Examining Organizational Commitment among National and Expatriate Employees in the Private and Public Sectors in United Arab Emirates

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Examining Organizational Commitment among National and Expatriate Employees in the Private and Public Sectors in United Arab Emirates

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The indigenous manpower deficit in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has resulted in hiring of millions of expatriate employees. In the past decade, this situation has led to many concerns for decision makers as organizational productivity declined. The present study aims at examining the relationship between employees’ nationality and their organizational commitment (OC), in addition to exploring the various forms of commitment exhibited in the workplace. Bivariate and multivariate analyses indicated that OC was multidimensional as employees have expressed differing types and levels of commitment. In addition, nationality of employees was significantly correlated with the level of their commitment. Thus, this study provides several recommendations for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: organizational commitment, private sector and public sector, workforce in the United Arab Emirates, expatriate and national workforce, continuance, affective, and normative organizational commitment, organizational environment and employees, public personnel

INTRODUCTION

Organizational commitment (OC) has been examined for decades in Western societies and it was used as an indicator of many workplace realities, such as stability of the workforce, absenteeism, turnover, satisfaction, organizational citizenship, productivity, efficiency, and organizational success (Alnajjar, 1996; Balfour & Wechsler, 1991; Becker & Wilson, 2000; Cohen, 2007; Koys, 1988; Lapointe, Vandenberghne, & Panaccio, 2011; Siders, George, & Dharwadkar, 2001; Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen, & Wright, 2005; WeiBo, Kaur, & Jun, 2010; Wiener, 1982; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2013). Several studies examined the relationship between commitment and personal factors, such as age, gender, education, tenure, sector, and benefits (Al Ajami, 1999; Al-Meer, 1989; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Previously, other studies have examined the relationship between commitment and organizational characteristics, such as work load, supervision, team work, and organizational environment (Amernic & Aranya, 1983; Baakile, 2011; Daud, 2010; Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a). In the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) area, only a few studies on OC have been published despite the importance of this area of research, especially with the massive influx of foreign workers and the decline of overall organizational productivity (see, for example, studies by Kuehn and Al-Busaidi (2002a), Shaw, Delery, and Abdulla (2003), Yavas, Luqmani, and Quraeshi (2007)).

The continuing interest in OC research stems from the impact of commitment on employees and their behavior. In addition, the uncertainty of such impact within different cultural contexts elevates the significance of such an
endeavor (Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a). Several studies in the GCC contexts have attempted to validate OC questionnaires, compare OC in public and private sectors, and contextualize OC literature in local cultures (Alnajjar, 1996; Shaw et al., 2003). This line of studies, although interrupted, highlights the role of commitment in today’s organizational life in countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Three main reasons make the study of OC in the UAE significantly important for researchers and practitioners. First, the workplace in the UAE is fragmented by employees’ nationality as a result of the fact that expatriates (i.e., foreign employees) make over 80% of the total workforce in both sectors (Shaw et al., 2003). The role of nationality in such case becomes as important as the previously examined role of gender, political stands, union affiliation, and education (Shaw et al., 2003; Yavas et al., 2007; Yousef, 2003). The fragmentation, hence, contributes to creating a convenient environment for decision makers to speculate about which elements of the workforce are committed more or commit less organizationally and to blaming nationality for the declining productivity and increasing turnover across organizations and sectors (Al-Emadi, 2008; Alwasluae, 2005; Elaph, 2001; Ministry of Labor, 2011). Second, some researchers have pointed out the human resource dilemma facing decision makers, which is how to implement strategies that achieve acceptable levels of commitment when expatriates and locals (i.e., nationals or Emiratis) are governed by two separate systems of employment, dismissal, promotion, work assignment, and visa status (Al-Meer, 1989; Alnajjar, 1996; Ashworth, 2007; Forman, 1996; Shaw et al., 2003; UAE National Bureau of Statistics, 2012; Yavas et al., 2007). Third, in light of the inconsistency of research findings about commitment in GCC countries, human resource practitioners need better assessment of the impact of nationality on OC in the UAE itself instead of relying on findings from other neighboring countries that may have different legal systems and organizational schemes that govern expatriates and locals (Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a; Shaw et al., 2003; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2013; Yousef, 2003).

RELEVANT LITERATURE

This section is divided into two parts: conceptualization of OC and summary of the research that was conducted in GCC area.

Conceptually, there is seemingly a consensus among researchers that OC is a complex phenomenon and has several forms (dimensions) meaning that employees may express more than one form of commitment, namely continuance, affective, or normative (Brown, 1996; Jauch, Glueck, & Osborn, 1978; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Powell & Meyer, 2004; Suliman & Iles, 2000; WeiBo et al., 2010). Allen and Meyer (1990) explained that affective commitment is an emotional feeling that attaches employees to the workplace and continuance commitment is a rational calculation in which employees compare the cost of leaving the organization (quit or change) with the cost of staying. In addition, normative commitment is an obligation that stems from values and culture and tie employees to a certain job or organization.

Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1979) noted that affective (emotional) commitment is twined in the way employees identify themselves and perceive the organization as worth working at. This bonding entails employees to strongly believe in the mission, vision, and values of the organization. So, it is not about committing oneself to a single job, but rather to the organization as a whole (Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a). Cohen (2007) and Meyer and Allen (1997) add that affective commitment emerges when employees are psychologically attached to the workplaces which for them satisfy certain emotional needs, such as belonging and family-alike feeling (see Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Yavas et al., 2007).

Mathieu and Zajac (1990) conceptualize continuance commitment as employee’s recognition of a certain set of tasks that are pre-assessed and judged to be beneficial. Employee’s performance, therefore, is framed to fit such calculations (Becker, 1960; Carson, Arson, Birkenmeier, & Philips, 1999; Cohen, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Somers, 1993; Yaghi, Morris, & Gibson, 2007). Alutto, Hrebiiniak, and Alonso (1973) explain that because benefits, such as salary and housing, are predetermined in the legal employment contracts, poor commitment can result from either unattractive employment contracts or from the way contracts are executed.

Wiener (1982) stressed that normative commitment is the belief that the employee is morally responsible for the success of the organization and therefore, the employee commits to a certain set of rules, guidelines, and behaviors that serve the goals of the organization. Yavas et al. (2007) noted that normative commitment occurs when employees demonstrate respect and commitment to the values of their organization regardless of any benefits they may or may not get in return. Normatively committed employees therefore tend to socialize positively with other members of the organization and refuse to change jobs (Yaghi, 2007). Hence, normative commitment is more likely to be found among employees who consider their jobs as a national duty or religious obligation.

Commitment research in the GCC and UAE in particular is limited. Therefore, it is difficult to speculate about the impact of nationality on organizational behavior, especially commitment. However, the available literature in this region reports quite inconsistent findings.

In the UAE, Shaw et al. (2003) examined the moderating role of “guest worker” or expatriate status between commitment and performance in two commercial banks. The study noted that local employees enjoy financial securities and abundant benefits while expatriate employees work under restrictive work visas that often stipulate deportation if
the employment contract is ended. Findings from the entire sample (locals and expatriates) showed that commitment was not strongly related to performance. When nationality was highlighted, commitment and performance were strongly and positively related among local employees, but not among expatriates. The study stressed the interactive dynamics between OC and guest worker status in predicting organizational performance.

Alnajjar (1999) explored the impact of psychosocial factors on commitment in several public and private UAE institutions. The study found no relationship between employee’s age and tenure (years of experience) and OC, while there was a significant relationship between the latter and employee’s educational level and salary. Findings indicated that the more employees were satisfied with salary and work environment, the higher level of commitment they expressed. OC was different among female and male employees, as females were more concerned about job security than male counterparts. The study also reported significant difference in commitment among nationals and expatriates. The study however did not elaborate on the different forms of commitment or how employees from different nationalities differ in expressing commitment.

Abdulla and Shaw (1999), in their examination of OC in the UAE Ministry of Health, found that demographics were significant predictors of commitment. Specifically, continuance commitment was significantly related to gender and marital status, and employee’s nationality and gender predicted continuance and affective commitment. Moreover, nationals expressed higher levels of continuance commitment while expatriates expressed low commitment.

The last study on OC in the UAE is the study by Yousef (2003) in which he validated Porter’s OC questionnaire in non-Western culture. Around 1,000 expatriate and national employees were surveyed. Findings indicated that OC in the UAE was a multidimensional phenomenon with three forms of commitment existed (continuance, affective, and normative). The study found that nationals and expatriates have expressed similar commitment as those in Western societies despite cultural and environmental differences. Unfortunately, although the study was carried out on nationals and expatriates, Yousef (2003) did not differentiate between the two groups in the statistical analyses, thus making it difficult to draw conclusions regarding nationality, gender, experience, and other important factors that were examined in other studies (see, for example, Alnajjar (1999)).

