

Article

# The Organizational Commitment of Public Administrative Leaders and Their Subjective Career Success: Case of the Saudi Irrigation Organization

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**Abstract:** Organizational commitment is a vital topic in the management field. This quantitative study aims to gain insights into the main factors that affect a leader's subjective career success and its relations with the level of commitment. The data in this study include all Saudi leaders who work at the Saudi Irrigation Organization. About 120 managers participated in this study. Primary data were collected through Mayer's questionnaire, which was sent through the official work email. The questionnaire consists of 5 scale items to measure subjective career success, 8 scale items to measure affective commitment, 6 scale items to measure continuous commitment, and 8 scale items to measure normative commitment. This study used the quantitative survey research design. The findings show significant relationships between affective commitment and normative commitment and subjective career success. It also found no significant relationship between continuous commitment and subjective career success.



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**Keywords:** organizational; commitment; public; administrative; leaders; subjective; career success

## 1. Introduction

*The problem of the study:* The concept of organizational commitment has emerged as an important issue in the management field in recent decades. At present, organizations are in a highly competitive market, and face great changes in their environmental forces. All organizations try to succeed and survive by adopting new, innovative strategies to manage and develop their people and meet their stakeholders' needs. The need to improve productivity is a great dilemma in the management field, and has been studied by many researchers. The situation might become worse in the public sector compared to the private sector. This research focuses on the factors that affect leaders' commitment and how these factors affect subjective career success.

**Importance of the study:** Employee commitment is an important field of study in the management field. All organizations try to find highly committed employees to enhance their productivity and performance. Committed employees are assumed to retain more than uncommitted employees (Meyer and Allen 1997; Roodt and Kotze 2005). This might require great effort from the organizations' leaders, who are responsible for formulating an effective organizational mission and strategy. The study reveals that increasing employees' satisfaction leads to improvements in organizational commitment. In addition, any improvement in the level of job satisfaction will enhance organizational commitment (Society for Human Resource Management 2008). Therefore, leaders should exert great efforts to improve overall employee satisfaction, especially during pandemics, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Some studies found that the organizational leadership style positively and strongly affects employees' organizational commitment in different organizations (Eliyana and Ma'arif 2019).

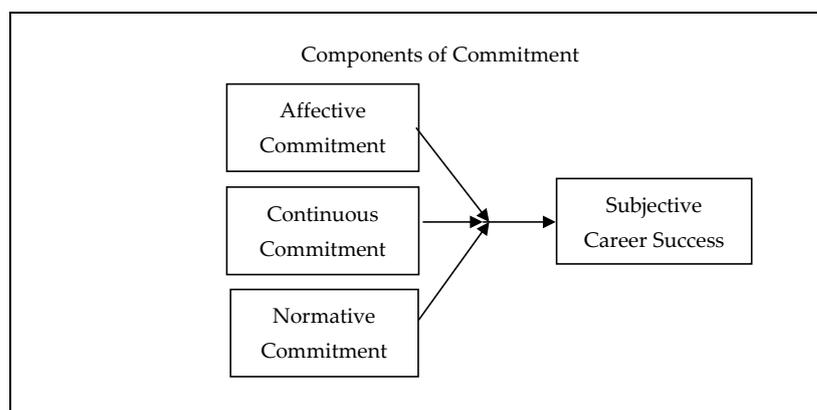
The leader's commitment is the key to success, competition, and survival (Mendes and Stander 2011). People's commitment is defined as the force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to one or more aims (Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001; Shepherd and Mathews 2000). This definition clearly shows how people's actions affect the future of organizations. Leaders' commitment is responsible for developing and adapting an effective mission and strategy, and the values that help organizations to compete.

**Objective of the study:** This paper aims to understand the relationship between the leader's subjective career success and organizational commitment among the leaders of the Saudi Irrigation Organization (SIO). SIO is a public governmental institution, established by Cabinet Resolution No. (187) to replace the Al-Ahsa Irrigation and Drainage Authority, which was established with the aim of managing, operating and maintaining irrigation and drainage in Al-Ahsa (see Appendix A for the location). According to the founding decision, the SIO enjoys legal personality and financial and administrative independence, linked to the Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture. It manages irrigation activity throughout the Kingdom, operates and develops irrigation, and transfers all responsibilities and tasks related to irrigation, as well as government agencies working in the field of irrigation, such as the National Irrigation Administration, which was affiliated with the Water Agency, Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture. This study is important because it takes the organizations' leaders as the main target, exploring how their commitment shapes the current and future success of their organizations. Very few studies explore the relationship between the leaders' subjective career success and organizational commitment, especially in organizations in Arab countries.

