COLLECTIVISM AND TRADITIONALITY: HOW DO THEY MEDIATE BETWEEN REWARDS AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT? EVIDENCE FROM CHINA

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Abstract

Although the diverse body of literature on affective organisational commitment continues to uncover increasingly complex workplace attitudes, the cultural dimensions influencing affective organisational commitment remains little understood, especially outside the Western context. This study reports on the antecedents of employee commitment in the Chinese context. Questionnaire survey from 290 employees in a major Chinese airline revealed positive relationship between employee commitment and satisfaction with compensation, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision, in line with previous studies in the Western context. It, however, suggested that traditionality negatively moderated the relationship between affective commitment and autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. This suggests that employees with different cultural orientations, especially in traditional societies, may have varying levels of emotional attachments to their organizations.

Keywords

Collectivism, organisational commitment, organisational rewards, traditionality

Introduction

Affective organisational commitment, commonly defined as employee identification with and emotional attachment to the organisation (Meyer and Allen, 1993), is one of the most frequently investigated constructs in the study of workplace attitudes. This results from the fact that it influences a whole host of individual level outcomes of benefit to organisations. Recent meta-analytical reviews of the literature find it to be negatively related to employee turnover and positively linked to job performance (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002). Compared to other commitment mindsets it has consistently been found to be the best predictor of positive organisational behavior (Chen and Francesco, 2003).

Despite a wealth of empirical work on organisational commitment there are still huge gaps in our knowledge as to its antecedents. One topic yet to be fully addressed in the literature is the role played by culture in shaping organisational commitment. Culture has traditionally been conceptualised as a group level construct which can be defined as a shared system of values, attitudes, beliefs and meanings between the members of a social group (Thomas et al., 2003). Since Hofstede's (1980) groundbreaking study, which introduced the notion that national cultures vary across four main dimensions, research on the relationship between culture and organisational commitment has increased in volume. Differences in national culture have been shown to exert a significant influence on employee commitment across national boundaries (Randall, 1993; Palich et al., 1995; Gelade et al., 2008).

There is a growing consensus in the literature that the conceptualisation and measurement of culture purely at a national level ignores significant within country variability along cultural dimensions (Clugston et al., 2000; Williamson et al., 2009). Recently, scholars have begun to argue that culture is something which can be psychologically experienced at an individual level, manifesting itself in individuals in terms of their assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms and behaviour (Earley and Randall, 1997; Aycan, 2000; Chao, 2000). Over the last decade, empirical work has begun to examine the influence of the cultural orientations of individuals on organisational commitment (Clugston et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2002; Williamson et al., 2009). However, the results of this work are inconsistent. Wang et al. (2002) report a positive relationship between the collectivism orientation of Chinese employees and their affective commitment. In contrast, Clugston et al. (2000) find no relationship between a number of cultural values and the organisational commitment of American employees. Recent work by Williamson et al. (2009) sheds further light on the subject through the use of an interactionist

approach to examine the moderating effects of culture on the relationship between the organisational rewards and affective commitment in the US context. They find significant moderating effects of collectivism on the relationship between both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and affective commitment.

In this study, a theoretical contribution to the literature is made by examining how the cultural orientation of the individual, influences the organisational rewards/commitment relationship in the Chinese context. Specifically we examine the moderating effects of collectivism and traditionality on the relationship between extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards, and affective commitment. Although previous work has examined the influence of culture on the organisational rewards/commitment relationship in Western settings (Williamson et al., 2009) this is the first study of its kind to look at these issues in China, a culture which is predominantly collectivist and traditional in nature. Our study is conducted in the context of the Chinese airline industry which is characterized by a shortage of skilled workers and high turnover. The findings of this research also have important managerial implications. They should be useful for Chinese organisations looking to foster high levels of employee commitment through the design of appropriate reward systems for individuals with different cultural orientations.

Theoretical Background

Organisational rewards

The literature distinguishes between three main types of rewards that individuals seek from their organisation; extrinsic, intrinsic and social (Malhotra et al., 2007; Williamson et al., 2009). Extrinsic rewards are those rewards that are provided by the organisation and do not arise from the context of the job itself. They may include compensation, fringe benefits and promotional opportunities. On the other hand, intrinsic rewards are those that arise from the content of the job itself. They may include motivational characteristics of the job such as autonomy, feedback and participation in decision making. Social rewards derive from interaction with other people on the job. They refer to the extent to which positive interpersonal relationships, such as those with a supervisor or a co-worker are available to the individual in the work environment.