Five additional studies were conducted in the GCC region. Al-Meer (1989) examined levels of OC of expatriates and local Saudi nationals. Surveying 239 full-time male employees in Saudi Arabia revealed that while Westerner expatriates and Saudi nationals showed similar levels of commitment, Asian expatriates expressed a higher level of OC. The study explains that most Asian employees come from poor countries such as India and Philippines where job opportunities are limited and unattractive. Working in Saudi Arabia could be seen by Asians as a premier opportunity to work, save, and afford a better lifestyle. Despite the discrimination against them in terms of wages and benefits, Asian expatriates still earn about six times more than their counterparts in their home countries. Conversely, Saudi nationals and Westerners who showed poor commitment have more job opportunities with similar or better benefits either inside or outside Saudi Arabia. Al-Meer (1989) blamed the employment-for-life system for the poor commitment among local Saudi nationals. The ease of changing jobs without having to deal with visa and residency matters, unlike Asians, could have resulted in poor attachments or commitment to the organization among Saudi nationals. The study showed that age and tenure positively correlated with commitment regardless of nationality. For Asian expatriates, there was an inverse relationship between educational level and commitment, but it was positive in the case of Saudi nationals and Westerners. The study explained that the inverse relationship could be explained by the fact that Westerners were paid higher than Saudi nationals, and Saudi nationals were paid higher than Asians. Therefore, when employees felt their education was not compensated fairly, their commitment could have declined.

Yavas et al. (2007) administered 275 questionnaires to managers in several private organizations in Saudi Arabia. The study found that Saudi nationals and expatriates have expressed similar levels of commitment. However, while expatriates expressed no desire to change organizations, nationals expressed the opposite. Yavas et al. (2007) confirmed that expatriates’ understanding of the visa system and legal barriers to changing jobs could have prevented them from expressing opposite desires. The study reported that expatriates were more satisfied than did nationals in regard to pay, benefits, work environment, job security, and supervision style. Yavas et al. (2007) recommended better designs and planning for human resources as jobs for nationals could not meet their expectations, which could be the reason for the poor job satisfaction.

In Oman, Kuehn and Al-Busaidi (2002a, 2002b) conducted their research to examine OC among nationals and expatriates in the public and private sectors. In the first study, the authors found that normative commitment, job satisfaction, and employee’s age were stronger predictors of employee’s citizenship behavior than did job characteristics (i.e., tasks and responsibilities). In the second study, the researchers found that in public sector organizations, there was no distinction in commitment levels between expatriates and nationals. In addition, national employees expressed similar levels of commitment in both sectors, but in the private sector alone, nationals were more committed than expatriates. The study confirmed that employees’ nationality and educational levels were strong predictors of their continuance commitment. These findings conform to the assertion of the OC literature that rationality in comparing
benefits and payoff can be crucial (see Abdulla & Shaw, 1999; Balfour & Wechsler, 1991; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986; WeiBo et al., 2010). Similar to the study by Allen and Meyer (1990), other studies also concluded that employees with higher educational levels were found less committed to the organization as they might have thought that with their credentials they could have secured better jobs (see Baruch, 1998; Benkhoff, 1997).

Finally, Al Ajami (1999) examined OC in Kuwait (without examining nationality factor). The study concluded that the more employees were satisfied with salary and work environment, the higher was their OC. In addition, employees commitment itself was correlated with supervision style, communication with others, team work groups, availability of alternative jobs, and employees’ desire to stay in the same job. Al Ajami (1999) reported that commitment in the private sector was slightly higher than it was in the public sector; so was job satisfaction.

Although Jordan is still waiting for its accession to GCC, one study was found relevant about OC. Suliman and Iles (2000) examined the three forms of OC in Jordan’s private sector. The study confirmed that Jordanian employees expressed two forms of commitment compared to Westerners in the literature, namely affective and continuance. The major contribution of this study was that it highlighted the cultural differences between Jordan and Western countries and the impact of cultural values and organizational environment on employees’ sense of commitment (see, for example, Meyer & Allen, 1991; Porter et al., 1974). This finding implies that there are also cultural or maybe environmental (i.e., legal) differences between Jordan, a non-GCC nation, and UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia where the literature confirmed similarities with Westerners in terms of employees’ expressing three forms of commitment (see, for example, Al-Meer, 1989; Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a, 2002b; Yavas et al., 2007). However, other factors might have led to the absence of normative commitment among Jordanian employees in Suliman and Iles’ study (2000). Unfortunately, scarcity of other studies on the subject matter limits any further analysis in this regard.

**PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESES**

Researchers, managers, and officials believe that employees’ nationality can impact their commitment (see, for example, Al-Ali, 2008; Al-Etabi, 2008; Farghali, 2011; Federal Authority of Government Human Resource, 2012; Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge, 2012; HayGroup, 2012; Ministry of Labor, 2011; Mubasher, 2012). However, the dilemma of lacking scientific studies on the subject matter in the UAE, coupled with inconsistent findings from other GCC countries, hinder efforts to reach better judgment in human resource planning and strategies setting (see, for example, Al-Meer, 1989; Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a).

