## Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment: A Study in the Public Sector

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study that examined differences in organizational commitment type and job satisfaction for a sample of 154 public sector employees consisting of firefighters (N = 52), police officers (N = 57), and utility district employees (N = 45). The study was conducted in a large southeastern metropolitan area. Firefighters were significantly more satisfied with their jobs than were both police officers and utility district employees. Significant differences were found for moral and alienative commitment forms. Firefighters expressed significantly higher moral commitment and significantly lower alienative commitment than did the police officers and utility district employees. There were no significant differences between police officers and utility district employees. The three groups did not differ significantly on calculative commitment.

#### INTRODUCTION

Lee and Olshfski (2002) argue that commitment to the organization (job) reinforces the role that an individual has taken in the community and serves as a source of motivation. Given the importance of police, fire, and utility district workers to a community, maintaining a stable workforce with a positive attitude toward their work would be in the public interest. In more pragmatic terms, having public employees who are committed to their organizations and satisfied with their jobs could result in reduced turnover, lower absenteeism, greater productivity, and ultimately lower costs to the public. The purpose of this study was to test for differences in levels of job satisfaction and three types of organizational commitment for a sample of police officers, firefighters, and public utility district employees in a large southeastern city.

## **JOB SATISFACTION**

Job satisfaction represents an expression of one's overall sense of satisfaction – or dissatisfaction – with a job. Job satisfaction is one of the most studied variables in the behavioral management literature. Job satisfaction has been defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976, p. 1300)." Job satisfaction is a global attitude that individuals maintain about their jobs based on perceptions of their jobs (Reilly, Chatham, & Caldwell, 1991). Studying job satisfaction aids in the understanding of those perceptions and their ultimate consequences. These investigations may help managers understand how employees form the attitudes that affect their job satisfaction (DeBats, 1982; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969; Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967).

Much attention has been given to the relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and findings from this study may be useful in developing a deeper understanding of public sector employees. There have been several studies that questioned the causal ordering of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (e.g., Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Williams & Hazer, 1986; Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Huang & Hsiao, 2007). In a meta-analysis, Tett and Meyer (1993) reported that satisfaction and commitment contribute uniquely to turnover. Kacmar, Carlson, and Brymer (1999) found that the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment was positive and

statistically significant. However, Kacmar et al. (1999) reported that the links for affiliation, exchange, and identification commitment with job satisfaction were not significant. Whereas, Huang and Hsiao (2007) suggested that a reciprocal model explained the relationship. In an examination of performance of virtual workers, Golden and Veiga (2008) found that high quality superior subordinate relationships lead to higher levels of commitment and job satisfaction and performance for those who worked extensively in a virtual mode. In another study of the relationship between job attitudes and performance, Riketta (2008) confirmed the existence of a small but significant effect for attitudes (such as job satisfaction) on performance. Previous research reported a positive relationship between substitutes for leadership and job satisfaction (e.g., Pool, 1997; Jernigan, 1990).

## ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

While researchers have varied in their emphasis, most suggest that commitment represents both an attitude that describes an individual's linkage to the organization and a set of behaviors by which individuals manifest that link. Researchers have examined a wide range of issues important to the understanding of organizational commitment such as job satisfaction and causality (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992), intention to leave the organization (Lee & Mitchell, 1991; Jaros, Jermier, Koehler & Sincich, 1993; Cohen, 1993), the influence of personal characteristics on dimensions of organizational commitment (Abdulla & Shaw, 1999), intrinsic motivation and affective commitment (Eby, Freeman, Rush & Lance, 1999), bases and foci of commitment (Clugston, Howell & Dorfman, 2000), and the dimensionality of commitment (Penley & Gould, 1988; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993; Jaros, et. al., 1993).

Emphasis on outsourcing, downsizing, and rightsizing strategies to adapt to more competitive environments caused some researchers to question the value of organizational commitment as a theoretical construct (see Baruch, 1998). From a strategic point-of-view, the value of these strategies for managers is decreased operating costs and/or increased productivity. These strategies are used not only in private enterprise but are also used by public sector administrators to stretch budgets to cover services. Baruch (1998) argues the cost to the organization of such actions can include a decline in employee organizational commitment. The genesis of Baruch's position is a belief that the traditional employment relationship, particularly in the United States, no longer exists. Because employees believe their employer is no longer committed to them, they have no reason to be committed to the organization.

