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Introduction

Loyalty or commitment to organisations has declined, partly as a consequence of organisational downsizing. Expectations of having a ‘job for life’ with one company are no longer realistic. Such rewards originally formed the employees’ side of the psychological contract, in return for which they committed to the organisation. Unlike loyalty to the organisation, employees’ commitment to their fellow workers or to their own development may have strengthened. Other important desires, such as that for job satisfaction and meaningful work, are just as important today.

Employers can capitalise on these other needs with alternative strategies for engendering commitment, including job design.

The material discussed in this chapter is significant for several reasons. The downsizing era in large organisations during the 1980s and 1990s eroded job security and opportunities for upward career progression. As a consequence, organisational commitment declined and turnover increased. However, despite planned reductions in workforce numbers, organisations still need to avoid losing skilled or high-performing employees.

Therefore, new strategies are needed to retain those they do wish to keep.

In terms of the practice of management, this chapter will point out that life-long learning can replace the old notion of life-long employment. Job rotation or sideways moves may also encourage commitment to the organisation. Managers can implement strategies based on the job characteristics model that meet individual needs for growth.

There are a number of challenges facing organisations in relation to organisational commitment. These include the way the concept of organisational commitment is understood; utilising the benefits that organisations derive from high organisational commitment; whether different jobs attract different levels of organisational commitment; whether organisations can identify the characteristics of employees that guarantee high commitment; whether commitment is simply a western concept that is not transferable to other cultures; whether organisational commitment is really a good thing for employees; and whether organisational commitment can be maintained in an era of downsizing and, consequently, the way it informs organisational and individual action.
Defining organisational commitment

Although it is rarely explained in these terms, the concept of organisational commitment can be understood using ideas that describe personal relationships between individuals — for example marriage. Organisational commitment includes an idea of dedication, with a judgmental component. In marriage, this translates into fidelity. There is an emotional element in terms of positive feelings and attraction between the two parties. Then there is the intention to stay in the relationship. In some wedding ceremonies, this intent is conveyed by the words 'until death us do part'.

Organisational commitment is similar in that there are normative or prescriptive components. That is, it includes ideas about what should be done, as well as affective or feeling components, including emotional attachment.

The final element is a continuance or 'not leaving' component.

Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979, p.226) define organisational commitment as the 'relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in an organisation.' Their definition distinguishes between normative, affective and continuance commitment. The differences between these types of organisational commitment within this general definition are shown in table 5.1. Views from other authors have been included to give more depth to this definition.

The definitions in table 5.1 suggest that a range of positive behaviours should be exhibited by committed employees, as will be discussed later in this chapter. For example, when individuals are highly committed, their job becomes part of their identity, and 'invisible T-shirts inscribed with Kodak, DEC, or AT&T are sometimes impossible icons to wash off' (Hakim, cited in Brown 1995, p.16).

### Table 5.1: Three elements of organisational commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Some authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Represents the 'feeling' aspect of the attitude. Employees feel emotionally attached to, identify with and are highly involved with the organisation. Employees adopt management's values, or believe that their values and goals are compatible.</td>
<td>O'Reilly and Chatman (1986); Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance</td>
<td>Highly committed individuals want to, and intend to, stay with the organisation. Employees put a high price on the cost of leaving the organisation.</td>
<td>Brewer (1996); Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979); Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe and Waters-Marsh (1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of organisational commitment

Organisational commitment is important because it can result in lower attrition or turnover, lower absenteeism and greater work effort (Randall 1990, in Tan & Akhtar 1998; Robbins et al. 1998; and DeConinck & Bachmann 1994). The evidence for these outcomes is consistent, although the relationship is not always particularly strong (Randall 1990, in Tan & Akhtar 1998). The main evidence seems to link high commitment with lower turnover.

