

A multilevel model of affect and organizational commitment

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Abstract This multilevel study investigates affective antecedents of organizational commitment. 230 individuals from 56 working groups were surveyed in eight mainland Chinese firms. The results showed that frequently experienced feelings of guilt and determination in organizations were positively related to increased organizational commitment. In addition, the increase of intragroup relationship conflict strengthened the negative association between chaotic emotions and organizational commitment. The findings suggest that the overall commitment to an organization is related to certain emotions in an organizational setting. This study, which employed a large sample from mainland China, proved consistent with past theory and empirical evidence from the West. A multilevel model of affective events theory with wide applicability is correspondingly proposed.

Keywords Emotion · Organizational commitment · Affective events theory · Multilevel analysis · China

The need for talented managers and employees in China represents a major challenge for both foreign and locally owned firms alike. Research points to not only a looming shortage of experienced personnel, but also challenges in retaining them (Farrell & Grant, 2005). Whether employees are fully committed to their organizations has a clear impact on an organization's performance and even its

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day-to-day function. The extant literature has found that organizational commitment is related to job performance and satisfaction (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989). Low organizational commitment increases the likelihood of turnover, intention to leave, searching for alternatives outside of organizations (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and hurts organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1990; Scholl, 1981; Wiener, 1982).

Because of its importance, a number of studies have sought to develop the construct of organizational commitment and to identify its antecedents and consequences. Among these studies, affective commitment has been proposed as one dimension to decipher attachment to organizations (Allen & Meyer, 1990; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Still, there are few studies of how emotion impacts overall organizational commitment. Such an absence leads to an inadequate understanding of how employee feelings in organizations determine their subsequent commitment to the organization and thereby influence organization performance. In response to this theoretical and empirical gap, this study aims at unveiling the affective mechanism of organizational commitment by addressing how employees build their overall commitment to organizations in a sample of firms in China.

What increases employee commitment to organizations? Becker's (1960) side-bet theory inspired early behavioral research (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Kline & Peters, 1991; Sheldon, 1971), noting that employees' investments in organizations such as time, work friendship, job specific skills, and job effort hinder employees from leaving the organizations. This conceptualization evolved and became a new dimension: continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Continuance commitment reflects the employee's desire to remain with an organization because of previous investment in that organization. Moreover, researchers reckoned that there should be something else behind organizational commitment, such as the employee's emotional bonding to an organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). In addition, different types of commitment have been proposed, including identification, value, calculative, affective, continuance, moral, and normative commitment. As a result, researchers have sought to further clarify and examine the construct of organizational commitment (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993; McGee & Ford, 1987; Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993).

That research has significantly enriched the understanding of different perspectives concerning organizational commitment. Nonetheless, a conundrum persists in linking each dimension to an employee's overall organizational commitment. Any dissatisfaction with the organization, no matter if it is about identification, organizational value, or affective experience, may yield only partial commitment to an organization—a varied “strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974: 604). It increases the reluctance for the employees to maintain organizational membership or to exert organization's goals and values, reflecting such dissatisfaction at a certain dimension of organizational commitment. Therefore, rather than further subdividing the construct of organizational commitment, identifying the antecedents and revealing the process of overall organizational commitment forming is a more important and promising avenue for management research and practice.

Although much research has been done in North America on commitment (e.g., Meyer et al., 1990), questions emerge on how this might play out in an Asian

cultural setting (Ahlstrom, 2010). This research examines organizational commitment in work settings in China. Some early research asserts that employees in mainland China are highly committed, though this was most likely because of laws binding them to their organization or region of the country (Oksenberg, 1970, 1973). But the transition from planned to market economy during China's economic reforms increased the job flexibility to the point that organizations in China need to be quite concerned about low commitment levels and increasing employee turnover (Ahlstrom, Bruton, & Chan, 2001). In addition to employing a China research site, this study extends previous research by showing how organizational events such as person-organization exchange, task completion, and organizational uncertainty can create feelings of guilt, determination, and chaos, which in turn impels employees to higher levels of organizational commitment.

To address the above issues, we utilize affective events theory (AET)¹ as a framework to understand why transient emotional experience in organizations can impact the relatively stable attitude of organizational commitment. To do this, our paper first examines the key affective events that matter in determining organizational commitment, including the person-organization exchange, task completion, and organizational uncertainty. Next, specific emotions, such as guilt, determination, and chaotic emotions, that are most likely to be activated by these affect events are identified. Third, this paper assesses how these emotions determine organizational commitment, particularly in the China work environment. Fourth, the ways in which a higher-level variable, such as group relationship conflict, moderates the association between organizational commitment and chaotic emotion is examined. The multilevel research design, data collection, and results are reported correspondingly. The implications for theory and practice, limitations, and contributions follow.

