The Effect of Employee Engagement on Continuance and Normative Commitment to the Organization

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Abstract

Several studies have conceptualized and tested the relationship between employee engagement and affective organizational commitment. Yet, the mediating mechanism that explains the association between these two constructs was rarely investigated. This article attempts to test the indirect effect of employee voice on employee engagement—affective organizational commitment linkage by drawing responses from 301 executives working in service sector. The finding of the study reported employee voice mediating the association of employee engagement and affective organizational commitment. In conclusion, the implications, limitations of the study and scope for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Employee, Voice, Employee Engagement, Affective Organizational Commitment, Service Sector, India

Introduction

The modern business environment is fraught with concerns of employee engagement, challenges related to head hunting, turnovers and numerous other external threats (Parzefall & Hakanen, 2010). Employee engagement is considered one of the significant attributes among the Fortune 500 companies, making them the best place to work (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Several empirical studies endorse the fact that employee 'engagement' and 'commitment' offer companies gain sustainable competitive advantage (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Studies have reported employee engagement as a possible antecedent to organizational commitment (Posthuma, Campion, Masimova & Campion, 2013). Kahn (1992) suggested that engaged employees share a positive relationship with their employer and other members of the organization. This finds validation in 'social exchange theory', which suggests that mutual respect and appreciation between employer and employee would eventually lead to commitment towards one another (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Based on this assumption, Saks (2006) reported that engaged employees who share a positive relationship with their employers are likely to possess positive outlook towards their organization. In terms of organizational effect, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) described employee engagement at work as a positive experience. Furthermore, this positive experience is described as an antecedent to several work related emotions (Sonnentag, 2003). In this context, affective commitment a significant component of organizational commitment takes precedence. Affective commitment recognizes how much an employee identifies and associates themself with the organizational goals (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974). Quite apparently, employee engagement holds the possibility of sharing a closer level of intimacy with the affective domain of organizational commitment.The effect of employee engagement on work-related outcomes depends on the degree to which employees are allowed to voice their opinions. Van dyne and LePine (1998) proposed in their study that satisfied employees are probably higher on engagement and thus motivates them to engage in voice behaviour. Moreover, the organization's role of assessing whether employees' voice is heard and reflected in reciprocal organizational transactions enhances the feeling of ownership among the employees (Morrison, 2014) thus increases the level of commitment. In continuation with the same logic, it can be presumed that employee's voice behaviour can act as a bridge between employee engagement and affective organizational commitment. Hence, we can propose that employee engagement along with psychological closeness to one's organization fosters employee voice and promotes affective commitment among the employees. Since previous investigations have not investigated the said relationship, the current study strives to address this research gap by testing the relationship between employee engagement and affective organizational commitment via employee voice as a mediator.

Affective Organizational Commitment

Organizations are expected to take initiatives to satisfy their employees and motivate them in order to retain and raise the company's commitment index.

This demands a thorough analysis and understanding of the commitment drivers in the organization (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014). To this end, an appreciative enquiry is a must to measure and monitor commitment level on a regular basis for significant results. Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualized organizational commitment as a combination of three components: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment has been considered as the strongest and most consistent predictor of organizationally desired outcomes. Hence, most empirical studies on organizational commitment have focused on affective commitment (Allen, 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000).

Affective commitment is defined as an emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in and enjoys membership in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The dimension of affective commitment suggests 'a kind of psychological attachment of the employee with his/her employing institution' (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Affective orientation focuses on the psychological bond or identification of the individual with an object that have a special meaning, importance to the individual and goes beyond the calculated involvement (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). An employee's strong identity with the goal of the organization and incessant desire to remain a part of the organization is considered as a positive state for a working professional.Affective commitment is developed as a result of a series of satisfying work experiences, which further leads to compliance with organizational norms and practices (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). McElroy (2001) observed that participation can increase affective commitment when employees are involved in decision-making and the organization is decentralized in its orientation. Therefore, an exploration of the antecedents of affective organizational commitment is essential on the part of the decision makers to identify mechanisms through which they can increase the commitment level of their employees.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been defined in different ways depending upon the context, in which

