Meyer and Allen Model of Organizational Commitment: Measurement Issues

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Meyer and Allen’s three-component model of organizational commitment has become the dominant model for study of workplace commitment. Given its widespread usage, analyzing the accuracy of the scales developed to tap the construct is warranted. This paper includes a critical analysis of the organizational commitment framework proposed by Meyer and Allen and examines the validity of its constituent subscales for the measurement of Affective Commitment (AC), Normative Commitment (NC), and Continuance Commitment (CC). It identifies the critical issues that need to be addressed to enhance the accuracy and usefulness of Meyer and Allen’s model. It incorporates corresponding solutions and proposes an enhanced model for the measurement of organizational commitment.

Introduction

The three-component model of commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) arguably dominates organizational commitment research (Meyer et al., 2002). This model proposes that organizational commitment is experienced by the employee as three simultaneous mindsets encompassing affective, normative, and continuance organizational commitment. Affective Commitment reflects commitment based on emotional ties the employee develops with the organization primarily via positive work experiences. Normative Commitment reflects commitment based on perceived obligation towards the organization, for example rooted in the norms of reciprocity. Continuance Commitment reflects commitment based on the perceived costs, both economic and social, of leaving the organization. This model of commitment has been used by researchers to predict important employee outcomes, including turnover and citizenship behaviors, job performance, absenteeism, and tardiness (Meyer et al., 2002). Meyer and Allen (1997) provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical lineage of this model.

Given its widespread usage in organizational behavior research, the measures used to tap the AC, NC, and CC constructs merit close scrutiny. Thus, this paper outlines some of the key measurement problems and challenges associated with this model, and presents recommendations for future research. Specifically, this paper analyzes
(1) The degree to which the three Meyer and Allen scales, the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS), and the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS), are structured in their item wording so as to tap their associated AC, CC, and NC constructs; (2) measurement issues that pertain specifically to NC; (3) issues that pertain specifically to CC; and (4) issues pertaining to the model’s generalizability and relationships with recently-developed work attitudes that may overlap its conceptual domain. Research implications and recommendations are discussed in each section. Revised scales that comport with these recommendations represent an enhanced model of organizational commitment. These are reported in Appendix A.

Analysis of Meyer and Allen’s Framework
How well do the ACS, CCS, and NCS reflect the underlying AC, NC, and CC concepts? While numerous studies have assessed the construct validity of these scales from a statistical point of view (Meyer et al., 2002), in this section the wording of the scale items are analyzed as a means of assessing the degree to which each scale taps the theorized structure of the corresponding construct—as defined by Allen and Meyer (1990); Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) and Meyer et al. (2006) that each is designed to reflect.

Overall Analysis of Commitment Construct Definitions
Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 301) propose that commitment is “a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets”. Employees are theorized to experience this force in the form of three bases, or mindsets: affective, normative, and continuance, which reflect emotional ties, perceived obligation, and perceived sunk costs in relation to a target, respectively (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Thus, any scale that purports to measure organizational commitment should tap one of these mindsets and should reference the target, what the employee is committed to, be it the organization, a team, a change initiative, or a goal.

Additionally, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 311) argue that commitments include ‘behavioral terms’ that describe what actions a commitment implies. Specifically, these terms can take the form of focal and discretionary behavior. A focal behavior is one believed to be integral to the concept of commitment to a particular target, such that all three mindsets should predict this behavior. It is the behavior “to which an individual is bound by his or her commitment”. For example, for organizational commitment, the focal behavior is theorized to be maintaining membership in the organization. In contrast, discretionary behaviors are ‘optional’, in the sense that the employee has some flexibility in defining the behavioral terms of his commitment. Some mindsets, but not others, may predict these behaviors. Meyer and Herscovitch argue that different behavioral terms should be

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1 There is no section that addresses measurement issues specific to the ACS, because there are no such issues. The only problem identified with the ACS is that one ACS item lacks the proper item-content structure, and this is addressed in the first section of the paper because it is a “model level” problem that characterizes all the three scales.
included in item wording, depending on the kind of behavior the researcher is trying to predict.

Finally, Meyer et al. (2006) note that commitment has both cognitive and affective elements. The cognitive elements are the behavioral terms and the basis of the commitment, and the affective element comprises whatever feelings a specific mindset invokes (e.g., in the case of NC, pride and/or guilt).

