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**ACCOUNTING FOR OCCUPATIONAL
AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT
A Longitudinal Reexamination of Structural
and Attitudinal Approaches**

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Using longitudinal data collected from a subsample (N = 92) of subjects surveyed five years earlier by Shoemaker et al. (1977), the present study assesses the relative utility of two distinctly different approaches to the study of occupational and organizational commitment. The first is the structural investments or side-bet approach made famous by Becker (1960); the second, the attitudinal or social psychological perspective used by Ritzer and Trice (1969), among others. Based on regression analyses of data, for the two time periods studied and for changes across time, structural variables appear to be slightly better predictors of commitment than do attitudinal variables. Of particular note, however, are the changes in predictive power of each approach, relative to both occupational and organizational commitment, when comparing two distinct stages in the worker career of employees represented by the five-year span of the study.

Much has been written over the years concerning the nature and importance of worker commitment to both their occupation and organization of employment. Weber (1919) for example in his classic essay, "Science as a Vocation," discusses those factors that he believes to be crucial to the development and maintenance of occupational commitment. Among these factors are such things as dedication, tolerance, and endurance to one's chosen "calling." In more recent times, the research of Morse and Weiss (1955) laid the groundwork for empirically documenting the importance of occupational commitment by

discovering that some 80% of the employees surveyed would continue to work, even if financially unwarranted.

While the writings of Weber (1919) and Morse and Weiss (1955) gave theoretical and empirical impetus, respectively, to the study of occupational commitment, Chester Barnard's (1938) work played a seminal role in the understanding of organizational commitment. For Barnard (1938: 23), organizational commitment represents effort extended with the anticipation of future reward. Hence commitment to one's organization hinges on the organization's distribution of rewards that in turn satisfy individual workers' desires. Stressing the importance of worker commitment to the organization, Moore (1965) notes that when multitudes of dissatisfied and noncommitted workers terminate their present employment, production, distribution, and marketing problems inevitably result. Furthermore, the increase in recruitment, training, and general labor costs that accompany massive employee turnover may well threaten an organization's very survival.

Although numerous researchers have investigated the relationship between various attributes of workers and their job commitment, no consensus exists as to those attributes that best predict such commitment. A review of the literature reveals basically two opposing perspectives. The first is the demographic or structural approach, and the second the attitudinal approach. The demographic approach argues that various background characteristics of the individual such as age, education, sex, and length of service in an organization are the most important determinants of commitment. The attitudinal approach, by contrast, maintains that certain perceptual definitions of individuals, such as perceived job satisfaction and conflict within the work setting, are the most influential factors in determining worker commitment.

In summary, the study of occupational and organizational commitment is an important topic of research in light of the fact that individuals' commitments both to work and to the organization appear to be of crucial concern to a vast majority of workers; and that a review of the literature reveals no consensus as to the attributes of workers, demographic versus

attitudinal, that best predict such commitments. The purpose of this study is to assess through the use of longitudinal data the relative merits of attitudinal versus structural variables in accounting for both occupational and organizational commitment.

FACTORS RELATED TO COMMITMENT

Over the last several decades there have been numerous studies that have attempted to delineate empirically those factors that in some way influence the extent of workers' occupational and organizational commitment. A tabular summary of many of the major research efforts in that regard is reported in Figure 1.

Upon analysis of these studies it becomes apparent that many of the factors found to influence both occupational and organizational commitment can be grouped under two broad headings: structural (including demographic variables) versus attitudinal variables. Starting with the study by Simon (1957), for example, "organizational identification" and "informal group identification" are plainly attitudinal variables; while "material incentives" is a structural variable. "Employee self-perceptions of marketability," a factor found by March and Simon (1958) to be negatively related to organizational commitment, is clearly an attitudinal variable.

