

What is the Influence of Work Values Relative to Other Variables in the Development of
Organizational Commitment ?

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ABSTRACT

Using the four high-order values proposed by Schwartz (1992) to operationalize the construct of work values, we evaluated the influence of these values on the development of organizational commitment, in comparison with four facets of work satisfaction and four organizational factors: empowerment, knowledge of organizational goals, and training and communication practices. A sample of 982 employees from eight companies of Northeastern Mexico was used in this study. Our findings suggest that work values occupy less important place on the development of organizational commitment when compared to organizational factors, such as the perceived knowledge of the goals of the organization, or some attitudes such as satisfaction with security and opportunities of development.

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INTRODUCTION.

Throughout the last decades work values and organizational commitment have been two constructs widely studied in the field of Work and Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Management (HRM). Organizational commitment has been considered by many authors as a good predictor of low absenteeism and turnover (*e.g.* Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Work values have been studied amongst many other reasons, for their influence over some key attitudes and psychological states such as work satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Work and general values.

From a semantic perspective work and general values are highly related constructs, but in the field of research they have been analyzed from distinct perspectives (Sagie, Elizur & Koslowsky, 1996; Schwartz, 1999). In other words, work values have been studied and measured in isolation from main stream research in general values (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). The study of general values has developed a well supported definition of the construct (*e.g.* Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992), and even more important, a dynamic structure that allows to classify them (Schwartz, 1992). Values have been conceptualized as cognitive representations of universal needs (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992), as enduring states of a proper social behavior (Rokeach, 1973), as trans-situational criteria or as goals ordered by importance as guiding principles in life (Schwartz, 1999). Work values have been defined as goals, results, or characteristics that can be found in a job (MOW, International Research Team, 1987).

Some authors instead of giving a precise definition of work values, have proposed when an item belongs to the universe of this construct (Guttman, 1982; Levy, 1990). From the perspective of

vocational behavior, Super (1995) affirmed that work values are the result of a process of refinement, where the individual learns through socialization how to express his needs in a socially accepted manner, being these ideas compatible with the conceptualization of values as cognitive representations of universal needs.

Recent studies support that the constructs of work values and general values have similar structures (Elizur & Sagie, 1999; Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss, 1999). In line with these ideas and based on the newest definitions of values, we consider that work values are cognitive representations of universal needs that are expressed through trans-situational goals in the work setting and ordered by importance.

During the last decades deep attention has been paid to the structure of both constructs. Meanwhile in the field of general values the universal structure of values proposed by Schwartz (1992) is the most widely known theory, in the arena of work values, the structure proposed by Elizur (1984) is the shed light for many researchers in the systematic study of the construct.

The universal theory of the content of values (Schwartz, 1992), establishes that the essence of a value is the motivational goal it expresses. Based on this idea, the author has derived 10 types of values that conforms a dynamic structure (see figure 1, left), where types sharing a similar motivational goal appear closer between them (for a full description of the 10 motivational types see Schwartz, 1992). On the contrary, types representing incompatible motivational goals, occupy opposite places in the continuum. These assumptions are based on the idea that actions taken in the pursuit of each typology have psychological and practical consequences, which may be compatible or in conflict with the goals derived from other value. As seen in figure 1 (left), the 10 types conform four high-order values. It is possible to distinguish two large bipolar dimensions. Each dimension presents opposite high-order values on each of its poles.

The basic structure of 10 types has been validated in more than 60 countries worldwide and has been used to explain and predict how value structures are related to diverse attitudes and behaviors (Schwartz, Melech, Lehman, Burgess, Harris & Owens, 2001).

It is important to note that the 10 types tend to be present in the general context of an individual's life, but not in specific settings, as the work context. That is why we used the four high-order values instead of the ten more specific types of values.

