CORRELATION BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT (120 WORDS)

This research investigates the relationship between personality traits and organisational commitment in the hotel industry. The research focused on a sample of ten centrally located 4/5 star hotels having 80+ rooms in Perth, Western Australia. The study utilised the big-five personality factor markers from Goldberg’s (1999) International Personality Item Pool and Meyer and Allen’s (1997) revised Affective Commitment and Continuous Commitment Scales. The respondents (N=99) were from all employee levels across the hotels. The study found that strong positive correlations exist between the personality dimensions of agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability and the affective commitment dimension of organisational commitment. Positive correlations also exist between conscientiousness and emotional stability on one hand, and continuance commitment on the other hand.

Keywords Organisational commitment; Personality; Human Resource Management

A significant challenge for sustainability within the global service industry is competition not only for customers, but also for employees. This is evidenced clearly within the hospitality industry where due to the transient nature of the workforce, it is generally accepted that having a committed workforce places an organisation in a position of sustainable competitive advantage (Cairncross & Kelly 2008; Meyer & Allen 1997). Organisational commitment has been argued to be the ‘driving force behind an organisation’s performance’ (Suliman & Iles 2000:408). Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979: 226) define organisational commitment as ‘the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organisation’.

A general assumption underpinning modern management thinking is that high levels of organisational commitment will relate positively to behaviours favourable to organisational effectiveness in a number of ways such as low turnover rates and better employee job performance (McShane & Travaglione 2007). Other researchers (McCrae & Costa 1997; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein 1991) present links
between personality and employee performance. However, there is a lack of literature that explores the links between personality and organisational commitment. This study aims to build on research by Erdheim, Wang and Zickar (2006) by implementing an adaptation of their study in terms of organisational commitment and personality within the hotel industry, thus adding empirically-based evidence to current knowledge concerning the relationship between personality and organisational commitment in the hotel industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

The hotel industry is a people industry, characterised by labour intensity and is reliant on service rather than product differentiation for competitive advantage (Kim, Shin & Umbreit 2007). To improve service quality and encourage organisational commitment, human resource (HR) managers in the hotel industry need to go beyond traditional reward systems and establish what really motivates hotel employees and provides job satisfaction (Chitiris 1990; Weaver 1988). Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) state that essentially, organisational commitment represents something beyond passive loyalty to an organisation. ‘It involves an active relationship with the organisation such that individuals are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the organisation’s well-being’ (Mowday, Steers & Porter 1979: 226). In an attempt to improve the construct, Meyer and Allen (1984) initially proposed that a distinction be made between affective (emotional attachment to the organisation) and continuance (perceived costs of leaving) commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) further developed their understanding of the construct by identifying three distinct components to organisational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

The most widely investigated dimension of organisational commitment is affective commitment, defined by Allen and Meyer (1990: 1) as ‘employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation’. Continuance commitment is derived from Becker’s (1960) notion of side-bets, and results from a transactional understanding of the relationship employees have with an organisation. It reflects a utilitarian perspective based on exchanges with the organization. An underlying assumption is that individuals invest in the organisation by staking something they value. Finally, normative commitment includes a moral component since it refers to ‘employees’ feelings of
obligation to remain with the organisation’ (Allen & Meyer 1990: 1). According to Wiener (1982), this aspect indicates that individuals will exhibit certain behaviours to support the organisation and its activities because they believe it is the right and moral thing to do. Several researchers contend that the affective and normative commitment constructs cannot be sufficiently differentiated, and that the normative dimension has a low level of reliability (Ferres, Travaglione & Firns 2003; Jaros 1997; Meyer and Allen 1997; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnytsky 2002). Following these researchers, only affective commitment and continuance commitment are examined in this study.

Outcomes of Organisational Commitment

Much of the interest in organisational commitment is due to the idea that it is an important part of an employee’s psychological state. It is generally acknowledged that employees with high levels of organisational commitment contribute to a range of positive organisational outcomes. For example, employees who experience high organisational commitment are theorised to engage in positive behaviours, such as organisational citizenship activities and high job performance that are believed to be beneficial to the organisation (Jaros 1997).

Commitment research has not simply suggested that organisational commitment is an important factor in predicting employees’ behaviours, such as absenteeism, turnover, and work performance (Meyer et al 2002). It has also argued that organisational commitment can buffer the negative effects of work-related stress on employee well-being (Begley & Czajka 1993). Iun and Huang (2007) and Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen and Wright (2005) found that employees with stronger organisational commitment find work more meaningful and are more determined to work well in difficult situations. Sagie (1998) and Mathieu and Zajac (1990) consider organisational commitment to be essential for quality improvement. If so, this implies that developing employee commitment in the upscale hotel industry may provide a sustainable competitive advantage through quality enhancement strategies (Kazlauskaite, Bucuniene & Turauskas 2006). Organisational commitment is believed to lead to outputs such as a more stable workforce, enhanced staff motivation, and organisational citizenship behaviours (Farrell 2003; Kazlauskaite et al 2006).
Powell and Meyer (2004) explain that affective commitment is expected to have the strongest positive effect on desirable work behaviours. Affective commitment is associated with higher productivity (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson 1989), more positive work attitudes (Allen & Meyer 1996) and a greater likelihood of engaging in organisational citizenship (Meyer & Allen 1991). Thus, the positive feelings which affectively committed individuals have towards their organisation are accompanied by other beneficial effects for the organisation.

In contrast, continuance commitment has very few positive relations with performance indicators (Meyer & Allen 1997). Studies have found either no relationship between continuance commitment and performance, or a negative one (Meyer et al 1989). Although increased continuance commitment can contribute to decreased turnover, research by Powell and Meyer (2004) demonstrate that it is a less desirable form of commitment compared to affective and normative commitment. Because individuals who score high on continuance commitment stay at their jobs because they have few alternatives, it is not surprising that continuance commitment is negatively (although modestly) correlated with job satisfaction (Hackett, Bycio & Hausdorf 1994).

**Research on Personality and Organisational Commitment**

The personality categorization known as the “Big-Five” or the Five-Factor Model has been particularly influential in industrial and organisational psychology (Barrick and Mount 1991; Costa & McCrae 1992). This model identifies five relatively independent dimensions of personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability or neuroticism, and openness to experience (Costa and McCrae 1992; Goldberg 1999). These broad factors constitute discernable patterns across individuals and are widely considered to be the fundamental dimensions of personality study (Matzler & Renzl 2007; Mount & Barrick 1998). Mount and Barrick (1998) show that the five dimensions of personality have been identified in different cultures with different languages, using different instruments and with different theoretical frameworks. Other research suggests that these personality traits remain quite stable throughout a person’s lifetime, and that the five-factor structure generalises across occupations and cultures (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen and Barrick 1999).
Kim, Shin and Umbreit (2007) describe extraversion as reflecting individual traits such as being sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active. Extraversion is related to the experience of positive emotions, and extraverts are more likely to take on leadership roles and to have a greater number of close friends (Judge et al 1999). Given that affective commitment represents an employee’s positive emotional reaction to the organisation and positive emotionality is the core of extraversion, extraverted employees may be more affectively committed. On the other hand, employees who perceive that they have several viable alternatives will have weaker continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen 1997). Based on the preceding logic, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1a.** Extraversion will be significantly and positively related to affective commitment.

**H1b.** Extraversion will be significantly and negatively related to continuance commitment.

Agreeableness reflects individual differences in the human aspects with a spectrum of characteristics such as altruism, nurturing, caring and emotional support to hostility, indifference to others, self-centeredness, spitefulness and jealousy at the other end (Digman 1990). Barrick and Mount (1991) provide examples of behavioral tendencies typically associated with agreeableness. These include being courteous, flexible, trusting, good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, soft-hearted and tolerant. Matzler & Renzl (2007) argue that agreeableness is positively related to employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction contributes to motivated, satisfied and committed employees, which in turn leads to more effective and efficient work, and to higher process and product quality (Eskildsen & Dahlgaard 2000; Silva 2006). With regard to continuance commitment, Organ and Lingl (1995) argue that although individuals high on agreeableness often demonstrate respectful and proper workplace behaviour, this behaviour is unlikely to be rewarded because it is expected. The absence of recognition and reward for this desirable behaviour fails to increase the costs associated with an employee leaving an organisation. As such, the following relationships between agreeableness and organisational commitment are hypothesized:

**H2a.** Agreeableness will be significantly and positively related to affective commitment.

**H2b.** Agreeableness will not be related to continuance commitment.
Conscientiousness is defined by Kim, Shin and Umbreit (2007) as an individual’s dependability and volition. This dimension measures the extent to which individuals are hardworking, organised, dependable and persevering versus lazy, disorganised, and unreliable (Salgado 1997). Silva (2006) found conscientiousness to be positively related to organisational commitment. Organ and Lingl (1995) infer otherwise with the justification that conscientiousness should not relate to affective commitment because it relates to a generalised work-involvement tendency, but not an organisational-involvement tendency. To the extent that conscientious employees earn rewards such as pay, promotion, recognition and respect, they should have heightened levels of continuance commitment because the costs of leaving the organisation have increased. Thus,

\[ H3a. \text{ Conscientiousness will be significantly and positively related to affective commitment.} \]

\[ H3b. \text{ Conscientiousness will be significantly and positively related to continuance commitment.} \]

Emotional stability reflects individual differences in anxiety, depression, anger, embarrassment, emotionality, worry and insecurity. Individuals who score low on emotional stability are more likely to experience a variety of problems related to these traits including negative moods and physical symptoms (Judge et al 1999). Emmons, Diener and Larsen (1985) argue that emotional stability should not relate to affective commitment. However, more recent studies (Morrison 1997; Silva 2006) show that emotional stability is significantly related to organisational commitment because emotionally stable individuals tend to experience positive affective feelings, which increases the likelihood that they will develop a positive emotional attitude towards their organisation. As emotionally unstable individuals tend to experience more negative life events than other individuals (Magnus, Deiner, Fujita and Pavot 1993), continuance commitment may develop out of fear of the costs associated with leaving his or her current position (Meyer & Allen 1997). To the extent that negative events occur in an emotionally unstable employee’s job, he or she may feel more apprehensive about facing a new work environment that could provide even harsher experiences. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:
H4a. Emotional stability will be significantly and positively related to affective commitment.

H4b. Emotional stability will be significantly and negatively related to continuance commitment.

The fifth personality dimension, openness to experience, is related to scientific and artistic creativity, divergent thinking, and political liberalism (Judge et al. 2002; McCrae 1996). The behavioural tendencies typically associated with openness to experience include being imaginative, curious, original, broad-minded, intelligent (Digman 1990), and having a need for variety, aesthetic sensitivity, and unconventional values (McCrae & John 1992). DeNeve and Cooper (1998) point out that openness to experience should not relate to affective commitment because research notes that it is a ‘double-edged sword that predisposes individuals to feel both the bad and the good more intensely’, leaving its directional influence on affective reactions unclear. Similarly, openness to experience should also not relate to continuance commitment because it has been related to divergent thinking (McCrae 1996), suggesting that formal and informal rewards that generally bind employees to their organisations may not apply to those who score highly on this dimension. Therefore,

H5a. Openness to experience will not be related to affective commitment.

H5b. Openness to experience will not be related to continuance commitment.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on centrally located 4/5 star hotels with more than 80 guest rooms which primarily market to corporate and business guests in Perth, Western Australia. A sample frame of ten such hotels located in the CBD area of Perth met the eligibility criteria identified for this study. Four of these hotels agreed to participate in this study, with all respondents being drawn from those four hotels. The survey was broadly distributed to a random selection of staff following staff meetings at each hotel. Staff returned the completed questionnaire to a secure collection box in a designated location. Of the 570 questionnaires distributed, a total of 101 (17.72%) questionnaires were returned. Two incomplete questionnaires were excluded which represent a 17.37 percent response rate (N=99).
This study used Meyer and Allen’s (1997) revised Affective Commitment Scale and Continuance Commitment Scale to measure organizational commitment. This scale is scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree to capture the extent of respondents’ agreement with each statement. Numerous studies (Naquin and Holton 2002; McDonald and Makin 2000; Allen and Meyer 1990; Meyer et al. 1989; McGee and Ford 1987; Meyer and Allen 1984) show a coefficient alpha reliability for the affective commitment scale to be between $\alpha=0.74$ and $\alpha=0.89$. The $\alpha$-coefficient for the continuance commitment scale is between $\alpha=0.69$ and $\alpha=0.84$. The normative commitment scale was not used in this study because previous research has found that correlations of up to 0.51 exist between the affective and normative commitment scales (Ferres, Travaglione, and Firns 2003; Meyer et al. 2002; Meyer and Allen 1997; Jaros 1997; Randall 1990).

