



Research Article

The Effects of the Personal Variables on Organizational Commitment in Public Organizations in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The present study investigated the impact of various personal variables on organizational commitment of employees working at different hierarchical levels. Age, gender, education level, and years of experience were studied as the personal variables. The study sample consisted of 137 employees who work for a public organization in Saudi Arabia, resulting in a response rate of 74.5 percent. The three component model of organizational commitment was used to measure the level of organizational commitment. The one-way Analysis of Variance indicated that the only significant difference in organizational commitment mean scores was found when age and education level groups were the independent variables.

Keywords: Organizational commitment, public organizations, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

The need for increased research on human resource management issues with respect to high skilled employees (e.g. IT professionals, engineers, scientists) has been emphasized in a number of previous studies (e.g. (Baroudi 1985; Iqbaria and Siegel 1992; Iqbaria and Guimaraes 1993; Abdul-Gader 1999; Kochanski and Ledford 2001; Lazar 2001; Alshitri 2008; Chang et al., 2008; Alshitri 2013; Alshitri and Abanumy 2013)). The importance of obtaining a better understanding of the factors related to recruitment, development, and retention of this group of employees is further

underscored by the high demand, short supply, rising personnel costs, and high rates of turnover among this group of employees.

The high turnover rate of high skilled employees is equally prevalent in Saudi Arabia (Alshitri 2008; HayGroup 2010). In their study of 250 organizations in Saudi Arabia covering over 219,000 jobs, (HayGroup 2010) reports that the average employees' turnover rate for 2010 was 10%. Furthermore, the skills shortage, particularly for engineering and technical jobs will be worse due to some government regulations (e.g. tightened emigration policies and higher Saudization quotas enforced on

organizations). Therefore, the need to retain skilled employees in Saudi Arabia is of perhaps even greater importance than elsewhere.

The increased demand for highly skilled professionals and the rapid changes being made in science, technology, and innovation imply that the skills shortage is unlikely to improve. Indeed, (HayGroup 2010) argued that there is a need for 200,000 new jobs every year in Saudi Arabia, making the ability to attract and retain skilled professionals even more important over the next years. The shortage will be exacerbated as a result of the high price of oil, investment in several big projects, development of economic zones, and growing economic liberalization. It is becoming increasingly important, therefore, for general management and human resources professionals in Saudi Arabia to understand the reasons behind the turnover. To the extent that specific aspects of jobs held by these skilled professionals contribute to high levels of turnover, and are within the control of the general management and human resources professionals, retention levels (e.g. job satisfaction and organizational commitment) could be increased through appropriate actions by management designed to minimize these problems.

Organizational commitment tends to attach individuals to their organizations. It has positive relationship with job performance and job satisfaction and it has negative relationship with turnover and absenteeism (Meyer et al., 2002). Antecedents of organizational commitment can be grouped into two major categories, namely, personal variables and organizational characteristics. Personal variables are defined as individual-based variables such as age, gender, education level, and years of experience. The organizational characteristics, on the other hand, include organizationally mediated variables, such as structural properties of the organization and job characteristics.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of personal variables (age, gender,

education level, and years of experience) on employees' organizational commitment. The three component model was used because it is viewed by many researchers as one of the most popular and thoroughly validated multidimensional model of organizational commitment (Vandenberghe and Tremblay 2008), and because, in term of both predictive power and construct validity, the three component model of organizational commitment has shown strong relationships with other important variables such as personal variables, job satisfaction, and the employees' intention to leave.

Theoretical background and hypothesis

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment has been defined in a different ways in the organizational literature (see (Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001)). Mowday et al., (Mowday et al., 1979) defined commitment as "*the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization*". On the other hand, Allen and Meyer (Allen and Meyer 1996) defined organizational commitment as "*a psychological link between the employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization*". It is therefore, an individual's attitude towards an organization that consists of (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1979).

Allen and Meyer's (Allen and Meyer 1990) proposed a three-component model (TCM): affective commitment (AC) (employees remain with the organization because they want to), continuance commitment (CC) (employees remain with the organization because they need to), and normative commitment (employees remain with the organization because they feel they ought to;

NC). Although all three forms of commitment tend to attach individuals to their organizations, their relationships with other types of work behavior might be quite different. For example, Meyer et al., (Meyer et al., 2002) argued that all three forms of organizational commitment correlated negatively with withdrawal cognitions, turnover intentions, and turnover and that they also correlated somewhat differently with job performance. AC had the strongest correlation with these work behaviors, followed by NC. That is, individuals who want to maintain membership in their organization will also want to do what it takes to make the organization successful. This will also be true for employees who feel a sense of obligation to remain, although the willingness to do more than is required might not be quite as strong as for AC. On the other hand, CC was unrelated or negatively related to these behaviors. This because individuals who remain primarily to avoid costs associated with leaving (e.g., loss of benefits) are not expected to do more than is required of them and might even reduce effort as a result of feeling trapped.

