THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Performance Appraisal Perceptions and Organisational Commitment – A Conceptual Debate

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Abstract:
Performance Appraisal Perceptions have been a keen area of study by researchers over the past years. Several aspects and variables have been studies with respect to how appraisal processes are viewed by employees and what actions can be taken thereof. The relationship between Perceptions of Appraisal systems with Organisational Commitment, however, has been given limited focus. There are conflicts in the results proposed by scholars on how these variables are related. The focus of this paper is to present a theoretical framework that highlights the work of several authors towards the relationship between Perception of Performance Appraisals and Organisational Commitment.

Keywords: Performance appraisal, organisational commitment, affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment

1. Introduction

This article intends to explain the relationship between the Perceptions of Performance Appraisal Systems and Organisational Commitment. Performance Appraisal and its several uses, influences and associated variables have spanned research interest for decades. Performance Appraisal practices and its possible relationship with Organisational Commitment, however, has not been investigated. This paper presents a conceptual framework to study the possible relationship between these variables, and the associated literature therein.

2. Performance Appraisal Research – An Overview

The applications and extensive use of performance appraisal can be attributed to the opinions of many managers and human resource professionals that performance appraisal is a crucial tool for the success of human resource management practices and performance improvement (Longenecker & Goff, 1992). The belief is that an effectively designed and implemented performance appraisal system can provide the organization, the manager, and the employee with a multitude of positive outcomes (Cascio, 1987; Coens& Jenkins, 2000). In spite of its widespread use, and sometimes because of its prevalence, the practice of formal performance appraisal continues to come under considerable scrutiny and criticism (Walsh, 2003). There is no dearth of research on PA (Performance Appraisal, henceforth referred to as PA in this article) and its use. The subject has also been viewed from the perspective of cognitive psychology (DeNisi, 1997). However, comprehensive research in the field of Performance Appraisal Efficacy is minimal.

Performance appraisal has increasingly becoming common and serves as a vital human resource practice in today's organizations. The practice that traditionally focused on and followed a control and maintenance based approach has somehow progressed towards a methodology that is more involved with growth, motivational and developmental issues (Dutra, 2001, cited in Ubeda and Santos, 2007; Obisi, 2011). The effectiveness of an appraisal system depends on how well its purposes are understood, accepted and strived to be achieved by users. The significance of the concept stems from the pivotal role it plays in measuring employee's contribution toward the achievement of organizational goals in terms of innovative contributions, knowledge, experience and physical strength (Agarwal & Doku, 2016).

Research on PA spans an entire range of aspects and constructs that include psychometric issues, rater/ratee characteristics, cognitive processes, rater training, and appraisal fairness (Bretz, Milkovich, and Read, 1992). The manner in which PA and its counter effects are used has proven to influence rating behaviour and results (e.g., Williams, DeNisi, Blencoe, & Cafferty, 1985; Zedeck & Cascio, 1982) and be an important predictor of employee attitudes and perceptions of their appraiser, the job, and the performance appraisal system as such (Meyer, Kay, & French, 1965; Prince & Lawler, 1989). Salary discussion has been a keen interest area and has been examined by Meyer et al.'s (1965). In the study, researchers stated that salary discussions with the employee during the annual performance appraisal interfered with the constructive finalisation of plans for future performance improvement. However, in the first

empirical test of the Meyer et al. (1965) study, salary discussion was found to have either no impact or a slightly positive impact on employee attitudes (Prince & Lawler, 1986). However, pay for performance has been studied as a consequence of appraisal processes (Jungin, 2016). As a result, PAs and their usage have developed as an area of interest, yielding mixed results and conclusions.

The traditional research themes of rater accuracy, psychometric measures, and technical considerations have recently been expanded to include organizational acceptance, employee attitudes toward the organization, and the performance appraisal system and employee satisfaction as key indicators of performance appraisal efficacy (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; Murphy & Cleveland, 1991; Tziner, Murphy & Cleveland, 2001) and relationships/ leader – member exchanges (Pichler et. Al, 2016). Murphy and Cleveland (1995) suggested that employee reaction to appraisals is a class of neglected criteria that should be considered in evaluating the success of a system. Bernardin and Beatty (1984) also suggested that employee reactions to a performance appraisal system are usually better indicators of the overall viability of a system than the narrower psychometric indices. A performance appraisal system can be psychometrically sound in design and construction but still wholly ineffective in practice due to resistance or lack of acceptance from the users. Career growth has also been seen to be associated with Performance appraisal fairness (Nawaz & Pangil, 2016). Thus, the effectiveness of a system is particularly contingent on the attitudes of the system users, both raters and ratees (Roberts, 1990).

