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# Getting to the Heart of It: Commitment at Work

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# Getting to the Heart of It: Commitment at Work

## **Abstract**

Individuals are looking for purpose-driven work that resonates with who they are, is satisfying, and engaging. At the same time, organizations, necessarily driven by concerns over making profit, are looking to hire individuals who show up, perform consistently, and who have the organization's best interests in mind. Though conceivably incongruent, what individuals and organizations are seeking is not dissimilar. Instead, when employees find work they can personally identify with and commit to, they are more likely to go above and beyond the call of duty, even when no one is watching. However, not all forms of commitment are created equal. Different forms of commitment arise from different sources of motivation, and lead to very different outcomes for both individuals and organizations. In this paper, I explore commitment and its various forms, and define how it is conceptualized in the organizational behavior literature. I then review the research on the outcomes and antecedents associated with each form of commitment and highlight important differences across forms. I then make sense of the pattern of results that emerges from this research by examining how self-determination theory relates to commitment. I then use the framework outlined by self-determination theory to offer strategies on how both organizations and individuals can cultivate the form of commitment that leads to the most affirmative outcomes.

## **Keywords**

Employee commitment, affective commitment, self-determination theory

## **Disciplines**

Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Leadership Studies

Getting to the heart of it: Commitment at work

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The University of Pennsylvania

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Advisor: Reb Rebele

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### Abstract

Individuals are looking for purpose-driven work that resonates with who they are, is satisfying, and engaging. At the same time, organizations, necessarily driven by concerns over making profit, are looking to hire individuals who show up, perform consistently, and who have the organization's best interests in mind. Though conceivably incongruent, what individuals and organizations are seeking is not dissimilar. Instead, when employees find work they can personally identify with and commit to, they are more likely to go above and beyond the call of duty, even when no one is watching. However, not all forms of commitment are created equal. Different forms of commitment arise from different sources of motivation, and lead to very different outcomes for both individuals and organizations. In this paper, I explore commitment and its various forms, and define how it is conceptualized in the organizational behavior literature. I then review the research on the outcomes and antecedents associated with each form of commitment and highlight important differences across forms. I then make sense of the pattern of results that emerges from this research by examining how self-determination theory relates to commitment. I then use the framework outlined by self-determination theory to offer strategies on how both organizations and individuals can cultivate the form of commitment that leads to the most affirmative outcomes.

Pam and Rebecca are sitting in a strategy meeting at their respective organizations to discuss progress on their organizations' efforts to expand. They have been working long hours to deliver on their part of the initiatives. Pam gives her leadership an overview of the proposal she and her committee have been developing. Her enthusiasm for her work is apparent as she talks through the proposal, and she makes sure to acknowledge her team for their efforts. Rebecca briefs her leadership team on a report she pulled together about potential community partnerships. As she presents the data she collected, Rebecca seems somewhat disengaged. Further, while she addressed the obvious opportunities in her report, there are a few details she missed. Pam and Rebecca's leadership teams are generally pleased with their preliminary progress, though Rebecca's leadership has a few remaining questions about her report and ask her to stick around after the meeting. How did Pam and Rebecca get here?

Two weeks earlier, Pam sits in her office as the clock rolls past 5 p.m. She is engrossed in pulling together a proposal for a new project and is energized by the task. A few weeks ago, she voluntarily formed a committee to help further her organization's goals of expanding into a new market and bolstering their outreach initiatives, goals she cares deeply about. This proposal is the first action taken by the committee and she wants it to be spot on. Though there has been a lot going on with her other projects, Pam has remained enthusiastic. Pam's work is marked by engagement, persistence, and solid teamwork. Most days, Pam wraps up her work well into the evening and leaves feeling a sense of pride and mission. She cannot imagine working anywhere else – this is where she is meant to be.

On the same afternoon, in an office across the street from Pam's, Rebecca has been watching the clock since lunch. Time moves slowly as she tries to pull together a report she has been avoiding. She does not understand why the report needs to be done in the first place and

cannot get on board with her organization's goal to expand. Nevertheless, leadership requested that she make the report her priority. She has been feeling stressed and rundown with everything she has on her plate. She has regular thoughts about leaving the organization, but it is too much of a risk – she receives good health benefits, full-fledged meals, discounted transportation, and is counting on her year-end bonus. Plus, she has explored other options, but nothing seems to offer anything that is worth her leaving. Though not readily apparent to an outside observer, Rebecca's work does not reflect her potential. Most days, Rebecca has to work hard to stay focused and engaged in her work. She leaves feeling drained from her day; the only thing that keeps her motivated is the promise of the weekend.

### **Introduction**

Both Pam and Rebecca could be described as committed to their organization – they are both pushing themselves to achieve their organizations' goals, they are both delivering on their required share of work, and they both remain with their respective organizations. However, the full picture of Pam and Rebecca makes clear that not all forms of commitment are created equal.

Organizations claim to want a workforce full of Pams – engaged and willing to go above and beyond the call of duty, even when no one is watching. They go through tremendous effort to establish brands and cultures that support such work. Yet, they end up with organizations full of Rebeccas. For example, places like Google, Amazon, and LinkedIn are providing their employees with endless perks – coffee bars with full-time baristas, three square meals a day, exercise classes, game rooms, and stunning campuses. Though well-meaning, I believe perks for perks sake only connect individuals to organizations to the extent that individuals keep receiving these perks, not because individuals are connected to the organization's mission. Perks for perks sake do not build the type of commitment organizations are really looking for in their employees.

Pam's and Rebecca's commitment is driven by sources much deeper than the surface level benefits they receive. What separates the type of commitment Pam experiences from the type that Rebecca does? The difference stems from a difference in motivation, and will ultimately lead to very different outcomes – both for the work they produce and for their overall satisfaction at work. These differences, though sometimes subtle, are important and need to be understood by organizations if they want to foster commitment that leads to positive outcomes, and by individuals if they want to feel an authentic connection to their work.

In the following pages of this paper, I explore the concept of commitment and its various forms. First, I review how commitment is currently theorized by organizational psychologists, and define its various forms. I go on to review the outcomes and antecedents of each form, highlighting the differences between them. Finally, I use positive psychology, and in particular self-determination theory, to make sense of these differences and as a framework for offering strategies to cultivate the form of commitment associated with positive outcomes.