Mowday (1998) countered that organizational commitment remains an important and desirable attitude for organizations. Mowday contends the evidence shows high commitment human resource practices produce high levels of affective commitment and subsequent organizational performance (p. 7). Mowday's position is partially supported by Whitner (2001) whose results suggest high commitment human resource practices affect the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment or trust in management. On an intuitive basis, there is some logic to Baruch's argument. However, Baruch does not take into account the possibility that changes in the traditional employment relationship may alter the nature of the individual's commitment to the organization rather than leading to the absence of organizational commitment.

The multidimensionality of organizational commitment is widely accepted and well established (e.g., Etzioni, 1961; Kanter, 1968; Penley & Gould, 1988; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993; Jaros, Jermier, Koehler & Sincich, 1993; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Several studies used the model of commitment developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) that identifies three

components of commitment – affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment "...refers to the employee's attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization." Continuance commitment "...refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization." Normative commitment "...reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment (p. 11)." According to Meyer and Allen, "Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with an organization because they want to do so. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel they ought to remain with the organization (p. 11)."

The model of commitment developed by Penley and Gould (1988) takes a slightly different approach from the Meyer and Allen model. Based on Etzioni's (1961) multiform conceptualization of organizational involvement, Penley and Gould endorse that an individual's commitment to an organization exists in both affective and instrumental forms. One can be morally committed, calculatively committed, or alienatively committed to an organization. Moral commitment is described as a highly positive affective form characterized by acceptance of and identification with organizational goals. Calculative commitment is an instrumental form essentially focused on one's satisfaction with the exchange relationship. Alienative commitment is described as a highly negative affective form that is a consequence of a lack of control over the internal organizational environment and of a perceived absence of alternatives for organizational commitment. Employees who express alienative commitment continue to engage in work behaviors that indicate a desire to continue their membership in the organization. In essence, they ensure their work performance at least meets minimal standards, and their interaction with managers and co-workers communicates that they do not want to leave.

Conceptually, Penley and Gould's (1988) moral and calculative commitment seem similar to affective and continuance commitment as defined by Meyer and Allen. However, alienative commitment does not appear to be conceptually similar to any of the forms of commitment described by Meyer and Allen (1997). As defined by Penley and Gould, alienative commitment suggests an external locus of control, a sense of powerlessness on the part of the employee, and a lower level of engagement in the work role. These are individuals who stay with an organization because they have to, not because they feel any sense of obligation to the organization. As described by Etzioni (1961) alienative commitment is an attitude reflecting the individuals' perception of sunk costs. Thus, alienative commitment would appear to be distinct from normative commitment as defined by Meyer and Allen.

The Penley and Gould model seems appropriate for a study of public sector employees. Public sector organizations are often stereotyped as highly bureaucratic organizations where promotions and pay raises are usually slow in coming and based on seniority. The highly bureaucratic environment may produce a feeling of powerlessness among individual employees. In addition, the frequent criticism of the public sector by the media, politicians, and community groups could add to a sense of alienation either in terms of sunk costs, or a sense of "separation" from the larger community in the case of police officers. The result is a lower sense of commitment. Powerlessness is important because it may lead to job dissatisfaction, burnout, and lower commitment (Ross & Wright, 1998; Wilson & Laschinger, 1994; Chandler, 1986; Bush, 1988). Penley and Gould's alienative commitment may measure powerlessness as well as sunk costs better than other models of commitment.

This paper focused on a single research question. Do firefighters, police officers, and utility district employees express significantly different job satisfaction, moral, calculative, and alienative organizational commitment?

## **METHOD**

#### Setting, Sample, and Procedure

This study was conducted in a southeastern metropolitan area. Police officers employed in the investigations bureau and in a patrol district were invited to participate in the study. With the support of supervisors in each division, questionnaires were distributed to 60 police officers in their work setting. With the support of the Fire Department Chief, surveys were distributed directly to a sample of 65 firefighters. With the support of the Director of the metropolitan area utility district, surveys were distributed to a sample of 50 employees. The utility district was the principle supplier of water and sewer service in the metropolitan area and faced competition from several private water and sewer companies in the region. The police and fire departments were the largest in the area and offered the most attractive compensation and benefits packages in the region. The fire department was the only fulltime, non-volunteer department in the county. Prior to distributing surveys, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured the confidentiality of the responses. Completed surveys were returned to the researcher in a sealed envelope.

