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By Fon Tamandjong Georges

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# Organisational Commitment: A Review of the Evolution from Side-Bets to the Three-Component Conceptualisation Model

Fon Tamandjong Georges

Ph.D. in Management (Human Resource Management) Advance Institute of Public Management, Yaounde, Cameroon.  
e-mail: tamindolo@yahoo.com

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Commitment has been widely studied by many organisational behaviourists (e.g. Allen and Meyer, 1990; Mowday, 1998). Commitment in marketing and sales has always been seen as an essential concept that could be used in understanding the behaviour of sales person (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Singh et al., 1996). For practitioners to be able to anticipate the impact of certain policies in an enterprise, the understanding of commitment is very primordial (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Bergmann et al., 2000). Commitment deals with measuring and capturing workers opinion of their identification with their organisations' core values, their intent to stay with their organisation, and their readiness to put extra energy than expected by their organisation (Mowday et al., 1979).

To have a good comprehension of what has been done so far in commitment, is better to first understand the picture of the advancement of the notion and dimension of OC and the way the current conceptualisation of commitment has affected the evolution of commitment.

## II. THE ERAS OF DEVELOPMENT OF COMMITMENT

The concept has developed for three eras; all these eras have an impact on the actual state of commitment.

### a) *The early era: commitment as side-bets*

The "side-bet" theory was the first contemporary theory of commitment raised by Howard S. Becker in 1960. As per this model, workers are committed because they have wholly hidden investment, "side bet", they have invested in a given organisation. Becker (1960) focused on what he called "side-bets" which explain the procedure to which workers tie themselves to organisations through investment such as effort, time and reward. These investments however have cost which reduce to some degree on employee's freedom in their future activity. Through investment employees are tied to organisations because of the costs linked with their departure from their organisation (for example, pension plans, seniority and firm specific knowledge) (Edey, 2004).

Becker (1960) suggested that there are certain costs that will accumulate over a period of time that will make it tough for individuals to untie themselves to a regular pattern of activity, namely; sustaining its affiliation in the enterprise. Side-bets always compel behaviour and it comes to light via the individual adjustment process to societal positions. A person pattern of activity may be altered in the process of conforming to the requirement for one social position that require that he unfit himself for the position he might have right to (Becker, 1960).

There is a close connection between the commitment process and the turn over process in Becker's model. Becker's model sees commitment as the main variable in explaining voluntary turnover. This view was held by other research that tried to operationalise Becker's theory (Alutto, Hrebiniak, & Alonso, 1973; Ritzer & Trice, 1969). According to these studies, commitment should be measured by assessing the motives, if there are any, which can cause an individual to vacate his enterprise. The scale that was assumed to represents Becker's approach was accepted by future research as the approach to examine and conceptualise the enterprise and/or to one's job. The side-bet theory was later leased as not part of leading commitment model, but as advanced by

Becker the link between turnover and commitment affected the future conceptualisation of commitment and turnover was to be affected by OC. The continuance commitment of Meyer and Allen's scales is influenced by the side-bet approach. Continuance commitment was advanced as a tool for testing the side-bet approach and is one dimension of the three OC dimensions outlined by Meyer and Allen (1991).

*b) Middle era: Affective-dependence period*

This approach was advanced by Porter et al. (1974). Here the attention of commitment shifted to psychological attachment a person has for his enterprise. This approach advanced by Porter and his colleagues is an attempt to designate commitment as a dedicated attitude. Accordingly, Porter and his followers defined commitment as "...the relative power of an individual's involvement and identification in a specific organisation..." (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Commitment here was characterised by three related factors: "(1) a tough acceptance and belief in an organisation's goals and values; (2) the will to utilise significant effort for one's enterprise; and (3) a strong wish to continue attachment with one's enterprise..." The theory of exchange has been seen as the principal reason for the commitment process (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982).

Porter and his peers while offering a different view of commitment, continued with the Becker's assumptions, which is the strong link between turnover and commitment. O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) suggested in the same line that the first element focuses on the psychological basis to affection and the other two are the outcome of commitment rather than background of commitment.

The tool designed to measure OC centred on the approach of Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian is recognised as the OCQ (Organisational Commitment Questionnaire). It is determined by the three-dimensional explanation aforementioned, though in practicable, many scholars use this tool as one-dimensional tool. Critics of the OCQ suggested that some items of the OCQ are tied to turnover goals or performance goals and that all of the declarations are more reflective of behavioural intentions than attitudes (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Contrary, supporters of OCQ suggested that the will to perform actions in support of an enterprise reflects than just a mind-set rather than behavioural intentions, and therefore, elements as the ones above replicate the behavioural approach of OCQ (Mowday et al., 1982).

