



Five-factor model of personality and organizational commitment: The mediating role of positive and negative affective states

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ABSTRACT

Using a one-year longitudinal study of four components of organizational commitment (affective, normative, continuance–sacrifices, and continuance–alternatives) on a sample of employees from multiple organizations ($N = 220$), we examined the relationships of employee Big-Five personality traits to employee commitment components, and the mediating role of positive and negative affective states. Personality was measured at Time 1 while affective states and commitment components were measured at Time 2, while controlling for Time 1 commitment. Extraversion and agreeableness were positively related to affective, normative, and continuance–sacrifices commitments via enhanced positive affect. Agreeableness was also positively linked to affective commitment and negatively associated with continuance–alternatives commitment through reduced negative affect. Finally, neuroticism was negatively linked to affective commitment, and positively related to continuance–alternatives commitment, through increased negative affect. The implications of these findings for our understanding of personality–commitment linkages are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The Big Five personality model (Digman, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1987) has gained widespread acceptance in the scientific community and has contributed to a resurgence of personality research in organizational behavior and I/O psychology. Indeed, this model has been used to study relationships between personality and variables of interest to organizations such as leadership (Bono & Judge, 2004), job satisfaction (e.g., Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002), job performance (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001) and turnover (e.g., Zimmerman, 2008). This research stream has generally supported the notion that “personality is an important determinant of individual behavior in the workplace” (Penney, David, & Witt, 2011, p. 297).

Our focus in this study is on the linkages between the Big Five traits and organizational commitment. Based on Affective Events Theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), we posit that (a) dispositions influence the extent to which individuals experience positive and negative affective states by acting upon the likelihood of encountering certain types of events at work (e.g., Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993) and by initiating self-regulatory processes that guide emotional and behavioral responses (Gramzow et al., 2004), and (b) through affective states, dispositions influence the types of commitment which employees experience. That is, depending on their relative standing on the Big Five traits, people will encounter events that generate certain emotional content which will be processed in order to initiate certain attitudes and behavior. Our contention that Big Five traits contribute to affective states is consistent with research suggesting that the Big Five traits influence how people self-regulate their emotional experience (e.g., Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a, 2001b; Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinari, 2000) and select themselves into situations that reflect their emotional states (Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1985; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). We contend that the Big Five traits indirectly influence one’s commitment by determining which affective states are experienced.

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Although research has widely investigated the situational antecedents of commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Morrow, 2011), much less attention has been given to its dispositional antecedents. Moreover, previous research on the relationships between the Big Five traits and commitment has been extremely limited (for an exception, see Erdheim, Wang, & Zickar, 2006), and mostly cross-sectional. The present study intends to contribute to commitment theory by shedding light on the mechanisms through which personality may predispose employees to experience specific types of commitment. Indeed, scholars have called for increased efforts to understand the intervening processes in these relationships (e.g., Penney et al., 2011). As explained below, this study relies on a multidimensional view of commitment. To overcome the limitations of prior research, we opted for a longitudinal design in which the influence of the Big Five traits on commitment through affect was examined while accounting for initial commitment levels.

2. The three-component model of organizational commitment

Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) and Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) conceptualized commitment as a force that binds individuals to courses of action of relevance to organizations. With the three-component model, they proposed that different mindsets underlie commitment. Affective commitment (AC) refers to an emotional attachment, identification, and involvement in the organization, normative commitment (NC) represents loyalty toward the organization out of a sense of obligation to it, and continuance commitment (CC) is based on a perceived necessity to stay. Further work on the dimensionality of CC suggested that it comprises two separate components: the perceived sacrifices or *cost* of leaving (CC-sacrifices) and the perceived *lack of alternatives* (CC-alternatives) which may be faced by employees in case of leaving (e.g., McGee & Ford, 1987). While CC-sacrifices is based on ties with the organization, CC-alternatives reflects commitment “by default” (Becker, 1960) as it involves a sense of being trapped within the organization. AC, NC, CC-sacrifices and CC-alternatives thus evoke distinct motives used by employees to make sense of their perceived bond with the organization.

3. Affective states

One important framework for understanding the role of emotions at work is AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). This theory posits that individuals are predisposed to experience certain events at work, thereby influencing the moods and emotions they experience. AET thus advances that dispositions act upon the *objective* stimuli to which an individual is subjected. One reason this may occur is because an individual's personality influences the behavior of others toward him or her, and because dispositions may influence the situations individuals seek out (e.g., Emmons et al., 1985; Magnus et al., 1993). Furthermore, dispositions may determine the experience of affective states by influencing the self-regulatory processes (such as emotion regulation strategies) that generate patterns of emotional and behavioral responses (Gramzow et al., 2004; Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a, 2001b). AET also proposes that, via moods and emotions, dispositions may influence individuals' responses to their jobs, such as job attitudes. Indeed, work attitudes such as organizational commitment are largely influenced by the way individuals respond affectively to their work environment (Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993).

4. Big five traits, affective states, and commitment

In the present study, we propose that three of the Big Five traits, namely extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness, act upon commitment components through the affective states they engender. Extraversion, which involves a propensity to experience positive emotions, and neuroticism, which reflects a predisposition to experience negative life events and emotions, are naturally tied to how people regulate their emotions (Gramzow et al., 2004; Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a, 2001b). Emotional regulation refers to the processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate and modify “the occurrence, intensity and duration of emotional reactions” (Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001a, p. 83). Recent research has revealed that agreeableness, i.e., the tendency to be trusting, compliant, and caring (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), also involves the regulation of emotional experience (Haas, Omura, Constable, & Canli, 2007). As shown by Tobin et al. (2000, p. 657), agreeableness “may be related to emotional processes that have consequences for relationships”. Below, we develop our hypotheses.

4.1. Extraversion

Extraversion is characterized by sociability, ambition, and positive emotionality (Barrick et al., 2001; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Extroverts have been shown to regulate emotions through seeking socioemotional support from others and displaying reduced emotional ambivalence (Kokkonen & Pulkkinen, 2001b), and use adaptive emotional regulation strategies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). In the work context, partly through these mechanisms, extroverts are likely to be trusted by others, and because they are sociable, they are likely to experience pleasant interactions with others, which should tinge the workplace experience positively. It has also been suggested that as they achieve higher social integration, extroverts experience more embeddedness in the organization (Zimmerman, 2008). Through this process, extroverts are likely to enact their environment and, following AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), act upon the stimuli to which they are subjected. For example, they are likely to enjoy high-quality interactions with supervisors. Moreover, as extroverts are motivated to achieve status and rewards (Zimmerman, 2008; Zimmerman, Boswell, Shipp, Dunford, & Boudreau, in press), they invest resources that provide opportunities for positive feedback and rewards (Penney et al., 2011). Rewards enhance AC via social exchange processes (Cohen & Gattiker,

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