



# THE EVOLUTION & DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A CRITICAL AND COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

*Many types of research have been piloted on the concept of organizational commitment. This paper tries to review established exploration of the existing literature related to the development of the concept of Organizational commitment critically. It has considered the literature related to the approaches of Organizational Commitment, advanced in past decades and has provided an overview of different methods. Every approach has been an extension and modification over the preceding ones. Precisely, this paper will be built on the following theories of organizational literature, from within the commitment and has highlighted the theories regarding organizational commitment chronologically and the gaps those are identified in the proposed theories have been reviewed critically. It argued some of the ideas and thinking, developed so far, to provide the platform to conceptualize and measure the concept of organizational commitment. By considering the importance of social exchange theory in today's world in enhancing the commitment level of the employee towards its organization, we have proposed a model that displays the specific relationship between social exchange variables and their assumed outcomes which is yet to be empirically tested.*

**KEYWORDS:** employee commitment, attitudinal approach, organizational commitment, reciprocal relationship, social exchange theory

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** M50, M51, M59



<b>CITE THIS ARTICLE</b>	<b>ARTICLE HISTORY</b>
Jaiswal, Rani., & Raychaudhuri, P.S., Akhtar, Bushra., (2020, June). The Evolution & Development of the Concept of Organizational Commitment: A Critical and Comprehensive Review of Literature. <i>Perspectives on Business Management &amp; Economics</i> , 1(1), 152-165. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.pbme.in/papers/21.pdf">http://www.pbme.in/papers/21.pdf</a>	Received: April 28, 2020 Accepted: June 16, 2020 Published: June 20, 2020

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term commitment refers to "participation or engagement that limits freedom of action" (Oxford Dictionary). Organizational commitment has been one of the most challenging and the most -researched topic of organizational researchers in the area of Human Resource Management and organizational behaviour (Morrow 1993; Cohen 2003; Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005). The conceptual framework of other forms of commitment like the commitment to the work, workgroup has been affected by the conceptual and operational development of organizational commitment (Gordon, Philpot, et al., 1980; Morrow, 1993; Cohen, 2003). Most of the researches have been focused on inspecting the predictors and outcomes of commitment in the organization as it is a basic predictor of an individual's attitude towards the organization. Its importance has been encouraged by several studies that supported the positive relationship between organizational commitment and organizationally salient outcomes such as job satisfaction, retention, performance, and employee wellness (Meyer and Allen, 1997) as well as a consistent pointer of citizenship behaviour, turnover intentions and work withdrawal (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Morrow, 1993; Sinclair and Wright, (2005). Commitment has a rich and long multidisciplinary history and has been examined from a variety of perspectives (for example, economic, behavioural, and psychological) and conceptualized in a variety of ways.

We discuss various commitment conceptualizations in chronological order from Becker's side bet approach (1960) to Klein et al., (2012) and then present most recent models of uni-and-multidimensional commitment conceptualization. Every approach has defined this concept in its way. For better understanding, this paper has reviewed the development of the concept of organizational commitment critically as needed.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the extant literature on the concept of the evolution of Organizational commitment and its different research theories based on different approaches.
2. To understand the comparative aspects of different theories and thereby examine the limitations of the theories.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

A structured review of the literature on commitment was conducted by adopting the exploratory approach and analysis to review the concepts of organizational commitment. The high-impact, seminal articles on the organizational commitment which are the most cited &



statistically stated by Google Scholar are considered for review to analyze and understand the evolution of the concept of Organizational Commitment and to study the available theoretical framework on it. The research studies available from the 1960s till present are reviewed to frame the development of organizational commitment as a construct. The search strategy began with online databases (ERIC, Emerald, Ebsco, Jstor, Sage, Research gate & Psycnet). Keywords used for the review are organizational commitment, workplace Commitment, commitment propensity, commitment theory & approaches.

