IMPACT OF PROTEAN CAREER ORIENTATION ON EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

[1]H.M. NISHANTHI, [2]PAVITHRA KAILASAPATHY

[1]Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
[2]Department of Human Resources Management, Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Colombo
Email: menaka@kln.ac.lk pavithra@hrm.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract: The current study examines the impact of protean career orientation on employee commitment of middle and junior employees in banking sector in Sri Lanka. It is hypothesised that protean career orientation has a negative impact on employee affective, continuance and normative commitment forms.
The study is of deductive in nature and all these relationships are tested using data collected from a sample of 209 middle and junior employees in the banking industry using convenience sampling technique. Data are collected using a self-administered anonymous questionnaire developed combining standard measures related to each construct. Data are analysed using SPSS and AMOS 16.0 and primarily screened to ensure that they were appropriate for the hypotheses testing and then the hypotheses were tested by using multiple regression analysis.
Based on results it is found there is a positive impact of protean career orientation on continuance and normative commitment while no relationship is recognised with affective commitment.

Key words: Employee Commitment, Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment, Normative Commitment, Protean Career Orientation

I. INTRODUCTION:

The concept of commitment in organisations has received greater attention by academics and practitioner community for the past decades. Many definitions of commitment have been offered, but it is well recognized that commitment reflects feelings such as attachment, identification, or loyalty to the object of the commitment (Morrow, 1983). The literature concerning soft versions of HRM suggest that one outcome of the adoption of HRM is organisational commitment. Further, commitment resulting from HRM policies is considered to result in greater effort which, in turn, results in improved performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Whereas, the concept of protean career (Hall, 1976) is a self-directed orientation to the career that implies independence from external career influences. Briscoe, Hall and De Muth (2006) more specifically identified a values-driven (one's own values) approach and self-directed career management behaviours (when identifying career success) as two conceptually distinct but related components of the protean career (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009).Originally, the protean career was defined by Hall (1976) as a process which is managed by the person and not by the organisation. Hence, it is not what would happen to the employee by staying in an organisation. Emphasising the significance of this concept Briscoe et al. (2006) mentioned that even though this concept had been researched for more than 30 years, comprehensive empirical study has not been fully developed. Hence, it could be understood that, still there are many arenas to discuss under protean career orientation.

Banking sector in Sri Lanka plays a major role in economic development of the country. However, it has been noted that there is high attrition ate s among the executive level employees in the banking sector. This fact was supported by the Fitch Ratings Lanka Ltd. in its report (2007), which stated that recruiting and retaining human talent is a key issue for Sri Lankan banks. Fitch observed that there is a rather high staff turnover at the middle/junior management and clerical levels (junior staff) within the banking system. Hence, the current study focuses on identifying whether there is any impact of protean career orientation on employee commitment levels in the banking sector of Sri Lanka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The concept of protean career orientation has been tested as a predictor with employee commitment forms (affective, continuance and normative) by scholars such as Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009), Cakmak-Otluoglu (2012) and Fernandez and Enache (2008). Protean career orientation signifies an intrinsic drive and a self-direction in handling one's own career with greater freedom and flexibility (Hall, 1976). On the basis of self-determination theory (Ryan &Deci, 2000) and regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998), the effect of protean career orientation on employee affective commitment could be well established.
The regulatory focus theory suggests that, individuals have the option of executing two separate strategies when achieving their goals and objectives (Higgins, 1998). They can be identified as promotion focus and prevention focus. According to Higgins (1998), under

promotion focus, individuals can work to achieve their ambitions with a determination of maximizing the benefits. If not, personalities can focus and work on completing the current duties and responsibilities with the view of minimizing the current losses under prevention approach. Hence, employees who adopt promotion focus have the needs focused on achievement and development while prevention focused individuals needs are in line with safety, security and protection needs (Higgins, 1998).

Hence, based on these two theories (self-determination and regulatory focus), Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe (2004) emphasised that employees with high affective commitment would focus on achieving greater internal motivation, with more self-direction and a promotion focus in order to achieve goals that are relevant to the target. According to Briscoe et al. (2006), as individuals tend to be more proactive, there is a greater possibility that they would leave the organisation if the current organisation does not meet the development needs of them. This was further verified by Fernandez and Enache (2008) who stated that among the employees who tend to identify more autonomous regulation, there is a greater tendency to develop proactive attitudes such as emotional or physical mobility from the current organisation to achieve more opportunities for continuous learning and personal development if the current organisation does not provide them with. Hence, it could be theoretically stated that higher the employees tend to be with protean attitudes, lower would be his/her affective commitment to the organisation. Even though this was the argument, Briscoe et al. (2006) in their study found no relation between protean career orientation and affective commitment. Based on the theoretical and empirical arguments, the following hypothesis can be identified.