Thus, taking these elements together, the basic structure of an organizational commitment scale item should be that it is worded to reflect (a) a specific mindset, either affective, normative, or continuance; (b) the target of commitment, in this case the organization; (c) the behavior to be predicted, such as remaining a member of the organization; and (d) affect, with cognitions being captured by the mindset and behavioral terms. The key issue, therefore, is: Do the ACS, NCS, and CCS items correspond to this structure?

Subscale Analysis: Correspondence between Subscales and Construct Definitions

Items of the original ACS, NCS, and CCS scales (Allen and Meyer, 1990) are listed in Appendix B. These are the scales most commonly used in substantive research (Meyer et al., 2002). Considering the NCS, an analysis of the item wording for this scale shows that all the eight items refer to the organization/company, and also seemingly tap the NC mindset of ‘perceived obligation’. Additionally, five of the eight items directly refer to the focal behavior, staying/leaving; while the remaining three items indirectly refer to it (they mention remaining loyal or something similar, which many respondents are likely to interpret to encompass remaining with the organization). Five of the items appear to have affective content. Although not reproduced here, the 1993 revised version of the NCS (Meyer et al., 1993) was also examined, and the results are similar: All items tap the appropriate target and a sense of perceived obligation, and four of the six items directly refer to staying/leaving, and the other two indirectly refer to it. All appear to have affective content.

Similarly, all items in the original CCS (and also the revised 1993 CCS, as well as the revised six-item Powell and Meyer (2004) CCS) directly refer to the organization, seemingly tap perceived costs or barriers to exit, and staying/leaving behavioral terms. However, only two of the eight CCS items tap affective content. Thus, the NCS and CCS have scale item structures that appear to correspond largely with the format implied by the Meyer and colleagues conceptualization, with the exception of the CCS concerning affective content.

Finally, while all eight items of the ACS refer to the target (the organization) and seemingly tap the mindset, and emotional attachment (and therefore have affective content), only one item, the first one listed, explicitly or implicitly mentions staying/leaving, or any other behavior. All of the other items refer to positive feelings about the
organization only, such as experiencing a sense of belonging, embracing the organization’s problems, and feeling emotionally attached to the organization. Thus, seven of the eight ACS items seemingly do not comport with Meyer and colleagues’ concept of AC with respect to the behavioral terms aspect of the construct.

The lack of behavioral terms in the item wording of the ACS is important from a predictive validity perspective because, all else being equal, it would be expected that a commitment scale that explicitly mentions an outcome in item wording correlates with and predicts it more strongly than a commitment scale that does not explicitly tap that outcome in the wording of its items. Some researchers have argued that such a scale invalidly overlaps with the outcome, thus overstating the relationship between the outcome and commitment (e.g., Bozeman and Perrewe’s 2001 analysis of intent-to-quit items in the organizational commitment questionnaire). Yet somewhat paradoxically, in the case of the Meyer and Allen scales, empirical research has shown that the exact opposite is true: the ACS, which largely lacks behavioral wording, is a much stronger correlate and predictor of turnover related variables than the NCS or the CCS, which are saturated with staying/leaving wording (Meyer et al., 2002). As Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) note, the ACS also tends to correlate more strongly with other behaviors, such as absenteeism, job performance and citizenship behaviors. Meyer and Herscovitch explain these results by speculating that the “binding force” for AC is both broader (i.e., implies a commitment to more behaviors) and stronger (is more intense) than that for CC or NC.

Research Recommendations for Scale-Construct Correspondence

There are seemingly two ways that the behavior-in-scale-items discrepancy between the ACS and the NCS/CCS can be resolved. Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) argue that it is appropriate to include behavioral terms in commitment scale items, and thus when studying turnover as an outcome, seven of the eight ACS items should be rewritten to explicitly tap concepts such as staying/leaving. But Bozeman and Perrewe (2001) argue that behavioral referents are invalid, contaminating the commitment measure with measures of other constructs, and thus the NCS and CCS should be rewritten to purge them of the staying/leaving language in their items. But, since either adjustment will increase the amount of overlap between the ACS and turnover variables relative to the NCS and CCS, either is likely to increase the already significantly large discrepancy in the turnover-related predictive power between the ACS and the NCS/CCS, perhaps to the point where only the ACS is a significant predictor. If so, the validity of the three-component model, at least with respect to the notion of turnover behavior and commitment to the organization, might be undermined.

