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JOB CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTORS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

Harry Obi – Nwosu

Department of psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Joe-Akunne Chiamaka O

Department of psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Oguegbe Tochukwu M

Department of psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

ABSTRACT

The study examined job characteristics as predictors of organizational commitment among private sector workers in Anambra state of Nigeria. Two hundred and thirty-two (232) participants comprising 115 males and 117 females aged between 17 – 70 years with a mean age of 29.72 years and standard deviation of 6.82 participated in the study. Two instruments were used: Job Characteristics Scale (Hackman and Oldham, 1975), and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Meyer and Allen, 1993).The hypothesis stated that job characteristics dimensions will predict organizational commitment among employees of private organizations, and it was partially accepted because only two dimensions of job characteristics namely dealing with others (β = .27, t = 3.80, p<.01) and task identity (β = .20, t = 2.26, p<.01) predicted organizational commitment while the remaining five dimensions; skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback from the job, and feedback from agents did not predict organizational commitment. The study strongly suggests that job characteristics are a predictor of employees' commitment.

Keywords: Job characteristics, Organizational commitment, Private sector workers.

INTRODUCTION

With the rate of globalization and industrialization witnessed all over the world, there seems to have been an unprecedented increase in the number and kinds of organizations that are springing up to meet different needs. Some of these organizations are in the financial sector, the telecommunications sector and a host of others. One of the many factors that have enhanced the functionality of these organizations is the individuals who work in such organizations (i.e. the

employees). Even in organizations where there are more operating machines than human beings, the fact remains that human beings are needed to operate the machines and to direct the affairs of such organizations (Adeyinka *et al.*, 2007). Due to the importance of employees in organizations, their commitment may go a long way in determining how well organizations achieve their set goals and objectives. As a result, it will be pertinent for organizations to pay attention to the well being and satisfaction of their employees in order to increase their (employees) organizational commitment. It therefore follows, that a responsible organization will strive to provide enabling work environment and make sure that the organizational framework gives shape, support and satisfaction to its employees that will enhance employee's organizational commitment (Adeyinka *et al.*, 2007).

High productivity and performance of most organizations could not be realized without employees support and contribution. This is because employees are partly responsible for development of strategy, and the achievement of organizations' goals. It is in this connection that employee satisfaction is thought to be one of the primary requirements of a well run organization and considered an imperative by corporate managers (Khalid and Irshad, 2010). It is a common belief that the future of a business enterprise depends on the level of its workforce (employees). Indeed, employee's commitment to the organization is likened to establishment of bonding, which enables the worker to optimize input into the organization, hence increase productivity of the organization. On this premise, it becomes alluring to examine the impact of Job Characteristics on employees' commitment to the organization.

Allen and Meyer (1996) defined organizational commitment as a psychological link between an employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization. According to Meyer and Allen (1997) three component model of commitment, there are three "mind-sets" which characterizes an employee's commitment to the organization namely; affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to employee's perception of the emotional attachment or identification with the organization. Continuance commitment refers to employee's perception of the cost of leaving the organization to another place. Normative commitment is the employees' perception of their normal obligation to the organization. Common to these three approaches is the view that commitment is a psychological state that characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization and has implications for the decision to continue membership of it.

Organizational commitment could also be referred to as the extent to which an employee develops an attachment and feels a sense of allegiance to his or her employer (Redmond, 2010). Mowday *et al.* (1982), saw organizational commitment as a strong belief in an organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of an organization and a strong desire to remain a member of the organization. Mullins (1999) postulated three pillars of organizational commitment. According to the theorist, committed employees in any organization must possess three major characteristics of: sense of belonging to the organization, sense of excitement in the

job, and confidence in management leadership. Based on this Martins and Nicholls (1999), viewed commitment as encapsulating "giving all of you while at work". This commitment entails a number of things such as using time constructively, paying attention to details, making extra effort to attain the organizational goals and so on.

