

# COMMITMENT AND MULTIPLE COMMITMENTS : THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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## I. Introduction

In modern society, most people inevitably belong to more than one organization. An individual can be a member of a family, church, company, political party, and so forth, and be committed to those organizations at the same time. An individual's commitment to one organization may or may not be related with his/her commitments to other organizations. If expectations and demands of various organizations are contradictory, an individual's commitment to one organization may affect causally his/her commitments to other organizations. On the contrary, if expectations and demands of one organization are not in conflict with those of other organizations, the individual can be committed to one organization regardless of his/her level of commitments to other organizations.

In unionized firms, an individual who is a union member belongs to both company and union and is committed to both organizations at the same time. When the company has a unique set of goals and values that may be in conflict with the goals and values of the union, the company and the union are

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likely to compete with each other for individuals' commitment and efforts. Therefore, identifying common or similar predictors of an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union may have very important implications for both organizations. Since common predictors are related with both commitment to the company and commitment to the union, both organizations can potentially cooperate with each other to simultaneously increase employees' commitments to both the organizations.

Many researchers have attempted to examine characteristics of an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union, and their relationships with other important variables. However, most studies did not define an individual's multiple commitments precisely (Reichers, 1985). An individual's multiple commitments can be explained with a sound understanding of his/her commitment to a single organization. Unfortunately, there has been a considerable amount of inconsistency in defining and operationalizing an individual's commitment to a single organization, which makes studies on multiple commitments difficult or problematic.

In this paper, previous studies on an individual's commitment to a single organization are reviewed to help understand his/her multiple commitments to a company and union. Systematic efforts are also made to address issues and problems related with an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union in theoretical perspectives.

## II. Definitions of Commitment

So far, the most popular explanation of commitment was given by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974). Porter et al. define commitment as a construct which has three primary components: (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organizations's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. According to this conceptualization, commitment can generally be defined as a state in which individuals identify

with their organization and its goals, and try to maintain membership in order to achieve those goals (Ferris and Aranya, 1983; Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982). Porter et al.'s definition has been widely accepted in many organizational and union commitment studies and operationalized by their popular measure of organizational commitment, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire.

Festinger (1957) and Kiesler (1971) explain commitment on the basis of cognitive consistency or dissonance theory.

Dissonance theory assumes that an individual always struggles toward consistency within oneself, and that one's opinions and attitudes tend to exist in the same domain which are internally consistent. There is a similar kind of consistency between what an individual knows or believes in and how he/she behaves. Kiesler (1971) defines commitment as "a pledging or binding of an individual to behavioral acts." If there exists some inconsistency between an individual's attitudes and behaviors, he/she may have to change his/her attitudes that cause the feeling of inconsistency in order to justify the behavior or decision. That is, people may experience dissonance when they behave explicitly or publicly in a manner discrepant with their attitudes. Whenever they feel dissonant, they will be motivated to reduce the dissonance or avoid any situations which would be likely to increase the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). An individual may increase or decrease one's commitment to the organization to reduce the dissonance and increase the consonance within oneself.

Salancik (1977) tries to explain an individual's commitment in relation to his/her behavior. According to Salancik, behaviors which are explicit, irrevocable, and public force an individual to have greater attitudinal commitment. He defines commitment as a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his/her actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities and his/her own involvement. Salancik's approach to commitment is thought to be an expansion of dissonance theory suggested by Festinger and Kiesler in that an individual's behaviors reinforce him/her to

change his/her attitudes in order to avoid dissonance between behaviors and attitudes.

Mowday, Porter, and Steers(1982) expand Salancik's approach and propose that previous behaviors cause the development of attitudes, which in turn leads to further behaviors. They called this process a "self-reinforcing cycle." According to Mowday et al., an individual tends to increase his/her overall behavioral and attitudinal commitment to the organization in the self-enforcing process.

Another approach to commitment originates from Becker's(1960) work on the idea of side bets, whereby individuals stake some aspects of their lives unrelated with the job itself on their continuation of organizational membership. According to Becker, there are various sources for the individual's side bets, and every individual may have different weight for each side bet depending on individual differences. For instance, if changing employers is not thought of as desirable, an individual may be unwilling to quit his/her current job for a better possible job in order to avoid losing his/her reputation. That is, an individual makes a side bet by staking his/her reputation for stability on the decision to stay with his/her current employer.

Some side bets are often made by organizations which make employees hesitant to quit their jobs for alternative jobs offered by other employers. Such factors as pensions, organizational tenure, and organization-specific skills are usually nontransferable so that changing employers can result in losing them.

