

Reconsidering the Potential of Commitment Phenomenon through a Critical Review of Three-Component Model: Interaction of Behavior, Attitude, and Conditions

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Abstract—In commitment research in the management field, the Three-Component Model (TCM) regarding workplace commitment influences so much research. In this study, by conducting a comparative analysis between TCM-1991, TCM-2001, and the concepts of attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment, we evaluate whether TCM-1991 and TCM-2001 truly integrated attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment. We clarified that TCM-1991 incorporated behavioral commitment in a very limited manner, it did not carry over in TCM-2001, and TCM-2001 did not sufficiently incorporate behavioral commitment. We also showed one aspect of the commitment phenomenon: the interaction of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions, and provided a new perspective for future research. This paper presents the potential of commitment research and provides suggestions regarding methodologies for commitment research.

Keywords—commitment, organization commitment, three-component model, attitudinal approach, behavioral approach

I. INTRODUCTION

For many years, many practitioners and researchers have been interested in the phenomenon of commitment and have studied it from various perspectives and methods [1–8].

Ref. [6] is regarded as the dominant model in organizational commitment research [9]. Meyer and Allen [6] attempted to provide an overall picture of organizational commitment research, which was confused by various studies, by presenting the Three-Component Model (TCM-1991). Later, Meyer and Herscovitch [8] proposed the Three-Component Model (TCM-2001) as a general model that could be applied to other workplace commitments, which was developed based on organizational commitment. Since then, TCM-2001 has greatly influenced commitment research in the management field, and many studies have followed or criticized it (e.g., [9–14]).

The distinction between attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment was considered well established [6]. Meyer and Allen [6] claimed that TCM-1991 was a model based on attitudinal commitment but incorporated behavioral commitment. However, no studies reviewed TCM-1991 and TCM-2001 from the perspective of integrating attitudinal and behavioral approaches. There are criticisms of TCM-1991 and TCM-2001, including [9], but they lack the perspective of integrating attitudinal and behavioral approaches.

However, the distinction between the two approaches, attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment, is shown to be useful and important in understanding the commitment phenomenon [4, 6, 7]. Whether the two

approaches can be integrated is a very critical issue because it relates to the overall framework of the three-component model and may affect the evaluation of subsequent commitment research based on the three-component model.

Therefore, this study aims to review the three-component model from the perspective of integration of attitudinal and behavioral approaches and to provide a new perspective on commitment research. This research brings to light the perspective of the interaction of behavior, attitude, and conditions, which has been missing in research since TCM-2001 and thus shows new expansion and potential for research on the commitment phenomenon.

This study is a theoretical study that critically reexamines previous research. By conducting a comparative analysis between TCM-1991, TCM-2001, and the concepts of attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment, we evaluate whether TCM-1991 and TCM-2001 truly integrated attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment. It clarifies how TCM-1991 incorporated behavioral commitment, whether it carried over (or not) in TCM-2001, and whether TCM-2001 sufficiently incorporated behavioral commitment in light of the concepts of attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment that were originally argued.

In the next section, we review Refs. [6, 8] to confirm the overview of TCM-1991 and TCM-2001, and we also review Ref. [9], which is the famous criticism against them. Then, by analyzing classical commitment studies prior to Ref. [6], we clarify the nature of the commitment phenomenon that TCM-2001 overlooked. In the discussion, we show what kind of theoretical and practical implications the revealed nature has, and finally, we state the directions for future research.

II. OVERVIEW AND CRITICISMS OF TCM-1991 AND TCM-2001

A. Overview of TCM-1991

Given that the diversity of the concept and measurement of organizational commitment made it difficult to interpret research results, Meyer and Allen [6] reviewed previous research on organizational commitment and proposed a new model.

The paper stated that “(t)he distinction between attitudinal and behavioral commitment is now well established in the organizational commitment literature” and illustrated the differences in the basic postulates of attitudinal and behavioral approaches by the schematic diagram in Fig. 1. They stated that there were apparent differences between the

two approaches when examining the main causal relationships (solid arrows), however, the complementary relationship between the two approaches became apparent when the secondary relationships (broken arrows) were included.

