

Role Space, Organizational Commitment and Perception about the Organization among Retail/Sales Professionals in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between role space and organizational commitment among the sales professionals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the study also examines the relationship between organizational commitment and employee perception about the organization they work for. The data were obtained from 148 sales and retail professionals. The gathered data were then analyzed by using suitable statistical tools. The results demonstrate that role space is significantly and negatively related to overall commitment among the selected respondents. Employee perception of the organization is found significantly positively related to affective commitment, normative commitment, and overall commitment. Regression analysis indicates that the change in overall OC is explained by 43.5% resulting from a change in the selected independent variables.

Keywords

Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Organizational Commitment, Employee perception of the organization

Introduction

In retailing industry, sales is one of the important areas which influences the whole business of the industry. Sales professionals have to maintain a good rapport with the customers and clients in order to get business and compete with the competitors at the same time. Sales professionals are challenged to meet their targets on monthly basis and meeting this challenge is not possible without being committed to their jobs as well as the organizations. The commitment is of great importance to sales professionals in achieving organizational goals (Boles et.al, 2007). Research findings have unfolded the fact that commitment brings higher productivity (Barksdale et al., 2003). Due to this relationship

between commitment and productivity, organizations are trying to develop a culture that fosters the commitment of staff toward the organizations and their performance goal (Welch & Welch, 2006).

Many organizations are hiring part-time sales staff in order to meet the fluctuating demand of workers. Hiring full-time sales staff is sometimes leading to high expenses especially in case of very uncertain economic conditions. These issues pose several challenges to organizations in the retailing industry. For better sales performance, staff needs to be committed to their job as well as organization in order to satisfy the clients and customers and maintaining the quality of the services. Commitment develops with the time spent by the individual in the organization and helps in retaining the workers (Mathieu et al., 2000). Part-time workers show less commitment level in contrast to full-time workers (Al Omar et al., 2011; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Martin & Hafer, 1995).

Commitment among sales professionals requires a thorough understanding and institutionalization of organization's strategic goals and expectations. Moreover, sales professionals are required to exhibit skills and competence in line with the organization's strategy. The alignment between the sales professionals' commitment and organization's strategy will help in building strong connections with the customers which led to better sales performance.

There is hardly any research study conducted on the selected variables among sales professionals in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The present study is aimed to fill that gap of knowledge in the context of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the findings of the research will provide sales professionals some input on how role conflict, role ambiguity, and the perception of the organization affect the commitment which eventually may lead to fluctuation in the work performance.

The purpose of this study is to explore the level of role space, organizational commitment, and perception of employees about the organizations they work for and the extent to which these variables are related to each other.

Literature Review

The concept of commitment is defined differently by researchers based on their findings. In order to have a common understanding among the researchers to come out with an acceptable definition, organizational commitment is considered to be the desire of an individual to maintain his/her membership with the current organization and the acceptance of its goals and values (Porter et.al., 1976). Allen and Mayer (1990) identified three forms of commitment: (1) affective commitment (2) normative commitment (3) continuance commitment. Affective commitment can be defined as an emotional attachment of an individual with the organization he/she currently works. The normative commitment stems from having the sense of obligation on the part of an individual to stay with the organization. The continuance commitment is related to the knowledge of cost involved with leaving the organization.

Scholl (1981) defined commitment as an employee's desire to remain with the organization, desire to exert high levels of effort on behalf of the organization and identification with the organization's goals. He further identified four antecedents of commitment in the context of sales professionals such as supervisory relationship, sales organization characteristics, sales task characteristics and personal characteristics.

Previous research findings indicate a significant relationship between workers commitment and their performance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mackenzie et al., 1998; Ketchand & Strawser, 2001; Riketta, 2002). Workers commitment is also found strongly associated with workers autonomy. The higher the autonomy given better the workers perform and stay with the organization for a long time (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Ketchand & Strawser, 1998; Stallworth, 2004). Committed sales professionals perform better and stay longer with the organizations in contrast to those who are less committed (Hom et al., 1979; Mowday et al., 1979).

Stress has become a buzz word for workers which affects the performance as well as health if not taken care off. There could be countless sources of stress but it varies from individual to individual what source or sources causing them stress. Role conflict and role ambiguity are one of the common sources of stress among workers. Due to these two sources, an individual is negatively affected psychologically as well as behaviorally (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003; Karatepe & Uludağ, 2008; Madare, Dawson & Nael, 2013). People in sales are more vulnerable to role ambiguity due to a variety of task they perform in isolation. In case, there is a role ambiguity on their job, the employees may have a decreased performance as well as organizational commitment (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Sometimes, role ambiguity occurs among sales professionals due to lack of proper training they require to perform the job and insufficient information provided by the managers. Initial or introductory training affects the sales performance and organizational commitment (Pettijohn et al., 2009).

Researchers have explored the link between role ambiguity and organizational commitment and reported that role ambiguity indirectly influences organizational commitment (Behrman & Perreault, 1984; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Brown & Peterson, 1993). Singh (1998) also suggested that there could be a direct relationship between the two. He also argued that well-defined roles can provide guidance to salespeople to evaluate the consequences of staying or severing a relationship. Katz and Kahn (1996) reported that salespeople's roles link them to their organization. Role theory explains how people react to their roles which are communicated to them at the time they join organizations. If the person's perception of the role is not clear, it may affect his or her behavior, the perception of the job communicated, and the perception toward the organization. (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Lopopolo, 2002).