Personality is measured by the big-five factor markers from Goldberg’s (1999) International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). Each respondent was asked to rate the degree to which the statements describe him or herself on a five-point scale with 1=very inaccurate to 5=very accurate. Demographic questions were also included in the questionnaire.

**FINDINGS**

The mean and standard deviation of the organisational commitment variables are presented in Table 1. These demonstrate that respondents reported higher levels of affective rather than continuance commitment.

*Insert Table 1 about here*

The data were subject to a correlation analysis to determine the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. Table 2 presents the correlations and reliabilities between the five personality dimensions and affective commitment and continuance commitment.
Agreeableness was found to be significantly and positively correlated with affective commitment as stated in $H2a$ ($r = 0.506$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, this correlation is deemed to have a large effect size (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007). $H2b$ is also supported with no significant relationship existing between agreeableness and continuance commitment ($r = 0.118$, $p > 0.05$). In support of $H3a$, there is a significant and positive correlation between conscientiousness and affective commitment ($r = 0.323$, $p < 0.01$). Likewise, there is a significant and positive (albeit slightly weaker) relationship between conscientiousness and continuance commitment ($r = 0.224$, $p < 0.05$) that supports $H3b$. $H4a$ is also supported by the data analysis, with high emotional stability found to be significantly and positively correlated with affective commitment ($r = 0.247$, $p < 0.05$). $H5a$ is also supported by the data. The remaining hypotheses were not supported by the findings from this study. Contradicting $H1a$ and $H1b$, no significant relationship was found to exist between extraversion and either affective commitment or continuance commitment. Openness to experience is found not to correlate with affective commitment ($r = 0.096$, $p > 0.05$). Finally, $H5b$ is supported because there is no significant correlation between openness to experience and continuance commitment ($r = -0.031$, $p > 0.05$).

**DISCUSSION**

These findings suggest that the big five personality model is an informative framework for examining the dispositional sources of organisational commitment. Specifically, conscientiousness and emotional stability emerge as the most consistent predictors, with both of these dimensions being significantly related to both affective commitment and continuance commitment. A surprising finding is the absence of a significant positive relationship between extraversion and either affective or continuance commitment. Previous studies have consistently reported positive relationships (e.g. Erdheim, Wang & Zickar 2006; Thoresen et al. 2003). It is possible that this finding is an artefact of an unrepresentative sample, one of the limitations associated with the small sample size that was
obtained. It is also possible that unknown moderators such as job characteristics, rewards, and the manner in which the hotels treat their employees may have an intervening effect on the personality-commitment relationship. Such variables have been considered to be antecedents to organisational commitment (e.g. Steers 1977a; Mathieu and Hamel 1989; de Gilder 2003). Consideration of the effect of possible moderators was beyond the scope of this study.

Agreeableness is a desirable personality trait in the hotel industry because employees with high levels of agreeableness tend to handle customer relations and conflict-based situations more effectively (Mullins 1995). In this study, agreeableness is positively correlated with affective commitment. Eskildsen and Dahlgaard (2000) associate employee satisfaction with a motivated and committed workforce, noting that satisfied employees tend to work more effectively and efficiently with better processes and higher product quality. Silva (2006) notes a positive relationship between agreeableness and organisational commitment. Matzler and Renzl (2007) reinforce this when they identify agreeableness as a positive influence on employee satisfaction, which in turn positively influences affective commitment. On the other hand, high agreeableness does not correlate with continuance commitment. This finding can best be explained by noting that highly agreeable behaviour is likely to go unrewarded since it is expected, thereby failing to increase the costs associated with leaving the organisation (Organ & Lingl 1995).