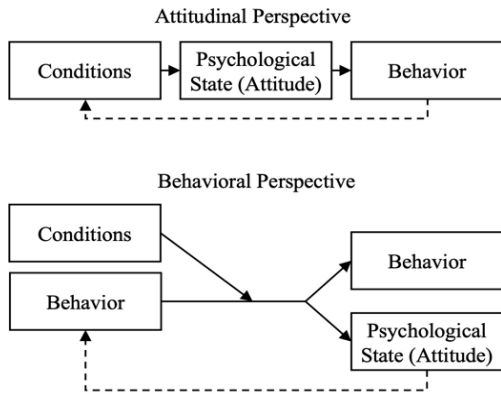


Fig. 1. The attitudinal and behavioral perspectives on organizational commitment.¹

At the same time, they stated that the main purpose of their article was to expand the concept of organizational commitment as a mindset or psychological state (feelings and beliefs about the employee-organization relationship), and the main focus of TCM-1991 was psychological states. In addition, they acknowledged that there was commitment as persistence of behavior (behavioral commitment), which is separate from commitment as a psychological state.

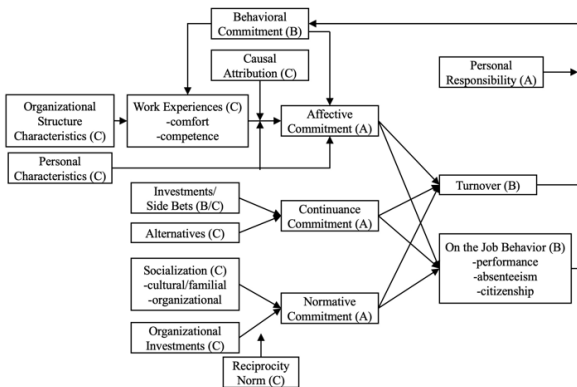


Fig. 2. The three-component model of organizational commitment (TCM-1991).²

Meyer and Allen [6] reviewed various definitions of commitment and identified the components that constitute them as affective attachment to the organization (affective commitment), perceived costs associated with leaving the organization (continuance), and obligation to remain with the organization. They organized the relationship between these antecedents and consequences as shown in Fig. 2, and proposed it as TCM-1991. Regarding the relationship with behavior commitment, TCM-1991 claimed to integrate the attitudinal approach with the behavioral approach by incorporating the influence of behavior on attitudes that [4] considered into its model. To demonstrate how TCM-1991 incorporated behavioral commitment, the elements of

¹ Based on Ref. [6], only the word "Attitude" was added for explanation.
² Based on Ref. [6], only the symbols "(A)", "(B)", "(C)" were added for explanation. "(A)", "(B)", "(C)" indicate attitude, behavior, and conditions respectively.

attitude, behavior, and condition are marked with (A), (B), and (C), respectively, in Fig. 2.

B. Overview of TCM-2001

Although interest in commitment grew, there remained considerable confusion and disagreement about what commitment was, where it was directed, how it developed, and how it influenced behavior. Given such a situation, Meyer and Herscovitch [8] aimed to develop a general model of workplace commitment. Meyer and Herscovitch [8] reviewed various definitions and usages of commitment, and stated that the definition of commitment referred to (a) it is a stabilizing or obliging force, that (b) gives direction to behavior (e.g., restricts freedom, binds the person to a course of action) and defined commitment as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets".

Similarly, based on the research they reviewed, Meyer and Herscovitch [8] considered "stabilizing or coercive forces" (i.e., commitment) to be "mindset (i.e., a frame of mind or psychological state that compels an individual toward a course of action)" and developed their argument along this line of thinking. After reviewing various studies, they proposed a general three-component model of workplace commitment (TCM-2001), which consists of three mindsets: desire (affective commitment), perceived cost (continuance commitment), and obligation (normative commitment) as shown in Fig. 3.

