

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE
IN THE U.S. LABOR FORCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between organizational commitment and job performance. We first discuss the theoretical rationale for why organizational commitment should enhance job performance. Then, we estimate the empirical relations between these constructs using data from a recent survey of a representative sample of employed Americans--the 1991 General Social Survey. These data suggest that there is a statistically significant--though modest--relationship between the "effort" dimension of organizational commitment and job performance. We next evaluate several possible explanations of this observed effect of commitment on performance. We finally discuss some of the implications and possible interpretations of our results.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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It is commonly assumed--by social scientists as well as managers--that workers who are highly committed to their organizations also perform better in their jobs. Much of what managers do is designed to increase their employees' organizational commitment, with the eventual goals of enhancing their job performance, and ultimately their organization's effectiveness. Such a strategy is represented by the current emphasis on a "commitment-oriented performance management approach" (e.g., Harvey, 1987:27), which seeks to control workers by eliciting their commitment to the organization rather than by coercive methods (see also Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990). Social scientists have also become increasingly concerned with the topic of organizational commitment (see, e.g., Mueller, Wallace, and Price, 1992), largely because of its presumed link to individual performance. It is thus no surprise that job performance may be regarded as the primary dependent variable of organizational behavior research since its inception (Staw, 1984:645).

While the conventional wisdom that commitment increases performance is intuitively plausible, the relationship between these concepts has not been adequately demonstrated empirically. Some studies have provided empirical evidence that organizational commitment enhances performance (Darden, Hampton, and Howell, 1989; DeCotiis and Summers, 1987; Johnston and Snizek, 1991; Larson and

Fukami, 1984; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, and Jackson, 1989; Van Maanen, 1975). Indeed, Locke, Latham, and Erez (1988:24-25) argued that a person's level of goal commitment can be inferred from his/her performance (and vice versa), since behaviors such as performance may be regarded as actual proof of commitment (see also Salancik, 1977). On the other hand, various researchers have reported that commitment is unrelated or only modestly related to performance (Balfour and Wechsler, 1991; Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982; Steers, 1977b). The latter view is supported by recent meta-analyses of commitment and performance, which also conclude that they are only weakly related: Randall's (1990) meta-analysis of 7 studies (totalling 1132 individuals) found but a small positive association between organizational commitment and job performance (the average correlation ranged between .15 and .17); while Mathieu and Zajac's (1990) meta-analysis found average correlations between commitment and others' (mainly supervisors') ratings of performance in 10 samples (2215 individuals) of .135, and between commitment and output measures (6 samples totalling 758 persons) of .054. They concluded that "commitment has relatively little direct influence on performance in most instances" (p. 184).

Despite the considerable theoretical and practical importance of the link between organizational commitment and job performance, then, there is relatively little empirical evidence that they are related. By contrast, the consequences of job satisfaction for behaviors such as job performance and turnover have been the subject of a great deal

of research (Darden et al., 1989; Shore and Martin, 1989). The relationship between job satisfaction and performance was called into question by several influential reviews in the early 1970s (Locke, 1970; Schwab and Cummings, 1970), however, and it is now generally accepted that organizational commitment is a more stable and less transitory attitude than job satisfaction, and thus should have greater consequences for behavior (see Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1982). Moreover, a cumulation of findings on the commitment-performance relationship among the studies that have been conducted is hampered by differences in conceptualization and measurement of the constructs involved. Many of these studies are also based on restricted samples with unknown generalizability, such as a single organization or occupation, or a single kind of activity like piecework. For example, Steers' (1977b) study of organizational commitment and job performance was based on information from employees in a large hospital and a research laboratory, while Darden et al. (1989) studied retail salespeople in a single department store chain.

This paper examines the relationship between organizational commitment and job performance, using data from a recent survey of a representative sample of employed Americans. We first discuss the theoretical rationale for why organizational commitment should enhance job performance. Then, we estimate the empirical relations between these constructs in the 1991 General Social Survey data. These data suggest that there is a statistically significant--though modest--relationship between the "effort" dimension of organizational

commitment and job performance. We next evaluate several possible explanations of this observed effect of commitment on performance. In closing, we discuss some of the implications and possible interpretations of our results.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is generally defined as:

"the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Conceptually, it can be characterized by at least three factors: a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982:27)).