Turnover has negative consequences for organisations in terms of general instability, the cost of replacing those who leave and specific disruption to the workplace, including damage to relationships with customers, for example. For the employees, there can also be costs in terms of losing friendships (Meadows-Taylor 1999). Nevertheless, even the link between commitment and turnover is not necessarily simple or straightforward, as Cohen (1991) found that it is stronger in the early stages of employees' careers.

Another organisational advantage associated with high commitment is citizenship behaviour, which is unofficial or informal behaviour that is good for the organisation (Schappe 1998). In a related study, Knoop (1995) also showed that organisational commitment is related to turning up to work on time. This idea of 'tardiness' does not receive much attention in the literature, but it is desirable employee behaviour. This is particularly the case in customer-service-orientated industries such as retail and hospitality (Hawk & Sheridan 1999), or where shift-changeover operations are critical, such as in nursing.

Does organisational commitment improve productivity? It is hard to find strong and consistent evidence for a relationship between high organisational commitment and good work performance, in terms of productivity, quality and other indicators. Nevertheless, some evidence has been found amongst a group of 213 women working in clothing manufacturing in New Zealand (Putterill & Rohrer 1995). This was a piece-work operation, where each worker's output could be measured objectively. Therefore, it may have been easier to demonstrate that workers with higher commitment also produced more work than it would be in other types of jobs (Taylor & Pierce 1999). In another context, organisational commitment has been linked to better service quality amongst insurance salespeople (Boshoff and Mels 1995).

In summary, the benefits of high organisational commitment for organisations include lower turnover and, to a lesser extent, lower absenteeism, more effort, punctuality and good citizenship. Despite one component of commitment being willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation, there seems to be little real evidence of a link between high organisational commitment and productivity. This may be because the link does not actually exist, because productivity is harder to measure in some jobs, or because one of the most popular tests for measuring organisational commitment may not address the effort component very well (White & Parks 1995). Nonetheless, organisational commitment is desirable for organisations, at least in terms of retaining key employees.

Organisational commitment: challenging issues

The reader may be interested in the different types of occupations and what is known about their organisational commitment. Some details have been summarised in table 5.2, which shows that organisational commitment has been of interest to researchers throughout the 1990s. Commitment has been measured in a broad range of occupations and employment settings, and varies quite widely across these different settings.
Table 5.2: Different jobs and different levels of organisational commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of job (number of employees studied)</th>
<th>Comments on organisational commitment</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacists in Western Australian hospitals (n = 83)</td>
<td>Commitment was lower than for the average worker. This was due to high stress and under-staffing.</td>
<td>Savery and Syme (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate engineers early in their careers in the UK (n = 853)</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with promotion opportunities was related to low commitment.</td>
<td>Cramer (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses in Canada (n = 171)</td>
<td>High commitment was related to satisfaction with promotion opportunities.</td>
<td>Knoop (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing managers in the United States (n = 336)</td>
<td>Commitment depended on the availability of promotion opportunities.</td>
<td>DeConinck and Bachmann (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary teachers in the United States (n = 116)</td>
<td>Teachers tended to be committed to their profession rather than to their school.</td>
<td>Burrows and Munday (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public accountants in the United States, large chartered accounting firms (n = 100)</td>
<td>Commitment was moderate. This was attributed to negative views of change, and to low perceived job security.</td>
<td>Pasewark and Strawser (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information systems personnel in the US (n = 464)</td>
<td>Job design was useful for increasing commitment, but not for all individuals. It had more effect on those with stronger growth needs.</td>
<td>Igbaria and Parasuraman (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals in the New Zealand public service (n = 129)</td>
<td>Implementation of a performance management system had some positive effects on commitment.</td>
<td>Taylor and Pierce (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus drivers in Sydney (n = 179)</td>
<td>Commitment was considered to be quite high.</td>
<td>Brewer (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers in the United States (n = 40)</td>
<td>Commitment was relatively high.</td>
<td>Ofori-Dankwa, Kanthi and Arora (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public servants in Jordan (n = 293)</td>
<td>Commitment was higher than expected.</td>
<td>Awamleh (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military personnel in Canada (n = 473)</td>
<td>Commitment was high for this group.</td>
<td>Leiter and Clark (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank employees in Papua New Guinea (n = 63)</td>
<td>Commitment was very high for this group.</td>
<td>Ramos (1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One point that emerges from these research studies is that organisational commitment seems to be related to satisfaction with perceived promotion opportunities. Interestingly, the studies mostly focus on white-collar or professional jobs. Is organisational commitment relevant to blue-collar workers? This seems to be the case according to a study by Loscocco (1990). Over 3500 blue-collar workers were surveyed in this research and the results showed that their organisational commitment was in the standard range compared to most other workers.