The study tries to determine whether there is a relationship between subjective career success and organizational commitment. In addition, the main aims are to understand how affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment are interrelated.

The study adopts Meyer's model of organizational commitment, as it is the most suitable for this type of study, which mainly focuses on the three main components of employees' commitment. These dimensions of employees' commitment frequently interact, as Meyer explained, and they are assumed to be the most responsible for the commitment issue. There are three components of commitment according to Mayer and Allen: affective commitment, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen 1997). This paper is structured as follows.

Section 1 provides a general introduction that covers the main variables of this study. Section 2 provides the readers with a literature review that covers all dimensions of organizational commitment, subjective career success, and the conceptual model of this research (see Figure 1). Section 3 presents the method, procedures, and instruments used in this research. Section 4 shows the main findings and how these findings are supported by the findings of previous studies. Section 5 discusses the findings and concludes with the implications of the main results.



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Model of the Research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Organizational Commitment

Many researchers have tried to define the concept of organizational commitment as the guarantee between the employee and the organization (O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). Researchers have created two main constructs to cover the subject of organizational commitment. These constructs include an attitudinal commitment to an organization, which involves three main components, such as a strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al. 2013).

In addition, behavioural commitment explains organizational commitment as the binding of the individual to behavioural acts (Alutto et al. 1973). The effective compensations and benefits of the system must fit with the organization's needs, wants, purpose, culture, values, and performance.

The effective reward system should create a balance between cash and non-cash incentives. Study shows that organizations with high-commitment employees but low competence have talented employees who fail to get things done (Ulrich 1998).

This finding shows how employees' commitment affects the overall career performance.

Study shows that employees' attitudes indicated that the individual consequences of employee commitment are positive, supporting the notion that psychological attachment to a work organization yields personal benefits for individuals (Romzek 1989). Some studies have suggested that employees experience several different levels of commitment to the goals and values of multiple groups (Reichers 1985).

Affective commitment is defined as employees' emotional attachment to identification with and involvement in the organization (Meyer and Allen 1997). This emotional attachment might be translated into a high level of satisfaction, which, in turn, helps an individual and organization to perform better than their rivals. When employees feel satisfied with their jobs, this will be translated into a high level of performance.

Different theories support the notion of developing employees' satisfaction and, thus, their performance by building a high level of emotional attachment. This emotional attachment might be controlled through the needs for satisfaction and motivational control (Herzberg 2017). One of the most important needs of people at work is subjective career success.

Many factors might improve the employees' level of affective commitment, such as participation in further training and the firm's support for this training (Grund and Titz 2022). In addition, research found that factors such as the work-life balance of the employees might positively contribute to affective commitment and normative commitment (Botella-Carrubi et al. 2021; Muleya et al. 2022).

**H1.** *Affective commitment affects the employee's subjective career success.*

Continuance commitment denotes the level of commitment based on the costs that the employee associates with leaving the organization. This includes age, tenure, career satisfaction, and intent to leave (Meyer and Allen 1997).

The organization usually adopts multiple strategies to improve the employee retention and minimize the overall turnover. These strategies might include person-environmental fitness, person-job fitness, and person-organization fitness. People usually have positive attitudes toward their jobs when they feel satisfied with the current working environment; this leads to improvements in their long-term commitment (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). Studies have found a negative relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave a job (Tett and Meyer 1993).

**H2.** *Continuous commitment affects the employee's subjective career success.*

In addition, normative commitment relates to an employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization (Muthuveloo and Rose 2005). This feeling helps the employee

to perform better by obtaining a high level of morale and loyalty, and achieving success. Many factors, such as changes of promotion, salary levels, and recognition, are considered key factors to enhance people's subjective career success. When employees believe that their organization will help them to achieve subjective success, they stop thinking of leaving the organization (Dyke and Duxbury 2011).