Mowday et al (1979) therefore believed that commitment represents a mere passive employee's loyalty to his enterprise and in reality represents an active connection among workers and their organisation. So strong is this that employee are willing

to give more of themselves so as to add to the organisation's effectiveness. Hence, commitment could be seen not from expression of an employee's belief and opinion but also from their actions within their organisation.

*c) The third era: the multi-dimensional approaches*

Becker (1960) and Porter (1974) theories belonged all to the one-dimension era, after them, two leading multidimensional views were brought forth in 1980s, one from O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) and from Meyer and Allen (1984). Other multidimensional approaches existed, but these had much less impact than the two main ones (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002).

*i. Organisational Commitment as Moral, Calculative, and Alienative Attachment*

The commitment of persons to their enterprises was profoundly investigated by Etzioni (1961) as well. It was based on his work that Penley & Gould (1988) created a commitment model consisting of three components. These three dimensions identified here are moral, calculative, and alienative commitments. The acceptance of and or identification with an enterprise goals is moral commitment. When an individual or worker gets incentive which tie with his contribution, it is called Calculative commitment. Alienative commitment results when the individual no longer receives compensations commensurate with his efforts, and yet he remains. Causes of staying are to be searched among external circumstances: absence of different job options, potential considerable financial loss resulting from quitting, and so on.

Penley & Gould (1988) sought to integrate and instrumental commitments into a single commitment model. They included calculative commitment into the instrumental category based on its exchange-based logic: the employee receives inducements from the organisation in exchange for his contributions. Contrarily, moral and alienative commitments can be tied with the affective type of commitment. According to the authors, the way moral commitment is associated with alienative commitment is similar to the relationship between job dissatisfaction and job satisfaction by Herzberg (1987). Implying that, they don't represent the two extremes of a dimension. Instead, the contrary of moral commitment is the absence of moral commitment instead of alienative commitment, and, likewise, the contrary of alienative commitment is the absence of alienative commitment instead of moral commitment.

As far as the consequence of commitment is concerned, the authors found that moral commitment has positive and significant correlations with the will to maintain organisational membership and job involvement, calculative commitment with two types of deferential behaviour, and alienative commitment with perceived absence of direction over career, respectively.

ii. *O'Reilly and Chatman Model 1986*

Their approach was based on what they considered as problematic in commitment, which is the inability to differentiate between the different backgrounds of commitment and they results (consequences) and again, the roots of their attachment on the other. Commitment was defined by O'Reilly and Chatman as the mental connection felt by a person for his organisation, replicating the level to that which the person embraces the characteristics or perspectives of the enterprise. They suggested that the psychological attachment of a person could be determined by three autonomous factors:

- ✓ compliance or extrinsic rewards
- ✓ identification
- ✓ Internalisation or involvement based on the similarity between a person and the value of his organisation.

Conceptually, these two authors gave a clear differentiation amongst the two commitment processes that is the psychological attachment and instrumental exchange. The compliance facet that signifies the exchange process leads to a slightly shallower attachment to the enterprise. The strongest attachment as per these two authors (O'Reilly and Chatman) is the psychological attachment shaped by the two other facets, which are internalisation and identification.

They also pointed out the link concerning OC and its outcome. While previous approaches (Becker, 1960; Porter et al., 1974) emphasized commitment as the main determinant of turnover, O'Reilly and Chatman suggested that the psychological attachment of an individual can lead to different behaviours and pointed out that organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is an important outcome of commitment. This argument was included in the conceptualisation brought out here.

Some few problems have been pointed out by studies that applied the scale of O'Reilly and Chatman. These authors, Vandenberg, Self, and Sep (1994), established that the identification facet added nothing from the captured explanations made from the OCQ. Others (Bennett & Durkin, 2000) concluded quite correctly that internalisation and identification appear to be tapping similar constructs and that the compliance facet cannot reflect psychological attachment to one's enterprise (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In summary, O'Reilly and Chatman brought out a fascinating look to commitment, but because of the questionability of its operationalisation, limited researchers have followed this approach. Instead, the approach by Meyer and Allen (1984) became the dominant one in the field of commitment.

d) *Three-Component Conceptualisation Model of Organisational Commitment developed by Allen and Meyer (1990)*

These authors defined organisational commitment as "the psychological relationship between

workers and their organisation that makes it difficult for the workers to voluntarily quit their organisations (Allen and Meyer 1990). Allen and Meyer first identified two dimension of organisational commitment; affective attachment and cost attachment. After continued research, Meyer and Allen identified another dimension which was obligation.

