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MNC commitment, OCB role definition and intent to leave in subsidiary top managers: The moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance values

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ABSTRACT

The current paper analyses in depth and expands on the study of the consequences of organisational commitment in the MNC setting. To that end the moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance as a personal cultural value is studied and two consequences of MNC commitment are analysed: intent to leave and organisational citizenship behaviour. The empirical analysis carried out on a cross-organisational sample of 101 top managers of MNC's subsidiaries located in Spain confirms the moderating role of uncertainty avoidance for the affective and normative commitments, as well as its moderating effect on the influence that organisational citizenship behaviour role definition exerts on intent to leave. Implications for management theory and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In the face of increased global competition, organisations are more dependent on the positive work attitudes and behaviours that typically emanate from employee commitment (Lavelle et al., 2009). Employee commitment is defined as a force that binds the individual to a target—e.g., a multinational corporation (MNC)—and consequently to a course of action which is relevant to that target (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006). In a MNC context, organisational commitment can encourage subsidiary top managers to willingly act in the MNC's interests, guaranteeing an alignment of objectives and interests between the parent company and subsidiaries (Kostova & Roth, 2002; Vora & Kostova, 2007; Welch & Welch, 2006). A large number of studies have examined those desirable attitudes and behaviours in which the individuals engage to benefit the target to which they have committed, as Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky's (2002) meta-analysis states. According to Cohen (2006), the object of organisational commitment is the employing organisation. Thus the most likely behaviour to be affected by the MNC commitment is the MNC-oriented behaviour; specifically, we study turnover intention and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) role definition. Turnover intention is the probability that a subsidiary top manager will change organizations within a particular period of time. OCB role definition is related to the description of the voluntary behaviours and obligations (Chiaburu & Byrne, 2009; Morrison, 1994) defined by the top manager for his job position. Given the positive consequences of a

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highly committed workforce, there is an ongoing need to understand the processes associated with employee commitment (Lavelle et al., 2009). In this respect, an important conceptual development in the commitment literature is related to national cultural values and personal cultural values—i.e., national cultural values at the individual level (Cohen, 2007b, p. 274)—as predictors of employee commitment (Fischer & Mansell, 2009). However, there is hardly any research to be found that analyses the moderating effect of the values in the influence that organisational commitment exerts on the attitudes and behaviours of the employee. The works of Cohen (2006) and of Wasti and Can (2008) represent two exceptions, but still leave important questions to be answered. Hence the moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance as a personal cultural value is studied in the current work. In addition, some works have suggested that organisational commitment may exert not only a direct influence on desirable attitudes and behaviours of the individuals but also indirectly, by means of other variables (e.g., Bande-Vilela, Varela-González, & Fernández-Ferrín, 2008). For this reason the current work likewise analyses the OCB role definition as mediating factor in the MNC commitment-intent to leave relation.

Reviewing the previous literature, the most influential commitment model is clearly Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model (Bergman, 2006; Herrbach, 2006) which distinguishes between three forces that bind the individual to the target (Meyer & Allen, 1997): affective (AC), normative (NC) and continuance (CC) commitment. The focus of the present study is on AC and NC. AC is the most widely studied of these components (Bergman, 2006), but researches are sometimes unable to discriminate clearly between AC and NC theoretically or empirically (for a summary of this criticism see Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer et al., 2002). However, as the high correlation between these two commitments does not mean that they are identical (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer et al., 2002), it is important to analyse to what extent each of those has an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the subsidiary top managers. To that end, we study uncertainty avoidance values as moderators of the influence that AC and NC exert on intent to leave and OCB role definition. There are two basic reasons for analysing these values. First, uncertainty avoidance is a relevant value when studying employees' attitudes and behaviour that entail the assumption of certain risk or uncertainty, such as intent to leave. When this occurs it is of interest to know if those risk-related values may condition the influence of AC and NC on those employees' attitudes and behaviour. Second, previous works were directed at primarily studying the values related to collectivism (e.g., Francesco & Chen, 2004; Johnson & Chang, 2006; Yao & Wang, 2006), with a significant level of unawareness existing as regards the moderating role of uncertainty avoidance.

Based on the arguments previously presented and using a sample of subsidiary top managers from Spain, this study has three main purposes: (1) *to explore how AC and NC affect intent to leave and OCB role definition*; (2) *to investigate whether or not OCB role definition acts as a mediator of the relationship that AC and NC have on subsidiary top managers' intention to leave*; (3) *to examine the moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance personal cultural values in the influences that AC and NC may exert on intent to leave and OCB role definition, as well as in the influence that OCB role definition may exert on intent to leave*.

This study has the potential to make several contributions. Specifically, it can advance our understanding of the consequences of AC and NC because we examine the conditions under which such commitments affect intent to leave and OCB role definition. First, although AC and NC have been studied as antecedents of OCB and, primarily, of intent to leave (e.g., Chen & Francesco, 2003; Fischer & Mansell, 2009; Meyer et al., 2002, 2006; Rifai, 2005), no research has been detected that analyzes the effect that NC may have on OCB role definition. It is possible that this line of enquiry may provide new evidence thus permitting a clearer understanding on the influence that AC and NC have on the citizenship behaviour of the individual in the firm. Second, previous research has explored the possible OCB value as a predictor of intent to leave (e.g., Chen & Wei, 2009; Coyne & Ong, 2007; Lam, Chen, & Takeuchi, 2009), as well as its potential mediating role in the influence that organisational commitment exerts on diverse individual outcomes such as overall work performance (e.g., Bande-Vilela et al., 2008). Unlike previous works, this current research analyzes the mediating role that OCB role definition carries out on the influence that AC and NC exert on intent to leave. Our analysis thus lets us identify, in addition to the direct effects, the indirect effects on intent to leave through OCB role definition. Third, we study the moderating potential of uncertainty avoidance personal cultural values in these relations. In this respect, Meyer et al. (2002) state that individual differences, such as personal values, would suppose a potentially fruitful avenue for research on NC. However, we were unable to identify previous evidence in the literature that explores the moderating role of uncertainty avoidance in the relations that the commitment has with intent to leave and OCB role definition, as well as the possible relation of the latter on intent to leave. Fourth, few previous researches examining consequences of commitment have focused their studies on subsidiary top managers. The work of Cole and Bruch (2006) is an exception, although these authors examine neither the effect of each component of organisational commitment on the top managers' intent to leave the firm nor on OCB role definition. In the MNC context it is fundamental that subsidiary top managers direct their efforts in favour of the economic interests of the parent company (Kostova & Roth, 2002; Vora & Kostova, 2007; Welch & Welch, 2006). Thus it may be of great relevance for the MNC to know to what extent the MNC commitment determines the perceptions of those managers regarding the behaviours that are required on the job and, then show predisposition to undertake them willingly and on their own initiative. Furthermore, some studies suggest that managers' intent to leave, manager's OCB and managers' OCB role definition are substantially different from those of subordinates (e.g., Allen, Barnard, Rush, & Russell, 2000; Chiaburu & Byrne, 2009; Cole & Bruch, 2006), but they usually only study supervisory (e.g., Chiaburu & Byrne, 2009). To provide new evidence on the organisational commitment consequences in top managers, we examine this relevant group of employees for an MNC. Specifically, we consider that in an MNC setting specific extra-role job behaviours exist that may benefit organisational performance, and as a consequence we study a new OCB facet related to actions that maximise the corporation's and shareholders' interests: a long-term focus.

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