

TCM Employee Commitment Survey

Academic Users Guide 2004

John P. Meyer and Natalie J. Allen

Department of Psychology

The University of Western Ontario

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Based on the Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997), the *TCM Employee Commitment Survey* measures three forms of employee commitment to an organization: desire-based (affective commitment), obligation-based (normative commitment) and cost-based (continuance commitment). The survey includes three well-validated scales, the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS) and the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS). Each is scored separately and can be used to identify the “commitment profile” of employees within an organization.

This academic version of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey was prepared for those who intend to use the commitment scales for academic research purposes. Original and revised versions of the scales are provided in Appendix A. This guide provides background information on the development of the commitment scales and addresses general issues pertaining to their use. Appendix B provides a list of references that you can consult for more information.

Why is commitment important?

Commitment implies an intention to persist in a course of action. Therefore, organizations often try to foster commitment in their employees to achieve stability and reduce costly turnover. It is commonly believed that committed employees will also work harder and be more likely to “go the extra mile” to achieve organizational objectives. Research has consistently demonstrated that commitment does indeed contribute to a reduction in turnover (see Tett & Meyer, 1993; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). But, there is a caveat to the assumption regarding its impact on performance.

Research conducted to test the three-component model of commitment has demonstrated that commitment can be characterized by different mindsets – desire, obligation, and cost (see Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997). Employees with a strong affective commitment (high ACS scores) stay because they *want to*, those with strong normative commitment (high NCS scores) stay because they feel they *ought to*, and those with strong continuance commitment (high CCS scores) stay because they *have to* do so.

Research consistently shows that employees who want to stay (high ACS) tend to perform at a higher level than those who do not (low ACS). Employees who remain out of obligation (high NCS) also tend to out-perform those who feel no such obligation (low NCS), but the effect on performance is not as strong as that observed for desire. Finally, employees who have to stay primarily to avoid losing something of value (e.g.,

benefits, seniority) often have little incentive to do anything more than is required to retain their positions. So, not all commitments are alike (for summaries of the empirical evidence, see Allen & Meyer, 1996, 2000; Meyer et al., 2002).

How do I use the Commitment Survey?

There are two versions of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey – original and revised (see below). Both include statements (items) pertaining to employees' perception of their relationship with the organization and their reasons for staying. After reading each item, employees indicate the strength of their agreement by selecting a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In the original version of the survey, there are eight items for each the three commitment scales: ACS, NCS, and CCS. In the revised survey there are six statements for each scale. (Note: A new version of the CCS has recently been developed based on accumulating evidence that the original scale reflects two underlying dimensions, personal sacrifice and lack of alternatives (see Allen & Meyer, 1996) and that the personal sacrifice dimension corresponds more closely to the continuance commitment construct as it was originally conceived (see Allen & Meyer, 1996; McGee & Ford, 1987; Meyer et al., 2002). For more information on the new version of the CCS, its development and psychometric properties, see Powell and Meyer, 2004.

For both the original and revised versions of the survey, the items in Appendix A are grouped according to scale: ACS, NCS, and CCS. For purposes of survey administration, we recommend that the items from the three scales be mixed. For scoring purposes, employees' responses to all of the items *within* a scale are averaged to yield an overall score for each of the three components of commitment (see below for more detail). Although it is also possible to sum the item scores rather than averaging, this can create some problems if employees fail to respond to some items. The existence of *missing data* will have a much greater impact on total scores than on average scores. Of course, if employees fail to respond to a large number of the items (e.g., more than two or three per scale), their scores will be suspect and probably should not be interpreted. (Note: The existence of missing data can be problematic for the analysis and interpretation of any employee survey. There are several different ways to address this problem. For a more detailed discussion of this issue and the options available, see McDonald, Thurston and Nelson (2000) and Roth, Switzer and Switzer (1999)).

Note that some of the items in the commitment scales have been worded such that strong agreement actually reflects a lower level of commitment. These are referred to as “reverse-keyed” items (identified by “R” after the statement) and are included to encourage respondents to think about each statement carefully rather than mindlessly adapting a pattern of agreeing or disagreeing with the statements. For the same reason, we typically recommend that items from the three commitment scales be integrated for purposes of presentation in a paper or web-based survey. For scoring purposes, however, it is important that (a) scores on reverse-keyed statements be re-

coded (i.e., 1 = 7, 2 = 6, ... 7 = 1) before scoring, and (b) averages are computed based only on items relevant to the specific scale. Scores computed by combining items from the different commitment scales will *not* be meaningful. If scored correctly, you should obtain three scores, one each for the ACS, NCS, and CCS, for each respondent. These scores should range in value from 1 to 7 with higher scores indicating stronger commitment.

