

# Development of Affective Organizational Commitment: A Cross-Sequential Examination of Change with Tenure

Karen Beck and Carlene Wilson

*National Police Research Unit, Adelaide, Australia and the  
University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia*

Much of the theoretical and empirical research devoted to affective organizational commitment has been based on the assumption that this form of commitment develops with tenure, displaying a rapid decrease after entry, followed later by a steady increase. The present study used the cross-sequential design, advocated in the life-span development literature, to examine changes in commitment with tenure and found evidence for a developmental trend in affective organizational commitment. However, contrary to theory and past results, the developmental function indicated a steady, persistent decrease with increasing tenure (from 1 to 9 and 15 to 19 years) in a sample of 479 Australian police officers. This is the first study designed explicitly to examine how commitment changes over an extended period of tenure, therefore replications are required to test for similar or other nonconforming trends in other organizations. If persistent decreases in commitment, resulting in low levels of commitment in groups of experienced employees, are found in other organizations, managers will need to be aware that low commitment norms may impact on new employees and will need advice on ways to improve commitment levels. If different trends are found, the influence of various characteristics of the culture or structure of organizations will need to be given greater consideration in theories devised to explain the development of commitment. © 2000 Academic Press

*Key Words:* organizational commitment; developmental method; cross-sequential measurement; cohort analysis; police personnel.

The study of employee attitudes to work has had a long and varied history. Earliest studies concentrated on enhancing job satisfaction, but attention was directed in the 1970s toward the impact of organizational commitment on employee performance (Katzell & Austin, 1992). The first extensive theory of organizational commitment was provided by Mowday and his colleagues (Mow-

This research was supported by the eight Australian Police Departments and the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department (Australia). This article is based on data from Karen Beck's doctoral dissertation, University of Adelaide, August, 1997. We thank Neil Bridge (NSW Police), who facilitated the involvement of his staff, and the police officers who participated in the study. We are grateful to Paula Morrow, Natalie Allen, Joyce Russell, and two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions regarding the publication of this research.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Karen Beck, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, P.O. Box 1500, Salisbury South Australia 5108, Australia. E-mail: [Karen.Beck@dsto.defence.gov.au](mailto:Karen.Beck@dsto.defence.gov.au).

day, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and used the definition offered by Porter and Smith (1970): "the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization, [which is] characterized by three factors: a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organization's goals and values; a readiness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to remain a member of the organization" (Mowday et al., 1982, p. 27).

Since that time there has been considerable interest in the study of organizational commitment, primarily because of reported relationships between this variable and various indices of organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Higher levels of employee commitment have been related to positive outcomes for the employer such as lower levels of absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover among employees and higher levels of individual performance (for a meta-analysis see Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Although recent reconceptualizations of commitment have highlighted the importance of differentiating the components of commitment (i.e., affective, continuance, and normative, e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991), the most consistent relationships have been found to be between affective organizational commitment and various performance indices (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Consequently, managers have been particularly concerned with identifying how and why affective organizational commitment develops, thereby enabling them to identify mechanisms through which they can optimize the commitment levels of their employees, thereby improving organizational effectiveness.

The issue of why affective commitment changes has been the subject of some theoretical speculation and considerable empirical research. The majority of this work has been concerned with identifying the antecedents of commitment (see Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Reichers, 1985) and has identified a range of factors that may be responsible for individual differences in commitment levels (i.e., inter-individual differences). This focus is interesting in view of the argument of both Johns (1991) and Vandenberg and Self (1993) that it is inappropriate to try to *explain* change in a measure over time without first *demonstrating* (as opposed to assuming) that change actually occurs. In fact, the issue of how intraindividual commitment changes with time has received little attention. The present study was designed to address this issue.

### *Development of Affective Organizational Commitment*

Mowday et al. (1982) addressed the issue of how commitment develops within an individual by describing the process as a series of "self-reinforcing cycles of attitudes and behaviors that evolve on the job and over time strengthen employee commitment to the organization" (p. 47). The specific nature of the attitude and the form of the cycle were not described. They went on to outline the different antecedents that may influence individual levels of commitment at different career stages (anticipation, initiation, and entrenchment), but failed to describe the developmental trend that would result from their hypothesized developmental process. Nonetheless, given the reference to strengthening of commitment over

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات