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The Relationship of Internal and External Commitment Foci to Objective Job Performance Measures

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The relationship of internal and external commitment foci to objective job performance measures

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Abstract

Prior research reports of a weak commitment-performance relationship can be attributed to inconsistency in conceptualization and measurement of the constructs. In this study, we differentially relate attitudinal commitment to internal (organization and supervisor) and external (customer) foci to objective measures of job performance. Results suggest that both internal foci are related to organizationally rewarded job performance and that the external focus influences job performance relevant to and rewarded by customers. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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Prior research reports of a weak commitment-performance relationship can be attributed to inconsistency in conceptualization and measurement of the constructs. In this study, we differentially relate attitudinal commitment to internal (organization and supervisor) and external (customer) foci to objective measures of job performance. Results suggest that both internal foci are related to organizationally rewarded job performance and that the external focus influences job performance relevant to and rewarded by customers. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Scholars have investigated the implications of employee commitment to internal foci, such as an organization and a supervisor, and external foci, such as unions and professions, for work outcomes including job performance, absenteeism, and turnover (e.g., Angle & Perry, 1981; Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Gilbert, 1996; Porter, Crampon, & Smith, 1976; Wallace, 1995). Although researchers have clearly identified the importance of various foci of commitment with respect to many work outcomes, they have been unable to document the elusive commitment-performance relationship (Benkhoff, 1997; Gregersen, 1993; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). We suspect that several conceptual and empirical issues concerning both commitment and job performance constructs may have confounded previous results. First, with respect to the commitment constructs, studies have used global commitment conceptualizations with underling attitudinal and calculative components (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) or multidimensional conceptualizations with a single focus (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989). Thus, little research has related multiple attitudinal foci to job performance.

Second, commitment studies have often used subjective assessments of an employee's overall job performance or performance along specific dimensions, such as the quality, and quantity of work, or they have used objective measures of combined unit or work group effectiveness (Angle & Perry, 1981; Steers, 1977). Subjective assessments have been at the individual level, but objective assessments have been at the group level, with little or no research having multiple objective indicators of performance at the individual level. Third, given the above two issues concerning the conceptualization of both constructs, few studies have simultaneously examined the differential impact of various commitment foci on multiple objective indicators of job performance.

In the present study, we addressed some of these limitations by considering multiple foci of commitment and multiple measures of performance in order to answer the following question: How do commitment to internal and external foci relate to different objective indicators of an individual's job performance? In addressing this question, this study makes two important contributions. First, we test and confirm theoretical predictions of the commitment-performance relationship by relating attitudinal commitment to objective measures of individual job performance. Second, we explore the implications of a differential relationship between commitment to multiple foci (internal and external) and objective performance measures.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Researchers have subscribed to two key theoretical premises concerning employee commitment. First, employees may be differentially committed to multiple organizational coalitions, such as departments, unions, and top management, on the basis of their individual agreement or disagreement with the coalitions' goals and objectives (Reichers, 1985). Second, employees do not necessarily suffer any cognitive dissonance with respect to their commitment to multiple coalitions having common goals (Angle & Perry, 1986). However, should there be incongruent goals between the multiple coalitions, employees are likely to suffer from cognitive dissonance that in turn may affect commitment to specific foci (Festinger, 1958). For example, Angle and Perry (1986) found that in cooperative labor-management relationship climates, employees showed higher levels of dual commitment (to organization and to union). Researchers have further investigated commitment to other foci, such as profession, top management, supervisor, coworkers, and customers, along with commitment to organization (Becker, 1992; Gregersen, 1993; Morrow, 1983; Wallace, 1995). However, no study has related these multiple foci to various objective measures of job performance.

Commitment Foci

Most early research used a global conceptualization of commitment that, in fact, had two distinct underlying dimensions--attitudinal and calculative--and did not show a significant relationship with job performance (Angle & Perry, 1981; Steers, 1977). In fact, Steers (1977) speculated that the absence of a commitment-performance relationship and the presence of a commitment-withdrawal relationship could be attributed to the very conceptualization of the construct, owing to the nature of the affective responses and behavioral intentions inherent within the same scale. Thus, studies that continued to use a global commitment conceptualization may have been limited in their findings because of the underlying multidimensionality of this conceptualization (Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Benkhoff, 1997; Gregersen, 1993).