H_1: Protean career orientation has a negative impact on employee affective commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Fernandez &Enache, 2008; Cakmak-Otluoglu, 2012)

In order to theoretically establish the relationship between protean career orientation and employee continuance and normative commitments, once again self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2000) can be employed. Self-determination theory highlights employees' intrinsic motivation to achieve their goals and objectives without depending on one organisation. The continuance commitment indicates that one tends to stay only because of the fear of losing the benefits if she or he leaves the organisation. Hence, it could be argued that if the employees tend to be with greater self-determination and driven by their own values, that would give more importance to their own development rather than the benefits received. Therefore, based on the argument that protean career oriented people tend to leave the organisation due to their autonomous nature regardless of some practical concerns, the following hypothesis can be identified.

H_2: Protean career orientation has a negative impact on employee continuance commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Cakmak-Otluoglu, 2012)

As mentioned in the literature review, normative commitment refers to the employees' tendency to be committed to the organisation due to some obligatory reasons which bound them to it (Allen and Meyer, 1990a). In this sense, with the theoretical backing of the self-determination theory (Ryan &deci, 2000), it could be identified that normative commitment provides an adverse view to the concept of self-directed independent career. Thus it is identified that protean career attitudes would be negatively related to the normative commitment (Briscoe et al., 2006). However, in practice, Briscoe et al (2006) found no relation of protean career attitudes to either continuance or normative commitment forms. Even though this was the case, it requires further empirical support in the Sri Lankan context and the following hypothesis is identified accordingly.

H_3: Protean career orientation has a negative impact on employee normative commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009; Cakmak-Otluoglu, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

A positivistic epistemology was adopted going in line with the reductionism and therefore this is considered a deductive research study. Further, this study is of explanatory nature as it attempts to investigate a 'why' question to explain relationships between the variables in this model. As data for this study are collected only at one point in time, this is regarded as a cross sectional study. The unit of analysis here is the individual banking employee (middle and junior executives/staff). The population of the study is all the middle and junior executives/staff banking employees in Sri Lanka. The sample size of the study is 209. The researcher employed convenience sampling technique and the data collection was done through a self-administered anonymous questionnaire which was developed using standard measures available for each variable of organisational socialisation, employee commitment and protean career orientation. Demographic information were also obtained from the banking employees at the end of the questionnaire. After the data collection was performed, data were analysed using SPSS version 16 and AMOS software. Data was screened before using for hypotheses testing in order to ensure no mistakes were done in data entering. Then the data was tested to ensure normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, validity, reliability, correlation, absence of multicollinearity as well as common method bias. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses and dummy variables were developed to test the control variables.

IV. MEASURES

The dependent variable- employee commitment is measured by administering the organisational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) developed and validated by Allen and Meyer (1990a). The questionnaire includes twenty four (24) Likert scale questions on a range of seven values in order to enhance the quality of the data captured. Further, the concept protean career orientation is tested via protean career orientation scale by Briscoe and Hall (2005) which includes fourteen (14) positive seven point Likert scale questions. Apart from the above mentioned validated measures, demographics of gender, age, work tenure, position and educational qualifications of the respondents are also assessed in the questionnaire where age and gender are considered the control variables of the study.

V. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Inter item consistency reliability for all latent variables was also tested using the Cronbach'sAlpha coefficient and the results are shown in Table 01. As overall reliability coefficients for all measures are above .7 it is deemed to be reliable (Sekaran, 2010).

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The hypothesis 01 tested whether there is a negative impact of protean career orientation on employee affective commitment. The results of the study indicated that there is no effect of protean career orientation on employee affective commitment as the impact identified through R^2 is not significant.