### Determinants of organisational commitment

Given the benefits that may accrue to organisations from a workforce that is highly committed, is it possible to identify such employees? What determines employees' levels of organisational commitment? By amalgamating findings from nine different studies, McClurg (1999, p.18) concluded that employees who are more likely to demonstrate high organisational commitment are:

* females
* older workers
* those who are less well-educated
* those who have been with the organisation for a longer time
* those who believe they have fewer opportunities to change jobs
* those whose jobs have a lot of rules and procedures
* those who believe their organisation offers a lot of support
* those who are paid more.

In addition, there is some evidence that employees who come from single income families may be more likely to have higher commitment than those from dual-income families (Elloy & Flynn 1998). There are also some gender differences in the causes of organisational commitment. For women, social cohesion with their work colleagues is associated with higher organisational commitment, whereas this is not the case for males (Leiter & Clark 1994).

It might be tempting to think that all employers need to do is recruit female workers or older workers in the hope that they will be more highly committed. However, most readers would be aware that such a strategy would be in breach of the principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action (Norris 1998). Relying on such simple demographic characteristics is not necessarily advisable. Instead, this chapter will look at other processes that organisations can focus on to engender commitment amongst existing employees.

Caldwell and Chatman (1990) looked more closely at the organisational processes adopted in recruitment and selection, and at socialisation. They were able to show that positive organisational commitment can be generated by certain HR practices. These practices were providing opportunities for new employees to learn and accept the values of the company, exposing employees to core functions and using training and rewards to promote desired behaviours. Further, the folklore of the firm and role models should reinforce key values. Thus, their findings suggest that the organisation's culture and how it is transmitted can engender strong organisational commitment. This point, however, was not made frequently in the literature reviewed for this chapter.

### Is organisational commitment a western concept?

The applicability of organisational commitment in different cultures should be considered for at least two reasons. Firstly, globalisation has now brought together employees and management from many different cultures in new ways and in situations where new understanding is necessary (Pearson & Chong 1997; Jolley 1997; Kheammareun 1999). Secondly, it is important to question whether cultural values influence the usefulness of different management concepts such as organisational commitment (Geiger & Robertson 1998). Consequently, this issue will be addressed here.

There is an argument that many of the concepts taught in management and organisational behaviour texts are culture-bound or ethnocentric. They may be applicable only in western business cultures such as those enjoyed in the
United States, United Kingdom or Australia. This argument is well summarised by Pearson and Chong (1997, p. 357) as follows: 'One emergent dominant belief is that management is a set of universal principles that can be transferred from one country to another as if there is global relevance.' For example, job design has emerged as a key position in the literature as a way of increasing organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Glisson & Durick 1988; Johns, Xie & Fang 1992). Job design involves considering how parts of a job can be organised to form a more meaningful whole. It concentrates on improving jobs so that they are less routine, more varied in terms of the skills they utilise, and more challenging or enriched (Robbins et al. 1998). However, job design is based on western assumptions about autonomy and self-achievement. Such assumptions may not be relevant where collectivism is valued (in Singapore, for example), or where other cultural values such as the Confucian ethic are adhered to (in Chinese-owned organisations, for example) (Pearson & Chong 1997).