Which version of the survey should I use?

The original version of the ACS, NCS and CCS each include eight items. The revised scales include six items. The two versions of the ACS and CCS are very similar – the choice between the two might best be made on the basis of desired length. The greatest difference between the original and revised versions will be seen in the NCS. Briefly, the NCS measures employees' feeling of obligation to remain with the organization. Theoretically, this obligation can arise from two primary sources: socialization experiences and receipt of "benefits" from the organization that require reciprocation on the part of the employee. Items in the original version of the NCS tend to include information about the basis for the obligation, whereas those in the revised version focus more specifically on the feeling of obligation without specifying the basis. The choice between these two versions might best be made on the basis of whether information about the basis for feeling of obligation is relevant. A note of caution is in order here, however. Making inferences about the basis for normative commitment from the original version of the scale might require interpretation of responses to one or a subset of the items. The NCS was not developed for this purpose and scores on single items can be unreliable.

How should I analyze my data?

As noted above, once you have administered and scored the TCM Employee Commitment Survey, you should have three scores for each respondent. For best results, the commitment survey should be completed anonymously. The content of the scales can be quite sensitive and, under some circumstances, employees might be reluctant to respond honestly if they believe that they can be identified. Therefore, if administered anonymously, interpretation is based on an assessment of the average score and the level of dispersion around this average. This can be done at an organizational level, or at a department or unit level (assuming sufficient numbers).

How these commitment scores are used for research purposes obviously depends on the nature of the research questions being asked. The most common data analytic approach has been to use correlation or regression to examine relations between the commitment scores and scores on other variables presumed to be their antecedents, correlates or consequences. Other strategies involve the use of ANOVA to compare commitment levels across groups. Appendix B provides a list of references where you can find examples of studies pertaining to the development and consequences of commitment as well as narrative and meta-analytic reviews of existing research. In the

remainder of this section we focus on approaches you might take to examine the behavioral consequences of employee commitment.

Although the vast majority of studies using the TCM employee commitment measures have examined the independent or additive effects of the three components on outcomes of interest (e.g., turnover intention, turnover, attendance, job performance, organizational citizenship behavior), in the original formulation of the theory, Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed the three components of commitment might interact to influence behavior (see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, for a set of propositions concerning the nature of the interaction effects). If so, the nature of the relation between any single component of commitment and an outcome of interest might vary depending on the strength of the other components. Only a handful of studies to date have tested for interaction effects (e.g., Chen & Francesco, 2003; Jaros, 1997; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin & Jackson, 1989; Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990; Somers, 1995). Most have found evidence for interactions. This suggests that interpretation of zero-order correlations might be somewhat misleading. Therefore, we recommend that researchers interested in examining relations between the commitment component and various “outcome” measures consider testing for interactions using moderated multiple regression analyses (for more information on this analytic strategy, see Aiken and West, 1991).

Another approach to examining the joint effects of the commitment components on behavior is to conduct commitment profile comparisons (see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, for propositions concerning behavior differences across profile groups, and Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, for an empirical example). Plotting the three commitment scores will yield a commitment profile for the organization, department, or unit. In theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) the optimal profile should be one in which ACS scores are high (e.g., above the scale midpoint), and the CCS is considerably lower (e.g., below the scale midpoint). Profiles in which the CCS scores are elevated suggest that many employees may feel “trapped” in the organization. Although this can contribute to a relatively low rate of turnover, our research suggests that such employees will do little beyond that which is required of them. To date, only a few studies have been conducted to make profile comparisons (e.g., Gellatly, Meyer & Luchak, 2004; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Preliminary evidence is generally consistent with prediction, but more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Can I alter the scales to suit my purposes?

It is possible to alter the scales without having a major impact on reliability and validity. The strength of the impact, however, will depend on the nature and extent of the revision. The most common revisions, and their potential effects, are described briefly below. Of course, we can only speculate on what the impact will be in any given situation. The evidence for reliability and validity accumulated through years of research (see Allen & Meyer, 1996, 2000) is based largely on the use of the scales in

unaltered form. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that the findings will apply when the scales are modified.

