ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the level of organizational commitment at a public higher education institution in Malaysia. The study utilized the Organizational Commitment Questionnaires to measure organizational commitment of the faculty members. Overall, the result revealed that the commitment level of faculty members was high; the majority (87.7%) of the respondents were classified as very committed (a score between 68 and 105). The remaining 12.3% of the respondents were classified as neutral (a score between 53 and 67). None of the respondents were rated as uncommitted. The results also revealed that there was no significant difference between the male and female faculty members regarding their level of organizational commitment.

Keywords: higher education; organizational commitment; gender.

1. 0   Introduction

Malaysian leaders have consistently and resolutely reiterated the call for higher education in the country in order to attain world-class status and become a regional center of excellence in education. During the Eighth Malaysia Plan period from 2001 to 2005, emphasis was given to increase accessibility to education at all levels, to strengthen the delivery system, and to improve the quality of education (Economic Planning Unit, 2001). Thus, education at tertiary levels was expanded to better respond to market requirements as well as to develop education as an export industry (Economic Planning Unit, 2001). In the Ninth Malaysia Plan (Economic Planning Unit, 2006) period, the emphasis was on enhancing the quality of tertiary education in order to attain international standing. For this purpose, local higher education institutions were benchmarked against international standards and a rating system was introduced (Economic Planning Unit, 2006). The Tenth Malaysia Plan (Economic Planning Unit, 2010), which covers the duration between 2011 and 2015, sets another milestone in higher education as the government stressed the importance of developing world-class educational institutions, particularly universities, with world-class leadership.

In line with the country's inspirations to create tertiary institutions of international standing, the government introduced several mechanisms to measure and to enhance the quality of higher education institutions. The changing nature of higher education suggests that committed employees are needed to cope with the demand foisted upon universities. Thus, with the various changes and reforms in higher education in Malaysia, it is crucial for universities to investigate the level of commitment among employees. The theory of organizational commitment by Meyer and Allen (1997) suggested that "by understanding when and how commitments develop and how they help shape attitudes and behaviors, organizations will be in a better position to anticipate the impact that change will have and to manage it more effectively" (p. ix).

Previous studies suggested that leaders in public organization need to make an effort to ensure high level of organizational commitment of subordinates (Buka & Bilgic, 2010; Gortner, Mahler, & Nicholson, 1987). The majority of the studies revealed the organizational commitment of employees in public sectors is low compared to employees in private sectors (Buka & Bilgic, 2010; Cho & Lee, 2001; Gortner et al., 1987; Goulet & Frank, 2002). Based on these findings, organizational commitment should be an important issue for all leaders especially in public organizations. The purpose of this study was to examine the level of organizational commitment of faculty members at one of the public university in Malaysia.

2. 0   Literature Review

Organizational commitment is a variable receiving great attention from researchers (Chughtai & Zafar, 2006; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Among other reasons for the prominence in the organizational literature is that commitment has repeatedly been recognized as a significant factor that determines the work behavior of employees in organizations (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovich, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Commitment is the factor that links employees to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and helps an organization succeed (Fornes, Rocco, & Wollard, 2008; Mowday et al., 1982). Commitment has been found related to positive organizational outcomes such as job performance (Chen, Silverthorne, & Hung, 2006; Yousef, 2000), employee satisfaction (Chugtai & Zafar, 2006; Meyer et al., 2002; Yousef, 2000), and turnover (Angle & Perry, 1981; Meyer et al., 2002; Powell & Meyer, 2004).

Research showed that commitment has been defined in many different ways. There was a lack of consistency in the definition of commitment (Mat Zin, 1998) that contributed to the difficulty in understanding the results of the research (Darolia, Kumari, & Darolia, 2010). However, the definition of organizational commitment by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) was the most widely

used in current research, particularly in the nonwestern countries (Yousef, 2000). Porter et al. characterized organizational commitment by three psychological factors: (a) belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values (identification), (b) willingness to exert considerable effort toward organizational goal accomplishment (involvement), and (c) strong desire to remain in an organization (loyalty).

Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) identified three common themes in the conceptualization of commitment. They argued that the various definitions of commitment can be grouped into three general categories: affective orientation, cost based, and obligation or moral responsibility. The three categories were later referred to as affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). Organizational commitment is viewed as a psychological state that ties employees to their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) suggested that commitment is an employee's relationship with an organization that can be categorized into three broad themes: (a) commitment is related to affective orientation toward the organization, (b) recognition of cost associated with leaving the organization, and (c) moral obligation to stay in the organization. They proposed a three-component model of organizational commitment: affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. An employee might have a varying combination of the three components of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997).