Conscientiousness is significantly and positively correlated with affective commitment, suggesting that a relationship exists between the two constructs. Organ and Lingl (1995) explain this by saying that conscientious individuals tend to get highly involved in their jobs, therefore possibly extending this involvement to the organisation. The positive relationship between conscientiousness and continuance commitment may exist because increased job involvement should lead to an accumulation of workplace rewards that heighten the costs associated with leaving an organisation. The finding that conscientiousness is related to both dimensions of organisational commitment is consistent with prior research identifying conscientiousness as a strong predictor of work performance among all work groups (Barrick & Mount 1991). Accordingly, it seems likely that recruiting individuals high on conscientiousness could increase the likelihood of satisfied, committed and highly performing
employees. McShane and Travaglione (2007) note that conscientiousness has taken centre stage as the most valuable personality dimension for predicting job performance in almost every job group. They note that highly conscientious employees set higher personal goals and have higher performance expectations. They also tend to have higher levels of organisational citizenship and are more suited to organisations that value employee empowerment than to traditional command and control organisations.

The finding that emotional stability predisposes employees to high levels of organisational commitment is supported by previous research showing a negative relationship between neuroticism and organisational commitment (Morrison 1997). This suggests that emotionally stable individuals tend to be more committed employees. McShane and Travaglione (2007) reason that people with high emotional stability tend to work better than others in high stressor situations. The results of this study show that emotional stability is positively related to both affective commitment and continuance commitment. Due to their nature, neurotics (emotionally unstable) are prone to experiencing negative situations (Magnus et al 1993) and negative affect (Emmons et al 1985). This may make them wary of becoming emotionally invested in their organisations and conscious of the costs associated with leaving an employer. Therefore, it is likely that emotionally stable employees make greater emotional investments in their organisations, leading to higher levels of affective commitment.

In contrast to the foregoing reasoning, it is arguable that neurotic employees may develop continuance commitment out of fear of losing their job. If this is so, emotional stability would be negatively related to continuance commitment. These findings are also consistent with previous research that has shown emotional stability to be related to important work outcomes such as job performance (Barrick & Mount 1991) and job satisfaction (Judge et al 2002).

The final two hypotheses to be examined found that there is no correlation relationship between openness to experience and either affective commitment or continuance commitment. It is arguable that being open to experience allows employees to experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely. As a consequence, its directional influence on affective reactions such as affective commitment will most likely be unclear (DeNeve & Cooper 1998). In a similar way, the finding that
openness to experience is not related to continuance commitment makes logical sense. The divergence in thinking associated with such openness suggests that the rewards that generally bind employees to their organisations may not be applicable to employees high on this personality trait. If extraverted, conscientious, and emotionally stable individuals are more likely to be committed employees, thus less likely to leave the organisation, then the recruitment of these personality types would be beneficial for organisations (Silva 2006). McShane and Travaglione (2007) add that when conscientiousness is combined with agreeableness and emotional stability, these employees tend to provide better customer service.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The results of the study suggest that personality plays a significant role in the development of organisational commitment, extending the validity of the personality-job attitudes linkage to organisational commitment. The results also imply that the big five is a useful framework to explain the “personological” basis of organisational commitment (Erdheim et al 2006). Further examination of dispositional factors that influence organisational commitment may be a fruitful area for future research. The results of this study also suggest that organisational commitment should be included on the list of constructs that are related to personality. Meta-analyses have indicated that employees with low levels of commitment are more likely to leave their organisations (Meyer et al 2002). Given that organisational commitment is an important antecedent of turnover, the predictive effect of personality on organisational commitment may have practical utility. Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren and de Chermont (2003) found that personality dimensions influence the extent to which employees are committed to their organisations. Instead of only focusing on post-entry work experiences, organisations could consider adopting selection procedures that consider personality measures to evoke high levels of organisational commitment from their employees (Erdheim et al 2006; Chang and Lee 2006). The limitations of this study would be the small sampling frame and the relatively low response rate to the survey resulting in a limitation concerning the generalisability of the results both within the hotel industry and across other service sector industries.
REFERENCES


Table 1.

Mean and Standard Deviation of Organisational Commitment Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
<th>Continuance Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.740</td>
<td>3.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.185</td>
<td>1.251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

Correlation between Personality Traits and Organisational Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Affective Commitment</th>
<th>Continuance Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>0.506***</td>
<td>0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>0.323***</td>
<td>0.224*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>0.247***</td>
<td>0.228*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 (two-tailed)