Ideally, commitment scales should comport with the theorized structure of the construct, which in the case of studying turnover would mean modifying seven of the eight items in the ACS to include turnover behavior wording. However, omitting staying/leaving wording from the one ACS item (and also deleting them from the NCS and CCS) is
recommended for two reasons: (1) As Bozeman and Perrewe (2001) note, if a commitment scale contains behavioral-terms wording, it isn’t possible to test theoretical models that specify behavioral intentions as mediators of the commitment-behavior relationship (e.g., the Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth, 1978; and Hom and Griffith, 1995 models of turnover); and (2) the Meyer and colleagues recommendation is seemingly impossible to follow if we are interested in assessing the relationship between commitment and multiple behaviors in a single study. That is, if the research goal involves studying organizational commitment and trying to predict a single behavior, such as job performance, then the ACS, NCS, and CCS items could be modified to include performance-related (and not turnover-related) terms. But if the goal is to study the impact of commitment on turnover, job performance, absenteeism, and citizenship behavior in the same study, it would be unwieldy, probably impractical, to modify scale items to refer to all of these behaviors simultaneously. Thus, the best solution is to purge the notion of behavioral terms from the commitment construct, and also from its measures.

Also, concerning Meyer and Herscovitch’s (2001) explanation that AC predicts a wider range of behaviors more strongly than do NC or CC: it could be that rather than AC being an inherently stronger/broader binding force, perhaps AC is typically a better predictor of non-turnover behaviors such as absenteeism, job performance, and citizenship because its items do not specifically reflect turnover cognitions while the NCS and CCS items do. By drawing the respondent’s attention to turnover cognitions, the NCS and CCS items might cause respondents to perceive them as relevant only to that outcome, and thus mute their reflection on how these forms of commitment bind them to non-turnover related outcomes. Thus, an approach that purges behavior-terms wording from these scales seems warranted.

Finally, as noted earlier, Meyer et al. (2006) recently proposed that CC has an affective component, in that an employee’s experience of CC should be characterized by feelings such as anxiety or security/insecurity concerning the sunk costs and side bets that tie them to the organization. Currently, only one of the original CCS items include wording that taps these feelings (CCS, see Appendix B, which refers to the respondents being ‘afraid’ of what might happen if they lost their job—another of the CCS items does mention a general ‘feeling’ about their commitment). Thus, like the NCS, the CCS may no longer be up-to-date with respect to recent conceptual modifications to the construct, in this case there is a need for items that capture this affective dimension. Note that Powell and Meyer’s (2004) high-sacrifice, only version of the CCS, omits this item and thus does not contain any items that directly tap affective content; nor does the 1993 version of the scales, the implication being that CCS items should be reworded to capture this affective aspect of CC.

The recommendations for eliminating behavioral terms wording from all of the scales and adding affective content to the CCS should precede the recommendations made in the remainder of the paper, since these recommendations pertain to the fundamental correspondence between the scales and the constructs they purport to measure.
NCS Measurement Issues

This section addresses some important measurement issues related specifically to the NCS: the discriminant validity between the NCS and the ACS; whether the item wording of the NCS has evolved as the concept of NC has evolved; and the discriminant validity between the NCS and the CCS.

Discriminant Validity of NCS vs. ACS

As noted by Bergman (2006), in the US and Canadian studies, neither the eight-item nor the six-item NCS has been shown to have a high degree of discriminant validity with the ACS. Although the NCS items invariably load on a separate factor from ACS items in Confirmatory Factor Analysis, both versions of the scale tend to be highly correlated with the ACS (0.77 for the 1993 six-item and 0.54 for the original 1990 eight-item versions, Meyer et al., 2002). While these correlations are not indicative of complete redundancy between AC and NC, in Western countries NC often offers little additional explanatory power when modeled as a predictor of outcomes in conjunction with AC.

Somewhat paradoxically, in non-Western cultures, the NCS and the ACS tend to be even more highly correlated, and yet the NCS arguably has shown greater discriminant validity in these settings, since it tends to contribute significantly to outcome prediction. For example, in the analysis of Chang et al. (2007), a Taiwanese sample reported a correlation between the ACS and NCS of 0.66, but structural-equation analysis showed that even when controlling the ACS, the NCS was a strong predictor of turnover intentions. Likewise, Chen and Francesco’s (2003) Chinese study found a correlation between the ACS and NCS of 0.64, but also found that the NCS played a key role in moderating the relationship between the ACS and three dimensions of citizenship behavior. Thus, despite high intercorrelations, there is an evidence of construct distinctiveness, at least in Eastern cultures, perhaps reflecting the “collectivist” natures of those cultures, in which commitment based on obligation might have more resonance (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