Affective commitment is the desire to remain a member of an organization due to an emotional attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). English, Morrison, and Chalon (2010) noted affective commitment is conceptualized as "a psychological state that characterizes an employee's relationship with their organization" (p. 395). Allen and Meyer (1990) said the committed employee "identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization" (p. 2). Individuals with strong affective commitments identify with the organization and are more committed to pursue their goals (Darolia et al., 2010). More specifically, with affective commitment the employees remain in an organization because they want to do so (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Normative commitment is a desire to remain a member of an organization due to a feeling of obligation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) defined *normative commitment* as "the mind-set that one has an obligation to pursue a course of action of relevance to a target" (p. 316). Meyer and Parfyonova (2010) believed that normative commitment has two faces: "moral duty and indebted obligation" (p. 284). Normative commitment exists when employees have the feeling that to stay in the organization is the "right" or "moral" thing to do (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2010; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Thus, employees with strong normative commitment stay in the organization because they ought to do so (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Continuance commitment is a desire to remain a member of an organization because of awareness of the cost associated with leaving it (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) described continuance commitment as "the perception that it would be costly to discontinue a course of action" (p. 316). Thus, employees continue employment in the organization because they need to do so (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment is associated with what employees have provided for the organization in the past. Past behavioral acts make the employees committed to the organization. Reciprocally, continuance commitment presents when employees feel they will get benefit if they stay and they will incur cost if they leave. For example, employees may enjoy high pay and other benefits related to job seniority if they stay in their current organization but such benefits may be lost if they move to another organization.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between gender and organizational commitment. However, those studies produced inconsistent results. Females have been observed as being more committed than their male counterparts (Angle & Perry, 1981; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). In

contrast, a study of 381 employees from a large corporation in Korea revealed that men were more committed to their organization than women (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). A meta-analysis on the effect of gender on organizational commitment by Aydin, Sarier, and Uysal (2011) also found that males have higher level of commitment than females. However, most of the studies on the relationship between gender and commitment found that gender was not a significant predictor of commitment (Al-Ajmi, 2006; Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Kacmar, Carlson, & Brymer, 1999; Stevens, Beyer, & Trice, 1978).

3.0   Research Methodology

This study was conducted at one of the public universities in Malaysia. The target population for the study consisted of the 78 full-time faculty members at the Faculty of Management and Economics. A total of 78 questionnaires were distributed to the members of the faculty. However, only 65 usable questionnaires were analyzed representing a response rate of 83%.

The instrument used was the Organizational Commitment Questionnaires (OCQ) which consists of 15 items to examine the level of organizational commitment of the faculty members. The OCQ was developed by Mowday et al. (1979). The instrument utilizes a 7-point Likert scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 15 in the instrument were negatively phrased and reverse scored in order to reduce response bias. To calculate a summary indicator of employee commitment, scores for all items were summed and divided by 15.

The scale that measured organizational commitment was made up of 15 statements. Each statement had a score between 1 and 7; therefore, the range of scores was between 15 and 105. To determine the respondents' commitment to the organization, the frequency analysis was utilized and three cut-off scores were used (Al-Ammaj, 2000; Smothers, 2008). The faculty members with a score between 15 and 52 were considered to be uncommitted to the organization. In contrast, faculty members with a score between 68 and 105 were considered to be committed to the organization. Those with a score between 53 and 67 were considered neutral, neither uncommitted nor committed to the organization.

The OCQ is a widely accepted measure with strong predictive and discriminate validity, as well as internal consistency and reliability (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Mowday et al. (1979) noted that a series of empirical studies using OCQ had shown a coefficient alpha ranging from 0.82 to 0.93 while the test-retest reliability ranged from 0.53 to 0.75. According to Mowday et al. (1979), the convergent validity for the OCQ ranges from 0.63 to 0.74.

4.0   Findings and Discussions

Table 1 presents demographic information of the respondents.

Table 1 *Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	33	50.8
	Female	32	49.2
Age	20–29	1	1.5
	30–39	35	53.8
	40–49	20	30.8
	More than 50	9	13.8
Marital status	Single	6	9.2

	Married	59	90.8
Education	Master's degree	46	70.8
	PhD	19	29.2
Years of service	Less than 5 years	10	15.4
	6–10 years	38	58.5
	11–15 years	17	26.2
Work position	Lecturer	39	60.0
	Senior lecturer	22	33.8
	Associate professor	4	6.2

Descriptive statistics were calculated to analyze the level of organizational commitment of the faculty members. Three cut-off scores were used to determine the level of organizational commitment. Results shown in Table 2 indicated the majority (87.7%) of the faculty members were rated as committed while the remaining 12.3% were rated as neutral. None of the faculty members were rated as uncommitted.