Given these weak findings, scholars began to explicitly examine the implication of the presence of two underlying dimensions. Within this stream of research, the attitudinal dimension has been found to subsume affective commitment, value commitment, identification with an employing organization, and value congruence, and the calculative dimension to subsume "continuance" commitment, "side bets," and "sunk costs." When scholars considered the multiple dimensions (attitudinal and calculative) of commitment separately, the attitudinal dimension showed positive correlations with performance in some studies (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Meyer et al., 1989). However, even when commitment to multiple foci (that is, work group and supervisor) were used, researchers inadvertently reverted to using both affective and continuance dimensions of organizational commitment (Becker, 1992). For example, to measure the organizational commitment construct, Becker (1992) resorted to using the original Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Becker acknowledged the criticism that several OCQ items inflate concept redundancy between organizational commitment and intent to quit and deleted two items reflecting calculative involvement. This meant that Becker's measure of organizational commitment still retained items that reflected both calculative involvement (four items) and affective commitment (nine items). Attitudinal and calculative commitment may overlap conceptually, but they are sufficiently distinct to permit comparisons between their relative relationships with other variables (Brett, Cron, & Slocum, 1995; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). In fact, Mayer and Schoorman (1992) empirically demonstrated that the attitudinal dimension of commitment to organization is related to performance, but the calculative dimension of commitment to organization is strongly related to turnover.

It is also important to select the appropriate focus of attitudinal commitment. In this study, we chose three commitment foci, two internal and one external to employing organizations. The sales context is rather unique in that most employees operate in boundary-spanning roles (Goodman, Fichman, Lerch, & Snyder, 1995; Singh, 1998). Thus, sales executives must consider the preferences and goals not only of internal organizational constituents but also of external customers. Given our research objectives, commitment to organization was an important focus, as sales executives can easily assess the strength of their identification and involvement with their organizations. Also, given the nature of sales executives' boundary-spanning role and their lack of a well-defined coworker group, their supervisors are a critical link between sales executives and organizations. Hence, commitment to supervisor was selected as a second internal focus. Finally, given our contention about sales and boundary spanning, one would expect that commitment to critical external constituents (that is, customers) would have implications for sales executives' job performance. In sum, we consider three commitment foci: commitment to organization, commitment to supervisor, and commitment to customer.

Performance Measures

The second critical issue concerns the conceptualization of job performance. In complex organizations, it is often difficult to measure individual performance, as work outcomes are a result of multiple interdependent work processes (Borman, 1991). Consequently, job performance[1] has been conceptualized as an individual's overall performance/task proficiency or as performance on specific dimensions, such as the quality and quantity of work (Meyer et al., 1989; Steers, 1977). When researchers study global or overall performance, they tend to use subjective ratings or perceptions of individual performance (Meyer et al., 1993). When researchers study dimensions of performance, they often measure job performance using subjective supervisor ratings (Meyer et al., 1989; Steers, 1977). Further, a few studies relate commitment to unit performance or organizational effectiveness (Angle & Perry, 1981; Benkhoff, 1997).

Given that individual job performance is a multifaceted and complex construct that may not be accurately captured with subjective or aggregated assessments, we considered it important to use multiple objective indicators of performance for the following reasons: First, compensation research highlights the effectiveness of an organization's objective performance measures in guiding employee behavior as role expectations are clearly defined (Banker, Lee, Potter, & Srinivasan, 1996; Lawler, 1986, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995). Hence, when individual objective measures of job performance exist, employees are more likely to understand pay and performance links (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Organizations can then use their compensation systems to drive individual behavior toward achieving overall organizational objectives. Assessment of the commitment-performance relationship is facilitated, as those who exhibit high levels of commitment to their organization can easily identify and pursue organizationally designated performance goals. Second, objective job performance measures limit both intentional and unintentional supervisory biases that occur in the performance evaluation processes. For example, both single and multiple subjective performance measures may be tainted with leniency error, halo error, similarity error, and low differentiation (Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990; Murphy & Balzer, 1989; Somers & Birnbaum, 1998). Thus, by reducing the effects of the biases, organizations can increase the credibility of pay-performance links.