Literature review

Affective process of organizational commitment

Both the sociological and psychological approaches to the study of organizational commitment have been used to study commitment, albeit with different foci. The sociological perspective emphasizes the influences of the social context including organizational features such as "corporate culture" (Kunda, 1992), and social exchange and trust between individuals and the organization (Yamagishi, Cook, & Watabe, 1998). The psychology perspective focuses attention on more psychological processes, including personality traits (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987), and life events (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). Combinations of the two approaches have found that organizational characteristics, such as organizational reward, procedural justice, and supervisor support as well as perceived organizational support, are influential in determining organizational commitment (Rhoades,

¹ AET was proposed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), who suggested that work events such as job demands and rewards (stable routines of organizations) can elicit certain emotions over time. AET holds that transient but frequently experienced emotions in the organizational setting can help to create relatively stable job attitudes and performance.

Eisenberger, & Armelis, 2001; Shore & Wayne, 1993). This suggests that we should take both individual and organizational processes into account to interpret organizational commitment in terms of a multilevel analysis.

Reviewing the research on organizational commitment from 1985 to 2000, Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnysky (2002) delineate the relationships between commitment and its antecedents as suggested by Steers (1977), which include personal characteristics (need for achievement, age, education, and so forth), job characteristics, and work experiences (group attitudes, organizational dependability, and personal import). Yet, Reichers (1985: 465) argues that the nature of organizational commitment should be revealed from the “day-to day realities of employees’ organizational life.” Consider for example, the meta-analysis by Meyer and colleagues (2002), which reports that role ambiguity is negatively related to affective commitment. But still unclear is how role ambiguity has an impact on organizational commitment over time from daily organizational life, particularly in an East Asia organizational context.

The research from the early work of Simon (1967) and Frijda (1993) further suggests the importance of affect in understanding attitudes and reasoning. A growing number of researchers believe that affective responses in organizations play an important role in connecting organizational daily life to organizational commitment (c.f., Klinger, 1977; Klinger, Barta, & Maxeiner, 1980). Yet how are transient emotions able to impact relatively stable work attitudes? To theorize this association, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) postulate an AET that assumes the continuing recurrences of episodic emotions over time and their accumulative influences on work attitude. This line of research is also consistent with a narrative approach (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001) as influenced by ecology psychology (Barker, 1968).

AET has slowly been incorporated into the study of organizational behavior in recent years (Ashkanasy, Zerbe, & Hartel, 2005; Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005; Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). George and Zhou (2007) have found that emotional events influence employee creativity in the supervisor-subordinate interactive process. Similarly, Li (in press) has found that affective anticipation regarding the outcome of a venture significantly influences an entrepreneur’s judgment on the perceived value and possibilities of success of the new venture. However, in terms of organizational commitment, the study of affective processes in daily person-organization interactions has been neglected.

AET is thus useful as a basic framework for understanding the effect of emotions on organizational commitment. In accordance with this theory, affective “script” recurrence under the organizational “theme” creates emotional “drama.” This emotional drama accumulatively affects individuals’ attitude of engagement with the organization. Based on the AET model, the following will mainly address the key aspects of the person-organization relationship influencing organizational commitment, such as person-organization exchange, task orientation, and the uncertainty in organizations.

Key features of person-organization relationships

Why some people commit to their organizations lies with the understanding of person-organization relationships. Previous research, no matter if it is side-bet, identification, or attitude-motivation theory, tends to overstate the psychological perspectives from employees while neglecting the organizational perspective. In fact,

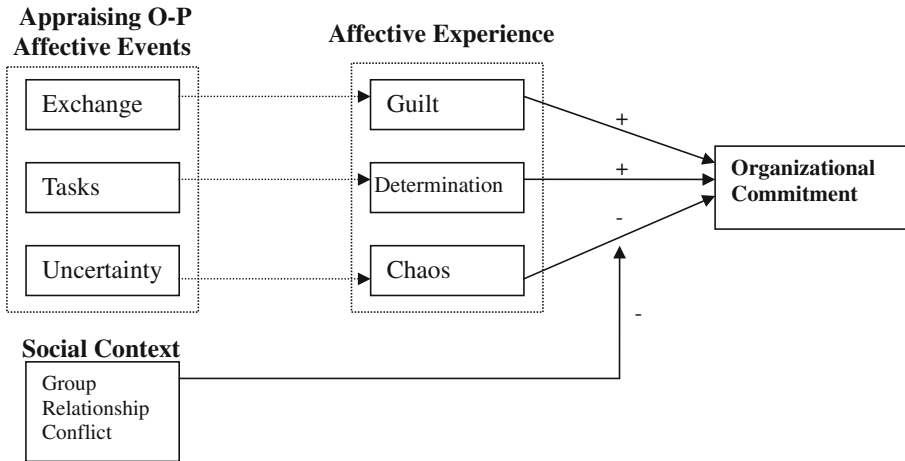
organizational commitment is an adaptive outcome reflecting the demands from both sides of employees and the organization. Reichers (1985), therefore, argues that organizational commitment should reflect the multi-faceted conception of organizations.

