DETERMINANTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES: A THEORETICAL MODEL WITH AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:
The current economic and social recession is taking its toll on public sector organizations, which suffer continuous budget restrictions and restrict service provision. Public employees are directly affected by such circumstances, worsening their working conditions and decreasing their satisfaction and engagement levels, which in turn will affect their performance and their organizational behaviour. Indeed, there is a need for public organizations to make more with less, and public employees have to endure facing the increasing demands of their citizen-customers with reduced resources, which will have an effect on the way they relate to their job (employee engagement) and their motivation and satisfaction levels at work. This paper presents a comprehensive review of the literature on the role of job engagement and job satisfaction as determinants of organizational commitment for local administration employees. Our research contribution is the development of a model in which the most relevant variables are put in value from a theoretical point of view, trying to establish the direct and indirect relationships that they might have over public employees' behaviour. The model takes into account the mediation effect of cultural values, since different country cultures result in different work environments.

Keywords: public employees, organisational commitment, job engagement, job satisfaction, cultural values

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Europe is currently under a critical time in which public budgets are becoming gradually constrictive, especially in those countries where the socioeconomically crisis is hitting the hardest. As a result, many countries have tried to streamline public administration aiming at optimizing effectiveness and efficiency (Olejniczak &Salmon, 2014), although a persistence of administrative traditions has been noticed in a number of countries (e.g. Spain, Italy, France) that tend to maintain existing bureaucratic patterns and reduce the impact of pressures to reform (Painter & Peters, 2010).

Indeed, there is a need for public organizations to make more with less, and public employees have to endure facing the increasing demands of their citizen-customers with reduced resources, which will have an effect on the way they relate to their job (employee engagement) and their motivation and satisfaction levels at work. Subsequently, public managers must find ways for a better usage of human capital, fostering managerial and organizational support and alternative rewarding systems in order to facilitate the development of organizational commitment and achieve higher levels of employee satisfaction. As a consequence, interest in studying public sector management, public service motivation and changes in public values has lately gained an increasing prominence in research (Jørgensen, 2014; Pedersen, 2014).

Many studies have tried to find if there is a relationship between the performance of a public employee and their organizational commitment, with diverse results. For Seppala et al. (2009); Harter et al., (2009), Vandenabeele (2009) and Turkyilmaz et al. (2011), among others, there is a clear and direct relationship, while for (Sinclair, et al., 2005) there seems to be no definite evidence that supports this hypothesis. This is a quite popular topic, and the controversial results that can be found in the literature only feed the bonfire. Therefore, the aim of this research is to take a step backwards and explore if there is a relationship between a public employees' organizational commitment and their level of job engagement and satisfaction. In addition, the perception of the employees on the above mentioned variables of their work environment and conditions might affect their levels of job engagement and satisfaction. These perceptions are in turn affected by the country's cultural values, so it is to be expected that public employees from different cultures will display different levels of job satisfaction and job engagement (Hu, 2014; Matheson & Kwon, 2003).

In sum, this paper lays out the theoretical background necessary to present, by means of a model, the determinants of job and organisational commitment for public sector employees. In addition, since the need for improving organisational commitment is a common challenge for many countries with different cultural values, it is interesting to provide a context to discuss if these different cultural may have an effect on these determinants.

2. BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB COMMITMENT AND ITS DETERMINANTS

In order to respond to our research question, a descriptive literature study has been carried out. A number of previous works have been analysed to understand how organisational commitment in the public sector might be determined by employee engagement and job satisfaction, and what the latter two have different and in common, especially when considering a cross- country perspective.

2.1. The relationship between employee engagement and job commitment

The concept of employee engagement was introduced by Kahn in 1990 (Welbourn et al. 2014). According to Kahn's (1990, p.964) original definition, employee engagement can be described as the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles". Kahn's idea of engagement, focused on the employee being able to express him/herself at work. Much of today's research refers to Kahn's work as the theoretical underpinning of employee engagement. Engagement started in the 1990s, and has quickly grown spread, and evolved.

The literature review reveals that there are no universally accepted definitions of engagement and commitment. Many researches and practitioners have tried to define and measure them (Seppala et al., 2009; Saks, 2008; Bakker, 2011; Welbourn et al., 2014). Saks et al. state that "*employee engagement has been defined in many different ways and the definitions and measures often sound*

like other better known and established constructs like organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour" (Saks et al., 2004, p. 601).