#### **4. APPROACHES RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

##### **THE SIDE-BET APPROACH**

This theory of Commitment has initially been presented by Howard Becker (1960). However, the earliest works, which focused on understanding loyalty and collective action (e.g. Roerthlisberger and Dickson, 1939), the commitment was implicitly discussed as a singular construct. The 1960s saw the emergence of the behavioural perspective on commitment. The relationship between an organization and its employee is established on behaviours that are confined by a “contract” of economic exchange and gains (Becker’s theory). Employees feel committed due to their hidden investments or side-bets. These are the accumulation of the investments in terms of time, effort and money, valued by the individual. Although the side-bet approach was left as a leading commitment theory, yet its impact in Meyer and Allen’s Scale (1991), is very apparent, recognized as continuance commitment scale. This scale was developed (Meyer and Allen 1991) to better testing of the side-bet approach.

"Organizational commitment comes into being when an individual, making an investment, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity" (Beckar, 1960, p.32). Becker's approach claimed that there is a close linking between employees' voluntary turnover behaviour and an organizational commitment. This argument was carried by the followers of Becker's side-bet theory (Alutto, Hrebiniak, and Alonso, 1973; Ritzer and Trice, 1969).

The early multi-dimensional view appeared around the same time, including Gouldner's (1960) distinction between cosmopolitan integration and organizational introjection based on different commitment targets, and Etzioni's (1961) typology of involvement based upon the use of power and organizational control. The final example here is Kanter's (1968) model of control, continuance, and cohesive commitment. Although Kanter described three distinct types of commitment. It should be noted that she also defined commitment singularly as 'the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems' (p. 499).

##### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTACHMENT APPROACH**

The second period of organizational commitment was proposed by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974). In this period, the focus shifted from an individual’s tangible investments to the psychological attachment to the organization. It is founded on the individual's identification with, and involvement in, the organization. This theory-based conceptualization became identified as the exchange theory of an individual’s commitment (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974, Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982). Accordingly, Porter and his



followers define commitment as “*an attachment to the organization, characterized by an intention to remain in it; identification with the values and goals of the organization; and a willingness to exert extra effort on its behalf*”. (Mowday, Steers and Porter 1974; p.604). Strong Acceptance, Participation, and Loyalty are three parts of it. Although described using multiple terms and indicators, this view presented commitment as uni-dimensional. They advanced that sometimes commitment was a better alternative to predict turnover intentions rather than job satisfaction.

While Porter et al. had contributed to the evolution of the concept of organizational commitment, they continued with one of the underlying assumptions that organizational commitment and turnover are highly correlated. A scale in the form of organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ), consisting of 15 items was developed. Despite the items that revealed the attitudinal commitment, the organizational commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) comprised items, termed as the consequences of commitment by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986). Critics of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire claimed that some items that scale dealt with turnover intentions and some items with performance intentions. The solution was found to use a shorter version of 9 item scale by deleting the six negatively worded statements (Iverson, 1999) or by deleting the three statements of turnover intentions, use a 12-item scale (Becker and Wilson, 2000). During this time, additional multidimensional models were also put forth, for example, Buchanan's (1974) model of identification, involvement, and loyalty as components of commitment.

## **THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH**

The era of 1980s saw two multidimensional approaches to organizational commitment. The key promoters of the multi-dimension approach are Meyer and Allen (1984) who used methodological paper to examine the side-bet approach and O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) who developed a conceptual and operational alternative to the OCQ.

## **MEYER AND ALLEN THEORY**

The Three-component (Affective, Continuous & Normative) Theory (1984, 1990, and 1997) of Meyer and Allen has been the dominant theory to organizational commitment for more than twenty years. The theory of Allen & Meyer (1984) started with a paper that argued about the inappropriate operationalization of Becker's Side-bet theory. It was claimed that the scales developed by the followers (Alutto et al., 1973; Ritzer and Trice, 1969) of Becker, measured attitudinal commitment, not side bets. The best way to measure side-bets, they asserted, was to use scale, which could directly assess individual's perceptions in terms of the number and magnitude of investments in terms of effort, time and money etc., an individual has made. For this, the interrelationships among some standard scales of commitment were compared and two scales; continuance commitment and affective commitment, were developed. The Continuance commitment scale, proposed, was a better demonstration of the side-bet approach of Becker. It was considered for the measurement of an employee's commitment towards his organization for his advantage. The affective commitment scale was developed as a noteworthy improvement over the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. Successively, Allen & Meyer added normative commitment as the third dimension; of Organizational