The four high-order values are labeled: self-enhancement, self-transcendence, openness to change and conservation. The first two are part of a bipolar dimension that refers to opposite motivational objectives: one to enhance personal interests even at the expenses of others, and the other, to transcend selfish concerns and promote the welfare of others. The other bipolar dimension clusters two different objectives. One refers to the extent to which they motivate persons to follow their own and unique intellectual and emotional interests, and the other, centered on preserving the status quo and the stability in relations with persons and institutions (Schwartz, 1992). Figure 1 shows which value types are contained by each high-order value.

Insert figure 1 about here

Considering the modality of their outcomes, Elizur (1984) proposed a structure for the construct of work values based on 3 dimensions (see figure 1, right). He labeled this dimensions as instrumental or material, cognitive and affective. Under the first classification he grouped all those work values related with material aspects such as salary and work conditions. Under the second classification he considered certain work outcomes like for instance meaningful job, or specific values such as achievement. Finally, he grouped as affective values, aspects such as esteem as a person, or recognition for performance. The proposed structure has been validated in different countries (Elizur, 1984; Elizur, Borg, Hunt and Beck, 1991) and it seems to be robust.

Recently Ros and collaborators (1999) proposed and validated that the four high order values of the Schwartz theory and the 3 dimensions of the modality facet of work values established by Elizur

(1984) can converge if the cognitive dimension is divided into 2 subdimensions: prestige and intrinsic (see Figure 1 right). Once the cognitive dimension is divided, each dimension of the modality facet encounters its parallel in one of the four high-order values, that is, the high-order value openness to change parallels the intrinsic dimension, conservation the instrumental or material dimension, self-enhancement matches with prestige, and finally, the high-order value self-transcendence parallels the affective dimension.

Organizational commitment.

Over the years, work commitment has been defined and measured in many ways. The focus of commitment seems to be diverse: the organization, the goals, the union, the occupation, etc.

During the first decades of the study of the construct, it was conceived basically from an attitudinal perspective. The classical definition proposed by Mowday (Mowday, Porter & Steers 1982), establishes that an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization, can be characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the company (Mowday et al., 1982, p.27).

Several authors have suggested that commitment is different from motivation or general attitudes (Brown, 1996; Scholl, 1981), they establish that commitment influences behavior independently of other motives and attitudes and, in fact, might lead to persistence in a course of action even in the face of conflicting motives or attitudes. Commitment can be conceived as a binding force that is experienced as a mind-set or as a psychological state that leads an individual toward a particular course of action (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001).

The literature in the field of organizational commitment reveals various models to describe the structure of the construct. Most models include a dimension reflecting an affective link with the organization characterized by a desire to follow a course of action. Some models also propose a

material or instrumental dimension, establishing that an individual may be committed to a course of action because of the perceived cost of failing to do so. Just few models also consider a third possible kind of bind with an organization, based basically on a feeling of obligation or moral debt. The origin of this last kind of organizational commitment is also affective in nature, but definitely there is a conceptual difference in remaining in an organization because the individual wants to stay, and because he or she feels a moral obligation to remain.

By far, the model of organizational commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991;1997) is the most widely used and studied in the field of Work and Organizational Psychology (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinsky & Erez, 2001). The three components of the model Meyer and Allen (1991;1997), differ basically in the kind of mind-set that binds the person to the organization. These three mind-sets are: an affective attachment to the organization, a perceived cost of leaving the company, and a moral obligation to remain. They have labeled these three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative commitment respectively.

The behavioral consequences of normative and continuance commitment are basically continued membership, by the other hand, the expected behavioral consequences from affective commitment are related to lower turnover, reduced absenteeism, improved performance and increased organizational citizenship behavior.

Meyer and Allen (1997), proposed a specific model for the antecedents and consequences of organizational commitment. The model establishes two main blocks of variables that can be considered as antecedents for the construct, and classified as proximal and distal. Distal variables are those associated with the characteristics of the organization (*e.g.* size, structure), personal characteristics (where they group values), socialization experiences (*e.g.* cultural, familial), management practices (*e.g.* recruiting, training), and environmental conditions. The main clusters of variables considered as proximal antecedents are: work experiences (*e.g.* support, justice), role states (*e.g.* conflict, overload) and psychological contracts.