### **Defining Commitment**

The notion of commitment as a motivating force behind workplace behavior took a central role in organizational behavior research in the early 1980s (Meyer & Allen, 1991). At the time, there was a lack of consensus around how commitment should be defined. For example, Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) defined commitment as the degree to which someone identifies with and is involved in an organization, whereas Farrell and Rusbult (1981) defined commitment as the likelihood that someone will leave his or her job. Another group of researchers was defining commitment as whether or not people feel like it was their duty to stay with their organization (Vardi, Wiener, & Popper, 1989). Though there is a fair amount of conceptual overlap in these definitions, there was no organizing framework that served to unify

the various lines of research. In the early 1990s, however, Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) outlined three general themes that had emerged in the commitment literature at the time. Each theme serves to describe the psychological relationship that an employee develops towards their organization, and marks how an employee views the organization and its goals in relation to themselves. These three themes are the foundation of Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of commitment, and are defined as follows:

*Affective commitment* describes an employee's emotional attachment to and involvement in the organization, as well as the extent to which he or she personally identifies with the organization. When an employee is affectively committed to an organization, he or she identifies with the organization and takes on the organization's goals and values as his or her own (Mowday et al., 1979).

*Continuance commitment* occurs when an employee realizes that the cost of leaving an organization is greater than the benefits he or she would receive by staying. Over time, employees accumulate benefits over and above that which is considered standard, called "side-bets." These come in the form of fancy retirement plans, healthcare benefits, and other perks, and are contingent on continued employment. After a certain point, these side-bets mean too much to an employee to justify leaving (Becker, 1960). The organization is seen as a conduit to maintaining these advantages.

*Normative Commitment* arises from an internal pressure to stay at an organization. This pressure is rooted in a sense of obligation and indebtedness towards the organization, regardless of how much satisfaction employees are receiving (Marsh & Mannari, 1977).

With this more nuanced perspective on commitment, we can return to the story of Pam and Rebecca to better understand the forms of commitment they experience. Pam is affectively



committed to her organization. She personally identifies with the organization's goals and stays with the organization because she *wants to*. On the other hand, Rebecca stays with the organization because she feels like she *needs to* or she will lose more than she might gain elsewhere. Another employee who feels normative commitment to the organization might stay because she feels like she *should*.

### **Commitment in Many Guises**

It is important to note Meyer and Allen use the term component instead of type to distinguish between affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Rather than being separate, mutually exclusive types of commitment, affective, continuance, and normative commitment can be experienced by an individual at the same time. In addition, an individual can experience commitment towards different foci, whether towards an organization, a particular position, or boss (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This serves to highlight that commitment is more complicated and multifaceted than one might originally expect. Rather than being of one type directed at a single target, an employee's commitment is an amalgam of commitments that make up an employee's commitment profile.

An example of a multi-dimensional commitment profile is an employee who experiences a strong psychological attachment to the tasks that make up his or her specific position (affective job commitment), but who lacks a connection to the organization in which he or she works, sticking around only because it provides a means to do what he or she loves to do (continuance organizational commitment). In another example, an employee might feel affective commitment towards multiple leaders in the organization, leaving him or her feeling conflicted over where to direct his or her attention. Beyond highlighting the complex nature of commitment, these examples also highlight how one's commitment profile might influence the outcomes

experienced by both individuals and organizations. Figure 1 below represents a two-dimensional matrix of commitment, with each cell serving to classify the nature of an employee’s commitment towards various foci.

Figure 1. Two-dimensional matrix of employee commitment.

	<b>Form of Commitment</b>		
<b>Foci of Commitment</b>	Affective	Continuance	Normative
Organization	<i>Affective Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Organizational Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Organizational Commitment</i>
Job	<i>Affective Job Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Job Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Job Commitment</i>
Boss	<i>Affective Boss Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Boss Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Boss Commitment</i>
Industry	<i>Affective Industry Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Industry Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Industry Commitment</i>
Work Team	<i>Affective Work Team Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Work Team Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Work Team Commitment</i>

**Outcomes of Commitment**

In the section below, I explore behavioral and psychological outcomes related to commitment, such as turnover, performance, engagement, and stress. When reviewing these outcomes, I focus primarily on the differences between affective and continuance commitment towards one’s organization, as these are the forms and foci of commitment that have received the most research attention. Where available, research on normative commitment and other commitment foci will be noted.

**Turnover**

Much of the early research on commitment focused on its ability to predict turnover. Keeping turnover low is important to an organization for a number of reasons, including the retention of top talent as well as for the reduction of costs associated with recruiting and

onboarding new employees. In a large meta-analysis, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found a negative correlation between organizational commitment and turnover. Though this relationship was moderate, it becomes much stronger when looking at turnover intentions. Specifically, the intention to search for job alternatives and the intention to leave one's job are strongly and negatively correlated with organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). These results have been replicated by others (Tett & Meyer, 1993; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002), and hold true for all three forms of commitment, with the relationship strongest for affective commitment, followed by normative commitment, and finally continuance commitment (Cohen, 1993a). Commitment's ability to predict turnover is also influenced by when it is measured – the shorter the interval between when commitment is assessed and turnover data is collected, the better commitment is at predicting turnover. For example, Porter, Crampton and Smith (1976) compared two groups of employees – those that chose to stay with their organization (stayers) and those that chose to leave (leavers). They found that six months prior to leaving, the stayers and leavers had almost the same level of commitment. Two months prior to leaving, the leavers showed slightly less commitment than stayers, and when measured one month away from leaving, leavers showed significantly less organizational commitment than stayers. The authors posit that the six-month gap between when commitment was measured and when turnover occurred left room for employees to be influenced by events that shaped their attitude towards their organization and determined whether or not they chose to remain. However, this relationship was moderated by career stage, with employees in the beginning phases of their career more likely to experience sharp changes in their commitment that ultimately result in turnover (Cohen, 1993b). Sharp changes in commitment might arise from rapidly changing roles and the existence of attractive alternatives, which are factors that mark

many employees' early careers. For those employees in the later stages of their career, fewer alternatives and a desire for stability might increase the time between when an employee experiences a decrease in commitment and when he or she decides to leave.

In general, this research provides evidence of a relationship between commitment and turnover, with more commitment increasing the likelihood that someone stay in his or her job. However, organizations are interested in not just whether someone will stay in a job, but how they will work on the job. In addition to turnover, they are interested in things like absenteeism, engagement, performance, effort, citizenship behaviors, and job satisfaction. When looking at how commitment influences these behaviors and outcomes, the relationship is more muddled. Depending on the behavior or outcome of interest, different forms of commitment lead to different outcomes, and more commitment of a particular form does not necessarily lead to a better outcome. These differences are addressed in the following sections.

