Teachers' dual commitment to the organization and occupation: A person-centered investigation

John P. Meyer [a, b, 1, *], Alexandre J.S. Morin [c, 1], Laura J. Stanley [d], Elyse R. Maltin [e]

[a] *Department of Psychology, The University of Western Ontario, Canada*
[b] *Curtin Business School, Curtin University, Australia*
[c] *Substantive-Methodological Synergy Research Laboratory, Department of Psychology, Concordia University, Canada*
[d] *Belk College of Business, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA*
[e] *JMW Consultants, Canada*

HIGHLIGHTS

- We surveyed Canadian teachers.
- We identified mindset profiles for dual commitment to organization and occupation.
- Profiles were associated with different levels of intention to stay in the occupation and organization.
- Profiles were associated with different levels of physical and psychological well-being.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study extends previous commitment research by applying person-centered analytic techniques to identify and compare profiles of affective, normative, and continuance commitment to the organization and occupation. Latent profile analyses applied to data from 336 Canadian teachers revealed five profiles with unique combinations of the three commitment mindsets across the two targets. Differences observed across profiles in teachers' turnover intention and physical and psychological well-being are used to illustrate the benefits of taking a more holistic approach to the investigation of commitment compared to analyses involving individual targets and/or mindsets. Implications for commitment theory, future research, and practice are discussed.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

There is a substantial body of research linking teachers' commitment to retention, performance, personal well-being, and student achievement (e.g., Akar, 2018; Day, 2008; Dee, Henkin, & Singleton, 2006; Park, 2005; Somech & Bogler, 2002). However, in this research, commitment is typically viewed as a "generalized identification with either the school or the teaching profession, and not as a multidimensional construct" (McInerney, Ganotice, King, Morin, & Marsh, 2015b, p. 926). Consequently, the field of education has not benefited from the large body of research demonstrating that commitments can be experienced in different ways and with different consequences. It is only recently that researchers have begun to apply the three-component model of commitment (TCM: Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997) to the study of teachers' organizational and occupational commitment (Joolideh & Yeshodhara, 2009; McInerney, Ganotice, Kin, Morin, & Marsh, 2015b; McInerney, Ganotice, King, Marsh, & Morin, 2015a; Morin, Meyer, McInerney, Marsh, & Ganotice, 2015). According to the TCM, commitment can reflect an emotional attachment (affective commitment), sense obligation (normative commitment), and/or perceived costs (continuance commitment). These 'commitment

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychology, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, N6A 5C2, Canada.
E-mail address: meyer@uwo.ca (J.P. Meyer).
[1] J.P Meyer and A.J.S. Morin contributed equally to this article and both should be considered first authors.

mindsets' have been found to relate differently to employee turnover, job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and employee well-being (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Meyer & Maltin, 2010; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

Until recently, the dominant approach used to test the TCM, including studies of teacher commitment, has been 'variable-centered,' with emphasis on relations between individual commitment mindsets and various antecedents and outcomes. Although informative, the variable-centered approach is not well suited to testing some aspects of the TCM. For example, Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed that employees could experience each of the basic commitment mindsets to varying degrees, and that this would be reflected in a 'commitment profile.' Building on this notion, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) identified eight potential profiles with varying high and low scores on affective, normative, and continuance commitment, and developed a set of propositions regarding how these profiles would develop, be experienced, and influence behavior. These propositions are best tested using person-centered analytic techniques such as latent profile analysis (Meyer, Stanley, & Vandenberg, 2013; Morin, 2016). Consequently, there has been a recent increase in person-centered research to identify and compare commitment mindset profiles (see Kabins, Xu, Bergman, Berry, & Willson, 2016, and Meyer & Morin, 2016 for reviews).

The person-centered approach has also been applied, albeit less frequently, to identify profiles of commitment to different targets, such as the organization, occupation, supervisor and team (Becker & Billings, 1993; Morin, Morizot, Boudrias, & Madore, 2011; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Swailes, 2004). Again, this person-centered approach is better suited than a variable-centered approach to testing propositions regarding the ways that commitments to different targets combine to influence behavior and well-being (Gouldner, 1957; Johnson, Groff, & Taing, 2009; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Morrow, 1993). However, most person-centered studies have treated commitment as a unidimensional construct. We are aware of only three studies that considered both commitment mindsets and targets (Meyer, Morin, & Vandenberghe, 2015; Morin et al., 2015; Tsoumbris & Xenikou, 2010). Only two of these studies considered dual commitment to the organization and occupation, and only one was conducted with teachers (Morin et al., 2015). Consequently, our understanding of how teachers' commitment to their organization and occupation combine and relate to school- and teacher-relevant outcomes is limited.

