

Organisational Commitment in the Public Service of Ghana: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Overall performance of an organisation depends on several factors including organisational commitment. This phenomenon is a valuable factor that affects policy direction of organisations of today. The current study examines commitment of workers in the civil/public service of Ghana. In the process, the researchers also investigated differences in commitment in terms of age and length of service. Subjects were 343 male and female civil/public servants, drawn from various ministries, departments and agencies. Analyses show that males are more committed than their female counterparts. It was further revealed that age is positively associated with employee commitment, and that longer serving employees are more committed than staff with short tenure in an organisation. The implications were discussed and recommendations made.

Keywords: Civil Service, Ghana, Organisational Behaviour, Organisational Commitment, Public Service.

1. Introduction

There have been concerns expressed as to whether civil servants are committed to doing their jobs as expected. In Ghana, civil servants are often perceived as idling around, “working lotto numbers”, reading newspapers, at most important times that they are expected to be working towards achieving the goals for which they were employed. This is the perception the general public has about civil servants, and so may not necessarily have scientific basis; but if this is true, does it apply to younger and older employees as well? Does long service play any role in this regard? This public perception about employees in the public service is a major issue of concern, one that when explored and addressed could go a long way to save the image of the public servant in the Ghana. This study attempts to answer the questions as to whether being in the public service for a long time, has any influence on the commitment that employees exhibit, and whether there is any gender differences in commitment to their organisations.

To this end, the study aims at exploring how organisational commitment is influenced by specific factors, with the intention of providing recommendations to help management in manpower planning process. Specifically, the current study objectives are to:

1. Investigate gender differences in employee commitment. Generally is it that women are more committed than men, and if so, can it be generalised across cultures?
2. Assess the relationship between commitment on one hand and age and tenure (length of service) on the other hand. Is there any consistent relationship?

1.1 The Civil/Public Service in Ghana

Many people tend to confuse the terms civil service and public service, and sometimes use them interchangeably. This section seeks to provide some clarifications and background for this important institution. In the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the Civil Service is considered a microcosm of the Public Service, that is, it forms part of the Public Service. The role played by the public service in national governance and administration is seen to be very vital. It is one of the institutions, which is closest to elected government and may rightly be said to be the secretariat of the Executive arm of government. The public service as an institution is indispensable to governments the world over, in achieving political goals in the material, social and moral development of the citizenry. The effectiveness of the government, therefore, depends on the efficiency of the public service and its ability to respond in practical terms to its policy decisions. The *raison d’être* of the public service is to assist government in the formulation and implementation of its policies, decisions, programmes and plans for the governance and development of the country, and for the well-being of the people in the country. These are, therefore, the reasons that the public service is often described as the custodian of the government’s reputation, since if it is unable to carry out the policies faithfully and efficiently it does not only frustrate the government, but it might seriously undermine the government’s position and stability.

Basically, the Civil Service Law, (PNDC L 327), defines the Civil Service as part of the Public Services of

Ghana, that is concerned with service in a civil office of Government in both central and local government platforms. It consists of the Office of the President and its Extra-Ministerial Organisations (i.e. the Office of the Head of the Civil Service and the secretariats), Sector Ministries and Departments, Regional and District Offices of the Central Government.

Therefore, the Civil Service comprises all servants of the state other than holders of political or judicial offices, who are employed in a civil capacity and whose remunerations are paid wholly and directly out of moneys voted by parliament. It is also a part of the machinery of the executive branch of government, and exists to put into effect government policies. Therefore, the term covers all staff of ministries and departments from the permanent Principal Secretary to the daily rated employees in the District Councils. It does not include personnel of the Armed Forces, Judges, Teachers, the Prisons Service, the Parliamentary Service, the Health Service, the Statistical Service, the National Fire Service, the Customs, Excise and Preventive Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the Police Service and workers in the public boards and corporations. These classes of workers, together with the civil servants are called public servants (Adu, 1968; Heady, 1984; Republic of Ghana, 1992).