To fill this gap, the following list of four main hypotheses intends to be tested in the present study:

**H1:** There are significant statistical differences in overall OC between national and expatriate employees who work in all sectors.

**H2:** There are significant statistical differences in the three dimensions of OC between national and expatriate employees who work in all sectors.

**H3:** There are insignificant statistical differences in the three dimensions of OC between employees who work in the public sector and those who work in the private sector.

**H4:** There are insignificant statistical differences between overall OC and employees’ demographics of nationals and expatriates who work in all sectors.

**METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

**Sample**

The research team selected a sample of employees working in public and private sector organizations in the UAE during 2011–2012. The team, first, prepared a list of 100 private sector organizations, mainly banks and commercial companies hiring not less than 200 employees and registered by the UAE chambers of commerce. A second list of 50 organizations in the public sector was prepared. (Each organization had employed at least 200 employees.) Name of the organization was used to order each list alphabetically before selecting a systematic random sample from each list: 13 private and 12 public organizations. Recognizing the difficulty of recruiting respondents in the UAE, the research team utilized the convenient sampling approach according to which employees in the selected organizations were approached and asked to be complete the study survey. The research team collected completed questionnaires on a time that was mutually determined with each respondent. This drop-off and pickup method is popular in the UAE and also in other GCC countries (see Al-Meer, 1989). Total of 1,200 questionnaires were collected and returned. After excluding questionnaires with unclear, irregular, or incomplete responses, the total number of valid questionnaires was found to be 836; making 69.6% overall return percentage ratio (out of 1,200) and 85.8% of returned questionnaires. As Table 1 shows, the sample includes 23% national employees, 36% Arab expatriates, and 40.6% non-Arab expatriates.

**Measurement**

The study used a questionnaire developed and tested by Meyer and Allen (1990) and revised, modified, and validated based on authentic validation process in Arab organizational settings by Suliman and Iles (2000) (see the “Appendix” section). Although the questionnaire measures the three
TABLE 1
Basic Information about Citizenship Distribution and Overall OC Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% Public sector</th>
<th>% Private sector</th>
<th>Mean score of overall OC*</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Emirati (UAE)</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.7791</td>
<td>.41536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.6591</td>
<td>.47949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab (non-GCC)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.8108</td>
<td>.39254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe, North America, Australia, or New Zealand</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1.6250</td>
<td>.51755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.5507</td>
<td>.50106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African (non-Arab)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1.5000</td>
<td>.53452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1.6667</td>
<td>.57735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Descriptive responses to all OC questions were dichotomized; “1” for low OC and “2” for high OC.

dimensions of OC (affective, continuance, and normative), unless indicated otherwise, all the three dimensions were treated as one component to measure “overall OC” by constructing an index of questions (see George & Mallery, 2003). The English version of the questionnaire was translated into Arabic using back translation method by two bilingual specialists. The questionnaire had 24 items measured by seven-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, and undecided). To collect responses from Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking employees, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic while the English version was used as proposed by Suliman and Iles (2000). Although the English version has already been reported to be reliable (Suliman & Iles, 2000), the present study retested its reliability, which showed acceptable reliability level (Cronbach value for the English version was $\alpha = 0.741$). Reliability test for the Arabic version showed an acceptable level, as well ($\alpha = 0.782$) (for reliability tests, see the study by George and Mallery (2003)).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Study Demographics

Using SPSS has enabled the utilization of descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses. The main characteristics of the study sample show that the average age of all respondents is 31 years with male-to-female distribution being 60:40, respectively. Over 80% of all respondents have post-secondary education. The average number of years of experience is 6.5. Employees indicating they perform administrative tasks make 35.4% of the sample, whereas 23.3% employees work in clerical jobs. Around 22% employees work in the public sector and 78% employees work in the private sector. Lastly, 63% of respondents indicated they were “ordinary employee,” 27.8% were “supervisors,” and 5.9% were “managers.”

Table 1 indicates that 23% of the sample is from UAE nationals and 77% is from foreign nationalities (i.e., expatriates). These numbers reflect to a certain extent the problematic distribution and deficit of the national workforce based on real numbers reported by the UAE National Bureau of Statistics (2012), which indicated that expatriates occupy about 43% of jobs in the public sector and 90% of jobs in all sectors. Al Bayan (2011) reported that nationalizing the workforce since 2000 (i.e., Emiratization) has succeeded in reducing numbers of expatriates in the public sector more than it did in the private sector.

Testing Hypotheses

The study hypotheses aim at testing impact of employees’ nationality on their commitment as well as differences of OC levels between nationals and expatriates by taking sector factor in consideration. To this end, indexes were created to measure OC. In addition, nationality question was treated in two forms, one as spelled out categories (e.g., Arab, Asian, Westerner) and one as a dichotomous variable; UAE national and Expatriates (for more theoretical justification on indexes and variables, see Babbie (2004)).

