

Does the form of employment make a difference?—Commitment of traditional, temporary, and self-employed workers

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Abstract

Increasing change in the labor market has produced new forms of employment. A growing number of people have temporary jobs or are self-employed freelancers. The aim of our study is to address these changes by introducing commitment to the form of employment as a new focus in commitment. In addition, we compare organizational commitment under conditions of these forms of employment to traditional form of employment. The study is based on several samples representing conventional and new forms of employment (overall $N = 494$). The results indicate that commitment to the form of employment explains variance of organizational outcomes over and above organizational commitment. Generally, commitment to the form of employment reflects an important attitude to the work situation besides commitment to the organization or occupation. The results are discussed in the light of labor market trends.

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1. Introduction

A tight job market and changes in the labor market, in general, have fostered ‘new’ forms of employment such as temporary work, multiple-employment, and self-employment. Although these have existed for a considerable time they can be regarded as ‘new’ in terms of both increasing prevalence and relevance for the job market. An increasing number of employees hold jobs that differ from traditional long-term employment characterized by open-ended employment. In contrast to earlier patterns, temporary or contingent work has expanded beyond clerical or unskilled work (Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001). Though there have always been differences, the contract of a ‘classic’ employment offered relatively high degrees of security, continuity, and dependability for employees and organizations. Although there has been increased flexibility in economies

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such as USA, in others, for example Germany, legal regulations have protected the unlimited classic employment. While there are some studies that focus on organizational commitment of temporary workers (e.g., Connelly, Gallagher, & Gilley, 2007; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006; Guest, 2004; Sverke, Gallagher, & Hellgren, 1999), only a few reflect on the commitment to new forms of employment (Torka, 2004). Thus, the level of commitment in other but classic forms of employment remains unclear. Gallagher and McLean Parks (2001, p. 204) state, “that the growth of ‘contingent’ or ‘alternative’ forms of work relationships highlights the need for researchers to examine work-related commitments outside of the traditional employer-employee framework.” Thus, the aim of this study is to contribute to the body of research of commitment by trying to close this gap. Our study has two aims: First, we want to examine whether commitment to the form of employment is able to explain outcome variables over and above organizational and occupational commitment. Second, we compare the patterns of commitment in new forms of employment (temporary work, self-employed freelancers) to the patterns of classic employees (i.e., permanent, full-time contracts).

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. Organizational commitment

Before we proceed to analyze the relationship between new forms of employment and commitment, the conceptual basis of the commitment concept will be summarized. As Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) stated, most of the general definitions consider commitment as a stabilizing and obliging force that gives direction to behavior and binds a person to a course of action. In this sense, commitment towards an organization is “a bond or linking of the individual to the organization” (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990, p. 171). As two decades of research have shown, organizational commitment serves as an important predictor for several positive and negative outcome variables (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Employees expressing high organizational commitment show higher degrees of satisfaction, and are more likely to engage in behaviors that contribute to an organization’s competitive advantage (Cohen, 2003; Meyer et al., 2002). Current research typically refers to Meyer and Allen (1991) who developed a three components model which consists of affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

2.2. New forms of employment and commitment

In the following, we discuss the consequences of new forms of employment. We differentiate between temporary work and self-employment as new forms of employment. Temporary work has rapidly increased in Europe over the last decade. This form of work is characterized by a limited time horizon for employment with an organization and therefore provides flexibility and independence for both the employer and the employee. Temporary work agencies advertise specific advantages for employees such as high autonomy, variability and the chance to gain broad experience in a number of organizations. However, some of the temporary workers may see temporary work as a transitional solution that helps them to find an unlimited, that is permanent, employment (Torka & Schyns, 2007). Consequently, temporary workers can regard two organizations as their employer, namely, the temp agency and the hiring-in organization. In our study, we focused on the commitment to the temp agency, as the consequences for employees’ commitment to their agency in this form of employment are rather unclear.

Another form of alternative employment is self-employment as a freelance work. Freelancers are workers that are not employed by a company but self-employed with contracts being provided by one or more companies for a specific assignment (e.g., accounting, training, consulting). In contrast to Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, and Kessler (2006) definition of independent contractors participants in our study are not employed by a third party (e.g., a large contractor company) but are self-employed, mainly in the form of ‘one-person-businesses’. This form is characterized by the following features: self-control over time and how work is performed, a direct contract with more than one client, and personal responsibility for working equipment, training, health insurance, etc. This form of employment often has its origin in part-time work or multiple employments. These ‘semi’-entrepreneurs or freelancers have chosen higher level of autonomy and independence together

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