### **Absenteeism**

Though committed employees do not seem to be leaving their organizations, this does not necessarily mean they are coming to work. Absent employees can seriously undercut an organization's ability to generate output and stay competitive. One meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of commitment found that affective commitment was negatively correlated with voluntary absence from work, but both continuance and normative commitment showed a positive, albeit weak, association with absenteeism (Meyer et al., 2002). Another study looked at whether affective commitment was related to long-term sickness absence, which was defined as more than three consecutive weeks of absence in the 18-month period after employees were surveyed. The findings show that those employees with low affective commitment are significantly more likely to experience long-term sickness absence (Clausen, Burr, & Borg,

2014). This was especially true of office workers and those employees who work directly with clients. Taken together, this research suggests that committed employees show up to work more often, but only if they are affectively committed.

### **Engagement**

It is one thing to not quit, and another to show up for work each day, but how employees behave when they get to work is a whole different story. One variable used to measure whether employees are actually focused on, involved with, or absorbed in their work is engagement (Rothbard, 2001). Engaged employees are more creative, efficient and productive, as well as energetic (Masson, Royal, Agnew, & Fine, 2008; Rothbard & Patil, 2011; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013). Organizational commitment has been posed as an antecedent of employee engagement in several models (Rothbard & Patil, 2011; Harter & Blacksmith, 2009; Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). One study confirmed the existence of this relationship, finding that organizational commitment is highly correlated with engagement (Le, Schmidt, Lauver, & Harter, 2007). Further, several other studies have found that affective commitment specifically is correlated with engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, de Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Though these studies did not look at the association between continuance or normative commitment and employee engagement, one can hypothesize how such a relationship might look by thinking about what motivates each form of commitment. For example, an employee who feels continuance commitment might only be engaged to the extent that it is personally beneficial. In the case of normative commitment, employees might feel obliged to demonstrate engagement even if they do not genuinely feel it. Further research on the connection between the three forms of commitment and engagement would shed light on the accuracy of these predictions. Nevertheless, the existing research

suggests that commitment is associated with higher engagement, though it may only be true for affective commitment.

### **Performance**

Performance is a broad construct used to assess how well employees do at work. The relationship between commitment and performance has been examined from several vantage points. In one study (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987), affective commitment was positively associated with objective measures of performance (e.g., the control of operational costs), but not with self-reported measures of performance. Bashaw and Grant (1994) found a similar correlation between affective commitment and objective measures of performance; the relationship held for job and career commitment as well. Specifically, they found that sales employees with higher organizational, job, and career commitment had higher sales figures. Finally, Riketta (2002) found that affective commitment was positively related to performance as coded by in-role tasks, or those included in one's job description; extra-role tasks, or those not included in one's formal job description, or mixed tasks; and performance was slightly stronger for extra-role performance.

Other studies have looked at supervisor ratings and self-reported measures of performance. These studies also find a positive relationship between affective commitment and performance; however, the strength of the relationship varies depending on the measure used. For example, one study found that employees with more affective commitment were more likely to be rated by their supervisors as having the potential for promotion (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989), while those with continuance commitment had lower promotion potential ratings. A later meta-analysis found that affective commitment is more strongly associated with self-reported measures of performance than supervisor ratings (Meyer et

al., 2002). Normative commitment was found to barely correlate with self-reported job performance, whereas continuance commitment was found to have a weak, negative correlation with self-reported performance. Another study found an inconsistent relationship between continuance commitment and performance that seemed to depend on the organization where commitment was measured – in one organization, continuance commitment and supervisor ratings of performance were negatively correlated, and in another organization no correlation was found (Shim & Steers, 1994).

Overall, this research shows a likely positive relationship between affective commitment and various self-report and supervisor ratings of job performance on an individual level. A few studies further find a positive relationship between affective commitment and performance as measured by beneficiary outcomes. Mowday and colleagues (1974) examined the commitment of bank employees at a branch level and found that affective commitment was positively correlated with customer service as rated by supervisors. Similarly, Ostroff (1992) found that the more affective commitment school teachers have, the more often their students attend class and the more satisfied their students are with their teaching.

Another important question to address in the relationship between commitment and performance is the direction of the causal arrow. Does affective commitment lead to better performance, or does performance lead to increased affective commitment? A meta-analysis of more than fifteen studies that looked at repeatedly measured job performance and commitment found a significant relationship for the effect of commitment on subsequent performance, and no correlation between performance and subsequent levels of commitment (Ricketta, 2008). This finding suggests that commitment influences performance, and not the other way around. However, this finding still omits an understanding of the mechanism through which commitment

brings about an increase in performance. Though intelligence and baseline ability are important for performance, effort has also been found to be a key ingredient to success (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Effort, or perseverance, allows individuals to persist through challenges despite failures, adversity, or plateaus in progress. Affective commitment has been linked to effort. In one study, sales employees who were high in affective commitment both worked harder, increasing their levels of exertion, as well as worked smarter, by focusing their efforts in a direction that provided the most return (Leong, Randall, & Cote, 1994). Therefore, effort or persistence might mediate the relationship between affective commitment and performance, explaining how affective commitment leads to positive outcomes.

### **Work Effort and Citizenship Behaviors**

Related to work effort is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Though defined in various ways, OCB involves extra-role behavior, often described as going “above and beyond” the call of duty (Organ, 1988). Employees who engage in OCB provide extra help to co-workers, suggest solutions to problems, and do something as simple as showing up on time. As with work effort, several studies have looked at the relationship between commitment and OCB. One study found that affective commitment was significantly correlated with two forms of OCB – engaging in altruistic acts towards specific members of the organization and complying with rules and norms implicit to the organization (Organ & Ryan, 1995). The same study found that continuance commitment is not related to altruistic acts towards organization members. Meyer and colleagues (2002) also found a positive relationship between affective commitment and OCB, as well as a negative relationship between continuance commitment and OCB. In addition, they found a positive correlation between normative commitment and OCB, though the relationship was less strong than that which characterizes affective commitment. Meyer and



colleagues (1993) also found that normative commitment is associated with citizenship behaviors, but again, the relationship is much weaker than that for affective commitment.

