

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF WHITE COLLAR EMPLOYEES IN DAMANSARA HEIGHTS, KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

Committed workforce has now become a competitive advantage of all types of organizations. However, employees' organizational commitment is comparatively lower now if compare to the past. The main aim of this research is to identify whether there is a significant relationship between personal characteristics and organizational commitment. By understanding personal characteristics that predict organizational commitment, organizations could take necessary actions to improve employee commitment levels before greater losses are incurred. In essence, results from this survey indicate that age group, educational level and organizational tenure have significant statistical differences in organizational commitment.

Keywords: Organizational commitment, Personal characteristics, Baby boomer, Generation X, Generation Y, Age, Educational level, Gender, Labor workforce, Kuala Lumpur.

Contribution/ Originality

There are very few empirical studies about organizational commitment in Malaysia, specifically among the white collar employees. Many of the white collar employees are the knowledge workers, their organizational commitment will determine how far a firm can go in the long run. It is crucial and urgent for employers to understand their employees, in order to enhance their engagement and commitment. This study will enlighten the employers regarding this aspect.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, organizations encounter more challenges when they aspire to achieve greater heights. These challenges include changes in both external and internal factors. External factors are like changes in consumption pattern, customers' life style, financial crisis in the developed countries etc. As for internal factors, these include changes in the employees' life values, working attitude and expectations, etc. Hence, employees' commitment to their jobs and their organizations is crucial, as one of the determinant factors of organizational performance.

Organizational commitment is a feeling of dedication to one's employing organization, willing to work hard for the employer, and the intent to remain with that organization (Meyer

and Allen, 1988). Employees are regarded as committed if they have the willingness to continue their work tenure in an organization and devote considerable effort to achieve organizational goals. Higher level of effort and commitment lead to higher level of performance, both the individual level and organizational level (Salami, 2008). For instance, an enthusiastic employee is more likely to put in additional time and effort on work, completing tasks given effectively and efficiently. Therefore, a committed labor workforce is the competitive advantage or a key survival factor of organizations.

Based on feedback given by organizations, Generation Y shows a trend of hopping from job to job, while Baby Boomers tend to stay longer in a firm. This current trend stirs up one question, do demographic factors influence organizational commitment? Are there any differences among employees of Generation X, Y and Baby Boomers with regards to work attitude and organizational commitment? Is it true that employees who are more senior in age have higher organizational commitment?

This study aims to investigate the relationship of age, gender, marital status, educational level and organizational service tenure to organizational commitment, in order to find out an effective recruitment policy. As employees of different generations have different life style and values, it is crucial to construct recruitment packages which are aligned with the needs and expectations of employees.

In accordance with the statistics provided by AON Hewitt, employee turnover of Malaysia is placed sixth in Asia Pacific after China, Australia, India, Hong Kong and Indonesia for the year 2011 with 15.9% attrition rate. As such, employers need to pay more attention on the issue of organizational commitment to avoid high absenteeism, low efficiency or low production rate. Also, as Malaysia aims to transform into a high income nation by 2020, it is crucial for organizations to achieve their goals continuously for years to come. Employers should have more awareness on employees hopping trend and, enhance employees' commitment to ensure satisfactory organizational performance.

1.1. The Consequences of Organizational Commitment

Rocha *et al.* (2008) say that organizational commitment not only has positive influences on organizations, but also beneficial to individual employee and the society as a whole. It benefits employees themselves in such a way that emotional and financial instability can be reduced by lower turnover rate.

These findings could help the management in recruitment and retention of staff by formulating strategies that would enhance employees' organizational commitment. In general, many studies have been conducted in regards to this research topic, especially, in western countries. Yet, not many researches were conducted in Malaysia. It is found that organizational commitment could be affected by the location of organizations since cultural forces from society, industry or even organizations themselves may vary across different geographical areas (Meijen, 2007). Hence, this study focuses on employees working in Damansara Heights, Kuala Lumpur.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Buchanan (1974) defines organizational commitment as the affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization as well as to one's job role that is corresponding to organizational goals and values. Later on, Mowday *et al.* (1979) claim organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification and involvement in a particular organization". Also, they have suggested that strong conviction of an organization's goals and values; the willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; the intention to be part of the organization, all these are the characteristics of organizational commitment (Bakan *et al.*, 2011).

