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RESEARCH NOTES

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A COMPARISON OF AMERICAN, JAPANESE, AND KOREAN EMPLOYEES

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Considerable attention is currently being given to exploring differences between Japanese and American workers that might explain the widening gap between the productivity growth rates of the two countries. Some researchers have suggested that this difference in productivity growth is, at least in part, due to Japanese workers' having a higher level of commitment to their organizations than American workers (Cole, 1979; Hatvany & Pucik, 1981; Marsh & Mannari, 1977; Whitehall & Takezawa, 1968). Turnover rates are commonly cited to support the popular notion that Japanese employees, whose turnover rate is about half that of their American counterparts, are more committed to their organizations (Cole, 1979). The purpose of this paper is to compare levels of organizational commitment among American, Japanese, and Korean employees by means of a self-report measure of organizational commitment rather than by inference from other indicators of commitment.

DEFINITION AND BACKGROUND

Steers (1977) defines organizational commitment as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) suggest that it has three primary components: (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to remain with the organization. In other words, an employee who is highly committed to an organization intends to stay with it and to work hard toward its goals. Many analysts—both academic researchers and the popular press—have suggested that this connection between organizational commitment and hard work is the reason why Japanese productivity has increased faster than U.S. productivity. That is, since Japanese workers are supposedly more committed to their organizations, they are therefore more productive than their U.S. counterparts.

A great deal of research in the United States has centered on determining the predictors of organizational commitment. Researchers have found that age is positively related to organizational commitment (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Koch & Steers, 1978; Morris & Sherman, 1981; Welsh & LeVan, 1981). Tenure has also been found to be positively related to organizational commitment (Koch & Steers, 1978; Stevens, Beyer, & Trice, 1978; Welsh & LeVan, 1981). These two variables, age and tenure, have been most frequently examined and have been most consistent in their relationship to organizational commitment.

Some researchers have examined the predictors of organizational commitment among Japanese workers. Starting with the hypothesis that Japanese workers are committed to a particular organization for life, Marsh and Mannari (1977) developed a measure of a distinctly Japanese version of organizational commitment, labelled "lifetime commitment," that they proposed would capture uniquely Japanese norms and values of loyalty to an organization. They found that job satisfaction, employee cohesiveness, perceived job autonomy, and organizational status explained 11 percent of the variance in lifetime commitment. Since these correlates, which leave much of the variance in commitment unexplained, cannot be considered to be uniquely Japanese, the authors concluded that commitment predictors are universal and not culture-specific.

Mobley and Hwang (1982) conducted a study similar to Marsh and Mannari's (1977) with a sample of Chinese workers. Once again they tested the notion that commitment has a unique set of predictors in a non-Western culture. They used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Porter and his colleagues (1974). The strongest predictors of organizational commitment were age and sex; tenure was not significantly related to commitment. Overall, their results showed the generalizability of the predictors of organizational commitment and reinforced Marsh and Mannari's (1977) finding that commitment among workers in a non-Western culture is based more on universal than on culture-specific factors.

In sum, previous research that has examined the correlates of organizational commitment in non-Western countries has not, to date, directly addressed the contention that levels of organizational commitment in these countries are higher than in the United States. The purpose of this study is to compare overall levels of organizational commitment among samples of employees in three countries: the United States, Japan, and Korea. We included Korea — a country similar to, though in many ways different from Japan — in the study in order to obtain a comparison between two Asian countries. We examined the relationship between organizational commitment and two predictors, age and tenure, for the three countries, as well as the overall levels of organizational commitment.

METHODS

Subjects

A representative sample of employees was selected from widely diverse organizations in the United States, Japan, and Korea. Table 1 shows the

sample sizes for each of the types of firms represented in the Japanese and Korean samples. Although information on specific firm types was not available for the entire U.S. sample, it included employees from manufacturing, retail, service, and government organizations. In terms of size of the organization, 34 percent of the Japanese respondents and 59 percent of the Korean respondents were employed by firms with 1,000 or more employees.

Also, 93 percent of the U.S. respondents, 84 percent of the Japanese respondents, and 74 percent of the Korean respondents were nonsupervisory employees. The average ages of the respondents in each country were 41, United States; 31, Japan; and 29, Korea. In the U.S. sample, 59 percent of the employees had been with their organizations five years or less, whereas 58 percent of the Japanese respondents and 73 percent of the Korean respondents had been with their organizations five years or less.

TABLE 1
Sample Sizes by Type of Firm

Type of Firm	Japan	Korea
Electronics	55	44
Trading	11	45
Construction	7	46
Petroleum	19	40
Investments/finance	11	41
Banking	8	47
Government	6	39
Other	59	—

The subjects were asked to complete appropriate translations of the widely used 15-item version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Porter et al., 1974). To verify accuracy of translation the questionnaire was put into Japanese and Korean, and then translated back into English. Subjects' responses were scored on 5-point Likert scales in which "5" represented high commitment and "1" indicated low commitment, except for six negatively phrased questions. Subjects were also asked to report their ages and their length of tenure with their organizations. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 1,181 U.S. employees, 176 Japanese employees, and 302 Korean employees.