Meyer and Allen (Meyer and Allen 1997) suggested that individuals can experience more than one form of commitment at the same time. For example, it is possible to feel both a desire and an obligation to remain with one's organization (Gellatly et al., 2006). Therefore, (Meyer and Allen 1997) suggested also that it is best to consider each individual as having a commitment profile reflecting the relative strength of the AC, NC, and CC components. For instance, a "pure" AC profile described an individual who had high levels of AC, but low levels of both NC and CC. The implication of commitment profiles is that researchers should examine the combined impact of the three components of commitment on behavior (Gellatly et al., 2006).

Organizational commitment and personal variables

Many investigations have been done over the past years, with contradictory results, which have left the true nature of the relationships between the personal variables (gender, age, education level, and years of experience) and organizational commitment unresolved. The relationship between gender and organizational commitment has been extensively researched. However, the results have been generally inconsistent. Some studies have shown male to be more committed than female (Boon et al., 2006), whereas other studies have reported no significant differences between gender in relation to organizational commitment (Zaitouni et al., 2011).

Many studies have examined the relationship between age and organizational commitment. However, the results were contradictory. Meyer et al., (Meyer et al., 2002) found a significant positive linear relationship between age and organizational commitment. Similarly, (Boon et al., 2006) found that older employees had higher affective commitment compared to those of younger employees. Zaitouni et al., (Zaitouni et al., 2011), on the other hand, found an insignificant statistical correlation between age and organizational commitment for a sample of banks' employees in Kuwait.

With regard to the education level, some studies showed a negative relationship with affective commitment (Yew 2008), but others showed no obvious relationship (Zaitouni et al., 2011). Meyer and Allen (Meyer and Allen 1991) stated that organizational tenure can lead to contemplative organizational commitment due to attempts on the part of senior employees to justify their having remain with the organization for many years. In another study by (Meyer et al., 2002), it was found that the senior-tenured employees are more committed than the new and the middle-tenured ones. In contrast, Boon et al., (Boon et al., 2006) concluded that affective

commitment has a significant and negative relationship with tenured employees.

Research hypotheses

Based on the extensive study of previous research, it would therefore suggest that personal variables affect organizational commitment. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1. There is statistically significant difference in organizational commitment scores based on gender.
- H2. There is statistically significant difference in organizational commitment scores based on age.
- H3. There is statistically significant difference in organizational commitment scores based on education level.
- H4. There is statistically significant difference in organizational commitment scores based on years of experience.

Methodology and Results

The data for this study was primarily collected through a structured questionnaire hosted on the web where respondents answered research questions online. Online questionnaires have their valuable advantages which include: the possibility of a large and geographically dispersed sample size and the low likelihood of contamination or distortion of respondent's answer. In addition, using this approach provides the opportunity to conduct surveys more efficiently and effectively than the traditional means. The primary reason for the utilization of the internet was due to cost as well as time saving. The questionnaire was distributed online using gmail.com web tools, which send personalized email invitations to 137 employees. Respondents were given 7 days to complete the questionnaire. The

completion of the electronic questionnaires was personally administered and anonymously handled. After all the responses had been collected, they were carefully reviewed and verified. The survey was conducted in January 2013. All instructions and questions were translated from English into Arabic in order to help all participants understand easily these surveys.

The questionnaire instrument consisted of two parts. The first part involved 4 questions regarding basic personal variables of the respondents. The three forms of organizational commitment scale, developed by (Allen and Meyer 1990; Meyer and Allen 1991) comprised the second part of the instrument. This scale measures three forms of organizational commitment: affective (eight-item), continuous (eight-item), and normative (eight-item). Examples of items include: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization", "I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up", and "I think that people these days move from company to company too often". Ratings were completed on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". These items were averaged to form a single index of organizational commitment.

The survey instrument was pilot tested among 5 employees. The pilot results were used to improve the clarity and readability of questions. The data obtained were analyzed by using SPSS for Windows 20.0 program. Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, and one-way ANOVA. A one-way ANOVA used to examine the differences between means of gender, age, education level, and experience in response to the three components of the organizational commitment (Garson 1998). A cut-off point of $p < 0.05$ was considered to indicate whether the relationship between the two factors is 'statistically significant'.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha Coefficient for the study variables. All subscales reliabilities are above the 0.70 minimum

suggested by (Nunnally 1967) except for normative commitment subscale which is relatively lower. The mean scores indicate that affective commitment (29.96) is higher than continuous (25.01) and normative commitment (24.09).

