

The Relationship Between Index of Social Position and Organizational Commitment of Taiwanese Expatriates Working in Mainland China

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ABSTRACT

A study of 389 Taiwanese expatriates working in Mainland China was conducted to investigate the relationship between Hollingshead's 2-Factor Index of Social Position and organizational commitment. The methods of data analysis used in this study consisted of exploratory factor analysis (EFA), internal consistency reliability, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc comparison tests. Findings indicated that Taiwanese expatriates with different educational level, occupational level, and index of social position had shown different perceptions on sub-variables of organizational commitment and general organizational commitment. Furthermore, occupational level had significant negative impact on affective and normative commitment. A further study to replicate the research in different countries in order to explore the relationships between Hollingshead's 2-factor Index of Social Position and organizational commitment of expatriates was recommended.

Keywords: *Two-Factor Index of Social Position, Organizational Commitment, Expatriates*

INTRODUCTION

With global businesses relocating employees, there are employees living and working abroad as international employees (Tharenou, 2002). Business is no longer limited by national boundaries, and retention of valuable expatriates is becoming a very important issue for international corporations (Ashamalla, 1998). Therefore, a "major challenge faced by expatriate managers is developing reasonable levels of worker commitment and satisfaction among host nation employees" (Peterson, Puia, & Suess, 2003, p. 73). In addition, a "failed international assignment represents substantial costs to both the corporation involved and the individual expatriate" (Ashamalla, 1998, p. 54); hence, expatriate employees have increasingly played an important role in an organization (Guzzo, 1996), and organizations have increasingly realized that it is necessary not only to have expatriate employees who are willing to live and work abroad, but also to have a staff that identifies closely with, and supports, the organization. There are many factors that impact people's organizational commitment. The Index of Social Position could be one of them, however, only a few studies were found that examined the relationships emphasizing expatriate employees (Chen, 2001; Hutchings, 2003). No study has been found concerning the relationship between the Index of Social Position and organizational commitment of Taiwanese expatriates who were working in mainland China. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to investigate the relationship between the Index of Social Position and organizational commitment of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China. In particular, this study compares the differences in Hollingshead's 2- Factor Index of Social Position and organizational commitment.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Independent Variables: Index of Social Position

The original Index of Social Position developed by Hollingshead (1971) had three forms, two-factor form, three-factor form, and four-factor form. The educational and occupational scales, on the other hand, have broader applicability and have been combined since the 1950s as a two –factor index.

Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment

The construct most often studied to explain employee attachment or loyalty to an organization is organizational commitment (Sommer, Bae, & Luthans, 1996). Two general forms of organizational commitment have been defined by theorists: moral and calculative. Moral orientation is attitude in the form of an attachment between an individual and an organization. This attitude-based commitment includes identification, involvement, and loyalty. It tends to make employees desire to maintain membership in the organization and reduces their desire to leave as they have a strong identification with the organization's goals and values (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Park, Gowan & Hwang, 2002). The calculative perspective is based upon exchange theory that explains organizational commitment as an investment that people make when they join an organization. After membership, all actions taken by the person are considered to justify the act of joining (Barge & Schlueter, 1988; Sager & Johnstone, 1989). In addition, organizational commitment could be linked to employees' attitude and behavior, such as intention to leave, absenteeism, actual turnover, and customer service quality (Hartmann & Bambacas 2000; Khan, 2005; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004). Employees who have a higher level of commitment to their organization will exert higher levels of effort toward the organization, and identify with the organization's goals (Scholl, 1981). Furthermore, Becker (1960) introduced the side-bet theory that focuses on the structural and transactional relationship between individuals and organizations. This theory has led to the development of different models of organizational commitment including Meyer and Allen's (1991). Meyer and Allen's model of organizational commitment which is the most popular conceptualization that is used to explain organizational commitment, is based on the side-bet theory, and includes the three components of normative, affective and continuance commitment (Hartmann & Bambacas, 2000; Tan & Akhtar, 1998; Wasti, 2003). Affective commitment is a sense of attachment and a feeling of belonging to the organization. Normative commitment is a feeling of obligation on the part of employees to maintain employment. Continuance commitment is an awareness of costs associated with leaving the organization or awareness of lack of alternatives (Hartmann & Bambacas, 2000; Tan & Akhtar, 1998).

