

Commitment of employees: The case of dormitory service administration at higher education in Beijing, China

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Abstract

Employees' commitment is pertinent for the effectiveness of any higher education administration. This study aimed to explore the commitment of employees working at the dormitory service administration at a national key university in Beijing. By adopting the quantitative methodology, a questionnaire of 10 statements with three- point Likert scale was designed and handed out to 25 employees through following the convenience sampling technique. Data was analyzed using frequency counts (i.e. number of responses) and percentages. The results showed high commitment among dormitory service administration employees.

Keywords: commitment; student affair; dormitory service; higher education; China

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1. Introduction

Chinese higher education system has been experiencing astonishing expansion since the beginning of the 21st century (Gu, Li & Wang, 2009). Over the past three decades, Chinese higher education shifted swiftly from an elite system to a mass system (Arnold & Zhu, 2011). This unprecedented expansion is seen through the absolute growth rate of currently enrolled students (Xiaohao, 2004). The gross enrollment rate in Chinese higher education reached 15 percent in 2002 (Gu, Li & Wang, 2009). According to Li and Xing (2010), colleges recruited 5.04 million new students in 2005, which was 4.7 times greater than the total number of students in 1998. They added that China ranked first globally in terms of the total number of college students, amounting to 23 million. As indicated in China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) the number of students enrolled in higher education is projected to be 35.5 million in 2020 (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2010). This expansion is characterized by more diverse student population and the implementation of market principles in colleges and universities (Arnold & Zhu, 2011). This increases pressure on the administration of student affairs.

The increment of enrollment results in the incidence of many challenges facing student affairs administration such as addressing different behavioral problems of students who are required to live in on-campus (Yu & Ke-Quan, n.d.). Chinese higher education system experiences a strong-cohort model in which students live and study together (Arnold & Zhu, 2011). This makes the work of dormitory service employees challenging. According to Yu and Ke-Quan (n.d.), increased workloads of employees as well as reduced service quality to students are among some problems associated with increased enrollment in higher education institutions in main-land China. According to UNESCO (2002), one of the many functions of student's housing/accommodation services in higher education institutions is to provide safe, comfortable, well-maintained and supportive on-campus accommodation for students. However, it is highly imperative to have committed employees who could identify with the goals and values of the organization (Nehmeh, 2009).

There is no absolute definition to the concept of commitment as they are many definitions (see Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). For example, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) defined it as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets" (p. 301). Commitment is also defined as a belief in and strong acceptance of institutional values, norms and goals, the willingness to exert substantial effort for the well-being and prosperity of the institution, and a resilient aspiration to serve it with loyalty (Mowday et al., 1979 as cited in Ghosh & Swamy, 2014). Ghosh and Swamy (2014) stated that individual's attitude and norms towards a job determine their intention. In Meyer and Allen's (1991) commitment model, three components of commitment are identified: affective, normative, and continuance, representing emotional ties, obligation, and incentives, respectively.

Commitment of employees is one of the major predictors of their attitude toward the institution and it is a strong indicator of employee's behavior of turnover, intention to withdraw and their organizational citizenship behavior (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Morrow, 1993; Sinclair & Wright, 2005 as cited in Ghosh & Swamy, 2014). Nehmeh (2009) argued that highly committed employees can take on additional duties. Employee's commitment is considered to be one of the most significant and controversial elements in human resource management (Lee & Chen, 2013). In this concern, Brown, Mchardy, McNabb, and Tayler (2011) reported that human resource management and psychology literatures have been attracted by the theory of organizational commitment. There has been, of course, a broad stream of research on employee's commitment which showed that committed employees are less likely to leave the organization and more likely to make extra efforts on their behalf than less committed employees (Ryland, n.d.). Some also argue that employee's commitment is significantly related to

sustained productivity (Dixit & Bhati, 2012); organizational performance and employees' turnover (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014). It is also found that a positive significant relationship exists between organizational commitment, career satisfaction, and engagement of employees (Khalid, Khalid, Waseem, Farooqi, & Nazish, 2015).

Studies in different organizational context have been conducted to determine antecedents of organizational commitment. Good leadership behavior contributes for improving employee commitment and job satisfaction (Kaiman, 2013) and work environment at large greatly influence the employees' commitment to the organization (Njenga, Kamau, & Njenga, 2015). Previous studies indicate the possibility that personal characteristics such as experience, gender, educational level etc. may differentially relate to the organizational commitment in different settings (Võ, 2015). The study of Võ conducted in a university setting, for instance, showed that the correlations between work experience and continuance commitment; gender and affective commitment; highest degree earned with normative commitment, were low. On the other hand, results of another study conducted in the context of lower level schools, reported a positive and significant relationship between teachers' organizational commitment, and age and experience of teaching (Zarandi & Noghondar, 2011).

