Predicting employee commitment to company and union: Divergent models

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The adequacy of Mowday, Porter & Steers' (1982) model of organizational commitment for predicting both company and union commitment was assessed. Data were obtained from 100 members of a white-collar union. Two months before this study, they had taken part in a three-week strike and were still involved in a dispute with management. Measures of company and union commitment were regressed separately on work experiences (job satisfaction, job involvement and perceived organizational climate) and personal characteristics (educational level, sex, company and union tenure). In neither of the multiple regression analyses did the same predictor account for a significant portion of the variance in both union and company commitment. Job satisfaction, organizational climate and job involvement were significant predictors of company commitment, accounting for 17.8 per cent of the variance. Union tenure was the only significant predictor (5.3 per cent of the variance) of union commitment. The emergence of divergent predictors of company and union commitment suggests the need for greater specificity within the literature on ‘organizational commitment’. Consistent with the differing nature and function of unions and companies, it may be more appropriate to construct separate models of company and union commitment.

The 1980s have been witness to an upswing in psychological research on labour organizations, the formation of various committees within the American Psychological Association aimed at developing union research (e.g. the implementation in 1981 of the Task Force on Union Negotiation), as well as the publication of special editions of psychological journals which have specifically addressed the issue of psychology’s relationship with labour [American Psychologist, 1984, 39(4); International Review of Applied Psychology, 1981, 30(2); Journal of Occupational Psychology, 1986, 59(3)]. One area of conceptual interest has been the generalization of theories of organizational commitment (e.g. Porter & Smith, 1970; Steers, 1977) to the theoretical development and operationalization of union commitment (Fullagar, 1986; Fullagar & Barling, 1987, 1989a; Gordon, Philip, Burt, Thompson & Spiller, 1980; Gordon, Beauvais & Ladd, 1984; Ladd, Gordon, Beauvais & Morgan, 1982).

* Requests for reprints.
There is a considerable amount of evidence pointing to a positive relationship between union and company commitment (Dean, 1954; Fukami & Larson, 1982; Gallagher, 1984; Purcell, 1960). Such a relationship suggests that the two commitment constructs may conceivably share certain common predictors. Indeed, Fukami & Larson (1984) investigated whether union and company commitment could be predicted by the same variables. They assessed whether Mowday et al.'s (1982) model of organizational commitment isolated the unique and common predictors of both company and union commitment. Fukami & Larson, however, provided little empirical evidence or justification for the inclusion of work- and role-related variables as antecedents, especially of union commitment. Nonetheless, based on Fukami & Larson's (1984) multiple regression analysis rather than their zero order correlations, company commitment was predicted significantly by personal characteristics (number of years with the company) and role-related variables (job scope and job stress). On the other hand, union commitment was predicted significantly by one kind of work experience, viz. social involvement. Yet it is not clear why social involvement at work would predict union commitment: the four items in their subscale may not be measuring work experiences at all (e.g. 'what percent of the people you work with would you consider to be good friends of yours?' and 'what percent of your friends work with the Courier?'). Fukami & Larson (1984) question whether the work experiences and personal characteristics they operationalized were appropriate for understanding union commitment, and suggest that future research still focus on these two categories as possible predictors of union commitment.

Consequently, the present study assessed whether various work experiences and personal characteristics found to be empirically associated with either union or company commitment would predict company and union commitment. First, various facets of job satisfaction (work, co-workers, supervision, pay and promotion satisfaction) were investigated as predictors, as correlations in the range of .50 have been found between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Brooke, Russell & Price, 1988; Hall & Schneider, 1972; Meyer & Allen, 1987; Mowday et al., 1982; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Dissatisfaction with extrinsic and intrinsic conditions of employment has also been found to be a major reason why workers join unions and vote for a union (Bigoness, 1978; DeCotiis & LeLouarn, 1981; Farber & Saks, 1980; Getman, Goldberg & Herman, 1976; Hammer & Berman, 1981; Kochan, 1979; Maxey & Mohrman, 1980; Premack & Hunter, 1988; Schriesheim, 1978; Zalesny, 1985). Regarding research on the relationship between union commitment and job satisfaction, Gordon et al. (1980) found either negative or non-significant associations between satisfaction of lower and higher order needs and three dimensions of union commitment (viz. feelings of responsibility to the union, expressed willingness to work for the union and general belief in unionism). Recently, extrinsic and intrinsic job dissatisfaction have been found to predict union commitment amongst both skilled and unskilled workers (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). Consequently, the present research hypothesized that although job satisfaction would be negatively associated with union commitment and positively associated with organizational commitment, it would be a common predictor of both types of commitment.