Howard Becker's (1960) notion of "side-bets" or investments is perhaps the foremost representation of the structural approach to commitment. He argues that employees are influenced by investments and costs associated with certain lines of activity. Costs are activities that if initiated would prove detrimental to the employee. For example, quitting a profitable job with no immediate alternative employment probably would be viewed as costly, while one's length of service and specialized education may be viewed as investments in a job. Becker believes many investments to be influenced structurally by society or by one's employment organization. For purposes here, such structural investments are operationalized as an employee's age, education, length of service, and percentage of income derived from a second job.

| <u>Author(s)</u> | <u>Primary Type of Commitment Studied</u> | <u>Relationship(s) to Commitment</u> | <u>Variable(s) Tested</u> |
|---|---|--|--|
| Simon (1957) | Organizational | + + + | Organizational identification Informal group identification Material incentives |
| March and Simon (1958) | Organizational | - | Self-perceptions of market- ability |
| Thibaut and Kelley (1959) | Organizational | + | + Rewards of employee- organization relationship |
| Becker (1960) | Both | + | + Structural investments/ Side-bets: a) age, b) length of service, c) marital status, d) education, e) job or location assignments with a particular company or organization |
| Homans (1961) | Organizational | + | + Rewards of employee-organi- zation relationship |
| Argyris (1964) | Organizational | - + | Employee-organization conflict Employee autonomy, challenge, participation, responsi- bility, power, rewards, penalty |
| Moore (1965) | Organizational | + | + Extensive employee participa- tion in decision-making |
| Ritzer and Trice (1969) | Organizational | + | Inter-company job mobility, salary |
| | | - + | + Occupational commitment |
| Thornton (1970) | Both | + | Age, educ. relevance, professionalism |
| | | + | Professional involvement |
| Sheldon (1971) | Organizational | + | Social involvement |
| | | + | Investments or Side-bets |
| Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) | Organizational | - | Perception of tension in the work setting |
| | | + | Age |
| | | + | Length of Service |
| Hall and Schneider (1972) | Organizational | + | Success and self-esteem from the task |
| | | + | Participation in goal setting |
| | | + | Internalization of organiza- tional values |
| Alutto and Hrebiniak and Alonso (1973) | Both | + | Structural investments/ Side-bets: a) age, b) education, c) years of experience, d) marital status. Age and education were also found to be curvilinearly related to occupational commitment in a positive manner. |
| Buchanan (1974) | Organizational | + | Organizational attitudes fostered within work units and informal work groups |
| Dansereau, Cashman and Graen (1974) | Organizational | - + | Perceptions of job availability Nature of work |
| | | + | Supervisory style of superiors |

Figure 1 Summary of Major Variables Related to Occupation and Organizational Commitment

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| Gould (1975) | Organizational | + | Organizational satisfaction of employee growth expectations † Tenure, age, sex, organizational level |
| Porter, Lawler and Hackman (1975) | Both | + | † Occupational and organizational success |
| | | + | † Perception of personal competence and work ability |
| | | - | † Job availability |
| Dubin, Hedley and Taveggia (1976) | Both | + | † Self orientation, power, company, craft orientation, autonomy, career and technology oriented |
| | | | † Systems of the work environment: Self, work group, company, union, craft-profession, industry |
| | | | † Work place and human conditions: technology, product, routine, autonomy, personal space/things |
| | | | † Payoffs: Money, prerequisites, power, authority, status, career |
| Shoemaker, Snizek and Bryant (1977) | Both | + | ‡ Structural Investments/Side-bets: a) age, b) education, c) length of service, d) number of locations assigned |
| | | - | e) age at becoming a ranger |
| | | + | ‡ Social Psychological or Attitudinal Variables: a) job satisfaction, b) feelings of solidarity |
| Steers (1977) | Organizational | + | Personal traits of employees: a) age, b) education, c) tenure, d) needs of achievement, affiliation, autonomy |
| | | + | Job characteristics: a) job autonomy, b) variety, c) feedback, d) task identity, e) interpersonal interaction |
| | | + | Work experience variables: a) employee perceptions of their organizational importance, b) organizational fulfillment of obligations to employees |
| Brief and Aldag (1980) | Both | + | Affective reactions to job: a) work task, b) promotion, opportunities, c) co-worker interaction |
| | | + | Employee attributes: a) age, b) internalization of work ethic |
| | | - | c) education, d) family responsibilities |

†These variables were not actually tested by the authors, but rather reviewed as having been used in other studies.