Conceptual Changes in NC

Allen and Meyer (1990) first introduced the concept of NC. Since then, researchers have noted that the definition of NC has changed (Allen, 2003 and Bergman, 2006). The original 1990 NCS was designed to capture an NC construct that was based largely on Wiener’s (1982) work on the internalization of social loyalty norms to organizations. In 1993, NC was reconceptualized somewhat as an obligation to stay with the organization, without specific reference to social pressures about loyalty (Meyer et al., 1993). This conceptual shift was built into the revised 1993 NCS. However, recently, NC has been altered again, to reflect reciprocity for a benefit (Meyer et al., 2002), and still more recently, Meyer et al. (2006) refined this reciprocity theme further, seemingly positing a two-dimensional concept of NC that includes an ‘indebted obligation’ aspect reflecting the perceived need to meet other’s expectations, which is theorized to be correlated with CC and a ‘moral imperative’ aspect that reflects striving to meet valued outcomes, which is theorized to be correlated with AC.
Thus, the NCS, which hasn’t been revised since 1993, has not been modified to keep up with the recent conceptual revisions, and thus probably does not adequately reflect the theorized construct, which now bears a strong resemblance to social exchange-based constructs such as the psychological contract (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1995). An analysis of the original eight-item scale (Appendix B), shows that only item seven, which references being taught to remain loyal to one’s organization and thus seems to tap the “indebted obligation” theme, directly taps either of these dimensions. The six-item 1993 scale includes two items that mention ‘obligation’, but neither indicates that the source of this obligation is other’s expectations. Nor do any of the items reflect the ‘moral imperative’ theme.

**Discriminant Validity of NCS vs. CCS**

Powell and Meyer’s (2004) analysis of CC found that contrary to expectations, social-cost side bets predicted NC stronger than CC, and based on this speculation predicted that NC might be a ‘special form’ of CC. This idea has face validity, since a perceived obligation to remain with the organization, particularly one based on reciprocity, could be experienced by the employee as a psychic ‘cost’, in the form of guilty conscience, that would have to be incurred if the employee were to break the obligation and leave. Similarly, Wasti (2002, p. 529), noting that Becker’s original commitment theory contemplated ‘generalized cultural expectations’ about remaining as an antecedent, says that “Becker has in effect proposed that CC does not develop from calculative costs only, but has normative bases (my emphasis) as well”. This further confounds the issue of discriminant validity of the NCS as measuring a distinct form of commitment, since it implies that NC might be an antecedent of CC.

**Research Recommendations for the Refinement of NCS**

Concerning the discriminant validity between the ACS and NCS, researchers who feel comfortable using the 1990 and 1993 definitions of NC would get benefit from comprehensive item-level confirmatory factor analysis or item response analysis to determine the redundancy between ACS and NCS at the item, level (not just scale) as a means of pinpointing redundant items and thus clarifying the distinctiveness of the NC construct. Ideally, this would be done on samples drawn from both western and eastern cultures, so that the cross-cultural validity of the item-level analysis can be established. It might be that a two-component model of commitment (CC and AC) is a better descriptor of an employee’s commitment in some cultural settings.

Concerning the issue of the bi-dimensional nature of NC, the NCS should be rewritten to include items that specifically tap the moral imperative and indebted obligation dimensions of Meyer et al. (2006). Doing so will also help resolve the discriminant validity issues regarding AC and CC, since whether NC is an antecedent or dimension of CC, or has discriminant validity with AC, can be validly tested only after we are confident that NC is being measured with appropriate items. Rewriting the NCS to reflect these dimensions should be done after or concurrently with the removal of behavioral terms wording as recommended in the preceding section of the paper.
CCS Measurement Issues
Since McGee and Ford’s (1987) seminal study, researchers have been concerned with the item wording and factor structure of the CCS. Recently, researchers studying CC have formulated differing views about how specific CCS items should be with regard to the kinds of costs and side bets that it taps. Also, advances in factor model structure research open the door to analyze whether or not CC is a higher-order construct with two sub-dimensions.

Specificity of CCS Items
Allen (2003, p. 242) noted that CC reflects the degree to which the employee ‘recognizes’, or is aware that she or he is bound to stay because of the costs associated with leaving, not the mere existence of the costs themselves. If, objectively, the employee has incurred costs, but subjectively is not aware of these costs and thus does not experience them as ‘binding’ him/her to the organization, then CC is not present. Further, the level of awareness can stem from various events or perceptions, the nature or substance, which can be quite idiosyncratic to the individual. For this reason, Allen argues that “the best CC items are those that capture the recognition of perceived costs but do so without reference to their specific source”.

