ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND WORK ETHICS: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT IN A MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

Abdullah Sanusi Othman
Nik Mu'tasim Ab. Rahman
Zakiah Abd. Malek
Ab. Razak Osman
Management Department
Facutly of Business Management
National University of Malaysia
Malaysia

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between Islamic work ethics and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is treated as comprising three dimensions, namely: affective, continuance and normative commitments. The study uses a sample of 227 employees from several branches of a local bank. The results of factor analysis confirm that organizational commitment is multidimensional and consisting of the above-mentioned dimensions. The findings also offer evidence of a direct, positive and significant relationship between these dimensions of commitment and Islamic work ethics. Specifically, affective commitment correlates highly with the latter than either continuance or normative commitment. Implications and limitations of the study are also discussed.

Introduction

The relationship between organizational commitment and work ethics has received considerable attention in the commitment literature (e.g., Jones, 1997, Elizur et. al., 1991, Yousef, 2001). Such interest might be attributed to the belief that work ethics facilitate employees ' attitudes toward work and the organization where they work. Work ethics, which are normally associated with religious beliefs, have been assumed to promote job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Studies with respect to the linkage between these variables have centered on two types of work ethics: formal ethics policies established by organizations, and informal ethical expectations (Sims, 1998). Buyer and Webb (1992) and Weeks and Nantel (1996), through their research suggest that when code of ethics are effectively applied, employee satisfaction increases. Likewise, Hunter et. al. (1989) and Byington and Johnston (1991) reported a significant positive relationship between the enforcement of corporate ethical values and organizational commitment.

Definition of organizational commitment

As Morris et. al (1993) observed, there is yet any consensus on the definition of organizational commitment. In fact, a long list of definitions can be found in commitment literatures. Table 1.0 depicts some of these definitions.

Table 1.0
Definitions of organizational commitment
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The attachment of an individual's fund of affectivity and emotion to the
Group (Kanter, 1968)

An attitude or an orientation toward the organisation which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organisation (Sheldon, 1971)

The process by which the goals of the organisation and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970)

A partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of the organisation to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to the organisation for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth (Buchanan, 1974)

The relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982)

Profit associated with continued participation and a 'cost' associated with leaving (Kanter, 1968)

A structural phenomenon which occurs as a result of individual-organisational transactions and alterations in side-bets or investments over time (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972)

The totality of internalised normative pressures to act in a way which meets organisational goals and interests (Wiener, 1982)

The committed employee considers it morally right to stay in the company, regardless of how much status enhancement or satisfaction the firm gives him or her over the years (Marsh & Mannari, 1977)
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Source: various sources

A scrutiny of these various definitions, suggests inconsistencies characterizing the understanding of the concept of commitment among researchers. The most widely adopted definition by commitment researchers in the eighties and early nineties, was the definition promoted by Mowday et.al (1982). According to these authors, organizational commitment should be perceived as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. To this effect, a committed employee is expected to be characterized by the following: a belief in and acceptance of the values of the organization, a strong willingness to put in effort for the organization, and the desire to remain with the organization. Mowday et. al.'s definition was criticized as being narrowly defined, and the concept of commitment was said to be wholly attitudinal and unidimensional (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

In response to these critics, Allen & Meyer (1991) proposed an expanded 'version' of commitment, which they also claimed as multidimensional, in nature. In their so-called

three component commitment model, these authors suggest that commitment can be categorized into three different dimensions, namely affective, continuance, and normative.

Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong degree of affective commitment continue employment with the organization because they want to do so. Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so. Finally, normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high degree or level of normative commitment feel that they ought to remain with the organization.

Overview of past studies on work ethics -commitment linkages

Among past studies that have examined the relationship between work ethics and organizational commitment, the most cited in the literature was the work conducted by Kidron (1978). Specifically, in his study, Kidron explored the link between protestant work ethics (PWE) and commitment to organization. Using three different samples, the author confirmed the existence of a relationship between the research variables. The study also revealed that work ethics was more related to moral commitment than calculative involvement. This latter finding has contributed significantly in the context of examining the link between organizational commitment, as a multidimensional concept, and, in particular, work ethics.

Further support for the relationship between ethics and commitment was also evident from studies conducted by Oliver (1990), Saks et. al (1996), Putti et. al (1989), Morrow and McElroy (1987), Randall and Cote (1991), and Chusmer and Koberg (1988). Generally, despite using different samples in their investigations, these studies have produced consistent results. Saks et. al., for example, employed a sample of 145 temporary employees of a Canadian theme park, while Putti et.al tested their hypotheses on a sample of workers in Singapore.

More recently, Yousef (2000) investigated the strength of the relationship between Islamic work ethics (IWE) and various dimensions of organizational commitment on a sample of 474 employees from 30 organizations in the United Arab Emirates. The concept of Islamic work ethics was derived from the teachings of Islam. It constitutes the religion's expectations with respect to one's behavior at work which includes his/her effort, dedication, cooperation, responsibility, social relations, and creativity. Some of these aspects of behavior Results from the study indicate the existence of a moderate positive relationship between Islamic work ethics and the following dimensions of commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. Comparatively, affective commitment was reported to be more related to the work ethics than either normative or continuance commitments.