Mullins (1999) sees organizational commitment as the level of association and contribution of employees, while Meyer and Allen (1991) describe organizational commitment as a psychological state which explains the relationship between employee and organization, as well as the implication of continuing with the employing organization (Salami, 2008). Recent researchers such as Elizur and Koslowsky (2001) also claim that commitment appears when one is emotionally and functionally attached to his or her working place (Bakan *et al.*, 2011). We can conclude that most researches perceive organizational commitment as the bond between workers and organization as well as their intention to maintain membership with the employing organization.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The effect of personal characteristics on organizational commitment will be the main focus of the present study. Five dominant personal characteristics: age, gender, marital status, education level and organization tenure that are related to organizational commitment. Of them, this research has a greater interest on investigating the influence of age on employee organizational commitment. The age group is categorized into dominant generational cohorts in the current workplace, while past studies had shown the significant difference in commitment among the studied cohorts (Swiggard, 2011). For instance, generation Y which grown up in technological era has affected their social affections. Thus, the up-brining factor contributes to their lower organizational commitment (Lyons, 2011).

The Three Component Model of Organizational commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1991) will be adopted as it is considered the most comprehensive and dominant model in this research topic. The three components of this model are affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

The measurement of affective commitment is associated with employees' positive feelings of attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization as well as the desire to build a close relationship with employing organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Employees tend to have a stronger affective commitment when their expectations and basic needs are satisfied.

This affective engagement with the organization is mainly due to the identification as well as their desire to build a satisfying relationship with the organization. In addition to that, employees are convinced that they are sharing similar goals and values with the organization whereas recognition from employers made them emotionally attached to the organization (Khan, 2013).

Continuance commitment develops as employees understand that their accumulated investments or side-bets will be gone if they decide to leave the employing organization or they believe comparable employment alternatives that are available in the job market is inadequate (Kaur and Sandhu, 2010).

Meyer and Allen (1991) also reveal that employees who have non-transferrable investments in the organization; close relationship with colleagues; and exclusive remuneration package, usually do not leave the organization easily as they share continuance commitment with their employer (Khalili and Asmawi, 2012). They are committed to the organization as they need to do so.

The measurement of normative commitment is related to employees' sense of responsibility to continue with the organization due to employees' various pre-entry and socialization experiences (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Khan, 2013). Employees remain with the employing organization as they feel that they ought to do so. They believe that this is a right thing to do, most probably due to the culture and work ethic they have undergone within the society or the organization. In either reason it is due to the benefits an employee previously received from the organization. Hence, commitment is a moral obligation in return (Khan, 2013).

2.2. Personal Characteristics and Organizational Commitment

Personal characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, level of education and organizational tenure have been frequently examined in this literature. Kitchen (1989) agrees that decreasing employment alternatives made older employees more dedicated. Abdullah and Shaw (1999); Newstrom (2007) have also revealed that older workers tend to be more committed as they are well-adapted to their job and work environment.

In the current study, the age group is based on different generational cohorts in today's workplace: Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964), Generation X (born between 1965-1979) and Generation Y (born between (1980-2000) (Meuse and Mlodzik, 2010; Farr-Wharton, 2011).

(Swiggard, 2011) has indicated a significant difference in levels of commitment among the three cohorts, while Patalano (2008) conclude in his study that Generation X is lower in commitment compared to Baby Boomers. This scenario may be due to the difference in life values and work ethics experienced by Baby Boomers and Generation X. For instance, Boomers tend to work hard and are committed to the employing organization, while Generation X emphasizes personal fulfillment and development (Meuse and Mlodzik, 2010).

A research had been carried out among 1,040 Canadian Charter Accountants in order to examine the relationship between organizational commitment and gender difference. The result has clearly shown that female workers have a lower level of organizational commitment than male workers (Khalili and Asmawi, 2012). In line with this finding, other researchers like Dodd-Mc and Wright (1996) have also suggested that men are more loyal to their firms.

On the other hand, Aven *et al.* (1993) reveals that there is no significant relationship between organizational commitment and gender difference if all workers in the organization were treated equally. Similar to this study, Marsden *et al.* (1993) also believed that men and women would

present similar levels of commitment to their organizations if they have worked under the same working conditions (Khalili and Asmawi, 2012).

Next, the impact of marital status has on organizational commitment has also been suggested in many early research (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Salami, 2008; Al-Kahtani, 2012). Some researchers argue that married and separated employees are more loyal to their employer than those who are single. Recent researchers such as Salami (2008) believe that married workers are more likely to remain with the organization due to their financial responsibilities to their family (Al-Kahtani, 2012).

Level of education has often been found inversely related to organizational commitment in prior studies (Bakan *et al.*, 2011).

