

Factors Associated with Affective Commitment of Indian IT/ITES Employees in the Aftermath of Downsizing

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This study examines the impact of specific contextual factors (perceived organizational support, trust in top management, meaningful work, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) on the affective commitment level of Indian managers operating in Indian IT and IT-enabled services (ITES) sector in the aftermath of organizational downsizing. Data collected from 190 managers working in an MNC operating in the IT/ITES domain in India was used to examine how the six contextual factors influence affective commitment. The managers surveyed were the survivors of the downsizing effort. Results suggest that except all three organizational justice, all other factors significantly positively impacted employee commitment.

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Introduction

For a long time, both academicians and practitioners have been keenly studying the factors associated with employee commitment in different contemporary contexts (Mueller et al., 1992; Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). The current article explores factors related to affective commitment in the Indian IT and IT-enabled services (ITES) sector. IT/ITES sector is increasingly becoming important for countries rich in human capital, like India (Kundu & Mor, 2017; Noronha & D’Cruz, 2020). India has been chosen as the target destinations for IT/ITES backend support systems for many multinational organizations primarily due to the skilled workforce and English language proficiency compared to other developing countries (Bhatnagar, 2007). Indian IT/ITES sector has an impressive growth rate and a significant contribution to the Indian economy (Hutchinson and Ilavarasan, 2008; Kanwar et al., 2012; Noronha & D’Cruz, 2016).

In this sector majority of the companies deploy employees in challenging projects, where high employee commitment is required. However, every time the sector does not provide adequate support to the employees (Tiwari & Lenka, 2019; Noronha & D’Cruz, 2020). Indian IT/ITES companies have seen a series of downsizing moves, which forced frequent job relocation and firing of employees (Tiwari & Lenka, 2018; 2019). Despite higher salaries, there are concerns about work-life balance, social protection, job security, and long working hours (Noronha & D’Cruz, 2020). Compassionate considerations towards employees often take backstage (Tiwari & Lenka, 2019). In the name of ‘professionalism,’ both from the customer’s and management sides, employees’ are often forced to overstretch themselves (Noronha & D’Cruz, 2016). The present study was carried out when the respondent managers were going through ‘survivor syndrome’ (Appelbaum et al., 1997; Datta et al., 2010) with emotional, behavioral, and psychological exhaustion due to involuntary workforce reduction in their workplace. The ongoing pandemic had also worsened the situation and have created additional physical, emotional, and psychosocial pressures on them.

Theory & Hypotheses

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that all human relationships are based on the exchange of resources valued by those interacting with each other. When an organization provides social-emotional supports to its employees, they are likely to reciprocate by providing their

affective commitment to the organization. Social Identity Theory suggests that when employees perceive that their organization values and appreciates an individual’s contribution, it symbolizes organizational respect for that individual or high status (Tyler, 1999; Fuller et al., 2003). High status, in turn, is likely to increase an individual’s organizational commitment since it is associated with increased social identity. Employees generally may perceive psychological contract violation due to downsizing moves initiated by the organization (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010). Thus, there may be the existence of perceived imbalance in the process of social exchange.

Affective Commitment

Although many conceptualizations of commitment (affective, normative, continuance) exist, affective commitment has remained the core of organizational commitment (Mercurio, 2015). Affective commitment is defined as the emotional attachment of individuals to their organization, which gets manifested by the individual’s identification and involvement with that of the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002). Higher commitment is likely to lead to increased organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1990), increased job satisfaction (Mathieu & Zajac,

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1990), and less absenteeism, less turnover intention (Wong et al., 2002; Wong & Wong, 2017). Employee work commitment is highly associated with employees' job performance, absenteeism, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee turnover (Cohen, 1992; Randall, 1990; Whitener & Walz, 1993; Liu & Cohen, 2010). Three different types of antecedents of commitment have been extensively studied in the literature. First category is related to the influence of an individual's demographic characteristics, such as age, job tenure, etc. (Steers, 1977; Cohen, 1992). Second category focuses on work experiences, an opportunity for social interactions, perceived organizational support (POS), organizational dependability, job characteristics, including job scope, variety and challenges, employees' perception of reward, etc. (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977; Shore & Wayne, 1993; O'Driscoll & Randall, 1999). Third category of antecedents involves an individual's value orientations and exploration on which 'right' type of individuals will strongly identify with the organization and commit to organizational goal attainment (Wiener, 1982). In the current research, our focus is on to explore the first two categories as antecedents of organizational commitment in the Indian IT/ITES context, aftermath of a downsizing move. Specifically, we are interested in knowing how POS, trust in top management, meaningful work, and organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) influence the affective commitment of Indian IT/ITES managers who are survivors of the downsize.