Objective of the study

Given the above overview of the literature, it is expected that similar relationships would exist in other different sample settings. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that work ethics is directly or positively related to the various dimensions of organizational commitment. Additionally, it also proposes that affective commitment would be more related to work ethics than normative or continuance commitments.

Methodology

A self -administered questionnaire design was employed for gathering data in this study. The subjects, selected in a convenience sample, were informed of the purpose of the study. The questionnaire contains questions on organizational commitment, Islamic work ethics, and a series of demographic questions. The subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires and were assured of anonymity.

Sample

The sample comprised of 227 employees employed in a local bank in the Klang valley area in peninsular Malaysia. Employees were drawn from 9 branches and 10 departments of the bank. Table 1 shows the detail characteristics of the sample. Data on religion and race of respondents, was collected but not presented in the table because more than 99 per cent are Muslims and Malays, respectively.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	148	65.2
Female	79	34.8
2. Age		
20 - 30 years	92	40.5
31 - 40 years	84	37.0
41 - 55 years	51	22.5
3. Marital status		
Single	55	24.2
Married	172	75.8
4. Designation		
Executive	125	55.1
Non-executive	102	44.9
5. Level of education		
SPM and lower	98	43.2
STPM and Diploma	72	31.7
Bachelor degree and above	57	25.1
6. Income		
< RM3,000	154	67.8
RM3,001 - RM5,000	48	21.1
> RM5000	25	11.1
7. Work experience		
0-5 years	56	24.6
6-10 years	72	31.7
11-15 years	23	10.2
> 16 years	76	33.5

N= 227

Measures

Organizational commitment was measured using Meyer and Allen's (1991) instrument. This instrument consist of 24 items, and was designed to capture three dimensions of organizational commitment, namely affective, continuance, and normative. Each sub-scale or dimension of commitment is measured by eight items. Examples of the items included in the affective sub-scale are: 'I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own', 'I feel emotionally attached to this organization'. Examples of items measuring continuance commitment are: 'Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave this organization now', 'I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization'. Finally, samples of items included in the normative commitment sub-scale are: 'I think that people these days move from company to company too often', ' I think that wanting to be a company man is sensible'. All sub-scales employ a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As the sampling units are all Malaysians, the questionnaire was translated into the local language. Due care has been taken to ensure that the translated questionnaire items are relevant and suitable for the sample. The internal consistency (measured by Cronbach's alpha) for overall organizational commitment scale and for affective, continuance and normative sub-scales in this study are 0.90, 0.89, 0.85, and 0.85 respectively.

The measure for Islamic work ethics was adopted and translated from the one used by Yousef (2001). It consists of 17 items altogether. The items that made up the scale include the following: 'Laziness is vice', 'One should carry out work to the best of one's ability'. In order to ensure consistency with the measures of organizational commitment, a five-point response was employed, ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency for this scale in this study is 0.78.

Demographic characteristics were captured through questions with respect to age, gender, income, level of education obtained, race, religion, work experience, and marital status. Each variable is broken down into at least two categories.

Analysis

In order to facilitate the analysis of the statistics generated from the data, this study employs descriptive analysis, t-test, Anova (analysis of variance), correlation analysis and factor analysis. The latter is used to confirm the multidimensionality of organizational commitment. Factor analysis has been widely employed in past studies on organizational commitment.

Results

The outcome of a confirmatory factor analysis of the organizational commitment measures is reported in Table 1.1 (see appendix 1). In the analysis, varimax rotation method was used. The statistics generated indicate that the sample and model are adequate (Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, .884; Bartlett's Test of Sphrecity with a Chi-square value of 2643.08 significant at $p<0.001$, df 253). The results confirm that organizational commitment is multidimensional, and has three dimensions, which can be appropriately labeled as affective commitment (factor 1), continuance commitment (factor 2), and normative commitment (factor 3). These dimensions account for almost 55 per cent of the total variance.

Affective commitment captured the highest percentage of variance (34.52%), while continuance commitment registered the lowest percentage (8.31%).

Table 2 demonstrates the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the variables of interest. Results indicate that, generally, the respondents' commitment is above average. However, interestingly, among the dimensions of organizational commitment, the mean of continuance commitment is highest (3.54). While the degree of normative commitment is lowest (3.18), it can be seen that the level of affective commitment is slightly lower than the mean of continuance commitment. Meanwhile, the overall mean of Islamic work ethics (IWE) is observed to be moderately high, i.e. on a scale of 4. On the other hand, the correlation coefficients between variables indicate that the three dimensions of organizational commitment are relatively independent of each other. The highest intercorrelation recorded is between affective commitment and normative commitment (.568). The correlations between the variables of interest further indicate significant relationships between each dimensions of organizational commitment and Islamic work ethics. Among the dimensions of commitment, affective commitment represents the dimension most highly correlated with the latter.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the key research variables

