



# Commitment profiles: Combinations of organizational commitment forms and job outcomes ☆

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## Abstract

Although the three-component model of organizational commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991) posits that an employee can experience the three components concurrently, previous research has been largely variable-centered, looking at the antecedents and outcomes of each component separately. Two studies explored how the three components combine to create distinct “profiles” of commitment and the implications of different profiles. In Study 1, six clusters were identified using *k*-means cluster analysis. These were labeled as the Highly committed, Non-committed, Neutral, Affective dominant, Continuance dominant and the Affective–Normative dominant profiles. Analysis of variance results indicated that the Highly committed, Affective–Normative dominant and the Affective dominant profiles demonstrated the most desirable job behaviors. The Non-committed profile showed the least desirable outcomes, followed by the Continuance dominant profile. Study 2 largely replicated these findings. The results suggest that affective commitment is the primary driver of positive outcomes, especially when combined with low levels of continuance commitment.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on organizational commitment dates back to the 1960s. The early conceptualizations of the construct were unidimensional, and commitment was defined as a consistent line of activity due to a recognition of costs associated with quitting (Becker, 1960) or more popularly, as an emotional attachment to the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Over the years, the increasing interest in the area added to the lack of consensus on the definition of organizational commitment. While inhibiting a meaningful accumulation of research, this state of affairs underlined the multidimensional nature of commitment. Indeed, although several alternative models of commitment were proposed in the 1980s and early 1990s, multidimensionality was common to all (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Penley & Gould, 1988).

Of these multidimensional conceptualizations, the model by Meyer and Allen (1991) has gained substantial popularity. According to this model, organizational commitment is composed of three components. The affective component refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. The continuance component refers to commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization. Finally, the normative component refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. While each commitment component reflects a psychological state that has implications to continue or discontinue membership in the organization, the nature of these states differs. Employees with strong affective commitment remain in the organization because they want to, those with strong continuance commitment because they need to, those with strong normative commitment because they feel they ought to do so. Further, each of the three components of commitment is proposed to develop as a function of different antecedents and to have different implications for work relevant behavior other than turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Nevertheless, affective, continuance, and normative commitment are best viewed as distinguishable components or forms, rather than types of commitment as employees can simultaneously experience each of these psychological states to varying degrees.

The three-component model of organizational commitment has received considerable empirical support (see Allen & Meyer, 1996; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). The three components have been shown to be related yet distinguishable from each other. The meta-analysis by Meyer et al. (2002) indicates that affective commitment develops primarily from positive work-related experiences, whereas lack of job alternatives and investments in the organization are predictive of continuance commitment. Although there is insufficient research to substantiate the proposition, normative commitment is arguably determined by early socialization experiences or the organization's investment in the employee. In terms of job-related outcomes, all three forms of commitment relate negatively to withdrawal cognitions and turnover behavior, with affective commitment showing the strongest correlations, followed by normative commitment and then continuance commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). The implications for other job-related behaviors differ across the

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