Second, perceptions of organizational climate have been found to result from interpersonal and supervisor–subordinate relationships at work (Schneider, 1985). There is some support for the hypothesis that the perceived quality of supervision predicts company commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). Positive perceptions of the labour–management
relationship is the only variable to have been consistently related to dual commitment in several studies (Angle & Perry, 1986; Gallagher, 1984; Larson & Fukami, 1985; Magenau & Martin, 1985; Magenau, Martin & Peterson, 1988; Schriesheim & Tsui, 1980). The present study, therefore, hypothesized that positive perceptions of organizational climate would predict both commitment to the union and company.

Third, job involvement has also been found to be associated with both company commitment (Mowday et al., 1982) and union loyalty (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). Regarding the former relationship, recent research (Brooke et al., 1988) has indicated that job involvement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are empirically distinct rather than partially redundant concepts (Morrow, 1983), and job involvement is positively related to union loyalty amongst skilled workers who have greater access to decision-making structures within the employing organization (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). Amongst semi-skilled and unskilled workers, on the other hand, job involvement is negatively related to union loyalty. This is attributable to more alienated (i.e. less job involved) workers having less opportunity for organizational involvement and the satisfaction of intrinsic needs. With the present study’s sample of white-collar workers, it was hypothesized that job involvement would be positively associated with both organizational and union commitment.

The current research also investigated personal characteristics as possible predictors of company and union commitment. Much evidence suggests that organizational commitment is positively related to age and tenure, and inversely related to education (Mowday et al., 1982). Moreover, males exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment than females (Angle & Perry, 1981). The little research that has been conducted on union commitment has found no significant correlations with job grade, tenure, marital status, and number of children (Gordon et al., 1980, 1984). Two personal variables which have been associated with union commitment are member’s gender (Gordon et al., 1980) and race (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). Women are more loyal to their union than men, even though men are more likely to participate in union affairs (Gordon et al., 1980). * Race has been found to moderate both the strength and nature of the relationship between certain predictor variables and union commitment (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a).† A side-bet approach to commitment (Becker, 1960) would suggest that where seniority clauses are part of the collective agreement, union tenure would be related to union commitment. Becker indicated that the longer the individual has spent with the organization, the more he/she has invested, both behaviourally and financially. Consequently, through a process of cognitive consonance, the individual becomes more attached and committed to the organization. Fukami & Larson (1984) showed a significant relationship between company commitment and tenure, but no relationship between company tenure and union commitment (union tenure was not reported). The present research, therefore, ascertained whether demographic characteristics, including union tenure, predicted company and union commitment, and controlled for the possible effects of these sociodemographic variables in the regression analysis by entering them first.

* This phenomenon is not due to gender per se, but rather diverse variables including the greater experience of sex-role conflict amongst working women (Chumir, 1982).
† Race was regarded as a marker variable denoting differences in occupational and social privilege, salary, history of trade unionism, and political representation.
Three other questions remaining from Fukami & Larson’s (1984) research were also addressed in this study. First, Fukami & Larson (1984) studied an all-male sample, even though males and females have been found to differ on both company (Mowday et al., 1982) and union (Gordon et al., 1980) commitment. The present sample included both male and female union members. Second, a subsequent description by Larson & Fukami (1985) shows that there was an unusually high level of cooperation between the company and union in their 1984 study. Since this may be atypical, the present research was conducted on members of a union involved in an ongoing labour dispute with management. Finally, Fukami & Larson (1984) assessed the correlation between company and union commitment. This phenomenon of dual loyalty or allegiance has been studied previously (e.g. Dean, 1954; Purcell, 1954; Stagner, 1954), where it was hypothesized that simultaneous or dual loyalty was unlikely because of the dissonance and role conflict it engendered. Yet consistent with Fukami & Larson (1984), many studies have yielded positive relationships between company and union commitment. The present study afforded a test of the generality of previous findings as (a) the union and management in this study were involved in an ongoing labour dispute, and (b) the methodological problems common in previous research (cf. Schriesheim & Tsui, 1980) were avoided.