This definition suggests that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct, a view that has been supported by a growing number of studies (e.g., Griffin and Bateman, 1986; Halaby and Weakliem, 1989; McGee and Ford, 1987; Meyer and Allen, 1984; Meyer et al., 1989; Morrow, 1983; Mueller, Wallace and Price, 1992; Reichers, 1985; Salancik, 1977. Three principal dimensions of organizational commitment have been identified. The first is affective commitment,

an attitudinal dimension that has become associated with the work of Porter and his associates (see Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974). This component has also been called value commitment (Angle and Perry, 1981). A second dimension is continuance commitment, and is usually identified with Becker's side-bet theory (Becker, 1960). It is also referred to as behavioral commitment (Mottaz, 1989), attachment or intention to stay (Halaby and Weakliem, 1989), or calculative commitment (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

A third dimension of commitment suggested by the above definition is effort. Effort is closely related to the first, attitudinal dimension: affective commitment implies effort, in that it compels one to act in pursuit of a goal (Darden et al., 1989; Steers, 1977b). Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979:236) argued that "highly committed employees are thought to be motivated to exert high levels of energy on behalf of the organization," and included effort as one of the three factors comprising the Porter scale (a variant of which we use to measure organizational commitment--see below). Mayer and Schoorman (1992) also grouped affective commitment and effort together as one dimension of organizational commitment--value commitment--arguing that they both reflect March and Simon's (1958:83) "decision to produce" (as opposed to the "decision to participate").

Types of Commitment and Performance

Steers (1977b:48) hypothesized that commitment is related to performance because committed employees are likely to expend greater

effort on the job. Similarly, Kiesler (1971) argued that commitment motivates a person or compels him or her to act. Therefore, we assume that committed workers perform better because they have higher levels of effort and motivation.¹ Theories of work motivation are directly relevant to performance (Staw, 1984): highly motivated workers perform better for various reasons: for example, they are thought to have greater needs for achievement that drive them toward success; and they are assumed to be more goal oriented and to pursue certain ends that require successful performance.

The connection between organizational commitment and motivation is perhaps most clearly observed in a Japanese model of work and organization. Staw (1984:651) observed that the Japanese model of motivation stresses achievement of organizational goals, cooperation, attachment, extending extra effort on behalf of the organization, and loyalty and service to the long term interests of the organization. Moreover, he noted that the relative emphasis upon collective versus individual motivation is a persistent theme that differentiates Japanese and Western models of rational maximization of personal utility.

We would expect affective commitment to be more strongly related than continuance commitment to job performance. Affective commitment denotes a correspondence between a person's and an organization's values, which would motivate one to seek to advance the organization's (and hence one's own) interests. This hypothesis has received considerable empirical support. Mayer and Schoorman (1992) found that

performance was more strongly related to value commitment, while turnover was more strongly linked to continuance commitment. They interpreted this as supporting March and Simon's (1958) distinction between the decision to participate as opposed to the decision to produce. Meyer et al. (1989) found that affective commitment was positively related to (supervisors' ratings of) first-level managers' job performance in a large food service company; by contrast, they found that continuance commitment was negatively related to job performance. They reasoned that "... employees with a strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to, whereas those with strong continuance commitment remain because they need to do so" (p. 152).

Similarly, Angle and Perry (1981) found that organizational performance was more strongly related to value commitment than to intention to stay (which was related more to turnover), though performance was not significantly related to either dimension of commitment. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) also reported that attitudinal commitment generally has been shown to have higher correlations with other variables than has calculative commitment.

We argue that the effort dimension of commitment mediates the effects of continuance commitment and (especially) affective commitment on job performance. Additionally, other variables, to which we now turn, may explain or interpret the relationship of commitment and performance.

Possible Explanations of the Commitment-Performance Relationship

An association between commitment and performance that holds up after controlling for their mutual causes would lend support to the view that affective states such as motivation have the most immediate influence on peoples' activities (see Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Thus, Darden et al. (1989:102) found that commitment was positively related to performance net of other determinants and that commitment mediated the effects of explanatory variables--such as a participatory, personal managerial style--on performance.

Alternatively, some or all of the commitment-performance relation might be explained by other variables. Steers (1977a) (see also Blumberg and Pringle, 1982; and Porter and Lawler, 1968) identified two major determinants of an individual's job performance (in addition to motivation). First, a person's performance is affected by his/her abilities, traits, and interests. Persons with higher skills and greater abilities are better able to perform the tasks associated with their jobs because they have greater capacities to do so, as opposed to the motivation or "will" to perform. Second, task characteristics often associated with the structural context of work may provide differential opportunities for performance (Blumberg and Pringle, 1982). Task characteristics include features of work organization such as autonomy, role clarity, and acceptance of role prescriptions; it has been hypothesized that people are better able to do their jobs if they are given the freedom to do so and if they understand what they are supposed to do. Moreover, higher levels of

rewards such as earnings may contribute to an atmosphere that is conducive to high performance.

Steers (1977b) argued that a major reason that he found no relationship between commitment and either quality of performance or overall performance--and only a small correlation between commitment and the quantity of work performance--was that he was unable to control for human abilities and role clarity. He emphasized the need to develop and test more complex models of the behavioral outcomes of employees' commitments to their organizations.

DATA AND VARIABLES

Data

The data base for our investigation of the relationship between organizational commitment and job performance is the 1991 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a nearly-annual multitopic survey administered to an area probability sample of roughly 1500 English-speaking Americans (for an introduction to the GSS, see Davis and Smith, 1992). The 1992 study surveyed 1517 respondents. The GSS includes a wealth of sociodemographic data on the background and current status of respondents, as well as many attitudinal data. In particular, the 1991 GSS included a topical module focused on "work organizations," which contained questions on organizational commitment and job performance as well as on ability and task characteristics.