Another study looked at the relationship between the various forms of commitment and self-reported quality of work, sacrifice, and sharing behaviors (Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990). The study found that affective commitment was positively correlated with all three measures, that normative commitment was positively correlated only with sacrifice behaviors, and that while continuance commitment was weakly related to quality of work, it was unrelated to both sacrifice and sharing behaviors. One other study looked at a form of commitment similar to affective commitment that assessed the degree to which employees cared about the fate of the organization as well as their willingness to put in extra-effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the organization succeed. Results of the study showed that those employees with higher value commitment were more likely to participate in organization-specific citizenship behavior (Mayer & Schoorman, 1992).

### **Stress and Emotional Fitness**

In addition to looking at how commitment affects the way employees behave on the job, we can also look at how commitment affects subjective states, or the way employees feel and think about their work. Stress is one such state. The arousal response associated with stress is sometimes adaptive – it mobilizes our energy to meet the task at hand and can even enhance performance (Hanin, 1997; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Harmon-Jones, Gable, & Price, 2013). However, over-experiencing stress can lead to a number of negative outcomes, such as poor performance, low motivation, and increased absenteeism, as well as sleep disturbances, poor health, and even psychological disorder (Brosschot, Gerin, & Thayer, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005; LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005; Doi, 2005; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Burke, Davis,

Otte, & Mohr, 2005). These negative outcomes have important implications for organizations. Toxic levels of stress prevent employees from working at their best, which can undercut an organization's effectiveness and performance. Further, the psychological disorder that is sometimes brought on by stress can manifest as conflict, aimlessness, irritability, and even passivity. If left unchecked, stress can spread from one employee to another, amplifying the effects of stress (Gump & Kulik, 1997). Studies looking at the relationship between the various forms of commitment and stress have found that both affective and continuance commitment are negatively correlated with stress (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Jamal, 1990). A later study confirmed the relationship between affective commitment and lower stress, but found that continuance commitment was positively correlated with stress (Meyer et al., 2002).

Several studies have found that commitment buffers against various role demands and stress. For example, several studies found that affective commitment buffered the relationship between day-specific self-control demands and psychological distress (Schmidt & Diestel, 2012; Rivkin, Diestel, & Schmidt, 2014). The mechanism used to explain this relationship is that the positive emotions believed to be at the core of affective commitment help people to better cope with the negative effects brought on by any kind of work stressor. Begley and Czapka (1993) found a similar relationship between commitment and its effect on stress, finding that affective commitment buffered the relationship between stress and job displeasure. Specifically, when affective commitment was high, stress did not cause residual changes in job satisfaction, however, when affective commitment was low, stress increased job displeasure.

In other studies, emotional exhaustion was found to be negatively associated with affective commitment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). When employees feel emotional exhaustion, they feel like their emotional

resources are used up, which can lead to irritation and the feeling of being worn-out (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Being able to manage the sometimes emotional aspects of work is critical for well-being (Singh & Mishra, 2011; Buruck, Dörfel, Kugler, & Brom, 2016).

### **Satisfaction**

Improving well-being is not only about combatting stress, but also about increasing satisfaction. Satisfaction at work is both a desirable outcome in its own right and has been linked to decreased turnover and increased profit, customer satisfaction, and productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Several studies have found that affective commitment is strongly correlated with job satisfaction (Meyer et al., 2002; Thoresen et al., 2003). Similarly, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found that affective commitment was significantly correlated with overall job satisfaction as well as satisfaction with supervision and co-workers. In another study, affective commitment was significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction and self-efficacy (Harris & Cameron, 2005). In the same study, continuance commitment was negatively associated with life satisfaction, though the relationship was not statistically significant.

### **Summary**

In general, the outcomes associated with each form of commitment follow a similar trend: affective commitment is associated with desirable outcomes for both the organization and the individual; continuance commitment, on the other hand, is negatively or weakly associated with desirable outcomes; and normative commitment, when measured, is usually either not associated with or only weakly associated with desirable outcomes. Given this pattern, individuals and organizations who are seeking ways to foster commitment would be wise to focus on affective commitment. However, if affective commitment is going to be pursued, it is important to understand what conditions are most conducive to its discovery.

### **Antecedents of Commitment**

When a psychological construct is associated with positive outcomes, many wonder to what extent it is innate. To address this question, I will explore variables such as personality, culture, and certain demographic variables that might predispose an individual to experience affective commitment. However, we also know that individual traits often interact with situational factors to influence the way these traits are expressed (Lewin, 1951). Therefore, I will also briefly review situational variables that might increase the likelihood that affective commitment forms.

#### **Individual Characteristics**

**Control.** There is some research on the relationship between the three forms of commitment and various personality traits. One such personality trait found to relate to commitment is locus of control, or the degree to which individuals feel like they can influence the things that happen to them (Rotter, 1966). In several studies, those individuals with a higher internal locus of control experienced more affective commitment, whereas those individuals with an external locus of control experienced more continuance commitment (Meyer et al., 2002; Coleman, Irving, & Cooper, 1999). People with an internal locus of control believe they have power over their lives and that the things that happen to them are due to their own actions. It could be that the more individuals feel like their actions are internally controlled, the more affectively committed they become. Conversely, people with an external locus of control believe they lack the power to influence their environment and tend to perceive fewer alternatives. This might leave employees to feel “stuck” and, in turn, lead to the development of continuance commitment.

**Competence.** There is some research suggesting that people’s degree of perceived

competence influences organizational commitment. Similar to locus of control, perceived competence is defined as the degree to which an individual believes themselves to be skilled and effective in a given situation (White, 1959). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found that perceived competence is strongly associated with affective commitment. Later research by Meyer and colleagues (1998) found that early work experiences that are competence-related are positively correlated with affective commitment and normative commitment, though the latter to a lesser degree. Paradoxically, this association was weaker, however, for those employees who valued such experiences (Meyer, Irving, & Allen, 1998). One possible explanation for this outcome is that employees who already place a high value on competence-related experiences view themselves as responsible for producing them. However, employees who do not value competence-related experiences, but come to understand their benefit through work experiences, might attribute the source of the benefit to their organization, thereby strengthening affective commitment, or might feel obligated to reciprocate in the case of normative commitment.

**The Big Five.** When looking at big five personality traits, affective commitment is found to moderately correlate with agreeableness, emotional stability, extraversion, and conscientiousness (Choi, Oh, & Colbert, 2015). Normative commitment is also related to the same personality traits, though the relationship is less strong than which characterizes affective commitment. On the other hand, continuance commitment has a weak, negative relationship with emotional stability, extraversion, and openness. On the whole, it appears that although individuals with certain personality profiles might be somewhat more or less likely to experience each type of commitment, the relationships are not so strong as to be resistant to outside influence.