H1: There are significant statistical differences in overall OC between national and expatriate employees who work in all sectors.

Findings in Table 1 show that when the “nationality” question was dichotomized (UAE national vs. Expatriate) and OC questions were reconstructed (low OC and high OC), expatriates from Arab nationalities have scored the highest level of overall commitment (mean = 1.810), followed by national Emiratis (mean = 1.779), then GCC employees (mean = 1.659). Expatriates from African nationalities followed by Asian and Westerner nationalities had expressed the lowest levels of overall commitment (mean scores were 1.500, 1.550, and 1.620, respectively).

These basic findings indicate that Emiratis and expatriates show different levels of overall OC. However, to better answer the study’s research question, the second hypothesis was tested.
TABLE 2
Dimensions of Organizational Commitment and Employees’ Citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship group</th>
<th>Affective commitment</th>
<th>Continuance commitment</th>
<th>Normative commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. dev.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>5.9184</td>
<td>1.367</td>
<td>5.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>5.6739</td>
<td>1.491</td>
<td>5.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>5.8026</td>
<td>1.216</td>
<td>5.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and N. America</td>
<td>4.6250</td>
<td>1.060</td>
<td>5.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.1528</td>
<td>1.121</td>
<td>5.929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African (non-Arab)</td>
<td>5.3000</td>
<td>1.414</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.800</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.130</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Significance (p < .05) .048* | — | .000* | — | .007* |

H2: There are significant statistical differences in the three dimensions of OC between national and expatriate employees who work in all sectors.

Findings in Tables 1 and 2 support H1 and H2 as using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyze the relationship between the three dimensions of OC and employees’ nationality reveal that Emiratis have scored the highest level in affective commitment (mean = 5.918), the fourth level in continuance commitment (mean = 5.348), and the third level in normative commitment (mean = 5.770). From all other nationalities, Asian expatriates have scored the highest level of continuance commitment (mean = 5.929), and Arab expatriates have scored the highest level of normative commitment (mean = 7.114).

These findings are consistent with those reported in Table 1 as there are significant differences in overall OC and in all dimensions of OC among different nationality groups. Put differently, nationals and expatriates show different levels of OC as Emiratis were more committed in one dimension of OC (affective) and less committed in two other dimensions of OC (normative and continuance). Tables 1 and 2 also indicate that H1 and H2 are correct as the statistical differences of OC levels between nationals and expatriates in all three dimensions as well as in the overall OC are significant (p < .05).

The present study confirms the findings of Suliman and Iles (2000) that OC is not a “one” dimension phenomenon. In other words, commitment is not one simple behavior but instead it has various forms and an employee can be committed in one dimension or aspect or form of OC and less committed in another. The third and fourth ranks of Emirati employees in normative and continuance OC support the findings of Al-Meer (1989) who reported that expatriates in Saudi Arabia were more committed than Saudi national employees. Relative poor commitment (in all dimensions together) of national employees may be influenced by the work-for-life system according to which Emiratis lose no benefits, pension, or rank and seniority even if they keep changing jobs from across sectors and organization. Shaw et al. (2003) and Abdulla and Shaw (1999) reported that Emirati employees and Arab expatriate employees have shown higher levels of OC compared to Asian expatriate employees. The present study confirms those previous assertions as Table 2 indicates that Arab expatriates were more normatively and affectively committed than Asian expatriates. But, in Jordan, nationals and expatriates showed similar levels of OC (Suliman & Iles, 2000). These contradicting findings by different researchers may point out the importance of environment as an untested predictor of OC. In other words, each country may have its own environmental effects, including organizational environment and legal environment that influence the way OC is being shaped, especially that the present study and the study of Shaw et al. (2003) have both examined OC in the UAE and reported very similar findings. These findings are contrary to those findings reported in studies conducted in Saudi Arabia or Jordan, for example.

Table 2 provides new information about the organizational culture and socialization patterns in UAE’s public and private organizations. Although there is no previous study to compare with, the facts in Table 2 are invaluable. As Porter et al. (1974), Yavas et al. (2007), and O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) suggest that OC is an expression of psychological attachment that connects employees with their workplace, Table 2 shows that Emirati employees have the highest level of affective (emotional) commitment followed by the Arab expatriates and employees from GCC countries. Hence, we can say that Emiratis, Arabs, and GCC nationals may feel emotionally attached to their organizations in light of the overwhelming numbers of non-Arab employees in the workplace in the UAE. In other words, maybe these three categories of nationalities feel more responsible for the organization than other “non-Arab” employees, considering that Arab expatriates (GCC and non-GCC) and Emirati nationals are all Arabs. However, we suggest that more studies should be done on this subject.