‡Investment or Side-bet factors were found to relate principally to organizational commitment, while Social Psychological or Attitudinal factors were shown to relate to both organizational and occupational commitment.

Figure 1 Continued

This "structural investment" hypothesis of Becker's was tested by Ritzer and Trice (1969) utilizing a sample of personnel managers, and was shown to be unsupported. No significant relationships were found among either organizational or occupational commitment and the investment variables of employee education, age, marital status, job mobility, and number of children. Based on these findings, Ritzer and Trice (1969) advocate a so-called "attitudinal" approach to account for both organizational and occupational commitment. The attitudinal traits that comprise such an approach refer to employees' perceptions of both their organization and their occupation. Such variables are operationalized in this study as employees' general levels of job satisfaction and perceptions of role conflict. Employees found to have a more positive perception of and attitude toward either or both their organization and their occupation are said to be more committed.

The findings of a study by Alutto et al. (1973) tend to support the earlier position of Becker (1960). They found positive relationships between organizational commitment and the structural variables of employee age, education, length of service, and marital status. In addition, age and length of service were shown to be related in a curvilinear fashion to occupational commitment.

More recently in an attempt to clarify the potential predictive power of structural versus attitudinal variables as they relate to both occupational and organizational commitment, Shoemaker et al. (1977) gathered commitment data from a sample of 120 federal and state park and forest rangers. Their findings indicate certain social psychological or attitudinal factors (employees' perception of general job satisfaction and feelings of solidarity) to be better predictors of both organizational and occupational commitment than were various structural variables (e.g., age, education, length of service). Based on these findings, they conclude that there is greater support for the attitudinal approach of Ritzer and Trice (1969) than for Becker's (1960) side-bet or structural approach. The authors state, however, that further analysis of their data must be undertaken and that "a full exposition of such differentials, however, must be deferred until the completion of the analysis" (Shoemaker et al., 1977: 603).

The present study extends the research of Shoemaker et al. (1977) by means of a five-year longitudinal analysis of data collected from the identical group of subjects originally surveyed by Shoemaker et al. (1977).¹ Having information from the same respondents at two different points in time allows the advantage of assessing changes in organizational and occupational commitment as well as comparing the predictive utility of two competing sets of explanatory variables (structural versus attitudinal).

PROCEDURE

All variables used in this study to test the structural investment or side-bet approach advocated by Becker (1960) and the social psychological or attitudinal approach used by Ritzer and Trice (1969) are identical to those used by Shoemaker et al. (1977), and incorporate the measurement suggestions made earlier by Alutto et al. (1973). The concept of commitment is operationalized by asking respondents whether or not they would consider leaving (definitely yes, undecided, definitely no) their present employment for a related job in another organization (organizational commitment) or for a job in another field (occupational commitment) if given a moderate or slight increase in: pay, freedom, status, responsibility, opportunity to get ahead, and friendliness of coworkers. The structural variables tested were those of age, education, length of service, and percentage of income attained from other sources, while job satisfaction and role conflict comprised the attitudinal variables.²

The actual data were gathered through self-administered mail questionnaires distributed to the original sample of 120 federal and state park forest rangers surveyed five years earlier by Shoemaker et al. (1975). Of the 111 rangers able to be located in 1980, 92 or 82.9% returned a completed questionnaire. Analysis of these data based on their date of return revealed no significant relationship between time of return and the variables analyzed as part of this study. Hence there is no evidence to indicate that results attained from those persons

who returned their questionnaire are significantly different from the missing response of nonreturners.

Finally, it should be noted that since Bohrnstedt (1969), Campbell and Stanley (1963), and others have noted the fact that gain or difference scores often are highly intercorrelated with the initial time one (T_1) measures, such initial measures were first controlled when analyzing the effect of changes in structural and attitudinal variables on changes in employee commitment (see Table 2).