**Culture.** The relationship between personality and commitment was found to be moderated by culture (Choi et al., 2015). Specifically, the relationship between agreeableness and both affective and normative commitment was strongest in cultures with a collective self-concept. A collective self-concept, typically found in Asian countries such as Korea, China, and Japan, is characterized by a group-oriented focus and an internalization of group goals. An individual self-concept, on the other hand, is typified by paying more attention to person-level information, such as investments and economic losses. It is distinctive of the United States and western European countries. Additional research linking self-concept and commitment has found that a collective self-concept is positively related to affective commitment and that an individual self-concept is positively related to continuance commitment (Johnson & Chang, 2006). Considering these results through the lens of person-situation interaction literature, certain cultures might encourage and reinforce agreeable behavior, thereby strengthening the outcomes associated with agreeableness, such as affective and normative commitment. Other studies on the interaction between culture and commitment have found that the relationship between affective commitment and organizational citizenship behavior was stronger for people with a collectivist self-concept (Johnson & Chang, 2006). This interaction might also be explained through social reinforcement in that collectivist cultures value and praise behaviors that are beneficial to the group, rather than the individual.

**Demographics.** Though there is research indicating that personality and other individual characteristics do have some predictive ability when it comes to commitment, other studies have found that commitment is either weakly correlated or uncorrelated to certain demographic variables. For example, age has been found to be significantly, though weakly, associated with affective commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Later research found that this relationship held,

even when controlling for possible confounds, such as tenure (Allen & Meyer, 1993). Despite these findings, researchers are hesitant to draw any definite conclusions as a strong pattern in the relationship between age and commitment has not been established (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Other studies show that demographic variables such as gender, marital status, and education are unrelated to commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002).

### **Job Characteristics**

**Tenure.** Apart from individual characteristics, certain job characteristics have been found to relate to affective commitment. For example, research has found a positive relationship between tenure and commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002; Cohen, 1993a). In some of this research, however, the relationship varies by type of tenure, with position tenure significantly related to affective commitment, and organizational tenure significantly related to continuance commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). This relationship is difficult to explain. For example, while it makes sense that the longer an individual stays in a particular position, the more they become attached to their particular role, it is also conceivable that the longer someone stays with a particular organization, the more they become attached to the organization. On the other hand, one could make similar arguments for the case of continuance commitment – the longer one stays with an organization, the more benefits they accrue. Therefore, additional research on the relationship between tenure and commitment would help to clarify possible mechanisms that underlie the relationship.

**Relationships.** Another job characteristic that influences affective commitment is the extent to which it permits individuals to feel like they are connected to others at work either through friendships or through collaboration with others. For example, the opportunity to form

friendships at work, defined as the degree to which a job allows an individual to talk with co-workers and form informal relationships, is associated with increases in affective commitment (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). This finding was supported by Morrison (2004), who found that not only do friendship opportunities increase affective commitment, but so does workgroup cohesion. Relatedly, task interdependence, or the degree to which an individual's tasks overlap with that of another employee, has been found to positively relate to affective commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). What this research suggests is that when employees work closely with others, they are made aware of their contributions to the work group as well as to the organization. In turn, employees might experience increased personal investment in and identification with their organization.

**Communication.** Similar to relationships is the amount of communication employees receive from leaders and managers. Early research suggested a strong relationship between leader communication and organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). It was proposed that accurate and timely communication on the part of leaders creates a work environment that enhances affective commitment. Later research supports this relationship, finding satisfaction with supervisor communication is linked to affective commitment (van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007). Another study found that management communication, or the extent to which organizations provide information about changes in policies and procedures, finances, successes, and customer feedback, is significantly related to affective commitment (Ng, Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, & Wilson, 2006). This type of communication sends a strong signal to employees that they are valued members of the collective organization and important contributors to the organization's goals.

### **Summary**



Taken together, this research shows that a range of individual and situational factors are related to commitment, though no one factor stands above the rest in its predicative ability. One possible way of organizing these findings, however, is to say that when employees feel their interests and needs are reinforced, that they are doing work that is aligned with their identity and builds their sense of competence, and when they feel they fit well within the organization, they are more likely to experience affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This summary has a number of parallels with research from the field of positive psychology, and in particular with self-determination theory. Below, I briefly introduce positive psychology and self-determination theory, then examine the antecedents and consequences of commitment through this lens.

### **Affective Commitment and Positive Psychology**

Affective commitment like that experienced by Pam is a form of positive deviance that is the central concern of the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology takes an evidence-based approach to studying constructs such as human potential, motivation, and aptitude (Rebele, 2015). Though there are many theories that can be subsumed under its title, what unifies them is the types of questions they seek to answer. Instead of focusing on identifying and fixing problems, positive psychology centers its efforts on recognizing and cultivating what is already good within an individual, organization, or community in order to promote thriving.

Understanding the benefits of capitalizing on existing resources, a number of other fields of study and practice have made similar shifts in their approach (Pawelski, 2016). For example, healthcare, education, and most recently, the humanities, have made what is called the eudaimonic turn; a turn characterized by a focus on strengths, rather than on deficits (Pawelski, 2013). It is important to note that this turn does not replace an understanding or use of a deficit-model approach, but serves to compliment and balance its focus. What this approach affords,

however, is an opportunity to think of things such as education, health, and literature as means of understanding and reaching human potential.

The world of business has also undergone a similar shift in focus. For many, work is seen not only as a means of putting food on the table, but also as a way to contribute to personal understanding, growth, and flourishing. However, the desire for work that people can identify with is not entirely new. As we moved away from hunter-gatherer societies, innovation spawned the creation of more individualized tasks that required specialized skills to perform (Šverko & Vizek-Vidović, 1995). Work began to define who people were – a carpenter, a baker, a blacksmith – and shaped the environment in which they developed. Continued economic progress has further complicated and specialized work tasks. For many careers, the products of work have been far delineated from the work itself. Furthermore, increasing levels of education and technological skill are required for more and more lines of work. Despite this progress, employees still desire work that resonates with who they are, that they find meaningful, and that they can feel committed to (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Akerlof & Kranton, 2005). Despite an initial hesitancy about how such work could co-exist with a need to remain profitable and competitive, organizations are slowly realizing its benefits. Positive psychology has been instrumental in overcoming this initial resistance. Research suggesting that optimism, passion, and strong relationships leads to better performance, increased persistence, and resilience, has helped both individuals and organizations understand the what and the how of work that promotes positive deviance (Seligman & Schulman, 1986; Vallerand et al., 2007; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).