Table 2 also shows that Asian and Westerner expatriates rank the highest on continuance OC. Although the literature suggests that OC is a contractual arrangement between employees and the organization, we can speculate that Asians are the most rational employees who rationally perceive their relationship with the organization merely as a contract according to which they commit to it after assessing benefits they get from the job (see Alutto et al., 1973; Becker, 1960). The two groups, Asian and Western expatriates, may not care about building emotional attachments with the organization as they treat the workplace as a place where they “gain” benefits rather regardless of emotional belonging.

Maybe as the literature suggests because Emirati employees can easily change jobs, they perceive commitment to
In the UAE, expatriate employees from Arab nationalities who scored higher OC levels per the present study have limited options available in hand. Expatriates, in general, cannot legally change their organizations or employer without going through a lengthy and risky process of sponsorship transfer. The sponsorship policy in the UAE thus limits expatriates’ employment options, which is the policy that requires all expatriates to reside in the country under a sponsorship of an Emirati citizen. Therefore, expatriate employees have to commit themselves to one employer. As Emiratization policies make national employees highly demanded, these employees can easily quit jobs without staying unemployed for long. Arab and non-Arab expatriates do not enjoy such competitive advantage. Hence, expatriates enter the country on specific visa and residency status with a particular sponsor making their mobility much restricted. If we believed the argument of availability of alternative jobs as a potential cause for low OC among national employees, then, some recommendations could be outlined.

The social aspects of the job and the patterns of interactions and socialization in the organization seem to be very important for expatriates than they are for nationals. If the job is important for Arabs, for example, they may perceive it as an extension to their own homes as they may perceive the workplace as something valuable to which they need to commit. This social aspect appears in Table 2 where Asian and Arab expatriates rank high on normative OC. Moreover, expatriate employees may have ethical reasons to be committed to their organization (see Suliman & Iles, 2000). More specifically, because expatriates showed relatively low affective commitment compared to nationals, they perceive the workplace from a universal moral perspective. Regardless of their origin, they may treat the organization as a place that shelters them and provides them with income and means of life (e.g., salary), thus they may feel morally obligated to return favor to such place by showing commitment to it.

One could speculate that some expatriates have little emotional attachments to the organization where they work because for them it is just a place to do certain tasks and get paid. However, for national Emiratis, an organization could carry a sentimental value or they could consider their attachment to it as part of their attachment to their own country. Nevertheless, when nationals score low on normative commitment this should not mean they have no moral or ethical grounds about the workplace. Rather, we could argue that since national employees expressed poorer OC in general compared to expatriates, their expressed commitment might not be motivated by factors of morality per se. Similarly, Shaw et al. (2003) posited that Arab and Emirati employees might perceive commitment to the organization as part of their commitment to the entire society or country (affective rather than normative). Further studies will be needed to examine the different forms of commitment and how they relate to employees’ organizational behavior, such as job satisfaction, productivity, and performance.

**H3:** There are significant statistical differences in the three dimensions of OC among all employees who work in the public sector and all employees who work in the private sector.

Findings in Table 3 support H3. When the sector factor is examined, results show that it only has significant impact on the affective dimension of OC. Affective OC is higher in the private sector than it is in the public sector. (Mean values are 1.1206 and 1.0743, respectively.) Although the continuance and normative OC are higher in the private sector than they are in the public sector, the differences between the two sectors are statistically insignificant. In addition, employees’ overall OC has insignificant difference between the two sectors.

These findings are in line with the previous findings, which showed that OC is a multidimensional phenomenon. Meyer and Allen (1997) and Suliman and Iles (2000) strongly assert that OC cannot be examined as a one-dimensional organizational phenomenon. Maybe because OC was perceived as rational and social reality, the sector factor appears to be insignificant in this part of the study. Only the emotional aspect of commitment is different in each sector. However, when OC is treated as one dimension, influence of sector becomes insignificant. These findings may mean that it is not important if the organization is public or private, rather, it is the working conditions, benefits, and factors that closely relate to the organization or job itself. This argument has some support in the literature as Kuehn and Al-Busaidi (2002a) asserted that Omani’s OC did not differ statistically when sector was considered in the analysis. However, the latter study reports that Omani employees in the private sector have stronger OC than expatriate employees. Similarly, all employees in the present study show slightly higher OC in the private sector than in the public sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational commitment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>*Significance (p &lt; .05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1.0743</td>
<td>.2628</td>
<td>3.908</td>
<td>.048*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1.1206</td>
<td>.3319</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1.1392</td>
<td>.3673</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1.1510</td>
<td>.3638</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1.3296</td>
<td>.4787</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1.3340</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall OC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>72.984</td>
<td>11.097</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73.212</td>
<td>12.670</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sector, although differences are not statistically significant. Shaw et al. (2003) report that Arabs and Emiratis together are more committed to work than their Asian colleagues. But Abdulla and Shaw (1999) assert that national Emirati employees ranked higher than all other expatriate groups. Al-Meer (1989) reports somewhat similar findings when asserting that expatriates from one particular group (Asian) have showed higher commitment than did Saudi nationals and Westerners. Yet, the present study challenges Al-Meer’s findings by reporting that Westerner expatriates are less organizationally committed than Asian and GCC employees may be because of cultural differences that prevent them from fitting in or appreciating the job.