it has been discussed. The definition of engagement revolves around specific attributes of the employee attitude (involvement, loyalty and commitment) and employee behaviour (such as taking initiatives and productivity levels). Kahn's (1990) early work on engagement defined engagement as 'the harnessing of organisational members' to their respective work roles. Among the contemporaries, Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques Pinto, Salanova and Bakker (2002) provided a comprehensive definition of employee engagement. They describe engagement 'as a positive, fulfilling work related state of mind and is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption'. Vigour is described as a high level of energy, while dedication is described as a mental resilience that involves being strongly involved in one's work and to experience a sense of significance, enthusiasm and challenge, and absorption is depicted as bringing a concentrated and engrossed self in one's work.Theoretically, employee engagement has been discussed from several perspectives. For instance, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) identify four premises necessary for employee engagement, namely, clarity of expectations, basic organizational resources and equipments provided to the employees, and last is a subjective sense of belonging and feeling (Simpson, 2009). Employee engagement has been perceived in certain works of empirical significance as purely an organizational variable. Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt and Barrick (2004) associated engagement with 'high motivational state', whereas Dvir, Eden, Avolio and Shamir (2002) considered active engagement to 'higher level of activity, initiative and responsibility'. Wellins and Concelman (2005) defined engagement as 'an amalgamation of commitment, loyalty, productivity and ownership'. They have also considered engagement as an 'illusive force that motivates employees to higher (or lower) levels of performance'. Previous investigations by Harter and colleagues (2002) and Deshwal (2015) reported a direct linkage between employee satisfaction and engagement. In this context, Gubman (2004) describes 'engagement is over and above simple satisfaction; engagement is related to passion and commitment that an employee has to help the employer succeed'.Engagement was also postulated as a psychological variable.

Macey and Schneider (2008) regarded employee engagement as an amalgamation of a psychological state and the behaviour it implies. Analogous to this view, Aon Hewitt (2012) defined engagement as 'the state of emotional and intellectual involvement that motivates employees to do their best work'. Hewitt (2012) described engaged employees as not just committed, passionate or proud but with a clear 'line of sight' about their future and the organization's mission and goals. They are 'enthused' and 'in-gear' using their talents and discretionary efforts to make a difference in their employer's quest for sustainable business thrust. An engaged employee is aware of the business contexts and works with the colleagues to improve their role performance for the benefit of the organization. It requires a two-way relationship between the employer and the employee. Thus, it is presumed that employee engagement is a combination of organizational commitment along with the willingness of employee to help out colleagues.

Relationship Between Employee Engagement (EE) and Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC).Investigations conducted in Western context demonstrate a positive relationship between employee engagement and affective emotional commitment (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014). Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) pointed out that with the enhancement of employee engagement organizational commitment gets heightened. Furthermore, the job demandsresources model explains that engagement at work is much more effective than job demand in predicting organizational commitment, since the latter predisposes an employee towards more professional and emotional exhaustion and ultimately leads to burnout (Hakanen, Schaufeli & Ahola, 2008). Previous investigations also indicate that work environment which provides psychological safety and meaning ensures commitment of the employees towards their organizations (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Most of the studies on employee engagement and organizational commitments are predominantly based on Western organizational set-up and have used Western sample (Bhatnagar, 2007). In Indian context, very few studies, such as Singh and Sanjeev (2013), have tested the factors of commitment

on the ground of performance among India PSU employees to understand the level of engagement among their executives. This has been supported by Swaminathan and Aramvalarthan (2013) who described engagement as a form of commitment which is determined by the amount of mutual efforts placed by the employees and the employers for organizational growth and development.

Bhatnagar (2007) has lamented the fact that, in spite of phenomenal organizational growth and high amount of market share, employee-related issues in India are not well-addressed thereby causing under-utilization of human resources. This argument was supported by a study in which it was found that only 8 per cent employees in India are meaningfully engaged with their companies (Kohli & Grover, 2013). A service intensive industry cannot afford to maintain such low levels of engagement but the reality is that engaging employees with their jobs and organizations is proving to be the biggest challenge for HR managers (Shao & David, 2007). It is therefore important to examine the employee engagement link with affective organizational commitment in the present study. Hence,

- **H1:** Employee engagement is positively related to affective organizational commitment.