Following the same line of thought, Hallberg & Schaufeli (2006) found that work engagement, job involvement, and organizational commitment are three empirically distinct concepts. Particularly, organizational commitment refers to an individual's psychological attachment to the organization, as follows: "*organizational commitment differs from engagement in that it refers to a person's attitude and attachment towards their organization. Engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles*" (Saks, 2006, p. 602).

According to this definition, only 58% of employees in public sectors employees are fully engaged in their job; 31% strongly feel that they are valued; 31% are very satisfied with their job/working conditions; 20% strongly believe they are adequately compensated, 32% strongly believe they have the tools and training needed to do their jobs effectively (IPMA, 2012). So this means that the situation is not a good one and that there is a need to define which factors play a key role in increasing job engagement and organisational commitment in public sector organisations.

One on the most popular concepts of organizational commitment was developed by Meyer & Allen (1991). These authors distinguish three components of organizational commitment: affective commitment (positive emotional attachment to the organization), continuance commitment (gains verses losses of working in an organization, also considered as intention to quit), and normative commitment (feelings of obligation). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) is also widely used as a measure of employee engagement. This scale (Seppala et al. 2009, p. 460) consists of three elements: vigour, dedication and absorption: "*Vigour refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption refers to being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, and is characterized by time passing quickly and difficulties in detaching oneself from work*" (Seppala, et al. 2009, p. 460).

2.2. The relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment

One of the most widely used definitions of job satisfaction describes it as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p.1300). There is also an approach, according to which job satisfaction is considered with various job facets (e.g., Smith, Kendal & Hulin, 1969, Spector, 1997, Kinicki et al., 2002). Facets of job satisfaction can involve any aspect of the job such as pay, interpersonal relations, and work environment (Coombe & Barriball, 2007). For Turkyilmaz et al. (2011), the satisfaction construct may contain five main factors: empowerment, participation, working conditions, reward and recognition, teamwork and training and personal development. They also proved that employee satisfaction is correlated with loyalty, understood as commitment, in the Turkish public sector.

2.3. Contributing factors to job satisfaction and employee engagement

In order to understand how the relationship between job satisfaction, employee engagement and employee commitment might function, it is necessary to explore the common contributors that the first two concepts have in common. In this sense, Saks (2006) noticed that perceived organizational support predicts both job and organization engagement and procedural justice predicts organization engagement. He also concluded that job engagement mediated the relationships between these factors and job satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to quit (described as how often an employee frequently thinks of quitting his during the next 12 months). Following his work, these factors have been found as common contributors to job satisfaction and employee engagement.

Reward system and recognition

When employees receive needed resources and/or recognition from their organization they feel obliged to repay the organization with greater levels of engagement and commitment. According to Kahn's (1990) concept of engagement, employees feel obliged to bring themselves more deeply into their role performances as repayment for the resources they receive from their organization. Cameron and Pierce (1997) found out after an extensive qualitative research that generally people enjoyed their

job more when they received a reward, enhancing their interest and performance, linking rewards and job satisfaction.

In theory, public sector organisations, due to their bureaucratic and controlling nature, are not expected to reward their employees, especially in difficult times, but instead to punish them when their initiatives are not successful. However, research work performed in developed and less-developed countries has proved the contrary (Borins, 2002). A discussion on this topic can be found in Milne (2007), who offer arguments for both sides of the coin, reaching to the conclusion that this quite a controversial relationship, particularly when studying individual commitment, satisfaction and performance.

Support from organization

Perceived organizational support (POS) is typical of a workplace relationship, it is assumed that, when the organization treats the employee well (access to resources, respect), the employee reciprocates by working hard to improve organizational effectiveness (Brunetto et. al., 2013). POS is important because it has an impact on the quality of the supervisor– subordinate relationship (Wayne et al., 1997; Shanock & Eisenberg, 2006), predicts employee engagement (Saks, 2006), plus organizational commitment, citizenship behaviour and employee retention (Eisenberger et al. 2002). There is evidence supporting that organization and manager influences job engagement and organisational commitment (Saks 2006; Guerro & Herrbach, 2009; Morrow, 2011; Brunetto et al. 2013). A definition of organization perceived support was first introduced by Eisenberg et al. (1986), according to whom employees feel secured by the organization when the organization values their colleagues and their welfare. Perceived support of the organization means for employee that the organization values him/ her as an employee and also values his/ her welfare. Organizational support have aided in several cases to bring about successful innovations that promoted job satisfaction and employee engagement, such as in Malhan (2006).