**H3.** *Normative commitment affects the employee's subjective career success.*

## 2.2. Subjective Career Success

Leaders influence people's success as well as the organization's performance. An organization's performance depends on the effectiveness of its leaders and managers (Larsson and Vinberg 2010; Muijs 2011). A career is defined as an organized path, designed by the organization and taken by an individual across time and space. Career success is defined as a person's hierarchical progression in an occupation (Bass and Stogdill 1981; Kotter 1982; Van Maanen and Schein 1977). This definition describes the objective sequence of processes and steps needed to reach a management position.

Subjective career success has been defined by many researchers. This describes the employee's self-evaluation of his or her success at work (Gattiker and Larwood 1986; Peluchette 1993). This definition reflects the proactive role that the individual plays in managing subjective career success at work. This might include different criteria, such as creating a work-life balance, recognition, and employee relations (Dyke and Murphy 2006).

The majority of researchers used two items to measure a person's career success. Some researchers defined career success as a combination of hierarchical level and salary. Career progression was found to correlate with high school grades, tolerance of ambiguity, work ethic, psychological success, and the need for achievement (Gould 1982). Career progression is related to both the extent of career development programs that are available and the industry in which the employing organization was located. The study shows that organizational sponsorship and stable individual differences are strongly related to subjective career success (Ng et al. 2005). Individual career success is related to many factors, such as access to information and access to resources (Seibert et al. 2001).

## 3. Methods

**Data collection procedures:** This research used a quantitative method. Inspired by previous relevant studies (in studies on the subject, we wrote the author's name and year 3 or 4), the research used a questionnaire method to assess organizational commitment as an approach to improving subjective career success. The researchers used the original commitment scales.

To study the effect of organizational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) on subjective career success, we applied Meyer's model and conducted a survey of leaders of the Saudi Irrigation Organization. The questionnaire contains four parts: subjective career success, affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Data were collected from the respondents' using emails. The questionnaires were sent in the period between 8 June 2022 and 25 July 2022.

**Instruments:** The first part of the questionnaire "subjective career success" was measured by 5 questions; the second part, "affective commitment", was measured by 8 questions; the third part "continuance commitment", was measured by 8 questions; and, finally, "normative commitment" was measured by 8 questions. The following statements constructed the main tool used to collect data regarding each variable.

### Subjective Career Success Scale Items

1. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.
2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.
3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.
4. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement.

5. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.

#### **Original Commitment Scale Items**

##### *Affective Commitment Scale Items*

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
3. I feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
4. I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one.
5. I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization.
6. I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization.
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
8. I do not feel a 'strong' sense of belonging to my organization.

##### *Continuance Commitment Scale Items*

1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up.
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
3. Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organization now.
4. It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization now.
5. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
6. I feel that I have very few options to consider leaving this organization.

##### *Normative Commitment Scale Items*

1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often.
2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization.
3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me.
4. One of the major reasons I continue to work in this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain.
5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization.
6. I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization.
7. Things were better in the days when people stayed in one organization for most of their careers.
8. I do not think that to be a 'company man' or 'company woman' is sensible anymore.

**Participants:** The research population were from the Saudi Irrigation Organization. About 120 managers participated in this study. The Hypotheses were tested on the responses of all leaders who participated in our study. This study was considered free from the common method bias because the leaders of the Saudi Irrigation Organization provided information about the independent variables, mediating variables and the dependent variable. About 120 managers participated in this study. Data were analysed through SPSS software by applying a simple regression model. Based on the interpretation of the data analysis, the findings of the research are presented in the following tables.

#### **4. Results**

Direct correlations were found between subjective career success and affective commitment, normative commitment and organizational commitment (see Table 1). The sig. was found to be 0.000, 0.003 and 0.000, respectively, at less than 0.01 ( $p < 0.01$ ). No correlation was found between subjective career success and continuance commitment, where its sig. was 0.084, more than 0.05 ( $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ).