In spite of the fact, that some organizational characteristics such as policies and structure, or some personal characteristics as values, tenure, and gender have been studied as antecedents of affective commitment, no consistent results of causality have been found. On the contrary, it seems that work experiences are the most consistent predictors of affective commitment according to the main cited reviews of the variable (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Among the work experiences that leads to affective commitment are: job challenge, degree of autonomy, variety of skills used by the employee, knowing the role that the employee plays in his or her company, and also, the relations of the employee and his or her co-workers and supervisor (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

It is important to point out that few studies have paid attention to how HRM practices such as performance appraisal, promotion systems, training programs, etc., influence the development of organizational commitment (*e.g.* Kinicki, Carson & Bohlander, 1992; Meyer & Smith, 2000).

Research reports about the antecedents of continuance commitment are scarce, probably because well validated scales to measure the construct appeared until the last decade. Meyer and Allen (1997) consider that the main antecedents of this kind of commitment are: the perception of the transferability of the employee's skills and education to other organizations, and the individual's perception of his job opportunities outside his current organization. From our perspective, and considering some research evidences (*e.g.* -----, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Whitener & Walz, 1993), we believe that two basic variables: satisfaction with compensation and job security, are good predictors of continuance commitment.

Finally, we can say that evidences of the antecedents of normative commitment are not only scarce but also vague, and certainly they are more theoretical than empirical. These are based mainly on the process of socialization and acculturation of values, such as loyalty.

Work Values and Organizational Commitment.

As stated earlier, few studies have analyzed the effects of work values on the development of organizational commitment. First of all, it is important to mention that among these studies it is possible to identify three clear lines of research. One of these, is centered in analyzing the direct effect of work values on organizational commitment (*e.g.* Elizur, 1996; Knoop, 1994; Oliver, 1990). Another stream, conceives work values as moderators or mediators between demographic or situational variables and organizational commitment (*e.g.* Meyer, Irving & Allen, 1998). Finally, a third approach is focused on the fit between person and peers, or supervisor's work values and the effect of this fit on organizational commitment (*e.g.* Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins, 1989). The majority of these studies report low or moderate influence of work values on the development of organizational commitment (Elizur, 1996, Meyer et al. 1998). From our perspective none of the studies conducted until now, have employed at the same time well validated construct structures to analyze both variables.

It is now clear that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct, and that each of its three dimensions have its own antecedents and consequences, interestingly, this is also characteristic of the four high-order values proposed by the Schwartz's theory.

Approach and hypothesis of this study.

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the direct effect of work values and some organizational variables and work attitudes over the development of organizational commitment, based on the recent empirical studies that demonstrate that work values can be studied and analyzed using the universal theory of values of Schwartz, specifically the four high-order values (-----, 2001; Ros et al., 1999), and the three dimensional model of organizational commitment of Meyer and Allen (1991;1997). For this purpose two are our main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: We expect that the employee's commitment to the organization could be predicted better from their evaluations of organizational factors, and their satisfaction to specific facets of their jobs, than from their priorities assigned to four general work values.

Hypothesis 2: Each organizational commitment dimension will have specific high-order values as antecedents.

METHOD

Subjects.

This study used a sample of 982 employees from eight different bottling companies belonging to the same corporation in Northeastern Mexico. Potential confounds attributable to industry difference were controlled using this kind of sample. Twenty percent of the employees of each company were invited to participate in the survey. Each sub sample was stratified by contract type, unionized and non unionized, and then by organizational level. The selection of the subjects was random, but following the stratification criteria. The mean age was 32.64 years, and the mean tenure 7.81 years, 89% were men and only 11% women. Only 11% had college studies, and 20.5% had only elementary school. Seventy percent were operations personnel, and only a 5.5% occupied manager and mid-manager levels. The rest were supervisors and professional workers. In order to guarantee anonymity, employees were told that their individual responses were confidential, and that only aggregate statistics would be provided to the headquarters of the Group.