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

Subscales	Items	Means	Standard deviations	Cronbach's alpha Coefficient
Affective commitment	8	29.96	6.28	.890
Continuous commitment	8	25.01	6.71	.830
Normative commitment	8	24.09	4.82	.665
Overall commitment	24	79.06	13.32	.862

Table 2 indicates that no significant differences exist among participants with regard to the gender. Therefore, H1 could be rejected at significant level $p = 0.05$. Although the male participants scored high on affective

commitment and normative commitment, while female participants scored high in the continuous commitment and overall commitment.

Table 2: Differences in job satisfaction means based on gender

Subscales	Gender		F	Sig.
	Male (N = 69)	Female (N=33)		
Affective commitment	30.00	29.88	.008	.928
Continuous commitment	24.68	25.70	.509	.477
Normative commitment	24.19	23.88	.091	.763
Overall commitment	78.87	79.45	.043	.837

Table 3 indicates that significant differences exist at the 0.05 level among participants with regard to their age on the subsections of the continuous commitment. Participants who were between 36-40 years old were found to have higher continuous commitment (28.80) than other participants. Therefore, H2 could not be rejected at

significant level $p = 0.05$. The result shows that there is no significant relationship between age and affective, normative, and overall commitment. However, the participants with 36-40 years old were found to have higher affective commitment (31.20), normative commitment (26.20), and overall commitment (86.20).

Table 3: Differences in job satisfaction means based on age

Subscales	Age					F	Sig.
	< 26	26 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40	> 40		
	(N = 21)	(N = 46)	(N = 22)	(N = 5)	(N = 8)		
Affective commitment	30.05	29.54	29.50	31.20	32.63	.480	.750
Continuous commitment	27.29	25.67	20.95	28.80	24.00	3.478	.011
Normative commitment	25.00	24.26	22.05	26.20	25.00	1.535	.198
Overall commitment	82.33	79.48	72.50	86.20	81.62	2.20	.075

Table 4 indicates that significant differences exist at the 0.05 level among participants with regard to their education level on the subsections of the affective and overall commitment. Participants with below college education and participants with PhD scored high on the affective and overall commitment than other participants. Therefore, H3 could

not be rejected at significant level $p = 0.05$. The result shows that there is no significant relationship between education level and normative and continuous commitment. However, participants with below college education scored high on the continuous and normative commitment.

Table 4: Differences in job satisfaction means based on education level

Subscales	Education level					F	Sig.
	Below college	College	Bachelor	Master	PhD		
	(N = 3)	(N = 18)	(N = 59)	(N = 18)	(N = 4)		
Affective commitment	36.67	31.89	29.22	28.11	35.50	2.848	.028
Continuous commitment	32.67	27.67	24.47	22.78	25.25	2.399	.055
Normative commitment	29.67	25.39	23.46	23.67	25.25	1.727	.150
Overall commitment	99.00	84.94	77.15	74.56	86.00	4.10	.004

Table 5 indicates that no significant differences exist among participants with regard to the years of experience. Therefore, H4 could be rejected at significant level $p = 0.05$. Although the participants with more

than 15 years of experience scored high on affective, continuous, and overall commitment, while participants with less than 2 years of experience scored high on the normative commitment.

Table 5: Differences in job satisfaction means based on years of experience

Subscales	Years of experience					F	Sig.
	< 2	3 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	> 15		
	(N = 41)	(N = 32)	(N = 16)	(N = 9)	(N = 4)		
Affective commitment	29.56	29.13	30.81	31.67	33.50	.733	.572
Continuous commitment	26.20	24.56	24.13	21.44	28.00	1.271	.287
Normative commitment	24.59	24.25	22.75	24.33	22.50	.531	.713
Overall commitment	80.34	77.94	77.69	77.44	84.00	.356	.840

Discussion

This research has been designed to examine the effect of personal variables on employees' organizational commitment. The research sample consisted of a population of full-time employees employed in public organizations in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of responses demonstrates that a statistically significant positive relationship existed between the organizational commitment, and 1) ages, and 2) education level. Thus, age and education are important variables that may predict the

level of commitment of employees in public organizations in Saudi Arabia. The findings of this research provide practical evidence to correspond with those of past empirical studies.