According to Mowday *et al.* (1982), highly educated workers are more likely to feel dissatisfied with the organization and leave their job when their high expectations and needs are not fulfilled (Bakan *et al.*, 2011). In addition, educated employees believe that their expertise and knowledge will allow them to obtain better employment alternatives (Al-Khatani, 2012).

Furthermore, employees with longer organizational tenure tend to have greater organizational commitment. The reason is simple. It is an established fact that the longer one serves in an organization, the more one is likely to have invested in it. Thus, he or she is less willing to leave the organization (Chien, 2009). Similarly, Allen and Meyer (1990) have also indicated that organizational tenure is positively related to organizational commitment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is characteristically an exploratory study using descriptive, T-test and ANOVA analysis to determine the relationship between demographic factors and organizational commitment.

In this research, data is assembled using a questionnaire administered to a sample of 200 white collar workers in Damansara Heights, Kuala Lumpur. Herein, questionnaire survey is the most suitable method as large amount of data could be collected in an economical way and completed within a short period of time.

This survey focuses on working population which falls into the three dominant generational cohorts, namely: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y.

Sample size plays an imperative role in achieving accurate statistical analysis. Significant results can hardly be attained by a small sample size, while sample size that is too large can also make statistical tests overly sensitive (Ping, 2008). According to the formula introduced by (Qureshi, 2012), $N \geq 50 + 8m$ ($m = \text{Number of independent variables}$), sample size required here becomes equal or more than 90 since there are 5 independent variables in this research. Thus, questionnaires are distributed to a sample size of 200 white collar employees.

Two types of non-probability sampling techniques; convenience sampling and snowball sampling are combined to select correct sample for this research.

An 18-item closed-ended questionnaire is utilized for the survey. Aside from the five questions concerning respondents' personal demographics, the questionnaire is divided into three

parts so as to test for affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment separately. Each part consists of 6 questions. The questionnaire is actually modified from the 24-item (8 items for each part) organizational commitment questionnaire developed by Meyer and Allen (1991). The reliability of the OCQ is reported 0.87 for affective commitment, 0.75 for continuance commitment and 0.79 for normative commitment (Ping, 2008).

The researcher has also completed a pilot test on 10 white collar employees of National University Singapore in order to identify the reliability and feasibility of the modified questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is reported 0.80 for affective commitment, 0.78 for continuance commitment and 0.71 for normative commitment.

The questionnaire used in this research can be divided into personal characteristics and organizational commitment. The first section of the questionnaire is about personal characteristics of participants, involving age, gender, marital status, educational levels and organization service tenure.

The second section of the questionnaire is about organizational commitment. It is a modification of the 24-item organizational commitment questionnaire developed by Meyer and Allen (1991), in which consists of 18-item in total. Questions 1 to 6 are to measure affective commitment, Questions 7 to 12 are to measure continuance commitment, while Questions 13 to 18 are used to evaluate normative commitment.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. The Relationship between Age Group and Organizational Commitment

In order to find out the age group of the 199 respondents, they are required to answer the question "What is your age group?" The respondents were given three options to choose regarding their age group, which are Baby Boomer (49-67 years old), Generation X (34-48 years old) and Generation Y (13-33 years old). One way ANOVA analysis is used so as to investigate whether age group has an impact on organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is measured using Meyer and Allen's three-component model of commitment which comprises of affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

As presented in Table 1, the significant level is 0.00, which is below 0.05. Therefore, as an overall, there is significant difference between age group and organizational commitment. Referring to the mean values presented in the descriptive table, Baby Boomers are proven to have the highest level of organizational commitment among all age groups, with a mean value of 3.4218, followed by Generation X (mean=3.234) and Generation Y (mean=3.1292).

This is compatible to the statement developed by (Qureshi, 2012), Abdullah and Shaw (1999); (Qureshi, 2012). Newstrom (2007) which suggest that senior adults tend to have a higher level of organizational commitment as they have well-adapted to the work environment. Thus, they are less likely to move out from their comfort zone. Referring to the results, Baby Boomers are most committed to their employing organization, followed by Generation X and Generation Y. This finding is also associated with the result collected by Swiggard (2011), even though that study was conducted in a Western culture.

Different level of organizational commitment among different generations may due to the variation in life values, attitudes and educational background. Senior adults have higher needs of job security and they prefer to stay in the same organization. Whereas, younger generation tends to take more risk and they are more willing to explore new job opportunities.