This is the only nationally representative sample of which we are aware that contains information on job performance. The fact that the GSS is conducted with a representative national sample is notable because, as we mentioned above, virtually all research on the commitment-performance relationship has used samples clustered within work organizations. Hence, it is difficult to know how far a set of results based on a given organization might be generalized beyond their settings.

Measuring Organizational Commitment

We measure the three dimensions of organizational commitment--effort, affective commitment, and continuance commitment--using seven items that are available in the GSS (see Table 1A, which provides descriptive statistics on the individual items and gives reliability estimates [Cronbach's alpha] for the two scales). Our theoretical decision to utilize three measures of organizational commitment was supported by statistical evidence provided by the results of several confirmatory factor analytic models.²

-- TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE --

The three dimensions of organizational commitment are interrelated (see also Mathieu and Zajac, 1990:172; Mayer and Schoorman, 1992). We are primarily interested here in the relationship between effort and the other two dimensions. Regressing effort on our measures of affective and continuance commitment indicated that the latter dimensions were both positively related to

effort, though the partial relationship between affective commitment and effort (unstandardized coefficient = .526; [standard error = .035]) was much greater than that between continuance commitment and effort (.108 [.028]). This is consistent with our view that effort is more strongly related to affective commitment than to continuance commitment.

Measuring Job Performance

Job performance can be measured in various ways. Among these are the use of ratings by others (usually supervisors), output measures, and self-evaluations. All of these kinds of measures have been used to assess the commitment-performance relationship. Steers (1977b) used supervisors' ratings to evaluate the overall performance, quality and quantity of work, and promotion readiness of employees (see also Judge and Ferris, 1993). Such evaluations are most useful in specific kinds of work settings. Neither supervisors' ratings nor output measures are on scales that apply throughout the labor force. Consequently, the GSS performance measures are based on the respondent's self-ratings of the quality and quantity of his/her performance (see Table 1B).

Self-report measures of job performance such as these have been used previously by others (e.g., Pruden and Reese's 1972 study of salesmen; Busch and Busch's 1978 study of an industrial salesforce; Darden et al., 1989). A possible criticism of such self-reports is that some people are unable to report their performance accurately,

due to reasons such as poor introspection (e.g., Locke et al., 1988). Nevertheless, there is evidence that self-ratings correlate highly with more objective measures of performance when anonymity is promised (Pym and Auld, 1965). In particular, Heneman (1974) compared self-ratings of job performance by managers with evaluations done by their superiors. He found that the self-report measures had less halo error, restriction of range, and leniency than the purportedly more objective supervisor ratings. He suggested that these results probably reflect the fact that these self-reports were obtained for research purposes (such as is the case in the GSS), and were not to be used for evaluatory or other organizational purposes.

Moreover, Darden et al. (1989:91) argued that self-report measures of performance are not confounded by factors beyond the employee's control which may affect performance, since such indicators ask people to compare themselves to similar people. This suggests that the "true" commitment-performance relation might actually be stronger than that observed using supervisors' ratings. This conclusion receives support from Randall's (1990) meta-analysis, which compared results of studies of organizational commitment and job performance using self-report vs. objective and supervisory ratings. She found that studies using self-report and objective data sources showed approximately the same strength of relationship, while those using supervisors' ratings had lower mean correlations. She concluded that the strength of the relationship between commitment and performance is weaker when the latter is evaluated by supervisory data

sources. In addition, she noted that "...while objective data sources probably provide the most 'accurate' assessment of behavioral outcomes, studies using them are characterized by a significant amount of nonartifactual variance" (p. 373).

Table 1B indicates that almost all respondents in the GSS rated themselves as doing work of similar or greater quantity and quality than persons who (in their judgment) do work like they do. This result parallels that usually obtained for self evaluations generally, and recalls Garrison Keillor's description of the children in mythical Lake Wobegon, who were all "above average." Why this is the case is somewhat unclear. It could be that the GSS respondents indeed are performing better than persons they selected as comparitors; that is, they may have chosen to compare themselves to others to whom they compared favorably. It might also reflect differences in standards of evaluation.³

The possibility that there may be differential standards and comparison groups suggests that social psychological processes may affect responses on self-reported performance measures. Theories of "status characteristics and expectation states" point to one important set of such processes. This literature shows that if members of a group have inadequate information about how well they are able to perform a task, then differences in status characteristics such as sex or race may become bases for differentiated performance expectations. Higher-status individuals are assumed to have more ability to perform tasks, while those with lower status are thought to have less ability

to do so (Stewart and Moore, 1992:78). Gender and race are examples of "diffuse" status characteristics, which are related to very general expectations about capabilities and overall "worth". People tend to make attributions based on status characteristics such as gender or race in situations where performance is ambiguous; in particular, men may be more likely than women to feel that their performance levels are higher (regardless of actual performance levels) because men are usually seen as being better workers. Stewart and Moore's (1992:83) laboratory experiment found that pay differences can also function as status characteristics and influence peoples' subjective assessments of their own and others' relative performance capabilities (this may occur by a "reverse process" of "backward inference" from reward allocations to relative ability assessments).