Expatriate Employees

Expatriates are international assignees and employees who are sent by a firm from the home country to work in a foreign location. Most expatriate employees are managerial employees who go to work abroad and are assigned significant responsibilities. With the increase in the globalization of business, expatriate employees are becoming very important and their numbers are expected to continue to grow. Hence, expatriate employees have an important role as representatives of the home office and as bearers of organizational culture (Ali, Krishnan, & Azim, 1997; Guzzo, 1996). Expatriate failures, such as lost business or suppliers, the potential damage to customers, and the negative effects on staff members and employees in the local market (Frank E. Allen & Associates, n.d.), could be costly to both the corporation involved and the individual expatriate. Consequences include financial failures, caused by increased direct costs, indirect costs, replacement costs, reduced productivity, or unstable corporate image, and lost sales (Ashamalla, 1998). The possible causes of expatriate failure include selection criteria, training, family situations, and work-related attitudes, particularly satisfaction and commitment, and job characteristics (Bluedorn, 1982; Naumann, 1993; Wetzel and Gallagher, 1990). Furthermore, studies by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) and Tung (1988) have shown that a significant percentage of expatriate employees do not perform effectively abroad, and as a result return home earlier than expected.

Expatriates in Mainland China

"As the world's biggest and fastest growing country market" (Li & Kleiner, 2001, p. 50), the international employment in mainland China has rapidly expanded. Therefore, most multinationals have tried to find ways to integrate mainland China into their global strategy. However, it is difficult for western expatriate business managers to deal with local employees in mainland China. The expatriate's way of life is very different and they have to perform in an unfamiliar work environment. They have to adopt new cultures and a social context that is fundamentally different from their own (Erbacher, D'Netto, & Espafia, 2006; Selmer, 2001; Selmer, 2005). Li and Kleiner's (2001) research study reported a difficult human relationship problem found by senior managers at multinational companies in mainland China.

Research Hypotheses

- H1 Index of Social Position is a significant explanatory variable of organizational commitment in Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China.
- H_{1a} Index of Social Position is a significant explanatory variable of affective commitment in Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China.
- H_{1b} Index of Social Position is a significant explanatory variable of normative commitment in Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China.
- H_{1c} Index of Social Position is a significant explanatory variable of continuance commitment in Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative and correlational (explanatory) online survey research design was used to explain the relationships between Hollingshead's (1971) two-factor Index of Social Position and organizational commitment. The data was collected by an online survey from Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China. A self-report survey consisting of two parts was used in this study. The first two questions in Part 1 (Index of Social Position) are filter questions developed by the researcher to identify a participant's qualifications (at least 18 years old, and not an owner or a significant shareholder who had decision making responsibility for the company). Part 1 is the *Index of Social Position* developed by Hollingshead's (1971) educational and occupational scales, and Index of Social Position. The questions for the occupational and educational scales were adopted from Hollingshead's 2-Factor Index of Social Position that appeared in Miller and Salkind (2002). Scores are added in a formula that weight education and occupational levels, to produce the Index of Social Position (ISP). Each occupational and educational scale has seven choices. Each choice equals one point. The ISP is calculated by the formula of (occupation score x 7) + (education score x 4). The ranges of ISP scores were from 11 to 77. The higher scores are associated with a lower Index of Social Position. Part 2, *Organizational Commitment*, uses the *Three-Component Model (TCM) Employee Survey* as developed by Meyer and Allen (1991; 1997). This 18-item Likert scale consists of three dimensions of organizational commitment as developed by Meyer and Allen (1991; 1997): affective commitment (6 items), three dimensions of organizational commitment reflected a psychological state of employees as the basis for maintaining employment in an organization that includes a desire (affective commitment), an obligation (normative commitment), and a need (continuance commitment) (Meyer, & Allen, 1991). The seven-point Likert-type scale response categories of (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree was used to measure the perception of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China concerning their organizational commitment to the company by which they were employed. Items 3, 4, 5, and 13 are negatively worded and require reverse scoring. The score on these items were reflected as 1=7, 2=6, 3=5, 4=4, 5=3, 6=2, 7=1 before computing scale scores. The range of scores were all 6 to 42 for each of the three dimensions of affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. The higher scores are associated with a greater degree of organizational commitment to the company for which they are now working. The total scale scores of MSQ are 18 to 126.