When addressing organizations, we attempt to recognize the key features of general person-organization relationships that determine the nature of organizational commitment instead. A variety of definitions have been provided to address the process-related, functional, and institutional aspects of organizations (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). As McKelvey (1980: 115) notes, an organization is a “myopically purposeful [boundary-maintaining] activity system containing one or more conditionally autonomous myopically purposeful subsystems having input-output resource ratios fostering survival in environments imposing particular constraints.” This squares with the view that organizations are administrative-economic entities formed to achieve economic or social goals by synergizing individuals’ task-oriented activities. Apparently, the exchange between employees’ inputs and organizational rewards becomes a fundamental means to realize employee and organizational goals (Adams, 1965). Person-organization exchange therefore is one of the key features of person-organization relationships from the economic perspective (Weber, 1947). Business organizations’ survival in market competition makes task completion requisite organizational activities. It is acceptable that task-oriented activities constitute another key feature of person-organization relationships.

Moreover, because of pressure for organizational survival, organizations have to adapt to the changing environment to enhance organizational capability of competition (e.g., Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). This makes the person-organization relationship more uncertain during the chaotic process of organizational change (Huy, 2002; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981), including periods of employee adaptation and socialization (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970) and perceived threats in the workplace (Elsbach, 2003). Uncertainty is an inevitable component of organizational life, which constitutes another key feature of person-organization relationship (Leana & Barry, 2000).

At the same time, organizational institutional theory emphasizes the importance of social context (c.f., Schneider, 1987; Scott, 2007), such as culture, rules, norms, and social networks. Such social environments have much influence on employee behavior (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998) and organizational strategy (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2002; Feldman, 2000). In this study, group relationship conflict represents an inextricably proximal climate of employee embeddedness in organizations. The findings from a number of studies further suggest that relationship conflict is of importance and detrimental to group satisfaction and commitment (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Based on the above analysis, a conceptual model is proposed to depict how employee feelings regarding organizational events influence person-organization commitment relationships, and thus impact their commitment to an organization (see Figure 1). Here, we suggest that employee appraisals of the person-organization exchange, task-oriented activities, and uncertainty will generate certain affective responses such as guilt, determination, and chaotic emotion. These emotional experiences in turn determine the degree to which employees are willing to commit to the organization. The individual level negative association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment is further influenced by the higher level relationship conflict in groups.



Note: O-P means Organization-Person.

Figure 1 Conceptual model: The multilevel model of affective determinants of organizational commitment

The present model contributes to the literature by conceptualizing a unique affect event process to reflect day-to-day affective experiences in determining overall organizational commitment, particularly for the most important affect relevant to key features of person-organization relationship.

Affective antecedents of organizational commitment: A multilevel view

As to the affective responses on the person-organization exchange, equity theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that employees are likely to feel some guilt and thus work harder when they perceive positive inequity (the ratio of their rewards to their input is relatively higher than that of referent others). As a feeling of being responsible for morally or socially unacceptable behavior, Lazarus and Cohen-Charash (2001: 67) regard guilt as “having transgressed a moral imperative.” Regan (1971) found that the arousal of guilt feelings is related to perceived injustice, in particular for those who believe that their behavior caused others to suffer. The elicited guilt increases altruism behavior (Regan, 1971) and hard work (Adams, 1965) that in turn leads to better job performance (Brockner, Davy, & Carter, 1985; Brockner, Greenberg, Brockner, Bortz, Davy, & Carter, 1986).

The cognitive evaluation of positive inequity accompanying the personal negative guilt feeling drives or motivates individuals to avoid the recurrence of the guilt and to make restitution (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001). Based on the AET framework, the recurring of guilt in the workplace is organized by an underlying theme of organizational life, indicating that the organization has certain mechanisms to activate employee guilt and make them feel satisfied with their relationship to the organization (Atkinson, 1964; Heckhausen, 1977). Thus it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1 The frequency of experienced guilt in workplace will be positively related to organizational commitment.

With regard to the affective experience toward task completion, “being determined” is believed to be closely related to goal commitment—the determination to attain a goal and the persistence in pursuing it over time (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). There is evidence that higher levels of goal commitment can lead to higher task performance (Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, & Allge, 1999). As a core affective element of goal commitment, determination has been a central concept of goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990). A higher level of determination indicates that organizational actors internalize organizational goals as their own. Given that determination is intrinsic and if the organization is unable to protect employee goal engagement with tasks over time, employees are likely to feel frustrated, doubt their capabilities to overcome further difficulties, and will exhibit little or no determination. Arthur’s (1994) study provides further evidence in that organizations which stimulate commitment to goals will reduce turnover rates in comparison with the organizations lacking such management routines. Hence, the frequent experiences of determination are partly a function of the organization, exogenously elicited by organizational events. Deci, Connell, and Ryan (1989) further suggest that employees’ determination is a function of corporate climate, not only an outcome of dispositional traits or intrinsic motivation. We therefore infer that good employee determination is an indicator that the organization has developed functional routines to maintain employee morale and motivation. Thus, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2 The frequency of experienced determination will be positively related to organizational commitment.