Analyses

Coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951), item analysis, and factor analysis (principal factors, varimax rotation) were used to estimate the internal consistency of the OCQ for each of the three samples. We computed the mean level of organizational commitment for each country, and used multiple regression analysis to determine if country, age, tenure, or a combination of these factors accounted for a significant amount of the variance in organizational commitment across the three samples. We also tested interactions among these three variables.

RESULTS

Reliability coefficients were relatively high for each of the three versions of the OCQ: .94 for the English and the Japanese, and .87 for the Korean.

The results of the factor analysis shown in Table 2 indicate that for the U.S. and Japanese samples the OCQ measured a single underlying construct. However, in the Korean sample, two factors emerged. Of six items on the OCQ associated with the second factor, five were negatively-phrased statements (numbers 3, 7, 11, 12, 15 on the questionnaire).

TABLE 2
Factor Analysis of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire
in Samples from Three Countries

OCQ Item	United States Factor 1	Japan Factor 1	Korea ^b	
			Factor 1	Factor 2
1	.59	.76	.54	
2	.76	.78	.69	.31
3 ^a	.53	.75		.47
4	.45	.71	.61	
5	.65	.82	.55	
6	.78	.84	.70	.32
7 ^a	.50	.33		.34
8	.72	.77	.41	.52
9 ^a	.60	.74		.55
10	.75	.78	.47	.33
11 ^a	.65	.60		.70
12 ^a	.56	.61		.51
13	.68	.81	.44	
14	.76	.80	.52	.48
15 ^a	.69	.72		.67
Variance (%)	98.30	93.40	80.60	20.80
Eigenvalues	6.37	8.04	4.58	1.19

^aReverse-scored items

^bOnly factor loadings above .30 are reported.

The level of organizational commitment was significantly higher among the U.S. employees ($\bar{x} = 3.61$), while the levels of organizational commitment among the Japanese and Korean employees were similar ($\bar{x} = 3.21$ and 3.29 , respectively); $F_{2, 1572} = 62.301, p < .0001$.

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis using age and tenure as predictors of organizational commitment. Country accounted for 7.35 percent of the variance in organizational commitment; adding age and tenure to the model increased the explained variance to 11.8 percent, a significant increment. The correlation between age and tenure was .14. When country and tenure were held constant, the semipartial correlation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983: 88–90) between organizational commitment and age was .13. Holding country and age constant, the semipartial correlation between organizational

TABLE 3
Regression Analysis of Organizational Commitment
in Samples from Three Countries

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Country	2,1570	.0735	.0001				
Age and tenure	4,1568	.1180	.0001	.0445	39.556	1,1568	<.01

commitment and tenure was .12. The interactions between country and age and tenure were not significant.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that Japanese and Korean employees, who showed no difference in levels of organizational commitment are both less organizationally committed than U.S. employees. Since country by itself accounted for only 7 percent of the variance, the difference found between the United States and the two Asian countries may be of little practical significance, but the finding certainly refutes the widespread belief that Japanese workers are more committed to the organizations that employ them than are their U.S. counterparts. This finding is particularly surprising in view of the fact that a greater percentage of the Japanese and Korean subjects were supervisory employees who might, because of their higher level, be expected to be more committed to their organizations than nonsupervisory employees. Also, a significant percentage of the Japanese and Korean employees were from large companies where lifetime employment contracts are likely to exist. Therefore, it would seem to be premature to attribute the productivity gap between the United States and major competitors such as Japan solely to U.S. employees' lack of commitment to the organizations that employ them. The U.S. may actually be better off in this regard, at least according to the data derived from the most widely accepted way of measuring such commitment.

The results of our factor analysis need further interpretation. While the OCQ, as is appropriate, measures just one factor in the U.S. and Japanese samples, it measured two factors in the Korean sample. Close examination of the individual items associated with the second factor did not reveal a construct distinct from the first; the only obvious difference between the two factors was the phrasing of the items. Apparently, Korean respondents had more difficulty responding to the negatively-phrased items — which were reverse scored in the analysis — than to the positively-phrased items. Other studies using the OCQ have also found two factors (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), and at least one study found the second factor to be associated with reverse scored items (Angle & Perry, 1981).

Our regression analysis verified the positive relationships of organizational commitment with age and tenure, a finding consistent with a number of previous studies. In addition, and importantly, this study found that the

positive relationship holds across countries as well. In other words, our findings are consistent with Marsh and Mannari's (1977) and Mobley and Hwang's (1982) conclusions that organizational commitment is not based on culture-specific norms and values.

This study does not support the popular notion that the lifetime commitment concept in Japanese management practice is responsible for the lower turnover rate in Japan. The lifetime employment contract is typically limited to permanent white-collar and blue-collar employees in large firms (Ballon, 1969). Since the Japanese and Korean samples used in this study included a fairly large proportion of employees in large firms, the level of organizational commitment for Japan and Korea might have been expected to be higher than for the United States. Again, the results of this study do not support that prediction.

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