As more research reveals the beneficial outcomes associated with incorporating positive psychology into business practices, the question of whether they should be incorporated at all has

become decreasingly relevant. Many organizations are recognizing that employee psychological health, individual achievement, and growth are becoming sources of competition (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, & Bernstein, 2003; Pertula & Cardon, 2011). This is especially true for organizations who employ a large number of millennials, who prefer their organizations to provide opportunities to develop a sense of purpose around people rather than profit (Deloitte, 2016). As a result, some organizations are making the promotion and maintenance of such things imperative strategic initiatives. While commitment research has both preceded and continued independently of positive psychology, there are clear parallels between these areas of scholarship. Positive psychology can help in both understanding commitment and in offering strategies that support the type of affective commitment demonstrated by Pam.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

One particular construct from the field of positive psychology is especially helpful for understanding affective commitment. Self-determination theory is embedded in the field of positive psychology, and offers an understanding of the sources of human motivation and how they influence behavior and psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2000). At its core, this theory assumes that people are naturally active, self-motivated, curious, and eager to succeed because it is inherently satisfying. At the same time, the theory recognizes that this experience is not a reality for everyone – many times, we lack motivation, are uninterested, and even sometimes are passive. The gap between the naturally occurring ideal and reality, according to self-determination theory, has to do with whether the environment we are in supports or thwarts our needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Satisfaction of these needs supports intrinsic motivation, which is marked by active engagement in tasks that an individual considers interesting and that, in turn, foster growth and development. On the other

hand, when these needs are thwarted, we either lack motivation or must turn to sources of motivation outside the self, which lead to decreasing amounts of inherent reward or interest in a given task, and can even halt our development.

When looking at the antecedents of affective commitment outlined in the previous section, we can see that they parallel our basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In other words, affectively committed employees have a higher internal locus of control and believe that their behavior is self-determined and autonomous. They have an increased sense of competence and faith in their skills and abilities to get the job done. Finally, they have an other-oriented focus and feel connected to both colleagues and the organization. The fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to intrinsic motivation, which in turn is associated with a slew of desirable outcomes, such as enhanced performance and increased persistence, as well as personal growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This relationship between need satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and positive outcomes can be used to make sense of the outcomes associated with affective commitment cited above – an affectively committed employee who acts autonomously is more engaged; her belief in her abilities enhances her performance and pushes her to work harder and longer; and the strong connection she feels towards others and the organization drives her to help others and go the extra mile for the organization.

Just as the antecedents of affective commitment mirror the satisfaction of our basic psychological needs, the absence of these needs can be likened to the antecedents of continuance commitment. Employees driven by continuance commitment have a lower internal locus of control, which weakens their belief in their ability to effect change in their environment and in their sense of competence. Further, their individualistic focus separates them from the group. As

a result of thwarted needs, employees with continuance commitment rely on extrinsic motivation, and might turn to pay, status, or some other opportunity as a source of continued motivation. Whereas intrinsic motivation produces positive outcomes, extrinsic motivation leads to compromised performance, decreased persistence, as well as anxiety, conflict, and in some cases, helplessness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Again, the relationship between needs, motivation, and outcomes, can be used to make sense of the outcomes associated with continuance commitment cited above – an employee driven by continuance commitment lacks a feeling of autonomy and is less engaged; her performance suffers as a result. This echoes the story of Rebecca, who had to find or manufacture ways of pushing herself to complete her work. The lack of connection she feels towards others and the organization does not encourage supportive behavior or extra-work effort.

Can the same link between needs, motivation, and outcomes be used to make sense of normative commitment? Remember that normative commitment is generally associated with outcomes in the same direction as affective commitment; however, the sense of moral obligation and responsibility that drive normative commitment seem to be externally driven. Therefore, the relationship between internal motivation and positive outcomes seems to be more complicated than how it has been presented so far, and it is. Though there seems to be a clear distinction between the presence or absence of needs and the resulting type of motivation that underlies affective and continuance commitment, the chain of events is not that black and white. Rather than being dichotomous variables, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation lie on a continuum. When our needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fully satisfied, our motivation is categorized as intrinsic and the more internally regulated our behavior becomes. However, the less our needs are satisfied, the more our motivation is categorized as extrinsic. Increasing

degrees of extrinsic motivation require an increasing amount of self-regulation to complete a given task (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Unfortunately, self-regulation is a limited resource (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006; Rivkin et al., 2014; Brown & Ryan, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When we engage in a task that requires self-regulation, our short-term supply is depleted, reducing our ability to self-regulate during subsequent tasks. Without a chance to replenish our reserve of self-regulation, our performance begins to slip and we are more likely to engage in self-defeating behaviors or save face as a way to comprise for our increasing deficit (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Hodgins, Liebeskind, & Schwartz, 1996).

Though there is not much research on the antecedents of normative commitment, this more nuanced perspective of the link between needs, motivation, and outcomes can help to explain what drives normative commitment and its associated outcomes. Rooted in moral obligation and responsibility, normative commitment might involve some recognition and acceptance of the value behind certain behavior, which increases personal identification and endorsement of it. As a result, the behavior becomes more autonomous and self-directed, and positive outcomes are more easily maintained. However, they are not as easily maintained as when behavior is more fully integrated and autonomous as in the case of affective commitment. A normatively committed employee is also more agreeable and has a group-oriented focus, which helps them to relate and feel connected to others and the organization. These ideas support the observed pattern of results associated with normative commitment in that outcomes are similar to those associated with affective commitment, though are not as strong in nature.

## **Summary**

Positive psychology, and self-determination theory in particular, not only helps us to understand antecedents and outcomes of commitment, but it can also give us ideas for how both individuals and organizations can support the cultivation of affective commitment, and keep continuance and normative commitment in check. Specifically, this research suggests that fulfilling the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness would support affective commitment.

### **Cultivating Commitment**

There are a plethora of things both individuals and organizations can do to foster these conditions. Following I offer strategies to build affective commitment using needs as both a framework and a means of explaining the mechanism through which the suggested strategies take effect. Many of the strategies outlined are drawn largely from research in the field of positive psychology.