1.2 Conceptual Framework and Related Studies

Whatever binds an individual to his/her organisation to the extent that they can be so glued to a course of action relevant to achieving the goals of that organisation is worth studying (Meyer, Becker, & van Dick, 2006). It has been found that there are lots of benefits in having committed employees in work organisations (Meyer & Maltin, 2010), and this has generated several theories, conceptions and definitions for commitment as a concept.

For some time now, psychologists and organisational behaviour researchers have observed that organisational commitment is an important job-related outcome at the individual level that can be linked to a number of other job-related outcomes such as employees' absenteeism, turnover, job effort and performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Randall, 1990), hence the need to understand this concept across different levels.

In order to explain the term, Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) conceptualise commitment as the relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organisation. To them, this is characterised by strong beliefs in, and acceptance of, the organisation's goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a strong desire to retain membership in the organisation. In a similar vein, Steers (1977) describes commitment as the relative strength of an individual's identification with a particular organisation. Accordingly, this is characterised by (a) strong belief in and acceptance of organisational goals and values, (b) willingness to exert efforts for the organisation and (c) the desire to maintain membership in the organisation (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). These elements of commitment are cognitive and behavioural in nature and so their influences on work related behaviours cannot be underrated (Markovits, Ullrich, van Dick, & Davis, 2008).

Some other researchers (e.g., Becker, 1960) theorize that commitment occurs in a situation whereby a person, by making some investment (side bets), links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity. That is, for Becker, commitment could be described as a tendency to engage in consistent lines of activity, and so argued that it develops as a 'person finds that his/her involvement in social organisation has, in effect, made some 'side bets' for him/her and thus constrained his future. Thus, the effect of making side bets is to persist in a course of action, in this case, staying with the organisation (Powell & Meyer, 2004). Becker's argument is that commitment would be accompanied by an awareness of the costs of discontinuing a course of action. Becker (1960) therefore describes commitment as the tendency to engage in "consistent lines of activity" because of the perceived cost of doing otherwise. In the case of commitment to an organisation, the activity referred to by Becker involves staying with the organisation and the perceived costs associated with discontinuing the activity (i.e. leaving) might include loss of "side bets", such as attractive benefits, seniority, the disruption of personal relations created by moving to another location, the effort of seeking a new job and so on. It should be noted that Becker's (1964) proposition is based on the assumptions that people engage in consistent behaviour because they invest in things of value to them, which were previously extraneous to the behaviour they are engaged in. He notes three elements of commitment. Firstly, that the individual who is committed is in a position in which his or her decision with regard to some particular line of action has consequences for other interests and activities not necessarily related to this particular line of action. Secondly, the individual places him/herself in the first position by his own prior actions. This however explains that commitment is not always conscious and deliberate; some are made conscious but others are not deliberate decisions. The individual gets to a certain point and realises the commitment he has made. Lastly, the individual must be aware that these commitments will have consequences beyond the decision to make them. He therefore emphasised that whenever commitment is used as an explanation of consistent behaviour, one must be able to make independent observation of these three elements above.

The results of side-bet theory research have been generally positive, although Meyer and Allen (1984) have criticised the appropriateness of the methods used. Conceptually, there is the lack of agreement regarding what commitment should be, and so it has been proposed that researchers recognise the complexity of the construct

and view it as multi-faceted (Benkhoff, 1997). Given the concerns, a more recent viewpoint on multidimensional organisational commitment is taking over from the one-dimensional approach that has dominated organisational research for some time now.

So far, popular among the empirical literature are the ones provided by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) Porter et al (1974) as well as Meyer and Allen (1991). According to Porter et al (1974), commitment is found to be the strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in a particular organisation. The definitions given by Porter et al are that commitment is a multi-dimensional construct, subsuming a desire to maintain membership in the organisation. For purposes of this study, this was used, unless otherwise stated and explained appropriately.

In another development, Meyer and Allen (1984, 1991, Allen & Meyer, 1990) suggest in their three-component model that commitment is best viewed as multi-dimensional, encompassing what can be described as affective, continuance and normative dimensions. With this, it is assumed that employees displaying each dimension of commitment will remain in an organisation because they feel that they want to, need to, or ought to do so. However, Meyer (2001) subsequently suggested that perceived lack of alternatives might be better considered an antecedent of continuance commitment than as part of the construct itself. That is, where one cannot leave an organisation (perhaps as a result of limited skills or personal limitations), it could better be explained as leading to commitment to the organisation than seeing it as part of commitment.