We include several status variables--gender and race--in our analysis, to control for such possible survey response biases. In addition, we recognize that the effects of other variables--such as earnings--can be interpreted in these terms. We discuss the issue of standards and comparison groups further in our concluding section.

Measuring Ability

The Appendix presents details on our measurement of ability and task characteristics. Our proxy indicators of ability are: (1) years of education completed; (2) a career history that has been marked by steady advances (which we assume to be a measure of past performance as evaluated by superiors in the organization); and (3) the

respondent's perception of the likelihood that he/she will be promoted within the next five years.

Measuring Task Characteristics

Our primary measure of task characteristics is the GSS respondent's assessment of his/her degree of autonomy and involvement in organizational decision-making. Autonomy has been emphasized by social scientists and human resource managers in recent years as being important for both commitment and performance: spurred by concerns regarding competitiveness and lagging productivity, managers are increasingly adopting work systems that involve workers in decision-making. A growing body of evidence, moreover, indicates that autonomy enhances individual and organizational performance: for example, Darden et al.'s (1989) study of retail salespeople found that a democratic supervisory style increases organizational commitment, and thereby job performance. Accordingly, we hypothesize that job performance will be greater among workers who have more autonomy and who are otherwise more involved in organizational decision-making. Controlling autonomy is important for our purposes, since it is well-known that autonomy heightens commitment, especially in the United States (see Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990).

Our (admittedly imperfect) indicator of role clarity is the respondent's evaluation of how easy or hard it is for his/her supervisor to measure the output of his/her job. We hypothesize that performance is enhanced when the output is more easily measurable,

since under these conditions the worker is more likely to receive feedback on his/her performance and is more apt to understand what needs to be done.

We use annual earnings from the main job as a measure of reward levels. We expect that workers with higher earnings will perform better, in part because they are likely to have higher levels of motivation.

We also include a measure of job satisfaction, due to the historical importance of this work attitude in research on job performance. Surprisingly, there appear to be few analyses that consider both satisfaction and commitment as predictors of performance: Shore and Martin (1989:634) claim that, prior to their study of 72 hospital professionals and 71 bank tellers from a hospital and bank in the midwest, "...no prior research was found that investigated the differential affects [sic] of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment on job performance measures."

In addition, we use two indicators of the GSS respondent's work position--whether he/she is a supervisor and whether he/she is self-employed. These variables serve as controls for task characteristics and other features of one's work situation. They are also status characteristics that may affect how one evaluates his/her performance.

ANALYZING THE COMMITMENT-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP

Effects of Commitment on Performance

Table 2 presents information on the zero-order relationship between the three dimensions of organizational commitment and two indicators of job performance.

-- TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE --

As we anticipated, effort is most strongly correlated with both dimensions of job performance, affective commitment is weakly and positively correlated with each dimension of performance, and continuance commitment is uncorrelated with either performance dimension (panel A). Furthermore, the regressions of the performance measures on the three dimensions of commitment (panel B) indicate that only effort is significantly related to the performance indicators. This result, taken together with our finding that affective and continuance commitment are significantly related to effort (see above), suggests that any association between affective and continuance commitment, on the one hand, and performance on the other, is indirect via the effect of effort on performance.

An alternative explanation for the observed association between effort and performance--particularly quantity of performance--is that instead of representing an effect of commitment on performance, it reflects an artifact of measurement since both effort and quantity of performance are based on the respondent's evaluations of "working hard." Statistical evidence that "effort" is a dimension of

commitment rather than performance was provided by the results of a confirmatory factor analysis in which we compared the fit of a three-factor model (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and a factor that included both effort and the two performance indicators) with a four-factor model (in which effort and the two performance indicators were assumed to constitute separate factors). The fit of the four-factor model (Chi-square = 45.65, 23 d.f.) was much superior to the three-factor model (Chi-square = 325.59, 25 d.f.). This empirical evidence reinforces our theoretical argument that willingness to exert effort in the organization's behalf constitutes a dimension of commitment that is conceptually distinct from job performance. This view is also consistent with most of the literature (e.g., Mathieu and Zajac, 1990), which generally treats effort (especially when it is directed toward the success of the organization) as a correlate of commitment, rather than as a consequence.