Methods of Data Analysis

In order to examine the research hypotheses, all of the data collected from the data producing sample through the online survey was analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14. The methods of data analysis used in this study consisted of exploratory factor analysis (EFA), internal consistency reliability, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc comparison tests.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a way to help an investigator to understand the relationships among variables, represent the validity of constructs, extract common factors, and reproduce or explain the correlation matrix by examining the correlation of large sets of items among interval-level variables (Leech et al., 2005). The organizational commitment included three dimensions, affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment with each dimension having six items. To examine the underlying structure for these variables, principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation was executed. Three factors, affective, normative, and continuance commitment were extracted with eigenvalues of 3.079 (20.682% of the variance), 6.847 (25.605% of the variance), and 1.376 (16.501 % of the variance), respectively. The loading values of all items were greater than .50, indicating the validity of organizational commitment was acceptable (Leech et al., 2005).

Reliability Analysis

To assess the reliability of the instrument in a study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha is the most commonly used method to compute the internal consistency reliability (Leech et al., 2005). As shown in Table 1, the coefficients of all the variables were greater than .70 (ranging from .742 to .894) which indicates the item construct scale for each variable has rational consistency reliability.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Variable	Item	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Affective commitment	4	.894
Normative commitment	9	.893
Continuance commitment	5	.812
General organizational commitment	18	.742

Descriptive Analysis

Through an online survey, there were 641 eligible participants actually participated in this study. Of the 641 participants, 252 gave incomplete responses. After the incomplete surveys were deleted, 389 surveys were useable, which represented a response rate of 5.5%.

Of the 389 participants, 129 (33.2%) were female, and 260 (66.8%) were male. The educational level of the 389 participants indicated that 343 (88.2%) had graduated from a four-year college, 28 (7.2%) had received high school degrees, 15 (3.9%) had received ten to eleven years of schooling, and 3 (0.8%) had received seven to nine years of schooling. For the occupational level, there were 9 (2.3%) higher executives of large concerns and major professionals, 170 (43.7%) business managers and lesser professionals, 94 (24.2%) administrative professionals and minor professionals, 69 (17.7%) clerical and sales workers and technicians, 43 (11.1%) skilled manual employees, and 4 (1%) machine operators and semiskilled employees. Of the 389 participants, the mean index of social position was 28.99 points

One-Way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA was used to assess "differences on a scale dependent variable between two or more groups comprising the levels of one independent variable or factor" (Leech et al., p. 129, 2005). In this study, one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there are significant differences in organizational commitment according to educational level, occupation level and Index of Social Position (ISP). If there was a significant F value, then Tukey's post hoc comparison test would be conducted next.

Educational Level

Table 2 provides the results of ANOVA comparisons for sub-variables (affective, normative, and continuance commitment) of organizational commitment and general organizational commitment that according to the educational level of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China. ANOVA comparisons indicated a significant difference for

affective commitment, and normative commitment ($p < .05$). Moreover, Taiwanese expatriates with a professional degree showed higher affective commitment to their companies than did four-year college graduates.

Table 2. ANOVA and Post Hoc Comparisons of Organizational Commitment According to Educational Level

Variable/ Educational Level	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Post Hoc Comparison Tukey HSD
Affective commitment	4.181	.003*	.005
Professional			
Four-year college graduate			
High-school graduate			
Ten to eleven years of school			
Seven to nine years of school			
Professional > Four-year college graduate			
Normative commitment	3.247	.012*	
Professional			
Four-year college graduate			
High-school graduate			
Ten to eleven years of school			
Seven to nine years of school			
Continuance commitment	.119	.976	
Professional			
Four-year college graduate			
High-school graduate			
Ten to eleven years of school			
Seven to nine years of school			
General organizational commitment	.564	.689	
Professional			
Four-year college graduate			
High-school graduate			
Ten to eleven years of school			
Seven to nine years of school			

$p < .05$ (Significant)

Occupational Level

With regard to occupational level, there is a strong correlation with affective, normative, and continuance commitment in the Pearson correlation analysis. Occupational level also had a significant negative impact on affective and normative commitment. Furthermore, the results of ANOVA comparisons for organizational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance commitment) that according to the occupational level of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China indicated significant differences for all variables ($p < .05$). According to occupational level, Tukey's post hoc comparison indicated that Taiwanese expatriates with positions as higher executives of large concerns and major professionals perceived they had higher affective commitment and general commitment than expatriates in positions as machine operators and semiskilled employees. Taiwanese expatriates with positions as business managers and lesser professionals perceived higher affective commitment than expatriates in positions as clerical and sales workers and technicians, administrative personnel and minor professionals, and skilled manual employees. Taiwanese expatriates in positions as higher executives of large concerns and major professionals and business managers and lesser professionals perceived they had higher normative commitment than expatriates in positions as administrative personnel and minor professionals, clerical and sales workers and technicians, and skilled manual employees. Taiwanese expatriates in positions as business managers and lesser professionals perceived higher general commitment than expatriates in positions as clerical and sales workers and technicians, and skilled manual employees (see Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA and Post Hoc Comparisons of Organizational Commitment According to Occupational Level