Rewards and affective commitment

According to the social exchange theory, employees will enhance their organisational commitment when the organisation meets their expectations regarding the fulfillment of their individual needs (Haar and Spell, 2004). This social exchange is based on what has been labelled in the literature a 'psychological contract' between employer and employee (Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contracts, based on the norm of reciprocity, have been shown to play an important role in determining organisational behaviour (Garrow, 2004). The provision of rewards by an organisation has been shown to be a major factor that strengthens the psychological contract between the employee and employer (Malhotra et al., 2007). According to the tenets of social exchange theory, on being rewarded for their work by the organisation, employees will reciprocate by displaying affective commitment to the organisation. Previous empirical work indicates that extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards all play an important role in determining the affective commitment of employees towards the organisation (Angle and Perry, 1983; Loscocco, 1990; Mottaz, 1998; Young et al., 1998; Eby et al., 1999; Malhotra et al., 2007; Williamson et al., 2009).

Cultural values- collectivism and traditionality

Of all the individual level cultural dimensions proposed to influence organisational behaviour, individualism/collectivism has received the greatest attention in the literature (Triandis, 1995). Individualism refers to the tendency of individuals to view themselves as being independent from others in society. Those high in individualism tend to emphasise the achievements of personal goals over group interests. In contrast, collectivism refers to the tendency of individuals to view themselves as being interdependent with others in society. Individuals high in collectivism typically place greater concern on the consequences of their behaviour for people in the same social group and show greater willingness to sacrifice personal interests for group welfare. Although China is considered to be highly collectivist society (Earley, 1989) previous research indicates that there is quite a high level of within country variability along the individualism/collectivism dimension (Francesco and Chen, 2004).

The problems faced in applying constructs developed in the West to explain organisational behaviour in non-Western settings have been highlighted by researchers who believe appropriate measures should be developed to explain phenomena indigenous to Asia (Meyer, 2006; Barney and Zhang, 2009). In recent years, a new construct labelled traditionality, has been developed by researchers investigating organisational behaviour in Confucian-based societies (Farh et al., 1997). Traditionality refers to the extent to which individuals endorse traditional Chinese values, consistent with Confucian ideology (Hui et al., 2004). Such values include respect for authority, filial piety, and conservatism, and stress the importance of hierarchical relationship between members in society (Yang et al., 1989; Spreitzer et al., 2005). The cultural value traditionality overlaps to a certain extent with the Hofstede's cultural dimension of power distance, given its focus on hierarchical relationships (Spreitzer et al., 2005). As Chinese society has opened up to Western influences over the last three decades the traditional ties that bind members of society are less important than was the case in the past. The influence of traditional Chinese values have weakened, especially amongst the younger members of society, who are more oriented towards egalitarianism, are increasingly self-reliant, and are more open to outside influences than their predecessors (Hui et al., 2004). As a result there should be growing variation in the traditionality orientation of individuals in the Chinese organisational context.

Hypothesis development

The cultural values of an individual have been shown to influence their preferences towards certain types of organisational rewards, which in turn impact on job attitudes (Yu et al., 2003; Williamson et al., 2009). In the following section we theorize that the collectivism and traditionality orientation of an individual may influence the strength of the relationship between organisational rewards and affective commitment. We focus on three organisational rewards in this study: compensation, autonomy and supervision. They were included to represent the categories of extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards (Malhotra et al., 2007). Hypotheses are developed based on existing theory and empirical evidence.

Satisfaction with compensation

Satisfaction with compensation is defined as the perceived satisfaction with compensation for the work done, as well as the relative satisfaction with compensation compared to that provided in other organisations (Malhotra et al., 2007). Previous work establishes a positive link between satisfaction with compensation and the affective commitment of employees (Mottaz, 1988; Loscocco, 1990). However, other studies produce conflicting results, indicating it may have no relationship (Malhotra et al., 2007) or even a negative relationship (Ebey et al., 1999) with affective commitment. We suspect that in China where employee turnover is relatively high, satisfaction with compensation will be positively related to affective commitment. Previous research indicates that Chinese employees rank pay highly in comparison to other organisational rewards (Chiu et al., 2002; Yu et al., 2003).