Our study extends the earlier investigation of teachers' dual commitment conducted by Morin et al. (2015) in three important ways. First, the Morin et al. study was conducted with Hong Kong teachers, whereas ours focuses on Canadian teachers. This is important because Morin et al. argued that some of their findings might have been culture specific, but there was no existing basis for comparison. Second, we measured two facets of continuance commitment to the organization — one reflecting the sacrifices teachers would have to make by leaving their school, and the other based on the lack of alternative employment opportunities. The importance of this distinction has been illustrated in variable-centered research (Chris, Maltin, & Meyer, 2016; Meyer et al., 2002), and in person-centered studies of single (Meyer, Morin, & Wasti, 2018; Stanley, Vandenberghe, Vandenberg, & Bentein, 2013) and dual (Meyer et al., 2015) targets of commitment. Finally, our study included a wider range of well-being outcomes than did Morin et al.

In sum, our study should provide a richer understanding of the ways teachers experience commitment to their school and to the teaching profession, as well as the implications of these commitment configurations for retention and well-being. Although our focus is on teachers, as one of only a few person-centered studies to include multiple targets and mindsets of commitment, it also contributes to the broader commitment literature.

1.1. Multiple commitment mindsets

In developing the TCM, Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed that commitment to any entity or course of action can be characterized by three distinct mindsets. *Affective commitment* (AC), reflects a desire to maintain a relationship and/or pursue a course of action, whereas *normative commitment* (NC) reflects a sense of obligation to do so. In contrast, *continuance commitment* (CC) involves an awareness of the costs of discontinuing a relationship or course of action. Regardless of the mindset, commitment relates positively with maintenance of a relationship or persistence in a course of action. Mindset differences are reflected in the strength of these relations and, most importantly, in the likelihood of engaging in discretionary behaviors that fall outside the 'terms' of the commitment (Brown, 1996; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). For example, individuals with a strong desire (AC) to remain with an organization are more likely to perform beyond minimum requirements than those who stay only because they lack alternatives (CC) (Meyer et al., 2002). Individuals with strong AC also tend to report greater well-being than those with strong CC (Meyer & Maltin, 2010).

Meyer and Allen (1991) proposed that employees can experience all three commitment mindsets to varying degrees, but most early investigations focused on the individual mindsets using variable-centered techniques. It was not until Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) offered a set of propositions regarding how the mindsets combine to influence behavior that researchers began to adopt a person-centered approach (Gellatly, Meyer, & Luchak, 2006; Wasti, 2005). Since those early studies, there has been a steady increase in person-centered studies conducted to identify commitment mindset profiles (Kabins et al., 2016; Meyer & Morin, 2016). Although studies differ in the number and nature of the profiles reported, several profiles emerge consistently, including fully-committed (high scores on all mindsets), AC/NC-dominant, AC-dominant, CC-dominant, and weakly committed (low scores on all mindsets) (Meyer & Morin, 2016). Moreover, the profile structure tends to be comparable for samples drawn from similar populations (Meyer et al., 2018; Meyer, Kam, Goldenberg & Bremner, 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Morin, Meyer, Creusier, & Biétry, 2016), and for the same sample over time (Kam, Morin, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2016; Xu & Payne, 2018). This consistency, combined with the fact that the profiles generally relate as expected to theoretical antecedents and outcomes, indicates that they reflect meaningful rather than spurious configurations (Marsh, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Morin, 2009).

The advantage of adopting a person-centered approach to the study of commitment becomes evident when comparing findings with those obtained in variable-centered studies. An underlying assumption in variable-centered research is that the sample is drawn from a homogeneous population and that any parameters (e.g., correlations) observed among variables apply to the population at large. The person-centered approach relaxes this assumption and tests for the presence of subpopulations characterized by differing variable relations. For example, the correlation between NC and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) is generally positive, albeit modest, in variable-centered studies (Meyer et al., 2002). However, taking a person-centered approach, Gellatly et al. (2006) found that NC was associated with much higher levels of OCB when combined with strong AC than with strong CC and weak AC. Similarly, variable-centered studies generally find that CC relates negatively with OCB and psychological well-being (Meyer et al., 2002; Meyer & Maltin, 2010). However, taking a