FINDINGS

Analysis of commitment data collected from the 92 respondents at two points in time indicate a significant decrease in both occupational ($t = 3.61$; $p < .01$) and organizational ($t = 2.07$; $p < .05$) commitment between 1975 and 1980. Occupational commitment among those surveyed declines from a mean of 13.30 (S.D. = 2.04) in 1975 to a mean of 12.25 (S.D. = 3.11) in 1980. Organizational commitment drops from 12.58 (S.D. = 2.39) in 1975 to 11.95 (S.D. = 3.08) in 1980.

Regression analyses were used to determine which group of variables (structural or attitudinal) best predict each type of commitment. As reported by Shoemaker et al. (1977; see Table 1), the attitudinal group of variables in 1975 account for more of the explained variance in occupational commitment than do the structural variables (13.95% v. 2.25%). However, analysis of data collected five years later from the same group of subjects shows that these attitudinal variables lose much of their influence on occupational commitment, as their explained variance drops from 13.95% in 1975 to 3.89% in 1980. By contrast, the structural variables increase in influence as shown by the amount of variance explained (2.25% v. 5.67%). By 1980 structural variables account for more of the variance in occupational commitment than do attitudinal variables. However, by 1980 none of the structural or attitudinal variables are individually related in a significant fashion to either workers' occupational or organizational commitment.

Inspection of the data found in the bottom portion of Table 1 indicates that structural variables account for a greater

percentage of the variance in organizational commitment in both 1975 and 1980 than do the attitudinal variables. One should note from the table, however, that the amount of variance explained by both the structural and attitudinal variables diminished from 1975 to 1980, such that by 1980 the effects of each group of variables on organizational commitment are roughly the same (5.90% and 5.54%). While in 1975 the variable of job satisfaction was related significantly to both occupational and organizational commitment, by 1980 it has ceased to be related significantly to either type of commitment.

In order to take full advantage of the longitudinal nature of these data, an assessment was made of the relationship between changes in the structural and attitudinal variables as they effect changes in both types of commitment. Results of regression analysis are presented in Table 2. In terms of changes in occupational commitment, the results indicate that changes in structural variables account for more explained variance (19.13%) than do changes in the attitudinal variables (15.18%). Hence while both groups of structural and attitudinal variables accounted for moderate amounts of explained variance, there appears to be slightly more support for the structural argument as presented by Becker (1960) when attempting to predict changes in occupational commitment. Independently, only one of the structural variables, that of education, was found to be related significantly to the dependent variable. Rangers acquiring more education are less likely to experience a decline in their occupational commitment. Neither of the attitudinal variables taken separately demonstrate a significant relationship to occupational commitment. Turning to the data on organizational commitment, changes in the structural and attitudinal groups of variables account for roughly the same amount of variance in changes in organizational commitment. Independently considered, education was again the only structural change variable significantly related to changes in organizational commitment. As in the case of occupational commitment, increased education appears to inhibit the loss of organizational commitment. In terms of the attitudinal variables, decreases in role conflict are related significantly to corresponding increases in organizational

TABLE 1
Regression Coefficients of the
Structural and Attitudinal Variables as They Relate to
Occupational and Organizational Commitment: 1975-1980