The argument that key management concepts are culture-specific has been extended to organisational commitment (Tan & Akhtar 1998). In the western view, the relationship between employer and employee is based on rational, logical and calculated contract-based understandings. The individual is the focus and essentially pursues self-interest. In contrast, the Confucian culture values self-in-relation-to-others, trust, harmony and the avoidance of conflict. These values lead to different types of employer-employee relationships in organisations that are Chinese-owned and based on Confucian values. The relationship between the superior and subordinate is one of paternalism and loyalty, where avoiding conflict and maintaining face is important.

Tan and Akhtar (1998) support their argument with evidence that normative commitment was higher than affective commitment amongst employees of a Chinese-owned bank in Hong Kong. They attributed this difference to the stronger influence of obligation and duty in the Confucian tradition. Their research also accorded with Hofstede's (1980) finding that commitment has stronger moral or prescriptive overtones in other cultures than it does in the west.

A second example of the need to take cultural differences into account comes from a study of 286 Malaysian nurses. Pearson and Chong (1997) found that, in Malaysia, relationship-orientated job design may have more impact on satisfaction and commitment than does western-style task-orientated job design. Such relationship-orientated design includes feedback from others, whereas feedback from the job itself is prescribed in the well-known job characteristics model of Hackman and Oldham (1980), which is based on western job design principles. Two other aspects of the relationship focus are dealing with others and building relationships at work that are predictable and harmonious.

As in Malaysia, Korean workers have values that are aligned with the Confucian ethic, although the cultural and political economy also shape some differences in workers' attitudes within each country. Korean organisational commitment was relatively high compared to United States and Japanese workers (Bae & Chung 1997).

In a fourth example, organisational commitment has been shown to be a relevant concept in the Japanese business culture (White & Parks 1995). In fact, Japanese workers have high organisational commitment because of a strong national tradition of lifetime employment, job security and seniority-based promotion. These unique features of Japanese work even carry over to Japanese firms based in the United States. United States engineers in a Japanese firm (that was also located in the United States) had higher organisational commitment than United States engineers in a United States firm (Ofori-Dankwa, Kanthi & Arora 1999). However, the instrument used to measure organisational commitment in western firms does not completely tap into the 'willingness to work hard' dimension of commitment, when applied to Japanese workers (White & Parks 1995).

The final example in this section comes from Mexico. With the expansion of United States firms into Mexico, there is now more focus on understanding the attitudes and behaviours of Mexican workers, including their levels of organisational commitment. The way that cultural factors affect the validity of western management concepts can be seen in Mexican workers' views of management initiatives to
Organisational commitment and employees

What about employees? Much of this discussion has focused on what organisations may extract from the exchange, but what do employees gain from their commitment? Owing to the changing nature of organisations and of employees, both of which have influenced the nature of the employer-employee relationship, this is a complex question.

Very little discussion takes place concerning the reverse relationship between employers and employees in the debate about organisation commitment — concerning the commitment of organisations to employees. This is despite quite compelling United States evidence that organisations who are committed to their workers exhibited much higher share price growth than did other organisations. Hawk and Sheridan (1999) argue that this growth is mediated by excellent customer service, which can be achieved only with a committed workforce. There may be a 'commitment gap' in so far as employees perceive that they are substantially more committed to organisations than organisations are to them (Sales and Marketing Management, April 1999). There is even a question as to whether strong organisational commitment is actually desirable in the current business environment.

There are alternative views, which argue that high levels of organisational commitment are not desirable because they can stifle creativity, engender conformity and generate the sort of strain that results in burnout (Tan & Akhtar 1998). For example, employees may be reluctant to suggest new or radical ideas, or to engage in diverse thinking. They may be so involved with the organisation and its fortunes that they suffer from stress. These criticisms suggest that increasingly high levels of organisational commitment should not be seen as an unending source of positive benefits to organisations and employees. Rather, commitment is one of several aspects of the employer-employee relationship that organisations should strive to improve, in balance with other factors.

Organisational commitment in an era of restructuring?