The effect of age on commitment has also been investigated in various ways. Some authors find age and tenure to be positively correlated with organisational commitment (Allen & Meyer 1993; Angle & Perry 1981; Harrison & Hubbard 1998; Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Mowday et al. 1982). That is, the older an employee, the higher will be the commitment level to organisations, and vice versa. In other words, as employees get older, their employment opportunities commonly decrease, thereby motivating them to identify themselves with the organisation and invest more personal efforts into the organisation, with the aim of being considered valuable to the firm and thus retain their position (Gregersen & Black 1992; Harrison & Hubbard 1998; Meyer & Allen 1984; Mowday et al. 1982).

Given the growing concern for the wave of change across the globe affecting business and employee work behaviour, and the perception that certain demographic variables like gender, tenure and age are important factors to consider when talking about commitment, it is expected that commitment will relate employee psychological attachment to work and the demographic variables in various ways.

1.3 Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing review of early research findings, and the need to give empirical consideration of the relationship with regards to these phenomena, the following hypotheses were examined in the study:

1. Male public servants would be more committed to their organisations than their female counterparts
2. Age will have significant positive relationship with organisational commitment.
3. There would be a positive relationship between the tenure of employees and the level of commitment to their organisations

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

The study aims at investigating the relationship between organisational commitment and demographic variables including gender, age, tenure, and public service. These were looked at in the Ghanaian working environment. For purposes of this study, however, participants were made of 343 workers selected from the Ministries.

Certain key factors have informed the researchers' choice of the Ministries. This is an area with diverse cultural practices, and employees therein are making every effort to provide services for the public, and as such they are assumed to be non-political. Specifically, the Ministries area was selected because it is one collective institution with large sets of professionals and non-professionals working alongside each other. Commitment to work and effort providing satisfactory service is therefore an issue of concern for the Ghanaian populace; this has some implications for the country as a whole.

The researchers used purposive and stratified random sampling technique in getting the various participants. Here, the various ministries and/or departments were first listed and the skip interval method applied for selecting them. The purpose (for using stratified technique) is to make it possible to solicit the views representative of both older and younger workers, as well as those with long service/short service. In all, 343 employees made up of 204 males and 139 females, participated. The process was done with the help of the representatives from the various ministries.

2.2 Instruments

A two-section questionnaire was administered:

2.2.1 Section A: Demographics

This section gathered relevant demographic information on participants. The generic biographical data included

age, gender, profession, tenure, and level of education. The focus was, however, on four (4) most relevant factors for this study and these are: Age, Gender, education level, and Tenure (number of years of service in the current organisation).

2.2.2 Section B: The Commitment Scale

The researchers have decided to use this scale because it assesses respondents' level of organisational commitment as developed by Allen and Meyer (1990), which incorporates multiple conceptual dimensions of commitment with three components, namely affective, continuance and normative commitment with each component having eight-items.

Some of the items in the scale are:

- i. I feel myself to be part of the organisation
- ii. I am not willing to put myself out just to help the organisation
- iii. I am quite proud to tell people whom I work for

Where there was the need, some of the words of some of the items in the original scale were adapted for clarification purposes. To minimise response bias, where some respondents may indiscriminately choose without carefully reading, some items were negatively worded. Moreover, the response dimension was also modified, that is, from a seven-point to a six-point Likert-type to avoid the situation whereby some respondents would take the "middle-of-the-road approach", (i.e., not providing response that connotes low or high commitment). Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained for this scale in the current study was 0.81.

For this scale, the response dimension was as follows: "Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Slightly Disagree", "Slightly Agree", "Agree" "Strongly Agree". Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the items on the scale by choosing only one of the response alternatives provided for each statement.

2.3 Scoring

Scores ranging from 1 to 6 respectively were applied. The minimum one could score was 24 and the highest, 144. With this scale, a high score is an indication of "high commitment", and vice versa.