H4: There are insignificant statistical differences between overall OC and employees’ demographics of national and expatriate employees who work in all sectors.

To examine the possible relationship between OC and employees’ demographics, two bivariate (Pearson correlation) tables are produced. Table 4 shows that there are no correlations between OC and demographic variables for Emirati employees, thus H4 is supported. Table 5 also indicates that there are no significant statistical relationships between OC of expatriate employees and their demographic variables.

There is no consensus in the literature on what demographics influence OC. For example, while Abdulla and Shaw (1999) found nationality and some demographics were important, Suliman and Iles (2000), Al-Meer (1989), and Alnajjar (1996) report that OC is correlated with cultural and demographics, such as age and work experience. The present study provides compelling evidence that OC is influenced by factors other than employees’ demographics because demographics were insignificant for both national and expatriate employees. These results also support the

### TABLE 4
Pearson Correlations between OC and Demographics for National Employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1—OC</th>
<th>2—Gender</th>
<th>3—Age</th>
<th>4—Education</th>
<th>5—Experience</th>
<th>6—Nature of work</th>
<th>7—Job title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1—OC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2—Gender</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.954)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3—Age</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.832)</td>
<td>(0.260)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4—Education</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.963)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5—Experience</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>0.738**</td>
<td>0.201**</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.899)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.208)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6—Nature of work</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.162**</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.126)</td>
<td>(0.294)</td>
<td>(0.892)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.317)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7—Job title</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>-0.318**</td>
<td>-0.189*</td>
<td>-0.248**</td>
<td>-0.209*</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.213)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.124)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Values in brackets indicate significance (two-tailed).

### TABLE 5
Pearson Correlations between OC and Demographics for Expatriate Employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1—OC</th>
<th>2—Age</th>
<th>3—Gender</th>
<th>4—Education</th>
<th>5—Experience</th>
<th>6—Nature of work</th>
<th>7—Job title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1—OC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2—Age</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.172)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3—Gender</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.164**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.774)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4—Education</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.370)</td>
<td>(0.151)</td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5—Experience</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.596**</td>
<td>0.164**</td>
<td>-0.119*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.397)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6—Nature of work</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.151**</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.612)</td>
<td>(0.934)</td>
<td>(0.478)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7—Job title</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>-0.131*</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.389**</td>
<td>-0.209*</td>
<td>-0.090</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.623)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.936)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td>(0.988)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Values in brackets indicate significance (two-tailed).
findings reported in Table 3 where sector was insignificant in two out of three dimensions of OC.

As we saw in the previous paragraphs, the present study and previous ones report somewhat different findings in terms of the relationship between OC and other organizational and personal factors. To examine the possible impact of all variables on the overall OC, multiple regression (enter method) was used in four ways. First, OC was examined as one construct without distinguishing any of its dimensions. Results showed that only one variable (employee’s age) had significantly influenced OC ($F_{8,593} = 2.778$, model’s $p < .005$, adjusted $R^2 = .023$, and $\beta = .168$, $\sigma = .006$).

Second, each one of the three dimensions of OC was examined in a separate multiple regression model. Results showed that only employees’ educational level had an impact on affective OC ($F_{8,623} = 1.965$, model’s $p < .048$, adjusted $R^2 = .012$, and $\beta = .087$, $\sigma = .042$). Results from examining the continuance OC showed three significant relationships between OC and educational level ($\beta = .098$, $\sigma = .020$), nationality ($\beta = .123$, $\sigma = .006$), and years of work experience at the same organization ($\beta = .118$, $\sigma = .033$). Examining the normative type of OC showed that a significant model emerged ($F_{8,626} = 5.454$, model’s $p < .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .053$). Normative OC was influenced by employee’s age ($\beta = .220$, $\sigma = .000$) and employee’s educational level ($\beta = .129$, $\sigma = .002$). Results showed that employees in the public and private sectors differed significantly only in perceiving affective OC. Overall, OC did not differ significantly across sectors (Table 6 summarizes these results).