POS & Affective Commitment

POS refers to how employees perceive their organizations are interested in their well-being and value their contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Many previous researchers have found a positive association between POS and affective commitment (Wong & Wong, 2017; McCormick & Donohue, 2019). POS can be thought of as employers' commitment towards the employees, which employees are likely to reciprocate positively.

H1. POS is positively related to affective commitment.

Trust in Top Management

Top management refers to the group of persons at or near the top of the organizational hierarchy (Hart, 1989). Trust in management has important productivity-related outcomes (Arygyris, 2017). Meyer (1995) conceptualized that trustworthiness may come from three factors: ability, benevolence, and integrity. We have conceptualized trust to be connected to the perceived skill or ability of the top management. IT/ITES being knowledge-driven sector in case the top management reflects certain strong knowledge or learning on important issues of concern, then the perception of the trust in top management may increase. Given mixed findings in the associations between trust

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in top management and commitment (Klendaer, & Deller, 2009; Mahajan et al., 2012), there is a need to explore this relationship further. Trustworthiness of the top management is a support, which employees will likely to reciprocate through higher commitment.

H2. Trust in top management is positively related to affective commitment.

Meaningful Work

Connected to the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), meaningful work refers to the perceived value and importance of the work that an employee experiences. Meaningful work enables an individual to develop competencies, ensures growth, and provides learning opportunities. Thus, meaningful work may enable employees to contribute more effectively (Steger & Dik, 2010). Earlier studies have found that meaningful work is positively associated with organizational commitment (Fairlie, 2011; Scroggins, 2008; Tummers & Knies, 2013; Jiang & Johnson, 2018).

H3. Meaningful work is positively related to affective commitment.

Distributive Justice

Distributive Justice is related to the perceived fairness of the amount of compensation employees receive, whereas procedural fairness is connected to the means of determining the compensation amount. Some studies found that procedural justice is more strongly related to employee commit-

ment (Cohen Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). There are also studies that found distributive justice and affective commitment are positively associated. Equity theory (Adams, 1965) suggests that when an employee finds his effort-reward ratio is not just aligned to others in the organization, they are bound to change their behavior and emotions attached to the organization.

H4. Distributive Justice is positively related to affective commitment.

Procedural Justice

Procedural Justice can be defined as an individual's perception of fairness about formal governing procedures prevalent in the organization. Procedural justice is a better predictor of employee commitment than distributive justice in certain studies (Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993). The reason behind this finding is that there can be considerable debate around what should be the exact reward or outcome of job performance. In this context, if employees find that the rules and procedures governing the 'unfair' reward are fair, it is more likely that they will value it and reciprocate this valuable support of the organization through a higher level of commitment. Earlier meta-analysis showed (Cohen Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001) procedural justice as an important predictor of employee commitment.

H5. Procedural Justice is positively related to affective commitment.

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatments offered during certain organizational procedures. It is much more connected to how humanely management or decision-makers treat the employees during certain procedural changes. Ideally, employees should be treated with honesty, politeness, and respect (Bies & Moag, 1986) during a changed context. Previous studies (Farndale et al., 2011; Klendauer & Deller, 2009; Swalhi et al., 2017) showed that interactional justice influences affective commitment. The study by Klendauer & Deller (2009) showed that, amongst the three organizational justices, the degree of association between interactional justice and affective commitment is greater.

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H6. Interactional Justice is positively related to affective commitment.