Employee Voice as the Mediator

Freeman and Medoff (1984) conceptualized the term employee voice as a combination of increased performance and productivity on one hand, and potential to deal with high pressure issues at work on the other. Similarly, MacLeod and Clarke (2009) defined employee voice in terms of how and when the perspectives of the employees are attended by the organization and a sense of employees:In an effective and empowered employee voice employees' views are sought out; they are listened to and see that their opinions count and make a difference. They speak out and challenge when appropriate. A strong sense of listening and of responsiveness permeates the organisation, enabled by effective communication. Contemporary empirical evidence points out that employee voice is slowly evolving from its industrial make up of group representation (Rees, Alfes & Gatenby, 2013) and gaining recognition in contemporary HRM literature. The expanse of

employee voice has also stretched out to include not only employees' say regarding work activities but also considers decision-making issues and policies within the organization (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). The application and contextual reference of employee's voice is witnessed equally across large groups, within small teams, and even the whole unit of workforce. Recent perspective on employee's voice is more attuned towards considering it as contextual performance or behavioural outcomes contributing to organizational effectiveness (Yoon, 2012). In this context, it is essential to note that employee's voice behaviour is an important factor towards enhancing organizational performance (Morrison, 2011). Employee's voice has been theorized more as a behaviour which holds the possibility of contributing to organizational performance with its emphasis on employee autonomy (Heffernan & Dundon, 2015). Previous investigation raises the possibility that employee's voice behaviour may contain an element which contributes to organizational commitment (Botero, 2013). Infante and Gordon (1991) remarked that employees who are free to voice their concern derive better satisfaction from work by being involved with it. The freedom and autonomy to air one's voice not only enhances employee's perception of the importance of their say in the organization but also a considerable amount of power to influence organizational decision (Truss, Mankin & Kelliher, 2012). Employee's voice behaviour is also indicated to foster a sense of ownership which is likely to be manifested in forms of creative and constructive solutions to organizational needs (Liu et al., 2010; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008) thereby leading towards commitment to the organization. In addition, Greguras and Diefendorff (2009) reported that employees with higher level of affective commitment feel their respective demands for autonomy and relatedness with organization were met. In other words, employees who are provided enough independence to voice their concerns, ultimately experience higher level of commitment. Employee engagement and its link with employee voice behaviour is relatively a new area which has been explored sparsely. However, Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) have asserted in their study that employee engagement often acts as a significant

precursor to promote meaningful employee voice. Moreover, it has been observed that employees who are psychologically closer to their organizations tend to manifest stronger voice to authority (Burris, Detert & Chiaburu, 2008). Mishra and Saxena (2011) in an empirical investigation on Gujarat-based Indian MNCs reported that a weak organizational practice induces employee voice behaviour. Hence, it can be remarked that a stronger attachment to organization improves organizational practices while enhancing the commitment levels of employees. Therefore, the aforementioned literature provides necessary foundation for stating the following hypothesis:

- H2: Employee voice is positively related to affective organizational commitment.
- H3: Employee voice positive mediates the relationship between employee engagement and affective organizational commitment.

Method
Participant and Procedures

The sample respondents were executives employed with various service sector organizations in India. We contacted human resource departments of service organizations (banking, insurance, retails, real estates, hotel, health, education, media, etc.) to seek their consent for executing the survey. Questionnaires were coded with pre-assigned identification numbers and were administered through pencil and paper mode. The survey was conducted during the working hours and the participants were advised regarding their voluntary nature of participation. The executive respondents were requested to complete the survey containing demographic profiles followed with our proposed frame work-specific questions. Our study used convenience sampling through approaching the human resource department of the organizations from which data were collected. We used a network of personal contacts to approach human resource executives of different organizations who provided necessary permission to conduct the survey exercise. Data screening was conducted to test for missing values in the beginning of the analysis. A total of 450 executives from different parts the country were approached to be a part of our survey. Out of the original number of questionnaires sent out, 374 questionnaires were filled in and returned with

a response rate of 83.1 per cent. After deleting the cases with substantial missing information, only 301 valid responses were considered for further analysis. Multi-collinearity was tested with the help of tolerance indices a threshold value of 0.1 (Hair et al., 1998). The multi-collinearity indices of the variables in the present study were found to be below the recommended threshold as shown in Table 2. Out of 301 respondents, 70.5 per cent were male executives and 29.5 per cent were female executives. The education level of the study shows 33.9 per cent of executives with college graduation and 66.1 per cent of executives with university/post-graduation degrees. Tenure of work in the present organization shows (1 year to 5 years = 6.6%; 6 years to 10 years = 55.3%; 11 years to 15 years = 22.5%; 16 years to 20 years = 7.3%). Age of the employees ranged from 24 to 56 years (M = 37.59, SD = 5.50).