#### **Supporting Interests: The Need for Autonomy**

Autonomy plays an important role in how certain activities are internalized and connected to one's identity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As a result, autonomy shapes the nature of the relationship people develop towards an activity such as work. When an individual is given autonomy over the way they engage in it, they are more likely to internalize work in a way that is in line with their identity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Such alignment is characteristic of a harmonious passion, described as an activity that individuals feel in control of, feel good about themselves while doing, and find congruent with other activities they engage in (Mageau et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003). At its most basic level, what this research suggests is that organizations should grant employees sufficient autonomy over their work to increase the likelihood that it is internalized in a way that leads to positive outcomes, such as harmonious passion.

What might this look like? For starters, this could involve ceasing the urge to micro-manage. Instead, making sure employees are clear on the “what” of their work, and then allowing them to determine the “how” of it puts them in the driver’s seat. Inevitably, though, managers will need to ask their employees to take on projects or tasks that are not particularly exciting, or that need to be carried out in a certain way. Instead of controlling or pressuring the work, however, there are several things managers can do to incite intrinsic motivation in their employees. For example, one study showed that when managers provide their employees with a personally meaningful rationale for the task or project, acknowledge possible conflict between their request and employees’ preference towards it, and convey choice over some part of the request can increase the internalization of a task or project that might otherwise be externally regulated (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). To include employees in deciding what goals to target, organizations should not only ask for, but also implement employee input. In this way, organizations are giving employees the opportunity to both identify and engage in tasks that they deem important and can approach how they see fit. One form of leadership that is particularly successful in this regard is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders provide a vision and sense of mission, infuse pride in their employees, and gain their respect and trust (Bass, 1990). Research supports the relationship between transformational leadership, autonomy, and commitment, showing that empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Jackson, Meyer, & Wang, 2013).

There are also strategies employees can use to better align their work with their interests and identity, and to increase the sense of autonomy they feel. One such strategy is changing an employee’s orientation towards work. There are at least three different ways people frame their



relationship with work, viewing it as either a job, a career, or a calling (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Viewing work as a job is characterized by a focus on the external rewards of work like salary and benefits, as opposed to more personal rewards such as meaning and fulfillment. When employees view their work as a career, the potential for advancement – and its accompanying prestige, power, and self-esteem – takes a central focus. Finally, those individuals who view their work as a calling believe that their work contributes to a greater good and see work as an end in itself. These work-orientations have been linked to commitment, with research finding a negative relationship between commitment and having a job orientation (Markow & Klenke, 2005). Commitment also mediated the relationship between a calling and job satisfaction (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey & Dik, 2012). Though this research did not look at affective commitment specifically, it used a measure of career commitment which assessed the degree to which employees agreed with statements similar to those that an affectively committed employee might agree with, such as “I like my work too much to give it up,” and “My current job is an ideal line of work.”

To go from viewing one’s work as a job or a career to viewing it as a calling, employees can engage in job crafting. Job crafting involves changing or re-arranging the building blocks of work so that it better incorporates an individual’s motives, strengths, and passions (Wrzesniewski, 2003; Wrzesniewski, Berg, & Dutton, 2010; Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Specifically, it involves assessing and then modifying either work tasks, the nature of work relationships, or perceptions of work. The goal of job crafting is to help employees gain a greater sense of control over their work and engage in tasks that are more aligned with their interests. For example, an individual might work with her organization to shift the amount of time she is spending on certain tasks that do not engage her interests to tasks that she finds both

interesting and engaging. Another example of job crafting might be to reframe the way an individual views her work, so that it is seen as more meaningful or in line with her goals. This might involve coming to a clear understanding of the purpose behind what she is doing and why it is important for both her and her organization.

The above strategies are just a few, among many, that can be used to satisfy employees' need for autonomy at work. The strategies allow employees to follow their inner interests and grant choice over their behavior. Further, they turn behavior, requests, and goals that are organizationally determined into personally valued and endorsed self-regulations. As employees take on the values and goals of the organization as their own, the more intrinsically motivated their work becomes, and the more affective commitment they experience.

### **Growth and Development: The Need for Competence**

Competence is another psychological need that, when met, supports the process through which individuals internalize the values and goals of their social group (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Competence reflects our belief in our ability to be proficient and successful when engaging in the task at hand, as well as to master and control our environment (White, 1959). As cited previously, perceived competence is strongly associated with affective commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Our sense of competence is influenced by feedback, whether through social approval or the acquisition of new skills. When this feedback is positive, our sense of competence is supported and we are more likely to rely on intrinsic sources of motivation and internalize behavior, which in turn supports affective commitment (Deci, 1971).

Leaders can, therefore, build affective commitment by supporting employees' competence through providing regular feedback. However, it is not necessarily the frequency of feedback that best supports competence, but also the nature of feedback provided. Feedback

surrounding employee performance is commonly aimed at areas for improvement, resulting in a bias towards negative performance. When positive feedback is provided, it is often generic or outcome-specific. In contrast, process praise focuses on acknowledging and reinforcing the specific, positive behaviors that an individual exhibited that led to a successful outcome, rather than an individual's personality or innate talent (Kamins & Dweck, 1999). Numerous studies across varied work functions have indicated that process praise encourages learning, problem-solving, competence, and organizational commitment (Luthans, Youssef, & Rawski, 2011; Sveinsdottir, Ragnarsdottir, & Blondal, 2015; Baek-Kyoo & Park, 2010). Process praise fosters a growth mindset in employees, which supports employees' belief that they are self-efficacious enough to develop abilities through hard work, and build their sense of competence by doing so.

In order for employees to view their behaviors as self-determined, however, research also suggests autonomy must accompany competence-building experiences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, it is important for organizations to allow and encourage employees also engage in self-determined activities that support competence through the acquisition of new skills. One way this can be achieved is through flow experiences, which are facilitated by intrinsic motivation (Kowal & Fortier, 1999). Flow is marked by effortless attention, engagement, and positive emotion, and results in increased "psychological capital" that can be further invested in other activities, such as goal-pursuit (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Peterson, 2006, p. 68). In this way, flow facilitates our continued progress towards goals, and builds our sense of competence as a result. There are several strategies employees can use to stimulate flow experiences, which arise when skill is perfectly matched to meet the challenge at hand. For example, engaging in tasks with clearly defined goals and rules of performance and that provide feedback for a job well done promote flow. Some examples include controlling attention in a way that allows full

engagement in the task at hand or making routine tasks more challenging by trying to complete them more quickly or efficiently.