Explaining the Commitment-Performance Relationship

Do workers scoring high on the effort dimension of commitment perform better because they have more ability, because they have particular kinds of jobs, or because they have certain status characteristics? Table 3 presents the correlations between indicators of ability, task characteristics and other work and individual characteristics, on the one hand, and measures of the three components of commitment and two components of performance, on the

other. Most of these explanatory variables are related to both commitment and performance. The main exceptions are: (1) the likelihood of future promotions, which is unrelated to commitment and to quality of performance; and (2) measurability of output, which is not associated with any dimension of commitment or performance.

-- TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE --

Table 4 presents results of regressions of each dimension of job performance on the commitment measures and the explanatory variables.⁴ Effort continues to affect both dimensions of performance, even after controlling for the other explanatory variables. We also control for another measure of effort--hours worked--which is positively related to quality, but not quantity, of work performance. Neither affective nor continuance commitment is significantly related to performance.

-- TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE --

None of our measures of ability is significantly related to quality of performance, though more educated workers and those who perceive that they are likely to be promoted tend to report that they work more than comparable workers. Workers who have the opportunity to work independently and to make decisions about how their work is done say that they do better work, but not necessarily more work. The former finding is consistent with the rationale underlying recent research and managerial thinking in the "employee involvement" tradition. By contrast, workers who earn more appear to do more work, but not better work, than people with whom they compare themselves.

Supervisors report that their performance (both quality and quantity) is better than workers who do not supervise others as part of their job duties. This may reflect supervisors' greater motivation and (in the case of quantity of performance) being less willing to restrict output, since they are more likely than workers to trust management, have their rewards linked to performance, and so on (Steers, 1977a). It could also be that supervisors have greater ability (to the extent that this is not captured by our three ability measures). Finally, authority may be operating as a status characteristic (people who are supervisors assume on that basis that they are high performers).

Women are more likely than men to say that the quantity of their work performance (but not their quality) is higher than that of people in similar kinds of jobs. Finally, non-whites are more apt than whites to report that the relative quality of their work performance is high.

Moderator or Interaction Effects

Many authors stress that job performance should be seen as an outcome of the combination of motivation, ability, and task characteristics, though there is little empirical evidence on the specific functional form by which these variables should combine to affect performance. Blumberg and Pringle (1982), following Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory (which posits that performance is a function of the product of ability/capacity and motivation/willingness),

assumed that ability, task characteristics (opportunity), and motivation interacted multiplicatively in their effects on job performance. Our assessment of such interaction effects is complicated by our use of multiple indicators of commitment, ability, task characteristics, and other work and individual characteristics. Nevertheless, we tested for the existence of several theoretically meaningful multiplicative interaction effects.

First, we hypothesized that ability should be more salient for performance when the job permits workers to exercise autonomy. If workers have no discretion, then individual differences in ability should not matter much for performance. Accordingly, we constructed multiplicative interaction terms between autonomy and each of the three indicators of ability (education, career advancement, future promotion). None of these interaction terms was significantly related to the prediction of either dimension of performance.

Second, using similar logic we reasoned that commitment should be more strongly related to performance when workers have greater autonomy. Interaction terms between autonomy and each of the three dimensions of commitment were unrelated to the quality of work performance. However, we did find a significant interaction effect between autonomy and effort in the prediction of quantity of performance: workers who had greater autonomy and who were willing to work harder to help the organization succeed also said they worked more; this interaction remained significant even after we controlled

for the other independent variables included in the models presented in Table 4.

Third, we hypothesized that workers with greater ability and who expend greater effort will perform better. Hence, we constructed multiplicative interaction terms between effort and each of the three indicators of ability. This hypothesis received weak and inconsistent support. While we found a positive interaction effect between "effort" and "career advancement" in the prediction of performance quality, this became non-significant when the other independent variables were added. Also, we found a significant interaction between "effort" and "education" in the prediction of performance quantity, but, contrary to our hypothesis, this interaction effect was negative.

Finally, we assessed the existence of interactions by career stage. Cohen (1991:256-257) hypothesized that commitment should affect job performance more in the mid- and late-career stages than in the early career stage. His reasoning was that in the early career stage, a lack of experience hampers ability to perform, regardless of commitment; in mid- and late-career stages, people will have learned their roles, and so general organizational attitudes such as commitment should be more important, while task characteristics become less important. We constructed measures of career stage using both the respondent's age (<30, 30-39, 40 and greater) and his/her years of employer tenure (<3, 3-8, 9 and greater) (see Cohen, 1991; Gould, 1979), and estimated the full equation (presented in Table 4) within

each of these groups. Our results provide support for Cohen's (1991) hypothesis that effort matters most when employees have developed the skills needed to perform their jobs: the effect of effort on quality of performance was significant only in the 30-39 age group (the effects of effort on quantity of performance were significant in each age group); while the effects of effort on both dimensions of performance were significant (at the $p=.05$ level) only among employees who had been with their employers for 9 or more years. Contrary to Cohen's (1991; see also Gould, 1979) hypothesis, we did not find a systematic difference in the effects of task characteristics on performance across the career stages.