Instruments.

To measure work values, we used a recently developed questionnaire that operationalizes the four high-order values proposed by the Schwartz theory (----- & -----, 2001). The 16 items of the instrument are based on the *Portraits Values Questionnaire* (Schwartz, et al., 2001). The questionnaire uses short verbal portraits that describe the goals and wishes of 16 employees, implicitly expressing their work values (*e.g. He always strives to make sure that all employees receive the same treatment and opportunities*). Respondents are asked to rate themselves in terms of

each of the 16 portraits, and use a 7-point Likert-type scale (7= *very much like me*, 1= *not like me at all*) to score their comparisons. Internal consistency indexes are shown in table 1.

Organizational commitment was measured using adapted versions of the three scales created by Meyer and Allen (1997): the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS) and the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS). The scales were back translated and all the items originally reversed were rephrased in positive (----- & Antón, 1997). Internal consistency indexes obtained in the three scales can be seeing on the diagonal of table 1.

Job satisfaction was operationalized through a back translated version of Job Diagnostic Survey of Hackman and Oldham (1975). All the items were also phrased in positive. The four facets measured were: satisfaction with compensation, opportunities of development, satisfaction with supervision and security. The internal consistency indexes obtained are reported on table 1.

Considering the main antecedents of each of the three dimensions of organizational commitment previously mentioned, we decided to measure some of them based on the availability to have well validated instruments in Spanish to measure the constructs. Some variables were measured in a direct manner, such is the case of knowledge of organizational goals, empowerment, and training and communication practices. The rest of the other variables were measured indirectly, through the levels of satisfaction with security, opportunities for development, supervision and compensation.

Knowledge of organizational goals, communication and training practices were measured through items specially tailored for this study but based on classical instruments of organizational climate. The number of items used to measure each of these variables were: 4, 3 and 3 respectively. Internal consistency indexes for the three measures are shown in Table 1. Finally to measure empowerment we used 4 items of a previously created instrument (Bores, 1998). The internal consistency index for this scale was 0.70 .

RESULTS.

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for all of the study variables are reported in Table 1.

Insert table 1 about here

Because of the high intercorrelations found between the variables of the study, we decided to evaluate the possibility of multicollinearity among the variables. The values encountered in the eigen values, and in the condition indexes, were between the ranges considered as low multicollinearity according to the rules of thumb for both parameters (Belsley, 1991; Kleinbaum, Kupper, & Muller, 1988).

To validate our two hypotheses, all variables considered as antecedents of organizational commitment were introduced in hierarchical regression models. One model was computed for each of the three dimensions. Independent variables were grouped in three different blocks according to their hypothesized influence in the development of organizational commitment.

For the three dimensions, block 1 was composed of the four organizational factors measured in this study: training practices, communication practices, empowerment, and knowledge of organizational objectives. According to the theoretical model of Meyer and Allen (1997, p. 106), as well as our hypothesis 1, these factors related to employees' perceptions of their work experiences, will have grater influence than work values in the development of organizational commitment.

In block 2, the four facets of job satisfaction measured were introduced: satisfaction with security, compensation, opportunities for development, and supervision. These measures were included in a second block because as was previously mentioned, they were considered to reflect indirect perceptions of job experiences. Finally, in the third block the four high order values were included.

Table 2 presents the final models for each of the three dimensions of organizational commitment. To allow direct comparison of the effect of each independent variable on the development of each of the dimensions, all regression coefficients were standardized.

As can be seen in Table 2, the model that reports the highest total R^2 is the model for the dimension of affective commitment with .512, followed by the model for the normative dimension with .343, and then by the continuance dimension model with .246.