Becker additionally proposes that an individual may be committed to the organization not only consciously, but also unconsciously, and that even a small side bet made unconsciously can affect an individual's total investment when accumulated. Becker names this "commitment by default". That is, a series of trivial acts can constitute for an individual a cumulation of side bets of such magnitude that he/she will find himself/herself unwilling to lose

them. This approach has been employed by many researchers, such as Alutto, Hrebiniak, and Alonso(1973), Farrell and Rusbult(1981), Hrebiniak and Alutto(1972), and Sheldon(1971).

Role conflict theory has also been applied to identify the characteristics of commitment. Katz and Kahn(1966) propose that an individual may experience role conflict when he/she has simultaneous occurrence of two or more roles such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other. According to Katz and Kahn's definition, role sending implies a continuing cyclical process that makes the individuals be socialized into their organizational role, know standards for their behavior, and get corrective feedback. Role conflict theory can explain not only the individual's commitment to a single organization, but also his/her multiple commitments to more than one organization. Based on role conflict theory, the degree of congruence between an individual's roles he/she wishes to play in the organization and roles he/she actually plays can influence the level of an individual's commitment to the organization. The more(less) congruent an individual's perceived roles in the organization are with his/her expected roles, the more(less) the individual will be committed to the organization.

According to Katz and Kahn(1966), role conflicts within an individual might be responsible for different levels of relative commitment an individual feels towards the union and company. Most organizations usually consist of many sub-organizations and an individual has multiple roles. Multiple roles tend to increase the feeling of role conflict within an individual, especially when the roles have very different characteristics and demands. In unionized firms, an individual who is a union member inevitably has multiple roles because he/she belongs to two different but partially overlapping organizations at the same time, and also because the goals and strategies of the two organizations are quite different and sometimes conflicting(Angle and Perry, 1986; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman, 1970).

Another widely accepted approach to commitment is exchange theory. The basic logic of exchange theory is expressed in the term "psychological contract". The psychological contract is an implicit agreement in which many obligations and rights remain unspecified, in contrast to an ordinary legal contract which has an explicit set of rights and obligations (Angle and Perry, 1983). Another important concept of exchange theory is the mechanism of reciprocation, which is based on the norm of reciprocity. Individuals will be highly committed to the organization in reciprocation for equitable treatment of the individuals by the organization (Gouldner, 1960; Angle and Perry, 1983).

Review of previous approaches to commitment shows that there exists a considerable amount of inconsistency across studies in understanding commitment. There are two general reasons for the inconsistency in defining an individual's commitment across studies. The first reason is that researchers have focused on different aspects of commitment and defined it differently. The second reason, which is somewhat related with the first one, is that there are differences across studies in terms of approach to commitment. Some researchers think that commitment is produced within an individual's cognitive processes, while others think that commitment is produced through interaction between an individual and the organization. Although diversity across studies often helps us understand commitment more comprehensively, it has made it difficult to understand characteristics of commitment and to generalize research results across studies, especially on the antecedents of commitment (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982; Reichers, 1985).

Some researchers have provided typologies into which differences in understanding characteristics of commitment can be organized. Etzioni (1961), on the basis of member compliance with organizational directives, proposes three patterns of commitment: (1) moral involvement, which centers on internalization of the organization's goals, values, and norms, and identifi-

cation with authority; (2) calculative involvement, which centers on an equitable exchange relationship between employees' contributions to the organization and the rewards they receive for service; and (3) alienative involvement, which centers on situations that make employees committed to the organization as a result of organizational life.

Kanter(1968), on the basis of behavioral requirements imposed on members by the organization, also suggests three forms of commitment: (1) continuance commitment, which is perceived in context of a member's dedication to the continuance of the organization; (2) cohesion commitment, which focuses on a member's psychological link to the organization through various types of social relationships a member has; (3) control commitment, which focuses on a member's attachment to the organizational norms that help a member behave in desired directions. According to Kanter, organizations sometimes employ all three forms of approach simultaneously to produce high commitment from their members. Hence, it is desirable to understand employee commitment in terms of all these three forms of commitment suggested by Etzioni or Kanter. However, researchers have tried to understand commitment based on only part of these typologies. Porter et al.'s approach focuses on the moral involvement, while exchange theory focuses largely on the calculative involvement.

There are differences across studies in whether commitment is produced within an individual's cognitive process(individual-based approach) or through interaction between an individual and the organization(organizational-based approach). The first five approaches focus more on cognitive process within individuals, while exchange theory focuses mainly on the interaction between individuals and their organization. While neither the individual-based approaches nor the organizational-based approaches taken alone can fully explain commitment, an integrated approach based on both approaches can explain commitment more thoroughly since commitment is determined by both individual and organizational characteristics.