**Method**

**Setting**

All participants in the present study were employed on a full-time basis by the same community college in south-western Ontario. Compulsory membership of the union was a condition of employment. Two months prior to this study, the participants were involved in a three-week, province-wide strike which had been preceded by 10 months of union–management negotiations. Twenty-two community colleges and 7600 faculty were involved in this strike, the first by this union against the community college’s Board of Regents. The major issue involved in this prolonged labour dispute was essentially economic, namely the number of hours of direct teaching contact required of faculty per week. The dispute had not been settled by the two parties concerned after three weeks of striking, and the teachers and counsellors were legislated back to work. Thus, the white-collar participants in this study were members of an active union.

**Subjects**

Questionnaires were mailed to the home addresses (obtained from the union) of all 305 of the 315 full-time teaching staff and counsellors at this one college for whom home addresses were available. Fifteen were returned by the post office as undeliverable. Of the final sample of 290, 100 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, a response rate of 34.4 per cent. The mean age of the respondents was 44.1 years (SD = 8.2), and their mean company and union tenure were 10.4 years (SD = 5.5) and 8.6 years (SD = 4.4) respectively. Forty-five individuals had acquired university degrees or college diplomas, 47 a graduate course or some graduate training, and the remaining eight had completed 13 years of formal education. Although there is no way of guaranteeing the representative nature of the sample, the male:female ratio in the present sample (62:38) closely approximated that of the total population (66:54) of this one college. The only study variable on which males and females differed was educational level. Female respondents had received significantly more formal schooling than males ($t(1, 97) = 2.30, p < .01$).

**Procedure**

The questionnaires and a covering letter from the local union president indicating support for the research were distributed to all respondents by mail, and returned in self-addressed, reply-paid envelopes. To ensure
confidentiality and anonymity, subjects were requested not to identify themselves in the questionnaires in any way. The union local received a report of the completed research, which was also available to any interested union member.

**Questionnaire materials**

Mowday et al.'s (1979) nine-item short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire assessed company commitment. All nine items are positively worded and rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale, and the short form correlates highly with the 12-item full scale. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire consistently yields satisfactory internal and temporal stability, discriminant, convergent and predictive validity (Mowday et al., 1982). The 'union loyalty' factor derived from Gorden et al.'s (1980) Union Commitment Questionnaire consists of the 10 items which consistently appear as the first factor, accounting for most of the variance in union commitment across different factor analytic studies (Fullagar, 1986; Fullagar & Barling, 1989b; Gordon et al., 1980; Ladd et al., 1982). All 10 items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale in this study, and adequate internal reliability and construct validity have been documented in these studies. (Unless specifically stated, reliability for all questionnaires for the present sample is adequate; see Table 1.)

The 72-item Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969) assesses satisfaction with work, pay, co-worker, promotion and supervision. The respondent rates whether each of the items presented is descriptive of the specific dimension. Cook, Hepworth, Wall & Warr (1981) suggest that the Job Descriptive Index remains the most psychometrically acceptable measure of job satisfaction. Taylor & Bowers' (1972) 13-item Organisational Climate Composite Indices measure technological readiness, human resource primacy, communication flow, motivational conditions and decision-making practices. Responding occurs on a five-point Likert-type scale. In the present study, however, the reliability of the Motivational Conditions subscale was low (alpha = .45), and it was discarded from all analyses. Job involvement was measured with Kanungo's (1982) 10-item (plus five filler items) Job Involvement Questionnaire. Responding occurs on a six-point Likert-type scale and this questionnaire has been used in previous union commitment research (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). This scale exhibits high internal and temporal stability, and its convergent and discriminant validity are also satisfactory (Kanungo, 1982).