The organizations participating in our study assessed individual job performance using five objective measures: sales volume, sales growth rate, sales from new accounts, product breadth, and market share; the first three measures were included in the compensation system. Thus, we would expect an incentive system based on sales measures to elicit improved performance on those measures. Strength in the other two performance areas, product breadth and market share, were desired by the organization but not necessarily formally rewarded. Compensation research

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[1] In our analysis, job performance does not include prosocial, or organizational citizenship, behaviors. As one reviewer pointed out, attitudinal commitment relating to identification with their organizations would lead employees to engage in discretionary behaviors that are not formally rewarded. However, as prior research in this area relies primarily on subjective assessments, say from supervisor or coworkers, we avoided the use of such assessments in establishing connections between commitment and performance. Hence, we do not rule out relationships between commitment and extra role behaviors but focus on why commitment and objective job performance rewarded by an organization should be related, consistent with compensation and incentive systems research.

also suggests that when employees perceive that certain behaviors are not rewarded by their organization, they are unlikely to be motivated to pursue such behaviors. However, these measures were important with respect to the goals of the external foci (the customers). For example, customers may want to consider a range of products before making a purchase decision. Thus, product breadth is clearly relevant to them even though the selling organization's incentive system does not include it in its commission formula. Similarly, customers may wish to purchase their supplies through a particular sales executive and indirectly reward the executive by ignoring his or her competitors. Therefore, we distinguished between performance outcomes that were rewarded by the organization's incentive systems and those that were relevant to and rewarded by the external foci.

Differential Relationships between Commitment Foci and Performance

Internal foci. Internal foci include commitment to internal organizational coalitions or their members. A high level of commitment to an organization suggests an acceptance of the organization's goals and objectives and identification with it (Mayer & Schoorman, 1992). Therefore, when an employee exhibits a high level of commitment to her or his organization, the individual is more likely to engage in behaviors that help attain organizational goals (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). These behaviors, in turn influence employee performance. Thus, it is expected that commitment to internal foci should result in better performance.

Organizations often signify the importance of their various objectives by using control and reward systems that highlight the importance of specific organizational goals and objectives (Lawler, 1988). Organizational control and reward systems align employee behavior with these goals by rewarding performance that is a consequence of these behaviors (Banker et al., 1996; Kerr, 1975; Lawler, 1995). As a result, employees who have high levels of attitudinal commitment to organization will strive to achieve higher levels of performance on the organizationally designated indicators of job performance. Given an organizational context in which clear individual performance measures are valued and rewarded by the organization, we expect that commitment to organization will be positively related to organizationally rewarded job performance. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1. Commitment to an organization will be positively related to objective job performance that is rewarded by the organization.

As mentioned above, employees do not suffer cognitive dissonance with respect to commitment to multiple coalitions when they have congruent goals. When supervisor goals are consistent with organizational goals, we would not expect commitment to internal foci to be differentially related to organizationally rewarded job performance. However, commitment to supervisor would be expected to increase access to supervisory resources that facilitate behaviors consistent with organizational objectives. Thus, assuming the same level of commitment to organization, employees committed to their supervisors will have access to more resources than employees with lower levels of commitment to supervisor, which in turn will influence their performance on organizationally rewarded behavior.

Other researchers, using the notion of proximity, have also considered the influence of commitment to supervisor on job performance. Becker and colleagues (1996) argued that job behaviors are often established by local foci such as supervisors. Inherently, such local commitment would facilitate the acceptance of performance norms and enhance performance effectiveness. Becker and colleagues further contended that proximity and interaction with employees make supervisors important proximal factors in an organizational environment (Lewin, 1943). These proximal factors aid the performance monitoring and evaluation functions of supervisors, which in turn create and promote appropriate performance norms. In either case, we expect supervisor commitment to influence organizationally rewarded job performance. Hence, we posit that:

Hypothesis 2. Commitment to supervisor will have an influence on organizationally rewarded objective job performance that is over and above the influence on such performance of commitment to organization.

External foci. External foci include groups outside an organization, such as customers, profession, and suppliers. A high level of commitment to external foci suggests an acceptance of the focal entity's goals and objectives. Given the boundary-spanning nature of the sales executive's job, incumbents are likely to form links and attachments with their external constituents (Singh, 1998). The nature of these attachments would then dictate the extent to which the sales executives would comply with the demands of the external constituent. Despite recent recognition of the boundary-spanning roles of sales executives (Singh, 1998), little research has considered the consequences of this role with respect to job performance. In fact, most marketing research on commitment has focused on the implications of commitment to internal foci for the performance of sales executives (Hunt, Wood, & Chonko, 1985; Leong, Randall, & Cote, 1994; Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearn, 1998).