Number of Items. One common modification is to reduce the number of items on each of the three scales, typically as a way of reducing overall survey length. Our experience has been that the scales can be reduced in length to as few as three or four items each without a major impact on reliability. If scale length is an issue, it might be wise to conduct a pilot investigation to assess reliability before conducting the full-scale study. Of course, reliability is only one factor that can affect validity, so even if it can be demonstrated that the reliabilities of shortened scales are acceptable, there is no guarantee that the validity will not be affected. For more information on strategies for scale reduction, see Stanton, Sinar, Balzer, & Smith (2002).

Response Scale. Another common modification is to alter the response scale. Typically, a 7-point disagree-agree scale has been used but, in our experience, a 5-point scale also works quite well. Reducing the number of response options below five is not advised. Obviously, it is important that researchers not directly compare scale scores that are based on different item response scales.

Customizing the Items for the Participating Organization. The items in the TCM Employee Commitment Survey refer to “the organization.” In cases where there may be some confusion about what the organization is, as for example when respondents work for a large subsidiary of an even larger organization, it may be advisable to substitute the relevant organization’s name in the item. In cases where respondents’ organizational affiliations may not be known in advance (e.g., when you collect data through a professional association), it is advisable to modify the instructions to inform respondents as to how you would like them to interpret the term “organization” for purposes of the survey.

Combining Measures. Users who want to measure attitudes other than commitment to the organization might consider mixing statements from the commitment scales with statements from other measures (e.g., job satisfaction). This is certainly possible as long as a common response scale is used. Doing so, however, could create problems. On the one hand, mixing the commitment scales with measures with a very different focus (e.g., attitudes toward supervisors, co-workers, compensation systems) can cause confusion for respondents – imagine carrying on a conversation where all of this was being discussed at once. On the other hand, mixing content can lead to artificial inflation of the relationship between scores on the measures. In situations where the other measures are included to help identify factors or conditions in the workplace that might contribute to employees’ commitment, or lack of commitment, the inflation of relationships could lead to erroneous conclusions. In light of these potential problems, it is usually advisable to include the commitment measures in a separate section of a more comprehensive attitude survey. A decision to do otherwise should be made with caution. For more information on item context effects, see Schwarz (1999).

Reversing the negatively keyed items. The use of negatively keyed items in attitude surveys is intended to control for acquiescence response bias (i.e., the tendency to respond affirmatively to items regardless of their content). While acquiescence response bias can be a problem, there is some evidence that using reverse-keyed items can create confusion for some respondents. An investigation using the TCM commitment scales indeed found evidence for a small “keying factor” resulting from the use of reverse keyed items (see Magazine, Williams, & Williams, 1996). Therefore, some users prefer to reword the reverse-keyed items to minimize potential confusion. There has yet to be a systematic investigation of the impact of doing so, but we believe that it will be minimal. Therefore, we suggest that the reverse-keyed items be reworded if there is any reason to be concerned that reverse-keyed items might be a problem for the respondent sample.

Adapting the scales to measure commitment to other foci. Researchers sometimes want to measure commitment to foci other than the organization itself (e.g., occupation, supervisor, work team, customers) and inquire as to whether it is appropriate to simply replace “organization” in the commitment items with a descriptor of the relevant target. We agree with the importance of acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of all workplace commitments but do not advocate this simple target substitution approach. The terms of a commitment can be very different depending on the target. For example, staying might be a relevant behavioral outcome of commitment to an organization or occupation, but is less relevant when the target is a supervisor or customer, and not at all relevant with the target of the commitment is a goal or change initiative. Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) recently explained how our three-component model of commitment can be adapted for the study of other workplace commitments. They also describe a strategy for developing measures of the three components of these commitments. For examples of research that has applied the three component model to other foci, see Becker and Kernan (2003), Bentein, Stinglhamber, and Vandenberghe (2002), Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000), Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), Meyer et al. (1993), Stinglhamber, Bentein, and Vandenberghe (2002), and Vandenberghe, Stinglhamber, Bentein, and Delhaise (2001).

Translation. Some users might want to administer the commitment scales in languages other than English, either within a largely English-speaking culture, or in a non-English-speaking country or culture. We do not yet have a standard set of translated scales. However, others have translated the scales for research purposes, with varying degrees of success. There are many factors to consider in translating and using measures in countries or cultures other those where they were originally developed and validated. Below, we provide sources where you can go to get more information about the potential impact of translation and the cross-cultural validity of the three-component model of commitment. For more detailed information about translation and transporting measures to other cultures, see Hulin (1987) and Hui and Triandis (1985).

