

Research Articles

Effect of Job Autonomy Upon Organizational Commitment of Employees at Different Hierarchical Level

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Abstract

The main aim of the present study was to examine the effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees at different hierarchical level. A study was made on randomly selected 100 male employees who work in different organizations in Agra, who were administered Organizational Commitment Scale (by Allen & Meyer, 1990) and Job Autonomy Scale (by Das, Arora, & Singhal, 2000). On the basis of median of the job autonomy scores, the sample was divided into two groups (1) high job autonomy group and (2) low job autonomy group and on the basis of hierarchical level, the employees were divided into two groups (1) 50 high hierarchical level employees' including managers, etc. and (2) 50 low hierarchical level employees, e.g. clerical staff, etc. The 2x2 factorial design was formed for this purpose and four groups of employees were formed (1) high hierarchy, high autonomy group (2) high hierarchy, low autonomy group (3) low hierarchy, high autonomy group and (4) low hierarchy, low autonomy group. A two-way analysis of variance was employed to compare the level of organizational commitment of each of the four groups. There is a significant difference found between job commitment of employees with high and low job autonomy ($F = 4.670, p < .05$). There is a significant difference found between job commitment of employees of high hierarchical group and those of low hierarchical group ($F = 40.691, p < .01$) and significant interaction effect found between job autonomy and hierarchical level upon organizational commitment of employees ($F = 6.114, p < .05$).

Keywords: job autonomy, organizational commitment, hierarchical level

Psychological Thought, 2013, Vol. 6(2), 241–251, doi:10.5964/psyct.v6i2.65

Received: 2013-03-16. Accepted: 2013-06-09. Published (VoR): 2013-10-25.

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Introduction

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment or employee loyalty is the degree to which an employee identifies with the organization and wants to continue participating actively in it (Solomon, 1992).

Meyer and Allen (1991) have proposed three-component model of organizational commitment.

1. **Affective Commitment:** involves the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization.
2. **Continuance Commitment:** involves commitment based on the costs to leaving the organization (loss of friends, loss of pension benefit, loss of familiar environment, etc.) that outweigh the benefits of taking a new job in a different organization, or because there is a lack of alternative employment opportunities ("Continuance Commitment," 2008).

3. Normative Commitment: involves the employee's feeling of obligation to stay with the organization.

According to [Mowday, Steers, and Porter \(1979\)](#) a strong organizational commitment is characterized by:

1. The extent to which an employee demonstrates a strong desire to remain with the organization;
2. The degree of willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization;
3. Belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values.

[Noms and Niebuhr \(2002\)](#) have studied professionalism, organizational commitment and job satisfaction in accounting organization. Data were collected from several field offices of a "Big Eight" U.S. accounting firm. The results showed that the accountants who reported high levels of professionalism also reported high levels of organizational commitment. Additionally, both professionalism and organizational commitment were strongly related to job satisfaction.

- Job characteristics: Research has shown that organizational commitment is affected by various jobs characteristics, for example, commitment tends to be greater when people have high levels of responsibility over the jobs they performed.
- Nature of reward: An employee's commitment is also likely to be influenced by the nature of rewards he or she receive, for example, feeling of commitment is enhanced by the use of a profit-sharing plan.
- The employment opportunities: Organizational commitment is affected by the existence of alternative employment opportunities.
- Personal characteristics: Personal characteristics also influence organizational commitment, for example, people who have more tenure with their organization are more highly committed to them than those who have been employed for shorter periods ([Miner, 1992](#)).

Job Autonomy

Job Autonomy is a degree or level of freedom and discretion allowed to an employee over his or her job ([Hackman & Oldham, 1976](#)).

Hackman and Oldham Job Characteristic Model — The job characteristics model is one of the most influential attempts to design jobs with increased motivational properties ([Hackman & Oldham, 1976](#)). Proposed by Hackman and Oldham, the model describes five core job dimensions leading to three critical psychological states, resulting in work-related outcomes.

- Skill variety - refers to the extent to which the job requires a person to utilize multiple high-level skills.
- Task identity - refers to the degree to which a person is in charge of completing an identifiable piece of work from start to finish.
- Task significance - refers to whether a person's job substantially affects other people's work, health, or well-being.
- Feedback - refers to the degree to which people learn how effective they are at work. Feedback at work may come from other people, such as supervisors, peers, subordinates, and customers, or it may come from the job itself.
- Autonomy - This describes the amount of individual choice and discretion involved in a job. More autonomy leads to more satisfaction.