We notice in Table 6 that employees’ age and educational level are repeatedly influencing OC. However, nationality and sector mostly are not significant in influencing OC except continuance OC where nationality is significant. These findings confirm findings of many previous studies, which have found insignificant influence of demographics over OC (see, for example, studies by Shaw et al. (2003); and Yousef (2003)).

### CONCLUSION

The major purpose of the present study was to find out whether or not expatriate and national employees in the public and private sectors in the UAE display different levels of OC. The importance of this study stems from the peculiar organizational environment in the UAE where expatriates outnumber national employees. Hence, some policies, such as Emiratization, have been adopted to increase the number of national employees in the workforce. Decision makers believe that when OC is high, the organization can be better off and absenteeism, turnover, dissatisfaction, and other problems facing many organizations in the UAE can be reduced (Amernic & Aranya, 1983; Federal Authority of Government Human Resource, 2012; Shaw et al., 2003).

The major findings of the present study can be summarized as: (1) levels of OC of national and expatriate employees differ significantly. (2) Arab expatriates show the strongest overall commitment and normative commitment. (3) Emirati employees show the strongest affective commitment. (4) Westerners show the strongest continuance commitment. (5) OC is a multidimensional phenomenon where more than one form or type of commitment may exist in the organization. (6) Sector and employee’s demographics are not important predictors of OC.

Although many findings are peculiar, some of them are in line with some previous studies (see, for example, Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002a; Shaw et al., 2003; Yavas et al. 2007). However, there will be a need for conducting more empirical studies on OC inside UAE. Although the overall and normative commitment levels of Emiratis were lower than that of Arab expatriates, affective commitment was the strongest among Emiratis. Researchers are recommended to examine the possible relationship between the different types of OC and how one dimension may relate to other dimensions in the UAE. Researchers are invited to validate the OC questionnaires that were used in non-Western context as new questionnaires may be needed. In addition, decision makers should assess the best ways to boost employees’ OC as national employees are emotionally attached to their organizations (i.e., affective), but achieving higher levels of commitment on all dimensions of OC can better benefit the organization and meet the goals of major human resource policies, such as Emiratization.

Since expatriates were generally more committed than nationals, decision makers are recommended to reexamine the current human resource policies in the UAE. If expatriates are better committed because they have the motivation to get their contracts renewed, then the rule of “employment-for-life”—which is the basis for the employment of Emiratis—may need to be reconsidered. In addition, eliminating the current system of employment-for-life and adopting instead a contract system for all Emirati employees may enhance government’s human resource policies.

Findings of the study suggest that Arab, GCC, and national employees show relatively close levels of OC (see Tables 1 and 2). Although this finding may seem supplementary, it indeed indicates that employees from similar cultures (Arabs, Emiratis, and GCC citizens) may share similar views about work, yet they differ in levels of commitment. Further

### TABLE 6

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Independent variables that significantly influence OC ($p &lt; .05$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall OC</td>
<td>Employee’s age, educational level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective OC</td>
<td>Educational level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance OC</td>
<td>Educational level, nationality, years of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative OC</td>
<td>Employees’ age, educational level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
examination of this finding may be needed in the future to find out what roles national culture and value systems may play in influencing OC.

Decision makers need to be alarmed that national employees show relatively poor OC. Therefore, employment policies may need to emphasize training, merit-based professional development, and performance-based salaries and benefits (see, for example, Ameinfo, 2011). When competition exists, employees’ performance may improve, but when employees take their perks and generous benefits for granted, their poor motivation to work may negatively affect their OC. More research will be needed in this regard especially that the UAE government emphasizes quantitative measures for nationalizing jobs while quality of employees’ work life and performance may instead need to be emphasized.

In line with the previous recommendations, the UAE government is recommended to make employment for nationals very competitive and merit-based. Generous employment benefits that are currently available for national employees may need to be restructured so that they are only given based on careful assessment of employees’ performance and their retention possibilities. Easy transfer from one organization to another can lead to impoverishing UAE organizations and prevent employees from developing strong expertise and professionalism in certain areas because employees feel unobligated to remain in one organization as long as they lose no benefits when they move. Adopting new laws in this regard is recommended.

FUNDING

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REFERENCES


Internet Materials


APPENDIX

Example of selected questions in the survey of the study (also, see Suliman and Iles (2000)

Affective OC:

- I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
- I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

Continuance OC:

- I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up.
- One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.

Normative OC:

- I think that people these days move from one company to another too often.
- I do not think that wanting to be a “company man” or “company woman” is sensible any more.