Table 01 Reliability statistics of measures

Measure	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Affective commitment	8	.809
Continuance commitment	8	.889
Normative commitment	8	.760
Protean Career Orientation (PCO)	14	.833

Source: Survey Data

This finding is in agreement with the findings of Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009) where they also found that protean career attitudes demonstrated no relation to affective commitment. This suggests that organisations cannot determine whether employees are more or less emotionally attached to the organisation based on their level of protean career attitudes. According to the current study, banks should expect as much or as little affective commitment from the employees with protean attitudes as any other employee in the bank. This non-relationship between protean career orientation and affective commitment might be due to many reasons. One reason might be that, those with protean attitudes tend to make their own opportunities and goals for advancement, and are not dependent on the current organisation or with external opportunities that are available, unlike the employees with boundary less career attitudes, who make it a must to seek opportunities outside the organisation. That is, employees with protean attitudes will only seek outside employment demonstrating less commitment to the current organisation, only if those opportunities are in line with their career objectives and their innate values. Further, organisational tenure might also influence the relationship between protean career orientation and affective commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009) as there is a tendency for employees to be more affectively committed to the organisation with time, suppressing their desire to be independent career oriented. Even though the current study is consistent with the findings of Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009), Fernandez and Enache (2008) and Çakmak-Otluoğlu (2012) found that protean career attitudes are of importance in predicting affective commitment. In the study conducted by Çakmak-Otluoğlu (2012), it was found that self-directed career management, which is one dimension of the two dimensions of protean career orientation, is positively related to affective and normative commitment forms. Further, Fernandez and Enache (2008) also stated based on their study that employees who are high in protean attitudes (self-directed and values driven) tend to display high levels of affective commitment and are not interested towards organisational mobility. Hence, it is better if this relationship is further verified in different study settings with different samples rather than depending only on the current findings.

The next two hypotheses (hypothesis 02 and 03) proposed a negative impact of protean career orientation on employee continuance and normative commitment forms. However, in contrary to theory, findings of the study have generated an opposing relationship than expected indicating a significant positive impact of protean career orientation on employee continuance and normative commitment. These results even contradict with the findings of the study conducted by Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009) where they found that protean career attitudes are not related negatively or positively to normative and continuance commitment. However, as mentioned above, Çakmak-Otluoğlu (2012) in her study found that out of the two dimensions of protean career orientation, self-directed career management is positively related to normative commitment and negatively related to continuance commitment while values driven career orientation is adversely related to normative commitment. Hence, based on the current findings it could be said that the study has generated novel insights to the protean career literature.

Based on self-determination theory, it was expected that employees with protean career attitudes to be less committed to the organisation due to the feelings of debt and lack of career advancement opportunities. Nevertheless, there can be many explanations for the emergence of a positive relationship between these variables in the banking industry in relation to middle and junior staff/executives. As mentioned before, under continuance commitment, employees tend to be committed to the organisation due to the fear of losing the benefits received by the current organisation. If an employee is driven by protean attitudes, she/he would manage his/her career based on his/her own career goals and objectives and intrinsic values. Hence, if the current organisation is providing ample opportunities for their career advancement, then there would be no reason to seek greater benefits outside. Further, this argument can be further justified because within the Sri Lankan banking industry, the benefits received by the same category of employees (junior and middle banking staff/executives) would be in the same range as noted by the researcher in the informal discussions had with banking staff/ executives. However, salary ranges would be different with the managerial categories of different banks and these employees are excluded from the current sample of the study.

This argument can also be applied to explain the positive association between protean career attitudes and normative commitment. Even though it has been argued that employees driven by self-direction and intrinsic values tend to be less obliged to the current organisation, if the organisation provides them with greater support and internal development opportunities, they would choose to remain with the organisation as having protean attitudes do not necessarily mean that they would leave the organisation. Apart from these causes, tenure in an organisation would also make an alteration to the relationship between protean career orientation and continuance, normative commitment forms as explained by Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009). Briscoe and Finkelstein (2009)'s argument that culture can play a major role in moderating the relationship between protean career orientation and commitment can also be applied in this context as well. According to Gasteiger and Briscoe (2007 as cited in Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009), employees holding protean attitudes are more interested in working with inventive and risk-taking entrepreneurial employers. Within the Sri Lankan banking industry today, it is visible that novel concepts to attract customers are emerging due to the mass completion prevailing among the commercial-non-commercial, private-public banks. Further, the banking industry is an industry in which employees tend to take greater risks as deals with financial resources. Hence, based on these arguments, it could be justified that there can exist a positive effect between protean career orientation and continuance and normative commitment among the middle and junior executives/staff in the banking sector in Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of this study is that it contributes to the various domains of Human Resource Management, Organisational behaviour, Career management and Management. The study suggest that being protean does not necessarily result in less employee commitment. Hence, the study may provide reassurance to employers who might worry about investing in employees who are more self-driven. On the contrary, it further guarantees that employees are committed even with high protean attitudes and do not find any difference from other employees. However, it would be necessary for the employing organisations to continue providing/enhancing the current rich tolerant culture coupled with proper HRM policies and ample opportunities for career advancement.

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