A sales executive who exhibits a high level of commitment to customers is likely to provide them with and inform them about multiple product choices and availability. This information allows the customers to make a more informed product decision, and the sales executive increases the breadth of the products that he or she actively sells. Similarly, an executive who exhibits high commitment to customer is likely to retain a large customer base, as customers are likely to reward the executive by not purchasing from competitors, thereby influencing the market share of the sales executive in a particular sales territory. Thus, commitment to customer may be directly linked to product breadth and market share, although neither may be rewarded by an organization's incentive system. Hence, we expect that commitment to external foci (customers) will result in higher performance on the above measures. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 3. Commitment to customer will be positively related to objective job performance (such as product breadth and market share) that is not necessarily rewarded by an organization but is relevant to and rewarded by customers.

METHODS

Setting and Sample

Hypotheses were tested in a two-stage field study conducted in four sales organizations in the orthopedic implant industry. In the first stage, the survey was mailed to the home addresses of 527 sales executives from the four organizations, with postage-paid envelopes. The respondents were requested to return the survey to us at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) or to use the postage-paid envelope. Participation was voluntary, and each survey was identified with a code number known only to us; this code was used for matching purposes in the second phase of data collection. Attendees at the meeting provided 301 usable surveys. Subsequent to the AAOS meeting, we contacted individuals who did not attend or did not complete a survey with a follow-up letter and survey, obtaining an additional 88 surveys. Thus, the first stage of data collection yielded 389 usable surveys, for a participation rate of 74 percent. This data collection was conducted in February. 1998. In the second stage, data concerning the performance of the 389 respondents were collected from organizational records in February 1999. During the two stages of data collection, 61 employees voluntarily exited the four organizations. This two-stage data collection yielded 328 completed responses matched with performance data; thus, the overall response rate was 62 percent.

Measures

Commitment foci. We measured attitudinal commitment to organization, supervisor, and customer using the identification scales developed by Becker and colleagues (1996). All items were assessed on a seven-point scale (7 = "always," 1 = "never"). Commitment to organization, supervisor, and customer had Cronbach's alpha values of .76, .80, and .75, respectively. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on the three commitment scales. The fit statistics for a one-factor model ($chi^2 = 806.24$, $df = 90$, $p < .001$, root-mean-square residual [RMSR] = .40, goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = .71, confirmed fit index [CFI] = .39, normed fit index [NFI] = .34) and for a two-factor model ($chi^2 = 400.3$, $df = 76$, $p < .001$, RMSR = .24, GFI = .83, CFI = .65, NFI = .70) indicated a poor fit. Results strongly support a three-factor solution ($chi^2 = 79.46$, $df = 63$, RMSR = .06, GFI = .97, CFI = .97, NFI = .94) and were well within the recommended ranges (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). A chi-square difference test suggested that the three-factor model fit the data better than the one- or two-factor model.

Performance measures. Performance data were collected from organizational records. All performance data pertained to fiscal year 1998 and were obtained from the organizations a year after the original survey was administered. We categorized five objective measures of performance into two categories: (1) rewarded by the organizations and (2) relevant to the external foci. Organizationally rewarded performance includes sales volume, sales growth, and sales volume from new accounts. Sales volume refers to an individual's total volume of sales for all product lines in the year 1998. Annual sales growth was computed as the percentage change over the previous year's sales ([1998 sales - 1997 sales]/1997 sales). Sales volume from new accounts in the past 12 months ([1998 total sales - 1998 sales from customers present in 1997]/1998 sales) provides an indication of sales from new account acquisition. All three measures were used in the organizations' compensation systems. Performance measures relevant to the external foci but not rewarded by the organizations included market share and product breadth. Market share was computed as an individual's 1998 sales revenues divided by 1998 total sales revenues in the individual's sales territory. This measure provides an indicator of market penetration as well as a basis for comparison to other sales executives. Product breadth refers to the number of different product types sold in 1998. To compute this measure, we divided the number of types of products actually sold during 1998 by the possible types of products manufactured by the organization in 1998. This measure identified the range of products that the sales executive effectively used. These measures reflect market characteristics as well as product characteristics. Again, neither of these measures was used in the organizations' compensation systems.