Typically, individuals with low collectivism are more likely to place emphasis on individual benefits and economic rewards whereas those with high collectivism are more likely to work together with others to achieve shared objectives (Wagner, 1995; Green et al., 2005; McMillan-Capehart, 2005). Williamson et al. (2009) find significant moderating effects of collectivism on the relationship between extrinsic rewards and affective commitment in a sample of American employees. They demonstrate that employees low in collectivism report higher levels of affective commitment when they are satisfied with compensation in their organisation. On the basis of these findings we might also expect that compensation to be more important to Chinese employees low in collectivism (as opposed to those high in collectivism).

Individuals high in traditionality tend to respond to their employers according to perceived role obligations rather than according to their perceptions of an inducement/contribution balance (Farh et al., 2007). Consequently, it is likely that individuals high in traditionality (as opposed to low) will show greater commitment to the organisation when they perceive their compensation to be low in comparison to other individuals. Indeed, recent research by Pillutla et al. (2007) demonstrates that individuals high in traditionality are more likely to accept unequal distribution of benefits than those low in traditionality, who exhibit greater sensitivity towards perceptions of inequality.

Based on the above literature we develop the following hypotheses:

H1: Satisfaction with compensation is positively related to affective commitment

H2: Collectivism moderates the relationship between satisfaction with compensation and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in collectivism.

H3: Traditionality moderates the relationship between satisfaction with compensation and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in traditionality.

Autonomy

Autonomy is defined as the ability of the employee to determine the way and manner in which they carry out their job. It is an important intrinsic motivator and is likely to be positively related to affective commitment as it helps to satisfy the internal psychological needs of the individual employee (Williamson et al., 2009). Empirical studies in Western contexts find evidence of a positive relationship between autonomy and affective commitment (Eby et al., 1999; Malhotra et al., 2007).

The desire for autonomy is a key distinguishing feature between employees with low and high collectivism (Williamson et al., 2009). Employees with low collectivism tend to prefer independent rather than team-based work activities and therefore typically prefer greater autonomy in their daily work (Benet-Martinez and Kitapoglu-Aygun, 2003). Gomez (2003) indicates that individuals high in collectivism place greater value on task interdependence than autonomy. Previous research in the US context demonstrates that employees with a higher collectivism orientation will exhibit lower affective commitment towards the organisation than those with a lower collectivism orientation when they perceive their organisation provides high levels of autonomy (Williamson et al., 2009). On this basis we might also expect that the amount of autonomy provided by the organisation might be more important to Chinese employees with a low collectivism orientation (as opposed to those high in collectivism).

Chen and Aryee (2007) argue that individuals high in traditionality, similar to high power distance employees, may be less reluctant to take responsibility for work-related activities than those low in traditionality due to a sense of powerlessness or lack of agency. They quote Kirkman and Shapiro (1997) to suggest that individuals low in traditionality (as opposed to high) typically seek greater autonomy over the manner in which they carry out their job and are more willing to accept responsibility. As a result we might expect that the provision of greater autonomy will not enhance the commitment of high traditionality individuals to the same extent as it would of those low in traditionality. This leads us to theorise that when autonomy is low individuals high in traditionality should exhibit greater affective commitment to the organisation than those low in traditionality.

Emanating from the above discussed literature, we develop the following hypotheses:

H4: Autonomy is positively related to affective commitment

H5: Collectivism moderates the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in collectivism.

H6: Traditionality moderates the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in traditionality.

Satisfaction with supervision

Satisfaction with supervision refers to the extent to which employees are satisfied with their supervisors conduct towards them. Previous studies demonstrate a positive relationship between satisfaction with supervision and organisational commitment in Western settings (De Cotiis and Summers, 1987; Mottaz, 1988). However, recent work by Malhotra et al. (2007) finds no evidence to support such a relationship. On the basis of previous empirical work which highlights the relative strength of the subordinate/supervisor relationship in the Chinese context (Chen at al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2003), we would expect there to be a strong link between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment within a Chinese organisational setting.

Although no research has directly investigated the impact of collectivism on the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and organisational commitment, previous research demonstrates that employees from Western cultures with a low collectivism orientation will view supervisor support more positively than individuals from cultures with a high collectivism orientation (Glazer, 2006). This leads us to hypothesise that employees low in

collectivism will exhibit greater affective commitment towards the organisation than those high in collectivism when they are satisfied with supervision.