Commitment in the year 1990. This type of commitment rooted from the belief to remain with the organization due to a sense of obligation. This type of commitment is influenced by social experiences or cultural background before entering into an organization. It is worth noting that, parallel to Kanter (1968), the Three-component model holds that commitment is experienced as multidimensional mindsets, but the essence of commitment is uni-dimensional, defined most recently as 'an internal force that binds an individual to a target (social or nonsocial) and/or to a course of action of relevance to that target' (Meyer., 2009, p. 39).

Even though Meyer & Allen's theory has been preferred as a basis for future research, Criticisms have also been levelled against it. Vandenberg and Self (1993) and Vandenberg, Self, and Seo (1994) found significant differences particularly between affective and continuance commitment across the three different time frames. Though they did not redefine Organizational commitment but found that individuals at different stages of their career experienced a varying degree of psychological and economic attachment.

A stronger criticism against Meyer & Allen's scales about its discriminant and content validity was levelled. Ko et al. 1997 claimed that Allen & Meyer's definition of commitment did not embrace all the characteristics related to affective, normative, and continuance commitment. They also targeted two key issues identified in this approach. The first was related to Becker's continuance commitment dimension, representing attitudinal commitment according to Meyer et al., (1993). Ko et al. contended that their argument is unsound as according to Becker, commitment is a "consistent line of activity". Hence, Becker's view of commitment was as similar to the behavioural approach rather than the attitudinal approach of Porter et al. (Ko et al., 1997). Their second criticism based on the findings of Allen & Meyer that showed a lack of discriminant validity between Affective & Normative Commitment. It was unclear how Normative Commitment can be conceptually separable from Affective Commitment. (Ko et al., 1997). Some changes were proposed and tested in the scales throughout the years. A six-item version of the three scales was developed.

### **O' REILLY & CHATMAN THEORY**

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986)'s theory based upon to differentiate cautiously between the predictors and outcomes of commitment and the basis of attachment to the organization. They claimed that an individual's psychological connection could be predicted by three factors independently: (a) compliance (b) identification (c) internalization. A sharp difference between the psychological attachment and the instrumental exchange was made well by O' Reilly and Chatman. The other exciting contribution made by them was to identify the relationship between Organizational Commitment and consequences. They pointed to organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) as an appropriate outcome of organizational commitment.

Vandenberg, Self, and Sep (1994) & Bennett & Durkin (2000) claimed that the scale of "identification" and "internalization," developed by O' Reilly & Chatman, captured the same explanation as an OCQ. Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001 claimed that the compliance dimension did not show any emotional attachment to the organization.



## **NEW DEVELOPMENT: MODEL-BASED ON TWO DIMENSIONS: TIME AND BASES OF COMMITMENT**

The theories of Organizational Commitment, those are developed so far, contribute significantly to understanding the concept of Organizational Commitment. However, a need to give more focus to the concept of time was felt in the conceptualization of commitment because of different timeframes (Vandenberg & Self, 1993). Further, in the meta-analysis study of Meyer et al., (2002), the high correlations between normative commitment and affective commitment was found as well as the bi-dimensionality of continuance commitment advocated some amendments in these dimensions (Ko et al., 1997). Considering some of the above conclusions in his projected conceptualization Cohen (2007), specified two bases of organizational commitment (that is, instrumental or psychological attachment) that can occur pre-or post-entry.

