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Increasing Organizational Commitment:
Empowering Employees in the Workplace

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Abstract

Attaining organizational commitment from employees plays a vital role in the success of a business. This is because commitment ensures loyalty and stability within an environment. Employee empowerment is also another critical element of business as it ensures motivation and engagement from the organization's workforce. By using Natalie Allen and John Meyer's three types of commitment as a major lens, this paper analyzes appropriate literature related to empowerment leadership. The correlation between organizational commitment and employee empowerment is discussed and it indicates that empowerment can positively impact an employee's commitment to their work organization. Employees can experience burnout if their jobs get too overwhelming. That is why it is crucial that appropriate applications of empowerment are applied to the organization's leadership through autonomy, resources, and overall job satisfaction. This paper also provides a brief guide that managers and organizations can use when re-evaluating their empowerment levels to increase organizational commitment.

Background

In business, companies have many employees they must try to keep interested and engaged in their work so that work gets completed and overall goals of the organization are achieved. If an employee is not motivated to be consistently engaged, there is a higher risk of the employee quitting and the organization's productivity suffering.

Commitment to an organization can provide various benefits for both the employee and the business such as: increased participation, productivity, job satisfaction and career development, and trust (Hanaysha 299-300). According to psychology professors, Natalie Allen and John Meyer, organizational commitment is based on the differing levels of attachment and

shared interests that an employee has with their employer. They also explain that there are three types of commitment that one can have toward an organization: affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment is an “emotional attachment and involvement” or *wanting* to stay with the organization (Allen and Meyer 2). Continuance commitment is the feeling of *needing* to stay with the organization based on the perceived costs of leaving (Allen and Meyer 3). Finally, normative commitment is the feeling of moral and experiential obligation of staying (Allen and Meyer 3). Ideally businesses would want to see all employees have a combination of all three types of attachment in order to build a strong relationship and sense of loyalty with their employees. But this begs the question: How does an organization create opportunities for employees to experience this commitment?

In chapter 7 titled “Power” in Rosabeth Kanter’s book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, she explains that empowerment can be a very important influencer on motivation as it gives people the power to act on their decisions. Kanter says “when more people are empowered—that is, allowed to have control over the conditions that make their actions possible—then more is accomplished, more gets done” (*Men and women of the Corporation* Ch. 7). In Donald Brown’s book, *An Experiential Approach to Organization Development*, empowerment is further defined through the perspective of an employee of an organization. Brown states that “empowerment is the delegation of power and decision making to lower levels, and the promulgation of a shared vision of the future, engaging all employees so that they develop a personal sense of pride and responsibility” (Brown 147). With a shared vision, employees may feel as though they are contributing more to their work because they are engaging with their personal interests as well.

Proposed Research and Research Question

In this paper, I plan to investigate the benefits of organizational commitment within the workplace and how to use empowerment to generate more commitment. To do this, I will use Allen and Meyer's levels of commitment as a model to analyze different studies and pieces of literature that examine the correlation between feelings of empowerment and the devotion an employee has to an organization. I will be using various articles found in databases like Research Gate, Science Direct, and Business Source Premier.

I will examine authors' ideas and studies of empowerment through autonomy, power distribution, and work dynamics and identity, as well as how empowerment made study participants more loyal and overall committed to the organization or activity. I will answer the question: How does employee empowerment lead to organizational commitment?

Discussion

Organizations want their employees to be engaged and committed to their jobs so that quality work gets done. Employees want to feel like their work matters not just to their themselves, but also to their co-workers, organization, and the external world. If this is achieved and the employee is enthusiastic about working for that particular cause, then the employee is already committing to the organization. But to do this, employees must feel like they belong in the work environment; they must be *empowered*.

Organizations will receive more commitment from their employees by incorporating empowerment within their leadership styles. Organizations can increase levels of empowerment by sharing power, building trust, and evaluating job satisfaction with the employee. They also

need to be on the lookout for evidence of burnout, which could prevent employees from fully engaging or committing with their work and organization.

Empowerment by Autonomy

One can be empowered by being given more autonomy or power. In the *Harvard Business Review* online article “When Empowering Employees Works, and When It Doesn’t,” authors Allan Lee, Sara Willis, and Amy Wei Tian discuss the results of their meta-analysis about empowering leadership. By analyzing 105 different studies from across the world, they found that managers who used empowerment, experienced increased levels of creativity and citizenship behaviors from the employees (Lee et al.). When the managers delegated more authority, asked employees for their input, and encouraged “autonomous decision making,” the employees were more likely to “help others in the workplace, volunteer for extra assignments, and be willing to support their organization outside of an official capacity” (Lee et al.). Just like Brown’s idea that empowerment can start from a shared vision, if the employees wanted to support the organization outside of work, then they probably shared some of the same interests or goals with the organization. This behavior sounds a lot like Allen and Meyer’s commitment model, specifically affective commitment, as the employees are *wanting* the organization to succeed, which can lead to or increase the feeling of *wanting* to stay with the organization themselves.