As regards the influence of traditionality on the relationship between organisational rewards and affective commitment previous research indicates that individuals high in traditionality tend to be more willing to comply with the directives of their supervisors and typically exhibit greater acceptance of status differences than those low in traditionality (Chen and Aryee, 2007). Success in their working life depends on having a good relationship with their supervisor (Redding, 1990). In contrast, those low in traditionality are more reluctant to obey their supervisor, especially when trust is low. Recent work indicates that individual differences in traditionality impact on the organisational behaviour of individuals in response to social realities. Hui et al. (2004) find that Chinese employees high in traditionality exhibit organisational citizenship behaviour that is relatively high, regardless of the quality of the relationship with their supervisor. In contrast, less traditional Chinese were found to be more sensitive to their relationship with their supervisor and exhibit greater organisational citizenship behaviour when they have a good relationship with their supervisor. This leads us to hypothesise that when employee satisfaction with supervision is low those individuals low in traditionality (as opposed to high in traditionality) will exhibit lower affective commitment. Likewise when satisfaction with supervisor is high we expect employees low in traditionality to develop greater affective commitment than those high in traditionality.

Based on the above literature we develop the following hypotheses:

H7: Satisfaction with supervision is positively related to affective commitment.

H8: Collectivism moderates the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in collectivism.

H9: Traditionality moderates the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher in traditionality.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

The research was conducted over a three month time period from May-July 2009. Participants in the study were employees of a major Chinese airline company located in the capital city of Henan Province, China. The airline company selected for the study is one of the top three airline companies in China, its shares listed on both domestic and overseas stock exchanges.

The research team distributed paper questionnaires to 500 full-time employees selected randomly from the records of the human resource department at two different time periods, firstly in May and secondly in July. The first questionnaire measured demographic variables and cultural orientations. The second questionnaire measured organisational rewards and affective commitment.

All individuals were full-time employees working in a managerial or administrative capacity in the organisation. Respondents were informed that the research study will be used to inform management of their views towards rewards in their organisation and promised confidentiality. Completed surveys were returned to a box placed inside the human resource department of the organisation. Valid responses to both questionnaires were obtained from 290 employees, a response rate of 58 per cent. Of the 290 respondents 43.1 per cent were male and 56.9 per cent female. The average age of respondents was 31.2 and their tenure 6.87 years. 62.4 percent of employees had a university education and 35.2 per cent of them were in a managerial position.

Measures

Satisfaction with compensation. We used 2 items from Malhotra et al. (2007). A typical item used is "I feel I am paid fairly considering the work I do".

Autonomy. This was measured using a 3-item scale taken from the job diagnostic survey developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976). This scale has been validated in previous research (Teas, 1981; Singh, 1993; Malhotra et al., 2007). A typical item is "The job allows me to use personal initiative in carrying out the work".

Satisfaction with supervision. We used 4 items taken from House and Dessler (1974). Items included "My supervisor helps make my job more pleasant" and "I am satisfied with my supervisor's ability to lead me".

Collectivism. We used 4 items taken from the collectivism scale of Singelis et al. (1995). This scale has been validated in previous studies in the Chinese context (Francesco and Chen, 2004). A typical item used is "If a friend gets a prize, I would be proud".

Traditionality. This was measured with 3 items taken from the Chinese Individual Traditionality Scale (Yang et al., 1989). This scale has been validated in prior research in the Chinese context (Farh et al., 1997; Spreitzer et al., 2005). A typical item used is "When people are in dispute, they should ask the most senior person to decide who is right".

Affective commitment. This was measured using 5 items developed by Meyer et al. (1993). Typical items include "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation" and "I do not feel like part of the family at this organisation".

For all the above items responses were made on a likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disgree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scales used were translated into Chinese using a back translation procedure (Brislin, 1980) by researchers fluent in both English and Chinese. Age, organisational tenure, gender, education level and position were included as control variables in line with previous research (Chen and Aryee, 2007).

Results

Before testing the hypotheses confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using LISREL 8.80 to examine the construct validity of the six scales used in our study (Joreskog and Sorboom, 2001). The final question items used in the analysis and their cross loadings and composite reliability estimates can been seen in Table 1. The composite reliability estimates are above the recommended 0.7 for all scales apart from that of traditionality which was 0.643. After removing one item the coefficient went up to 0.739. However, we decided to keep this item in the scale as its removal did not subsequently influence the results of hierarchical regression analysis and affect the overall findings of the study. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the six factor model indicate good fit to the data (GFI = 0.89, NFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96 RMSEA = 0.066).