Sample

The current survey was carried out amongst middle level managers who have seen a huge exodus of their colleagues in the recent past. In the post downsizing situation majority of these managers had to take up expanded roles and responsibilities. The ongoing pandemic has created an additional pressure on these managers. Total 213 data were collected, out

of which 190 were complete and used for the final analysis. The average age of the respondents was 36.30 years (SD=10.08), with an average work experience of 12.52 years (SD=9.33). All the employees held at least graduation degrees. Total 87 female (45.8%) and 103 male (54.2%) managers participated in the survey.

Measures

All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'.

Affective Commitment was measured by using Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective commitment scale. There were total 8 items. Sample item includes: 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.' 3-items of the scale were properly reverse coded. Perceived Organizational Support was measured by 16 items of perceived organizational support scale of Eisenberger et al. (1986). Sample item includes: 'My organization values my contribution to its well-being'. Trust in top management was measured by Mayer and Davis (1999)'s 6 items of trust in top management's ability scale. Sample item includes: 'Top management is known to be successful at the things it tries to do'. Meaningful work was measured by 4-items from meaning at work scale developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000). Sample item includes 'I experience joy in my work'.

Distributive Justice was measured using Niehoff & Moorman's (1993)

scale. Sample item of the scale includes: ‘My work schedule is fair.’ The scale had total 5 items. Procedural Justice was measured using the approach followed by McFarlin and Sweeney (1992). Respondents indicated the extent to which procedures used to determine pay increases, communication of performance feedback, evaluation of performance, and promotability were fair. Sample scale item includes ‘The way promotions are decided just and fair.’ There were total 4-items on the scale. Interactional Justice was measured by using Niehoff & Moorman’s (1993) scale. Sample item of the scale includes: ‘When decisions are made about my job/me, my supervisor treats me with kindness and consideration’. Instead of using the term ‘general manager,’ we made a slight modification and used the word ‘my supervisor’. The scale had total 9 items.

Control Variables used in the study include age, gender, and organizational tenure of the respondents.

Results

Table 1 presents mean, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities (where applicable). Moderate correlations between the factors were found. All the factors are significantly related to affective commitment. None of the control variables is significantly associated with affective commitment.

Table 2 outlines the results of regression analyses performed with SPSS. Model 1 includes only the control variables and their effect on affective com-

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics, Correlations & Reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	-	-										
2. Age	36.3	10.84	0.124									
3. Work Experience	12.52	9.33	0.126	.917**								
4. Affective Commitment	3.19	0.73	0.044	.256**	.228**							
5. Perceived Organizational Support	3.48	0.65	0.036	.204**	.179*	.658**	0.88					
6. Trust in Top Management	3.34	0.84	-0.034	0.135	0.093	.587**	.678**	0.93				
7. Meaningful work	3.55	0.79	-0.055	.213**	.156*	.674**	.676**	.615**	0.88			
8. Distributive Justice	3.29	0.76	0.113	.202**	.175*	.514**	.669**	.501**	.544**	0.82		
9. Procedural Justice	3.08	0.91	0.056	.199**	.174*	.613**	.731**	.581**	.671**	.704**	0.89	
10. Interactional Justice	3.44	0.73	0.017	0.126	0.108	.576**	.737**	.686**	.654**	.614**	.723**	0.93

N=190.

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Cronbach alpha values are shown on the diagonal

Table 2 Hierarchical Regression Results for Affective Commitment ^a

Variable	Model1 ^b	Model 2 ^c
Constant	2.448*** (0.323)	0.331 (0.293)
Gender	0.019 (0.105)	0.06 (0.075)
Age	0.021 (0.013)	0.001 (0.009)
Work Experience	-0.003 (0.014)	0.007 (0.01)
Perceived Organizational Support		0.256* (0.101)
Trust in Top Management		0.140* (0.065)
Meaningful work		0.318*** (0.071)
Distributive Justice		0.007 (0.071)
Procedural Justice		0.096 (0.071)
Interactional Justice		-0.025 (0.086)
R ²	0.066	0.559
Adj. R ²	0.051	0.537
ΔR^2		0.493***

N=190.

^a: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported, with standard errors in parentheses^b: Model 1 includes only the control variables and their effect on affective commitment.^c: Model 2 examines the effect of control variables and all the main factors (POS, trust in top management, meaningful work, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) on affective commitment.