The emphasis on perceived costs is also important because it pertains to the accumulated evidence that the CCS is bi-dimensional, i.e., it includes items that reflect both ‘High Sacrifices’ (HS) that would be incurred in order to leave the organization, and ‘Low Alternatives’ (LA) items that reflect the degree to which the employee believes that alternate employment opportunities exist in the labor market (Meyer et al., 2002). Since perceptions of employment alternatives do not reflect the existence of sunk costs, the conclusion that has been drawn is that only the three HS items from the original CCS reflect the construct of CC, and that only these items should be used to measure it: Powell and Meyer (2004) have developed a new CCS that includes the three HS items, plus three additional items also designed to tap sunk costs but not LA.

However, Wasti (2002, p. 547), while agreeing that CC should reflect HS side bets and costs and not LA, adopts a perspective on item specificity that parts company with Allen’s notion that the best CC items capture perceived costs sans reference to their specific source. Wasti argues that the CCS should not consist of “vague items expressing awareness of unspecified costs” because doing so means a respondent’s score on the CCS could be influenced by affective and normative factors that the employee might perceive to be ‘costs’ that would have to be incurred if they left, thus conflating CC with AC and NC, and thus precluding the development of a ‘pure’ three-component model, one in which each form of commitment has unique antecedents and unique implications for outcomes. Wasti Wasti (2002, p. 547) argues that the current ‘vaguely worded’ CCS does not “reliably represent a calculative attachment to the organization” and recommends rewriting the CCS to consist entirely of items that narrowly reflect calculative, instrumental costs as opposed to broader normative/affective social and cultural costs.
Other Possible CCS Models

In the last section, an argument was presented against inclusion of LA items in favor of HS items in the CCS and therefore within the domain of the CC construct. However, one other possibility that has not been tested is that both the HS and LA subscales are first-order factors that reflect a higher second order CC construct. For example, it might be the case that an employee experiences CC (perhaps as a result of dissonance reduction effects such as a felt need to maintain consistency in behavior, to avoid losing face, etc.), and as a result, this causes them to believe that they lack alternatives and that leaving the organization would be difficult/disruptive. This is a reflective model of CC (Edwards, 2001), since the HS and LA dimensions would reflect this underlying state of commitment to the organization.

Conversely, it’s possible that the HS and LA subscales are formative dimensions of CC, i.e., they ‘cause’ the formation of a CC construct. A formative model would hypothesize that an employee perceives that he/she lacks alternatives and has incurred sunk costs that would be difficult to sacrifice, and as a result, experiences CC to the organization. If this is correct, then it would be absolutely necessary to include the LA items in our measurement of CC, since failure to do so would mean that we are omitting a key component of the CC construct (Mackenzie et al., 2005).

Research Recommendations for CCS

Concerning the issue of the specificity of CCS items, to an extent, Wasti’s (2002) position has merits. There is a rich research tradition on ‘calculative’ commitment, which is based on economic exchange, which traces its theoretical lineage back to March and Simon (Mayer and Schoorman, 1996), and that has been shunted aside over the past 15 or so years as the Meyer/Allen model has gained ascendancy in the literature. Future research could compare measures of calculative commitment against Meyer and Allen’s CCS to determine which kind of “cost-based commitment” has the most explanatory power. But within the context of the Meyer/Allen model, Allen’s (2003) perspective is more compelling. CC is based on Becker’s (1960) side-bet theory, and as Wasti (2002) acknowledges, Becker contemplated commitment based on a broad array of costs, ranging from economic to cultural and social to psychological. Thus, the CCS should include items that encompass this full range of possible costs, even if this means some conceptual clarity between CC and AC/NC is lost.

Concerning the ‘other possible CCS models’ issue, the ‘reflective’ model possibility could be empirically investigated using second order CFA with CC posited as a second order factor that underlies the HS and LA sub-dimensions. The critical tests to be performed is to determine if this second order factor structure provides a good fit to the data, and if the second order CC construct directly impacts on outcomes such as turnover behavior and job performance, while direct paths from HS and LA to these outcomes are non-significant.
The ‘formative’ model possibility could be assessed by modeling CC as a latent construct that is formed by the combined influence of latent LA and HS constructs. This is not the same as simply adding the scores on all of the LA and HS items to create a single CC scale (as has been the usual practice in the literature). The CC construct would include a construct-level error term, which implies that the CC construct has ‘surplus meaning’ (Mackenzie et al., 2005), including the possibility that perhaps some third factor, in addition to HS and LA, contributes to the formation of CC as well. Thus, the aggregate CC construct cannot be reduced to a simple mathematical sum of its indicators, in this case the HS and LA constructs. Tests of these models may reveal that the LA items may yet to be found to play a role in the formation or reflection of CC.