Autonomy is the degree to which a person has the freedom to decide how to perform his or her tasks. Autonomy increases motivation at work, but it also has other benefits. Giving employees' autonomy at work is a key to indi-

vidual as well as company success, because autonomous employees are free to choose how to do their jobs and therefore can be more effective. Giving employees autonomy is also a great way to train them on the job.

Hackman and Oldham's model proposes that the five characteristics will not have uniform effects. Instead, they proposed the following formula to calculate the motivating potential of a given job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976)

$$\text{Motivating Potential Score (MPS)} = \frac{(\text{Skill Variety} + \text{Task Identity} + \text{Task Significance}) \times \text{Autonomy} \times \text{Feedback}}{3}$$

According to this formula, autonomy and feedback are the more important elements in deciding motivating potential compared to skill variety, task identity, or task significance. Moreover, note how the job characteristics interact with each other in this model. If someone's job is completely lacking in autonomy (or feedback), regardless of levels of variety, identity, and significance, the motivating potential score will be very low.

Job Autonomy is a degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the employee in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Job with high degree of autonomy creates a sense of responsibility and greater job satisfaction in the employee(s). Chu (2006) examined the relationship between autonomy and well-being in Chinese in the United States. Correlation and multiple regression analysis revealed a positive relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction, and that higher autonomy was related to higher self-esteem. However, no significant relationship was found between autonomy and life satisfaction. Moreover, autonomy and esteem were related.

DeCarlo and Agarwal (1999) examined the effects of managerial behavior (i.e., initiation of structure and consideration) and job autonomy on industrial salesperson's job satisfaction. The study also investigated the generalizability of the theoretical model developed for U.S. salespersons to salespersons in Australia and India. The study findings suggested that perceived job autonomy was an important antecedent to job satisfaction among salespersons from all three countries. Surprisingly, little differences were observed in the impact of managerial initiation of structure and consideration on job satisfaction among the sales personnel from three countries. The investigator therefore feels that effect of job autonomy vary according to the hierarchical levels of employees.

Hierarchical Level

Hierarchy is a feature of organization design and is composed of structure, job and work allocation and rules and procedures. It indicates span of control, areas of responsibility and accountability, the scalar chain and reporting relationships.

Organizational hierarchies are normally based on a combination of rank and function and this is reflected in job titles (marketing director; quality manager; production supervisor; personnel assistant) that indicate both levels of position held in the hierarchy and also the nature and mix of expertise and responsibility. It is a determinant of some workplace attitudes.

Hossain (2000) found that bank executives were significantly more satisfied in their jobs than non-executives. Higher level employees were more satisfied because they enjoyed more opportunity to satisfy their ego needs, high status, higher payment and self - direction than lower level employees.

None of the above mentioned studies show the effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees at different hierarchical levels. It is therefore the purpose of this paper to investigate the effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees at different hierarchical levels.

Rationale of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees at different hierarchical level. It may be the case that job autonomy may influence job commitment at managerial level but it may not be so in case of clerical workers or it may be vice versa.

If it is proved that job autonomy improves job commitment, it can be suggested to industrial proprietors to give more job autonomy to their employees at different hierarchical level to have high job commitment. High job commitment would then lead to higher profit for the organization and high degree of autonomy in employees at different hierarchical level provides a greater role for workers in setting their own goals and pursuing plans to achieve them. Thus, based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were stated:

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to achieve the objectives of the present study:

1. There is a significant positive effect of employees' job autonomy upon their organizational commitment.
2. There is no significant effect of hierarchical level upon organizational commitment.
3. There is a significant interaction effect of job autonomy and hierarchical level upon employees' organizational commitment.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the present study was to examine the effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees at different hierarchical levels.

Method

Sample

The study was conducted on a representative sample of 100 male employees, who work at different organizations in Agra. The organizations included Basant Overseas, India casting, Eskay sales cooperation and Rogers. On the bases of hierarchical level, the employees were divided into two groups (1) 50 high hierarchical level employees including managers, etc. and (2) 50 low hierarchical level employees, e. g. Clerical staff, etc. The test was administered on 100 employees taken randomly from each organization in the population. The employees to be selected in the sample were at least graduates and their age range was between 25 to 55 years old.

