

GOAL REGULATION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND WORK MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we will try to emphasize the importance of commitment, in an organizational world that tries to constantly adapt to the socio-economic environment in which it operates. More precisely, in this paper, based on theoretical analyses, we will present the importance of studying the relationships between organizational commitment and other organizational process, namely and work motivation. And we will also try to show by introducing the concept of goal regulation, that commitment influences organizational behavior independently of some extrinsic reasons or positive attitudes and that it can lead to the persistence of an action even in the face of conflicting reasons or attitudes. Starting from this conceptualization, we encourage the leads of empirical studies that support the hypothesis, that an integrated model of organizational commitment and motivation for work, better explains the involvement of individuals in an organizational context, beyond its theoretical validation.

KEYWORDS: goal regulation, organizational commitment, work motivation

1. Introduction

We are actors in a new organizational world that values to a greater extent than in the past, learning, motivations, knowledge, talents or innovative spirit. No matter how the theorists related to this organizational world, like a: learning organizations, adhocracies or expressive organizations their performance, mostly depends on the degree to which they manage to select, keep and motivate employees involved, dedicated to the organization's goals. For this reason, the discussion about *organizational commitment* is also situated, initially defined as the psychological connection established between the individual and the organization of which he is a part (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Some may wonder if commitment to the organization is still an important

variable in this period of rapid changes, where the relationship between the organization and the employee is certainly in a constant state of change, where some voices announced the end of organizational loyalty (Nussbaum, 1986). Certainly, this has not decreased the value of understanding how commitment develops and how it can influence the nature of the relationship between the organization and the employee. On the contrary, employees as human beings inevitably develop a commitment of one form or another that will influence their behavior at work. Consequently, by understanding how commitment develops and how it helps to shape attitudes and behaviors, organizations have nothing but to gain, because they will have more competitive advantages.

The continued interest in organizational commitment is the result of the belief that, through effective management, it will bring a series of positive consequences for the organization. Thus, most studies show that organizational commitment positively correlates with *organizational performance and involvement in organizational civic behaviors* (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Another positive consequence would be, as stated by Ulrich (1998), the fact that talented employees who also have increased organizational commitment ensure a high level of intellectual capital in organizations. Organizational commitment correlates negatively with *absenteeism* (Gellatly, 1995), *with the intention to leave the organization or with resignation* (Wasti, 2003; Liou & Cheng, 2008).

Another important aspect in reviewing the different conceptualizations of organizational commitment refers to the differentiation or connection with other close concepts, for example motivation, attitude towards work, job satisfaction, work involvement, etc. Is commitment more than a reason to engage in certain actions, more than a positive attitude toward the organization that requires the individual to behave in a manner that benefits that organization? If commitment represents no more than a positive state of mind that occurs when the individual experiences a positive exchange relationship with the organization, then it contributes no more to understanding organizational behavior than motivation or job satisfaction.

2. The Aim and Methodological Approach

Next, we will try to demonstrate that commitment influences organizational behavior independently of some extrinsic reasons or positive attitudes and that it can lead to the persistence of an action even in the face of conflicting reasons or attitudes. Commitment can determine employees to

act in a way contrary to their own interest but in the interest of the organization. Starting from this objective, we have two objectives that guide our argumentation. On the one hand, we will identify the correlations between organizational commitment and the two organizational processes, work satisfaction and motivation, and on the other hand, we will analyze the concept of **goal regulation** (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberg, 2004) as a possibility to conceptualize the organizational behavior for the following empirical studies. For this approach, we will use a methodology focused on the analysis of literature in the field, and the synthesis of relevant information. This perspective can be the basis of the subsequent empirical analyses, by building research methods and tools, that integrated aspects that take into account the operationalization of both concepts: organizational commitment and motivation, through the notion of goal regulation.

3. Organizational Commitment and Motivation

The theorists who studied organizational commitment and those who studied work motivation did not take enough advantage of each other's work. Even if there is interest in the study of both organizational processes, resulting from the belief that they bring benefits to the organization, the literature dedicated to organizational commitment and that dedicated to motivation have somehow evolved independently. One of the explanations may be related to their different origins. The study of motivation at work has its origin rather in psychological motivational theories, while the study of organizational commitment developed rather in sociology and social psychology (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). There are few attempts to integrate those two concepts, or to highlight their similarities, differences or relationship.