The three distinct components of organisational commitment identified by these authors were termed affective orientation or affective commitment, cost-based orientation or continuance commitment, obligation (moral), responsibility or normative commitment.

- *Affective commitment*; it refers to a worker continuing to work for an entity because of the emotional attachment of the worker to, identification with and involvement in the entity (Allen and Meyer 1990). Example, a person can be proud to belong to enterprise Q and whole heartedly wants enterprise Q to succeed. Employees having tough affective commitment stay with an enterprise because they want to.
- *Continuance commitment*; it is the commitment that is grounded on the cost that is tied with quitting a specific organisation. The potential cost of quitting an organisation includes threats of wasting effort and time in acquiring non-transferable skills, losing attractive benefits, leaving behind privileges due to seniority or to disrupt personal relationship and to up root family. Apart from all these continuance commitment can also be developed because of the absence of different employment chances. Workers who are tied to their organisation based on continuance commitment continue because they need to.
- *Normative commitment*; it refers to the workers' perceived obligation to continue with their enterprises. Wiener (1982) suggested that the sense of obligation to continue with an enterprise might result from internalisation or normative pressure applied on a person before the person entered to the enterprise (family, cultural orientation) or following entry (organisational orientation). Normative commitment might come forth when an organisation gives the worker "advance reward" (paying college tuition) or incur significant cost in providing employment (cost tied with job training). For instance, a person can feel attached or indebted to an entity because the entity had paid for the education of the person. Employees having a high degree of normative commitment continue with their organisation because they ought.

iii. *Antecedents of the three element approach of commitment*

The antecedent of Allen & Meyer's (1990) and Meyer & Allen's (1991) three components of



commitment were developed as per the different antecedents.

*Antecedent of affective commitment:* Meyer & Allen (1991) developed three categories of antecedents to organisational commitment which are; personal characteristics, organisational organisation and work experience.

- *Personal characteristics;* personal characteristics are variables that define an individual (Steers, 1977). These characteristics which are the need for achievement, affiliation and autonomy as well as need for achievement and interest of an individual at his job site have been found to correlate with commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991, Steer, 1997). Meyer and Allen (1991) stated that individuals who chose their work to be compatible with their personal characteristics should have a positive attitude than those employees whose job does not tie with their personal characteristics.
- *Organisational Structure;* Few research have scrutinised the link between organisational structure and commitment (Glisson and Durick, 1988). None the less they are some evidence that affective commitment is linked to decentralisation of decision (Brooke, Russell and Price 1988) and formalisation of policies and procedures (Meyer and Allen, 1991).
- *Work experience;* Buchanan (1974) suggested that work experiences are major socialisation force and this represent an important psychological ties created inside an enterprise. Employee whose experiences within an organisation are the same as their expectation and that gratify the employees fundamental need are more inclined to develop a tougher affective commitment to their enterprise than the workers with less satisfying work experiences (Meyer et al 2002). Meyer and Allen (1991) believe that this work experience variable can be separated in two categories: those that satisfy employee's need to feel psychological and physical comfortable in their enterprise (comfort) and those that contributed to employees' feeling of competence in their job role (competence).

Variable correlating with affective commitment in comfort category include confirmation of pre-entry expectation, equitable reward, organisational dependability and support, no conflict and role clearness (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Factors in the competence related experiences include accomplishment, autonomy, scope of the job and challenges, opportunity for advancement, taking part in making and personal significance to the enterprise (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