Measures

Established and valid scales were considered for measuring the variables defining our proposed framework. Affective organizational commitment was measured in the present study by Allen and Meyer's (1996) Organizational Commitment scale. The scale consists of three dimensions: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment consisting of six items for each dimension. In the current study, we used the items related only to affective commitment. A sample item for the measure: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization'. 'The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)' developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) was used in the present study to measure employee engagement. The scale consists of 17 items. The scale measures three dimensions, namely, vigour, dedication and absorption. Six items of the scale assessed 'vigour' (a sample item is: At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well); five items measured 'dedication' (e.g., I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose); the last six items of the instrument measured 'absorption' dimension (e.g., It is difficult to detach myself from my job). Employee's voice was measured with the help of six-item scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). A sample item for the measure: 'I

communicate my opinions about work issues to my supervisor even if my opinion is different and my supervisor disagrees with me'.

Control Variables

Age, gender, tenure of work and education of the employees have been found quite relevant in employee voice and organizational commitment literature. In this study, it is presumed that employees with higher level of educations are more confident to express credible and effective ideas (Frese, Teng & Wijnen, 1999), whereas the continuity in an organization for a long duration increases the confidence of employee's voice (Stamper & VanDyne, 2001). Earlier studies show that older employees are more willing and eager to voice their concerns and decisions (Artistico, Cervone & Pezzuti, 2003). Tenure in organization has been consistently related to attrition and retention in an organization. Longer the tenure of an employee, higher is the willingness to continue with the same organization and vice versa (Hall, Garnett, Barnes & Stevens, 2007; Somers, 1996). An employee's last tenure with an organization was a good predictor of the commitment to their current organization (Davies & Shackleton, 1975). Tenure is observed as an important variable as it is a potential predictor of commitment and turnover (Hall et al., 2007). Education level of an employee influences an employee's decision to stay or take a leave from the present organization. It was observed that highly skilled employees were more likely to continue with the organization if they are able to get a meaningful engagement and satisfaction in their present job (Sourdif, 2004). Gender has consistently been found to influence commitment and turnover (Kuzyk, 2008) suggesting that female employees tend to have high turnover rates than their counterpart (Gow, Warren, Anthony & Hinschen, 2008). Earlier studies have reported a higher turnover intention among female employees than men due to work-life balance issues (Moncrief, EminBabakus & Mark, 2000). Age has recurrently been identified as influencing commitment, more specifically turnover rates generally decline with the progressive tenure of an employee in an organization (McNearney, Hunnicutt, Maganti & Rice, 2008).The demographic variables in the study were dummy-coded as follows: gender was coded as (1 = female; 2 = male); educational level of the participants was coded as (1 = college graduate; 2 = university/post-graduate). Besides tenure was coded as (1 = 1–5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 11–15 years; 4 = 16–20 years; 5 = 21–26 years). Tenure in our study denoted the number of years the employee has spent in their current organization. Tenure was coded as (1 year to 5 years = 1; 6 years to 10 years = 2; 11 years to 15 years = 3; 16 years to 20 years = 4). In this present study, age was excluded from inclusion as a control in the analysis since tenure was found to be more significance when it comes to professional outcome. Meyer and Allen's (1984) classical work on age, tenure and organizational commitment considers both of these factors of less importance than measuring employee perception about the extent of their direct investment to the organization. Moreover, Bedian, Ferris and Kacmar (1992) considered tenure as steadier than age in relation to satisfaction with one's profession. Further, Cohen (1993) argues in his meta-analysis that with increased stay in an organization, an employee not only gains authority but also establishes a strong emotional bond. Hence, based on this tenure was chosen to included over age in the analysis.

Analysis Strategy

In the initial phase of the analysis, we constructed a three item parcel of the work engagement scale in order to remove errors owing to multiple items of its sub-dimension (Little, Cunningham, Shahar & Widaman, 2002). For this purpose, an average score of the items were used in each parcel. We used structural equation modelling to check whether the variables had a suitable fit to the data. The meditational analysis was tested with the help of the PROCESS plug-in (Hayes, 2013) in SPSS, v. 20. PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) was considered over Baron and Kenny's mediation procedure owing to shortcoming with the latter procedure (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

Results
Preliminary Analysis

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the independent as a preliminary

analysis to test for any difference in data concerning gender, education level and tenure of the executives. A multivariate analysis of variance test found significant difference in main effect regarding gender for male and female executives in the study where, F (3, 284) = 3.68, $p < 0.012$; Wilk's Λ = 0.963, partial η^2 = 0.03. The univariate test for gender showed significant difference for employee voice F (1, 286) = 10.21, $p < 0.002$ partial η^2 = 0.03 and employee engagement F (1, 286) = 7.92, $p < 0.005$; partial η^2 = 0.02. Further analysis did not reveal any significant difference regarding tenure and education level for employee voice and engagement.