Are there major conceptual differences between motivation and commitment? Certainly, motivation and commitment are two different concepts even if they are related. Work motivation is defined as a sum of internal and external energies or forces that initiate, direct and sustain an effort directed towards an organizational objective, which will simultaneously satisfy individual needs, in short what causes a person to act in a certain way (Grancsa, Nițu, Văduva & Tănase, 2023). Meyer & Herscovitch (2001, p. 301) define commitment as a force that binds the individual to an ongoing action relevant to a particular goal. Motivation is similar to commitment in the sense that it is embodied in behaviors directed towards a goal, associated with the promise to fulfill an obligation. But once the goals have been achieved, the behavior ceases, just as with calculative or continuance commitment (Zangaro, 2001).

As can be seen, both concepts are described as energetic forces with implications for attitudes and behaviors. We note that motivation is a concept with wider valences than commitment, it is one of the forces that can motivate behavior. Commitment can serve as a powerful source of motivation and can lead to persistence of an action, even in the face of opposing forces (Scholl, 1991). Commitment is only one of the components of motivational process (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). Starting from these findings, the authors propose the integration of theories of motivation and organizational commitment in order to have a better understanding of organizational behavior.

Both concepts were developed in an attempt to understand, explain, predict and influence people's behavior. Motivation theories focused more on explaining organizational performance and behavior, while organizational commitment theorists initially focused only on explaining the

causes of staying in organizations, absenteeism, the desire to leave the organization (turnover), resignation (Meyer & Allen, 1997), a direction that was later enriched with the study of: organizational civic behavior, role performance, etc. So, in recent years, the paths of the two categories of studies have begun to converge.

4. Goal Regulation: The Relationship between Organizational Commitment and Work Motivation

Meyer, Becker & Vandenberg (2004) proposed an integrative model of motivation and commitment at work, in which, as we mentioned before, commitment appears as one of the components of motivation at work, one of the “energetic forces” that contribute to motivating people. By incorporating commitment into the more general theoretical framework of motivation, we can gain a clearer picture of how organizational commitment exerts its influence on organizational behavior, and a better understanding of how and when the forms of commitment are converging or conflicting.

Next, we will present this model considering that it is the only one in the specialized literature dedicated to the analysis of organizational behaviors that lead to work performance.

The model built by Meyer, Becker & Vandenberg (2004) is based on the conception of Loche (1991) who proposed the integration of existing motivation theories into a mega-theory of motivation, the theory of goals (Locke & Latham, 1990), and Meyer & Allen (1997), based on past conceptualizations of commitment, proposed a general multidimensional model of organizational commitment. Within this model, as we mentioned before, commitment is differentiated from the other components of motivation for work. In this context, our objective is to further explain the place of commitment in the motivational process and why this inclusion helps to better understand organizational behaviors.

In order to be able to describe the integrative model of motivation and commitment, (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberg, 2004) we will briefly present the two theories that were its basis. His central idea of *Locke's (1991) goal theory* is that how organizational goals are set may or may not determine the motivation of individuals. In fact, goal-setting theory starts from the premise that all motivated behavior is goal-directed, regardless of whether it is an individually set goal or a goal set for us by someone else. Goal setting is determined by a combination of personal values personality characteristics, human needs, and the perception of self-efficacy shaped by work experience and socialization in general. Individuals may also set or accept goals for extrinsic rewards. Foreshadowing goals and achieving them are the causes of positive behavior at work and the emergence of performance (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004, p. 992). The difficulty and specificity of the goals, together with the perception of one's own efficiency in achieving them, influence the establishment of the direction of the behavior, the persistence of the effort and the probability that employees will develop strategies that will facilitate the achievement of the goal (Locke & Latham, 1990). According to Locke, for goals to lead to motivated behavior, they must meet certain conditions: they must be clear, stimulating, there must be attachment to them (the individual's attachment to goals is dependent on the importance of the results expected by achieving the goal and on the belief that they can achieve those goals (perception of self-efficacy), there is feedback (without feedback it is impossible to adjust your behavior and it is also important that employees see how effective they were in achieving the goals) and the level of complexity of the tasks to be solved. In Locke's view (1991), the performance resulting from all this will

have an impact on the level of organizational satisfaction and commitment.