Job characteristics are the extent that a job is structured to provide regular feedback as well as a sense of task completion, and for employees to monitor their own behaviour and gain an increased sense of personal control (Greenberger and Strasser, 1986). Personal control is an individuals' belief that he or she can effect a change in a desired direction. According to Lawler (1992), an increase in perceived control strengthens emotional bonds with an organization. Thus a heightened sense of autonomy or personal control has positive consequences for employees' attitudes and behaviours at work. Chiu and Chen (2005) add that job characteristics are those attributes of job, which have motivational functions for employees. (Oliver *et al.*, 2005), claimed that perceived job characteristics would influence the motivation and commitment of employees. This is in line with Mottaz (1988) that job characteristics such as variety and autonomy are well established determinants of organizational commitment.

(Hackman and Lawler, 1971) suggested that job characteristics, such as skill variety, task identity, autonomy and feedback motivated employees in their job commitment. According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), the job characteristics model stipulate that the way jobs are perceived in terms of these five core job characteristics (Skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback) tend to impact three particular psychological states in employees which include: experienced meaningfulness of work (i.e. the extent that the work is seen as making a difference to others), felt responsibility (i.e. the extent that the worker assumes responsibility for his or her work), and knowledge of results (i.e. the extent to which the worker is aware of the quality of his/her work). Hackman and Oldham had established the five core job characteristics before it was expanded to seven dimensions namely; skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback from job, feedback from agents and dealing with others.

As regards organisational commitment of workers (especially those in private sectors), there is divergence of opinions among researchers (Salami, 2008). Some researchers believe that Nigerian private sector workers are not committed to their organisations (Olugbile, 1996). Others believe that they are committed to organisational goals but that at times it is the organisations that do not show commitment to the plight of the workers (Alarape and Akinlabi, 2000). They believe that organisational commitment reflects one side of the reciprocal relationship between the employer and the employees and as such each party has to play its role.

Private sector workers' commitment may not only be as a result of just personal decision of workers to be committed to their work. Job characteristics such as (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback from the job, feedback from the agents and dealing with others)

may have a high influence in the level of commitment among workers (Cable and Judge, 1994; Chiu and Chen, 2005) Motivating job characteristics such as meaningful work, autonomy and feedback maximize the possibility for internal motivation. According to Jernigan and Kohut. (2002), satisfaction with autonomy (perceived independence), status (sense of importance) and policies (satisfaction with organisational demand) are all significant predictors of commitment. Thus, specific characteristics of a job can increase an employee's sense of attachment to the organisation. Understanding how one's job contributes to interdependent outcomes enhances feelings of embeddedness and accountability. Similarly, awareness of outcomes (feedback) can lead to a strong feeling of mutual responsibility. A job that allows a high degree of autonomy and the absence of close supervision suggests a situation characterized by trust(Coetzee and Rothmann, 2005).

Empirical studies have also provided strong connections among these variables. Sneed and Herman (1990) in their study using supervisory (n = 45) and non-supervisory staff (n = 172), found job characteristics for supervisory and non-supervisory staff to be positively related (p = 0.02) with organizational commitment while individually they found skill variety, dealing with others, feedback and autonomy to be the only significant individual job characteristics. In two separate studies (Durham *et al.*, 1994), and (Bhuian *et al.*, 1996) found inconsistent relationships between job characteristics and organisational commitment. Only two of the seven job characteristics were significantly related to organisational commitment (skill variety and feedback, p<0.01). However, Steers (1977) found task identity to be significantly related to organisational commitment.

Also, comparing organisational commitment and job characteristics among private and public sector managers, (Flynn and Tannebaum, 1993) found a stronger relationship between job characteristics and organisational commitment among private sector managers than their counterparts in the public sector. A study by (Feather and Rauter, 2004) involving permanent and temporary teachers in Victoria, Australia, revealed a positive relationship between organisational commitment and organisational identification, variety, skill utilization and organisational behaviour. A lot of studies have shown organisational commitment and autonomy to be positively related(Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). For instance, a study conducted by Colarelli *et al.* (1987)Colarelli, yielded a positive correlation of 0.31 between organisational commitment and autonomy. The full sample for this study consisted of 468 accountants in eleven accounting firms in the United States. The analyzed sample for the study comprised 280 participants. The study indicated that the lack of autonomy and the use of close supervision in organisations result in diminished performance and employee stress.