Managerial Support

In line with the previous item, there is quite a body of work supporting that, if managers show their support to their employees, these tend to increase their organizational commitment levels (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Furthermore, trust is gained when employees perceive that they are treated fairly by their supervisor (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Managerial coaching, or those effective managerial practices that improve employee effectiveness and learning also plays a relevant role in the level of satisfaction and commitment of the employee (Ellinger et al., 2010), even for public sector employees from culturally different countries (Kim et al., 2014). Likewise, it works the other way around: poor managerial support leads to lower levels of organizational commitment (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). This relationship is found in both private and public sector organisations; although some evidence shows public sector employees are less strongly affected by this relationship than employees of profit and non-profit organisations (Emhan, 2012).

Perceived justice and fairness of organizational procedure

Organizational justice refers to employees' perception of fair treatment by an organization and its agents (distributive justice and procedural justice). Fairness of organisational procedures may also have an impact on organisational commitment because procedures define the organisation's capacity to treat employees fairly. Distributive justice has its roots in Adams' (1965) equity theory and it relates to the preoccupations expressed by employees considering the distribution of outcomes and resources. Procedural justice deals with the criteria used in allocation decisions, and there is outstanding evidence of its effect on organizational commitment (Demirel & Yücel, 2013; Gupta and Kumar, 2013). Considerable research has also shown that perceptions of fairness are associated with positive organisational commitment (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Kim & Mauborgne, 1993) and job satisfaction (Clark et al., 2009).

2.4. The effect of culture on employee engagement and satisfaction

Finally, the context of business culture and national culture may be taken in account when talking about job engagement and organisational commitment. An organization is established at a specific point in history and hence is shaped by specific cultural contexts or norms and values. In fact, it is well

acknowledged that national culture has a significant influence on behaviour of employees, as well as on consumer behaviour and technology diffusion (Dwyer et al. 2005, Tiferet & Herstein 2010; Srite & Karahanna, 2006), as well as on the choice for a particular profession (Malach-Pines & Kaspi-Barcu, 2008). Additionally, individual demographic features, such as age, tenure, education, sex, work experience, and ethnic and geographical background, can also be significant for the organizational culture (Christensen et al., 2007), but not always (Malach-Pines & Kaspi-Barcu, 2008).

Public institutions are characterised by a special culture, called "bureaucratic culture" (e.g. managers trying to evoke change, risk avoidance), different from that of private sector organizations (Schraeder et al., 2005; Christensen et al., 2007). Members of public organizations stand in a dynamic and reciprocal relation to their organizational culture, and usually have similar attitudes and interests (Vandenabeele, 2008). There is also evidence that national culture influences change management in the public sector (Fang, 2013; Rufin et al, 2014), since it was found that there are significant correlations between e-government development and the cultural dimensions as defined by Hofstede. However, according to Schneider's model of homo-social reproduction (Schneider, 1987), people working for public sector organizations, due to their similar organizational cultures, might not be as affected by Hofstede cultural dimensions, since bureaucratic principles may override any differences between countries.

3. RESULTS- THE MODEL

As it was seen before, the phenomenon of evaluating a public employee's level of organizational commitment is complex and a number of steps should be taken in order to comprehend all its possible determinants and factors, even more in an international context. A number of discrepancies have showed up in regards to the role of job satisfaction and job engagement as determinants, and if this role is affected by cultural values.

Therefore, the proposed research model must encompass a number of more specific questions that have arisen during the theoretical research. These questions may be formulated as hypotheses, as follows:
- H1A: There is a direct relationship between a public employee's level of engagement with their job and their organizational commitment.
- H1B: There is a direct relationship between a public employee's level of satisfaction with their job and their organizational commitment.
- H2A: Each of the founding factors (organization's rewarding system, perceived organizational support, perceived managerial support, procedural justice, and distributive justice) is related to the employee's level of job engagement.
- H2B: Each of the founding factors (organization's rewarding system, perceived organizational support, perceived managerial support, procedural justice, and distributive justice) is related to the employee's level of job satisfaction.
- H2A1: There is a positive relationship between the organization's rewarding system and the employee's job engagement.
- H2B1: There is a positive relationship between the organization's rewarding system and the employee's level of job satisfaction.
- H2A2: There is a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and the employee's job engagement.
- H2B2: There is a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and the employee's level of job satisfaction.
- H2A3: There is a positive relationship between perceived managerial support and the employee's job engagement.
- H2B3: There is a positive relationship between perceived managerial support and the employee's level of job satisfaction.
- H2A4: There is a positive relationship between perceived procedural justice and the employee's job engagement.
- H2B4: There is a positive relationship between perceived procedural justice and the employee's level of job satisfaction.
- H2A5: There is a positive relationship between perceived distributive justice and the employee's job engagement.
- H2B5: There is a positive relationship between perceived distributive justice and the employee's level of job satisfaction.