**Results**

The extent to which work experiences and demographic characteristics predict company and union commitment were analysed in two separate multiple regression analyses. However, although the linearity assumption was satisfied in all instances, the multicollinearity assumption was questionable. First, there were substantial correlations between the demographic characteristics, viz. age, company and union tenure (see Table 1). Thus, age was omitted from the multiple regression analyses, and union and company tenure were assessed as separate predictors of union and company commitment respectively. Second, all five work satisfaction facets were significantly intercorrelated, there were significant correlations between all work satisfaction and all perceived organizational climate indices, while the correlations amongst the perceived organizational climate indices were substantial (range: r = .63 to .82, all p < .001). To minimize the possibility of a multicollinearity problem, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was computed on the job satisfaction and organizational climate variables. Two interpretable components emerged.* The first component was labelled 'perceived organizational climate' (alpha = .85; accounting for 53 per cent of the overall variance). The items (with their loadings in parentheses) on this component were human

* Detailed results of the factor analysis are obtainable from the first author on request.
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* t(99) ≥ 1.99, p < .05; t(99) ≥ .53, p < .01.  
* A significant Hotelling's T indicates a correlation between that predictor and company commitment differs from the correlation between the same predictor and union commitment (T ≥ 1.99, p < .05; T ≥ 2.63, p < .01).
resource primacy (.88), decision-making practices (.87), communication flow (.85), technological readiness (.80) and supervisor satisfaction (.63). The items in the second component were work (.84), co-worker (.66), promotion (.44) and pay (.49) satisfaction. This component was labelled 'job satisfaction' (11 per cent overall variance explained; alpha = .76). Factor scores were calculated for these two components using the regression method.

Two stepwise multiple regression analyses were computed. As in Fukami & Larson's (1984) study, the demographic variables, i.e. sex (coded as a dummy variable), level of education, union tenure (in the case of union commitment), and company tenure (as a possible predictor of company commitment) were entered first in both regression equations to control for the effects of these demographic variables. The factor scores for job satisfaction and then perceived organizational climate were then entered, followed by job involvement. The order in which predictor variables are entered in a stepwise multiple regression analysis influences the amount of variance each variable will explain (Pedhazur, 1982). Unlike Fukami & Larson, the order of entry of the work experience variables in the hierarchical regression analysis in the present study was determined by their conceptual and theoretical importance based on previous empirical research on union and company commitment.*

The above six variables explained 19 per cent of the variance in company commitment. However, only job satisfaction ($F(1, 94) = 3.07, p < .05; \text{beta} = .29$), perceived organizational climate ($F(1, 94) = 4.05, p < .01; \text{beta} = .26$) and job involvement ($F(1, 94) = 5.46, p < .01; \text{beta} = .09$) significantly predicted company commitment. These three variables respectively accounted for 7.9, 6.3 and 1.2 per cent of the variance in

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*p < .05; **p < .01.
* Total variance explained at the end of each regression step.
* In this instance, the regression parameter for company tenure was compared to that for union tenure.
* Given the significance of the order of variable entry in stepwise regression, alternative hierarchical orders were computed for the entry of predictor variables in the regression equation. These alternative stepwise solutions yielded no significant differences in the amount of variance explained by each variable.
company commitment. On the contrary, only 7.1 per cent of the variance in union commitment was accounted for by the six predictors. In this analysis, the only significant predictor was union tenure ($F(1, 94) = 5.46, p < .05; \beta = -.24$), explaining 5.3 per cent of the variance in union commitment (see Table 2). As it was expected that union and company commitment would share the same predictors, the difference between these regression coefficients was tested for statistical significance (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The result of this test is reported as a $t$ ratio (see Table 2). The unstandardized partial regression coefficients differed significantly for tenure (company tenure vs. union tenure), job satisfaction, perceived organizational climate and job involvement.

There was a significant, negative relationship between union and company commitment ($r(93) = -.25, p > .01$).