Most studies of the behavioural outcomes of job characteristics (Seyer, 1998) have focused on employees in public establishments and in the west hence the need for milieu relevant study that is focused on employees in private sector organizations. The question then becomes: will job characteristic dimensions predict organizational commitment of employees in private

organizations? To address this question, a hypothesis was formulated thus: Job characteristics dimensions will predict organizational commitment among employees of private organizations.

METHOD

Participants

Participants of the study were two hundred and thirty-two (232) employees selected through probability sampling from 16(sixteen) private organizations in the three senatorial zones (Central, North and South) of Anambra State, Southeast region of Nigeria. They comprised of 115(49.6%) males and 117(50.4%) females, whose age ranged from 17 to 70 years with a mean age of 29.72years and standard deviation of 6.82. They all attained a minimum of high school education, and were confirmed staff.

Instrument

Two instruments were used for the study: Hackman and Oldham (1975) Job Characteristics Scale (JCS) and Meyer and Allen (1993) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). In addition, demographic variables which include gender, age, marital status, educational qualification and length of service in organization were included in the overall (collapsed) instrument used for the study. A cover letter was included to seek the consent of the participants and to reassure them of the genuine purpose of the research.

The Job Characteristics Scale (JCS) was developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) and validated for Nigerian use by Omoluabi (2000). The JCS assesses employees perceptions of seven (7) principal job characteristics. The seven characteristics or sub-scales of JCS are: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback from the job, feedback from the agents and dealing with others. There are both direct scoring and reverse scoring items. Each of the sub-scales could be scored separately. The scoring was done on a 7(seven)-point scale ranging from 1=''very inaccurate'' to 7=''very accurate'' indicating the extent to which the items apply to a participant. Fried and Ferris (1987) in a Meta analysis reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .20 to .90. Also, Hackman and Oldham validated the JCS by intercorrelating the scores of the seven sub-scales with the factor structure of the responses to the individual items and obtained a convergent validity coefficient ranging from .16 to .51 (median .24). A reliability co-efficient (cronbach alpha) was obtained for job characteristics dimensions (skill variety .72, task identity .50, task significance .48, autonomy .40, feedback from job .68, feedback from agents .64 and dealing with others .58). These confirmed the reliability and validity of the JCS for the purpose of this study. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was developed by Meyer and Allen (1993) and adapted for Nigerian use by Gbadamosi (2006). It is designed to assess employee commitment to an organization. OCQ measures three dimensions of organizational commitment namely; Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment. Meyer and Allen (1993), reported internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach alpha) for affective commitment (.82), continuance commitment

(.74), and Normative Commitment (.83). Similarly, using African samples, Gbadamosi (2006) obtained internal consistency alpha reliability coefficients of .73 for affective commitment, .74 for continuance commitment and .66 for normative commitment. A reliability co-efficient (Cronbach alpha) was obtained for organizational commitment (affective commitment .65, continuance commitment .70 and normative commitment .50)

Procedure

The researchers identified eighteen private sector organizations that had no less than one hundred and fifty workers, which were also in good standing with the Federal Inland Revenue Service (a measure of viability) and sought the permission of the Chief Executive Officers to carry out the study in their organizations.   Out of the eighteen (18) organizations selected, only five (5) organizations from the central senatorial district, five(5) from the north, and six(6) from the south, totaling sixteen(16) organizations granted the permission. The researchers then worked with the public relations managers of the organizations to reach the individual workers. It was during their meetings that copies of the questionnaire were distributed and completed by every willing staff who met the criterion of having been confirmed (not ad hock). Hence participants were selected through probability technique. A total of 264 copies of the questionnaire were distributed out of which 241 were returned but 232 were properly completed, giving a return rate of 91.3% and 96.3% usable.

Design and Statistics

The study has job characteristics as its predictor variable, while organizational commitment is the criterion variable. Correlation design was adopted for the study while Multiple Regression statistic was used in testing the hypothesis of this study.

Results

The results of the statistical analysis of the data obtained in the study are presented in below.