Most Baby Boomers were taught by their parents to work hard in order to accumulate wealth. Therefore, they are less likely to take the risks of unknown future. During the grown-up stage of Generation X, living standards in Malaysia have been more elevated than the past. Employees from this generation start to emphasize on work-life balance, thus there is decline in organizational commitment among Generation X. Whereas, Generation Y is widely exposed to communicational technology, which affected their social affection (Lyons, 2011). In fact, Generation Y has greater familiarity than past generations with technology and internet (Kaifi, 2012). Vast information which they can assess through world-wide-web results in more confidence and less fear of uncertainties. For example, high access to various employment alternatives through Internet and social media indirectly encouraged the job hopping trend.

4.2. The Relationship between Educational Level and Organizational Commitment

In order to find out the relationship between educational level and organizational commitment, all respondents are required to fill their education level. One way ANOVA analysis is used to investigate whether educational level has a significant effect on organizational commitment. Levels of commitment for each category group would also be examined if the relationship is relevant.

As shown in Table 2, the significant level is 0.01, which is below 0.05. As an overall, there is a significant difference between educational level and organizational commitment. Referring to the mean values presented in the descriptive table, employees with “High School/ Diploma or Equivalent” has the highest level of organizational commitment among all, with a mean value of 3.37. This is followed by Master Degree (mean=3.33), Bachelor Degree (mean=3.33). Secondary School Leavers or lower level (mean=3.14) has the lowest score, while none of the respondents hold PhD degree in this survey. Secondary school leavers tend to receive less attractive compensation packages, which encourage them to hop for other jobs. According to Mowday *et al.* (1982), highly educated employees are more likely to feel unsatisfied and leave their job when their high expectations and needs are not fulfilled by their employer. From this result, those holding master degree; diploma and high school qualification show a higher level organizational commitment. If Mowday’s explanation is used, it reveals that expectations and needs of employees with master degree are fulfilled.

Generally, it is easier for white collar employees with higher qualifications to receive more attractive remuneration package and other terms of employment. All these extrinsic and intrinsic rewards contribute to higher level of organizational commitment. As for high school leavers and diploma holders, better career path; pride to work in a well-known firm and training opportunities might be the key contributor to higher level of commitment, as employers in

Damansara Heights are mostly large firms, such as Ernst & Young, Shell, HP and other multinational companies.

4.3. The Relationship between Organizational Tenure and Organizational Commitment

All respondents are also requested to answer the question “How long is your service tenure in this organization?” so as to examine the relation of organizational tenure to organizational commitment. One way ANOVA analysis is used to investigate whether organizational tenure has a significant impact on organizational commitment.

As shown in Table 3, the significant level is 0.00, which is below 0.05. Therefore, there is difference between organizational tenure and organizational commitment. Referring to the mean values presented in the descriptive table, employees who work for 10 years and above have the highest level of organizational commitment, with a mean value of 3.42. This is followed by those who work for 7-9 years (mean=3.30), 4-6 years (mean=3.24). The results indicate that those with a working tenure of less than a year or between 1 to 3 years have the lowest score. Thus, organizational tenure has a significant impact on organizational commitment.

Employees with long service tenure are likely to stay with their existing organization as much time and effort have been invested. [Ritzer and Trice \(1969\)](#) argue that side-bets, such as age and tenure will accumulate over time. Through increased tenure, employees gain seniority and connection within the organizations. As employees investment more time and effort in their jobs and organizations, it is more difficult to leave. This result is in line with the research of [Allen and Meyer \(1990\)](#).

4.4. The Relationship between Gender and Organizational Commitment

Independent sample T-test is utilized to find out the relations between gender and organizational commitment. There is no significant difference between gender and organizational commitment as the value in Sig (2-tailed) is 0.65, greater than 0.05. However, it has proven that organizational commitment of female employees was slightly higher than that of male employees, with a mean value 3.24 and 3.22 respectively.

This result is oppose with the finding collected by [Dodd-Mc and Wright \(1996\)](#) & [\(Khalili and Asmawi, 2012\)](#), for which the finding shows a lower organizational commitment among female employees than male employees. This is due to the fact that the said researches were conducted among Iranian and Canadian workers, where gender inequality does occur in the society and workplace. In Canada, for instance, women are given the same opportunity in access to education but there is gender discrimination in the workplace. As a result, Canadian female workers tend to have lower organizational commitment.

However, this finding is similar with the study of [Aven et al. \(1993\)](#) and [Marsden et al. \(1993\)](#), there is no significant relationship between organizational commitment and gender, if all employees are working under the same working conditions and treated equally.

