

# CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF SALESFORCE COMMITMENT AND JOB INVOLVEMENT AS CONTRIBUTORS TO ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Bulent Menguc, University of Melbourne, Australia  
A. Tansu Barker, Brock University, Canada

## ABSTRACT

In this era of customer-orientation and cost savings, the organizational (psychological) climate faced by salespeople in a firm is an area of investigation that can enhance sales performance. This study contributes to the literature by reconsidering the strategic importance of the effect of salesforce commitment and job involvement on organizational performance. Firstly, our model posits the direct and interactive (or perhaps complementary) role of commitment and involvement on organizational performance. More specifically, we are interested in the contingency role of commitment on the performance impact of involvement. Secondly, we question whether all levels of salesforce commitment benefit the organization. Commitment theorists argue that high levels of commitment may result in costs to the organization that exceed its benefits (Gallagher and McLean Parks 2001). This "dark side" of commitment, to the best of our knowledge, has not been tested. We propose direct and moderating relationships between both affective commitment and job involvement versus organizational performance. The direct relationships of affective commitment and job involvement will enhance organizational performance through their positive effects on the value of knowledge-based resources. The moderating relationship of affective commitment and job involvement interacts in a way that, under varying degrees of affective commitment, the relationship between job involvement and organizational performance is likely to vary. Further, we question whether the nature of the relationship between affective commitment and organizational performance is always linear. Using an organizational-level approach, the authors test the proposed model and its hypotheses using a sample of 102 Canadian sales organizations.

Our analyses suggest that the level of salesforce job involvement is positively related to sales volume, profitability, customer satisfaction, and market share. However, a significant but negative relationship between job involvement and sales growth and sales from new customers was unexpected. Interestingly, a high level of affective commitment to the organization is positively related only to market share. We found that job involvement contributed significantly to sales volume, profitability, customer satisfaction, and market share. This finding supports the theoretical argument that organizational performance is affected more by salesforce effort than either their acceptance of organizational values or their desire to remain with the organization. We believe that this is an important finding: job involvement is more important than affective commitment in influencing organizational performance. There is a significant curvilinear relationship between affective commitment and market share that supported a cost-benefit argument. Furthermore, affective commitment and job involvement interact in a way such that, when affective commitment is high, the relationship between job involvement and sales from new customers was positive and significant. As previously discussed, both job involvement and organizational commitment were significantly but negatively related to sales from new customers. All in all, these findings, along with the moderation results, support the argument that salesforce involvement and their commitment to their organization's goals and values should be aligned in order to generate positive organizational outcomes. In contrast, however, when commitment is high, job involvement is negatively related to sales volume, profitability, and market share. These unexpected findings support our alternative view of the dark side of commitment: there might be some high levels of commitment that are no longer beneficial for the organization. Our findings also revealed that the moderating role of affective commitment is not always positive but curvilinear. This finding suggests that at high (low) levels of affective commitment, organizational performance might suffer. A high level of commitment may reflect salespersons' over-institutionalization and might lead to conducting impression management tactics.

By managing the psychological climate, sales managers can demonstrate that they value salespersons' contributions, care about their well-being, and seek to meet their socio-emotional needs (Eisenberger et al. 1986). In return, salespeople are likely to respond to their organization's efforts by increasing their commitment to the organization and engaging in behaviors that support the organization's goals and objectives (Wayne et al. 1997). The managerial challenge is how to improve salesforce commitment to the organization and increase their involvement in their tasks.