Regarding the *multidimensional model of commitment*, it should be stated that probably the most important achievement of the last decades in the analysis of organizational commitment is the recognition of the fact that it can take different forms (Meyer & Allen, 1997) and that it can be directed towards different entities (in theory they are called "seals") (Cohen, 2003), such as: organization, occupation, team, union, leader, etc.

In order to build the integrative model Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe (2004) used the three-dimensional commitment model of Meyer & Allen (1997). The three forms of organizational commitment: affective, normative and continuance lead to an increase in the probability of employees remaining in the organization, they have behind them different mental concepts: *desire, need, obligation respectively*, which has different implications on behavior.

The aspects of motivation included in Locke's model (1991) do not take into account the mental conceptions (mindsets) behind motivation. For this reason, Locke's model is enriched by Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe (2004) with premises taken from two other psychological theories, namely the *self-determination theory* of Ryan & Deci (2000) and the *regulatory focus theory* of Higgins (1997) which presents motivation as a multidimensional construct like commitment. By incorporating commitment as a multidimensional construct in the conceptualization of motivation (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004) they introduced a change derived from the theories mentioned above, namely: the concept of ***goal regulation***.

Goal regulation refers to those mindsets that are behind the reasons for and purpose of an action (Meyer, Becker &

Vandenberghe, 2004, p. 992). Motivated behaviors can be accompanied by different psychological states, forms comparable to those that characterize forms of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). And this point of view is an important one in building the integrated model.

We consider that is important for a better understanding, to briefly explain the two theories underlying these changes in Locke's (1991) original model.

4.1. Self-Determination Theory

First of all, according to the *self-determination theory*, motivation reflects the intention to act. This intention can be intrinsic or extrinsic to the individual. Extrinsically motivated behaviors can take various forms depending on the degree of autonomy existing in the intention to act (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004, p. 995): *externally controlled behavior* (appears to satisfy an external requirement to have access to a reward and is associated with the feeling of external control); *introjected regulation* refers to the fact that people often engage in socially accepted behaviors just to avoid feelings of guilt or anxiety or to gain the respect of others (e.g. return the favor, go to a certain college just because the parents want it, etc.). Behavior is also determined by external factors, even if not imperatively, but more subtly, it is perceived as being controlled; extrinsically motivated behavior through *identified regulation* implies an evaluation of the action and its consequences: even if the work tasks are not pleasant (as in the case of intrinsically motivated behaviors) they are seen as serving an important purpose and thereby accepting their necessity (e.g. studying for an exam instead of going out with friends); finally, in *integrated regulation* which assumes that what initiates the behavior is fully accepted and internalized; the behavior is experienced as voluntarily chosen, even if external sources of influence are evident

(for example, as a soldier obeying orders out of patriotism). It is important to note that these forms of regulation/external motivation are highly motivating but can have negative consequences on the individual's well-being.

The pattern of relationships between the four forms of regulation and behavior is similar to that of the three forms of commitment to organizational behavior. Thus, as affective commitment correlates more strongly with positive workplace behaviors than normative and continuance commitment (Meyer et al., 2002), the more autonomous forms of behavior regulation/motivation (intrinsic, integration and identification regulation) have been found to be associated to a greater extent with creativity, involvement in work, making a persistent effort in carrying out work tasks (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004).

There is a strong similarity between the consequences and different forms of regulation in self-determination theory and the nature and consequences of the three forms of organizational commitment. The four forms of behavior regulation from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) and the three forms of commitment from the multidimensional model (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) can be arranged along an axis, where at one end we have absolute external control (external regulation, continuance commitment) and at the opposite pole we have internal control (regulation through integration and identification and affective commitment), and between these we have the soft forms of external control, namely: regulation through introspection (*introjected regulation*) and normative commitment.