Research Design

A 2x2 factorial design was formed. In [Table 1](#) the four groups thus formed were (1) high hierarchy, high autonomy (2) high hierarchy, low autonomy (3) low hierarchy, high autonomy (4) low hierarchy, low autonomy. The levels of organizational commitment of each of these four groups were obtained and were compared by the method of Analysis of variance.

Table 1

2x2 Factorial Design

	Job Autonomy	
	High	Low
High Hierarchical Level	<i>N</i> = 25	<i>N</i> = 25
Low Hierarchical Level	<i>N</i> = 25	<i>N</i> = 25

Variables

Independent Variables:

1. Job Autonomy
 - a. High
 - b. Low
2. Hierarchical Level
 - a. High
 - b. Low

Dependent Variable: Organizational commitment

Tools

Job Autonomy Scale (2000) — Job Autonomy Scale was developed by [Das, Arora, and Singhal \(2000\)](#). Each area has five items and each item has five alternative responses: rarely, often, usually, and always, their scores being 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. It consists of 30 items which are related to six different areas namely:

1. Policy making
2. Designing
3. Decision making
4. Resource utilization
5. Planning work schedule
6. Assigning duties to subordinates

Organizational Commitment Scale (1990) — Organizational Commitment Scale was developed by [Allen and Meyer \(1990\)](#). This scale comprises of three components and has 24 items in total. Respondents are required to rate items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (from 0 to 6). Items numbers 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 23, and 29 have reverse scoring 6 to 0.

The components covered by this scale are as follows:

1. Affective commitment scale (ACS);
2. Continuance commitment scale (CCS);
3. Normative commitment scale (NCS).

Results

The data were analyzed by means of SPSS.

The results in Table 2 indicate that there was a significant positive effect of employees' job autonomy upon their organizational commitment ($F = 4.670, p < .05$). It further shows, that there was a significant effect of employees' hierarchical level upon their organizational commitment ($F = 40.691, p < .01$). It also shows that there was a significant interaction effect of job autonomy and employees hierarchical level upon their organizational commitment ($F = 6.114, p < .05$).

Table 2

Summary Table of Analysis of Variance Concerning the Effect of Job Autonomy and Hierarchical Level on Organizational Commitment

Source of Variance	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square (Variance)	F	Significance Level
Job Autonomy (A)	1730.560	1	1730.560	4.670	$p < .05$
Hierarchical level (B)	15079.840	1	15079.800	40.691	$p < .01$
Job Auto x Hierarchical level (AxB)	2265.760	1	2265.760	6.114	$p < .05$
Within group error	35577.200	96	370.596		

The results in Table 3 indicate that employees with high job autonomy showed higher organizational commitment ($M = 69.24$) in comparison to employees with low job autonomy ($M = 60.92$). Hence the investigator has accepted the hypothesis that employees with high job autonomy have more job commitment in comparison to employees with low job autonomy.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Effect of Job Autonomy Upon Organizational Commitment

Levels of Job Autonomy	N	M	SD
High Job Autonomy Group	50	69.24	22.633
Low Job Autonomy Group	50	60.92	23.828

Figure 1 shows that the mean organizational commitment of high job autonomy group ($M = 69.24$) is greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of low job autonomy group ($M = 60.92$). Therefore, it is concluded that if employees are given more job autonomy their job commitment will also be high.

The results in Table 4 show that mean organizational commitment scores of employees in high hierarchical group ($M = 77.36$) was greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of employees in low hierarchy group ($M = 52.80$).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Effect of Hierarchical Level Upon Organizational Commitment

Levels of Hierarchy	N	M	SD
High Hierarchy Group	50	77.36	21.308
Low Hierarchy Group	50	52.80	18.804