There was a direct correlation between organizational commitment and affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment, with  $p$  values of 0.000, 0.000 and 0.000, respectively, at less than 0.01 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

No correlations between continuance commitment and normative commitment were found to be significant, equal 0.106, or more than 0.05 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 2 shows a significant relationship between affective commitment and subjective career success. Affective commitment can interpret 21% of changes in subjective career success, where  $p < 0.001$ . This finding is supported by previous studies (Bergman 2006; Zafar and Nawaz 2016). In addition, Table 2 shows no significant relationship between continuance commitment and subjective career success, where the  $p$ -value was 0.084, which is more than 0.05.

Normative commitment can interpret 11.6% of changes in subjective career success with a  $p$ -value of 0.003, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between them. This finding is also supported by previous studies (Ahmed 2019; Peluchette 1993).

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix among research variables.

Variable		Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment	Organizational Commitment
Subjective Career Success (SCS)	Pearson Correlation	0.458 **	0.202	0.340 **	0.456
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.084	0.003	0.000
Affective Commitment (AC)	Pearson Correlation		0.235 *	0.470 **	0.786 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.044	0.000	0.000
Continuance Commitment (CC)	Pearson Correlation			0.189	0.681 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)			0.106	0.000
Normative Commitment (NC)	Pearson Correlation				0.717 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)				0.000

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

**Table 2.** The results of simple regression models.

	Relationships	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B.	Estimate	$\beta$	t	Sig.
H1	SCC<- - AC	0.458	0.210	19.147	0.000	0.485	0.037	4.376	0.000
H2	SCC<- - CC	0.202	0.014	3.070	0.084	0.211	0.12	1.752	0.084
H3	SCC<- - NC	0.340	0.116	9.411	0.003	0.441	0.144	3.068	0.003

## 5. Conclusions

This study mainly focused on leaders' subjective career success in the Saudi Irrigation Organization. It tried to explore the relationships between affective commitment, continuous commitment, normative commitment, and how these concepts affect the employees' subjective career success. The main hypotheses of this study are supported, reflecting direct correlations between these concepts, as summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Thus, this study contributes to the current literature with important facts related to the relationship between organizational commitment and leaders' subjective career success, especially in the public sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The issue of commitment is a vital component of employee and leader behaviour. Organizations should improve their performance by developing the factors that affect commitment.

All HRM practices might help to improve the level of satisfaction, which, in turn, translates into high performance. The organization's management should develop strategies to improve the employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. The HRM department at the Saudi Irrigation organization should develop and adopt sustainable HRM practices in areas such as selection, recruitment, training, and reward management practices. This might lead to improvements in the level of satisfaction, which, in turn, would improve commitment (Cahyadi et al. 2022).

The findings of this study support the previous findings and remind HR managers to formulate effective HR policies that align with the organization's goals and encourage

motivation among people at work. Positive attitudes towards HR practices such as recruitment, selection, reward, and training might improve the level of commitment and overall performance. Our results align with the theories of career success and organizational commitment, which clearly mention the important of organizational commitment. Public and private organizations should take care of employees' personal development in terms of training needs, psychological needs, and well-being to improve the leaders' and employees' affective commitment.

In recent years, HR practices at all organizations were negatively affected by many factors, such as previous pandemics. It is time to review and update these practices to ensure high loyalty and sustain employee commitment.

Organizations should also develop mechanisms to enhance the effective and normative commitment of their leaders. This will translate into high levels of leader effectiveness.

The main limitation of this study is that it only covers the public sector. It focuses on the public organization leaders at a specific sector. It is highly recommended that future studies apply the concept of organizational commitment and leaders' subjective career success to the private sector to see the main implications. Therefore, the definition of leaders' subjective careers in this study focuses only on the public sector as the study case.

This study has managerial implications as it provides some evidence on the relationships between the main components of organizational commitment and subjective career success. Organizations should help managers and employees to believe in, contribute to, and work hard to achieve the organization's goals. This might be achieved by improving the level of leaders' commitment, which, in turn, could lead to a satisfying level of career success.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent has been obtained from participants.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

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## Appendix A

The location of the irrigation territory: <https://www.google.com/maps/dir//25.4653424,49.5636499/@25.4653258,49.4936096,12z> (accessed on 19 September 2022).

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