However, even if empirical tests of the formative/reflective model indicate a very good fit, these results might still be trumped by the conceptual argument that ‘low alternatives’ items do not fall within the proper domain of CC, as conceived by Becker (1960). The tests for the usefulness of formative and reflective models should not be conducted until the CCS items have been restructured so as to remove behavioral terms wording, and have been rewritten to include affective content, as recommended in the “analysis of Meyer and Allen’s framework” section.

Recommendations for Further Research

Two remaining issues that are important for further refinement of the Meyer/Allen measures are the generalizability of the model in a ‘micro’ sense, and the relationship between the commitment constructs and recently developed work attitudes that appear to tap at least a part of the same conceptual space. Note that these issues should not be addressed until the recommendations outlined in the preceding sections of the paper have been implemented, since tests of generalizability and nomological net placement should not be conducted until valid and structurally sound commitment scales have been constructed.

Micro Generalizability

Macro generalizability refers to the generalizability of the Meyer/Allen commitment measures to populations beyond the Western population in which it was originally developed. Currently, a robust research program studying the validity of the model in East Asian cultures (e.g., Chen and Francesco, 2003 and Chang et al., 2007), Mid-Eastern cultures (e.g., Wasti 2002 and Cetin 2006), and Eastern Europe (e.g., Vandenberghe et al., 2001) is being implemented.

In contrast, micro generalizability refers to the validity of the model within sub-populations in the broader Western culture in which it was developed. Historically, research on organizational commitment within the Meyer and Allen paradigm has focused on full-time paid organizational members. But, not all organizational members have these characteristics. A growing number of organizations are employing part-time, temporary,
and contract workers (Meyer et al., 2006), and some organizations include volunteers. Concerning the commitment of members of these sub-population, research is largely lacking, though some initial steps have been taken. For example, Dawley et al. (2005) extended the analysis of the Meyer/Allen constructs to one such sub-population, volunteers, specifically chamber of commerce board members, and found that the “high sacrifice” CCS subscale did not measure a meaningful construct.

Dawley et al. (2005) explained this finding by noting that volunteer chamber board members often have paid employment with other organizations, and would not suffer monetary losses to the same degree as regular paid employees. They argue that their findings should not be interpreted as HS is not an important basis of commitment for volunteer chamber of commerce board members, but instead that the CCS contains items that are too narrowly focused on economic sacrifices to the exclusion of the kinds of social and psychological sacrifices (e.g., the prestige and public visibility of being a board member and feeling good for volunteering) that quitting a chamber board would entail. Thus, their position implies the need for a refined measure of CC that would better tap these non-economic costs (note that this view of the nature of the current CCS is the opposite of Wasti (2002), who argues that the CCS is characterized by vague items and isn’t focused enough on economic costs).

Relationships with Other Recently Developed Work Attitude Constructs

Recently, several new work-related attitudes have been introduced in the literature that seemingly tap similar conceptual space or otherwise challenge the validity of the Meyer/Allen model. For example, Harrison et al. (2006, p. 306) note that the meta-analytic correlations between the ACS and measures of Job Satisfaction (JS) are greater than the correlations between the ACS and the CCS and between the ACS and NCS, implying that AC is more closely related to JS than to the other Meyer/Allen commitment constructs. Thus, they propose that the ACS should be broken off from the three-component model and coupled with JS as sub-dimensions of a broader job attitude construct reflecting a ‘fundamental evaluation of one’s job experiences’, and which should predict behaviors such as turnover and job performance better than the three-component model.

Harrison et al. (2006) found some support for their contention: A meta-analytic structural model that posited JS and AC as first order latent indicators of a second order job attitude construct fit the data well, and the job attitude construct predicted behaviors such as job performance and absenteeism. However, they did not test the comparative utility of their formula versus possible alternatives, such as modeling JS and AC as having direct effects on behavior, or including NC or CC in their analysis. Still, the findings of Harrison et al. (2006) challenge the basic structure of the Meyer/Allen model: Is AC one of three commitment mindsets, or is it its affective component so strong that it actually is distinct from NC and CC, and subsumed in a general orientation towards one’s job?
Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2001) and Lee et al. (2004) have recently developed a Job Embeddedness (JE) construct, which reflects the extent to which one has links to other people, the extent to which one’s job/community fit in their life-spaces, and the sacrifices incurred if one wants to break these links and leave the organization. In developing this construct, Mitchell et al. (2001, p. 1106) compared it to the Meyer/Allen commitment model. They noted that whereas (a) JE captures both organizational and non-work linkages, organizational commitment is focused on organizational linkages only (b) that NC and AC are ‘conceptually quite different’ from JE because NC and AC reflect emotional ties whereas JE is a largely cognitive construct; but (c) JE does share considerable conceptual space with CC, as both try to capture sunk costs and ties that bind one to the organization. But, they also noted some differences, such as the CCS’s inclusion of ‘perceived alternatives’ items, and the CCS’s use of ‘general items’, whereas their JE scale was designed to tap specific side bets. They conclude by saying their JE measure is “more specific and includes elements not typically included within the side bet idea”.