Variable/ Occupational Level	F	p	Post Hoc Comparison Tukey HSD
Affective commitment	10.086	.000*	
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
1> 5			.031
2> 3			.000
2> 4			.000
2> 5			.000
Normative commitment	16.845	.000*	
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
1> 3			.002
1> 4			.000
1> 5			.000
2> 3			.000
2> 4			.000
2> 5			.000
Continuance commitment	2.828	.016*	
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
General organizational commitment	6.540	.000*	
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
1> 5			.018
2> 4			.001
2> 5			.000

Note. $p < .05$ (Significant). 1: Higher executives of large concerns and major professionals; 2: Business managers and lesser professionals; 3: Administrative personnel and minor professionals; 4: Clerical and sales workers and technicians; 5: Skilled manual employees; 6: Machine operators and semiskilled employees.

Index of Social Position

The results of ANOVA comparisons for organizational commitment (affective, normative, and continuance commitment) according to the Index of Social Position (ISP) of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China indicated a significant difference for all variables ($p < .05$). Higher scores for ISP means that the Taiwanese expatriates have a lower social position. Tukey's post hoc comparison indicated that Taiwanese expatriates whose ISP scores were 11 to 19 and 20 to 28 demonstrated higher general organizational commitment and normative commitment to their companies than those with scores from 38 to 46. They are also revealed to have higher normative commitment than those with scores from 29 to 37. Taiwanese expatriates with ISP scores from 29 to 37 perceived greater general organizational commitment than those with scores from 38 to 46.

Table 4. ANOVA and Post Hoc Comparisons of Organizational Commitment According to Index of Social Position

Variable/ ISP	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	Post Hoc Comparison Tukey HSD
Affective commitment	9.251	.000*	
11-19			
20-28			
29-37			
38-46			
47-55			
20-28 > 29-37			.001
20-28 > 38-46			.007
Normative commitment	14.938	.000*	
11-19			
20-28			
29-37			
38-46			
47-55			
11-19 > 29-37			.000
11-19 > 38-46			.000
20-28 > 29-37			.001
20-28 > 38-46			.000
Continuance commitment	1.953	.104	
11-19			
20-28			
29-37			
38-46			
47-55			
General organizational commitment	6.606	.000*	
11-19			
20-28			
29-37			
38-46			
47-55			
11-19 > 38-46			.000
20-28 > 38-46			.000
29-37 > 38-46			.015

p < .05 (Significant)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that Taiwanese expatriates with different educational levels, occupational levels, and indices of social position had shown different perceptions on sub-variables of organizational commitment and general organizational commitment. Furthermore, occupational level had significant negative impact on affective and normative commitment. Although many existing theories and models have provided a framework to research the impact of organizational commitment, these theories and models need further development with current business globalization. Specifically, applications to expatriate employees that can comprehensively explain the focus on organizational commitment for expatriate employees are needed. Since mainland China instituted its “Open Door” policy, there has been a flow of foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland that has resulted in a substantially increased number of foreign business executives working there (Selmer, 1998). Moreover, for many western organizations, mainland China has become a very important country in which to expand their Asian production and marketing operations. The findings of this study provided information for global corporations to choose the right expatriate employee in order to avoid failed international assignments that may cause substantial costs for both the corporation involved and the individual expatriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

To further explore the relationships among educational level, occupational level, and social position, and organizational commitment, future study should be based on the interpretations and conclusions in this study.

1. Further study should explore the impact of educational level, occupational level, and social position on organizational commitment in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of their relationships.
2. This study provided overall research on the relationships among educational level, occupational level, and organizational commitment of Taiwanese expatriates working in mainland China. Further studies should undertake an in-depth examination of their relationships with different target populations based on the findings of this study in order to gain better understandings about their relationships.
3. Observations or interviews combined with surveys should be considered for future studies to examine the relationships among educational level, occupational level, and organizational commitment.

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