Table 1: Cross Loadings and Composite Reliability

	Satisfaction with compensation	Autonomy	Satisfaction with supervision	Collectivism	Traditionality	Affective commitment	Composite reliability
I am satisfied with my pay considering other organisations I know of	**.816**	.225	.156	-.011	.123	.175	.769
I feel I am paid fairly considering the work I do	**.784**	.162	.199	-.081	.171	.180	
The job allows me to use personal initiative in carrying out the work	.192	**.755**	.185	.016	.113	.201	.780
The job gives me opportunity for freedom in how I do the work	-.007	**.748**	.289	.095	.080	.204	
I have freedom to do what I want on my job to meet my work objectives	.251	**.747**	.190	.086	.092	.128	
My supervisor helps make my job more pleasant	.104	.076	**.829**	.176	.058	.154	.873
My supervisor treats all the workers as his/her equal	.011	.176	**.816**	.122	.117	.182	
I am satisfied with the technical competence of my supervisor	.133	.183	**.811**	.151	-.044	.154	
I am satisfied with my supervisor's ability to lead me	.190	.263	**.746**	.080	.042	.004	
If a friend gets a prize, I would be proud	.090	-.053	.043	**.850**	-.028	-.045	.780
If a relative were in financial difficulty, I would help within my means	-.032	.192	.029	**.826**	-.015	.035	
It is important to maintain harmony within my group	-.147	-.048	.217	**.754**	.068	.186	
I feel good when I cooperate with others	-.042	.116	.276	**.587**	.157	.064	
When people are in dispute, they should ask the most senior person to decide who is right	.047	.054	.084	.129	**.876**	.063	.643
The best way to avoid mistakes is to follow the instructions of senior persons	.058	.182	.019	.089	**.803**	.063	
Before marriage, a woman should subordinate herself to her father; after marriage, to her husband	.315	.000	.039	-.126	**.533**	.198	
I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation.	.090	.051	.140	.009	.094	**.893**	.928
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation.	.056	.112	.092	.027	.085	**.883**	
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organisation.	.128	.146	.192	.089	.104	**.864**	
I do not feel like "part of the family" at this organisation.	.180	.074	.068	.036	-.024	**.832**	
This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me.	.025	.252	.063	.104	.136	**.792**	

The descriptive statistics and correlations of all the control, independent and moderating variables included in our study are presented in table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations amongst Study Variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	31.2	8.7	1.00									
2. Tenure	6.87	6.74	.796	1.00								
3. Gender	.43	.50	-.172	-.162	1.00							
4. Education	.62	.49	.345	.215	-.003	1.00						
5. Position	.35	.48	.387	.283	-.126	.198	1.00					
6. Satisfaction with compensation	2.87	.77	.147	.089	-.022	.040	.122	1.00				
7. Autonomy	3.01	.70	.260	.209	-.102	.143	.146	.443	1.00			
8. Satisfaction with supervision	3.33	.74	.154	.065	-.059	.075	.144	.362	.498	1.00		
9. Collectivism	3.64	.58	.051	.089	.023	.053	-.069	-.009	.209	.339	1.00	
10. Traditionality	3.08	.71	.272	.213	-.016	.081	.184	.344	.293	.179	.098	1.00

An OLS regression was used to test hypotheses 1, 4 and 7. As shown in table 3 all three of the independent variables were related to affective commitment when demographic characteristics were controlled for: satisfaction with compensation (β = .191, p < 0.1) , autonomy (β = .187, p < 0.1) and satisfaction with supervision (β = .124, p < 0.5). Only one of the control variables, age, was found to be positively correlated with affective commitment . (β = .236, p < 0.5).

Table 3

Results of OLS Regression

Predictors	
Age	.236**
Tenure	.031
Gender	.078
Education	.042
Position	-.025

Satisfaction with compensation		.191***
Autonomy		.187***
Satisfaction with supervision		.124**
R^2		.277

*, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Following this we ran a series of hierarchical regressions to examine the moderating effects of collectivism and traditionality on the relationship between extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards, and affective commitment. The results of these are presented in tables 4 and 5. As predicted by hypotheses 6 and 9 traditionality negatively moderated the relationship between autonomy and satisfaction and affective commitment. There were no significant moderated effects of traditionality on the relationship between satisfaction with compensation and affective commitment, and of collectivism on the relationship between all three variables included to represent organisational rewards, and affective commitment.