### III. Definitional Issues Related with Multiple Commitments

Since the 1950's employees' multiple commitments to the company and union have been studied under the name of "dual allegiance" or "dual commitment"(Angle and Perry, 1986; Gruen, 1954; Kerr, 1954; Magenau, Martin, and Peterson, 1988; Purcell, 1954; Rosen, 1954; Stagner, 1954). The rationale for the use of these terms to express an individuals's multiple commitments to the company and union seems to be related with the fact that only the two organizations, company and union, are the main subjects in the studies of multiple commitments. In the early studies, the term "dual allegiance" was preferred to "dual loyalty" or "dual commitment", and excluded any aspects related with behavioral intention from their definition of commitment (Purecell, 1954). But, when researchers resumed studies on the individual's multiple commitments to the company and union in the 1970's, the term "dual commitment", which includes both aspects of commitment(attitude and behavioral intention), has been more prevalently used in the literature.

Regardless of whatever terms have been used for multiple commitments to the company and union, review of previous studies show that the theoretical basis to define an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union(dual commitment: DC), more specifically whether multiple commitments can be defined as a "construct" or not, has been one of the most fundamental issues in the study of multiple commitments.

Webster's dictionary(1968) defines a construct as "an idea or perception resulting from the orderly arrangement of facts, impressions, etc.(p. 489)." Following this definition, dual commitment(DC), which is conceptually defined as an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union, can be treated as a construct. Early studies by Purcell(1954), Stagner(1954), Rosen(1954), and Kerr(1954) define DC as an individual's favorable attitudes



toward both his/her employing organization and union. Although behavioral aspects of commitment were excluded from this early definition of dual commitment(at that time, "dual allegiance"), it could meet the definition of a construct in Webster's dictionary.

However, it is very difficult to treat DC as a construct when all requirements of a construct in the psychological literature are considered. The issue is related with how to measure an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union, and how to test their relationships with other characteristics of individuals and both organizations. Cronbach and Meehl(1955) define a construct as "some postulated attribute of people, assumed to be reflected in test performance(p. 283)." They also describe that "in test validation the attribute about which we make statements in interpreting a test is a construct(p. 283)." On the basis of the above statements by Cronbach and Meehl, it is not easy to treat DC as a construct. Since DC has not been measured directly using scales in the previous literature(except Angle and Perry's attempt(1986)), it has not been properly reflected in test procedures.

"Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing" of the American Psychological Association(1985), also help us understand whether or not DC is a construct in the following paragraph: "The construct of interest for a particular test should be embedded in a conceptual framework, no matter how imperfect that framework may be. The conceptual framework specifies the meaning of the construct, distinguishes it from other constructs, and indicates how measures of the construct should relate to other variables"(pp. 9-10). On the basis of the above paragraph, it is difficult to treat DC as a construct because DC does not have its own conceptual framework which distinguishes it from other constructs. In the previous literature, DC has not been measured directly and its relationships with other variables have not been tested and interpreted meaningfully.

Two different types of working definitions of dual commitment have been

suggested in order to operationalize the concept of the individual's multiple commitments to the company and union provided in the previous studies. These definitions are highly related with analytical methods used in the studies. Although both approaches have contributed to the study of dual commitment, neither approach was successful in defining DC that testing the relationships of DC with other variables could meet requirements for the construct and standards for psychological testing.

Researchers who have used the taxonomic approach (Dean, 1954; Katz, 1949; Martin, 1981; Purcell, 1954) bifurcate both company and union commitments into low and high on the basis of mean, midpoint, or median splits of each commitment scale. After that, they define the group with low commitments to both organizations as "dually discommitted", the group with high company but low union commitments as "unilaterally committed to the company", the group with low company but high union commitment as "unilaterally committed to the union", and the group with high commitments to both organizations as "dually committed". Under the taxonomic approach, DC is defined as a state in which an individual is highly committed to both company and union. The working definition of DC under the taxonomic approach is very limited to the extent that it excludes unilaterally committed and dually discommitted groups from consideration.

The second approach to DC is the dimensional approach (Angle and Perry, 1986; Conlon and Gallagher, 1987; Fukami and Larson, 1984; Magenau and Martin, 1985; Martin, Magenau, and Peterson, 1982; Schriesheim and Tsui, 1980; Stagner, 1954; Thacker and Rosen, 1986), which tries to understand dual commitment on the basis of the existence of a high positive and significant correlation between commitment to the company and commitment to the union. If the two commitment measures are highly correlated in the positive direction, it is believed that DC exists. This operationalization of DC can be examined empirically by looking at the magnitude of the correlation between

the two commitment measures. The dimensional approach differs from the taxonomic approach in that it does not preclude any group of employees from consideration.