Control measures. In order to assess the role of demographic variables and firm-specific context, we used the following control measures: Tenure was number of years in the organization, and race ("Caucasian" = 1, "other" = 0) and gender ("man" = 1, "woman" = 0) were dummy variables. In addition, as we had respondents affiliated with four organizations, we also used three dummy codes to control for firm-level effects.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the summary statistics and correlations among the variables. As the table indicates, significant correlations support many of our predictions regarding commitment foci and objective job performance. With respect to the control variables, the mean score for tenure ($x = 7.23$, s.d. = 3.04) suggests that executives had been in the employing organizations long enough to develop commitment to various foci. Also, the sample was predominantly Caucasian men. The three main independent variables of interest (organization, supervisor, and customer foci) had low correlations. Also, the five performance measures showed low correlations, justifying their use as five distinct indicators of job performance. To examine the relative effects of commitment foci on the different measures of job performance, we used hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Specifically, we entered the control variables (tenure, gender, race, and firm dummies) in step 1 to test all our hypotheses. In order to test for Hypotheses 1 and 2, we introduced commitment to organization in step 2 and commitment to supervisor in step 3. To test for Hypothesis 3, we introduced commitment to customer in step 2. Then, to determine the unique amount of variance accounted for by each block of variables, we examined the increase in the adjusted multiple squared correlation coefficient (R^2).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations[a]

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Tenure	7.23	3.04										
2. Gender	0.95	0.23	.01									
3. Race	0.97	0.18	.08	−.05								
4. Sales volume	1.06	0.22	.05	−.10	.10							
5. Growth rate	7.20	14.13	.23***	−.04	−.03	.14*						
6. New accounts	9.22	3.77	−.26***	.03	.04	.11	.16**					
7. Product breadth	76.32	9.05	.48***	−.03	.03	−.11	.13*	−.06				
8. Market share	35.05	7.21	.21***	.09	.06	−.09	−.02	.23***	.16**			
9. Organizational focus	4.66	1.20	.04	−.08	.05	.55***	.08	.09	−.07	−.06		
10. Supervisor focus	4.64	1.10	.00	.06	.02	.22***	.32***	.45***	.03	−.01	.10	
11. Customer focus	4.77	1.15	.05	.16**	.03	.00	.02	.03	.21***	.43***	−.06	.17**

[a] $n = 328$. Sales volume was measured in millions of dollars.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Two sets of t-tests were conducted. First, we tested for nonresponse bias by comparing the means of the performance data for 1997 for the 389 respondents with those of 138 nonrespondents (sales volume, t = 0.85; sales growth, t = 0.70; sales from new accounts, t = -1.40; product breadth, t = 0.80; and market share, t = 0.43). Next, we tested for significant differences between the surveys provided at the meeting (n = 301) and the surveys returned by mail (n = 88) (sales volume, t = 0.83; sales growth, t = 0.92; sales from new accounts, t = 0.01; product breadth, t = -0.30; and market share, t = -0.36). All tests indicated no significant differences in means on the performance criteria.

Table 2 presents results of hierarchical regression analyses for the commitment foci as predictors of sales executive performance. Hypothesis 1 received partial support: commitment to organization was positively related to sales volume (beta = .52, p < .001, change R^2 = .29) but not related to sales growth rate and sales from new accounts. Hypothesis 2 received strong support: commitment to supervisor explained additional variance over and above that explained by commitment to organization. Commitment to supervisor was positively related to sales volume (beta = .18, p < .001; change R^2 = .03), sales growth rate (beta = .32, p < .001, change R^2 = .10), and sales from new accounts (beta = .44, p < .001; change R^2 = .19). Hypothesis 3 received strong support: commitment to customer was positively related to market share (beta = .41, p < .001, change R^2 = .17) and product breadth (beta = .20, p < .001, change R^2= .04). Among the control variables, tenure was significant in most performance measures. In general, tenure was positively related to growth rate, market share, and product breadth but negatively related to sales volume from new accounts. Finally, gender and the dummy variable for firm C were significant in some instances. Other control variables were not significant across all the performance measures.

