THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of perceived organizational support and work engagement on affective commitment of employees. Responses to a survey of 102 employees from the petrochemical industry were used to test the study hypotheses. Multiple Regression Analyses revealed that employee's perception of organizational support and their dedication towards their work contributes significantly to their affective commitment. It was also found that engagement mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment.

Keywords – Perceived Organizational Support, POS, Engagement, Affective Commitment

Introduction

Job hopping has become a norm in the modern day context. Organizations are looking for ways to retain their employees. Rather than looking at retention strategies, which are more reactive in nature, the proactive approach is to keep them committed to their organizations. This brings the question, "What keeps the employees committed?" to the forefront. Innumerable research have tried to answer that question. This article is one such attempt.

Numerous factors have been identified as contributing to organizational commitment. This research looks at the recently emerged engagement as the contributor of commitment. This research tries to answer the question, whether engaged employees are more committed to their jobs than their less engaged counterparts.

According to social exchange theory by Blau (1968)[2], certain workplace antecedents lead to interpersonal connections. In line with this argument, this research tries to find out if an antecedent condition of perceived organizational support leads to emotional bonding with the organization. In other words, if perceived

organizational support plays a role in the affective commitment of the employee with the organization.

Literature Review

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) which is based on organizational support theory is the belief that employees form about the extent to which the organization cares about their wellbeing, fulfills their socioemotional needs, values their contribution and its readiness to reward the same (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986[6]; Shore & Shore, 1995[25]).

Based on the theory, Eisenberger et al., (1986) [6] further stated that, it is the employees' tendency to assign humanlike characteristics to the organization that support the development of POS. According to them, POS is the organization's commitment to the employees.

Work Engagement

It was Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001)[16] who introduced engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout. According to them,

energy, involvement and efficacy which are the opposites of burnout's dimensions exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness, constitute engagement. Their work was carried forward by Schaufeli & Bakker (2004)[23] who proposed a comprehensive model to predict job burnout and engagement from job demands and resources. Simply, job demands refers to the 'things that need to be done' and job resources refers to aspects of the job that reduce job demands, help in achieving work goals and stimulate personal growth. According to their model, job demands and job resources predict engagement that in turn leads to positive work outcomes.

Schaufeli & Bakker (2004)[23] defined engagement as, "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

Research has shown that work engagement can be discriminated from related concepts like workaholism (Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008[24]), job involvement, organizational commitment (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006[11]) and job embeddedness (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2008[10]).

Affective Commitment

Organizational commitment in general reflects the psychological bond between employees and their organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990[1]). They conceptualized organizational commitment into three dimensions namely affective, normative and continuance commitment.

Affective commitment has been defined by Allen and Meyer (1990)[1] as the emotional attachment to the organization, in which the employee identifies with the organization and enjoys membership in it. It refers to the desire to stay with the organization whereas continuance commitment refers to the costs of leaving the organization and normative commitment refers to feelings of obligation to stay with the organization.

Meyer and Allen[17] drew largely on Mowday, Porter and Steers (1979)[18] concept of commitment, which in turn is based on earlier work by Kanter (1968)[12].

This research study deals only with the affective component of organizational commitment.

Perceived Organizational Support and Affective Commitment

Eisenberger at al., (1986)[6] using the social exchange framework, proved that when employees perceive a high degree of POS, they repay the organization through increased affective commitment. Shore and her colleagues (Shore & Tetrick, 1991[26]; Shore & Wayne, 1993 [27]; Wayne, Shore and Linden, 1997[28]) came up with a similar finding.

In a study by Driscoll and Randall (1999)[4] on employees from dairy cooperatives, it was found that the belief that organization supports and values their contribution increased their attachment to their organization.

Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades (2001)[5] proved that POS and Affective Commitment (AC) were empirically distinctive. They also found that POS was positively and directly related to AC, which they attributed to social identification with the organization.

Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli (2001)[20] established that POS and affective commitment

although closely related were empirically discriminant. They also explored the causal relationship between POS and AC. They were able to find that POS was positively related to changes in AC over time that provided evidence that POS contributes to affective commitment and not the other way around.

In a meta analytic study conducted by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002)[19] in which they reviewed more than 70 studies, it was found that POS and affective commitment had a strong and positive relationship. They concluded stating that employees translate the support received from the organization into their emotional attachment with the organization.

Lee and Peccei (2006) [13] conducted a research on Korean employees, to find out the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between POS and affective commitment, found that though self-esteem was found to mediate the relationship, POS retained a strong independent direct effect on affective commitment.

Liu (2009) [14] based on his research on expatriates in Mainland China, found that affective commitment mediated the relationship between POS and OCB. They found that POS and affective commitment were significantly and positively related.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H1: POS will be positively related to affective commitment

Engagement and Affective Commitment

Research on the relationship between engagement and affective commitment started in the early years of this century. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001)[16] came up with the conceptual model that treated engagement as the mediating variable between six work conditions and various work outcomes including commitment.