To interpret the significant moderated effects of traditionality on the relationship between autonomy and satisfaction with supervision on affective commitment regression equations were calculated for each relationship at high and low levels of traditionality. The results of these equations can be seen graphically in figures 1 and 2. As illustrated in figure 1, when autonomy was low, individuals with a high (compared to low) traditionality orientation reported higher levels of affective commitment. When autonomy was high individuals high and low in traditionality have similar levels of organisational commitment. This supports hypothesis 6. As illustrated in figure 2, when satisfaction with supervisor was low, individuals with a high (compared to low) traditionality orientation reported higher levels of affective commitment. When satisfaction with supervisor was high, the opposite was the case: individuals low in traditionality (as opposed to high) exhibited greater affective commitment.

Table 4
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Moderation by Collectivism

Predictors	Satisfaction with Compensation	Autonomy	Satisfaction with Supervision
Stage 1: Control variables			
Age	.288***	.280***	.278***
Tenure	-.001	-.013	.033
Gender	.056	.085	.073
Education	.050	.015	.044
Position	.000	.014	-.004
ΔR^2	.128	.128	.128
Stage 2:			
Reward	.039	.813**	.375
Collectivism	.001	.404*	.136
ΔR^2	.116	.108	.076
Stage 3: Interactive effects			
Reward x Collectivism	.313	-.650	-.163
ΔR^2	.002	.005	.001
Overall Model			

R^2	.246	.241	.205

*, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Table 5
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Moderation by Traditionality

Predictors	Satisfaction with Compensation	Autonomy	Satisfaction with Supervision
Stage 1: Control variables			
Age	.251***	.216**	.198**
Tenure	.035	.019	.083
Gender	.059	.080	.045
Education	.063	.048	.077
Position	-.020	-.006	-.015
ΔR^2	.128	.128	.128
Stage 2:			
Reward	.557**	.804***	1.439***
Traditionality	.338*	.635***	1.437***
ΔR^2	.101	.112	.094
Stage 3: Interactive effects			
Reward x Traditionality	-.430	-.831***	-1.922***
ΔR^2	.005	.019	.085
Overall Model			
R^2	.234	.259	.307

*, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Figure 1

The Moderating Effects of Traditionality on the Relationship between Autonomy and Organisational Commitment
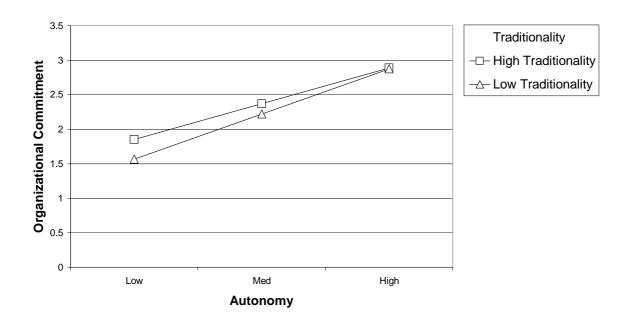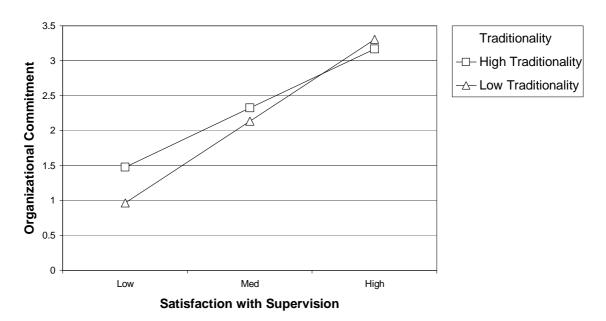
Figure 2

The Moderating Effects of Traditionality on the Relationship between Satisfaction with Supervision and Organisational Commitment

Discussion

The results of our study revealed that satisfaction with compensation, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision were all positively related to the affective commitment of Chinese employees. This is in line with the findings of previous studies conducted in Western settings which confirm a positive relationship between extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards, and employee commitment (Mottaz, 1998; Malhotra et al., 2007). Our findings suggest that the antecedents of employee commitment in the Chinese organisational setting may emanate from similar factors to those for employees in the Western countries.

A key contribution of this study is the finding that traditionality negatively moderates the relationship between two variables: autonomy and satisfaction with supervision, and affective commitment. In particular we found that individuals high in traditionality exhibited greater levels of affective commitment even when they perceived low levels of autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. However, when autonomy and satisfaction with supervision increased individuals low in traditionality exhibited similar (autonomy) or higher (satisfaction with supervision) levels of affective commitment. This suggests that employees with different cultural orientations might evaluate their workplace differently, which in turn influences their emotional attachment to the organisation.