Role ambiguity comprises of unclear expectations which subsequently lead to negative work experience. This situation of the ambiguity of roles and responsibilities attached to one's job causes stress among the job performers in the organization (Madare et al., 2013). Due to lack of role definitions or proper communication of role/job descriptions, an employee may experience role ambiguity (Adiguzel, 2012).

Role conflict occurs when many requests come from multiple stakeholders such as customers, colleagues or a manager at the same time and the employee cannot fulfill all of them (Karatepe & Uludag, 2008). Hunter et al., (1982) indicate that role conflict has a moderate negative relationship with organizational commitment, and it had a negative relationship with performance.

Babakus et al., (1996) found that role ambiguity has a negative moderate relationship with organizational commitment. Singh (1998) also reported a negative relationship between role ambiguity and organizational commitment. The literature indicates that both role states, generally have a negative relationship with OC. However, the magnitude of

these relationships varies from low to high, with a few studies indicating no relationship. Generally, the findings support the contention that an employee who is under role stress may consider leaving the organization, thus have a lower resultant organizational commitment.

Cook and Wall (1980) studied employee perception of the organization and organizational commitment and found a high positive correlation between the two. Positive employee perception of the organization has a positive influence on organizational commitment and performance. (Peter & Waterman, 1982). They suggested that the productivity through people means that organizations treat people as partners; treating them with dignity and respect. Peter and Waterman (1982) suggest that if workers perceive that the organization they work for is considered as “excellent” then their level of motivation and performance will be positively affected.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature review following hypothesis are developed:

H1: There will be a significant negative relationship among organizational commitment dimensions and role ambiguity.

H2: There will be a significant negative relationship among organizational commitment dimensions and role conflict.

H3: There will be a significant negative relationship between overall organizational commitment and role space.

H4: There will be a significant positive relationship among organizational commitment dimensions and employee perception of the organization.

H5: There will be a significant positive relationship between overall organizational commitment and employee perception of the organization.

H6: There will be a significant negative relationship between total role space and employee perception of the organization.

Methodology

For the collection of the data, convenience sampling technique was adopted. Data was collected from 148 sales professionals working for various companies. The questionnaires were distributed to them personally as well as through online.

Role space: Role ambiguity and role conflict scale of Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) was used in the study. 6 item for role ambiguity and 8 item for role conflict are extracted from the instrument which is consisted of 30 items. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The literature review indicated that the studies consistently report coefficient alphas of 0.78 and above for both scales.

Organizational commitment: Meyer and Allen (1997) scale was used to measure organizational commitment. The scale consists of 18 items. There are three subscales; affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Each subscale contains 6 item. Internal consistency using coefficient alpha (median reliabilities) for *Affective*, *Continuance* and *Normative* scales have been reported at 0.85, 0.79 and 0.73 respectively (Allen and Meyer, 1996).

Perception of the organization: Sharma, Netemeyer, and Mahajan (1990) scale was used for measuring employee perception of the organization. The scale consists of 16 items with a 5-point Likert scale.

Results

Table 1 indicates that the respondents have a moderate level of commitment. The COC received relatively highest mean score (3.42). Role space level is quite high among the respondents (ambiguity, 4.27 and conflict, 4.09). Employees' perception of the organizations has received an average score of 3.34. It seems that the respondents are facing high levels of role ambiguity and role conflict on their jobs and due to this their commitment level is dropped. Further statistical tools may find the significance of the obtained mean scores.

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
AOC	148	2.90	4.80	3.10	.565
COC	148	2.30	4.50	3.42	.484
NOC	148	3.00	4.90	3.12	.499
OC	148	2.97	4.47	3.22	.307
Conflict	148	3.00	4.90	4.09	.384
Ambiguity	148	3.00	5.00	4.27	.472
TRS	148	3.70	4.95	4.18	.264
Emp.per	148	1.90	4.30	3.34	.608
Valid N (listwise)	148				

Table 2 shows the correlation analysis among the chosen variables for the study. The affective commitment and normative commitment dimensions of organizational commitment are found significantly negatively correlated with role ambiguity ($r = -.394$, $p < 0.05$; $r = -.511$, $p < 0.01$). The results partially support the hypothesis#1. The continuance commitment is found negatively correlated related with role conflict ($r = -.241$, $p < 0.05$). The hypothesis#2 is partially supported by the results. The overall organizational commitment is found negatively related to total role space ($r = -.254$, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis# 3 is completely supported by the obtained results. The affective commitment and normative commitment are found significantly positively correlated with the employee perception of the organization ($r = .150$, $p < 0.05$; $r = .321$, $p < 0.01$). These results partially support the hypothesis# 4. The overall organizational commitment is significantly positively correlated with employee perception of the organization ($r = .490$, $p < 0.01$). The hypothesis#5 is confirmed by the obtained results. Total role space is found negatively related to employee perception of the organization. ($r = -.316$, $p < 0.01$). The results support the hypothesis# 6. The overall findings of the study are in line with the previous research findings (Sayeeduzzafar & Afroz, 2017; Bhalla & Sayeed, 2013; Mahfuz, J., 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970; Babakus et al., 1996; Sing, 1998; Hunter et al., 1982, Cook & Wall, 1980; Peter & Waterman, 1982; Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Leong et al., 1996).