Later, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)[23] based on the job demands and resources model, found that engagement was negatively related to turnover intention. Taking this as the lead, Saks (2006) [21] conceptualized that those high on engagement would be more attached to the job. His study on Canadian employees found that engagement caused significant variance in affective commitment. Based on these results the following hypotheses were formulated.

H2: Engagement will be positively related to affective commitment
H2a: Vigor will be positively related to affective commitment
H2b: Dedication would be positively related to affective commitment
H2c: Absorption would be positively related to affective commitment

POS, Engagement and Affective Commitment

Llorens, Bakker, Schaufeli and Salanova (2006) [15] conducted research on two occupational samples of Spanish and Dutch employees to evaluate the robustness of Job Resources and Demands model. In that they found that work engagement mediated the relationship between job resources and commitment. Similar result was found by Hakanen, Schaufeli and Ahola (2008)[9]. They conducted a longitudinal study to test the motivational and health impairment processes proposed in the Job resources and demands model. In that they found that job resources influenced future work engagement which in turn predicted organizational commitment.

Saks (2006)[21] found that engagement mediated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. It was part of a research that analyzed the antecedents and

consequences of employee engagement. Based on these results, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H3: Engagement will mediate the relationship between POS and affective commitment
H3a: Vigor will mediate the relationship between POS and affective commitment
H3b: Dedication will mediate the relationship between POS and affective commitment
H3c: Absorption will mediate the relationship between POS and affective commitment

Research Method

Sample

The sample for the research comprised 102 employees from a petrolchemical organization. Based on a pre-study with twenty employees, employees from process, maintenance and service were selected whereas the employees belonging to clerical cadre were excluded from the study. Questionnaires were distributed during the recess with the help of the department in charge. Convenience sampling was adopted as the method of sampling.

Measures
Each of the variables in this study was measured using structured and validated tools. The measures are listed below.

Work Engagement. Work engagement was measured by means of the UWES-9 (Schaufeli &

Bakker, 2003[22]) which measures the three dimensions of engagement namely vigor, dedication, and absorption. Each of these dimension were measured with three items. Responses to items are given on a frequency scale varying from 0(never) to 6(always).

Perceived Organizational Support. POS was measured by the eight-item short-form of the survey of perceived organizational support (SPOS) (Rhoades et al., 2001[19]). Participants' responded to a five-point Likert-type scale varying from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Affective Commitment. Affective commitment was measured with five items from Meyer and Allen's Affective commitment scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997 [17]) and one item concerning pride in organizational membership from organizational commitment questionnaire (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979) [18]. The study employed 6 items totally with respect to affective commitment ,measured on a five point rating scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree".

Results

The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach alpha. All the values were above 0.7 indicating good reliability. Table (1) lists the reliability values along the diagonal. It also displays the inter correlation among the variables. It can be seen that the correlation among each of the variables were significant.

Table (1) - Intercorrelations among the variables and their reliabilities

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. POS	2.08	.58	0.73				
2. Vigor	4.10	1.27	.28**	0.72			
3. Dedication	4.59	1.24	.35**	.59**	0.82		
4. Absorption	4.36	1.21	.21*	.65**	.69**	0.77	
5. Affective Commitment	2.78	.70	.42**	.40**	.62**	.46**	0.88

Italized numerals along the diagonal are the Cronbach alpha for the variables

** p< .01, * p< .05

In order to test the hypotheses, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The statistical procedure used (least squares) for multiple regression depends on several assumptions about the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Hair, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006[8]). The assumptions are normality of data, linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables, independence of the error terms and absence of multicollinearity and heteroscedasticity.

Therefore before conducting the multiple regressions, testing of these assumptions on the data collected for the study was done.

In order to test the normality of data, skewness, kurtosis and histogram with normal plot for each of the variables, were tested. Z values of skewness and kurtosis were well below the critical values specified (Hair et al, 2006 [8]) and histogram matched the normal curve, indicating normality of data.

Homoscedasticity or the constant variance of error terms was tested using scatter plots, in which the dispersion of the dependent variables across values of independent variables was checked. Affective commitment had constant variance of error terms as that of the independent variables of Vigor, absorption, dedication and positive organizational support.

Linearity was checked with the same scatter plots. The output of the scatter plot between the dependent variable and each of the independent variable indicated a consistent change of slope, hence confirming the linear relationship between the variables.

Multicollinearity was tested by variance inflation factor (VIF) and condition index. VIF less than 3 and condition index value that is less than 15 indicates absence of multicollinearity. The variables conformed to this criteria, thereby indicating an absence of multicollinearity.

Also, the auto correlation of residuals was examined by Durbin-Watson statistic and the test revealed that the residuals were independent of each other as the values were between the limit of 1.5 to 2.5

The data conformed to the all the assumptions of multiple regression. Hence the next step was to conduct stepwise regression to test the hypotheses.

The results of the stepwise regression indicated that only dedication and perceived organizational support were significant predictors of affective commitment. The results are listed in Table (2).