Regarding the relationship with behavioral commitment, although they acknowledged that "(t)here is a long-standing distinction between attitudinal and behavioral commitment" and that "the attitude versus behavior distinction relates more to the processes involved in the development of commitment", they did not provide a detailed explanation of the relationship between the two or demonstrate the relationship with behavioral commitment in TCM-2001.

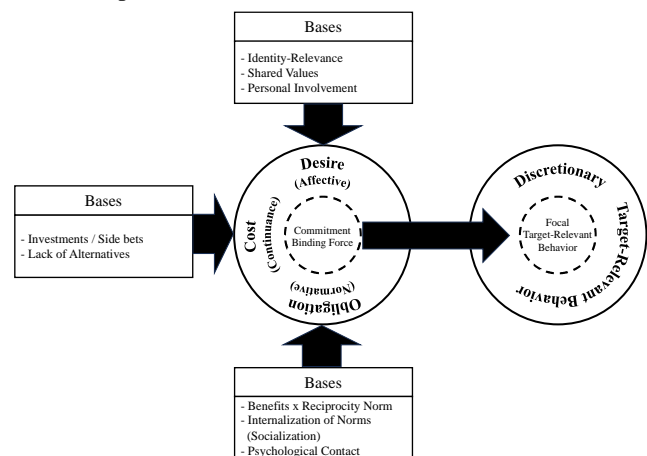


Fig. 3. The three-component model for a general model of workplace commitment (TCM-2001).³

C. Criticisms against TCM-1991 and TCM-2001

Several critical opinions exist regarding TCM-1991 and TCM-2001. For example, one of the major criticisms against TCM-1991 and TCM-2001 is [9]. First, they reviewed the major points of criticism against the three-component model revealed in empirical studies. Empirical studies showed that continuance commitment generally correlates slightly

³ Quoted from Ref. [8].

negatively or not at all with affective commitment and important work-related outcome variables, such as organizational citizenship behaviors and job performance. Therefore, continuance commitment was questioned as to its convergent validity. In addition, they said normative commitment was consistently found to correlate very strongly with affective commitment, making it difficult to separate normative commitment from affective commitment empirically.

Second, they stated that the TCM-1991 fit very well with Eagly and Chaiken's attitude-behavior model and used the model to demonstrate that the TCM-1991 combines fundamentally different attitudinal phenomena. They argued that normative commitment and continuance commitment were attitudes about specific behaviors (i.e., staying or leaving) and that TCM-1991 was a specific model for predicting turnover. They suggested adopting Eagly and Chaiken's model as a generic commitment model for organizational behaviors.

Criticisms against TCM-1991 and TCM-2001 have been made this way. Still, the main criticisms were about the discrepancy with empirical results and the possibility that other components are more suitable as attitudes (psychological states).

III. INTERACTION OF BEHAVIOR, ATTITUDE, AND CONDITIONS

A. Commitment Research by Salancik and Staw

Prior to Ref. [6], commitment researchers such as Salancik and Staw researched the effects of certain behaviors on subsequent attitudes and behaviors.

For example, Salancik [1] defined commitment as "a state of being in which an individual becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to beliefs that sustain the activities and his own involvement". Besides, he described the characteristics of commitment as "Our behavior leads to expectations about what we will do in the future. These expectations surround our behavior and constrain us to act within them. Commitments thus mold our attitudes and maintain our behavior even in the absence of positive reinforcements and tangible rewards." and argued that it was the behavior that determined the attitude in the commitment phenomenon rather than the reverse.

Salancik [2] also mentioned an experiment by Kiesler, Nisbett, and Zanna [15] as an example of how behaviors influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors. When asked to persuade passersby to sign an anti-pollution petition, participants who agreed became more negative about pollution. In such cases, the actor does not necessarily need to be aware of the implications. Meyer and Allen [6] also referred to Ref. [2] and pointed out that it may be possible that the behavior contributes to the initiation and continuation of behavior beyond conscious recognition, compared to the fact that continuity commitment requires recognition of the costs associated with leaving the organization. In other words, Meyer and Allen [6] recognized the possibility that behavior directly influenced subsequent actions without clear consciousness or attitudes.

