



Umbrella Summary

Organizational Commitment

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is organizational commitment?

Organizational commitment, along with [job satisfaction](#), is one of the most commonly studied job attitudes within the psychological sciences and is often used to gauge how employees feel about their job. Research on organizational commitment has largely been a fragmented endeavor, with no clear consensus on what organizational commitment actually is or how it should be conceptualized. To date, there is not one definition that is regarded as the best, but there are some common themes that can be seen throughout the many definitions in existence. For example, most definitions refer to organizational commitment in terms of a tie that binds employees to their organization (Allen, 2016). Other common definitions describe organizational commitment as loyalty, a psychological bond, identification with an organization, or something that drives one to give energy to and pursue activities for the good of one's organization (Allen, 2016).

Organizational commitment tends to be conceptualized as either one or three factors. The unidimensional view of organizational commitment focuses on commitment based on feelings of attachment and loyalty to one's organization (Klein & Park, 2016). The three-factor model breaks down organizational commitment into three commitment factors based on one's rationale for staying at the organization, including affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). All three types of commitment are alike in that they decrease the chance of an employee leaving, but they differ in the way in which they tie individuals to an organization.

- Affective commitment consists of the desire to stay at an organization out of emotional attachment. Individuals high in affective commitment enjoy the organization and choose to stay there because they want to.
- Normative commitment consists of feelings of obligation to remain at an organization. Individuals high in normative commitment stay at an organization because it seems like the right thing to do.
- Continuance commitment consists of the need to stay at the organization based on analysis of the possible costs and benefits incurred from leaving. Individuals high in continuance commitment choose to stay at an organization because they feel they have to (e.g., no other options, it would be too costly to work somewhere else; Allen, 2016; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

These three types of commitment are interrelated and can be experienced by the same individual simultaneously. Affective and normative commitment tend to be strongly and

positively related, whereas continuance commitment only relates modestly to both affective and normative commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). In addition to studying each type of organizational commitment separately, research has also begun to look at patterns of the three types of commitment that can be seen across individuals, termed “commitment profiles.” It is thought that varying combinations of the three types of commitment will result in different attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the workplace. For example, research indicates that individuals that are high in all three types of commitment tend to perform more [organizational citizenship behaviors](#) (OCB) in the workplace compared to those that are high in continuance commitment but low in affective and normative commitment (Meyer et al., 2012). Thus, it may be important to consider how varying levels of affective, normative, and continuance commitment differentially relate to employee outcomes, rather than just considering commitment on the whole.

Unidimensional organizational commitment is most commonly measured using the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979). Using this questionnaire, individuals are asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with 15 items designed to measure organizational loyalty and attachment (e.g., “I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization,” “I really care about the fate of this organization”). The three-factor model of organizational commitment is most commonly measured using a 24-item scale that contains eight items pertaining to affective (e.g., “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me”), normative (e.g., “If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization”), and continuance commitment (e.g., “I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization”; Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Why is organizational commitment important?

Most of the research on organizational commitment has focused on the conceptualization of it as a single, affective factor. Thus, most meta-analytic findings were found using this one-factor approach. Organizational commitment is important because it is related to certain attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in the workplace. For example, organizational commitment is moderately related to less [turnover](#) and higher job performance in the workplace (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Rubenstein et al., 2017). Those who are committed are also moderately more likely to perform [OCB](#) and are moderately less likely to engage in [counterproductive work behaviors](#) (CWB) which could harm the workplace (Dalal, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 2019).

When examining organizational commitment using the three-factor model, the following relationships have been found:

- Affective commitment is strongly related to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intention, moderately related to performing more OCB and experiencing less stress, and modestly related to higher job performance and less turnover.
- Normative commitment is moderately related to performing more OCB and having lower turnover intention. It is modestly related to higher job satisfaction, higher job

performance and lower turnover. The relationship between normative commitment and stress is currently unknown.

- Continuance commitment is modestly related to lower job satisfaction, lower job performance, lower turnover, lower turnover intention, and higher stress. Continuance commitment is not related to OCB (Meyer et al., 2002).

What contributes to organizational commitment?

Research on organizational commitment has focused on assessing the factors associated with organizational commitment, rather than testing for causality. Thus, we know that a wide variety of factors in the workplace are related to organizational commitment, but not exactly how they relate. Factors to note that are associated with greater organizational commitment include [job involvement](#), [occupational commitment](#), [employee engagement](#), [perceived organizational support](#), positive forms of leadership (e.g., [transformational leadership](#), [leader-member exchange](#)), and components of [job design](#) (e.g., job autonomy, task identity; Christian et al., 2011; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Ng, 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

A multitude of other factors including job attitudes, demographic factors, job characteristics, and factors within the organizational context may contribute to experiencing organizational commitment in the workplace. For a more complete breakdown of the other meta-analytically identified correlates of organizational commitment, please refer to the [QIC-WD Workforce Research Catalog](#).

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Organizational commitment is a job attitude that ties an individual to their organization.
- ▶ Organizational commitment can be thought of as a single factor or can be classified as three factors of affective, normative, and continuance commitment.
- ▶ Organizational commitment is associated with performing fewer counterproductive work behaviors and experiencing less turnover.
- ▶ Organizational commitment is related to higher job performance and performing more organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace.
- ▶ A variety of job attitudes, demographic differences, job characteristics, and contextual factors may contribute to an employee's feelings of organizational commitment.
- ▶ Those seeking to measure organizational commitment should consider using the 24-item measure of affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990) or the 15-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday et al., 1979).

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