Table (2) - Multiple regression analysis of Work engagement and Perceived organizational support on Affective commitment among employees (n = 102)

Variables	ΔR^2	Beta	t
Dedication	0.39	0.54	6.70
POS	0.05	0.23	2.83

The results indicate that dedication has a higher impact (Beta = 0.54, p<0.001) than positive organizational support (Beta = 0.23, p<0.05). Dedication amounted to significant variance of 39 % whereas POS amounted to 5% of the variance in affective commitment with F-value of 37.45 (p<0.001).

Thus only hypotheses H1 and H2b were supported. Vigor and absorption were not significant predictors of affective commitment.

The next step was to test if engagement mediated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. Since the stepwise regression results suggested that only the engagement dimension of dedication had a significant positive impact on affective commitment and not the other dimensions of vigor and absorption, it was decided that only dedication would be tested for the mediation effect. Hence H3a and H3c were not tested. As for the mediation, Baron and Kenny's (1986) [3] technique was adopted. This approach requires estimating three regression equations. In the first equation, the dependent variable (affective commitment) was regressed on the independent variable (POS). In the second equation, the mediating variable (dedication) was regressed on the independent variable (POS). In the third equation, the dependent variable (affective commitment) was regressed on both the independent variable (POS) and the mediating variable (dedication).

According to Baron and Kenny (1986) [3], there is support for mediation if the following are obtained: (1) the first regression equation shows that the independent variable relates to the dependent variable; (2) the second equation shows that the independent variable relates to the mediating variable; and (3a). the third regression shows that the mediating variable relates to the dependent variable and (3b). the relationship of the independent variable with the dependent variable is significantly lower in magnitude in the third equation than in the second. For full mediation, the independent variable must not relate to the dependent variable when the mediating variable is added to the equation.

Analyses were done as per the above mentioned criteria. As seen in Table (2), both POS and dedication were positively and significantly related to affective commitment. When dedication was regressed on POS, it was also found to be positively related to dedication (R^2 =.12, Beta = .35, p<.01). This satisfies (1), (2) and (3a) of Baron and Kenny's criteria. In order to check the (3b) condition, affective commitment was regressed on both dedication and engagement. As a result, the impact of POS on affective commitment dropped from beta value of .42** to .23** (p< .01). But the effect of POS on affective commitment was still significant. Hence there is support only for partial mediation and not for full mediation. This provides support for H3b. The values are listed in Table (3).

Table (3) - Multiple Regression Results for Mediation

	Affective Commitment	
	Step1	Step2
	Beta	Beta
POS	.42**	.23**
Dedication		.54**
R^2	0.17**	0.43**
Change in R2		.26**

**p< .01

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the impact of work engagement and perceived organizational support on affective commitment of employees with respect to petrochemical industry. The results revealed that perceived organizational support has a strong impact on affective commitment. This result was in accordance with the findings of Eisenberger et al., (1986) [6], Shore & Tetrick, 1991[26]; Shore & Wayne, 1993 [27]; Wayne, Shore and Linden, 1997[28], Driscoll and Randall (1999)[4], Eisenberger et al., (2001) [5], Rhodes, Eisenberger & Armeli (2001) [20], Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002)[19], Lee and Peccei (2006) [13], Liu (2009)[14]. That is if employees perceive that their organization is supportive, they tend to be more committed to the organization. Also, results showed that out of the three dimensions of engagement namely vigor, dedication and absorption, only dedication caused a positive significant variance in affective commitment. This implies that, the employees who are highly dedicated to their work are more committed to their organization. The effect of vigor and absorption on commitment was not significant. Earlier Saks (2006)[21] had found that job engagement and organizational engagement were positively and significantly related to affective commitment.

Results also revealed that dedication partially mediated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. This finding is in accordance with that of Saks (2006) [21], who found that engagement mediated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. This implies that, when employees perceive their organization to be supportive, they become more dedicated and this contributes to their emotional bonding with the organization.

Thus, it is up to the organization to provide a supportive climate for their employees, to keep them committed. The kind of support that employees require to perceive the organization to be supportive differs from one sector to another and from organization to another. Hence it is the responsibility of the organization to understand what their employees need, to feel supported. Also this research has shown that it is the dedication dimension of engagement that matters for the employee to be affectively committed to the organization. Though the other dimensions contribute to engagement with the organization, it is only dedication that contributes to attachment with the organization.

The study is not without any limitations. Only a petrochemical industry, which is a manufacturing–cum extraction industry, is taken up for this study. As a result, the generalization of the findings across other industries may be restricted.

Conclusion

This research has exhibited that positive organizational support through employees' dedication is important for them to be affectively committed to their organization. Research has well established that committed employees are better performers. Hence organizations need to strive better to provide a supportive climate for their employees to be better committed and hence perform better.

This research done in the Indian context in petrochemical sector, is a significant contribution to literature, as there are not much research done in this particular context to validate the effect of POS and engagement on affective commitment.

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