#### Survey Instrumentation:

Commitment was measured using the Organizational Commitment Scale (OCS) developed by Penley and Gould (1988). The OCS is a 15 item seven-point Likert scale that measures organizational commitment on three dimensions: moral, calculative, and alienative. All three dimensions of commitment are measured using subscales consisting of five items. A sample moral commitment item is: "I feel it is my duty to support this organization." A sample calculative commitment item is: "I will give my best when I know it will be seen by the 'right' people in this organization." A sample alienative commitment item is: "I feel trapped here." Coefficient alphas for the three sub-scales were moral commitment, .81; alienative commitment, .75; and calculative commitment, .66. Penley and Gould (1988) reported coefficient alphas of .80 (moral), .82 (alienative), and .67 (calculative).

The following demographic information was solicited for each participating police officer: current job (patrol officer, investigator, or supervisor), age, number of years in the current job, number of years as a police officer, marital status, work shift (first, second, or third), and education. The following demographic information was collected from each firefighter: current job title (firefighter, engineer, captain), age, number of years in the current job, number of years as a firefighter, marital status, and education. The shift question was eliminated for firefighters because all worked the same schedule. Utility district employees were asked to provide demographic information similar to firefighters except job titles differed.

Job satisfaction was measured using the Index of Job Satisfaction developed by Brayfield and Rothe (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981). The index consisted of eighteen items of which half were reverse scored (alpha = .87). Originally formulated with a 5 point agree-disagree scale, the index was modified to a 7-point (very strongly agree to very strongly disagree) scale in order to make it consistent with the other measures employed in this study. Sample items from the index include: "My job is like a hobby to me," "I am often bored with my job (R)," and "I find real enjoyment in my work."

#### Analysis:

Basic relationships were first examined using correlation analysis. T-tests were used to test for differences in organizational commitment and job satisfaction between police officers, firefighters, and utility district employees. For analysis purposes, the supervisory personnel who responded to the survey were included in the group that they supervised. We felt this approach was justifiable since the supervisors performed "regular" duties in addition to their supervisory responsibilities.

#### RESULTS

Demographic data are summarized in Tables 1A, 1B, and 1C. The average police officer in this survey was 35 years old, had 11.46 years of experience on the department, had 6 years experience in their current job, 71.9 percent of police officers were married, 61.4 percent worked first shift, and 50.9 percent were college graduates. The average firefighter was 33 years old, had 11.41 years of experience as a firefighter, and 5.8 years of experience in their current job, 74 percent were married, and 28 percent were college graduates. The average utility district employee was 39 years old, had 9 years of experience in the industry, 5 years of experience in their current job, 56 percent were married, and 58 percent were college graduates. The largest percentage of utility district employees worked in the laboratory and system protection (environmental protection) departments.

Correlations for the total sample and each subsample are reported in Table 2, 2A, 2B, and 2C. For the total population, the results indicate a small positive and significant correlation between job satisfaction and moral commitment (r = .164, p = .044), and between job satisfaction and calculative commitment (r = .162, p = .05). The correlation between job satisfaction and alienative commitment was not significant. The results also showed a negative correlation for moral and alienative commitment (r = .164, p = .000), a positive correlation between moral and calculative commitment (r = .018, p = .000), a positive correlation between calculative and alienative commitment. Examination of the correlation results for the subsamples showed no significant correlations between job satisfaction and any commitment type for police officers and firefighters; however, there was a significant correlation between job satisfaction and calculative commitment for the utility district workers (r = .302, p = .055).

Table 3 reports the mean scores for job satisfaction and each type of commitment for firefighters, police officers, and utility district employees. T-test analysis show that there were significant differences between firefighters and police officers for moral commitment (t = 5.832, p = .000) and alienative commitment (t = -5.725, p = .000). Firefighters expressed higher moral commitment than police officers, and police officers expressed higher alienative commitment than firefighters. A similar pattern of results were found where firefighters and utility district employees were compared. Firefighters reported significantly higher moral commitment (t = 4.797, p = .000) and significantly lower alienative commitment (t = -4.086, p = .000) than utility workers. No significant differences were found when police officers and utility district employees were compared on moral and alienative commitment. No significant differences for any comparisons of firefighters, police officers, and utility district employees were found for calculative commitment.

Examination of the T-test analysis for job satisfaction show that there were significant differences in reported job satisfaction between firefighters and police officers (t = -2.718, p = .008) and between firefighters and utility district employees (t = 2.411, p = .018). In both instances

firefighters reported higher job satisfaction that either police officers or utility district workers. There were no significant results when police officers and utility district workers were compared.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment have many favorable outcomes for all organizations. These include better attendance records, longer job tenure, and higher performance levels. As Dessler (1999) points out, "...there is considerable evidence that committed employees will be more valuable employees than those with weak commitment (p. 58)." This study suggests that there may be vocational differences in job satisfaction and organizational commitment types that are worth examining.