Meanwhile, Staw [3] examined cases such as the US's involvement in the Vietnam War and laboratory experiments

that simulated corporate investment decisions. He studied the tendency for individuals to commit to a certain course of action (escalation of commitment) by spending more money after a bad result or devoting new resources to a losing action. He experimented with the escalation of commitment by setting several independent variables such as responsibility conditions (high or low), cause information of previous success/failure (exogenous or endogenous), etc., and clarified part of the dynamic nature of commitment, in which each individual's behavior changed as various variables and time change.

Staw [3] advanced theorizing on the escalation of commitment by using self-justification theory and the existence of norms for consistency in leadership theory. The escalation of commitment is also a phenomenon in which a certain behavior influences one's subsequent behaviors. The theory states that behaviors and conditions interact to influence attitudes and behaviors. Meyer and Allen [7] also mentioned escalation of commitment as the most interesting aspect of behavioral commitment research.

B. Limitations of TCM-1991 and TCM-2001

As shown in the previous section, Meyer and Allen [6] did not integrate the broader commitment research results such as Salancik and Staw, in line with the concept of organizational commitment as a mindset or psychological state. Meyer and Allen [6] recognized and agreed on the need to integrate both attitudinal and behavioral approaches, acknowledging that the phenomenon of commitment occurs through the interaction of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions. However, Meyer and Allen [6] selected some of the empirical research on organizational commitment and treated the influence of behavior on attitudes in a very limited manner. (As you can see from Fig. 1, although the antecedents and the consequences of attitude are described, the influence of behavior on attitude and condition is extremely limited.) Regarding the relationship between behavior and attitude approaches, Fig. 1, which shows the relationship between the two at a conceptual level, is more suggestive than Fig. 2 (TCM-1991), which integrates only some of the elements tested in the empirical tests.

Furthermore, Meyer and Herscovitch [8] did not mention the results of commitment research by classic behavior approaches such as Salancik and Staw, and did not incorporate behavioral commitment into TCM-2001. The problem lies in that they defined organizational commitment, and even workplace commitment, as a psychological attitude based only on the research they reviewed and that they viewed commitment only as an attitude (a psychological state) rather than a phenomenon.

C. Interaction of Behavior, Attitude, and Conditions

In light of these discussions, we must consider the scope and limitations of TCM-2001. In other words, in line with the argument of Ref. [8], even though much of the commitment research refers to "a stabilizing or obliging force that gives direction to behavior", it is essential to view commitment not just as a psychological attitude, but as a "phenomenon" caused by the interaction of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions. In other words, it is necessary to distinguish between the attitude (attitudinal commitment) observed at the time of the phenomenon, the behaviors (behavioral

commitment) that cause the phenomenon, and the commitment phenomenon itself.

Fig. 4 shows this proposition (interactions) based on Fig. 1. Fig. 4 conceptually integrates the attitudinal perspective and behavioral perspective in Fig. 1. It doesn't matter whether we start from the attitudinal or behavioral perspective; even if we start the analysis with the attitudinal perspective, a complex and dynamic interaction will continue in which behaviors that are influenced by attitude, combine with conditions to influence behaviors, attitudes, and conditions.

For example, in the case of investment decisions like those simulated by Staw, when making an investment (assuming that you have conditions and attitude that influence behavior), the subsequent behavior, attitude, and conditions will change depending on the various conditions (number of options, discussions leading up to a decision, formal and informal responsibilities, time lag until results are known, etc.) at which the investment is made and subsequent changes in the environment. Changes in conditions affect attitudes, which in turn affects behaviors after investment. In this way, when elucidating a series of commitment phenomenon, it is necessary to carefully unravel the context in which the commitment phenomenon occurs and the complex and dynamic interaction between behaviors, attitudes, and conditions.

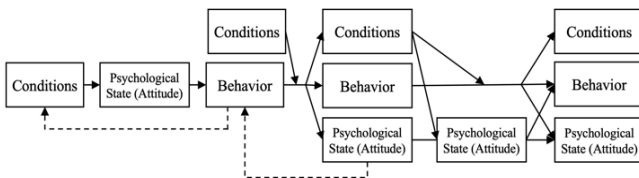


Fig. 4. Interactions of behavior, attitudes, and conditions: A conceptual integration.⁴

IV. DISCUSSION

In the previous sections, we show that commitment is a highly complex and dynamic phenomenon in which behaviors, attitudes, and conditions interact. The theoretical implications are three points.