Table 1 shows that AC score is high and CC and NC score are considerably lower. The results indicate that individuals in this organization feel a sense of emotionally attached to the organization not feel obliged or trapped. These results are in line with that of (Meyer et al., 2012a). The high scores of

AC could be due to the individualism/collectivism cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede's work (Hofstede 2013) which place importance on social ties and in-group goals. Saudi Arabia is classified as a collectivist culture, high in power distance, and high in uncertainty avoidance. Long-term commitment in a collectivist culture is paramount, and overrides most other societal rules and regulations and employer/employee relationships are perceived in moral terms (like a family link).

Female participants were found to be more committed to their organization than male participants. This finding contradicts that of (Boon et al., 2006). Such clear distinction in gender behavior in this study could be explained as follows. Females in Saudi Arabia, in general, have less access to much longer list of possible jobs in the market with greater variation in employee benefits compared to males. Furthermore, females in the public sector in Saudi Arabia have very special benefits during pregnancy and maternity such as long paid leave. Such benefits are highly appreciated and may be attributed to general females commitment observed.

The overall commitment among various age groups, as shown in Table 3, starts high among young participants, and then it declines with age before it starts to improve again. This finding agrees with past studies conducted by several researchers (Meyer et al., 2002; Boon et al., 2006). Such results could be explained as follows. Young participants with no experience and low competency levels are more content and have very well managed low expectations. Therefore, the job attractiveness is high and so the commitment to their organization. As they grow in age, their experience and knowledge improve and they become more aware of their rights and in a stronger position to compare themselves with others inside and outside their organization. This may explain the decline in overall commitment observed as employees get

older. The improved overall commitment among participants of old age group could also be attributed to the fact that they are more settled, most likely have created enough wealth, facing declining social demands, and less likely to seek new jobs.

The overall commitment among various education level groups, as shown in Table 4, starts high among participants with below college, and then it declines with higher education level before it starts to improve again for participants with PhD degree. This finding contradicts with that of (Yew 2008). Such results could be explained as follows. In Saudi Arabia, it is widely accepted that private sector does not prefer low level educated people and highly educated technical people compared to bachelor and master degree holders. This means that most of the possible local research and development is done in the public sector and, hence, almost all PhD degree holders seek government jobs. For this reason low level educated people and highly educated technical people have high commitment, and less likely to seek new jobs.

The overall commitment among various years of experience groups, as shown in Table 5, starts high among participants with less than 2 years of experience, and then it declines with higher years of experience before it starts to improve again for participants with more than 15 years of experience. This finding is consistent with that of (Meyer and Allen 1991; Meyer et al., 2002) and in contrast with that of (Boon et al., 2006). Such results could be explained as same as age variable.

Conclusion

The study reports an exploratory investigation of the relationship between four personal variables and organizational commitment within public organizations in Saudi Arabia. Two of the personal variables, age and education level have a significantly positive relationship with the organizational commitment, but the other two variables in

the study (gender and years of experience) did not.

The present study makes several important contributions to both the human resources and organizational behavior literature. First, in contrast to most previous studies found in the literature, this research examined these relationships in a different context. Specifically, this study investigated the relationship between the personal variables and organizational commitment in public organizations. The finding enhances our understanding of the association between personal variables and organizational commitment. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that examines the relationship between personal variables and organizational commitment, within Saudi Arabia R&D public organizations. This is an important contribution, given that human resources problems with Saudi Arabian workers, such as high rates of employee turnover and shortage of expertise, have been often cited as a critical factors affecting human resources profession in Saudi Arabia.

Second, the findings from this study creates awareness and understanding for the development of a theoretical base for the association between personal variables and organizational commitment resulting in an improvement of employees' working conditions that inevitably contributes towards their organizational commitment. Third, the findings could prescribe potential implications for top management and human resources professionals to review their human resources strategies and emphasizing more of the training and recognition needs of the employees within the organization. Hence, employee will be more likely to perform better and feel a higher level of job satisfaction and increasing levels of commitment towards the organization. Finally, the present study, however, contributes to the body of knowledge by providing new data and empirical insights into the relationship between personal

variables and organizational commitment in public organizations in Saudi Arabia.

There are some limitations of the current study, which suggest some directions for possible extensions in the future. The study is based solely on data from one organization. Therefore, it might be premature to generalize the findings reported here to all employees working in the public organizations in Saudi Arabia. There is a need for additional research to obtain a better comprehension of the factors affecting organizational commitment of employees in Saudi Arabia. Future studies might focus therefore on collecting data from other organizations in order to validate and enhance the results from this study and to investigate whether various organizational structures encourage or prohibit organizational commitment. It also suggested studying the effects of the three components of organizational commitment on staying intentions with the organization. Finally, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other types of organization (e.g., private), which differ in many aspects from public organizations, and thus, differences could be observed. Future studies might focus therefore on examining employees' organizational commitment in the private sector in Saudi Arabian organization.

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