2.4 Procedure

The researchers, with the help of the personnel managers of selected ministries, got four hundred and ten (410) employees to participate in the study. The participants were given the questionnaires each to respond to, indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with the questionnaire items. Some of them requested for clarifications, and some few hours to complete the questionnaire. In all, about four hundred and ten (410) questionnaires were distributed out of which three hundred and forty-eight (348) were retrieved, with five (5) not properly filled. The researchers then prepared the correctly-filled out questionnaires for analysis.

3. Results

This section presents data analysis and results. The study sought to investigate any differential influence of employee age and length of service on commitment among public servants. In all, 343 completed questionnaires were subjected to statistical analyses using the Statistical Product and Services Solution (SPSS) for Windows. The findings and related interpretations are presented below, in tables.

To investigate gender differences among public servants on commitment, the independent t-test was used and the results detailed in Table 1 that follows:

Table 1: Independent Samples t-Test Results: Gender Differences in Organisational Commitment

Category	N	Mean	Std Deviation	df	t	P
<i>Males</i>	204	98.11	12.71	341	5.69	< .05
<i>Females</i>	139	79.52	15.34			

In Table 1, initial descriptive statistics performed on participants' scores revealed various values for means and standard deviations for the scores of males and females on commitment. The mean score for males is 98.11 (SD=12.71) and this is higher than that of the females which is 79.52 (SD=15.34), suggesting greater commitment among males, than females. However, to further test the significant differences in the means, the independent t-test was conducted, showing a value of: $t_{(341)} = 5.69$, $p < .05$ which is statistically significant. This means that the difference between the mean scores of the two groups is not by chance. In other words, looking at the mean scores, commitment is higher among males than it is with their female counterparts. This supports the hypothesis that *male public servants would be more committed to their organisations than their female counterparts*.

The study further observed that age of employees relate positively with commitment levels among employees, displayed in Table 2 below, using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation.

Table 2: Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (r) Among Commitment, Age and Tenure

Variables	Commitment	Age	Tenure
Commitment	—	.74*	.71*
Age	.74*	—	.65*
Tenure	.71*	.65*	—

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (1-tailed), N=343

In Table 2, analyses show that there is a significant positive relationship between commitment and age of employees, indicated by: $r = 0.74$, $N=343$, $p < .05$. This means that irrespective of one's gender, the older an employee is, the more s/he becomes committed. In other words, the analyses reveal that older workers have the higher tendency to be committed to their organisations than younger employees, irrespective of gender. This supports the hypothesis that *age will have significant positive relationship with organisational commitment*.

Similarly, the study reveals a significant relationship between organisational commitment and length of service (number of years of service with the organisation) given by $r = 0.71$, $N=343$, $p < .05$. This supports the hypothesis that *there would be a positive relationship between the tenure of employees and the level of commitment to their organisations*. That is the longer an employee serves in the organisation, the more likely it is that s/he will be committed to the organisation. It could also mean that when one is committed to the organisation, s/he is more likely to serve longer than when the commitment was not there.

3. Discussion

The study explored the differential impact of certain demographic variables namely gender, tenure and age on organisational commitment.

In all, the three (3) hypotheses that were tested were supported by the study. Specifically, the hypothesis that *male public servants would be more committed to their organisations than their female counterparts* was supported. This is consistent with the findings by Cofie (2004), when he found that male employees are more committed than their female counterparts. It is, however, not in line with the findings of Matheiu and Zajac (1990) that women tend to be more committed to organisations than men, primarily due to the fact that they are offered fewer opportunities for employment (Aven, Parker & McEvoy 1993). Among the reasons that can be cited for the higher commitment as displayed by men than women is that in Ghana, and some African societies, males are traditionally considered as bread winners of their families, while women are regarded as homemakers. And so males are more likely to take their job seriously, value their work, more than females who (are seen as only) playing supporting role in the family.