In organizational life, numerous events, like radical organizational change without continuity (Huy, 2002; Staw et al., 1981), role conflict and ambiguity (Rizzo et al., 1970), can make the individual perceive threats and uncertainty (Elsbach, 2003) and hence elicit chaotic emotions such as anxiety, fear, and upset (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O’Connor, 1987). Frequently experienced chaotic emotions can reduce an individual’s well being and generate job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), which in turn impairs individual attachment to the organization. Hence, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3a Frequently experienced chaotic emotion is negatively related to organizational commitment.

Antecedents to commitment have been found to differ across organizations or work teams (Powell, Galvin, & Piccoli, 2006; Steers, 1977). For example, expectations to job realities are positively related to organizational commitment in hospital employees, but have no significant relationship in a sample of scientists and engineers (Steers, 1977). The between-group differences imply that some antecedent-commitment associations might have been influenced by certain higher level variables such as task complexity, organizational conflicts, and so forth. Likewise, the prediction of affective responses on organizational commitment may also exist with similar differences across groups or organizations.

Organizations or work groups might differ systematically across characteristics, such as relationship conflict. Being a key group process (Amason & Schweiger, 1997; Jehn, 1997; Kabanoff, 1991), relationship conflict is defined as an awareness of

interpersonal incompatibilities, including feeling tension and friction while concomitant with intense negative emotion (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Group level relationship conflict reflects the affective status of social interactions among the group members. As such, ecological psychologists conceive relationships and social interactions as parts of the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). From the perspective of social network theory, cooperative and trust relationship among members generates alliance (Gulati & Westphal, 1999). Higher group relationship conflict generates frustration and unhappiness within groups. As a result, it influences the effectiveness of group process, increases poor team decisions (Simons & Peterson, 2000), and decreases individual satisfaction and commitment to groups (Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn, Neale, & Nothcraft, 1999). Therefore, if an organization often creates emotional chaos, such as feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity, accompanied with strained and unhappy group relations, the negative association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment will be strengthened, therefore:

Hypothesis 3b The negative association between frequently experienced chaotic emotions and organizational commitment will be strengthened with the increasing of group relationship conflict.

Method

Sample and procedure

The 230 participants in this study were employees from eight indigenous Chinese firms based in the Beijing area. In order to ensure the heterogeneity of participants, the eight firms were drawn from the information technology (IT), publishing, consultancy, and design industries. One firm was state-owned, seven were privately-owned. The size of the firms ranged from 25 to 300 employees. All departments of each firm were involved in the survey. In order to control for desire to be a part of the study, participants were informed: (1) the survey is for the purposes of academic research; (2) it is confidential and anonymous; and (3) there are no right and wrong answers. The participants were randomly selected from the official register of each firm as follows: (1) working groups were the unit of sampling; (2) all group members were selected as participants, if the number of members of a particular group was less than or equal to 5, otherwise, (3) 5 participants were randomly selected. 230 employees from 56 working groups took part in the investigation. All answered the questionnaires within one week.

The average age of the participants was 29 years ($SD = 7.05$, range from 21 to 60). 38% were female, 62% male. They had been working in the firm for 25.04 months on the average ($SD = 33.03$, range from 3 to 290). The average workday was 8.66 hours ($SD = 1.28$, range from 5.5 to 14).

Measures

All multi-item scales were measured on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree). All of the measures were first translated from English to Chinese and back translated to English to ensure equivalence of meaning (Brislin, 1970).

Organizational commitment We measured commitment using the scale developed by Porter and colleagues (1974). That list of seven items included: “I feel very little loyalty to this organization (reverse),” “I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization,” or “I am proud to tell others that I am a part of this organization.” Participants rate these items from 6 points (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .73.

Group relationship conflict We used the ICS (intra-group conflict scale) (Jehn, 1995; Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002) to measure group relationship conflict. The relationship conflict questionnaire contained 4 items, such as “There is much friction among members in my work unit,” “There is much tension among members in my work unit,” and “There is much emotional conflict among members in my work unit.” Participants were asked to respond on a 6 point scale (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree). Cronbach’s alpha of the relationship conflict scale was .90. The ICC (intra-class coefficient) of group relationship conflict was 11.1% with significant chi-square to degree of freedom (χ^2 / df) ($p < .01$), indicating that relationship conflicts significantly explained 11.1% of the variance between groups and the group members’ perceptions on the relationship conflict within group can be aggregated as a group level variable.