In many respects, the results for the correlation are consistent with what one might expect. For example, people satisfied with their jobs are also more likely to be morally and calculatively committed to their organizations while those who feel alienated (possibly estranged) from the organization are less satisfied with their jobs. In the case of moral commitment, job satisfaction may lead to a greater acceptance of organizational goals and values or possibly a manifestation of organizational fit. The relationship between job satisfaction and calculative commitment may be an indicator of the extent to which one's exchange expectations have been met on psychological contracts.

Why do firefighters express higher moral commitment than their police department and utility district counterparts? Possible answers include the public and professional perception of the firefighting profession and the specific nature of the work of firefighters. Firefighters are generally seen by the public as helpers. The media characterizations of the profession are usually positive. The fire department comes to your house to either save the building or to save your life. However, when the police department comes to your house, there is generally something bad that has happened. The police may be there to take you into custody. In general, firefighters do not have their actions or motives second guessed by the media as the police do. For example, when was the last time a fire department was accused of profiling?

For utility district employees a combination of public perception and sunk costs may provide some explanation. For example, working at the sewer plant may not be the most desirable or most appreciated job in a community. Additionally, many utility district employees' jobs may involve repetitive testing and analysis which could be perceived as boring. Sunk costs may provide an explanation for higher alienative commitment among utility district employees. Many utility district jobs require extensive training and professional certification. Individuals may feel that having made such investments, they are now "stuck" because of "overspecialization," and as a consequence, their skills are not transferable. They stay because they can see no viable alternatives to their current circumstances.

The nature of firefighting work could play a role in firefighters being more morally committed than police officers. Firefighters work in relatively stable teams with 24 hour work schedules. Therefore, members of a firefighting team spend significant amounts of time together and should be more likely to establish strong interpersonal bonds as well as a strong organizational/professional identity. It has long been accepted in the teamwork literature that commitment increases with the level of interaction and involvement. In addition, although not tested in this study, individual expectations about the job and the organization may be better met for firefighters than for police officers. The extent to which one's expectations about the job and the organizational commitment (Lee & Mitchell, 1999). Dessler (1999) argues that organizations that have high commitment

screen new employees for attitudes that are consistent with company values. The extensive screening process that is part of the hiring process for fire and police departments may result in a larger percentage of employees who are predisposed to the values of the organization and are consequently more likely to express a higher degree of positive types of organizational commitment.

Why do police officers express higher alienative commitment than their fire department counterparts? Possible answers include the way in which police work is often done. Frequently, one officer works alone in a patrol car or as an investigator while firefighters work together in teams or crews. Another answer may be the higher education requirements for police officers than for firefighters. Most urban police departments now require a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and that requirement may create higher individual expectations in economic and professional terms that may not be met.

Are police officers morally committed to their departments? Our results suggest that they are morally committed, but less than firefighters are. Differences in public perceptions of the two groups, differences in the nature of the work they do, and differences in education levels may explain the variance in moral commitment between the two groups. The results of this study showed significant differences between police officers and firefighters on two of the three forms of commitment examined. The group differences on moral and alienative commitment are relatively small in magnitude. This may mean that while statistically significant and important from a theory perspective; in practical terms, the differences might not be important.

There are several limitations to this study. The study is cross sectional and is subject to all the limitations associated such studies. An examination of organizational commitment over time might yield very different results. The small sample size (52 firefighters, 57 police officers, and 45 utility district employees) limits the study. The police officer sample was drawn from a single investigations bureau and only included officers from one shift in a single patrol district. We surveyed fulltime, professional firefighters, and volunteer firefighters were excluded. We did not survey employees of private utility companies in the region. Finally police officers and firefighters working in suburban communities were not included in this study.