A favorable performance appraisal would have positive effects on employee attitudes, behaviour patterns and organizational efficiency (Gardner, 2008; Salleh et al., 2013). For example, higher employee performance and productivity attainment is derived through the performance appraisal capability in reflecting, measuring and evaluating an individual employee's behaviour (DeVries et al., 1981; Sarita, 2012), collaboration, teamwork, knowledge reuse, and knowledge sharing competencies and accomplishments (Kimiz, 2005) over a specific period of time.

Past research shown that appraisals are used in organizations for multiple purposes (Cleveland, Murphy, & Williams, 1989; Ostroff, 1993). These purposes are often shown to be contradictory (Cleveland et al., 1989; Meyer et al., 1965; Ostroff, 1993). This conflict may obstruct the efficiency of the appraisal process, perhaps even negatively influencing individual attitudes and organizational performance. Boswell & Boudreau (1997) have investigated appraisal uses and how reactions to appraisal are governed by employee attitudes. Their research states that Employee perceptions that appraisals were used for development positively associated with both attitudinal variables, after controlling for justice perceptions, performance, and demographics. Perceptions of PA use for evaluation did not show a significant relationship with either employee attitude.

Since previous research has shown PA purpose affects rating processes and outcomes (Murphy, Balzer, Kellam, & Armstrong, 1984; Ostroff, 1993; Williamset al., 1985) as well as accuracy of the rating (Murphy, Garcia, Kerkar, Martin, &Balzer, 1982), it is conceivable that employee attitudes may vary depending on perceptions of how the PA is used.

Past research is largely from the perspective of PA administrators (e.g., human resource managers) and the perspective is in terms of how appraisals are used (Cleveland et al., 1989; Ostroff, 1993). As proposed by Bretz et al. (1992), these respondents may be talking about the PA system as it should be ideally and not how it is actually practiced. Another approach is to investigate the appraised employee's perception of how PA is used. This has been taken up in this research project. If individuals differently perceive PA uses as suggested (Balzer & Sulsky, 1990; Ostroff, 1993), then attitudes may differ depending on that perception. How a PA is used may indicate to an employee their worth and/or growth prospects within the organization. The various ways in which stakeholders such as HR Managers, Top Management and the reporting manager themselves use the results of the PA are crucial determinants of how an employee views the PA system.

In addition, appraisal outcomes and behaviours such as accuracy, strategy, or information utilization are often the focus when PA use is investigated (e.g., Ostroff, 1983; Williams et al., 1985; Zedeck & Cascio, 1982), but very few researchers have looked at employee reactions (Prince & Lawler, 1986). In the Prince and Lawler study, salary discussion during the appraisal positively associated with employee attitudes (e.g., PA satisfaction and utility).

Performance Appraisal decisions affect a variety of human resource activities and outcomes (Judge & Ferris, 1993). Appraisal effectiveness and its measurement has often been an intriguing research question for many authors. As surveys show, the general objective of performance appraisal is primarily to improve an organizational efficiency. However, this efficiency is expected to be achieved through settings of a wider range of organizational objectives (McGregor, 1957; Mamoria, 1995, Atiomo, 2000, cited in Obisi, 2011) that reflects the source of perceived performance appraisal variation (Scholtes, 1993). Due to confusion, as to the true purpose of a system that attempts to achieve too many objectives, the system has the tendency to fail in meeting any of its objectives (Reneker and Steel, 1989). This appraisal system imperfection eventually allows the continuity of an appraisal that relies solely upon human information processing and judgment. Also, these multitudinous conflicting objectives of an appraisal system has received increasing attention in HR literatures for so many years (Strebler et al., 2001), despite an orthodox appraisal that is expected to motivate employees through well-defined objectives with provision for training and development needs (Bach, 2005). Performance appraisals exist to merely provide the organization with a tool to make decisions about an employee, as opposed to help him/her make personal decisions on his/her performance. By and large, what is typically communicated by the management is not what is actually rewarded.