Lee et al. also state that “When a leader tries to empower employees, he or she asks them to take on additional challenges and responsibility at work.” More responsibility and challenges can lead to a mentoring style of leadership, where the manager guides the subordinate to help

them gain self-esteem and the skills needed to finish a job strong. Mentoring can lead to more trust between the employee and the manager or even the organization.

Preventing Burnout

Although additional responsibility allows the employee to have more power, organizations and managers have to be careful about the amount of new responsibilities their empowerment techniques give employees. If there is too much pressure, employees could face disengagement from their work, that would lead to lack of commitment. In the article “Areas of Worklife: A Structured Approach to Organizational Predictors of Job Burnout”, Michael Leiter and Christina Maslach break down what it means to have too much pressure, or to experience burnout. They define burnout as “A psychological syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficiency which is experienced in response to chronic job stressors” (Leiter and Maslach 93). If employees have more responsibility or more autonomy to make their own decisions, they might start to feel overwhelmed and feel like they don’t have what it takes to put forth their best efforts.

Leiter and Maslach further explain that “Burnout involves a layer point in the process when the person has been working for a while and is experiencing a more chronic misfit between self and the job” (101). They found that increased burnout decreases commitment to the organization as their work behaviors change based on their levels of exhaustion (Leiter and Maslach 125). This means that if the employee is feeling frustrated or exhausted and is left feeling this way for a while, they can further detach from their job. This poses a threat to the organization as the employee eventually won’t be committed to the organization in *any* way and has no reason to stay.

Organizations can prevent burnout by finding the balance between providing the employee with too many responsibilities and too few responsibilities. Their employees must feel engaged enough within their work to not burnout. To find this balance, employers must find the elements that give employees the feeling of sharing power.

Using Kanter's Lines of Power Model

One way to prevent burnout and increase levels of organizational commitment is to examine how power is distributed within an organization and then delegate more shared power to the lacking areas. Kanter explains in her online *Harvard Business Review* article "Power Failure in Management Circuits," that power comes from three elements: "lines of supply, lines of information, and lines of support." Lines of supply represents the necessary resources required to do the work such as equipment, money, and additional rewards (Kanter "Power Failure"). Lines of information represents having accurate knowledge necessary to effectively solve problems and complete tasks (Kanter "Power Failure"). Lines of support represents having guidance and getting feedback in order to improve work quality (Kanter "Power Failure"). These three elements of power are important to share with employees because if the employees are fighting for the materials they need to be successful in their jobs, they will quickly experience exhaustion and frustration.

In the article, "Work Engagement and Organizational Commitment of New Graduate Nurses," authors Julia Cho, Heather Laschinger, and Carol Wong used this three-element power model to see how committed graduate nurses were to their hospital organizations. In their study, Cho et al. sent out a questionnaire survey to 496 new graduate nurses and found that while the graduate nurses were experiencing high access to opportunity and added responsibility, they

were feeling high pressures to perform at a higher level (Cho et al. 55). With the graduate nurses having “the least access to information” and “only moderate levels of support” (Cho et al. 54), 68% of them experienced “experienced high levels of burnout” (Cho et al. 55). This proves that a lack of access to power can lead to burnout. Within fast-paced industries like nursing and business, resources, information, and support must be constantly shared to keep up with changing policies and to achieve organizational goals. Because of this, Kanter’s three lines of power model can be very useful to evaluate how power is distributed throughout an organization and how the sources of power can be improved to provide employees with a sense of empowerment.

Evaluating Job Satisfaction

Another way to prevent burnout and to increase commitment is to make sure that employees are satisfied with their job. To achieve a combination of Allen and Meyer’s three levels of commitment, employees must feel like they belong in their job position and their work organization. Hari Vasudevan, the author of the article “Examining the Relationship of Training on Job Satisfaction and Organizational Effectiveness” says that an “increase [in] job satisfaction increases performance and dedication to the organization...[and] can influence the employee’s attitude and view toward their job” (192). In other words, when an employee is engaged and satisfied with their job, they can commit more to the organization through Allen and Meyer’s levels of affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Vasudevan also states that training for a particular job position is a crucial part of job satisfaction as it “is a long-term allegiance to all employees because they have to learn new skills and knowledge which become a turning point for their success in the workplace...” (185).

Training is the base of success as it gives employees the chance to build on their skills and learn new things that can benefit them not only during their current position, but also for future jobs. When employees learn new things and feel like they have power or can contribute and be successful in their work, they will be more willing to work harder.