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Table 1A Descriptive Statistics: Police Sample

Descriptive Statistics: I once Sample					
Mean Age	35				
Years in Current Job	6.04				
Years a Police Officer	11.46				
Married	71.9%				
Single	22.8%				
Divorced	1.8%				
Separated	1.8%				
Work First Shift	61.4%				
Work Second Shift	28.1%				
Work Third Shift	7%				
High School Graduate	15.8%				
Associate Degree	28.1%				
Bachelors Degree	50.9%				
Masters or Higher	3.5%				
Age 25 or Less	7%				
Age 26 to 30	14%				
Age 31 to 35	33.3%				
Age 36 to 40	15.8%				
Age 41 or Older	21.1%				

# Table 1C

Descriptive Statistics: Utility Sample

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Mean Age	39.3
Years in Current Job	5.15
Years in Industry	9.13
Married	56.3%
Single	16.7%
Divorced	8.3%
Water Treatment Employee	12.5%
Laboratory Employee	35.4%
Wastewater Treatment	22.9%
System Protection	10.4
High School Graduate	14.6%
Associate Degree	14.6%
Bachelors Degree	47.9%
Masters or Higher	10.4%
Age 25 or Less	6.3%
Age 26 to 30	4.2%
Age 31 to 35	20.8%
Age 36 to 40	8.3%
Age 41 or Older	29.2%

Table 1B Descriptive Statistics: Firefighter Sample

Mean Age	33.5
Years in Current Job	5.83
Years a Firefighter	11.42
Married	74.5%
Single	19.6%
Divorced	2.0%
Separated	3.9%
Firefighter	66.0%
Engineer	28.0%
Captain	6.0%
High School Graduate	48.0%
Associate Degree	24.0%
Bachelors Degree	28.0%
Age 25 or Less	12.5%
Age 26 to 30	10.4%
Age 31 to 35	31.3%
Age 36 to 40	27.1%
Age 41 or Older	18.8%

		Job			
		Satisfacti	Moral	Alienative	Calculative
		on	Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	Ν	151			
Moral Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.164(*)	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044			
	Ν	151	153		
Alienative	Pearson Correlation	042	610(**)	1	
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.605	.000		
	Ν	151	153	153	1
Calculative	Pearson Correlation	.162(*)	.194(*)	104	
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.018	.212	
	Ν	146	147	147	147

Table 2 Correlations (Total Sample)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

		Job			[!
		Satisfacti	Moral	Alienative	Calculative
		on	Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	57			
Moral Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.118	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.380			
	N	57			
Alienative	Pearson Correlation	.046	650(**)	1	
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.731	.000		
	N	57	57	57	
Calculative	Pearson Correlation	.081	.309(*)	266(*)	1
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.553	.020	.048	
	N	56	56	56	56

Table 2A Correlations (Police Sample)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

		Job			
		Satisfacti	Moral	Alienative	Calculative
		on	Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	Ν	50			
Moral Commitment	Pearson Correlation	058	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.687			
	Ν	50	52		
Alienative	Pearson Correlation	.104	378(**)	1	
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.473	.006		
	Ν	50	52	52	
Calculative	Pearson Correlation	.098	.113	.263	1
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.501	.433	.065	
	Ν	49	50	50	50

Table 2BCorrelations (Firefighter Sample)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

		Job			
		Satisfacti	Moral	Alienative	Calculative
		on	Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Job Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	Ν	44			
Moral Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.120	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.436			
	Ν	44	44		
Alienative	Pearson Correlation	.031	446(**)	1	
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.844	.002		
	N	44	44	44	
Calculative	Pearson Correlation	.302(*)	.134	183	1
Commitment	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.404	.253	
	N	41	41	41	41

Table 2CCorrelations Utility Sample

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3Job Satisfaction and Commitment Type ComparisonsFor Firefighters, Police Officers, and Utility District Employees

Moral Commitment	Number	Mean	T-Test Results
Firefighters	52	4.2846	t = 5.823
Police Officers	57	3.5719	p = .000**
Firefighters	52	4.2846	t = 4.797
Utility Employees	45	3.6455	p = .000**
Police Officers	57	3.5719	t =475
Utility Employees	44	3.6455	p = .636
Alienative Commitment			
Firefighters	52	1.7192	t = -5.725
Police Officers	57	2.5404	p = .000**
Firefighters	52	1.7192	t = -4.086
Utility Employees	44	2.3000	p = .000**
Police Officers	57	2.5404	t = 1.403
Utility Employee	44	2.3000	p = .164
Calculative Commitment			
Firefighters	50	3.0480	t = .938
Police Officers	56	2.8893	p = .350
Firefighters	50	3.0480	t =083
Utility Employees	41	3.0634	p = .934
Police Officers	57	2.8893	t = -1.071
Utility Employees	44	3.0634	p = .287
Job Satisfaction			
Firefighters	52	2.8511	t = -2.718
Police Officers	57	2.7368	p = .008**
Firefighters	50	2.8511	t = 2.411
Utility Employees	44	2.7260	p = .018**
Police Officers	57	2.7368	t =227
Utility Employees	44	2.7260	p = .821

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).