3. Organisational Commitment

The concept organisational commitment has grown in popularity in the literature on industrial and organisational psychology (Cohen, 2003). Researchers continue to focus on the importance of employees' commitment to the organisation (Mitonga – Monga & Cilliers, 2016) and understanding the dynamics of employee commitment has been an important issue for both practitioners and management scholars alike (Tan, 2016). It has been viewed to be the heart of HRM practices in an organisation, since organisations need committed and sincere workers to be able to achieve their objectives (Peter & Eunice, 2014). Popular definition initially divided commitment into

the behavioural and attitudinal components (Peter, Mowday and Steers, 1979). However, the more popular categorisation is the 3-component model proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991) that categorises commitment into affective commitment (attachment to the organisation), normative commitment (a sense of obligation to stay with the organisation) and continuance commitment (the intention to stay with the organisation to avoid the costs associated with leaving the company, or an opportunity cost perspective). This is also the model that is used in this study.

3.1. Definitions of Organisational Commitment
Organizational commitment has been conceptualized and defined in different ways (Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990). Some researchers regard organizational commitment as a uni-dimensional construct (e.g. Blau, 1985; Kanter, 1968; Wiener,1982). Kanter (1968) viewed commitment as the willingness of social actors to give energy and loyalty to the organization. According to Porter (1968), commitment involves willingness of employees to exert higher efforts on behalf of the organization, a strong desire to stay in the organization, and willingness to accept major goals and values of the organization. In essence, organisational commitment is a psychological state that reflects a sense of shared values, identity, loyalty, support and pride a staff member feels towards their organisation (Kim et al., 2005; Le Rouge et al., 2006; Aghdasi et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2012).
Popular definitions of Organisational Commitment have surfaced after the concept has gained acceptance and applicability. A few definitions are examined in this section.
Bateman and Strasser state that organizational commitment has been operationally defined as "multidimensional in nature, involving an employee's loyalty to the organization, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, degree of goal and value congruency with the organization, and desire to maintain membership" (p.95). Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) identified commitment-related attitudes and commitment-related behaviours. Porter et al. (1974) discuss three major components of organizational commitment as being "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership". Organisational commitment has recently been defined as 'the degree to which people identify with their organisations and they want to remain with them, (Bell & Mjoli, 2014).
Definitions concur on the belief that commitment relates to loyalty to an organisation, based on how they relate to its overall association with them. The next section will further describe the component model used in this study.

3.2. Organisational Commitment Model
Meyer and Allen (1997, p 106) explain Organisational Commitment through a tri- dimensional model and categorise commitment into 3 kinds, namely affective, continuance and normative commitments.
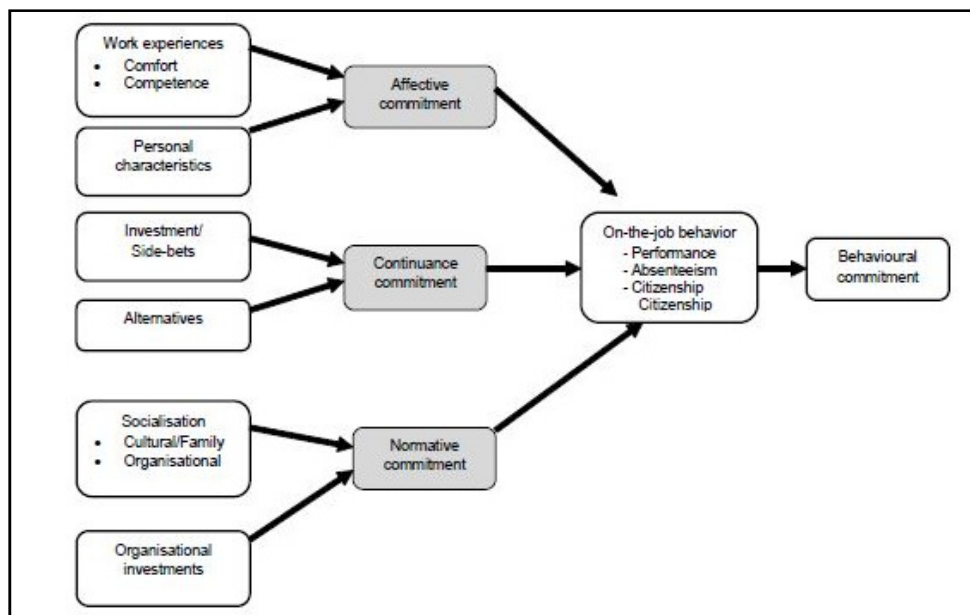

Figure 1: A three component conceptualization of Organisational Commitment Source: Meyer & Allen (1991)

3.2.1. Affective Commitment Dimension
The first dimension in the model is affective commitment, which represents the individual's emotional attachment to the organisation. According to Meyer and Allen (1997, p 11) affective commitment is "the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation". Affectively committed individuals continue their relationship with the commitment target because they like to do so (Torka, Shynes & Jan, 2010). Affective commitment is the emotional attachment to and involvement in the job (Geldenhuys, Laba & Vender, 2014), Members who are committed on an affective level stay with the organisation because they view their personal employment relationship as congruent to the goals and values of the organisation (Beck & Wilson, 2000).