Affect The scale of Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) was used to rate 20 emotions, including upset, afraid, scared, irritable, distressed, ashamed, nervous, guilty, hostile, jittery, interested, alert, excited, inspired, strong, determined, attentive, enthusiastic, active, and proud. That scale lacks low activation emotion in comparison to the circumplex structure of affect (Larsen & Diener, 1992; Thayer, 1989), therefore calmness, relaxation, and ease from Larsen and Diener’s (1992) circumplex model were added as one factor denoting low activated emotion. Moreover, the three emotions afraid, upset, and scared are generally regarded as emotional feeling of anxiety or chaos (Shaver et al., 1987). The three items were aggregated to denote chaotic emotion. Participants were required to select 1 from 6 options to rate themselves on frequency of emotion experienced in organizations in the recent couple of weeks (1—always; 2—most of the time; 3—a good part of the time; 4—some of the time; 5—little of the time; 6—none). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that the 17 discrete emotions, the chaotic emotion, and the low activation emotion presented a good model fit, with RMSEA = 0.0440, NFI = 0.957, NNFI = 0.941, GFI = 0.960, and CFI = 0.982. This CFA model proved better than the single factor model with its poorer fit (RMSEA = 0.2044, NFI = 0.496, NNFI = 0.493, and CFI = 0.538). The analysis supports that the 19 emotions have acceptable psychometric characters to measure emotions. This model is also better than the 3-factor model in that it includes the low activation emotion, positive affect (interested, alert, excited, inspired, strong, determined, attentive, enthusiastic, active, and proud), and negative affect (upset, afraid, scared, irritable, distressed, ashamed, nervous, guilty, hostile, jittery), with RMSEA = 0.0640 NFI = 0.837 NNFI = 0.903 GFI = 0.856 CFI = 0.912.

Common method variance

Except the variable of group relationship conflict generated by aggregating individual ratings, all others are self-reported in this study. In order to exclude the

potential bias from the common method, we conducted the Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1967; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). No single factor was identified by unrotated exploratory factor analysis (EFA), showing that common method variance did not impair the current findings.

Results

No higher correlations ($r > 0.70$) were found among the emotions (see Table 1). The correlations among negative emotions range from 0.07 to 0.52. Among positive emotions, they range from 0.01 to 0.62. This result indicated that participants can differentiate these emotions from each another.

Results also show that organizational commitment is negatively correlated to group relationship conflict ($r = -.41, p < .01$), and chaotic emotion ($r = -.15, p < .05$), whereas it is positively correlated to the positive emotions, like interest ($r = .18, p < .05$), inspiration ($r = .15, p < .05$), determination ($r = .28, p < .01$), enthusiasm ($r = .26, p < .01$), activeness ($r = .16, p < .05$), and pride ($r = .13, p < .05$).

The group relationship conflict is accompanied with more negative emotions, such as chaotic emotion ($r = .20, p < .01$), irritability ($r = .15, p < .05$), distress ($r = .17, p < .05$), nervousness ($r = .16, p < .01$), hostility ($r = .35, p < .01$), and jitteriness ($r = .28, p < .05$). In contrast, it is negatively related to positive emotions, such as, interest ($r = -.16, p < .05$), determination ($r = -.17, p < .05$), enthusiasm ($r = -.21, p < .01$), and activeness ($r = -.19, p < .01$).

Multilevel model of emotions on organizational commitment

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was conducted to support multilevel analysis (HLM; Brye & Raudenbush, 1992). All variables except control variables were standardized. In order to satisfy the necessary conditions of multilevel analysis (Hofmann, 1997), we conducted a two-step analysis. First, we ran random effect regression at the individual level (level one) analysis without group level variables. 24 variables were put into the regression, including 5 control variables (age, gender, education, tenure, and working hours per week) and 19 emotion variables (chaotic emotion, equilibrium emotion, irritability, distress, shame, nervousness, guilt, hostility, jitteriness, interest, alertness, excitedness, inspiration, strength, determination, attentiveness, enthusiasm, activeness, and pride). The results as shown in Table 2 demonstrate that guilt is positively related to organizational commitment ($\beta = .22, p < .05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 stated that determination would be positively related to organizational commitment. The result strongly supports the positive relationship ($\beta = .34, p < .000$).

For the second step, we tested the variance significance of the Level-1 slope. The results (shown in Table 2) demonstrate that the association between guilt and organizational commitment ($\beta = .22$) is the same across groups with insignificant variance ($0.0749, p > 0.1$). The between-group differences for the association between determination and organization commitment ($\beta = .34$) also is insignificant (variance = $0.1025, p > 0.1$). These results indicate that, in predicting organizational commitment, the effects of experienced guilt and determination are constant across groups with no between-group differences.