Organisational commitment can be said to develop on the basis of social exchange. That is, organisational commitment is given in return for pay, promotions and job security (Mattaz 1989, in Brewer 1996). Satisfaction with the organisation's career structure is associated with higher commitment (Cramer 1993). Therefore, another organisational factor of interest in this chapter is career structures, or opportunities for progression based on promotion. Career opportunities fulfil status needs according to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy. Such career structures have a role in engendering commitment and effort and in encouraging long tenure (Stinchcombe 1974).

Thus the traditional psychological contract traded lifelong employment and job security for
employee loyalty and commitment. Recent events in organisations, as well as changes in
the demographics and values of employees, have resulted in a situation where the tra-
ditional contract may no longer apply. As a consequence, it appears that organisational
commitment has declined. However, organisations may now be facing a dilemma, in that
they do wish to attract and keep high-performing employees, even if they cannot
offer the job security that formerly contributed to commitment.

This dilemma can be further illustrated as follows. Attempting to achieve the objectives of
effectiveness and cost reduction means organisations tend to undermine the welfare and
well-being of their employees' (Baruch 1998, p. 141). However, in terms of downsizing, the
'slash-and-burn regime' of the early 1990s has not contributed to long-term productivity
(Littler 1998). Similarly, other organisational changes such as relocation may have negative
effects on employees, including on their commitment (Lawson & Angle 1998).

Recent feedback from nearly 500 companies suggests that Australian organisations are experi-
cencing a backlash from a decade of downsizing. The backlash is being felt in the form of unac-
ceptably high turnover rates. The workforce is now much more mobile and much less loyal
than in earlier times. Up to 66 per cent of Australian employees have little or no under-
standing of, or commitment to, organisational values. Companies are finding it difficult to
retain the employees that they want to keep (Meadows-Taylor 1999). In another study of
1000 Australian managers, just over half indicated that their loyalty to employers had
decreased (Marchant 1998). Thus, reports from both organisations and individuals suggest that
downsizing has negative consequences for organisational commitment.

To describe this situation in other words, the 'death of corporate paternalism' (Davidson
1991, p. 34) means that it is no longer realistic to expect strong loyalty from employees in
exchange for lifelong job security. In fact, research shows that organisational commitment
has declined in most industries, age groups, income groups and job types (Stum 1999). Far-
ther, the relationships between organisational commitment and the two important outcomes
of turnover and absenteeism have declined throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Randall 1990;
and Cohen 1993, in Baruch 1998). This is not to say that all employees no longer have any loy-
alty to their employers. On the contrary, it is still possible to find evidence of commitment
(Hawk & Sheridan 1999). However, this commitment may not be based on the same reasons
or factors as in earlier times.

As we begin the new millennium, there are several factors that make it less likely that organis-
ational commitment can be maintained, or even that it is a realistic goal of management.
These factors include employees being subject to frequent change, sometimes on a 'like it or
not' basis, and explicit contracts replacing the old psychological contract. As a consequence,
some argue that today's employees are more likely to be committed to their profession, to
their workmates or colleagues and to other activities outside of work such as family and
leisure (Robbins et al. 1998). This idea of commitment to the work group is elaborated by
Poole and Jenkins (1997). They distinguish between commitment to fellow workers, which is
much more specific and focused, and commitment to the organisation as a whole, which
is a more abstract concept. Interestingly, the majority of Australian managers did not feel that
their loyalty to colleagues had decreased (Marchant 1998).

There have been other changes besides downsizing that might also affect organisational
commitment, as businesses begin the new mil-
leennium. One of these is the increase in 'periph-
eral' roles in organisations. There has been a
substantial increase in the incidence of tem-
porary employment in Australia (Bramble, Littler
& O'Brien 1996). Temporary positions are
referred to as 'the periphery' in the core-versus-
ing model of new organisations (Robbins et al.
1998). There is at least one organisational com-
mitment issue that arises with this newer,
increasingly prevalent group of workers: whether they are committed to the organ-
isation, to their own careers, or to the employ-
ment agency that organises the temporary
position (where one is involved). Research has
suggested that these employees are loyal to
both the employing organisation and the
agency, although in many cases their primary
The aim is to obtain a permanent position (McClurg 1999). Thus, organisational commitment or lack of it may not be an issue in dealing with 'peripheral' workers. These issues, however, have not been extensively investigated.