Affective Commitment brings about many organisational impacts. It reflects employees' attitudes toward the way their organisation manages cultural diversity (Leveson et al., 2009), and it may influence their decision to expend efforts on their job (Zhang and Zhang, 2009), have an impact on their levels of job satisfaction (Patrick & Sonia, 2012), and they contribute more to advancing an organisation and less to leave the organisation at the same time (Laschinger et al., 2000). A recent study by Yang, Tsai & Liao (2014) has investigated that affective commitment is also influenced by behavioural integrity, mediated by charismatic leadership. In simpler terms, employees who see their leaders demonstrating the values that an organisation preaches, show greater affective commitment. Affective Commitment is seen to have a definite relationship with many HR practices. However, whether or not appraisal perceptions influence affective commitment remains to be investigated.

3.2.2. Continuance Commitment Dimension

Meyer and Allen (1997, p 11) define continuance commitment as "awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation". It is calculative in nature because of the individual's perception or weighing of costs and risks associated with leaving the current organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Meyer and Allen (1991, p 67) further state that "employees whose primary link to the organisation is based on continuance commitment remain because they need to do so". This indicates the difference between continuance and affective commitment. The latter entails that individuals stay in the organisation because they want to.

Continuance commitment can be regarded as an instrumental attachment to the organisation, where the individual's association with the organisation is based on an assessment of economic benefits gained (Beck & Wilson, 2000). COC is derived from the perceived costs of leaving the organization such as the loss of economic investments and difficulties in finding a new job (Tainget. Al, 2011). The strength of continuance commitment, which implies the need to stay, is determined by the perceived costs of leaving the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Best (1994, p 71) indicates that "continuance organisational commitment will therefore be the strongest when availability of alternatives is few and the number of investments are high". Employees are therefore committed to staying in the organisation, because alternates are not available and when presented with better and promising options, they may consider leaving.

The other dimension to continuance commitment is in terms of the costs associated and benefits attached to the present organisations that employees are with. Concurring with this statement is a recent study that states that 'Retail employees who are high in continuance commitment are committed to stay with a given retailer, regardless of their emotional detachment, because they have significant organization-specific investments, too few options for alternative employment, or both, (Boichuk & Menguk, 2013).

Yet another approach states that employee's perceived lack of opportunities is not actually a component of continuance commitment and if employees seek to enact policies that reduce an employee's sense of superiority for alternate job options, it would in reality step up their motivation to indulge in unethical behaviour (Jaros, 2012).

In conclusion, it is wise to state that continuance commitment is a facet of organisational commitment that needs to be fostered and channeled into becoming affective commitment, wherein emotional attachment to the organisation can be cultivated.

3.2.3. Normative Commitment Dimension

The last dimension of the organisational commitment model is normative commitment. Meyer and Allen (1997, p 11) define normative commitment as "a feeling of obligation to continue employment".

Normative commitment has also been described from the view of social interactions, wherein, 'it is an almost natural predisposition to be loyal and committed to the institutions such as family, marriage, country, religion and employment organization as a result of socialization in a culture that places a premium on loyalty and devotion to institutions (Jha, 2011).Meyer and Allen (1991, p 88) argue that "this moral obligation arises either through the process of socialisation within the society or the organisation". Also, behaving in a disloyal fashion is seen as 'wrong' by a person with normative commitment. This view is reinstated in a study analysing normative commitment in cooperative member societies, wherein it is noted that 'this sense of moral obligation can be seen as manifesting itself when a member considers that opportunistic behaviour (e.g., free riding and taking advantage of the public goods provided by the co-operative) is wrong' (Jussila, et. Al, 2014).

 In simpler terms, normative commitment is driven by a norm of reciprocity, which means that if an employee receives a benefit, it places him or her, under a moral obligation with the organisation.