No.	Variables	1	2	3	4	M	SD
1	Affective Commitment	-	.393**	.568**	.490**	3.48	.73
2	Continuance Commitment		-	.353**	.297**	3.54	.71
3	Normative Commitment			-	.390**	3.18	.75
4	Islamic work ethics				-	4.01	.40

** $p < 0.001$

Tables 3 and 4 show the results of t-tests on the means of the variables of interest. For all variables, the differences in the means are not significant. Hence, the results indicate that in terms of gender, males and females demonstrate almost similar levels of Islamic work ethics and organizational commitment, irrespective of its dimensions. Similarly, respondents' levels of affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment and Islamic work ethics do not differ across categories of marital status.

Table 3

Results of t-test on the means of the variables of interest across categories of gender

Variable	Gender		Significance
	Male (n= 148)	Female (n = 78)	
Affective Commitment	3.46	3.51	n.s
Continuance Commitment	3.54	3.53	n.s
Normative Commitment	3.17	3.20	
			n.s
Islamic work Ethics	4.00	4.03	

Table 4

Results of t-test on the means of the variables of interest across categories of marital status

Variable	Marital status		Significance
	Married (n= 172)	Single (n = 55)	
Affective Commitment	3.50	3.42	n.s
Continuance Commitment	3.54	3.52	n.s
Normative Commitment	3.21	3.08	
			n.s
Islamic work Ethics	4.00	4.03	

Anova (analysis of variance) was also conducted on the data to determine differences, if any, with respect to the means of categories within demographic variables such as level of income, level of education, and age. The results are not presented as there were no indication of any significant differences in the means.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study offer support for the believe that organizational commitment is a multidimensional concept. The results are consistent with what was proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991) that organizational commitment exists in the forms of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Despite differences in the nature of the sample and respondents employed, the study adds to the existing evidence with respect to the thesis that employee commitment to the organization can take several dimensions. Equally important would be the contribution of this finding towards establishing a statistically reliable Malay language version of the construct of organizational commitment. For this study sample, Cronbach alphas of more than 0.85 recorded for all dimensions of organizational commitment are higher, or, if not, consistent with previous research which reports a range of internal reliability coefficients of 0.70 to 0.88. (Sims, 1998). However, this remains to be tested using other samples in future research.

On the relationship between organizational commitment and Islamic work ethics, it is interesting to note the fact that a direct, significant and positive association exists between all dimensions of organizational commitment and the latter. A differential relationship that notably characterizes the link between these variables suggest that an employee with a different degree of perception towards Islamic work ethics would demonstrate a different dimension of commitment to the organization. Specifically, as the findings suggest, an individual with a high level of perception of Islamic work ethics would tend to develop an affective commitment to the organization. While, on the other hand, an employee with a lower level of perception of Islamic work ethics would be more inclined towards nurturing a normative kind of attachment, one experiencing a much lesser degree of perception of Islamic work ethics would be expected to demonstrate a calculative or continuance form of commitment to the organization.

Apart from the theoretical implications, the findings of this study offer some interesting guidelines to practioners in formulating their human resource (HR) policies and strategies. For example, managers who aspire to develop employees with characteristics of affective and normative commitment, would, obviously, have to engage in a more serious approach in establishing a higher degree of Islamic work ethics among their employees. Formal Islamic ethical codes, for that matter, would have to be introduced.

Finally, there are some limitations to this study which need to be considered. First, the application of correlations as evidence of the association between the dimensions of organizational commitment and Islamic work ethics should not be confused with cause effect relationships. In other words, the correlations only suggest relationship, but not causality between the variables of interest. Second, the findings should not be generalized to other samples. The use of other types of samples in future research may produce different results.

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Appendix 1

Table 1.1

Item	AC	CC	NC
I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization	**.775**		
I feel like part of the family in this organization	**.760**		
I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it	**.755**		
This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me	**.755**		
I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	**.720**		
I think I could not easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one	**.692**		
I feel emotionally attached to this organization	**.625**		
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization	**.575**		
I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization		.788	
Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave this organization now		.766	
It would be too costly for me to leave this organization now		.745	
I am afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up		.707	

Table 1.   continued

Item	AC	CC	NC
Right now, staying with this organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire		**.634**	
One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives		**.618**	
It would be very hard for me to leave this organization right now, even if I wanted to		**.561**	
One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here		**.537**	
One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain			**.790**
Jumping from organization to organization seems unethical to me			**.788**
I believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization			**.693**
If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would feel it was not right to leave this organization			**.654**
I think that wanting to be a company man or company woman is sensible			**.592**
I think people these days move from company to company too often			.147

AC Affective commitment   CC Continuance commitment
NC Normative commitment
Factor 1 eigenvalue (7.940), percentage of variance (34.52%)
Factor 2 eigenvalue (2.712), percentage of variance (11.79%)
Factor 3 eigenvalue (1.912), percentage of variance (8.31%)