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APPENDIX A

Commitment Scales

Instructions

Listed below is a series of statements that represent feelings that individuals might have about the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working, please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling a number from 1 to 7 using the scale below.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = undecided
- 5 = slightly agree
- 6 = agree
- 7 = strongly agree

Original Version (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

Affective Commitment Scale

- 1) I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
- 2) I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
- 3) I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
- 4) I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one. (R)
- 5) I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization. (R)
- 6) I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization. (R)
- 7) This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
- 8) I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization. (R)

Continuance Commitment Scale

- 1) I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up. (R)
- 2) It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
- 3) Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.
- 4) It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization now. (R)
- 5) Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
- 6) I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
- 7) One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
- 8) One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice -another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here.

Normative Commitment Scale

- 1) I think that people these days move from company to company too often.
- 2) I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization. (R)
- 3) Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me. (R)
- 4) One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain.
- 5) If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization.
- 6) I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one's organization.
- 7) Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers.
- 8) I do not think that wanting to be a 'company man' or 'company woman' is sensible anymore. (R)

Revised Version (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993)

Affective Commitment Scale

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
3. I do not feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization. (R)
4. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization. (R)
5. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization. (R)
6. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

Continuance Commitment Scale

1. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
3. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.
4. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
5. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.
6. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.

Normative Commitment Scale

1. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer. (R)
2. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
3. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.
4. This organization deserves my loyalty.
5. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.
6. I owe a great deal to my organization.

Note. (R) indicates a reverse-keyed item. Scores on these items should be reflected (i.e., 1 = 7, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, 4 = 4, 5 = 3, 6 = 2, 7 = 1) before computing scale scores.

APPENDIX B

Sources for Additional Information

The most complete and comprehensive source of information about the commitment measures and the three-component model of commitment is as follows.

Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1997). *Commitment in the workplace: Theory, research, and application*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Additional information on more specific issues can be found in the following sources.

- For information on how the commitment model can serve as the basis for the development and implementation of employee retention strategies, see:

Meyer, J. P., & Topolnytsky, L. (2000). *Best practices: Employee retention*. Toronto, Canada: Carswell.

- For more information about the development of the measures, and evidence for their psychometric properties, see:

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1990). The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 1-18.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1996). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: An examination of construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 49, 252-276.

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Meyer, J. P., Allen, N. J., & Smith, C. A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78, 538-551.

Powell, D., & Meyer, J. P. (2004). Becker's side-bet theory revisited: A test of the theory within the context of Meyer and Allen's three-component model of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65, 157-177.

- For summaries of research pertaining to the development and consequences of employee commitment, see:

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (1996). Affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization: An examination of construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 49*, 252-276.

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (2000). Construct validation in organizational behavior research: The case of organizational commitment. In R. D. Goffin and E. Helms (Eds.), *Problems and solutions in human assessment: Honoring Douglas N. Jackson at seventy*. Kluwer Academic.

Meyer, J. P., Stanley, D. J., Herscovitch, L., & Topolnytsky, L. (2002). Affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization: A meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 62*, 20-52

- For more information on the interpretation of commitment profiles, see:

Gellatly, I. R., Meyer, J. P., & Luchak, A. A. (2004). Organizational commitment and behavior: Testing for interdependencies among three forms of commitment. Unpublished manuscript, School of Business, University of Alberta.

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Wasti, S. A. (2004, April). *Commitment profiles: The combined influence of organizational commitment forms on job outcomes*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Chicago, IL.

- For information about the cross-cultural generalizability of the model and the impact of translation on the psychometric properties of the scales, see:

Allen, N. J., & Meyer, J. P. (2000). Construct validation in organizational behavior research: The case of organizational commitment. In R. D. Goffin and E. Helms (Eds.), *Problems and solutions in human assessment: Honoring Douglas N. Jackson at seventy*. Kluwer Academic.

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- For information on the relevance of employee commitment in the changing world of work, see:

Meyer, J. P. (1999). Building employee commitment in and era of change: Rx for HRM. *The HRM Research Quarterly*, 3(3), 1-4.

Herscovitch, L., & Meyer, J. P. (2002). Commitment to organizational change: Extension of a three-component model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 474-487.

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