- H3: Public employees from countries with different cultural values will have significantly different perceptions of each of the contributing factors.

Figure 1: Determinants of organizational commitment model
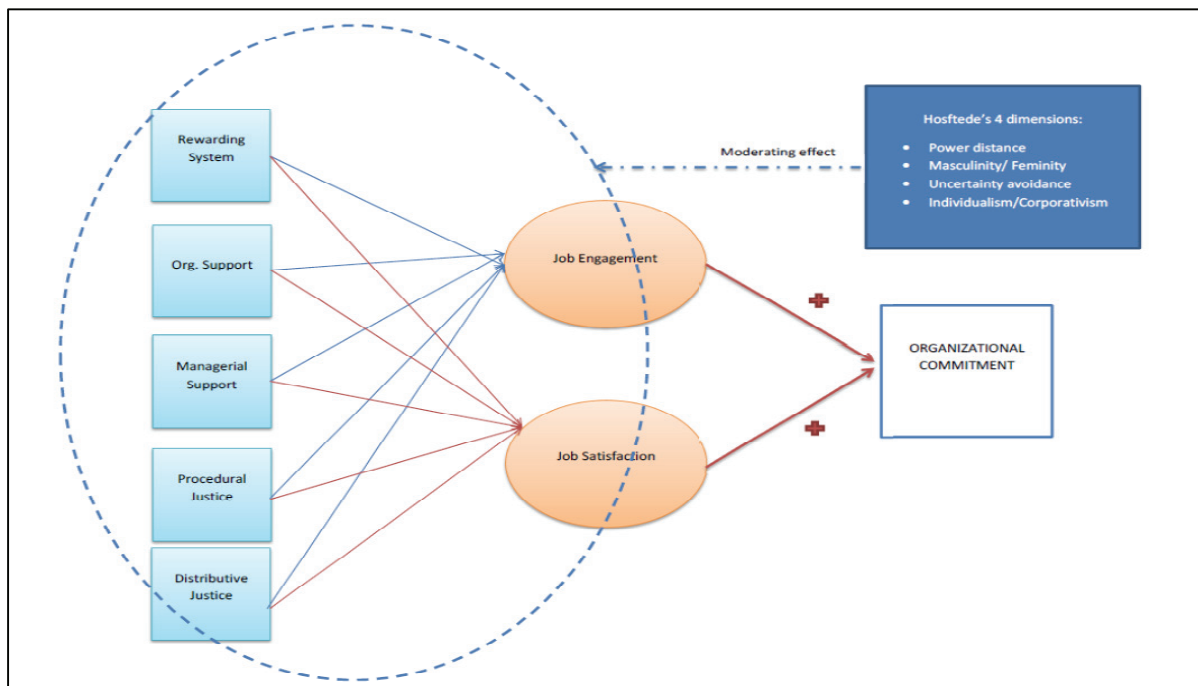
4. FINAL THOUGHTS

Current researchers in the public administration field must concentrate on those factors influencing job satisfaction, job engagement and organisational commitment. However, most of the research in this field is centred in private companies' employees, where a person's performance is more easily measured and thus capable of improvement. The patterns of contribution of an organization's rewarding system, perceived organizational support, perceived managerial support, procedural justice and distributive justice represent a quite complex network, which may vary from country to country, although the problem is the same within the European environment.

The broad approach of the model designed in this research puts in value the determinants that play a role in promoting job engagement in public administrations, hindering or boosting it. There is a need for empirical research to support the theoretical research findings on the determinants of job engagement, so as to derive a number of lessons for policy makers and other researchers that may contribute to an improvement of the motivation and performance of public employees in these times of scarcity.

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