TABLE 2
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Commitment to Organization, Supervisor, and Customer[a]

		Sales Volume		Growth Rate		New Accounts		Product Breadth		Market Share	
Step	Independent Variables	Internal Foci	External Foci	Internal Foci	External Foci	Internal Foci	External Foci	Internal Foci	External Foci	Internal Foci	External Foci
1	Gender	−.08	−.11*	−.07	−.05	.01	.03	−.04	−.06	.09	.02
	Race	.07	.10	−.07	−.06	.04	.05	−.01	−.02	.04	.03
	Tenure	.03	.05	.22***	.23***	−.26***	−.27***	.49***	.48***	.21***	.19***
	Firm A	−.06	−.07	−.06	−.03	.01	.05	.01	.02	.04	.04
	Firm B	−.04	−.04	−.05	−.05	−.02	−.01	.05	.04	.00	−.02
	Firm C	−.13*	−.17**	.05	.07	.05	.07	.03	.02	.07	.04
	Adjusted R^2	.03*	.03*	.05**	.05**	.06**	.06**	.22***	.22***	.04**	.04**
2	Organization	.52***		.05		.07		−.10*		−.06	
	Change in adjusted R^2	.29		.00		.01		.01		.00	
3	Supervisor	.18***		.32***		.44***		.04		−.02	
	Change in adjusted R^2	.03		.10		.19		.00		.00	
2	Customer		.02		.02		.04		.20***		.41***
	Change in adjusted R^2		.00		.00		.00		.04		.17
	Overall model F	22.90	2.20	8.31	3.32	15.58	3.94	13.09	17.41	2.65	13.08
	Overall adjusted R^2	.35***	.03*	.15***	.05**	.26***	.06**	.23***	.26***	.04**	.21***

[a] Standardized regression coefficients are reported. Internal foci columns give values for commitment to organization, commitment to supervisor, and controls.
External foci columns give values for commitment to customer and controls. $n = 328$.
* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

Our findings support our three hypotheses yet challenge the conventional results concerning the commitment-performance link. First, we find that commitment to organization is indeed a critical determinant of sales volume. Although most previous research has shown a weak or no relationship with job performance for employees with high levels of commitment to their organizations, our findings suggest the contrary when attitudinal commitment and type of objective job performance are accounted for. In addition, commitment to supervisor matters with regard to organizationally rewarded job performance. However, commitment to customer is significantly related to job performance that is not necessarily rewarded by the organization but is relevant to and rewarded by the customer. Taken together, these findings have important implications for theory and practice.

Our study demonstrates that commitment to organization matters when it comes to objective indicators of organizationally rewarded job performance. That is, employees who identify with their organizations show increased sales volume. This result is consistent with the theoretical position of most commitment researchers who have posited that commitment influences job performance. Our findings narrow the scope of this statement to suggest that commitment to organization influences job performance that is both clearly defined and rewarded by an organization's compensation system. Previously, researchers have often been unable to access clear performance indicators and, in most instances, have relied on supervisory reports or self-reports. One can surmise that gaining access to objective performance data is a difficult proposition because today's complex jobs do not allow for isolation of individual job performance; instead, individual performance may involve team effort and produce soft outcomes. Even when such data are available, competitive pressures and an excessively legalized employment context preclude organizations from sharing such data with researchers. As a result, researchers resort to second-best alternatives, like supervisory, reports, to avoid the common method bias problem. However, the conclusions of these studies using subjective measures have rarely been interpreted with respect to the above, and the absence of a strong relationship has made many researchers question the commitment-performance link itself. We believe that the subjectivity of individual performance assessment and the use of objective measures of unit-level effectiveness confound previous findings. We recommend that researchers use objective measures at the individual level of analysis before they draw further conclusions.

The second important finding of this study was that commitment to supervisor explains variance in job performance over and above that explained by commitment to organization. Thus, support is provided for the consistency of the implications of multiple internal foci of commitment. Given our earlier explanation of the boundary-spanning nature of the job and the importance of the supervisors in providing an important link with organizations, the results are not surprising. Although commitment to supervisor results in enhanced performance, it is interesting to note that commitment to supervisor is a more potent predictor of growth rate and sales from new accounts than it is of sales volume. Thus, commitment to supervisor seems to help sales executives increase their performance on certain dimensions and not others. We speculate that this commitment leads to access to supervisory resources that would not be forthcoming otherwise. As a result, employees may have access to resources that enhance their performance. It is possible that among the executives sampled here, those who were more committed to their supervisors had higher-quality leads, more leads, or better assignments of sales territories and thus got larger sales volumes from new accounts and higher sales growth rates.