In the three models, the block that reports the highest explained variance is block number 1, that is, the block that contains the four organizational factors, followed by block 2, and block 3.

Insert table 2 about here

The standardized coefficients for each of the three models reveal that the best predictors for the affective dimension were: knowledge of organizational goals (.263), satisfaction with security (.175), satisfaction with opportunities for development (.136), and the high order value self-transcendence (.120). All regression coefficients were positive.

The best predictors for the continuance dimension were: empowerment (.148), satisfaction with compensation (.135), the high order value conservation (.128), and communication practices (.111). In this case also, all regression coefficients were positive.

Finally, for the normative dimension the best predicting variables were: knowledge of organizational goals (.209), satisfaction with security (.135), empowerment (.127), satisfaction with compensation (.110), and the high order value openness to change (.104). As can be compared, knowledge of organizational goals and satisfaction with security were the two better predictors of both the affective and the normative dimension, and this result is consistent with the theory, because of the common nature of both constructs.

Among the four high order values, and considering the coefficient regression and the statistical significance, the high order values that appeared as predictors of the affective dimension were self-

transcendence (.120) and openness to change (.095), meanwhile for the continuance dimension they were conservation (.128) and self-transcendence (-.104). For the normative dimension the only high order value that showed significance was openness to change (.104).

DISCUSSION.

Examination of the standardized regression coefficients of each model indicate that even when one or two high-order values predict with satisfactory accuracy the scores for affective, continuance and normative commitment, contribution of those characteristics to such prediction tend to be lower than contribution of organizational factors and facets of work satisfaction. For instance, in the affective dimension there are three variables with standardized coefficients higher than the high-order value self-transcendence. Meanwhile in the continuance dimension, although the statistical significance of the coefficient of the high-order value conservation is strong ($p < 0.001$), there are two variables, empowerment and satisfaction with compensation, that show significant coefficients of higher value. Finally in the normative dimension, there are also four variables showing higher regression coefficients than any of the four high-order values.

These results allow us to say that employees commitment to the organization are predicted better from their evaluations of organizational factors, and their satisfaction to specific facets of their jobs, than from their priorities assigned to the four high order values, confirming hypothesis 1.

As expected, each dimension of organizational commitment was better predicted by different high-order values. While the two values that best predicted affective commitment were self-transcendence and openness to change, continuance was best predicted by conservation and self-transcendence, the latter variable being negatively related to this second type of commitment. As previously mentioned, conservation comprises values related to security and conformity. It appears fair to presume that an individual that assigns higher priority to this value would tend to commit to an organization mostly for materialistic reasons, being this kind of bind, the essence of the continuance commitment. Finally, the unique high-order value that predicted the normative

dimension was openness to change. This latter result is opposite to our expectations, basically because the specific value loyalty, is clearly associated with self-transcendence, that is why we expected a high and significant coefficient for this value. By definition, normative commitment is a mind-set that binds the person to the organization based on a moral obligation to remain (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Our results suggest that this kind of commitment is not based on the value loyalty, it seems to be more related with a feeling of gratitude for having a stable job, an acceptable pay, for experiencing empowerment, and overall, for having a clear view of where the company goes, and what is the employee doing to accomplish the goal.

At this point of the discussion we can answer to our basic research question, saying that work values occupy a second place in the development of organizational commitment when compared with other organizational practices and work attitudes. We can also say that each dimension of the organizational commitment construct is predicted from a different set of high order values, which supports hypothesis 2 of this study.

If we focus our attention on the affective dimension, we can observe that all the HRM practices previously mentioned, tend to be good predictors. Such is the case of empowerment. It would also seem evident that a committed employee might feel secure in its job and might perform activities that allow him or her to feel useful and important, something that has to be considered in the work design (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

It is important to mention, the influence that the variable knowledge of organizational goals generates in the development of affective and normative commitment, the two dimensions related with the affective nature of the construct. These findings are a strong support to the basic premise of Mowday and collaborators (1982) that establishes that an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization, can be characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals.