Table 1 Correlation matrix.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
1 Commitment	2.28	.75	.73																				
2 GRC+	4.67	.98	-.41**	.90																			
3 Low activation	2.53	.71	-.06	-.05																			
4 Chaos	3.78	.64	-.15*	.20***	-.32**																		
5 Irritated	3.51	1.11	-.02	.15*	-.12	.32**																	
6 Distress	3.98	.81	-.06	.17*	-.15*	.46**	.29**																
7 Shame	3.85	.78	.03	.10	-.07	.34**	.07	.25**															
8 Nervousness	3.67	1.00	.01	.16*	-.28**	.50**	.16*	.29**	.12														
9 Guilt	3.96	.81	.09	.12	-.03	.37**	.13	.25**	.52**	.26**													
10 Hostility	4.40	.84	-.13	.35***	-.06	.34**	.31**	.28**	.07	.27**	.11												
11 Jitteriness	.37	.92	-.08	.28***	-.15*	.45**	.20*	.31**	.21**	.39**	.26**	.40**											
12 Interest	2.04	.85	.18*	-.16*	.27**	-.21*	-.10	-.10	.06	-.07	.02	-.16	-.06										
13 Alertness	3.08	.98	-.02	.17*	-.09	.16*	.05	.11	.04	.36**	.09	.15*	.15*	.01									
14 Excitement	2.66	.83	.09	-.06	.27**	-.10	-.06	-.15*	.00	-.02	-.01	-.07	-.01	.37**	.16*								
15 Inspired	2.61	.82	.15*	-.09	.22**	-.18*	-.11	-.09	-.05	-.06	-.07	-.12	-.08	.36**	.12	.46**							
16 Strong	3.02	1.00	.02	.08	.17**	-.13	-.05	-.09	-.11	.04	-.11	-.00	.06	.24**	.21**	.32**	.50**						
17 Determined	2.16	.78	.28**	-.17*	.15**	-.18*	-.03	-.16*	-.04	-.01	-.06	-.13	-.12	.27**	.09	.28**	.53**	.41**					
18 Attentive	2.03	.73	.18*	-.10	.12	-.30**	-.07	-.14*	-.12	-.17*	-.09	-.22**	-.15*	.27**	-.01	.17*	.21*	.19*	.29**				
19 Enthusiastic	1.98	.81	.26**	-.21**	.17*	-.25**	-.01	-.08	.02	-.10	-.03	-.16*	-.14*	.34**	.02	.36**	.42**	.24**	.44**	.40*			
20 Active	2.05	.83	.16*	-.19**	.19*	-.20*	.06	-.16*	-.07	-.08	-.11	-.06	-.13	.36**	.14*	.38**	.44**	.29**	.41**	.24**	.62**		
21 Pride	2.55	.98	.13*	-.07	.26**	-.24**	-.06	-.18*	-.06	-.09	-.14	-.16	-.10	.29**	.10	.30**	.39**	.38**	.40**	.34**	.36**	.49**	

+ Group relationship conflict.

**p* < .01.

***p* < .05.

Table 2 Level one analysis—Random effects on organizational commitment.

Affect ⁺	Regression Coefficient (β)	SE	<i>t</i> test	Variance
1 Chaotic emotion	-0.18*	0.10	-1.76*	0.1517*
2 Low activation	-0.09	0.09	-1.06	0.0757
3 Irritation	-0.01	0.09	-0.14	0.1836**
4 Distress	0.01	0.07	0.15	0.0376
5 Shame	0.03	0.08	0.39	0.0469
6 Nervousness	0.02	0.08	0.22	0.0668
7 Guilt	0.22**	0.09	2.55**	0.0749
8 Hostility	-0.08	0.07	-1.05	0.1128
9 Jitteriness	-0.03	0.09	-0.31	0.0374
10 Interest	0.09	0.07	1.20	0.0070
11 Alertness	0.02	0.09	0.23	0.1356*
12 Excitement	0.01	0.09	0.13	0.0282
13 Inspiration	-0.01	0.08	-0.09	0.0036
14 Strength	-0.08	0.08	-0.97	0.0746
15 Determination	0.34**	0.09	3.75**	0.1025
16 Attentiveness	0.01	0.10	-0.07	0.0393
17 Enthusiasm	0.03	0.10	0.33	0.0190
18 Active	-0.00	0.10	-0.04	0.0829
19 Pride	0.01	0.08	0.14	0.0243

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

⁺ Age, gender, education, tenure, and working hours were the control variables.

Hypothesis 3a, which stated that chaotic emotion is negatively related to organizational commitment, is supported ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$). But different with guilt and determination, the Level-1 association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment has significant between-group-variance (0.1517, $p < 0.05$), confirming that it is sufficient to conduct Level-2 analysis. At the same time, the slope of irritability (variance = 0.1836, $p < 0.01$) and alertness (variance = 0.1356, $p < 0.05$) also show significant between-group variance. Therefore, at the third step, the two levels of analysis were conducted by inputting the three emotions (chaotic emotion, irritability, and alertness) into the equation as Level-1 variables.

In order to examine Hypothesis 3b, the moderating effect of group relationship conflict on the Level-1 associations, the second level variable-group relationship conflict was input to examine the between-group differences on these three individual level slopes. The results show (see Table 3) that the negative association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment at Level-1 ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.1$) is significantly moderated by group relationship conflict ($\gamma = -0.25$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the negative Level-1 association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment ($\beta = -0.18$) is strengthened by 0.25 units when the group relationship conflict increases by one unit, thus supporting Hypothesis 3b.

Although, organizational commitment has shown significant correlation with a variety of emotions frequently experienced in organizations (as shown in Table 1),

Table 3 Level 2 analysis—Effects of group level relationship conflict on individual level regression coefficients in predicting organizational commitment.