We found that commitment to customer also matters, leading to increased market share as well as use of product breadth. We believe that identification with customers' goals and objectives leads to continued patronage from the customers but does not increase sales volume. That is, the greater the level of executive commitment to a customer, the more likely is the individual's chance of retaining the customer. Further, the more committed a sales executive is to the customer, the more likely it is that he or she will attempt to satisfy broader customer requirements, which would then be reflected in the product breadth dimension of performance. This finding is interesting because neither of these job performance measures (market share or product breadth) was rewarded by the studied organization's compensation system. Our results suggest that commitment to customer does not necessarily increase sales volume or growth, but it does help maintain existing accounts essentially by addressing customer needs through greater product breadth. Also, retaining an existing customer account is reflected in the market share measure because the executive can now maintain sales in a declining or competitive market.

Our findings about external foci are not only unique but are also important for many other reasons. Many organizations have redefined themselves by shedding their bureaucratic images for new, boundaryless ones. Advances in information technology have enabled organizations to eliminate not only internal vertical and horizontal boundaries, but also the external boundaries between them and their customers and suppliers. In today's networked organization, the blurring of boundaries has enabled many employees to interact with various external coalitions. Given the increase in the possibilities of external foci (such as customers, suppliers, and alliances), we expect that commitment to them will take center stage with the other internal foci. Commitment to external foci may, however, be a two-edged sword. As far as internal foci are concerned, one can normatively assume that greater commitment to organization, top management team, work group, or supervisor should eventually result in beneficial behavior for organizations. This assumption may not hold for external foci. That is, commitment to external foci such as customers or suppliers may detract from organizationally beneficial behaviors and reduce employee ability to objectively assess a situation from their organization's perspective.

Implications for Practice

The three commitment foci differentially correlate with different measures of performance, and this holds significant implications for managers. First, there are a large number of studies that have identified numerous antecedents of organizational commitment (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). It behooves managers to strategically manage these antecedents to improve job performance. Also, our study points to the importance of using objective measures of performance in order to create more credible links between pay and performance to realize the benefits of commitment. Managers also need to be cognizant of the importance the various foci have from the perspective of employees. Drawing on these perceptions, organizations may benefit by clarifying their performance goals and then strengthening the employee commitment focus or foci corresponding with their stated organizational objectives. Second, managers may also need to think about the various intended and unintended consequences of the indicators of job performance used for employee compensation and rewards. In our context, it is clear that internal commitment foci lead to higher performance based on designated reward systems, but this may not always be the case.

Limitations and Conclusions

Although the multiple foci of commitment, objective measures of job performance, multi firm data, and longitudinal study design are strengths of this study, as a caveat, we would like to remind readers about the unique nature of the sales context that made such a study design possible. The data were drawn from four firms, adding to the stability of our findings. However, we were clearly limited by our study's context, a single profession within one industry. This narrow context allowed the data to be compared across firms and individuals, but external validity and generalizability may have been sacrificed. The results obtained from this research should be used with caution when compared to results from other occupations and industries. Because the sample was composed of sales executives, findings of commitment to customer may not be as strong when research is conducted in situations where customer contact is minimal. Finally, this study used three context-specific commitment foci and five performance measures out of many possible combinations present in workplaces. Other foci and performance measures may also provide additional explanatory power and should be carefully tailored to the group of workers studied.

Limitations aside, this study is the first in the commitment literature to examine the relationship between multiple attitudinal foci of commitment and multiple objective indicators of individual job performance. Although a single study does not provide conclusive evidence, we have reasons to question previous findings that commitment does not influence job performance. We have also extended commitment theory by (1) linking commitment to internal foci (organizations and supervisors) and individual objective job performance and (2) establishing the importance of external foci (customers, in this case) for objective performance relevant to and rewarded by the focal entity. Once again, we hope that future studies will address the effects of internal and external commitment foci for important organizational outcomes.

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