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

mitment. The effects of gender, age, and work experience on affective commitment are statistically not significant. Model 2 examines the effect of control variables and all the main factors (POS, trust in top management, meaningful work, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) on affective commitment. The addition of main factors increases the variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = 0.493$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 1 predicts that POS will be related to affective commitment. The relationship is positive and statistically significant ($t=2.53$,

$p < .05$), offering support for H1. The relationship between trust in top management and affective commitment is positive and significant ($t=2.14$, $p < .05$), supporting H2. The relationship between affective commitment and meaningful work is positive and significant ($t=4.491$, $p < .001$), providing support for H3. Organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and affective commitment were not significantly associated with each other. Thus H4, H5 & H6 were not supported.

Discussion

The current study in the Indian IT/ITES sector showed that POS and trust in top management are significantly associated with employee commitment, even after a major downsizing move. Earlier, a meta-analysis by Kurtessis et al. (2017) found that POS was strongly related to trust in top management. POS in this analysis was also strongly associated with affective commitment. Despite the downsizing move taken by the current organization, the survivors in the sector feel that the organization takes adequate care of them and reciprocates this with their commitment.

POS and trust in top management are significantly associated with employee commitment, even after a major downsizing move.

Most of the companies in this sector in India are involved in routine jobs. Sometimes this may create frustrations (Rastogi et al. 2018). The present study shows that meaningful work has the most significant impact on the commitment level of the survivors. Routine, monotonous jobs can be made meaningful by considering an individual's interest level and job sculpting or crafting the job to meet the individual needs of employees. Overall, giving employees flexibility and control may make them feel more empowered and bring meaningfulness to the job.

In many previous studies (e.g., Clay-Warner et al., 2005), it was found that

both distributive and procedural justice were associated with organizational commitment of the survivors. However, we did not find support for any organizational justice to be connected to employees' affective commitment in the current context. This finding is quite surprising since POS is generally significantly associated with all the three organizational justice and specifically with procedural justice (Kurtessis et al., 2017). In this IT/ITES sector, despite employees feeling that the overall organization is supportive towards them, organizational justice is not connected to employee commitment. Is this an Indian sector-specific phenomenon, where surviving employees may have considerable frustrations regarding organizational justice, yet overall they do not consider the organization uncaring? Is it that previous rounds of downsizing moves have made the employees attuned to it, which is why the POS still influences employee commitment? Interestingly, even though employees' trust in top management (initiators of downsizing move) is associated with employee commitment, still implementation side of the downsizing strategy (as somewhat reflected through organizational justice) is not connected to employee commitment. More qualitative research needs to be carried out in this sector for getting an answer to this phenomenon.

Overall the current research has important policy implications for the survivors of a downsizing move. To keep employees committed to the organization particularly need to make the jobs meaningful for the surviving employees. Trust in top management's ability also goes a

long way for the survivors to be strongly integrated into the organization. As a result, top management must communicate their strategic intent clearly and transparently through their actions, walk the talk, and involve employees in the organization's strategic direction. Employees' perception of organizational support and care is critical for ensuring a committed employee base right after a significant job loss and restructuring of the workplace. Noer (1993) mentioned the importance of healing the wound when employees face anxiety, stress, and isolation after downsizing. Specifically, there is a need to empathize with the survivors to revive their confidence level. To make employees feel that procedural and distributive justice prevails, organizations must ensure fair and transparent policies before and after downsizing. Leaders, employees, colleagues need to put in place collective efforts to ensure that employees are treated with dignity, respect, politeness, and ensure interactional justice.

The results of this study should be assessed in the context of a few limitations. Despite support for the hypotheses that POS, trust in top management, and meaningful work influence affective commitment, the micro-processes through which they influence commitment remain unexamined. The cross-sectional nature of the study is also another research limitation. Interpretation of the results of this study should also be made, keeping in mind that the study was carried out only in a particular organizational context, with a limited sample. Given the rampant use of downsizing moves across different

sectors, we believe more contextual factors need to be examined under different country contexts to understand the different drivers of employee commitment fully.

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