| A - OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------|------------------------|---------|
| Structural Variables | 1975 | | | 1980 | | |
| | b | beta | F Value | b | beta | F Value |
| Age | -0.013 | -0.05 | 0.08 | 0.011 | 0.03 | 0.04 |
| Education | 0.200 | 0.11 | 0.89 | 0.480 | 0.17 | 2.33 |
| Length of Service | 0.027 | 0.09 | 0.24 | -0.025 | -0.05 | 0.10 |
| % Other Income | -0.008 | -0.04 | 0.11 | -0.046 | -0.14 | 1.53 |
| | | (R ² = .02) | | | (R ² = .06) | |
| Attitudinal Variables | | | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.010 | 0.38 | 11.75*** | 0.039 | 0.13 | 1.34 |
| Role Conflict | 0.054 | 0.17 | 2.51 | -0.056 | -0.12 | 1.18 |
| | | (R ² = .14) | | | (R ² = .04) | |
| | | | | | | |
| B - ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT | | | | | | |
| Structural Variables | 1975 | | | 1980 | | |
| | b | beta | F Value | b | beta | F Value |
| Age | 0.014 | 0.05 | 0.08 | -0.021 | -0.06 | 0.11 |
| Education | 0.440 | 0.21 | 3.22 | 0.430 | 0.15 | 1.79 |
| Length of Service | 0.507 | 0.14 | 0.64 | 9.048 | 0.10 | 0.34 |
| % Other Income | -0.027 | -0.12 | 1.05 | -0.052 | -0.15 | 1.84 |
| | | (R ² = .09) | | | (R ² = .06) | |
| Attitudinal Variables | | | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.082 | 0.26 | 5.11* | 0.037 | 0.12 | 1.15 |
| Role Conflict | 0.008 | 0.02 | 0.05 | -0.084 | -0.18 | 2.55 |
| | | (R ² = .07) | | | (R ² = .06) | |

*Significant at the .05 level of statistical probability.

***Significant at the .001 level of statistical probability.

commitment. Thus both the structural and attitudinal arguments as represented by Becker (1960) and Ritzer and Trice (1969) appear to receive approximately equal support empirically when predicting organizational commitment.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Previous literature demonstrates a conflict about the differential importance of structural versus attitudinal variables on occupational and organizational commitment. Shoemaker et al. (1977) in their original study of occupational and organizational commitment reported greater overall support for a social psychological or attitudinal explanation. Becker (1960) and Alutto et al. (1973) demonstrate support for a structural

TABLE 2
Regression Coefficients of Changes in Each of the
Structural and Attitudinal Variables as They Relate to
Occupational and Organizational Commitment: 1975-1980

| Structural Variables (Change) | A - OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------|----------|----------------|
| | b | beta | F Value | R ² |
| Age | 0.051 | 0.15 | 0.75 | .19 |
| Education | -1.640 | -0.27 | 5.81* | |
| Length of Service | -0.088 | -0.20 | 1.36 | |
| % Other Income | -0.036 | -0.11 | 1.16 | |
| <u>Attitudinal Variables (Change)</u> | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.021 | 0.08 | 0.64 | .15 |
| Role Conflict | -0.077 | -0.19 | 3.14 | |
| <u>Time 1 Control</u> | | | | |
| Occupational Commitment (1975) | -0.48 | -0.33 | 8.50** | |
| <u>B - ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT</u> | | | | |
| Structural Variables (Change) | b | beta | F Value | R ² |
| Age | 0.012 | 0.03 | 0.04 | .23 |
| Education | -1.630 | -0.25 | 5.32* | |
| Length of Service | -0.028 | -0.06 | 0.13 | |
| % Other Income | -0.031 | -0.09 | 0.76 | |
| <u>Attitudinal Variables</u> | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction | -0.014 | 0.05 | 0.31 | .23 |
| Role Conflict | -0.110 | -0.27 | 6.73** | |
| <u>Time 1 Control</u> | | | | |
| Organizational Commitment (1975) | -0.530 | -0.40 | 14.72*** | |

*Significant at the .05 level of statistical probability.

**Significant at the .01 level of statistical probability.

***Significant at the .001 level of statistical probability.

explanation of commitment. Using longitudinal data collected from the same respondents five years after initially being studied by Shoemaker et al. (1977), the present study shows that the effects of both types of variables on commitment had changed appreciably over time.