As explained in Figure 1, the first two forms; one is instrumental commitment propensity that an individual brings to the organization before he enters into the organization. They were subjective to personal values, beliefs, socialization, expectations about the job, and prior experiences, stated as commitment propensity. It has resulted from his/her general expectations in terms of rewards and benefits, he/she might expect and get from his/her organization, and second was normative commitment propensity, based on his/her moral obligation towards his/her firm.

The other two forms that grow after entry are the Affective commitment is an emotional attachment to the organization developed by identification with it and the Instrumental commitment, deriving from the perception of an individual on the quality of the exchange between her/his contributions and the tangible rewards that he/she receives. It demonstrates that these forms are theoretically distinct from one another, but associated as the two forms of pre-entry commitment are essential predictors of the two forms of post-entry commitments.

**Figure 1: Two-dimensional organizational commitment**

		Nature of commitment	
		Instrumental Connection	Psychological Connection
Time	Pre-entry	Instrumental commitment propensity	Normative commitment propensity
	Post-entry	Instrumental commitment	Affective commitment

Source: Adapted Cohen. A (2006, 2007)'s two-dimensional commitment model

The two-dimensional model could solve two problems:





1. First, there is a close relation between affective commitment and normative commitment. This has given rise to enquire on how the normative commitment has enriched the theorization of commitment. This theory resolved the issue by defining normative commitment as the time- dimension as well as the propensity to the affective commitment. It contended that the high correlations between these two arise as the normative commitment tends to be committed due to personal characteristics & experiences about the organization before entry. So, it should be observed before entry.
2. Second, the limitation, related to the definition and measurement of the continuance commitment could be resolved by defining it as an instrumental commitment that better characterizes the notion of exchange.

### **THE COMBINED IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE, CONTINUANCE AND NORMATIVE COMMITMENT APPROACH**

John Somers (2009) in his research gave the preferences to the combined effect of commitment on work outcomes; mainly, employee retention and citizenship behaviour. He had compared the commitment profiles with job search behaviour, turnover intentions, absenteeism, lateness, work stress etc. Affective–normative, continuance–normative, continuance, highly committed and uncommitted have occurred as five empirically-derived dominant commitments. Findings showed that lower turnover intentions and lower levels of psychological stress are the most positive work outcomes, which was associated with the normative dominant profile. The more general psychological state of commitment, experienced by each individual is influenced by the relative levels of commitment. Such as, when Affective Commitment and Normative Commitment are high, consequently, the adverse effects of Continuance Commitment are eased out.