**Future directions — alternative strategies for organisations and managers**

Regarding the provision by management of facilities and practices which might foster commitment, Putterill and Rohrer (1995, p.61) observe that 'grudgingly, ignorantly or lavishly, the common root of the problem is the lack of understanding of the factors and processes which promote organisational commitment.' That is, it would seem that organisations do not know how to, or do not want to, take action to enhance the commitment of their employees. This is particularly true in relation to the negative consequences of organisational downsizing discussed in the previous section.

What can be done to combat downsizing's negative consequences for organisational commitment? One way that management can ensure less drastic fallout is to make sure that downsizing is done properly. This means with due attention to supporting those employees to be retrenched and to following equitable procedures. Consequently, the remaining employees receive a more positive message about management's concern for them. The damage to organisational commitment arising from downsizing may therefore be contained (Naumann, Bennett, Bies & Martin 1998). Unfortunately, in Australia management has not been particularly effective in properly executing downsizing, particularly with regards to the procedural justice elements of the process. Loyalty to the organisation appears to have declined as a result (Marchant 1998).

More general actions that management can take to increase organisational commitment include:

- better communication
- improved person-job fit
- effective induction
- clear and available promotion opportunities
- positive mentoring (Robbins et al. 1998).

However, promotion (and job security) as the core elements of the old psychological contract are not as available as they were in the pre-downsizing era (Marchant, Critchley & Littler 1997). Organisations need to develop a 'new deal' or exchange between employers and employees (Baruch 1998; Meadows-Taylor 1999). Some of the conditions that Australian employees would like as part of the new exchange are:

- better work–family balance
- opportunities for personal development
- being fairly rewarded for their efforts (Meadows-Taylor 1999).

Other useful suggestions on what management can do to increase commitment are also available. For example, Stum (1999) lists the following 'actions drivers', based on his large-scale, current research in the United States:

- Address work–life balance
- Provide compensation that is seen to be equitable and adopt a 'cafeteria benefits' approach that recognises individual differences
- Attend to the organisational culture and provide leadership which exhibits a clear sense of direction
- Anticipate and implement change programs that are effective and well managed
- Ensure that employees are recruited and developed based on sound, high-level skills, as employees feel more committed to an organisation if they believe that their work colleagues' skills are up to scratch.

There is some overlap between these lists of suggestions, particularly work–life balance, pay equity and a skills development focus. These suggestions for improving organisational commitment also appear to reflect ideas that are advanced in the HR professional literature as constituting good practice, given the current nature of organisations and employees.

Organisations may be advised to focus on providing opportunities for development and employability. The advice is well described by Doherty and Horsted (1995, p. 29) as follows.
Organisations are buying only half of the new psychological contract. They cannot offer job security, but at the same time they do not want to lose the traditional commitment and loyalty of their employees. If organisations move to employability rather than employment as a conceptual model, they must find alternative ways to develop skills, and to retain and motivate employees.

Looking at alternatives to the traditional notion of advancement or promotion, Igbaria and Parasuraman (1994) suggest the idea of capitalising on employees’ satisfaction with their developmental prospects. While not representing promotions, these prospects are still career-enhancing. They allow for challenge and the acquisition of new skills by moving to new positions or new projects. Igbaria and Parasuraman (1994) found that employees’ perceptions of their developmental prospects positively influenced organisational commitment. This finding concurs with Meadows-Taylor (1999) since opportunity for personal development is one current employee desire.