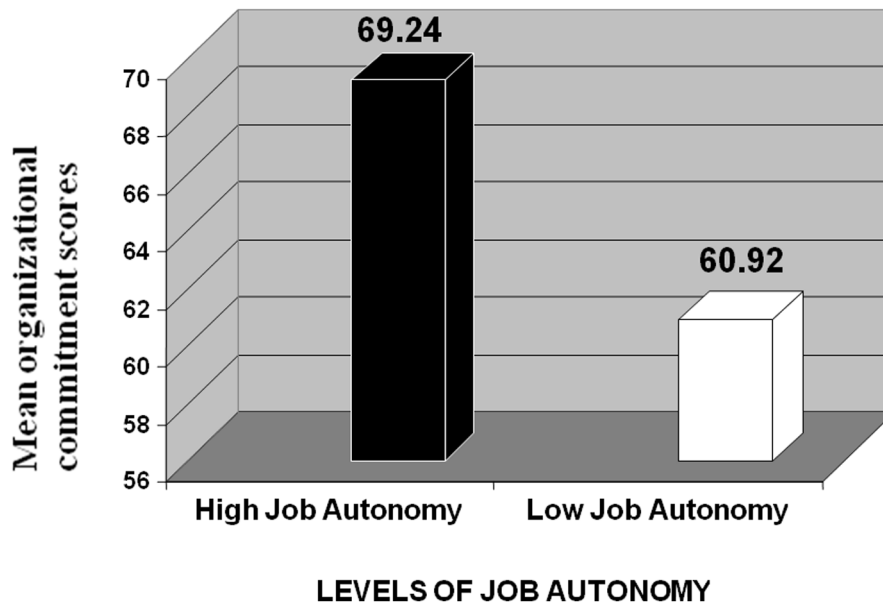


Figure 1. Effect of job autonomy upon organizational commitment.

Figure 2 indicates that high hierarchy employees had higher organizational commitment as compared to employees of low hierarchy group. Hence the investigator has rejected the hypothesis that there is no significant effect of hierarchical level upon organizational commitment.

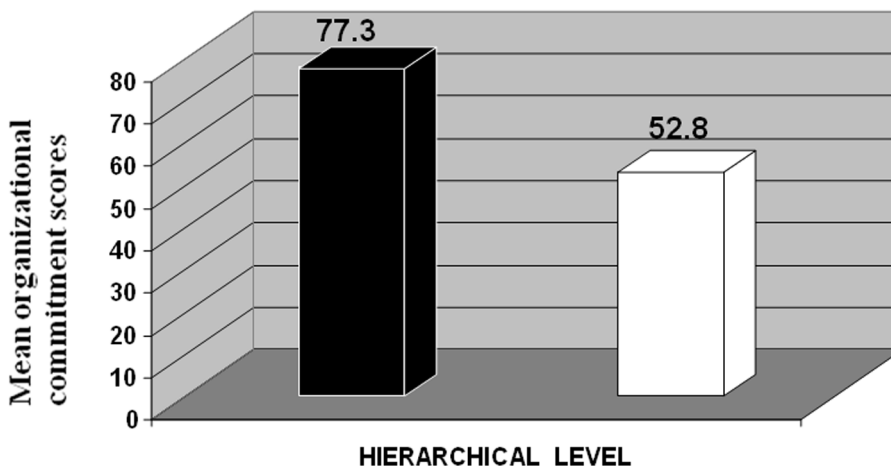


Figure 2. Effect of hierarchical level upon organizational commitment.

Table 5 indicates organizational commitment scores of employees of high hierarchy and low hierarchy group, with high and low level job autonomy. In case of employees of high job autonomy group, the employees of high hierarchy group showed high level of organizational commitment in comparison to employees of low hierarchy group.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Interaction Effect of Hierarchical Level and Job Autonomy Upon Organizational Commitment of Employees

Hierarchical Level	Job Autonomy			
	High		Low	
High Hierarchy Group	N1	25	N2	25
	M1	86.280	M2	68.440
	$\sigma 1$	13.575	$\sigma 2$	24.019
Low Hierarchy Group	N3	25	N4	25
	M3	52.200	M4	53.400
	$\sigma 3$	16.021	$\sigma 4$	21.552

Figure 3 shows that therefore the third hypothesis is proved that there is a significant interaction effect of job autonomy and hierarchical level upon organizational commitment of employees. Job autonomy improves job commitment only if employees are high hierarchical level.