### **NEW DEVELOPMENT- THE KLEIN, MOLLOY AND BRINSFIELD'S UNI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL**

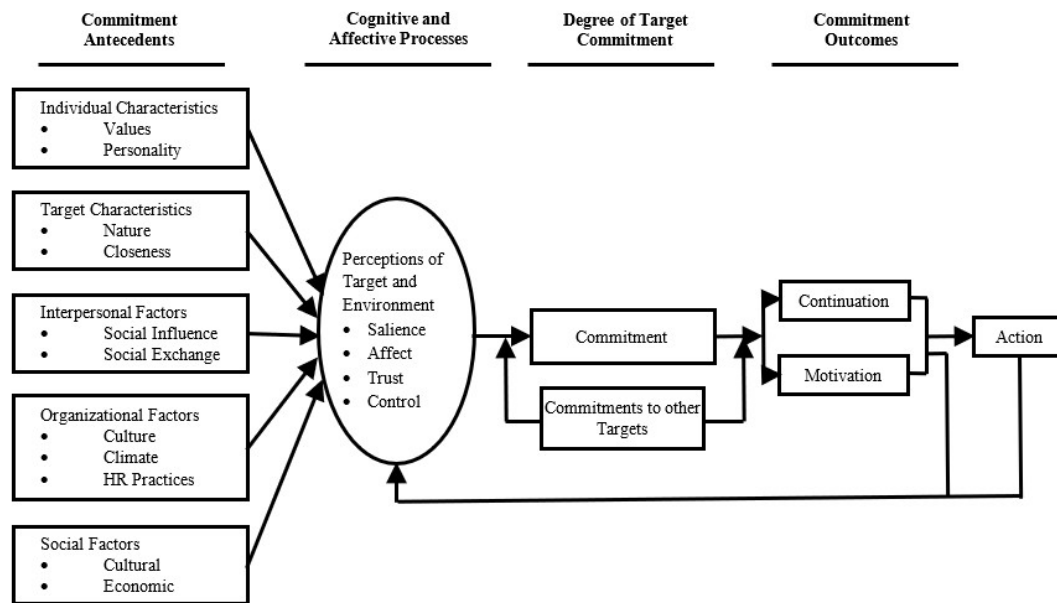
The most recent uni-dimensional Perspective is proposed by Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield. Klein et al. (2012) redefined commitment on three primary objectives: (1) conceptualization commitment as a unique type of psychological attachment or bond to highlight the distinctiveness of the commitment construct; (2) Reconceptualizingg commitment in a target free manner – one applicable to any workplace target (3) drawing the construct boundaries narrowly to exclude perceived confound in prior definitions. Based on their analysis, Klein et al. (2012) concluded that commitment is a "volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication and responsibility for a particular target" (p. 137). Defining the commitment as a particular type of bond is not just relabeling or excluding some of the TCM (Three-Component Model) mindsets. The definition is distinct from the TCM essence of commitment in three ways. First, commitment is defined as a type of bond rather than a binding force. Second, commitment is defined as a particular bond type, eliminating the need for ancillary mindsets. Finally, there is no reference to a 'course of action'.

Klein et al. (2012) propose two proximal outcomes (Continuation & Motivation). In short, committed individuals are less likely to withdraw from the target of that commitment. In term of motivation, high commitment results in individuals allocating more effort and resources in



support of the target, and being more willing to make the trade-offs in favour of the target when allocating constrained resources such as time & attention (Klein et al. 2012).

**Figure 2: Klein et.al (2012) process model of commitment to any workplace target**



### COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF DIFFERENT THEORIES OF OC WITH THEIR LIMITATIONS

The approaches examined organizational commitment has been steered either through side-bet theory or through psychological attachment, attitudinal and behavioural commitment and time and bases. The following table 1 briefed about the comparative aspects of different organizational commitment theories with their limitations.

**Table 1**

Approaches	Researchers	Conceptual framework	Concepts	Scales	Limitations	Comments
Side-bet theory	Howard Becker (1960)	Economic Exchange & gains contract	One dimension; Organizational Commitment leads to voluntary	RitzerTri ce Scale, Hrebeniak Alutto Scale	Content and discriminant validity were not satisfactory	Allen & Meyer (1991) termed it as "Continuous Commitment"
Attitudinal approach/Ps	Porter, Steers, Mowday, and	Affective/emotional attachment	turnover/ turnover intentions	Organizational Commit	Despite the widespread use of OCQ,	Allen & Meyer termed it as





Psychological attachment	Boulian (1974)	3 independent aspects: Strong acceptance; Participation and Loyalty		ment Questionnaire	relatively little evidence for its construct validity exists (Morrow, 1993; Price & Mueller, 1986; White et al., 1995).	"Affective Commitment".
Multi-dimensional Approach	O'Reilly and Chatman (1986)	independently three factors; Compliance, Internalization, and Identification Commitment	Multi-dimension; Organizational Commitment leads to Organizational citizenship behavior, Turnover, Job search, Withdraw, Absenteeism, Lateness, Job stress, and so on		The scale captured the same explanation as an OCQ and also facing difficulties in implementing its mechanism, so very few followers.	
	Meyer and Allen (1984, 1990, 1997)	Continuous Commitment and Affective Commitment		Continuous Commitment Scale and Affective Commitment Scale	Continuance Commitment Scale is relatively independent of both the ACS and NCS, having content and discriminant validity. The OCQ correlated significantly with the Affective Commitment Scale.	
		Normative Commitment		Normative Commitment Scale	Affective Commitment Scale & Normative Commitment Scale are highly correlative/interrelated.	
Two-dimensional Approach	Cohen.A (2007)	Two dimensional: Time be parted into pre (commitment Propensity) and post (Organizational commitment) entry commitment to the org; nature of Commitment be parted into Instrumental Commitment and Affective Commitment and normative commitment				Need to be validated