FURTHER SPECULATIONS ON THE COMMITMENT-PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP

The results in this paper suggest that workers who are more committed to their organizations also perform better in their jobs, primarily because more committed workers are more willing to exert effort to help their organizations succeed. Affective and continuance commitment appear to affect performance, if at all, only indirectly by enhancing effort. The relationship between effort and performance, moreover, was not explained by our measures of ability, task characteristics, and other work and individual properties. While some of these explanatory variables influenced performance, none did so consistently.

Taken together, our results provide modest, but by no means overwhelming, support for the hypothesis that organizational commitment enhances job performance, despite what appears at first glance to be an intuitively obvious linkage between these two constructs. This conclusion is not inconsistent with many previous empirical studies. Randall's (1990) meta-analysis, for example, indicated that commitment is only weakly related to performance, and that methodological factors are unable to explain much of the variance in their relationship. If true, this might have a profound impact on current theory and practice in areas of organization behavior and human resources, since it would appear to undermine a basic justification for managers' attempts to enhance employees' commitments to the organization. This is not to say that it is unimportant for managers to elicit organizational commitment, since it is well known that commitment is negatively related to behaviors such as absenteeism and quit rates (Steers, 1977b). Indeed, it may be that general or global attitudes toward the organization affect primarily organization-oriented behavior (such as attachment or quitting), while task-oriented behaviors (including performance) are more strongly affected by specific attitudes toward the job. In other words, organizational attitudes mainly affect organizational outcomes, while job attitudes influence job-related outcomes such as performance (see Jackofsky and Peters, 1983; Porter et al., 1974; Randall, 1990; Wiener and Vardi, 1980:83). Our finding that job satisfaction was

unrelated to performance is, however, inconsistent with this view (cf., Shore and Martin, 1989).

Since our measurement of key concepts is less than ideal, we are reluctant to draw a strong conclusion about the relation between organizational commitment and job performance based on the present evidence. We would have liked to have had more and better measures of ability, task characteristics, and the various dimensions of effort and motivation, of course. In addition, our use of self-reports to measure job performance leaves open another plausible alternative explanation of our findings: there is really a genuine causal relationship between the two constructs, but the comparative nature of our job performance measure precludes us from demonstrating it.

Our argument has been directed toward explaining actual performance, and we have assumed that the self-reported performance measures accurately tap this. It might be, however, that our measures of comparative job performance result from two offsetting effects of commitment. On the one hand, commitment may enhance actual performance, and thereby have a positive effect on our measure of comparative job performance. On the other hand, commitment may also increase one's standards regarding how hard one "should" work, or one's norms for judging his/her performance. Higher performance standards must be negatively related to comparative perceptions of job performance, since the harder one thinks he/she ought to work, the less likely--*ceteris paribus*--he/she is to feel that his/her performance exceeds that of the comparative persons (see Jasso, 1980,

for a related view). Hodson (1989) uses a similar argument to explain why women report equal or greater job satisfaction than men despite objectively inferior jobs. He suggests that women use different social comparison groups from men (i.e., they compare themselves to other women, not to men), and thus have different personal expectations; he also speculates that gender differences in socialization make women less willing to express discontent.

A theoretical foundation for relating standards to performance is provided by equity theory, and a number of equity theory experiments conclude that women tend to undervalue their efforts relative to men. For example, a laboratory experiment by Major, McFarlin, and Gagnon (1984) found that women performed better than men (as judged by objective measures of the accuracy and efficiency of task performance), yet men and women did not differ in their subjective evaluations of their performance. Sex-segregation in the workplace reinforces sex differences in entitlement standards and effort: since women work mostly with other women, they lack information on effort-to-reward ratios for men, and the absence of external bases of comparison fosters reliance on internal, same-sex norms (Bielby and Bielby, 1988). Gender differences in performance standards might help to explain why women do not say that their quality of performance is higher than men's. Our finding that males report a lower quantity performance than females might be due to either: males and females having equal levels of actual performance

but males having higher performance standards; or women actually working more than males.

Other variables might be similarly "double-barreled" in their effects on comparative judgments of job performance. We do not know whether whites report that the quality of their performance is lower than non-whites, for example, because of differences in standards or in actual performance. Moreover, this ambiguity may not be limited to self-reports: in view of the social and situational influences associated with supervisors' ratings (see Judge and Ferris, 1993), actual performance may be unknowable except in very specific circumstances (e.g., piecework). The most promising strategy, therefore, might be to seek to measure and study in more detail the performance standards that people use to rate themselves and others, and to assess whether organizational commitment enhances performance standards as well as effort. This might be most profitably done within specific work contexts, a research focus that is more conducive to the use of objective performance measures.

Our efforts in this paper have identified a number of issues implicated in the commitment-performance relationship. Further research is necessary to resolve these questions, which are likely to take on added importance in the future, as the pressures to perform increase for both organizations and workers.

APPENDIX: MEASURES OF EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Ability

Education. Highest year of education completed.