	Coefficient (γ)	SE	<i>t</i> test	Variance
Chaotic				
Group Relationship Conflict	-0.25*	0.12	-2.12*	0.1402
Irritation				
Group Relationship Conflict	-0.13	0.15	-0.89	0.1917*
Alertness				
Group Relationship Conflict	-0.17	0.12	-1.31	0.1297**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Age, gender, education, tenure, and working hours were controlled.

only guilt, determination, and chaotic emotions significantly predict organizational commitment in regression (see Table 2). This phenomenon, in part, reveals that the significant co-occurrences between organizational commitment and other emotions, such as interest, inspiration, enthusiasm, activeness, and pride, are superficial. Their effects have been explained by guilt, determination, and chaotic emotion—the key emotions related to appraising person-organization relationships. It also provides evidence that multivariate design can reduce superficial variables in organizational commitment models.

Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the literature in several ways. First, by conceptualizing a unique affect event process, the results reveal how day-to-day affective experiences in organizations can help determine employee commitment to the organization. The results also identify the specific affective connection most important to the person-organization relationship.

Second, although a variety of positive emotions are correlated to organizational commitment, the HLM analysis found determination to be the only positive affective antecedent of organizational commitment across groups. Moreover, frequently experienced guilt increases the bonding to organization. The negative effects of chaotic emotion on organizational commitment are strengthened by the degree of group level relationship conflict by the cross-level analysis. These findings shed important light on the theoretical and empirical implications upon organizational commitment.

Third, frequently experienced positive affect, such as interest, inspiration, enthusiasm, activeness, and pride in one's organization may certainly be related to an employee's well-being in organizational life. But their impact on organizational commitment is almost fully explained by determination. The positive correlation between determination and other positive affects implies that employees are likely to experience interest, activity, inspiration, and pride as long as the organization can enhance employees' feeling of determination—the key positive affect that reflects the person-organization relationship in task completion. This important finding

suggests that organizations should generate determination toward task completion rather than taking too much time and resources to improve the positive affective attachment, such as excitement, happiness, fondness, pleasure, comfort, and spiritedness (Meyer & Allen, 1984). This result further confirms the importance of task instrumentality and accomplishment over simple emotional attachment to an organization. Most people like to feel they are getting things done, serving customers and coworkers, and learning something—this weighs much more heavily in committing to an organization than simply feeling good about it (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997).

Guilt is a negative painful emotion. But its occurrence in an organization increases the stickiness of employees to the organization. This study was conducted in China, but the findings are consistent with inferences from Adams (1965) and other studies from Western society on commitment and reduced turnover. This indicates the relationship between guilt and organizational commitment is likely to be a pan-culture phenomenon. Nonetheless, the mechanism and the threshold of generating guilt might differ due to the variation of the reference of appraising person-organization exchange. For example, for Chinese, one value of the Confucian system is that when one receives a small favor such as a drop of water from others, a fountain of water should be returned. This cultural value may serve to increase guilt feelings for Chinese workers and the pressure to reciprocate; though more research is needed to provide validation for this (and other) such widely quoted proverbial statements from China and other East Asian countries (Levine, 1998, 2003).

In real organizational life, Chinese managers also apply this guilt-provoking skill to manage employees' commitment in a more Chinese way. For example, some CEOs and middle managers in China try to do personal favors for their subordinates such as giving some special financial support at the time when the employee has a significant family need (outside of the organization's regular compensation system). In so doing, managers have to increase employee commitment to the organization. Recent empirical research (Wu et al., 2006) also supported the observation that Chinese managers make significant use of reciprocation (gift giving, doing favors) in expecting that such favors will be promptly reciprocated by subordinates. The empirical findings and practical observations suggest the future research question: What are the specific appraisals of guilt-provoking person-organization exchange and its cultural variants?

Chaotic emotions such as fear and upset significantly decrease employees' commitment to organization. Although organization theorists also found that appropriately dealing with organizational uncertainty can enhance organizational innovation (Cheng & Van de Ven, 1996), the finding here suggests that organizations should try to avoid increasing employees' fear and upset (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). Recent research (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallios, & Calling, 2004) actually provides evidence that organizations are able to better cope with uncertainty by utilizing the methods of improved management communication and increased employee participatory decision making.

As a societal entity, relationship conflict in organizations was found to strengthen the negative association between chaotic emotion and organizational commitment. More group level interpersonal friction leads to a higher likelihood that employees will be less able to endure the uncertainty in the organization which in turn reduces

commitment to the organization. Based on this finding, we suggest that organizations provide training to enhance employee capacity to deal with the conflict from supervisors and peers and encourage them to build group harmony with reduced relationship conflict. In so doing, it would facilitate the work team to solve task problems in an innovative way without hurting employees' commitment even under higher level uncertainty, and thus generate higher productive performance.

An implication for theory comes from the unidentified higher level variables for irritability and alertness. Despite the significant between group variances for the individual level analysis, group relationship conflict has no influence over the association linking irritability and alertness to organizational commitment. Therefore, other higher level variables need to be identified to explain the first level's association.