Combined influence Approach	Somers (2009)	Eight commitment profiles: Highly Committed, Affective Commitment dominant, Continuous Commitment dominant, Normative Commitment dominant, Affective Commitment-Continuous Commitment, Affective Commitment-Normative Commitment, Continuous Commitment-Normative Commitment dominant and Un-commitment.	More complicated to assess clearly
New Development	Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield (2012)	Uni-dimensional Model- commitment as a psychological bond conveys that it is a psychological state which can change over time. Volition indicates that commitment requires individuals to choose or decide to be committed, regardless of what led to the perceived bond. The definition is also target-free, which was defined previously and, from a measurement perspective, requires that scale items be applicable to any target.	Having very high internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .86 to .97 and above .90 for seven of the eight targets but does have limitations. The KUT relative to eight commitment targets, several prior commitment measures, and a variety of contexts. but there are other targets that warrant exploration, other prior commitment measures that await comparison, and additional contextual dimensions for which generalizability needs to be determined

Sources: Researcher's analysis

## 5. CONCLUSION

After reviewing the literature available, it may be concluded that most of the approaches to OC developed so far have the potential to contribute to a better understanding of OC. Prior commitment conceptualization includes both uni and multidimensional perspectives, with both represented with the employing organization as the target and the uni-dimensional perspective being more prevalent for other targets. Research on organizational commitment spans over four decades and remains an area of interest to both researchers and practitioners. The criticism levelled against these approaches can be used as a basis for furthering the scope of research in organizational commitment.

## 6. PROPOSED FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Today Organizations are facing challenges in retaining its workforce. Therefore, this study suggests that Organizational Commitment deserves much more analysis & research. The existing literature on Commitment might be a source of major empirical research and could be designed to further measure this construct. Though all the aforementioned effects on