Table 2 *Organizational Commitment*

Commitment	Frequency	%
Uncommitted	0	0.0
Neutral	8	12.3
Committed	57	87.7

A descriptive analysis was calculated for the overall and for each question of the OCQ to examine further the organizational commitment of the faculty members. Results in Table 3 showed that the mean for overall OCQ scores ($M = 5.10$, $SD = .55$) was slightly above the midpoint of the scale (4.0), which indicated that faculty members were committed to their organization. The result revealed that the mean for overall scores was consistent with the range of means (4.0 to 6.1) obtained by Mowday et al. (1979) in their reliability test involving 2,563 employees working in nine different organizations (public employees, classified university employees, hospital employees, bank employees, telephone company employees, scientists, auto company managers, psychiatric technicians, and retail management trainees). In addition, the mean for overall scores was slightly higher than the mean scores for classified university employees ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.30$) reported in Mowday et al.'s reliability test.

An analysis of each question revealed that Question 15 had the overall highest score. This question was negatively phrased; therefore, the reverse score was used to calculate the mean. The high mean ($M = 6.05$, $SD = .87$) for this question indicated the faculty members did not feel that decision to work for the university was a mistake. Question 1 had the second highest score ($M = 5.98$, $SD = .67$), which indicated the faculty members were willing to put in extra effort to help the university be successful. Question 13 had the third highest score ($M = 5.65$, $SD = .78$), which indicated the faculty members cared about the fate of the university. Question 7 had the lowest mean score ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.26$). This question was negatively phrased. The lowest mean score indicated faculty members were willing to work for different organizations for similar work. The next lowest score was Question 12

($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.24$), which indicated faculty members found it difficult to agree with the policies of the university.

Table 3 *Mean Score of Organizational Commitment*

Survey Questions	Mean	SD
Overall scores	5.10	.55
1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.	5.98	.67
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.	5.55	.66
3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization.	5.29	1.30
4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.	5.11	1.17
5. I find that my values and the organizations values are very similar.	5.20	.92
6. I am proud to tell others that I am a part of this organization.	5.48	1.09
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar.	3.42	1.26
8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.	5.29	.94
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization.	4.14	1.36
10. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.	5.31	1.19
11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely.	4.60	1.42
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization policies on important matters relating to its employees.	3.75	1.24
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.	5.65	.78
14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.	5.14	.95
15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake.	6.05	.87

The mean organizational commitment of the sample of males ($M = 76.82$, $SD = 7.59$) and females ($M = 76.03$, $SD = 9.06$) was examined using an independent samples t test to investigate the difference between the male and female faculty members of their level of organizational commitment. Examination of the two samples using normal Q-Q plots and Levene test of equality of variance revealed no serious threats to the assumptions of normality or homogeneity of variance, respectively. The t test indicated that the difference between the mean of two groups did not achieve significance at the .05 level, $t (63) = .38$, $p = .71$. These results gave some support that there was no significant difference in the mean organizational commitment scores for male and female faculty members.

5. Conclusions

Limited research on organizational commitment had been done in Malaysia, particularly in higher education settings. Hence, this study has added to the growing body of literature by examining the level of organizational commitment of faculty members at a higher education institution in

Malaysia. The results revealed that 87.7% of the faculty members had high level of commitment, while the remaining 12.3% had moderate level of commitment. None of the respondents were categorized as uncommitted. The study also investigated the relationship between gender and organizational commitment and found no significant difference between the male and female respondents in terms of commitment. In general, the relationship between gender and organizational commitment were weak and inconsistent. However, most of the studies in this area found that gender was not a significant predictor of commitment (Al-Ajmi, 2006; Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Kacmar et al., 1999; Stevens et al., 1978). In a study on 436 government employees in Kuwait, Al-Ajmi (2006) found that even though the male employees had higher score on organizational commitment, there were no significant differences between male and female samples. Therefore, the finding of this study supports the findings of previous studies that the male and female employees did not differ in their level of organizational commitment.

The limitation of this study is due to the generalizability of the results. Due to time constraints, the study focused only on faculty members at one public university in Malaysia. Therefore, the results of this study were limited to this population and generalization cannot be made to other public universities in Malaysia. For the purpose of generalizing the results, more studies that involve larger samples are needed. It is recommended that more research from other public and private universities be conducted to generalize the findings. This study is a preliminary study that investigated the level of organizational commitment of faculty members. Future studies should also look at factors that influence organizational commitment among faculty members in Malaysian settings.

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