It is, however, worth noting that, even though there is some gender differences in almost everything conceivable, from education, through choice of profession, and even in games, situations are changing. For example, there has been increase in the number of women entering the workforce now, than before, and in the number of women pursuing professional and managerial careers. Furthermore, as the social perspective surrounding women issues changes, it may also be that the experience and anxiety associated with women's achievement will also change (Akotia, Schroeder & Abdul-Nasiru, 2004), especially so with women activists and other non-governmental organisations yearning for changes in policies to reflect gender equality. Research has found that governments and women organisations have realised the role of education in creating awareness and are making efforts at helping make gender stereotype a thing of the past (Abdul-Nasiru & Cofie, 2002) and this effort immensely contributes to making women more achievement oriented than ever before.

The second hypothesis which states that *age will have significant positive relationship with organisational commitment* was also supported. Organisations are full of people, and it seems only natural and appropriate to analyse and manage organisations using individuals as the units of analysis (Perrow, 1970). The finding by this study, that, there is a significant positive relationship between commitment and age means that age is associated with (but does not necessarily cause) high commitment in older working people in their organisations. This lends support to the hypothesis, which states that there would be positive relationship between the age of employees and the level of commitment to their organisations. Some previous studies support this findings, including that of Mathieu and Zajac, (1990), and Meyer and Smith, (2000), even when both positional and organisational tenure are controlled for (Allen & Meyer, 1993). To further stress the importance of such a finding, Allen and Meyer (1993) argue that employee age represents the real career stage effect on affective commitment and that older employees are more affectively committed than younger employees. This could be due to more positive work experiences by the older employees. Often times, it is argued that as employees get older, their employment opportunities commonly decrease as a result of retiring age policy, thereby motivating them to put in more personal efforts in the organisation, with the aim of being considered valuable to the firm and thus retain their position.

Further, the hypothesis that *there would be a positive relationship between the tenure of employees and the level of commitment to their organisations* was also supported. This implies that longer serving employees have the

tendency of becoming more committed than their counterparts with short tenure in organisations. With this, it can be said that the longer an employee serves in the organisation, the more probable it is that s/he will be committed to the organisation. It could also mean that when one is committed to the organisation, s/he is more likely to serve longer than when the commitment was not there. A study by Cohen (1993) supports this finding when it was found that there is a stronger correlation between commitment and tenure among the more senior employees, (i.e. those with over nine years' experience).

4.1 Challenges

The current study was not without limitations. The sample for the study is from employees in the public sector, and so the finding could not be generalised to their counterparts in the private sector. Moreover, there was little time for the researchers to use in conducting the study due to the fact that it was considered unethical to use office hours for non-office activities. The finding on age (in this study) was correlation, and not a detailed account of how age affects commitment. For cause-and-effect relationship between these two variables, a more rigorous research needs to be carried out.

4.2 Conclusion

The study was set to investigate the extent to which people's commitment to their organisations can be affected by factors relevant to work environment. It was observed that there are gender differences in organisational commitment among employees of the public services, and that age is positively related to the extent to which people will be committed to their organisations. From the review of other studies, these findings are very important if people working in the public service sector are to make meaningful contribution to the development of their countries. It however, came up that extensive work is needed for a fuller understanding of how commitment works and how it is affected by individual differences, and cultural settings. Finally, research is needed to determine how commitment affects such variables as work performance and job satisfaction in the public service.

It is recommended that public sector organisations be re-examined in terms of gender composition because if left unattended to, there is the likelihood that low commitment levels (mainly from one group) can affect performance. For instance, with the issue of gender being given serious attention in almost all sectors, attention should be paid to how this translates to performance. It is one thing embarking on affirmative actions to ensure gender equality, and another thing instituting performance improvement measures, and other organisational citizenship behaviours that would justify the struggle to attain gender equality, especially in developing countries. This calls for a concerted effort from both practitioners and academics, towards ensuring improvement in livelihood of people by ensuring that individuals selected to work are really working and providing value for money. Development should not be one-sided; it must come from all directions. Therefore, public service contribution must be felt, to support private sector which is often touted as the engine of growth. This is where the services of industrial and organisational psychologists, management scientists and other related orientations are needed, to join forces in providing for improved commitment in the public sector which could provide the platform for improved performance and service delivery in both the public and private sectors.

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