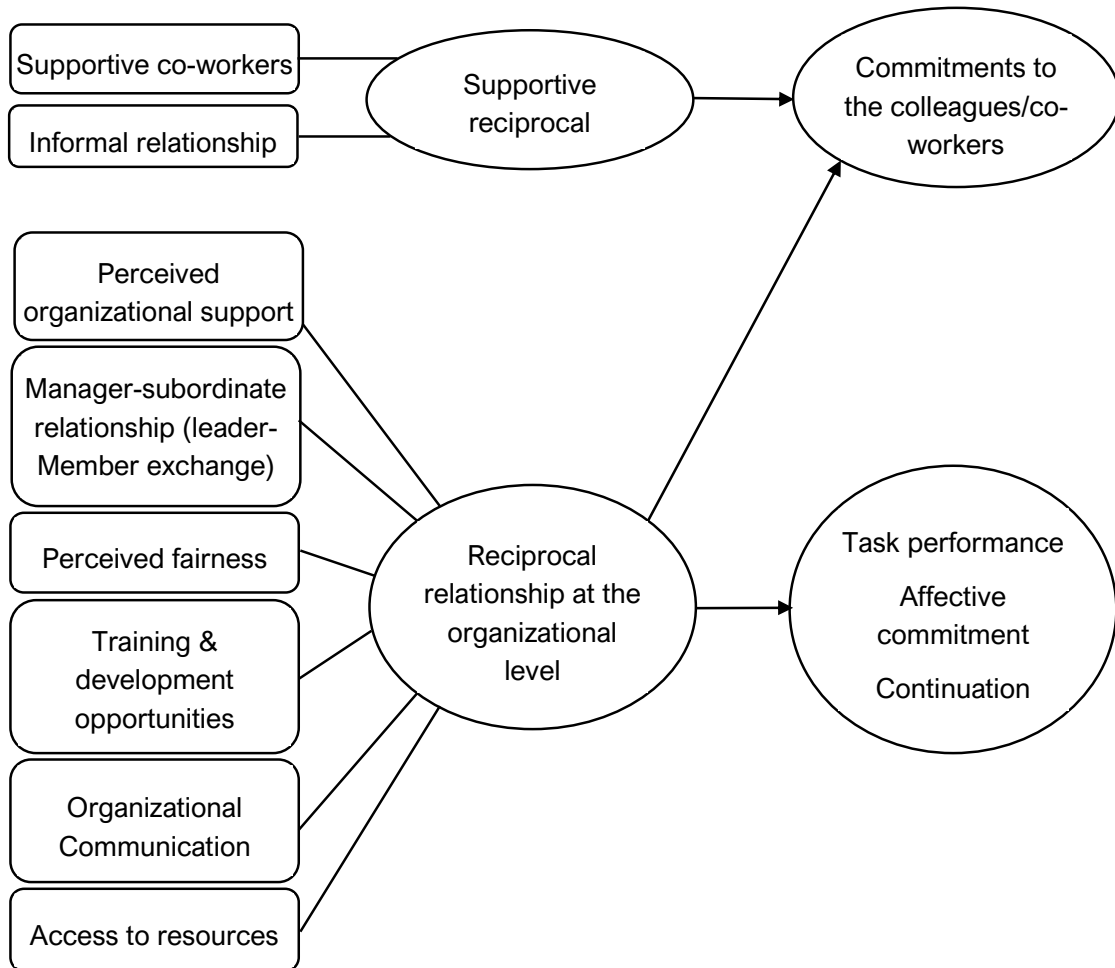
Commitment are important and worthy research topics, it is suggested that future researches should be focusing more on the strength of individuals' employment relationships that are largely rooted in an exchange process and has been described as an exchange relationship (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Organizational commitment has been associated with the balance between investment and outcomes. Both the organizational commitment and the psychological contracts literature have emphasized the importance of employee perceptions of the exchange relationship with the organization. Eisenberger and his colleagues (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986) proposed that commitment is best conceptualized as a social exchange relationship. The core idea behind social exchange theory is the concept of "reciprocity"; similarly respond to each other.

This theory explains social exchange as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties in which both parties involved in the exchange take responsibility for one another and strongly depend on each other. Besides, the interactions between parties are usually seen as mutually dependent and contingent on the actions made by the other persons (Blau, 1964). Emerson (1976) who studied social exchange theory in psychological was concerned on the individual behaviour when interacting with one another and suggested that power, conformity, status, leadership and justice within the social behaviour are important in explaining the theory. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2007) discovered that the social exchange relationship in a typical work setting determines the continuous retention or termination of contract from either party. The authors suggested that one employee can form distinguishable social exchange relationship either with his or her immediate supervisor, co-workers, organizations, customers, as well as the suppliers, where these distinct relationships have implications on their behaviour. Although the importance of this reciprocal relationship between the organization and employee has been recognized throughout the literature, this notion yet to be explored much to understand relations at the workplace in terms of reciprocal exchange of rewards (tangible and intangible) as well as to be attempted to link employee commitment with social exchange process and its variables. In fact, according to a study (Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review by Russell Cropanzano & Marie S. Mitchell, 2005), social exchange theory is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms in organizational behaviour. It has been fruitfully applied to the workplace to explain employee interactions. This makes perfect sense because we spend so much at our lives at our jobs. Work is a give and take. Everyone has hit the wall at one point or another and questioned whether sticking around at a company was worth it. They then make decisions about the relationships in their lives by comparing alternatives.

Considering the importance of enhancing employee commitment towards its organization via social exchange process, we propose the specific relationship between social exchange variables and their assumed outcomes that constitute the basis for future research. In the below figure, the reciprocity at both levels of social exchange is expected to be connected with organizational commitment. The below model is yet to empirically tested.



## 7. PROPOSED MODEL



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