Despite the improvement of the dimensional approach over the taxonomic approach in terms of understanding DC, the dimensional approach has also attracted some criticism. In their recent paper, Gallagher, Fiorito, Jarley, Jeong, and Wakabayashi(1988) point out that the operational definition of DC based on the dimensional approach may not reflect fully the concept of DC suggested in the early studies, and may lead to misunderstanding of DC. A high positive correlation between company and union commitment measures does not indicate conclusively the existence of DC.

Under the dimensional approach, the rank-order among employees in commitment to each organization strongly influences the magnitude of correlation coefficient between two commitment measures. Therefore, the level of commitment of the individual employee to either organization is not properly considered in the operational definition of DC provided by the dimensional approach, although the individual commitment pattern could be important.

Another issue is that the operational definition of DC under the dimensional approach, a high positive correlation, assumes a strong relationship between the two commitments. An individual's commitment to the company may be strongly related with his/her commitment to the union, or vice versa since both organizations have various interorganizational relationships each other. However, this relationship may be different person by person and may not affect very much the magnitude of correlation coefficient.

In summary, previous studies have not provided a proper operational definition of DC. The taxonomic approach contributes to identifying dually high committed groups, but excludes other groups from consideration. The dimensional approach suffers from a lack of theoretical justification for its definition. Due to a lack of theoretical basis, the operational definition of DC

suggested by either the taxonomic or the dimensional approach is deficient in understanding DC properly. DC is nothing else than an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union which consists of employees' commitment to the company and to the union. More theory-oriented studies should be done to understand an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union(Reichers, 1985).

#### IV. DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT AND ISSUES RELATED WITH MULTIPLE COMMITMENTS

Without fundamental agreement on conceptual definition of commitment, further discussion on dimensionality of commitment will inevitably provoke argument. The dimensionality of commitment may be an important issue for organizations in the determination of policy and strategy, because each dimension may have different relationships with other characteristics of an organization and its members, and therefore result in different outcomes.

Many studies have attempted to determine the dimensions of company and union commitment(Ferris and Aranya, 1980; Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, and Spiller, 1980; Ladd, Gordon, Beauvais, and Morgan, 1982; Fullager, 1986; Friedman and Harvey, 1986; Fullagar and Barling, 1987; Kuruvilla, 1989;Thacker and Fields, 1989). The approach has generally attempted to decide on the dimensionality of commitment empirically rather than from theoretical perspectives regarding the construct. The dimensions of commitment should reflect all aspects of the predetermined construct, and the selection of latent variables and development of a questionnaire should be done on the basis of the dimensions of commitment(Thorndike and Hagen, 1977). This is what psychologists essentially call construct validity. Construct validity is usually defined as the extent to which a test has been shown to be a measure of the trait or dimension it purports to measure(Anastasi, 1976).

## 1. DIMENSIONS OF COMMITMENT

Several studies have suggested different number of dimensions of commitment. Unlike the construct, the dimensions of company commitment might be different from those of union commitment depending upon differences between the two organizations in terms of their characteristics such as functions, goals, strategies, and so forth. Dimensions of commitment, therefore, should be fully considered in deriving an operational definition of commitment.

Porter et al.'s work(1974) on "organizational"(largely company) commitment merits attention for its treatment of dimensionality of commitment. In defining organizational commitment, Porter et al. suggest that commitment has three primary components: (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values: (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization: and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. But, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by them does not incorporate these three components of commitment properly, i.e., when applied empirically. Mowday, Porter, and Steers(1982) modify their initial suggestion of three components of commitment and suggest that commitment actually has only two interpretable dimensions, attitude and behavioral intention.

With respect to the dimensionality of union commitment, Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, and Spiller(1980) suggest four dimensions: union loyalty, responsibility to the union, willingness to work for the union, and belief in unionism. Gordon et al. borrow Porter et al.'s(1974) three components of organizational commitment in their study of the dimensionality of union commitment. Recently, some union commitment researchers have insisted that union commitment also consists of only two interpretable dimensions, attitude and behavioral intention, which are essentially the same as the dimensions of

organizational commitment suggested by Mowday et al.(1982) (Friedman and Harvey, 1986 Kuruvilla, 1989; Thacker and Fields, 1989)

Previous studies on dimensionality of commitment have left a number of fundamental questions unanswered. Are the dimensions of company commitment different from those of union commitment? If they are different, then how and why are they different? If they are identical, then why have studies on dimensions of each commitment been done independently? Answers to these questions may be different depending on the definition and level of focus on dimensions. Some researchers may think that a construct should not be divided into many specific dimensions, and they advocate the idea that commitment has only two interpretable dimensions, attitude and behavioral intention. On the contrary, other researchers may think that a construct should be divided into as many dimensions as possible in order to understand the characteristics of the construct more comprehensively. Certainly, the former group of researchers, based on the previous studies, may conclude that there is no difference in construct and dimensionality between commitment to the company and commitment to the union. But, the latter group of researchers may conclude that commitment to the company and commitment to the union have different dimensions since the two organizations have different characteristics which should be considered while determining dimensions.