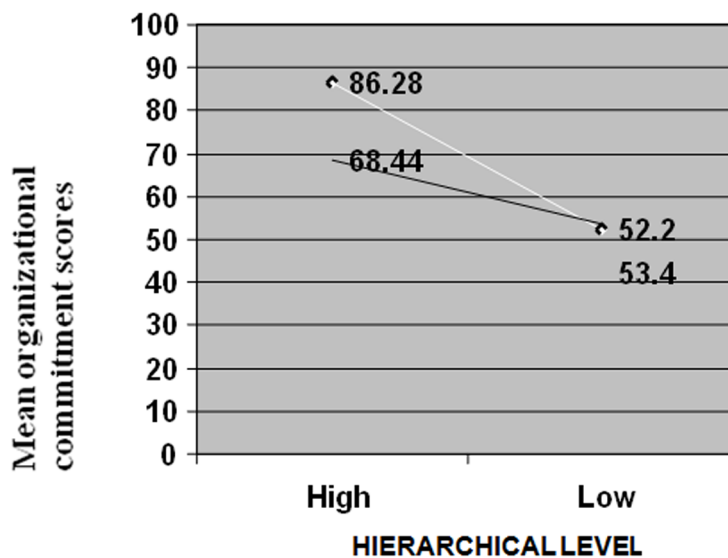


Figure 3. Interaction effect of hierarchical level and job autonomy upon organizational commitment of employees. White line means high job autonomy; black line means low job autonomy.

Discussion

The first hypothesis stated that there was a significant difference between job commitment of employees with high job autonomy and low Job autonomy. Therefore, the first hypothesis was accepted that there was a significant positive effect of employees' job autonomy upon their organizational commitment. The mean organizational commitment of high job autonomy group ($M = 69.24$) was greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of low job autonomy group ($M = 60.92$). Therefore, it is concluded that if employees are given more job autonomy their job commitment will also be high.

This finding is also in agreement with Pathak and Das (2003) who have indicated that the managers and the supervisors with high need autonomy are less absent (have higher presence percentage) from their job in comparison to the managers with low need autonomy. McCloskey (1990) studied the interaction effect of autonomy (control over work activities) and social integration (relationship workers) on a sample of newly employed nurses in 6th and 12th month of work. Those nurses with low autonomy and low social integration reported low job satisfaction and poor commitment and less intent to stay on the job in comparison to those nurses who have high autonomy.

The second hypothesis stated that there was a significant difference between job commitment of employees of high hierarchical group and those of low hierarchical group. Therefore, the second hypothesis was rejected. The mean job commitment scores of high hierarchical group ($M = 77.36$) was greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of low hierarchical group ($M = 52.80$). The difference was significant at .01 level. Therefore, it is concluded that high hierarchy group employees have higher organizational commitment as compared to employees of low hierarchy group.

It is also in agreement with Hossain (2000) who found that bank executives were significantly more satisfied in their jobs than non-executives. Higher-level employees are more satisfied because they enjoy more opportunity to satisfy their ego needs, high status payment and self-direction than lower level employees.

The third hypothesis stated that there was a significant interaction effect of job autonomy and hierarchical level upon job commitment of employees. The mean organizational commitment scores of employees with high hierarchical group and high job autonomy ($M = 86.28$) was greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of employees with low hierarchy group and high job autonomy ($M = 52.20$) and the mean organizational commitment scores of employees with high hierarchy group and low job autonomy ($M = 68.44$) was greater than the mean organizational commitment scores of employees with low hierarchy group and low job autonomy. Therefore it is concluded that high hierarchy group of employees have high job commitment if they are given high job autonomy, whereas high hierarchy group employees have low job commitment if they are given low job autonomy. But in case of low hierarchical group, employees have low job commitment, whether they are given high job autonomy or they are given low job autonomy. Therefore, job autonomy is an effective variable only in case of high hierarchy group and is not effective in case of low hierarchy group of employees.

It is also in agreement with the findings of Khandelwal and Dhar (2003) who examined the effect of locus of control and hierarchy as determinants of organizational commitment in the banking industry. The results showed that the clerks differed from the managers in terms of organizational commitment ($F = 6.57, p < .05$). Also, the managers with internal locus of control as well as the managers with external locus of control have higher organizational commitment than clerks with internal and external locus of control. Thus managerial level promotes organizational commitment amongst bank employees.

Conclusion

Hence on the basis of the present research findings, it is concluded that there is a significant effect of employees' hierarchical level upon their organizational commitment. There is a significant greater job commitment of employees among high hierarchical group in comparison to those of low hierarchical group. The results also indicate that there is a significant interaction effect of job autonomy and hierarchical level upon job commitment of employees. More job autonomy given to low hierarchy group does not improve job commitment.

Limitations

Due to lack of time, many other situational variables such as organizational structure, leadership style, etc. could not be taken in to accounts. It is therefore suggested that effect of job autonomy should be studied under different organizational conditions.

The size of sample was limited to 50 high hierarchical employees and 50 low hierarchical employees of Agra. It can be increased to get more reliable results, so that it could be generalized for the whole country.

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