The first is implications for workplace commitment research. Thus far, workplace commitment research has focused on TCM-2001. Still, even in workplace commitment, interactions among behaviors, attitudes, and conditions that are difficult to capture through questionnaires are not clarified as phenomenon. For example, there are commitment phenomenon by behaviors mentioned by Salancik, which may contribute to the initiation and continuation of behavior beyond conscious recognition. Meyer and Allen [7] also stated that it must be acknowledged that the commitment phenomenon in the behavior approach was a very subtle process and, quite likely, occurred very quickly and without the person's awareness. It is necessary to research the possibility of commitment phenomenon originating from individual behaviors (for example, employee turnover or organizational behavior changes without awareness due to company measures).

The second suggestion concerns the scope of application

of TCM-2001 to other areas. Suppose the commitment phenomenon is not solely caused by human attitudes (psychological states) but is a complex and dynamic phenomenon consisting of the interactions of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions. In that case, it is natural to think that if context-specific behaviors and conditions cause interactions, commitment phenomenon also have context-specific unique characteristics. It is conceivable that the intellectual assets of TCM-2001 and previous workplace commitments can be useful, but careful consideration is required when applying TCM-2001 to other areas.

The third implication concerns future research methods. Because commitment is a highly complex and dynamic phenomenon in which behaviors, attitudes and conditions interact, new aspects of the commitment phenomenon may be revealed through research using qualitative methods and interpretive paradigms that facilitate elucidation of more dynamic interactions in addition to using questionnaires. In particular, the grounded theory, which has an advantage in elucidating phenomenon caused by human actions and interactions [16], is considered promising for research on the commitment phenomenon. Furthermore, research methods utilizing information technology, such as IoT, can obtain a wealth of objective data on individual behaviors and may be promising research methods for the commitment phenomenon.

The practical implication of this study is the suggestion for human resource management practice. Research on organizational commitment and workplace commitment, including TCM-2001, was used to consider management measures. Of course, the practical accumulation to date continues to be effective, but based on the scope of application of TCM-2001, it is essential to pay attention to behavioral commitment (see Salancik, Staw, etc.) and consider measures for human resource management.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, by critically reviewing TCM-2001 and analyzing classical commitment research, we clarified one aspect of the commitment phenomenon, "the interaction of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions", and provided a new research perspective.

TCM-2001 is a meaningful and powerful theory supported by empirical research. For this reason, it has a significant influence on commitment research. However, because it aimed to generalize to workplace commitment, the relationship with the behavioral approach was not well-organized, and there was a lack of mention of the scope of application. TCM-2001 is the model that deals with limited aspects of the commitment phenomenon.

In this study, we critically reviewed the three-component model of commitment with comparing to classical commitment studies such as Salancik and Staw, and proposed a new way of understanding the commitment phenomenon. The commitment phenomenon is extremely complex and dynamic in which behaviors, attitudes, and conditions interact. When researching the commitment phenomenon, it is necessary to proceed carefully, paying attention to its complex and dynamic interactions that vary depending on the context.

This study is a theoretical study that critically reexamines

⁴ Fig. 4 appears to have an endpoint due to space limitation, but this phenomenon does not have a clear endpoint; previous behaviors and attitudes continue to influence subsequent behaviors, attitudes, and conditions.

past research, so it needs to be reexamined through further theoretical and empirical research. Besides, the effectiveness of TCM-2001 is already clear from numerous empirical studies and practices; the interaction between behaviors, attitudes, and conditions revealed in this study should be further explored and clarified in more detail through exploratory and testing research using various research methods such as qualitative and quantitative methods. We hope this research will become part of the foundation for future commitment research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

YS and SS were involved in the study design and research conduct; YS wrote the paper with support from SS; both authors had approved the final version.

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