), "the invisible organization DNA" that guides workplace events (Davenport, 1998), the organization's "personality" (Van der Post, de Coning, & Smit, 1998), "management practices" (Denison, 1999), the right way to face problems (Schein, 1999), traditions, values, beliefs, policies, and attitudes that set context for thoughts and actions in an organization (Mullins, 1999). These ideas are well summarized by Georgiades (1987) who defines culture as "a system of shared values (what is important) and beliefs (how things work) that interact with a company's people, organizational structures and control systems to produce behavioral norms (the way we do things around here)".

While Smircich (1983) alludes to culture as "what the organization is," Legge (1994) prefers to think of it as "a set of attributes that the organization has." This is a significant point because if it is the former then management being part of the culture cannot control it (Nicholson, 1984). From a management perspective, culture as a psychological disposition of employees that guides them to act in certain ways (Schein, 1992) tends to be a more desirable view.

Since management would like to create and then sustain a certain kind of culture in the organization, academicians have also attempted to categorize culture either in umbrella terms or in terms of granular elements that may be thought of determining culture.

Examples of umbrella terms for culture offered by different academicians include "competitive culture, entrepreneurial culture, bureaucratic culture, consensual culture" (Deshpande & Farley, 1999); and "bureaucratic culture, clan culture, entrepreneurial culture, market culture" (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 2001). Examples of granular attributes of culture proposed by various academicians and authors include "power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity" (Hofstede, 1980); "openness, confrontation, trust, authenticity, proaction, autonomy, collaboration, and experimenting," or OCTAPACE (Udai Pareek, 1997); "involvement, consistency, adaptability and mission traits" (Denison, 1990; Coffey, 2003; Fey and Denison, 2003; Miller, 2004); "innovation and risk taking, attention to detail, outcome orientation, people orientation, team orientation, aggressiveness, and stability" (Collins & Porras, 2003); and "power distance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, assertiveness, future orientation, uncertainty avoidance, performance orientation, gender egalitarianism, and humane orientation" (Messner & Schäfer, 2012). Cultural dimensions proposed by Mullins (1999) are characteristically different from the above mentioned people focused terms used by most other authors. The terms used by Mullins include routines, rituals, stories, symbols, power structures, control systems, and organization structure.

Antecedents to Commitment

Organization commitment is dependent on several factors (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 2001) such as personal and organizational characteristics. An individual's commitment could also vary over time based on experiences relating to the job, relationship with other members of the organization, career progression, rewards and recognition, personal situations as well as one's own expectations of the organization over time (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Luthans, Baack & Taylor, 1987; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Reidenbach & Wilson, 1996; Payne, Holt & Frow, 2000).

An interesting addition to the list of antecedents to commitment is "locus of control" (Rotter, 1966), that determines if the individual is internally driven and feels in control of his actions and outcomes, or attributes events to extraneous factors like fate. Several studies indicate a strong correlation between organization commitment and locus of control (Luthans, Baack, & Taylor, 1987; Furnham, Brewin, & O'Kelly, 1994; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994).

Commitment is well predicted by organization characteristics comprising organizational policies, supportiveness, and recognition (Steers, 1977; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Baker, 1995). Similarly studies on organization practices - the way things get done or the "means through which ends are distributed" - indicate a crucial impact on organization commitment (Folger

& Konovsky, 1989).

Other factors that influence commitment include autonomy (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Dunham, Grube, & Castaneda, 1994; Agarwal & Ferratt, 1999), competence development (Jones, 1986; Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Meyer, 2001), organizational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, & Sava, 1986; (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Mottaz, 1988; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Taormina, 1999), and procedural justice (Greenberg, 1990; Brockner & Greenbert, 1990; Taormina, 1999).

Interestingly a large number of these studies on antecedents to commitment are on parameters that were also used in explaining culture. In fact these are the visible aspects of culture, the invisible being values, beliefs and assumptions. Thus culture also emerges as antecedent to commitment.

Correlation between Commitment and Culture

Literature on correlation between culture and commitment provides mixed signals though more studies favor a positive correlation and impact of culture on commitment. Even though Lahiry (1994) is not supportive of a strong correlation between the two and Mckinnon, Harrison, Chow, & Wu (2003) site lack of substantial evidence of the effect of the former on the latter, several other studies point otherwise.

Deal and Kennedy (1982), Sathe (1983) and Silverthorne (2004) opine in favor of a positive correlation between the two constructs and argue that organization culture influences employee commitment. This assertion is also supported by Bretz & Judge (1994) and Nazir (2005) who assert that employees who share an organization's values (an element of culture) also choose to be committed to it. Studies by Lok & Crawford (2004), Zain, Ishak, & Ghani (2009), and Mahmudah (2012) have similarly reported a positive correlation between culture and commitment. Studies conducted on the relationship between the two constructs in different geographies as well as diverse industries (Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003; Shannawaz & Hazarika, 2004; Yiing & Ahmad, 2009) are similarly founded.

Several studies have also been conducted on correlation between constituent dimensions of culture and commitment. Shannawaz & Hazarika's (2004) assessment of organizational culture in hospital environments based on OCTAPACE scale (Pareek, 1997) found dimensions of organizational culture to significantly predict organizational commitment. Allen & Smith (1987) found innovation and affective commitment to be related, while Maignan & Ferrell (1999) in their exploratory research showed that organizations with both market friendly and humanitarian cultures lead to better employee commitment.

Cohen's (2000) study on cultural socialization revealed correlation between power distance and normative commitment; uncertainty avoidance and

continuance commitment; as well as collectivism and all the three dimensions of commitment viz. affective, continuance and normative.

Commitment is also influenced by tenure, work overload, attitude toward change, and level of involvement in the job (Stevens, Beyers, & Trice, 1978); "perceived structure, process, climate, and job satisfaction" (DeCottis & Summers, 1987); perception of "organizational support, procedural justice, and transformational leadership" (Connell, Ferres, & Travaglione, 2003); "teamwork and trust" (Sungmin, Henkin, & Egley, 2005); and "job autonomy, procedural justice, distributive justice, organizational support, and employee age" (Tilaye, 2005). On the other hand Singh & Das (1978) found coercive authority to negatively impact commitment.

Discussion

Our review reveals the expansive nature of research that has been conducted on organizational commitment and culture reflecting the popularity of the two constructs as impacting organizational performance. Both these constructs independently impact organizational performance in a positive way. The multitude of definitions of culture and the numerous dimensions of commitment forwarded by academicians makes for the richness of these studies. The granular approach to defining these constructs as compared to the umbrella definitions may be more constructive in developing proof of concept and paving the way for effective implementation of performance enhancement programs. Moreover, of the three types of commitment, organizations would do well to find ways to promote affective commitment among employees so they associate with the organization because they "want to" rather than because of certain compulsions.

While both commitment and culture impact organizational performance, the finding that culture is also an antecedent to commitment provides organizations with an effective and efficient way of enhancing organization performance. Culture is something they can create and develop from a grass roots level and being independent can be within their locus of internal control. By focusing on this single construct organizations can deploy scarce resources to better effect.

Conclusion

Academicians have greatly contributed to the diversity of exploration of organizational commitment and culture as constructs impacting organizational performance thereby leading to their immense popularity as

research subjects. The findings that correlate culture to commitment are robust and the emergence of culture as an antecedent to commitment encourages us to recommend culture as the single most effective construct with internal locus of control for promoting organizational performance through enhanced employee commitment.

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