**Discussion**

Consistent with previous findings (Mowday et al., 1982), all individual facets (see Table 1) and the global index (see Table 2) of job satisfaction predicted company commitment. However, neither the specific job satisfaction facets correlated with union commitment, nor did the global job satisfaction index predict commitment to the union in the multiple regression analysis (see Tables 1 and 2).

That job satisfaction, perceived organizational climate and job involvement were correlated with company commitment replicates a large body of existing data (Brooke et al., 1988; Mowday et al., 1982); other than pointing to the strength of the relationship between organizational commitment and these work-related factors (15.5 per cent of the variance explained), no further discussion is warranted. However, the fact that neither job satisfaction nor job involvement predicted union commitment is not consistent with previous findings (e.g. Fullagar & Barling, 1989a; Gordon et al., 1980, 1984). A number of factors might account for this discrepancy. First, the nature of the union–management relationship in the various studies differs somewhat. The present study assessed the correlation between job satisfaction and company and union commitment in an organization where the union–management relationship was unfavourable. In such adversarial situations, the role of job satisfaction in union commitment may be reduced. Specifically, job dissatisfaction predicts increased initial union activity (Brett, 1980a, b; DeCotiis & LeLouarn, 1981). Second, one would have expected amongst a sample which had been on strike for three weeks, and been legislated back to work, that union commitment would have been relatively high and job satisfaction low. However, the dissatisfactions experienced by the present sample may not have generalized to, or been measured by, the specific job satisfaction dimensions included in the Job Descriptive Index. The specific grievances expressed by the faculty concerned the weekly, direct teaching load, which was not defined by any of the items in the JDI and which did not appear to spill over into dissatisfaction with co-workers, pay, supervisors, promotional prospects or work. Furthermore, the source of dissatisfaction was probably perceived as being the Board of Regents and not the work per se, nor direct supervision. If future research is to concentrate on ascertaining the common work experience predictors of both union and organizational commitment, specific grievances will have to be focused on and operationalized, rather than relying on global indices of satisfaction. Finally, the breakdown in
labour negotiations may have been attributed to union incompetency and produced a deterioration in membership commitment rather than an increase.

This raises the issue of whether the perceived instrumentality of the union in fulfilling the needs and resolving the dissatisfaction of its members might be a more important predictor of union commitment. Previous findings have shown that job dissatisfaction is highly related to pro-union voting and activity in certification elections (Brett, 1980a, b; DeCotiis & LeLouarn, 1981), yet the relationship between job satisfaction and union commitment amongst members in already certified unions is modest at best (Gordon et al., 1980, 1984). However, perceived union instrumentality has been shown to moderate the relationship between job dissatisfaction and union commitment (Fullagar & Barling, 1989a). Workers who are dissatisfied with their jobs do not necessarily become committed to the union unless they perceive the union as instrumental in redressing their grievances.

With regard to the lack of a relationship between job involvement and union commitment, Fullagar & Barling (1989a) found a significant, but weak, effect amongst a sample of blue-collar workers. The discrepancy with the present results may be due to the differing nature of the samples. Job involvement (or alienation) appears to be an important predictor amongst workers of lower occupational status who enjoy less access to decision-making processes. Furthermore, where the relationship between management and labour is poor (as in the present instance), job characteristics may become less significant as predictors of union commitment. Indeed, the significant negative correlation between organizational and union commitment can probably be attributed to the adversarial nature of the labour–management relationship (Angle & Perry, 1986; Gallagher, 1984; Magenau & Martin, 1985).

The separate components of perceived organizational climate correlated significantly with company but not union commitment (see Table 1). There is a growing amount of evidence which would suggest that organizational climate is a moderator of the relationship between union and company commitment, rather than a direct predictor of both types of commitment (Angle & Perry, 1986; Gallagher, 1984; Magenau & Martin, 1985; Magenau et al., 1988; Schriesheim & Tsui, 1978). Where the union–management relationship is favourable (e.g. Fukami & Larson, 1984), positive correlations emerge. In situations where the union–management relationship is adversarial (e.g. the present study), either negative correlations emerge or union and company commitment are unrelated. Subjects in the present research were divided into those with favourable perceptions of organizational climate and those with unfavourable perceptions on the basis of a median split. Amongst the latter there was a significant negative correlation between union and company commitment ($r(46) = -.52$, $p < .01$), whereas amongst those subjects with positive perceptions of organizational climate, an insignificant correlation between both types of commitment emerged ($r(47) = -.06$, $p > .05$). This would confirm the moderating role of organizational climate.