The results of this study indicate that while attitudinal variables explained noticeably more variance in occupational commitment in 1975 than did structural variables, by 1980 the amount of variance explained by attitudinal variables had dropped precipitously from 13.95% to 3.89%. By contrast, the percentage of variance in occupational commitment explained

by structural variables as a group had increased from 2.25% to 5.67%. Thus it appears that with the passage of time, structural characteristics of workers become more important than do social psychological traits in accounting for occupational commitment among the workers surveyed. As for organizational commitment, both the structural and attitudinal group of variables decreased in percentage of variance explained, such that by 1980 each group of variables accounted for approximately the same amount of variance in organizational commitment. In terms of accounting for changes in commitment, a structural theory appears slightly more viable. As a group, changes in structural variables explain 19.13% of the variation in occupational commitment, while changes in attitudinal variables account for 15.18%. As for changes in organizational commitment, structural and attitudinal variables explain nearly equal amounts of variance. Only one structural variable, that of education, and one attitudinal variable, role conflict, are found to be significantly related to organizational commitment.

While this study has focused on the differential explanatory power of certain structural as opposed to attitudinal variables, the noticeable overall decline in the amount of variance in commitment explained by each group of variables must not be overlooked (see Table 1). Similarly, the failure of various individual variables to relate significantly to both types of commitment cannot go unnoticed. Given the significant decline in both occupational and organizational commitment found to have taken place from 1975 to 1980 among those surveyed, both theories of commitment tested leave much variance to be explained. Future research may profit well from testing such variables as worker's sense of professionalism, perceptions of marketability, changes in work routine resulting from increasing technology, and changes in bureaucratic structure as these relate to employee commitment. But perhaps most importantly, more research of a longitudinal nature is necessary before the more salient contributors to both occupational and organizational commitment can be isolated. As demonstrated by the findings reported here, the effects of both attitudinal and structural factors, whether studied singularly or in groups, can be observed to change markedly over both the occupational and organizational careers of workers.

APPENDIX
Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations for All Variables: 1975-1980

1980

| 1975 | Age | Educ. | Years Service | % Income | Job Sat. | Role Conflict | Occ. Commit. | Organ. Commit. | \bar{X} | S.D. |
|----------------|--------|--------|------------------|----------|-------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|------|
| Age | --- | -.26** | .74*** | .16 | -.14 | -.08 | -.07 | -.04 | 42.6 | 8.4 |
| Educ. | -.31** | --- | -.09 | -.03 | .03 | .23* | .26** | .24** | 15.7 | 1.2 |
| Yrs. Service | .74*** | -.05 | --- | -.01 | -.17 | .02 | .07 | .15 | 14.5 | 6.6 |
| % Income | .24* | -.16 | .04 | --- | -.17 | -.10 | -.15 | -.21* | 8.9 | 3.4 |
| Job Sat. | -.08 | -.08 | -.05 | -.04 | --- | -.10 | .16 | .16 | 60.5 | 9.5 |
| Role Conflict | -.18* | .32*** | -.04 | -.15 | -.29** | --- | -.12 | -.14 | 28.9 | 6.5 |
| Occ. Commit. | -.04 | .17* | .10 | -.07 | .39** | .01 | --- | .89*** | 12.3 | 3.1 |
| Organ. Commit. | .07 | .24** | .21* | -.12 | .31** | -.09 | .70*** | --- | 11.9 | 3.1 |
| \bar{X} | 37.6 | 15.6 | 9.5 | 9.1 | 73.0 | 29.0 | 13.3 | 12.6 | | |
| S.D. | 8.4 | 1.2 | 6.6 | 3.4 | 7.5 | 6.0 | 2.0 | 2.4 | | |

*Significant at the .05 level of statistical probability.

**Significant at the .01 level of statistical probability.

***Significant at the .001 level of statistical probability.

NOTES

1. The 1975 benchmark data on which this longitudinal study is based were gathered with funds from the Hatch Act, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Project No. 616253.

2. The attitudinal variables of job satisfaction and role conflict were measured through the use of indices developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) and Miles (1975), respectively. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients computed on each of these measures, as well as on Alutto et al.'s (1973) commitment measures, are reported below:

| | 1975 | 1980 |
|---------------------------|------|------|
| Job Satisfaction | .86 | .82 |
| Role Conflict | .80 | .81 |
| Occupational Commitment | .81 | .93 |
| Organizational Commitment | .84 | .91 |

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