Test of Measurement Model

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to check the discrimination of the constructs in the study. The measurement model was examined with the help of the following model fit indices: the normed fit index devised by Bentler and Bonnet (1980) (NFI); Tucker Lewis index (TLI) (Hu & Bentler, 1999); standardized root mean residual (SRMR) (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000); chi-square statistics; the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The measurement model showed a good fit to the data: χ^2 (87, N = 301) = 198.83 $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.064; SRMR = 0.04; CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.90; TLI = 0.93. To check common method bias, we used Harman's single factor model (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The model fit for the single factor model showed a bad fit: χ^2 (90, N = 301) = 713.95 $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.152; SRMR = 0.110; CFI = 0.67, NFI = 0.65; TLI = 0.62. Thus, removing any doubt on common method bias in our study. Discriminant validity was tested next with the help of average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity is supported only if the AVE of each construct exceeds the maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) of the respective constructs (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The discriminant validity of the constructs in the study duly met the acceptable threshold as shown in Table 1. The reliability of the constructs in the study was established with the help of composite reliability and AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The threshold of acceptance for AVE should be 0.50 or greater and 0.70 for composite reliability.

The composite reliability of each construct the threshold in the present article were found to exceed the minimum cut-off and AVE values were found to beyond 0.50 in the present study.

Tests of Hypotheses

We used model 4 of PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013) to examine the mediation model in our study. A bootstrap method (with a bootstrap sample of 5000) was used in our analysis. Moreover, to test a null hypothesis regarding mediation a 95 per cent bias-corrected confidence interval and bootstrapped percentile was assessed (Hayes, 2013). The demographic variables (gender, education level of the participants and tenure of work in the current organization) were entered as covariates in the analysis. The analysis was conducted as three linear regression models by PROCESS along with the covariates. The first model shows employee engagement as predictor and employee voice as dependent variable. The second model includes employee engagement and employee voice as predictor and affective organizational commitment as dependent variable. The third model of the analysis includes employee engagement as predictor and affective organizational commitment as dependent variable.

Employee engagement was found to positively correlate with affective organizational commitment as seen (r = 0.46, $p < 0.001$). In the second model regression analysis, employee engagement was found to significantly relate to affective organizational commitment (β = 0.23, $p < 0.001$). After controlling for gender, tenure and education level, as indicated in the third model of linear regression employee engagement was again found to significantly relate to affective organizational commitment (β = 0.36, $p < 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. Furthermore, employee engagement was found to positively correlate with employee voice (r = 0.67, $p < 0.001$). Based on the second model of the linear regression analysis, employee voice is found to significantly predict affective organizational commitment (β = 0.27, $p < 0.001$). Thus hypothesis 2 was supported. In the second and third model of linear regression analysis, the education level of the executives revealed a significant relationship

with affective organizational commitment. This indicates that a unit increase in executives having post-graduation degree leads to increase in their level of affective organizational commitment. Besides education level, none of the other control variable revealed any significant relationship with employee voice and affective organizational commitment as dependent variables. The mediation analysis revealed that employee voice mediates the relationship between employee engagement and affective organizational commitment in the study. The path from employee engagement to employee voice; and to affective commitment was significant (as shown in Table 2). Besides the path from employee voice to affective commitment was also found to be significant. Furthermore, the interval between lower confidence interval CI and upper level CI for indirect effect did not include zero which suggests a significant indirect effect (Zhao, Lynch & Chen, 2010). The indirect effect was found to be quite small in comparison to the direct effect as seen in Table 4. Since we found a significant direct effect and also an indirect effect in the study, we can conclude that a partial mediation (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010) occurred in the study. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Conclusion

There is no magical way of creating and harnessing commitment. Equally, there is no single 'road map' that will work for all organizations—every organization starts from a different place and has a unique destination. So what are the key principles that need to be applied? In other words 'positive, beneficial actions directed at employees by the organisation contribute to the establishment of high quality exchange relationships […] that create obligations for employees to reciprocate in positive, beneficial ways' (Setton, Bennet & Liden, 1996). Thus, it is essential for organizations to identify factors valued by employees and also recognize employees as key stakeholders of the organization in order to achieve organizational excellence.

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