No significant moderating effects were found of traditionality on the relationship between satisfaction with compensation and affective commitment. Limited evidence of moderating effects might be explained by the fact that pay levels are relatively low in China compared to the West, resulting in general employee dissatisfaction with compensation, regardless of their traditionality orientation.

In contrast to existing work in the US context no significant moderated effects were found of collectivism on the relationship between the three organisational reward variables in our study and affective commitment (Williamson et al., 2009). This may have arisen from the low variance in the collectivism orientation of respondents in our sample. Previous work examining the moderating effects of collectivism on the organisational rewards/affective commitment was done using a sample containing higher variance in collectivism than was present in our sample (Williamson et al., 2009). Our findings might also indicate that the collectivism orientation of an individual does not impact significantly on the organisation rewards/affective commitment relationship in societies which are predominantly collective, such as China. Further work would need to be done on a sample with wider variance in collectivism to confirm these assertions.

Managerial implications

Our findings indicate that managers may be able to influence the commitment formation of their employees through the strategic provision of organisational rewards. We establish that employees, regardless of their cultural orientation, exhibit greater levels of affective commitment when they perceive higher levels of extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards. Managers should consider the provision of such rewards as especially important when the workforce has a low traditionality orientation.

Managers might also consider taking into account the cultural orientation of individuals during the process of employee recruitment. Measuring the traditionality of employees will allow the organisation to identify potential employees with the greatest chance of developing affective commitment towards the organisation, given a fixed set of workplace characteristics. If supervisor support and autonomy is low in a certain position, for example, managers might consider employing someone high in traditionality for that role.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

As is the case for all research the results of this study are subject to methodological limitations. One limitation concerns the use of self-reporting to measure all the variables in the study, which may have resulted in common method bias. Although incorporating objective measures into our study might strengthen its findings, we believe self-report bias is not a significant problem. Firstly, we measured traditionality at a different time from the other variables in our study. Secondly previous research indicates that common method bias is not a serious problem when moderation analysis is undertaken (Brockner et al., 1997; Pillutla et al., 2007).

The cross-sectional design of our study means we are unable to infer cause and effect relationships from our findings. It is arguable that those individuals who exhibit greater commitment to the organisation might view the rewards provided by the organisation more favorably than those individuals with lower levels of commitment. Our findings are, however, consistent with the social exchange theory that underpins the organisational rewards/affective

commitment relationship, and in line with findings from previous research in a whole host of organisational settings. Moreover, the main focus of our research was not the study of causal relationships, but the investigation of the moderating effects of cultural variables on such a relationship, which is not compromised by the use of a cross-sectional design.

Another limitation arises from the use of a sample of employees from a single organisation. The use of such a sample of employees assimilated into a single organisational culture might affect the generalisability of our results to the whole population. The sample might not represent the full cultural spectrum of individuals across the whole of China. Future research may address these concerns by replicating this research in different organisational, industrial and geographical settings. In addition, the extent to which our research findings are applicable outside China, especially in relation to traditionality need to be examined.

Conclusion

China's long history of insularity has created a culture and business environment considered to be   traditional and considerably centered on Confucian based values. Yet in the last couple of decades China has opened its doors to globalization and consequently the social landscape is changing – this would make one think that endorsement to indigenous value systems (traditional beliefs), such as Confucian ideology and other philosophies rooted in orient may not have bearing on employees' views of interplay between intrinsic and social organizational rewards and their commitment to the organizations. Interestingly, however, traditional values still seems to have impact on peoples' attitudes towards work and their attachment to their employers. Unlike Western societies, which are mostly low in traditionality, higher levels of organizational commitment may not be contingent on high autonomy and satisfaction with supervision in traditional societies. One prominent contribution of this study is, therefore, the revelation that individuals high in traditionality still appear to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment even when their perceived levels of autonomy and satisfaction with supervision are low.

This finding has important implications on business practices, especially for multinationals operating in China, in dealing with issues surrounding varying traditionality levels among their workforces in shaping their organizational commitment. Thus managers attempting to increase the affective commitment levels of their employees' may find it useful to understand how workers having varying traditionality levels would value different organizational rewards in developing loyalty and commitment towards their organizations.
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