Table-1. Presented the summary of multiple regression analysis of job characteristics dimensions with organizational commitment.

Predictor Variables	R	R^2	F	B	t	P
	.37	.13	4.868			
Skill Variety				.025	.299	.765
Task Identity				.199	2.261	.025
Task significance				-.016	-.207	.836
Autonomy				.025	.355	.723
Feedback from the Job				.033	.465	.642
Feedback from Agents				.025	.321	.748
Dealing with Others				.272	3.801	.000

Results from Table 1 indicate that jointly, all the job characteristics dimensions accounted for 13% variance in organizational commitment, with $F_{(7, 220)} = 4.87$, $P<.00$; R = .37, $R^2 = .13$. While independently, only dealing with others ($\beta = .27$, t = 3.80, P < .00) followed by task identity ($\beta = $

.20, t = 2.26, P <.02) made a positive significant contribution in predicting organizational commitment. Thus the hypothesis was partially accepted because not all job characteristics dimensions were significant contributors to organizational commitment; it was observed that dealing with others predicted organizational commitment at .27% followed by task identity at .19% while skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback from job and feedback from agents had no significant predictive power.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study which showed that only two dimensions (dealing with others and task identity) of job characteristics predicted organizational commitment whereas skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback for job and feedback from agents did not predict organizational commitment is not in consonance with many of the past empirical evidence, though they are in tandem with many others. Steers (1977) found task identity to be significantly related to organizational commitment, while Sneed and Herman (1990) comparing supervisory and non-supervisory staff job characteristics with organizational commitment found 'dealing with others' to be significantly related to organizational commitment. This is perhaps because when employees are left to do work independently from beginning to end (task identity) before supervision and are encouraged to work closely with others as a team (dealing with others), commitment in their work increases thereby improving productivity, reducing tension, increasing job satisfaction, therefore increasing employee's sense of attachment to the organization.

In contrast to the above findings, Durham *et al.* (1994) and Bhuian *et al.* (1996) found only two of the seven job characteristics dimensions (skill variety and feedback) to be significantly related to organizational commitment. Also Feather and Rauter (2004), using permanent and temporary teachers in Victoria, Australia revealed a positive relationship between organizational commitment and skill variety.

However, one would have expected that in the present study all the Job characteristics dimensions could have predicted organizational commitment just like the studies of Allen. *et al.* (2004) study among 255 social and human service employees across northwest Ohio, and that of Flynn and Tannebaum (1993) study among private sector managers which found a strong prediction/relationship between job characteristics dimensions and organizational commitment. This is because Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model stipulated that the way jobs are perceived in terms of these job characteristics dimensions tend to impact three particular psychological states in employees which include "experienced meaningfulness of work"(i.e. the extent that the work is seen as making a difference to others), "felt responsibility" (i.e. the extent that the worker assumes responsibility for his or her work), and "knowledge of results" (i.e. the extent to which the worker is aware of the quality of his/her work) and this it is believed will help to enhance/improve employees' commitment.

Again, it has been observed that characteristics of a job can help to increase an employee's performance, attitude and responsibility to the organization which might lead to commitment. It follows that job structure tends to determine to a large extent the organizational commitment of workers hence the imperativeness of structuring jobs in a way that it will become motivating, achievable and enjoyable to the workers. When jobs are meaningful and have good feedback, they tend to maximize internal motivation. Thus jobs that are very difficult or over tasking can decrease an employee's sense of attachment to the organization.

Thus, it is recommended that employers should lay more emphasis on specifying and describing jobs in organizations and encourage them to work closely with others as a team (dealing with others) because this tends to enhance productivity, reduce stress and make workers feel relaxed and committed. They should also try to reduce the hours spent on supervision, allowing their employees to work more independently (task identity) because it is seen to enhance commitment

Limitations

Although generalization of results of this study is limited by its scope, the study is nonetheless a major contribution to existing literature on the extent of relationship between job characteristics and organizational commitment. It is also relevant for employers and managers of organization who are desirous of improving their productivity. Further study in this area is advocated, so as to close gaps that have not been covered by the present study, such as cultural variables and other kinds of organizations.

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