To the best of the author's knowledge, there is still a dearth of administration specific studies on employees' commitment in the context of Chinese higher education institutions. Findings from those organizational studies may not be fully applicable to a particular group of employees working for a certain administrative unit. In this concern, Hsieh (2012) stated that "when compared with Westerners, the Chinese have a stronger sense of responsibility and obligation towards those who have a close relationship with them" (p. 250). Therefore, the main leading question for this study is: are employees working at dormitory service administration at university committed to their work? This paper explores the commitment of dormitory service employees at one key university in Beijing, China.

2. Overview of Organizational Commitment

Meyer and Allen (1991) have conceptualized organizational commitment as a psychological state characterized by employees relationship with the organization in the way they decided to continue working in the organization. In the model of organizational commitment, affective, affective commitment is noted as emotional attachment, identification with, and involvement of employee in the organization. Affectively committed employees in an organization are those who want and decide to stay in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). It is also confirmed that affective commitment refers a psychological attachment to the organization as evidenced by identification with it, a sense of belonging and emotional involvement (WeiBo, Kaur, & Jun, 2010). It has been noted that the aim of affective commitment is emotional attachment of employee to the organization rather than focusing on the behavior of leaving or remaining with the organization (Roe, Solinger, & Olffen, 2008). A further comprehensive definition of affective organizational commitment is "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p. 27).

Continuance organizational commitment is the counterpart of affective organizational commitment in which employee's commitment is associated with economic benefit. For instance, Murray, Gregoire, and Downey (1991) described continuance organizational commitment as the state of mind in which employees decided not to leave their organization as they are afraid of the loss they might face, such as reduced payment and difficulties of finding a job elsewhere. Similarly, Meyer and Allen (1997) defined continuance commitment as employee's consciousness of risk of losing income due to leaving their organization. Supporting this definition, Kanter (1968) described it as the financial gain and loss associated with staying in and leaving the organization respectively. In continuance commitment, before deciding to leave their job, employees calculate the risks and the costs they could encounter upon leaving their job (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Certain benefits and rewards would drive one's attitudes and behaviors (Singh & Gupta, 2008). In short, continuance commitment is forces employees to be

committed since they need to be so (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Normative commitment is the third component of commitment, and indicates that employees stay in their organization/institution since they feel obliged to do so as a feeling of duty (Meyer & Smith, 2000). This obligation sometimes emanates from acceptance of organizational norms and/or a desire to repay what they received from their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This description resembles that of Wiener (1982): "the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way that meets organizational interests" (p. 471). In short, normative commitment is the relationship between employees and their organization created based on the drive of social norms of attachment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). As normative commitment is developed based on norms and values, it is likely challenging to get changed (Roxenhall & Andrésen, 2012). Qualities of faithfulness and responsibilities are valued more in normative commitment (Weiner, 1982). To conclude, it seemingly appears that these three commitment components are interrelated and their increment depends on those who lead institution.

3. Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional design with quantitative research approach. A cross-sectional design is employed wherein the author collected data on relevant variables from the study participants at one time (Malhotra, 1999). It was conducted at one national key university in Beijing, between September 2016 and December 2016. The university was selected by considering feasibility criteria. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, the name of the university is not mentioned in this paper. The study participants are employees working at the students' dormitory service administration regardless of their qualification and specific responsibilities. The study participants were selected by following 'convenience sampling' technique as only staff members who can easily be accessible for the researcher (Ross, 1978) are recruited. In other words, it was difficult for the researcher to convince all these staff members to participate in the study and therefore, the study participants got limited to twenty-five in total.

A questionnaire containing ten statements was prepared through reviewing relevant literature. In particular, some questions were adapted from other questionnaires prepared for previous studies meant to assess organizational commitment in various contexts (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014; Poznanski, 1991; Tang, Lo, & Fryxell, 2013; Wolowska, 2014). The questionnaire was first prepared in English and was later translated into Chinese with the help of native professors. The reliability of the scale is found to be an alpha coefficient of 0.64. To select items to be involved in the instrument item analysis, inter item correlation was carried out. All participants responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire follows a three-point Likert scale: agree, neither agree nor disagree (neutral), and disagree. Before data collection, the researchers briefly explained the purpose of the research to the study participants, and mentioned to them that their responses would remain confidential. Moreover, they get informed not to write their names on the questionnaires. The data was analyzed using frequency counts (i.e. number of responses) and percentages.