4. Performance Appraisal and Organizational Commitment

Organisational commitment has been related to many constructs such as leadership style and job satisfaction (Lok& Crawford, 2004), HRM practices (Peter & Eunice, 2014), turnover intentions (Faloye, 2014), perceived organisational support (Tumwesigye, 2010), amongst others. Organizational commitment is frequently a variable of interest in studies of HRM and individual or organizational performance (Swailes, 2002), and has engendered a field of study of high-commitment work practices that includes performance appraisal (Farndale, Hope-Hailey, &Kelliher, 2011).

There have been varied studies conducted on the linkages between these two variables. Some samples present a significantly positive relationship between appraisal perceptions and organisational commitment, whilst others state the opposite.

Mowday, Porter and Dubin (1974) link performance to commitment, and state that the employees who are more committed are anticipated to give a superior performance as compare to those ones who are less committed. Organisational commitment has been proved to be a consequence of a positive appraisal experience in one isolated study (Brown, Hyatt & Benson, 2010). The study was conducted across a larger sample of public sector employees. Another study conducted by Farndale and Kelliher (2013) states that the actual employee experience of the appraisal procedures enacted by line managers (which may differ from how they were intended or

enacted) in terms of perceptions of justice in the process is likely to have consequences for levels of organizational commitment. Also, the level of trust employees has in the senior management largely determines how the appraisal is perceived. This appraisal experience is thus also seen to be in line with the organisational climate. In the same context, another study conducted by Cheng (2014) states that the implementation of administrative PA activities is highly associated with employee perception of organizational justice and that the level of perceived organizational justice is highly associated with the level of organizational commitment. The results also demonstrate that perceived organizational justice has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between administrative PA practices and organizational commitment. A study by Ahmed, Mohammed and Islam (2014) concludes that Perceived Fairness of Performance Appraisal is directly related to Organisational Citizenship Behaviour and this relationship is mediated by Organisational Commitment. Hence, even though a direct relationship has not been established, Organisational Commitment is seen to influence Appraisal perceptions.

There are studies that also suggest that only a weak or non-existent relationship lies between these variables. Pettijohn, Pettijohn& Taylor (2000) conducted a study amongst salespersons that concluded that employees are satisfied with one specific criteria used in appraisals. However, this is not seen to significantly influence Organisational Commitment. Similar to this, a study conducted by Sapian, Abd Rahim, Anuar& Ismail (2016) investigated the relationship between performance based reward (communication, participation, performance appraisal) and organizational commitment. Findings clearly indicated that there is a positive relationship between communication and organizational commitment. However, the impact is greater for the relationship between communication and organizational commitment than between performance appraisals and organisational commitment. Brown, Hyatt & Benson (2010) also have examined the effects of a low-quality appraisal perception on the employee's intention to quit and found that employees with a low-quality appraisal are more likely to quit their organisations, and also have a low level of commitment.

Another dimension that has been studied is indicating performance appraisals as an outcome of definite organisational commitment, that is, employees who are encouraged by a positive organisational climate will be committed employees. This is turn will lead to positive appraisal perceptions (Saha, 2016). In another study, Organisational Commitment is studies as an outcome of Performance Appraisals, wherein Organisational Commitment is seen to have a negative but not significant relationship with Performance Appraisals (Miah & Talukder, 2012). Another study also unearths the relationship between Performance Appraisal Perceptions and Turnover Intention of employees in the Higher Education Institutions, observing Organisational Commitment as a mediator (Kumudha and Bamini, 2013). Recent research also goes to state that Performance Appraisal perceptions have a moderate and a comparatively lower effect on Organisational Commitment than other HR practices (Chang et. Al, 2016).

It is also to be noted that performance is measured in financial and non-financial metrics for employees. A recent study (Tan & Lau, 2012) has concluded that when non-financial metrics are used for measuring employees' performance, the effect on organisational commitment is only indirect (moderated through procedural fairness).

5. Conclusion

Organisational Commitment is a crucial construct that is discussed at length in research. It is also observed to have ample effects on several constructs in organisational behaviour and Human Resources. Although it has been studied in the context of performance appraisal perceptions, a review of literature suggests that authors are in disagreement when it comes to conclusive opinions on the relationship these variables have with each other. This paper attempts to integrate the efforts of researchers through time, to highlight the conclusions that have emerged from the debates on Organisational Commitment.

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