4.2. Regulatory Focus Theory

The idea from which the *regulatory focus theory* starts (Higgins, 1998) is that people in general are motivated to minimize the discrepancy between a current and a

desired final state (i.e. to seek pleasure) and to maximize the discrepancy between a current and a final state undesirable (to avoid pain) but the theory goes beyond this hedonistic principle, noting that the end state can reflect two different things, namely: “what one wishes to be” and “what others think one should be” (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). The author identifies two individual, dominant, behavioral regulation orientations, which determine different ways of achieving goals: *promotion focus*, which focuses more on the idea of achievement, winning, advancement, pursuing your ideals. In this case the goals are the dreams and aspirations of the individual; and *prevention-focus* is on security, safety, responsibility. Goals are seen as obligations, duties or needs. With a promotion-centered orientation, the individual will have zealous behavior in which he/she will try to obtain gains and advantages, and with a prevention-centered orientation, the individual will be vigilant to ensure that they are safe and that they have nothing to lose (Higgins, 1998). Motivation reaches its maximum level when people try to achieve their goals in a way that matches their dominant orientation and minimum level when people will try to reach their goals in a way that does not match their orientation. The explanation would be that the matching of the individual’s orientation leads to the intensification of the commitment to the goal itself. Both orientations can work very well and lead to sops, but the choice of orientation is determined by individual preference and style.

The two theories: *regulatory focus theory* (Higgins, 1997), *self-determination theory* (Ryan & Deci, 2002) as well as the *multidimensional model of organizational commitment* (Meyer & Allen, 1991) have a number of commonalities. Starting from the idea that *promotion-focus* and *prevention-focus* reflect different motivational states, it is argued that there are similarities between these motivational states on the one hand

and those characterizing the different forms of perceived regulation in self-determination theory, and with the psychological states characterizing the forms of commitment in Meyer’s model on the other hand (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004, p. 996) Individuals who have increased affective commitment are more likely to experience more autonomous forms of regulation (intrinsic, integrative, identification) and also have a stronger desire for promotion (*promotion focus*). Likewise, those with higher levels of continuance and normative commitment are more responsive to external forms of regulation, control, and have a stronger *prevention focus* orientation.

Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe (2004), starting from the two theories, laid the foundations of a new concept, that of ***goal regulation***, which represents the connection point between motivation and commitment in the integrative model. *Goal regulation* is defined by the authors as a set of conceptions/motivational states that reflect the purpose and causes for which the individual carries out an action (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). Starting from the theory of self-determination, goal regulation considers the individual’s answer to the question “what are the reasons for pursuing this goal”, and this answer can be located along a continuum, where on the one hand we have reasons of an external nature (external regulation and introspection regulation to be exact) and on the other side we have internal reasons (intrinsic, identification regulation and integration regulation). On the other hand, starting from the theory of dominant regulation (regulatory focus), the individual may have different intentions for which they carry out an action. The individual will have either a dominant orientation based on achievements and aspirations (promotion focus) or a dominant orientation based on fulfilling obligations, avoiding losses, safety and responsibility (prevention focus).

Goal regulation plays an important role in both goal selection and action. It is possible to change the orientation in the functions of external and internal conditions. If someone has to solve a work task at the request of the boss (so for extrinsic reasons) and has a dominant orientation based on prevention, he/she can end up appreciating the work task due to the significance, the importance of the results. It moves from a prevention-based orientation to an achievements-based orientation, more precisely identification regulation. The opposite situation when an individual pursues the realization of some ideals, (so due to rather autonomous reasons – regulation by identification), and has an orientation dominated by the desire to achieve, to succeed (promotion focus), can reach the point where they realize that their efforts are useless, and they will continue only because of the fear of failure

(external regulation and prevention-based orientation) (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004, p. 999).

5. Conclusions

One thing is certain, whether it is one of the energetic forces that motivate people's behavior or whether its high level causes an increase in job satisfaction or is determined by job satisfaction, organizational commitment is considered to be a condition or a consequence of organizational construct as motivation, influencing work engagement.

The introduction of the goal regulation concept, as a more efficient way of explaining the organizational behavior involved, is a benefit for the subsequent empirical analyses, which can be the basis for the construction of organizational strategies to increase the involvement of individuals in the work process.

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