The term "organizational commitment" used by Porter et al.(1974) includes not only company commitment, but also union commitment. That is, the "organization" in their studies means a general organization, not a company. Gordon et al.(1980) suggest that a criterion of union commitment be similar to an accepted definition of the more general construct of organizational commitment, and have a factor structure that reflects the components identified in the definitions of organizational commitment. Differences in validity between each commitment measure and other variables are not evidence for differing dimensionality of both commitments. That is, the differing validity

of both commitments with a specific variable such as job satisfaction does not necessarily mean that the two commitments have different dimensions. Company commitment and union commitment may have different validity with other variables not because they have different dimensions, but because the two organizations have different characteristics in terms of their goals, functions, policies, management strategies, and so forth.

Reserachers have suggested multiple dimensions of commitment although there is some controversy as to the number of dimensions. However, many empirical studies have assumed that company and /or union commitment has a single dimension, especially when the commitment measure is used a an antecedent of other variables. There are some acceptable reasons behind the use of a single measure of commitment. Firstly, despite the contribution made by previous studies to understanding dimensions of commitment, diversity in definition and dimensionality of commitment across studies has made it very difficult to determine number of dimensions as well as to generalize research results across studies. Secondly, most survey questionnaires developed to measure commitment do not consider dimensions of commitment properly. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire(OCQ) developed by Porter et al.(1974) has been most widely used to measure an individual's commitment to the employing organization. However, some researchers insist that the OCQ actually represent only the attitudinal aspect of comitment (Reichers, 1985). When dimensions of commitment are not an important issue in the study, the use of a single measure of commitment can be accepted without causing any serious problems.

## 2. Dimensionality Issues Related with Multiple Commitments

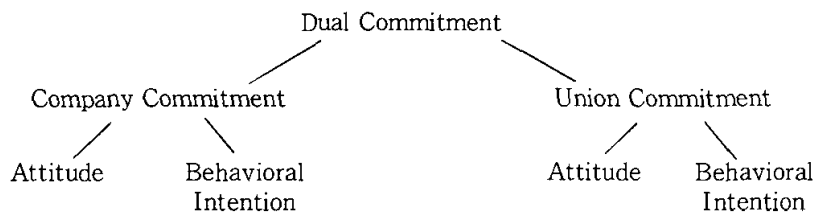
Generally, no research to examine or explain dimensionality of DC can be done since DC is not a construct in itself, it actually being a combination of

the two constructs, company commitment and union commitment. Thus, it is more reasonable to assume that DC has all the components of both commitments. Most studies on DC have assumed that DC consists of company commitment and union commitment, and assumed that each commitment has only one dimension. Following Mowday et al.'s study(1982), both company commitment and union commitment consist of two dimensions, attitude and behavioral intention. Hence, the hierarchy of components of DC can be depicted as Figure 1.

DC may be classified into several meaningful subdimensions depending on the purpose of a study. Bilaterally high or low commitment and unilateral commitment to either company or union can be identified with different levels of combination of both commitments.

Since DC is not a construct, it should be measured indirectly by both company commitment and union commitment questionnaires. Developing a direct measure of DC may be an important issue, but a consideration of characteristics of DC makes a direct measure of DC difficult. Any efforts to measure DC directly should necessarily include not only all its four components, but also any meaningful combinations among them.

Figure 1. The Hierarchy of Components of DC



In summary, the definition or construct of any concept limits or regulates further discussion on its dimensionality. And, the construct and dimensionality of the concept affect the development of a proper measurement scale and sele-



ction of appropriate analytical methods. So far, definition and dimensionality issues related with DC have not been discussed properly, which has led to misuse of analytical methods and difficulty of generalization of results of previous studies. The use of "component" seems more reasonable than the use of "dimension" in discussing aspects of DC since DC can not be treated as a construct. We can conclude that DC, an individual's multiple commitments to the company and union, has all the characteristics of employees' commitment to either company or union.

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