



Effects of team and organizational commitment – A longitudinal study

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ABSTRACT

Retention management, i.e., keeping qualified employees, is a top priority for contemporary organizations. Commitment, and especially team commitment, can be the key to mastering this challenge. There is a lack of longitudinal research concerning the development and the direction of the effects of team commitment over time. In a longitudinal field-study design with three points of measurement, a total of 360 employees in 52 semi-autonomous industrial teams were surveyed over a period of three years. On the one hand, organizational commitment showed stronger effects on organization-related criteria (job satisfaction and intention to leave). These effects were consistent over the three points of measurement. Team commitment, on the other hand, affected team-related criteria (team performance and altruism). Longitudinal analyses confirmed the effects of organizational commitment on job satisfaction and intention to leave, and of team commitment on team performance and altruism. Moreover, these effects increased over time. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

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1. Theoretical background

Keeping employees committed to the organization is a top priority for many contemporary organizations (Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009; Hunziger & Biele, 2002; Reiche, 2008). Especially in times of crises and job cuts, committing top performers to the organization becomes a challenge (Hunziger & Biele, 2002). Organizations which fail to accomplish this will have reduced resources for the capability of competing in the future (Rappaport, Bancroft, & Okum, 2003). Top performers are not limited to higher management, but can be found at all levels of an organization. Organizational commitment is one of the main reasons for these employees to stay (Hausknecht et al., 2009). However, in large organizations or after mergers or acquisitions, employees' commitment to the organization as a whole may be questionable (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005; Van Dick, 2004; Van Dick & Riketta, 2006). In these cases, team commitment can be a key to retention management (cf. Hausknecht et al., 2009).

While organizational commitment has been subject to extensive research, team commitment has rarely been investigated. There is a particular lack of research on longitudinal effects of team commitment (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005).

Individuals identify with social groups that are familiar and similar to them (Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). Team members spend most of their organizational lives in the context of their team, which leads to higher familiarity and cohesion within rather than between teams (Moreland & Levine, 2001). Moreover, teams have a stronger direct influence on their members than does the organization (Anderson & Thomas, 1996). This makes teams be more salient in employees' everyday lives than the organization as a whole (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Research has shown that employees are more committed to their team than to the organization (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Organizational commitment affects relevant outcomes, e.g., employees' turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and job satisfaction (Mathieu & Zajac,

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1990; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Some studies hint at a link between organizational commitment and performance; however, several meta-analyses have shown that this link is rather weak (Cohen, 1991; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Randall, 1990; Riketta, 2002). A recent meta-analysis shows relationships between team commitment and team satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues, and team climate (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). However, some questions remain. Does team commitment contribute to explaining changes in relevant organizational variables such as performance? How strong are the effects of team commitment in comparison with organizational commitment?

1.1. Team commitment

Organizational commitment has been conceptualized in terms of the strength of an employee's involvement in and identification with an organization (cf. Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Following the approach of Mowday et al. (1982), we define team commitment in terms of the strength of team members' involvement and identification with their team (cf. Bishop & Scott, 2000).

Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed a three-component model, which distinguishes affective, continuous, and normative commitment. An employee will remain with an organization because he or she wants to (affective commitment), has to (continuous commitment), or feels compelled to do so (normative commitment). There is substantial empirical support for this distinction (e.g., Bentein, Stinglhamber, & Vandenberghe, 2002; Schmidt, Hollmann, & Sodenkamp, 1998; Vandenberghe, Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Delhaise, 2001). Moreover, affective organizational commitment shows the most pronounced effects on outcomes relevant to this study, such as performance, OCB, and turnover intentions (Felfe & Six, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Therefore, in our study, we focus on the affective component of organizational and team commitment.

According to the attitudinal approach, commitment is a positive feeling toward the organization which depends on what employees experience on the job and how they perceive the organization (Mowday et al., 1982). Affective and continuous organizational commitment can be explained by this notion (Allen & Meyer, 1990). We expect team commitment to develop in a similar manner. Employees who work in a team will gain positive experiences within their team, will identify with goals and values of their team, and will want to remain in the team in order to contribute to team goals (cf. Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). This development is often accompanied by an exchange relationship in the context of which a member receives something from the team (e.g., getting assistance, trading shifts) and in turn commits him- or herself to the group (cf. Mowday et al., 1979).

The present study of semi-autonomous industrial teams is aimed at identifying the effects of organizational and team commitment on performance and other organizational and team outcomes in a longitudinal design.

1.2. Effects of commitment

It could be argued that the connection between commitment and outcomes, such as performance, is weak (Cohen, 1991; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Randall, 1990; Riketta, 2002), because the assessment of attitudes such as organizational commitment and behavior (e.g., OCB) is too general and does not refer to specific foci (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Organizational commitment is often measured as a predictor at the organizational level, while team performance as a criterion is measured at the team-level. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) first established the importance of a similar focus level. According to their "theory of reasoned action", a behavior will be predicted best by an attitude when both refer to the same "action" in terms of context, timing, and object. For the present study, it may be inferred that team-related behavior (e.g., altruism toward colleagues) should be predicted better by team-related attitudes (e.g., team commitment) than by organization-related attitudes (e.g., organizational commitment; cf. Lavelle et al., 2009; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005).

To this date, longitudinal studies of different commitment foci are rare however (cf. Ellemers, De Gilder, & Van den Heuvel, 1998; Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Among these very few longitudinal studies, most have examined a maximum period of twelve months (e.g., Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Koch & Steers, 1978; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992; Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004). The question of whether the effects of commitment persist over several measuring points and longer periods of time remains unanswered. To address the lack of longitudinal research, the present study investigates differences in the outcomes of organizational and team commitment over time. A field-study design with three points of measurement over three years can yield hints at the direction of the effects.

Overall job satisfaction has been described as a correlate (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), an antecedent (Bluedorn, 1982; Koch & Steers, 1978), or a consequence of affective organizational commitment (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Longitudinal studies have found support for both directions (e.g., Farkas & Tetrick, 1989; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992). In accordance with Bateman and Strasser (1984), we assume that overall job satisfaction is a consequence of affective organizational commitment. Employees can feel committed to their organization before they develop attitudes such as job satisfaction. Some studies suggest that commitment develops even before an employee enters a company (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1981), or at a very early stage in a new job position (Porter, Crampon, & Smith, 1976). In a rationalization process, organizational commitment in turn causes positive attitudes toward the job (Bem, 1967; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Turnover intentions, in-role behavior, and extra-role behavior are viewed as consequences of commitment in recent research. However, there is a lack of longitudinal studies which could confirm this direction of the established effects (cf. Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002). Similarly, it is not clear how the relationships between commitment and its possible

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