4. Reporting Results and Discussion

Employees' responses were collected and tabulated as shown in Table 1 below. The responses given by the study participants are categorized in three columns labeled as: Agree, Neutral, and Disagree. As shown in table 1, a majority of the respondents, 84%, agreed that they put a great deal of effort in their work beyond what is normally expected of them. However, 16% of the respondents disagreed. This finding is also supported by responses that more than half of the employee (56%) believed that the administration inspired them in a better performance of their job, even though 28% and 16% of the respondents still responded to the same question neutrally and in a disagreement way, respectively. This is in line with the assertion that committed employees have "a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organization's goals, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership" (Porter et al., 1974 as cited in Schultz, n.d., p. 2).

Table 1*Employees' Responses*

N	Items	Agree F (%)	Neutral F (%)	Disagree F (%)
1	I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this department be successful.	21 (84)	0 (0)	4 (16)
2	I talk up this department to my friends as a great department to work for.	13 (52)	7 (28)	5 (20)
3	I feel very little loyalty to this department.	0 (0)	0 (0)	25 (100)
4	I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this department.	10 (40)	5 (20)	10 (40)
5	I am proud to tell others that I am part of this department.	18 (72)	7 (28)	0 (0)
6	I could just as well be working for a different department in the university as long as the types of work were similar.	18 (72)	7 (28)	0 (0)
7	This department really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance	14 (56)	7 (28)	4 (16)
8	There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this department indefinitely.	7 (28)	7 (28)	11 (44)
9	I really care about the fate of this Department.	21 (84)	4 (16)	0 (0)
10	Deciding to work for this department was a definite mistake on my part.	4 (16)	0 (0)	21 (84)

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) agreed that they proudly talk about their administration to their friends as a great department to work for. However, 28 % and 20% of them decided not to or disagreed, respectively. These results are congruent with the responses that a majority of the respondents (72%) indicated that they were proud to tell others that they were part of this administration (Statement# 5). This finding, to some extent, reflects that employees have affective commitment in which they show emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with their organization and its goal among others (Reichers, 1985).

All respondents (100%) felt that they were loyal to their administration. Committed employees felt loyal toward the organization because, they shared the values of the organization and had a personal sense of importance about the institution's mission (Berhan, 2007). In turn, a loyal employee has greater motivation to perform duties and is trustworthy than a disloyal employee (Elegido, 2013 as cited in Smith, 2015).

As clearly indicated in Statement #6 (Table 1), except for 28% of the respondents who responded 'neutral', 72% agreed as they could work for other administration within the institution provided that similar roles are given. For professional workers, this finding reflects their professional commitment than organizational loyalty. Therefore, data from the current study supports the statement that "professional commitment is a person's belief in and acceptance of the values of his or her chosen occupation or line of work, and a willingness to maintain membership in that occupation" (Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1994 as cited in Bagraim, 2003, p. 6). Though the findings above showed as the employees are loyal and proud of their administration, and willingness to exert much effort for its success, supported by the data showing 44% of the respondents disagreed with Statement#8 that 'there's not too much to be gained by sticking with their current department indefinitely'. This finding might be justified by the claim that as committed employees invest their time, mental and emotional energy, most of them anticipate rewards such as 'favors, affection, gifts, attention, goods, money and property' from their administration or institution (Vance, 2006). However, it is evident in the literature that intrinsic rewards should be given priority. For instance, the review of meta-analysis of research results showed that extrinsic rewards do certainly have a considerable undermining effect on intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001). Data from the current study cannot decipher any possible gains perceived by those who disagreed with Statement #8 that 'there's not too much to be gained by sticking with this department indefinitely'.

As demonstrated in the above table, most of the respondents, 84%, indicated that they cared about the fate of their administration, while only 16 % of them were neutral and none of them disagreed. This means that employees do show normative commitment. The concept of 'normative commitment' assumes that employees

stay committed as they feel it is their moral obligation to work for the success of their institution/administration (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Since 84% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that 'deciding to work for this department was a definite mistake...', and only 16 % of them agreed, it is implied that employees developed affective commitment in which they have a desire to maintain membership as a result of their work experiences that could bring feelings of comfort to work for their institution (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendation

The paper reports the commitment of employees working at dormitory services administration at a key national university in Beijing. The results showed that staff members put a great deal of effort in their work beyond what is normally expected of them. Feeling proud of the administration and being loyal is reported in this study. As committed, the participants showed interest in working for other administrations within the same institution. This reflects that employees have affective commitment in which they show emotional attachment, identification, and involvement with their organization and its goal among others. The findings of this study have implications to management bodies in Chinese higher education institutions to design strategies to enhance the commitment level of employees at dormitory services administration. As the topic is less researched at a specific service administration unit, it would lay foundation for future researchers who would like to broaden the existing knowledge in the same topic and context. Since the current study is focused only on commitment of employees working in dormitory service administration, a large-scale study in Chinese higher education is recommended. Moreover, studies specifically focused on the influence of commitment on employee's performance and service quality are highly recommended.

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