4.5. The Relationship between Marital Status and Organizational Commitment

Independent T-test is selected in order to identify whether single and married employees tend to have different organizational commitment. Sig. (2-tailed) value presented in the first row is 0.46, which is greater than 0.05. Thus, it has proven that there is no significant difference between marital status and organizational commitment. Nonetheless, married employees have a greater mean value of 3.25 compared to single employees with 3.20. It can be concluded that married employees tend to be more committed than single employees.

The current study has yielded a dissimilar result as previous studies concluded that married workers tend to be more committed to their employers (Salami, 2008; Al-Kahtani, 2012). The argument of these researchers is that married employees are more committed as they have more financial responsibilities to their families. The opposite result might be due to the change of life style and purchasing pattern. High living expenses and higher demand for better living standard have caused more financial needs for both single and married employees. As such, there are no significant differences between marital status and organizational commitment in this finding.

5. CONCLUSION

In essence, a highly committed workforce is one of the most important assets of an organization. When there are expectations on employees to be committed and have satisfactory performance, there are responsibilities on organizations to provide employees a satisfactory job, working environment and remuneration packages. Hence, there is a necessity for organizations to understand the complexity and multifaceted nature of antecedents to organizational commitment, particularly the dynamic relationship between employees' personal characteristics and their organizational commitment (Qureshi, 2012). Findings from this research have a great implication on organizations as they could take the necessary measures to cater to employees' needs and wants in order to enhance their organizational commitment.

For example, 'Teach for Malaysia' Program has teamed up with various multinational companies (MNCs). Under this scheme, graduates who complete their one year teaching contract with 'Teach for Malaysia' are free to select to work in one of the listed MNCs for two years. They are also given the choice to work in different listed MNCs, each firm at a certain period of time. This allows graduates to explore the nature and operation of various firms without hopping for jobs elsewhere, while building up their organizational commitment.

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APPENDIXES

Table-1. Age and Overall Organizational Commitment

Descriptive		Organizational Commitment							
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
13-33 years old	92	3.1292	.41074	.04282	3.0442	3.2143	1.56	4.33	
34-48 years old	53	3.2034	.36118	.04961	3.1038	3.3029	2.06	4.28	
49-67 years old	54	3.4218	.31987	.04353	3.3345	3.5091	2.11	3.94	
Total	199	3.2284	.39259	.02783	3.1735	3.2832	1.56	4.33	
ANOVA		Organizational Commitment							
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
Between Groups	(Combined)	2.958	2	1.479	10.519	.000			
	Linear	2.913	1	2.913	20.717	.000			
	Term	2.759	1	2.759	19.625	.000			
	Deviation	.199	1	.199	1.413	.236			
Within Groups		27.559	196	.141					
Total		30.517	198						

Table-2. Educational level and Organizational Commitment

Descriptive		Organizational Commitment							
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Secondary school or Lower	4	3.1389	.41698	.20849	2.4754	3.8024	2.78	3.67	
High School/ Diploma or Equivalent	42	3.3717	.37689	.05816	3.2542	3.4891	2.56	4.33	
Bachelor Degree	129	3.1654	.40697	.03583	3.0945	3.2363	1.56	4.06	
Master Degree	24	3.3310	.23880	.04875	3.2302	3.4319	2.89	3.94	
Doctor Degree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Total	199	3.2284	.39259	.02783	3.1735	3.2832	1.56	4.33
ANOVA								
Organizational Commitment								
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	(Combined)		1.660	3	.553	3.738	.012	
	Linear Term	Unweight	.052	1	.052	.348	.556	
		Weighted	.103	1	.103	.694	.406	
		Deviation	1.557	2	.778	5.260	.006	
Within Groups			28.858	195	.148			
Total			30.517	198				

Table-3. Organizational Tenure and Organizational Commitment

Descriptive								
Overall OC								
					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Less than a year	32	3.1285	.50297	.08891	2.9471	3.3098	1.56	4.33
1-3 years	53	3.1048	.32112	.04411	3.0163	3.1933	2.22	3.67
4-6 years	45	3.2395	.32498	.04845	3.1419	3.3371	2.44	4.17
7-9 years	32	3.2951	.28096	.04967	3.1938	3.3964	2.44	3.83
10 years and above	37	3.4204	.45878	.07542	3.2675	3.5734	2.06	4.28
Total	199	3.2284	.39259	.02783	3.1735	3.2832	1.56	4.33
ANOVA								
Overall OC								
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Between Groups	(Combined)		2.641	4	.660	4.595	.001	
	Linear Term	Unweight	2.116	1	2.116	14.729	.000	
		Weighted	2.380	1	2.380	16.566	.000	
		Deviation	.261	3	.087	.605	.612	
Within Groups			27.876	194	.144			
Total			30.517	198				

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