Multilevel view of affective events theory

The findings based on the multilevel analysis provide evidence that the degree of individual level association is able to be influenced by the variation of higher level variables, as shown by the significant between-group variance for irritability and alertness in predicting organizational commitment, as well as the moderating effect of group relationship conflict on the chaotic emotion and organizational commitment association. Such kinds of higher level variation added new paths into the original AET theory. We therefore revised AET in two ways for better understanding (1) the systematic differences between organizations and its influences in determining affective responses and (2) the association between affect and organizational behavior including relatively stable attitudes toward the organization (shown in Figure 2, the dashed lines), namely a multilevel view of AET.

Just as Weiss and Beal (2005: 4) comment, “[AET] makes a clear distinction between features and events as explanatory constructs and one of the central theses of AET is that events are the proximal causes of affective reaction.” It advanced theories in providing a perspective emphasizing the underlying organizational mechanism in linking transient affective actions to stable work attitudes. However, work features systematically differ across organizational units (group, team, or organization), for instance, task complexity, reward system, group relationship conflict, or group task conflict.

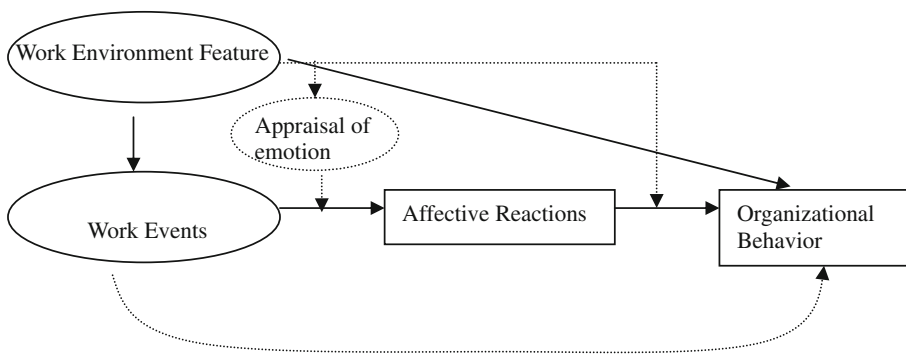


Figure 2 A multilevel view of affective events theory

The systematic difference across organizational units leads to two significant implications. First, as examined, it influences the individual level of association between affective responses and organizational commitment. Second, the systematic difference also impacts employees' appraisal of organizational events, which elicited the varying affective responses across the organization. According to some social constructionists (e.g., Averill, 1980; Gergen, 1999), the construct of emotional response can be influenced by local cultural expectations of appropriate behavior and social roles. And through the process of emotion socialization, the shared expectation of appropriate emotion response will be internalized as one part of one's own appraisal system and have a direct influence on emotion activation. This is how organizational culture or group/organizational norms influence emotion activation. Empirically, Li (2006) already found that national cultural values can moderate the relationship between one's familiarity with a harm doer and the intensity of anger elicited by a hurt.

On the organizational level, organizations or organizational units develop their own values and beliefs. That is organizational culture. For example, working overtime is viewed as working hard in some organizations. But some other organizations consider that employees should work efficiently and daily work should be done within working hours. Working overtime is not encouraged and is considered as a symbol of inefficiency or not working as a team. Rentsch's (1990) study also found that "people who interacted with each other had similar interpretations of organizational events and that members of different interaction groups attached qualitatively different meanings to similar organizational events." Much research about affect and appraisals (Ellsworth, 1991; Lazarus & Smith, 1988; Parkinson & Manstead, 1992; Scherer, 1984) has already found that same events are able to activate the variety of emotions because of the variation of the appraisals people used. Therefore, we added a path from work feature to the linkage from work events to affective responses, representing the effect from shared appraisals for a group of employees.

Like all cross-sectional studies, the causal linkage between affective antecedents and organizational commitment are derived from casual inference based on logical inference and correlation, rather than direct causality. Given the difficulties of directly observing the long term forming process of a stable attitude, a cross-sectional design is acceptable and the findings are also reliable in statistically inferring the causal relationship connecting transient emotions and the stable attitude of commitment to the organization.

Though it may be desirable, it is not essential for organizations to please their employees so they can feel happy, interested, or inspired to thus increase their commitment. The findings here have shown that employees are willing to commit to the organizations that can motivate them to complete tasks with the feelings of determination and goal accomplishment. Employees also want to commit to such an organization—the organization that can elicit some guilt feelings in person-organization exchange events, the organization that is able to generate less fear for uncertainty, and also the organization that has the mechanism to reduce group relationship conflict. Although we do not know enough about the specific appraisals for the feelings of guilty, determination, and chaotic emotion, as well as the detailed construct of the organizational events influencing person-organization exchange,

task completion, and organizational uncertainty, these are all promising avenues for future research. The multilevel view of affective events theory proposed here provides a robust model for future research on organizational differences, particularly its effects on affective response and the consequence of affective responses on organizational behavior. The empirical findings and the multilevel view of affective events theory suggest that organizations can improve employees' organizational commitment through enhancing organizational level function and design. Organizations should build mechanisms to improve employee determination to complete a given task rather than simply designing and assigning goals to employees.

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