Training can be expensive and not just monetarily. Training requires time and resources from the organization and time spent learning from the new employee. It's an investment and if training is effective at teaching employees new skills, the employees will be more likely to have a better perception of the organization and have a mix of Allen and Meyer's commitment levels. They will want to stay at the organization because they are improving their skills as well as investing time for training. They will feel like they ought to stay because they are learning and because the company is spending time on them. They will feel like they need to stay so that they don't waste the time they spent training and getting familiar with the organization.

Teamwork and work dynamics can also affect one's feelings of job satisfaction. In the article, "Teamwork, Skill Development and Employee Welfare," authors Duncan Gallie, Ying Zhou, Alan Felstead, and Francis Green conducted a study to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and different kinds of teamwork. They found that compared to individual projects, teamwork provided more opportunities to develop skills and to gain perspective from others; but if teamwork is not monitored effectively based on the motivation levels of the group members, group work intensity can lead to a decrease of satisfaction within the employee's job and organization (37-39). Teamwork allows individuals to collaborate with others and see things they might not have seen otherwise; and when a group is empowered to achieve a goal, there is more room to positively influence motivation.

Gallie et al. also found that when a group is given more power or autonomy, they experienced higher job satisfaction (37-38). This is likely due to the employee's feelings of being empowered, which provides confidence to the employee in their team's ability to get a project done. With this in mind, managers and organizations can experiment with different levels of autonomy in teams to find the right balance between group intensity and skill development to increase their employee's overall job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Gallie et al. further explain that "Self-directive teams were associated with greater opportunities for the employee to exercise individual initiative in their jobs; more opportunity and motivation to learn on the job; stronger commitment to the organization, and more frequent work effort over and above what is strictly required by the job" (41). Gallie et al. noticed that teams that had no team manager or leader were more self-motivated and contributed more not only to their job, but also to their organization. In other words, when empowerment leadership was encouraged within the work environment, the employees were more compelled to commit to their work organization.

Conclusion

Organizational commitment is critical to the business world because without it, companies have no loyalty from their employees and are left vulnerable. Employee empowerment is a very important element within organizational commitment as it distributes more shared power to each individual and motivates employees to develop their skills not only for their work within the organization, but also for themselves.

When employees experience more shared power- or empowerment- within their jobs, they are more likely to remain with the organization. If employees receive too much added

responsibility or don't have the resources to be successful at their job, burnout occurs and commitment to the organizations decreases. This is why managers must find the right balance of empowerment to use so that employees are consistently satisfied within their job and organization.

Implications

The research conducted in this paper was intended to develop more of an understanding of what it means to be committed to an organization as an employee. It was also intended to study the relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment. As Lee et al. point out, empowerment isn't just beneficial to the fast-paced industries; it impacts various industries. This is because empowerment is generally what keeps operations moving and employees working. Because an organization with achievable goals and a higher committed staff is more likely to succeed, managers or organizations should use empowerment techniques to increase their employees' organizational commitment. Based on the studies and ideas analyzed in this paper, the brief guide on the following page was designed for managers to use to empower the individuals they employ in order to increase levels of belonging and productivity within the workplace.

A Manager's Brief Guide to Employee Empowerment

- Offer frequent opportunities for additional responsibilities so employees can be encouraged to develop their skills at more of an even pace.
 - Do not add too much pressure or too many new responsibilities to an employee's job.
 - As a manager, ask yourself these questions: *Do my employees feel like they are challenged enough? When do my employees feel most frustrated or experience the most work pressure? What types of responsibilities do I tend to add to their job duties? Do I encourage my employees to challenge themselves and learn new skills? What skills are my employees looking to develop to advance in their careers? How do my employees feel in terms of being satisfied within their job?*

Note: You may need to do some surveying from your employees to answer these questions.

- Be sure to provide continuous support and guidance while still allowing employees to make their own decisions.
 - Establish a bond with each employee immediately after they are hired to introduce a mentorship relationship.
 - In addition to the questions from the previous takeaway, ask yourself these questions: *Have I made it clear to my employees that they can come to me if they have any questions or guidance? Do I make myself available when an employee wants or needs to talk to me? Are my employees receiving all the resources they need to be successful within their job? What are the career goals of each of my*

employees and how can I help to get them there? What other kinds of support do my employees need or want from me as a manager?

Note: You may need to do some surveying from your employees to answer these questions.

- Evaluate training processes and make sure the training sessions are motivating employees to stay with the organization.
 - Provide introductory training for new hires and also offer or require occasional training for skill development. Training that is engaging and relevant to necessary or desirable skills will improve perceptions of the job or organization.
 - Ask yourself: *What skills do these trainings develop? Do my employees feel that the skills they are learning are valuable? Do they feel like the skills learned from the training are relevant to their job or their personal goals? After training sessions, are employees applying the techniques and skills they learned? Do my employees feel motivated or dedicated to practice the skills the training provides?*

Note: You may need to do some surveying from your employees to answer these questions.

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