One developmental opportunity that may lead to increased organisational commitment is an involvement program, which draws on the psychological underpinnings of job design (Hackman 1977). Involving employees more frequently in decisions about how their work is done, and other aspects of their work, may lead to greater commitment (Juravich 1996). There is some evidence that such programs also lead to lower absenteeism and increased job satisfaction. For example, a participatory management style allows employees to experience responsibility for work outcomes (Hackman 1977). This style has been linked to higher organisational commitment (Boshoff & Mels 1995).

Yet there is little consistent evidence that such programs actually improve the performance of individuals, or that of the firm as a whole (Juravich 1996). Similarly, as noted above, organisational commitment, while having several benefits for employers, does not in itself seem to be strongly linked to actual improvements in performance or productivity.

Still on the negative side, Juravich (1996) also points out that such programs add responsibility to employees’ roles, and may actually lead to adverse consequences such as increased work stress. The value of job redesign also depends on how strong employee growth needs are (Igbaria & Parasuraman 1994). In summary, there is some evidence that participation or involvement can in some instances generate advantages, particularly if the right employees, with the right expectations, are involved. This discussion suggests that job redesign may not be a universal panacea to organisational ills including low commitment. Rather, successful implementation depends on understanding the diverse needs of employees, amongst other factors.

One example of the necessary leadership and top management commitment is given by Mescon and Mescon (1996) in a study of a United States pest control company. The managers of this organisation were all expected to spend 3 days in the field with customers and employees every week. CEO Gary Rollins travelled the country, meeting frequently with his managers. He believed that by communicating often, sharing his visions and ‘putting his money where his mouth is’, he could generate enthusiasm and commitment amongst his employees. This example also supports the emphasis put on communication above.

Future directions — alternative strategies for employees

Instead of encouraging employees to be dependent on the organisation for their identity, and thus committed to the employer, perhaps a philosophy of continuous learning should be adopted. Here the idea is that employees should be committed to their own continuous improvement, through learning and development (Webber 1997). This will free them from being dependent on their employer. From the organisational viewpoint, such workers are less likely to have strong organisational commitment, which may mean greater turnover. However, that turnover may be less costly than having low-performing or unproductive employees and is certainly less traumatic than being forced into downsizing.

This encouragement for employees to take responsibility for their own learning, and thus
ensure their employability, is consistent with observations that employees are demanding more interesting work. Further, lack of learning has been implicated as a cause of retrenchment for Australian managers (Marchant & Littler 1998). Retrenchment is the ultimate expression of an organisation’s lack of commitment to employees.

In summary, employees should focus on their own employability. They should commit to their own development and learning rather than to the rapidly vanishing benevolence of any one employer. Some authors even urge employees to ‘sever the corporate umbilical cord’ (Garcia 1997, p. 23).

Conclusion

The following main points have been made in this chapter. Although definitions of organisational commitment vary, there are common elements of loyalty or obligation, aligning employee values with those of the organisation, and retaining membership in the organisation.

Organisational commitment is desirable because it is associated with lower attrition and possibly other advantages, although any link to productivity is not clearly established. Organisational commitment has been measured and analysed amongst white-collar workers and blue-collar workers. The level varies quite markedly, depending on several factors including promotion opportunities and job security.

There are also certain characteristics of employees that may signal stronger commitment, including gender, age and perceptions of fewer outside opportunities. Further, one of the key factors associated with commitment is satisfaction with promotion opportunities and job security. However, given the extent of downsizing in western nations throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this form of the psychological contract has been severed, or at least weakened.

Culturally, there are variations between countries and organisations, but organisational commitment is still a relevant concern in both western and eastern cultures. Again, types, levels and causes vary and therefore so do appropriate strategies for harnessing this employee attribute.

New strategies for organisations and management include capitalising on employee growth needs through rotation, involvement, participation and relationships with colleagues. Organisations can also add other benefits to the employer–employee exchange. These benefits should take into account a more diverse range of employee desires, such as that for work–life balance. Finally, employees are strongly advised to keep learning and take responsibility for their own development.

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