Unlike previous research, none of the demographic variables were associated with company commitment (see Tables 1 and 2). On the other hand, union tenure was the only significant predictor of union commitment. Given the seniority clause within the collective agreement, this may be consistent with a side-bet approach to understanding commitment. Meyer & Allen (1984) question whether a significant correlation between loyalty (affective commitment) and tenure is a sufficient test of side-bet; they showed that
side-bet theory can be assessed more adequately with measures of continuance (membership) commitment. Nonetheless, where a seniority clause is operative, it is possible that affective commitment follows continuance commitment to reduce any possible role conflict or cognitive dissonance.

The findings of this study raised several issues. First, although job satisfaction may precede company commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1987), it remains unclear if union tenure is an antecedent, correlate or consequence of union commitment, and longitudinal data are required. Second, a global measure of job satisfaction obscures possible contributions of specific satisfaction facets to union commitment. Although the possibility of a multicollinearity problem precluded the use of unique measures, it remains unclear what purpose intrinsic job dissatisfaction fulfills in the union commitment process. To date, research has primarily investigated the role of extrinsic dissatisfaction in the unionization process (Brett, 1980a, b; Hammer & Smith, 1978). Third, it is important to replicate the present findings amongst blue-collar unions, as the type of union studied may limit the generalizability of any findings. However, the ongoing labor dispute and recent strike experience of this white-collar union affords the results obtained in this study greater external validity. Fourth, males and females have been shown to enjoy different union experiences (Izraeli, 1985) and exhibit differing levels of commitment (Gordon et al., 1980). Future research should focus on gender as a possible moderator, rather than direct predictor, of union commitment. Unfortunately, the small sample size in the present study prevented an assessment of the moderating role of gender, although it was found that no differences existed between male and female respondents on the union, work and organization variables. That males and females did not differ with respect to either organizational commitment or union commitment suggests that in situations where the labor-management relationship is highly adversarial, gender differences in commitment are minimal, and loyalty to both companies and union become more uniform. Fifth, the present sample consisted of members of a closed-shop union. The level, nature, and determinants of union commitment may differ between companies that have two or more competing labor organizations and companies governed by a single-union shop agreement. For example, the low amounts of variance accounted for in the present study may be attributable to the possible effects of a union shop, as freedom of association is an important determinant of commitment (Salancik, 1977). The current results suggest that variables which had been found to be significant correlates of union commitment in situations where there is freedom to choose between membership of several unions, or even whether one wants to join a union or not, may not generalize to the union shop situation.

Even though the present study investigated different kinds of work-experience variables to Fukami & Larson (1984), the results still did not isolate a common predictor of both company and union commitment. We suggest that the nature of companies and unions as organizations is such that research should address ‘divergent’ rather than ‘parallel’ models of commitment, and focus explicitly on their differential predictors.

Although both unions and companies are social organizations, there are fundamental differences between the two. Companies develop from the need to pool resources to manufacture marketable goods; unions arise largely from dissatisfaction with employment conditions (Brett, 1980a, b; Tannenbaum, 1965). Besides other distinctions such as (a) whether the particular organization is incorporated for financial gain, and (b) the fact that workers perceive the company as providing basic needs (Schein, 1980) and the union
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as ensuring those basic needs are satisfied through the collective bargaining and grievance processes, the motivation, involvement and commitment required by unions and companies for their survival and growth differ.

It is argued, therefore, that divergent models be constructed and tested to understand and predict union and company commitment. This is consistent with the suggestion that organizational commitment is not a global, unitary construct. Rather, individuals simultaneously experience a series of multiple commitments (Reichers, 1985). It follows that the term ‘organizational commitment’ should be discarded in favour of the terminological and conceptual precision afforded by the alternative use of ‘company’ and ‘union’ commitment.

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