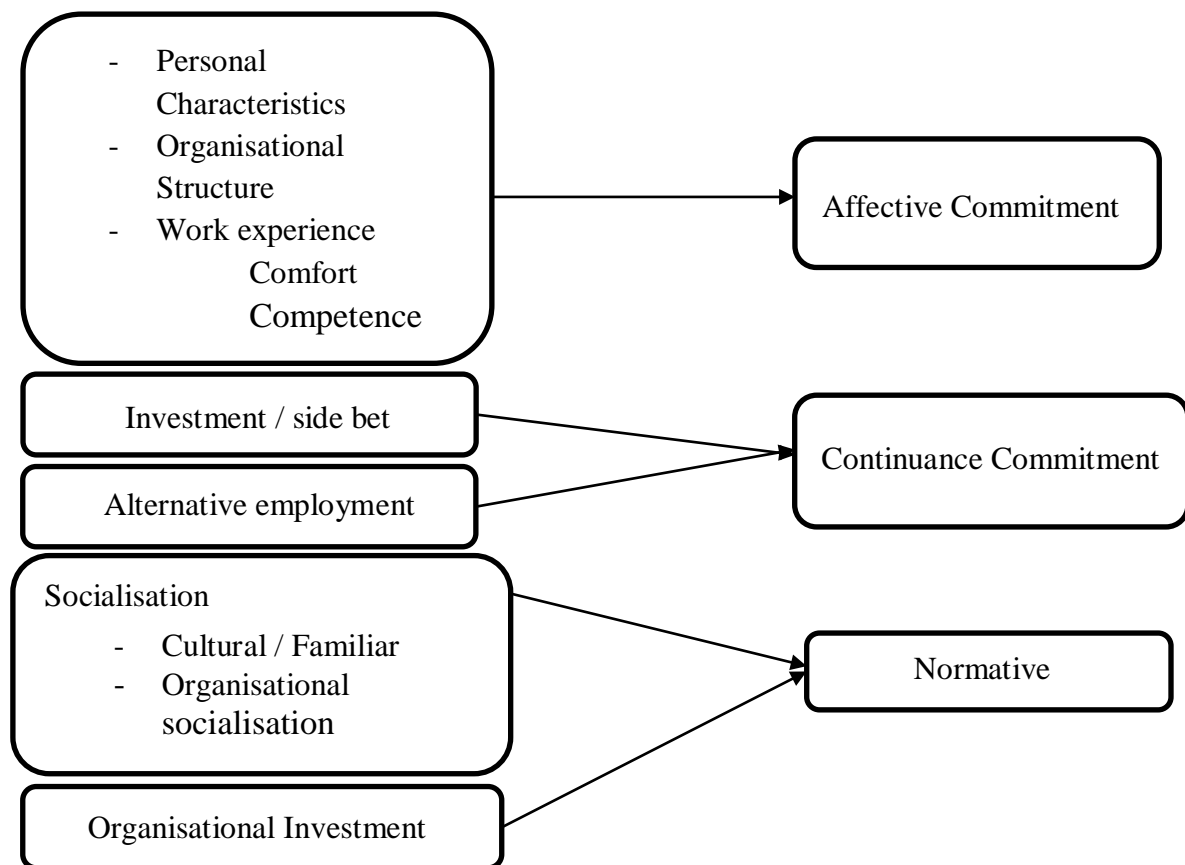
*Antecedent of continuance commitment:* It is associated to an employee's realisation of what will cost the employee to quite his/her organisation; whatever that

can increase perceived cost can be considered antecedence (Meyer and Allen, 1991). The most frequently studied antecedence has been side bet, or investment and the readiness of alternative job prospect.

- *Side bet/Investment:* Backer (1960) proposed that a person has commitment for his organisation when the person makes site bets and the person continues with the organisation because of the fear to lose side bets. The side bets are in different forms and may be related to one's job or not (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Rusbult and Farrel (1983) had similar view point in their investment model as Meyer & Allen, which shows how commitment to organisations will rise as the degree of the worker's investment within that organisation increases.
- *Availability of alternatives:* Meyer & Allen (1991) state that continues commitment will grow as a result of absence of different employment opportunities, so the absence of job availability is an antecedent to continuance commitment.

*Antecedent of norminative commitment:* Wiener (1982) suggested that when an employee if felling obliged to stay in his/her organisation it may be as a result of the internationalisation of norminative pressure exercised on a person before the person entered the organisation (that is, familial or cultural socialisation) or following entry (that is organisational socialisation). Norminative commitments may also develop, however, when an organisation provide the worker with "advance reward" (example paying tuition, or incur significant budget connected with training the employees). Reorganisation of these investments as for what concerns the employee/organisation relation may cause employee to feel an obligation to reciprocate by being committed to his/her organisation till the moment when the debt will be repaid (Scholl, R.W. 1981).

The antecedence of the three component model of Allen & Meyer (1990) are listed in the figure below.



Source: Researcher's own construction adapted from Meyer and Allen (1991) page 68

Figure 1: Antecedents of the three component model of commitment

Meyer & Allen and their peers were conscious of certain hitches connected to their three-dimensional scales. Throughout the years, some variations in the scales were proposed and tested. For example, a six item version of the scale was brought to light, the normative scale was reviewed and proposed, and the continuance scale was brought forth to have two dimensions (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Subsequently, major revisions in the scale of continuance commitment were advanced (Powell & Meyer, 2004). Though all this variations in the scale increased certain psychometric properties, it consists of a great problem for researchers as per of which scale (version) is to be used.

### III. CONCLUSION

The work was aimed at bringing out the key theories underpinning the different views of the concepts commitment. It was done by presenting the evolution of commitment theories. These theories presented and examined will go a long way to widen the understanding of the said concept, therein given employers and managers a hold of this concept. The understanding of commitment is very essential for the growth of enterprises, a committed employee is a happy employee, therefore motivated and satisfied.

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