Since, JE was designed to reflect an employee’s level of enmeshment in the organization and community, Mitchell et al. (2001) argued that their JE construct should be a powerful predictor of voluntary turnover, above and beyond the predictive power of job satisfaction and Meyer and Allen’s three components of organizational commitment. Results from the 2001 study were partially supportive: Controlling for the three commitment mindsets and job satisfaction, JE significantly predicted turnover amongst a sample of hospital workers, but not for a sample of grocery workers. Also, contrary to their conceptual argument, JE was strongly correlated with AC (0.65) and NC (0.39) but not significantly correlated with CC (0.12), indicating that JE is saturated with affective/evaluative content.

In their 2004 study, Lee et al. conducted an exploratory factor analysis of their JE scale items, a measure of JS, and Meyer/Allen’s ACS. Unlike in their 2001 study, in this paper they measured JE as having separate ‘on the job’ and ‘off the job’ dimensions. Results showed a three-factor solution in which items for JS, AC, and the ‘fit’ and ‘sacrifice’ dimensions of on-the-job JE loaded on one factor, the ‘fit’ and ‘sacrifice’ dimensions of off-the-job JE on a second factor, and the ‘links’ items for both on and off JE loaded on a third factor. These findings muddle the waters as to what JE is and how it relates to Meyer and Allen’s model.

Finally, Jackson et al. (2006) have introduced an individual-difference concept, Psychological Collectivism (PC), a personality trait that reflects a preference for and reliance on group membership, a tendency to adhere to group norms, and prioritization of in-group goals over individual goals. Jackson et al. succeeded in developing scales for 5 facets of PC, and found that overall PC positively predicted citizenship behavior and task performance, and negatively predicted withdrawal behavior, although they did not control other causes such as organizational commitment. The key issue here is whether PC is a factor that might ‘compete’ with Meyer and Allen’s constructs in the prediction.
of these outcomes, or is PC an antecedent of commitment? Usually, the search for antecedents to AC, NC, and CC has focused on extra-individual factors such as side bets (CC), work experiences (AC), and socio-cultural normative pressures (NC). But, perhaps PC represents a dispositional tendency to commit to collectives, including the organization, the team, etc. and therefore might predict all three forms of commitment.

Research Implications
Concerning the issue of micro generalizability, the findings of Dawley et al. (2005) have to be viewed with some caution, because Dawley et al. altered the wording of the three high-sacrifice items in a way that might have caused respondents to disregard non-economic sacrifices, precisely those that Dawley et al. argue, need to be assessed when studying volunteers. For example, CC-HS item three was altered to remove wording in the original scale that refers to ‘considerable personal sacrifices’ that would have to be made, and CC-HS item two was altered to remove wording that refers to ‘life disruptions’. Thus, because these alterations could have biased the findings of Dawley et al. in the direction of irrelevancy for the CC-HS scale, future research should try to replicate their findings using the regular scale items. Also, chamber of commerce volunteers may not be representatives of volunteers generally, since most members are businessmen who join and serve at least in part for instrumental reasons (to make business contacts, network with customers, etc.), as opposed to purely altruistic reasons. Perhaps a sample of Red Cross or battered women’s shelter volunteers would have yielded different results.

But beyond these study specifics, Dawley et al. (2005) is exemplary in that it highlights the need to conduct research that tests the validity of the model amongst non-traditional organization members, such as volunteers, contract workers and temporary workers (Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow, 2006). Ultimately, formal tests of measurement invariance should be conducted to determine the relative fit of the ACS, CCS and NCS across these sub-populations.