In later years, companies included in our study have invested time and resources implementing a system that allows all their collaborators, from line operators to top executives, to know how their weekly work affects the company objectives. This strategy seems to be successful, and could be considered as a high performance HRM practice that may be followed by practitioners in the field.

It is important to remark that this research provides clear evidence that the universal theory of the content of values of Schwartz, with its ten types of values and its four high order values can be used as an effective approach to analyze the construct of values in the work setting.

At the opening plenum of the 8th biannual conference of the International Society for the Study of Work and Organizational Values (Ronen, 2002) it was remarked the necessity for using cross-cultural, or in other words universally, validated structures for the construct of work values in order to study and analyze these values. One of the specific proposals was to use the structure established by Schwartz (1992), and this paper represents a materialization of this proposal.

Finally we have to point out the main limitation of this research, the fact that all variables were assessed using self-reported measures, something that create the possibility that relations between the measured variables reflect shared response bias.

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Table 1.- Mean, standard deviations and intercorrelations of study variables.

Independent Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 Affective commitment	5.75	1.01	(.79)														
2 Continuance commitment	4.67	1.35	.41	(.77)													
3 Normative commitment	5.19	1.14	.58	.53	(.72)												
4 Training practices	5.99	1.22	.39	.28	.35	(.85)											
5 Communication practices	5.35	1.35	.46	.36	.37	.48	(.75)										
6 Empowerment	5.24	1.21	.47	.37	.42	.39	.58	(.70)									
7 Knowledge of objectives	5.81	1.06	.60	.35	.48	.44	.58	.52	(.70)								
8 Compensation	4.70	1.58	.35	.36	.36	.33	.43	.42	.32	(.98)							
9 Development	5.56	.97	.54	.35	.44	.37	.50	.52	.54	.47	(.70)						
10 Security	5.80	1.06	.52	.30	.43	.31	.39	.37	.47	.36	.57	(.64)					
11 Supervision	5.56	1.21	.37	.25	.32	.40	.55	.50	.41	.37	.57	.40	(.87)				
12 Openness to change	5.38	1.17	.39	.17	.32	.19	.20	.22	.32	.10	.36	.34	.22	(.75)			
13 Conservation	4.60	1.07	.20	.21	.22	.18	.15	.17	.13	.16	.20	.22	.16	.40	(.60)		
14 Self-enhancement	3.85	1.22	.19	.15	.22	.16	.15	.20	.13	.14	.14	.19	.13	.37	.45	(.62)	
15 Self-transcendence	5.61	1.09	.45	.17	.33	.25	.27	.29	.41	.15	.37	.35	.28	.70	.39	.36	(.77)

All coefficients were significant at $p < .01$. Internal consistency indexes for each scale measured are reported in the diagonal.

Table 2.- Regression models for each dimension of organizational commitment.

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Affective Commitment</i>	<i>Continuance Commitment</i>	<i>Normative Commitment</i>
<i>Block 1</i>			
Training practices	.075**	.060	.084*
Communication practices	.065	.111**	-.006
Empowerment	.086**	.148**	.127**
Knowledge of goals	.263***	.093*	.209***
ΔR^2	.414	.193	.273
<i>Block 2</i>			
Security	.175***	.074*	.135***
Compensation	.062*	.135***	.110**
Development	.136***	.083	.077
Supervision	-.063*	-.072	-.030
ΔR^2	.071	.036	.050
<i>Block 3</i>			
Openness to change	.095**	.029	.104**
Conservation	-.013	.128***	.044
Self-enhancement	-.018	.016	.053
Self-transcendence	.120***	-.104*	-.010
ΔR^2	.027	.017	.020
Total R^2 of the model	.512	.246	.343

All regression coefficients are standardized. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure 1. The 4 high-order values of the Schwartz's theory (1992) and the 3 dimensions of the modality facet of Elizur's model (1984).