Career advancement. Respondent's evaluation of the pace at which he or she has advanced with the current employer, from "lost some ground" (coded 1) to "advanced rapidly" (coded 4).

Future Promotion. Respondent's assessment of the likelihood he/she will be promoted within the next five years, from "not likely at all" (coded 1) to "very likely" (coded 4).

Task Characteristics

Autonomy. A four-item scale, computed as the mean of items measuring the extent to which a respondent says that he or she: (1) can work independently; (2) has a lot of say over what happens on the job; (3) allows him or her to take part in making decisions; and (4) is (not) closely supervised. Scale ranges from 1 = low autonomy to 4 = high autonomy. The scale's estimated reliability (Cronbach's alpha) is .834.

Measurability of Output. A two-item scale, computed as the mean of two questions indicating the respondent's perception of how hard or easy it is for his/her supervisor to evaluate the quantity and quality of the work that is done by a person in a job like the respondent's. Scale ranges from 1 = very easy to 4 = very hard. Missing values on

this variable were assigned the mean of the cases on which information was present.

Annual Earnings (logged). Natural logarithm of respondent's own income from employment in 1990; obtained by assigning midpoints (in thousands of dollars) to response categories offered.

Other Work-Related Characteristics

Job Satisfaction. Respondent's assessment of "how satisfied he/she is with his/her job". Coded 1 = low, 4 = high.

Supervisor. Dichotomous variable coded 1 = respondent supervises the work of other employees or tells other employees what work to do; 0 = respondent does not do this.

Self-employed. Dichotomous variable coded 1 = respondent works for him-/her-self; 0 = works for someone else.

Other Individual Characteristics

Female. Dichotomous variable coded 1 = female; 0 = male.

White. Dichotomous variable coded 1 = white; 0 = non-white.

Hours Worked. Respondent's report of the number of hours worked in the week prior to the interview; a report of hours worked in a typical week was substituted if respondent is employed but was not at work in the prior week.

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NOTES

1. Effort is one component of the more general concept of motivation; another aspect is direction of effort (see Staw, 1984). Steers (1977a:127) defined motivation as "...the process by which behavior is energized, directed, and sustained over time." His definition includes three components: (1) energetic force that drives individuals to behave in certain ways; (2) goal orientation which causes behavior to be directed toward certain ends; and (3) feedback that reinforces behavior over time. Our measure of effort refers mainly to the second dimension, since it reflects the degree to which workers are willing to exert one kind of effort--to help the organization to succeed.

2. We estimated confirmatory factor analytic models that specified that these seven items represented one, two, and three factors. A comparison of Chi-square values indicated that the fits of the two-factor and three-factor models were significantly superior to the fit of the one-factor model. Moreover, the fit of the two-factor model (in which "effort" was combined with the "affective commitment" items) was virtually identical to that of the three-factor model. We chose the three-factor model over the two-factor model since the former better captures our theoretical conception of the dimensionality of organizational commitment.

3. Comparative research suggests that there may be possible country differences in such evaluations. For example, psychiatrist Herbert Hendin asked Norwegian nurses if they were good nurses. Not one nurse would say yes, but all insisted that they were average. By contrast, all American nurses so questioned said they were good nurses (Jonassen, 1983:244).

4. We also estimated the models presented in Table 4 using ordinal logistic regression techniques, for two reasons: (1) the responses on the job performance items were highly skewed (toward positive evaluations of performance), violating the normality assumption of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression; and (2) it is arguable that the job performance items form ordinal, rather than interval scales. Ordinal logistic regression is less sensitive to distributional assumptions than OLS, since the former only makes assumptions about the disturbance of an equation, which is not necessarily violated by a skewed distribution of the dependent variable. The ordinal logistic regression analysis produced identical results for quality of performance. For quantity of performance, the only differences were that hours worked were significantly and positively related to the quantity of work done, while education (unstandardized coefficient [standard error] = .050 [.028], p-value of Chi-square = .078) and the likelihood of promotion (.123 [.065], .059) were no longer significant at $p < .05$.

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TABLE 1. MEASURES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

A. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

EFFORT

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Would you say that you strongly agree [=4], agree [=3], disagree [=2], or strongly disagree [=1]?

"I am willing to work harder than I have to in order to help this organization succeed" (Mean = 3.27, SD = .66).

AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT (Coefficient Alpha = .73)

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Would you say that you strongly agree [=4], agree [=3], disagree [=2], or strongly disagree [=1]?

(1) "I feel very little loyalty to this organization" [reflected] (Mean = 3.15, SD = .82).

(2) "I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar" (Mean = 2.95, SD = .74).

(3) "I am proud to be working for this organization" (Mean = 3.19, SD = .64).

CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT (Coefficient Alpha = .60)

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Would you say that you strongly agree [=4], agree [=3], disagree [=2], or strongly disagree [=1]?

(1) "I would take almost any job to keep working for this organization" (Mean = 2.30, SD = .86).