Table 2- Correlation Matrix

	AOC	COC	NOC	OC	Conflict	Ambigu uity	TRS	Emp. perception
AOC	1	.017	-.021	.611**	.033	-.394*	.054	.150*
COC	.017	1	.096	.589**	-.241**	.059	-.049	.112
NOC	-.021	.096	1	.581**	-.057	-.511**	.005	.321**
OC	.611**	.589**	.581**	1	-.083	.076	-.215*	.490**
Conflict	.033	-.241**	-.057	-.083	1	-.254*	.500**	-.235*
Ambigu uity	-.394**	.059	-.511**	-.366**	-.254*	1	.710**	.162
TRS	.054	-.049	.005	-.215*	.500**	.710**	1	-.316**
Emp.per	.150*	.112	.321**	.490**	-.235*	.162	-.316**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted for overall commitment and its three dimensions. The results show a large correlation with a coefficient of determination (R^2) at 0.435 for overall OC, 0.352 for affective OC, 0.320 for normative OC and 0.182 for continuance OC. This indicates that the change in overall OC is explained by 43.5% resulting from a change in the selected independent variables. The explained variance for the three dimensions respectively are 35.2% (affective commitment-AOC), 32.0% (normative commitment-NOC) and 18.2% (continuance commitment-COC).

Table 3- Multiple Regression Analysis

Step-1	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	t	Sig.
	Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC)	Role Ambiguity	0.213	7.142	.000
		Role Conflict	0.098	1.785	.211
		Employee Perception of the Org.	0.196	5.639	.000

R=0.5936; R^2 =0.3523

Table 4- Multiple Regression Analysis

Step-2	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	t	Sig.
	Normative Organizational Commitment (NOC)	Role Ambiguity	0.214	6.518	.000
		Role Conflict	-0.127	-5.713	.000
		Employee Perception of the Org.	0.126	4.225	.004

R=0.5658; R^2 =0.3201

Table 5- Multiple Regression Analysis

Step-3	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	t	Sig.
	Continuance Organizational Commitment (COC)	Role Ambiguity	0.098	1.263	.110
		Role Conflict	-0.203	6.127	.000
		Employee Perception of the Org.	0.071	1.715	.016

R=0.4273; R²=0.1826

Table 6- Multiple Regression Analysis

Step-4	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	t	Sig.
	Overall Organizational Commitment (OC)	Role Ambiguity	-0.289	5.168	.000
		Role Conflict	-0.034	1.117	.019
		Employee Perception of the Org.	0.371	7.715	.000

R=0.435; R²=0.1892

Discussion

Limitation and Recommendation

The study was an attempt to explore the relationship between organizational commitment, role space and the employees' perception among the sale personnel. Due to the lack of awareness about the importance of research efforts in improving management practices in the region, the support for data collection by the organizations is not welcomed. The researcher has to put in a lot of efforts in collecting the data. The sample size is not representing the entire population of sales personnel in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia so, the findings cannot be generalized but can be used to explore the relationship among the selected variables. It is important for sales managers to understand the factors related to organizational commitment among the retail sales personnel. Moreover, developing employees' commitment to the sales/retailing organization is of great importance that every organization needs to understand and act. A committed sales team will bring the noticeable difference between the effective and ineffective organizations.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reported that role space and some of its dimensions and significantly negatively related to overall commitment and its dimensions. The findings of the present study are supported by the previous findings as well. Therefore, a

conclusion can be drawn that sales professionals have reported the moderate level of commitment due to a high level of role conflict and role ambiguity associated with their jobs. Generally, the findings support the contention that an employee who is under role stress may consider leaving the organization, thus have a lower resultant OC.

On the other hand employee perception of the organization has a positive influence on overall OC and its dimensions. Affective and normative OC tend to have a positive relationship with the employees' perception of the organization. Continuance OC appears to have a low positive relationship, but some studies have indicated no significant correlation, and one study showed a high positive correlation. The literature indicates that there appears to be general agreement that a favorable perception of the organization by employees is positively related to OC. As it has been reported by the research that role ambiguity and role conflict negatively influenced sales personnel's commitment (Singh, 1998). This may happen when the employees are not given proper orientation related to the job they supposed to be doing. Their job description is not clearly defined and they struggle between failure to perform and frustration which subsequently leads to lack of commitment, loyalty, stress, and desire to leave.

Sales personnel are representatives of their organizations to the customers. They are likely to perform better if their roles are well defined and specifically communicated. Committed and satisfied sales personnel will talk very positively about the organization and perform beyond the expected level (Robbins, 2005). Managers need to realize the importance of sales personnel job and its relationship with factors like commitment, role space, job satisfaction which play a significant role in enhancing their performance in particular and organization's performance in general.

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