Another way to build competence is through deliberate practice. When engaging in deliberate practice, rather than a perfect match between skill and challenge, deliberate practice is marked by challenge that exceeds skill. In order to master the challenge, individuals break it down into the necessary skills required to accomplish it, and then focus on improving those skills through daily, effortful practice (Ericsson, Krmappe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993). While these individual tasks might not be intrinsically motivating in and of themselves, when in service of reaching the larger goal, individuals are able to find value in mastering them, and as a result, are able to rely on more internalized sources of motivation to complete them. The acquisition of new skills and the continued progress towards one's goal that deliberate practice affords, supports enhanced competence and the further integration of goal-relevant behavior.

Taken together, these strategies support employees' need for competence through signaling their effectiveness and enabling continued progress towards their goals. To the extent that organizations support employees' efforts by not only giving them positive feedback and autonomy over this process, but also providing them with resources to facilitate goal achievement, intrinsic motivation will be supported, and affective commitment strengthened in turn.

### **Valued and Supported: The Need for Relatedness**

In addition to being influenced by autonomy and competence, the process through which individuals internalize the values and goals of their social group is supported by a feeling of

relatedness to the group (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Relatedness makes us feel like we belong where we are and that we are able to connect with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is strengthened when we feel securely attached to others, and when we feel like others are warm and caring. One strategy that is particularly effective in increasing employees' feelings of relatedness towards their organization is giving. When an organization gives to its employees in the form of employee assistance programs, for example, employees judge the organization's actions and identity as caring and supportive (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008). The study also found that when employees give back to their organization in the same form, by supporting an employee assistance program, they interpret their actions in prosocial, compassionate terms. Similarly, when employees are connected to the beneficiaries of their work, they experience more affective commitment and are more persistent as a result (Grant et al., 2007). Therefore, giving on the part of both organizations and individuals not only increases employees' sense of relatedness to the organization, but also increases employees' sense of relatedness to their beneficiaries. Through the process of giving, employees are better able to understand why what they are doing matters. This understanding fosters internal regulation over one's behavior, and enhances affective commitment through a deeper connection to one's work on a personal level.

Transformational leadership is also an effective strategy to enhance employees' sense of relatedness at work, and has been positively associated with affective commitment as previously cited (Bycio et al., 1995; Jackson et al., 2013). This style of leadership not only provides a means of inspiration, but is also defined by giving employees personal attention, individual treatment, and a good deal of coaching and advising (Bass, 1990). The willingness of transformational leaders to invest time in their employees signals and further reinforces that employees are valued members of the group. Similarly, managers who signal inclusiveness and esteem towards

employees by being receptive their ideas has also been linked to affective commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Taking time to invest in employees as well as listening to their input makes clear makes clear that the organization understands that employees are important stakeholders and that they are cared for accordingly. It creates an environment in which employees feel secure to pursue activities that are inherently interesting and intrinsically motivating and in turn fosters affective commitment.

Improving employees' connection to others in the organization can also support relatedness and lead to affective commitment. As mentioned previously, the opportunity for employees to form informal friendships as well as the degree to which individuals feel they are a part of a cohesive work group helps to foster affective commitment (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Morrison, 2004). In fact, changing the extent or nature of employees' interactions with others at work so that they are more meaningful is another form of job crafting (Wrzesniewski, Berg, & Dutton, 2010). There are several strategies individuals can use to carry out this goal. One strategy is through creating high-quality connections (HQC). An HQC is a brief interaction between individuals that is subjectively positive and serves to strengthen the relationship. These interactions are marked by an experience of aliveness, positive regard, and mutuality, and are associated with increased resilience, positive emotion, and calculated risk-taking, as well as decreased stress (Stephens et al., 2011; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). HQCs can be fostered by respectful engagement, which is achieved by using body language that signals being present in conversation, such as eye contact and reducing distractions; by actively listening and affirming what is shared; as well as by being honest and authentic (Dutton, 2003). HQCs can also be cultivated through task enabling, which involves coaching people to develop skills, facilitating team member's needs, as well as accommodating other's schedules. Finally, HQCs can be built

through enabling trust by appropriate self-disclosure, use of collective nouns such as “we” and “us,” as well as delegating tasks and providing constructive feedback.

Creating HQCs, along with the other strategies outlined above, help to support employees’ need for relatedness by creating environments characterized by consideration and sincerity, and marked by secure attachment. This sense of security allows employees to follow their innate desire to find work that is personally meaningful and intrinsically motivating, as well as encourages employees to internalize the organization's goals in the process. As a result, affective commitment is strengthened.

### **Conclusion**

Organizations are having to answer a complex set of demands in the modern world – while the need to sustain profit remains, organizations are now also charged with meeting employees’ desire for organizations to place a premium on people-oriented values and enriching work experiences. Organizational commitment meets both these needs, in part by driving down turnover. However, organizational commitment is a multi-faceted construct that comes in many forms, which beyond turnover lead to very different outcomes for both the organization and individuals. Therefore, if organizations are not careful, they might end up fostering forms of commitment that undercut positive outcomes such as performance, engagement, and citizenship behaviors.

This reality is made clear by the story of Pam and Rebecca. While both might be considered committed, and stay with their organization as a result, the form of commitment that Pam experiences leads to her persistence and hard work, as well as her connection to her team. Her work promotes not only the success of her organization’s initiative, but also her sense of satisfaction and well-being. Pam *wants to* be at work. Rebecca, on the other hand, is

disconnected from her organization and its goals, turning to incentives to get the job done. Her lack of engagement shows in her performance and leads to her feeling demotivated and stressed.

Rebecca *needs to* be at work to keep receiving the perks her organization provides.

Organizations should take heed of these differences if they want to keep Pams around and either avoid Rebeccas all together, or make an effort to turn Rebeccas into Pams.

At a basic level, the wanting to that characterizes Pam's work versus the needing to that characterizes Rebecca's work is a difference in motivation. Pam feels that her work is part of who she is and her need to feel autonomous, competent, and related is satisfied by it. Pam's motivation to work is intrinsically driven and supports the positive outcomes we observe – high performance, engagement, and satisfaction. Rebecca cannot personally get behind her work. It does not foster a sense of autonomy, build her competence, or strengthen her connection to others – at least not enough. Rebecca's motivation to work is driven by external forces and undercuts her performance and well-being. Fortunately, both organizations and individuals can turn to the field of positive psychology to find strategies that create environments that support the satisfaction of our basic psychological needs and that support internally driven motivation. By adopting such strategies as those offered above, organizations will come closer to filling their seats with more employees like Pam and fewer like Rebecca. The same goes for employees. Relying on strategies that build affective commitment will help to satisfy their needs, and fulfill their desire for more meaningful, personally relevant work.



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