(2) "I would turn down another job for more pay in order to stay with this organization" (Mean = 2.34, SD = .92)

(3) "All in all, how likely is it that you will try hard to find a job with another organization within the next 12 months?" Would you say you are not at all likely [=4], somewhat likely [=2.5], or very likely [=1]? (Mean = 3.12, SD = 1.21).

B. JOB PERFORMANCE

QUALITY. "Compared to other people who do the same or similar kind of work that you do, how well would you say you do your job? Would you say...

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 5. Much better | (299, 34%), |
| 4. Somewhat better | (343, 38%), |
| 3. About the same | (248, 28%), |
| 2. Somewhat worse | (2, .2%), or |
| 1. Much worse? | (0) |
| DON'T KNOW/NA | (625) |

(Mean = 4.05, SD = .79)

QUANTITY. "Compared to other people who do the same or similar kind of work that you do, how much work would you say you do? Would you say...

| | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 5. Much more | (203, 23%), |
| 4. Somewhat more | (338, 38%), |
| 3. About the same | (317, 36%), |
| 2. Somewhat less | (28, 3%), or |
| 1. Much less? | (2, .2%) |
| DON'T KNOW/NA | (629) |

(Mean = 3.80, SD = .83)

Correlation between QUALITY and QUANTITY = .51

TABLE 2. RELATIONS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS
OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE

A. CORRELATIONS

| | QUALITY | QUANTITY |
|------------------------|---------|----------|
| Effort | .105** | .177*** |
| Affective Commitment | .059* | .056* |
| Continuance Commitment | .020 | .052 |

B. REGRESSIONS^a

| | QUALITY | QUANTITY |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Intercept | 3.613 | 3.297 |
| Effort | .159 (.053)** | .244 (.056)*** |
| Affective Commitment | .010 (.062) | -.087 (.065) |
| Continuance Commitment | -.045 (.045) | -.007 (.047) |
| R ² (adj) | .012 | .023 |
| N | 738 | 735 |

^a Unstandardized coefficients (Standard errors)

***: p < .001; **: p < .01; *: p < .10.

TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COMMITMENT/PERFORMANCE
AND EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

| | EFFORT | AFF. COMM. | CON. COMM. | QUALITY | QUANTITY |
|---|---------|---------------|------------|---------|----------|
| ABILITY | | | | | |
| Education | .026 | .068* | -.073* | .085** | .112*** |
| Career Advancement | .102** | .139*** | .103** | .043 | .125*** |
| Future Promotion | -.009 | -.024 | -.042 | .004 | .084* |
| TASK CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | |
| Autonomy | .324*** | .411*** | .283*** | .127*** | .080* |
| Measurability of Output | -.064 | -.032 | -.038 | -.025 | .001 |
| (log) Earnings | .158*** | .122*** | .141*** | .116*** | .176* |
| OTHER WORK CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | |
| Job Satisfaction | .275*** | .425*** | .356*** | .052 | .073* |
| Supervisor (=1) | .167*** | .187*** | .094** | .126*** | .176*** |
| Self-Employed (=1) | .216*** | .340*** | .265*** | .002 | -.053 |
| OTHER INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | |
| Female (=1) | -.087** | -.060 | -.065* | -.024 | .022 |
| White (=1) | .021 | .073* | -.037 | -.075* | -.022 |
| Hours Worked | .169*** | .114*** | .134*** | .130*** | .171*** |

***: P < .001; **: P < .01; *: P < .05

TABLE 4. REGRESSIONS OF JOB PERFORMANCE ON EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

| <u>Independent Variable</u> | QUALITY | QUANTITY |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| EFFORT | .113 (.053)* | .206 (.055)*** |
| AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT | -.034 (.066) | -.125 (.068) |
| CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT | -.064 (.046) | -.017 (.047) |
| ABILITY | | |
| Education | .019 (.011) | .023 (.012)* |
| Career Advancement | .022 (.045) | .063 (.046) |
| Future Promotion | -.011 (.026) | .055 (.027)* |
| TASK CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| Autonomy | .086 (.043)* | -.010 (.045) |
| Measurability of Output | -.041 (.039) | -.021 (.040) |
| (log) Earnings | .031 (.036) | .098 (.038)** |
| OTHER WORK CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| Job Satisfaction | .017 (.042) | .041 (.043) |
| Supervisor (=1) | .153 (.064)* | .227 (.066)*** |
| Self-Employed (=1) | -.059 (.104) | -.093 (.107) |
| OTHER INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| Female (=1) | .042 (.062) | .203 (.064)** |
| White (=1) | -.242 (.082)** | -.114(.084) |
| Hours Worked | .071 (.033)* | .061 (.035) |
| Intercept | 3.301 | 1.866 |
| R ² (adj) | .045 | .095 |
| N | 738 | 735 |

***: P < .001; **: P < .01; *: P < .05. Unstandardized coefficients (standard errors).