Concerning the nomological net issue, a number of research implications are apparent. First, Harrison et al.’s (2006) development of the “job attitude” construct is provocative because it threatens the unity of the Meyer/Allen model. Whether they are right or not will largely hinge on empirical tests that they did not conduct—comparing their formula with competing versions that model JS and the three Meyer/Allen commitment constructs as independent or profile-type predictors of behavioral outcomes. Lee et al.’s (2004) concept of JE should ultimately be researched to determine if it competes with or complements Meyer and Allen’s commitment constructs as predictors of behavior. However, as indicated above, both the study of Mitchell et al. (2001) and Lee et al. (2004) showed that the factor structure of the JE scale is unstable and not in accordance with theory predictions. Until researchers develop a valid JE scale and sort out its conceptual terrain, it will be fruitless to compare its predictive utility versus the Meyer/Allen constructs.
Finally, the future research should assess the notion that the PC construct of Jackson et al. (2006) is a dispositional/personality factor that might predict each of the three Meyer/Allen commitment constructs. By clarifying their position relative to other similar constructs, research into the nomological net issues discussed in this section will also serve as a means of further refining the meaning and measures of the Meyer/Allen commitment constructs.

This paper has highlighted several measurement issues in Meyer/Allen model of commitment, making recommendations to address them. An enhanced model of organizational commitment with revised subscales for AC, NC, and CC has been proposed, aiming at an improved understanding of organizational commitment.

References


Reference # 06J-2007-10-01-01
### Revised Commitment Scale Items

#### Affective Commitment

“I am very happy being a member of this organization”.

This item is a ‘revision’ of ACS item #1 and should replace it. The remainder of the scale would consist of the original ACS items #2–#7 listed in Appendix B, as they already comport with the recommended item structure.

#### Continuance Commitment

It is recommended that the eight original CCS items from Appendix B be replaced with these six newly written items, all of which reflect the ‘high sacrifice’ theme and have affective content:

- “I worry about the loss of investments I have made in this organization”.
- “If I wasn’t a member of this organization, I would be sad because my life would be disrupted”.
- “I am loyal to this organization because I have invested a lot in it, emotionally, socially, and economically”.
- “I often feel anxious about what I have to lose with this organization”.
- “Sometimes I worry about what might happen if something was to happen to this organization and I was no longer a member”.
- “I am dedicated to this organization because I fear what I have to lose in it”.

#### Normative Commitment

It is recommended that the following newly-written items, which reflect the indebted obligation and moral imperative dimensions, replace the original NCS items given in Appendix B.

**Indebted Obligation Dimension**

- “I feel that I owe this organization quite a bit because of what it has done for me”.
- “My organization deserves my loyalty because of its treatment towards me”.
- “I feel I would be letting my co-workers down if I wasn’t a member of this organization”.

(Contd...)
### Appendix A

**Moral Imperative Dimension**

“I am loyal to this organization because my values are largely its values”.

“This organization has a mission that I believe in and am committed to”.

“I feel it is ‘morally correct’ to dedicate myself to this organization”.

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### Appendix B

**Original Commitment Scale Items (Allen and Meyer, 1990)**

**Affective Commitment Scale Items**

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.  
   
2. I enjoy discussing about my organization with people outside it.  
   
3. I really feel as if this organization’s problems are my own.  
   
4. I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one.  
   
5. I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization.  
   
6. I do not feel ‘emotionally attached’ to this organization.  
   
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.  
   
8. I do not feel a ‘strong’ sense of belonging to my organization.

**Continuance Commitment Scale Items**

1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up.  
   
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.  
   
3. Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organization now.  
   
4. It wouldn’t be too costly for me to leave my organization now.  
   
5. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.  
   
6. I feel that I have very few options to consider leaving this organization.

(Contd...)
Appendix B

7. One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.

8. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice—another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here.

Normative Commitment Scale Items

1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often.

2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization.\(\text{(R)}\) \(^*\)

3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me.\(\text{(R)}\) \(#\)

4. One of the major reasons I continue to work in this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain.\(\text{\#}\)

5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization.\(^*\)

6. I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization.\(^{**}\)

7. Things were better in the days when people stayed in one organization for most of their careers.

8. I do not think that to be a ‘company man’ or ‘company woman’ is sensible anymore.\(\text{(R)}\) \(^{**}\)

Note:

\(^*\) Meyer and Allen (1997) substitute ‘believe’ for ‘feel’ in this item.

\(^{**}\) Directly reflects the focal behavior for organizational commitment, staying/leaving.

\(#\) Indirectly reflects the focal behavior.

\(^\#\) Reflects affective content.

\(\text{(R)}\) Reverse-coded item.