

Employee Commitment in Virtual Teams: State of the Art and Research Directions

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Keywords: Employee commitment, Virtual work settings, Remote teams, Digital communication platforms, Trust dynamics, Communication patterns, Work-life balance, Review paper

Abstract: The digital era has revolutionized the modern workplace, bringing forth new challenges and opportunities that impact employee commitment. This paper aims to provide a thorough examination of the existing literature on employee commitment in virtual teams while offering valuable insights for future research. By conducting an in-depth analysis of remote teams, digital communication platforms, trust dynamics, communication patterns, and work-life balance within virtual work settings, this review paper reveals the intricate interplay between technology and employee commitment. Drawing upon compelling research findings, it demonstrates how affective commitment, emotional attachment, and organizational identity are strongly influenced by these factors. Furthermore, this review highlights the pressing need for further investigation into the complex relationship between remote working technology and employee commitment. By addressing these knowledge gaps, this study offers practical implications for businesses and paves the way for future research endeavours in this field.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Technology and digitalization are driving massive changes in the way businesses operate in today's quickly changing digital world. The contemporary workforce is significantly altered by these developments, which also raise concerns about how they may affect employee commitment (Parker & Grote, 2022) [1]. The ubiquity of virtual workplaces and their effects on employee commitment have been noted in research studies. Researchers discovered that workers in virtual environments reported lower levels of affective commitment (Presbitero, 2021; Vuchkovski et al., 2023) [2, 3], suggesting that it may be more difficult to get employees to feel a sense of emotional attachment and identification with the organisation. A survey by Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) [4] found similar challenges in developing loyalty and commitment among remote employees. The results of this study highlight the need of learning more about the variables that affect employee commitment in remote workplaces.

In today's hyperconnected world, digital communication channels are crucial for coordinating efforts and sharing knowledge. But it remains unclear how they affect employee commitment.

Concerns regarding WLB and its effect on employee commitment have also been raised as virtual teams has blurred the lines between work and personal life. Tautz, Schübbe and Felfe's (2022) [5] research implies that the flexibility of remote work made possible by digital technology might make it harder to draw clear lines between work and personal life, which in turn may have an effect on employees' dedication. On the other hand, Ali et al. (2023) [6] show that workers who feel they have more control over their schedules are more dedicated to their jobs. These divergent results emphasise the need of more research into the connection between WLB and employee commitment in the information age.

This review paper seeks to give a complete examination of employee commitment in virtual teams. The goal is to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between technology and employee commitment by investigating the impact of remote work, distributed teams, and digital communication platforms, as well as other factors like trust, communication habits, and WLB. It aims to render useful insights for businesses and point the way towards further studies in this area.

1.2. Definitions of Terms

1.2.1. Employee Commitment

Employee Commitment describes how emotionally invested and committed employees are to their company and its mission (Rafiei, Amini & Foroozandeh, 2014) [7]. It is an indication of the employee's dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991) [8].

1.2.2. Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are groups of people that work together online to complete tasks and meet objectives, although being in different physical locations (Asatiani et al., 2021) [9].

1.2.3. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to the state in which one is able to successfully juggle both their professional and personal commitments (Marques & Berry, 2021) [10]. It entails prioritizing and organizing one's efforts such that they are most productively spent on work, family, friends, and oneself (Haar & Brougham, 2022) [11].

2. Theorizing Employee Commitment

2.1. The Three-Component Model

The Three-Component Model by Meyer and Allen (1991) [8] gives a solid theoretical basis for comprehending employee commitment. Continuance commitment, emotional commitment, and normative commitment are theorized to make up the commitment in this framework (see Figure 1). Each element represents a distinct facet of an employee's dedication to the company. The model allows academics to investigate the complex nature of employee dedication from every angle. Using this paradigm, one may analyse how various aspects of commitment affect workers' mindsets and actions in more depth. It also paves the way for studies into the ways in which different aspects of commitment are influenced by the unique characteristics of the modern digital environment. Studies have established links between employee commitment and numerous outcomes, including work satisfaction (Sharma & Dhar, 2016) [12] and retention (Eisenberger et al., 2019) [13]. Understanding employee commitment is made possible by these theoretical frameworks and their

corresponding findings.

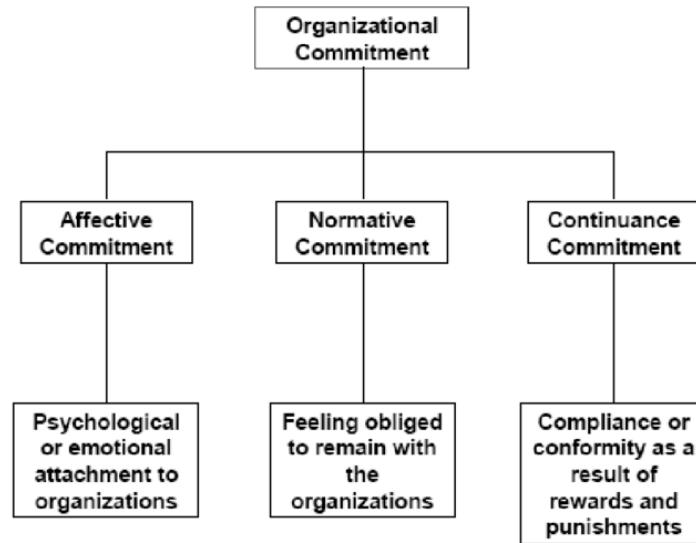


Figure 1: Three-Component Model by Meyer and Allen (1991) [8]

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to the Model. One complaint about the concept is that it puts too much emphasis on the employee's internal state of mind and not enough on the external environment (Jaros, 2017) [14]. Rafiei, Amini and Foroozandeh (2014) [7] note that organizational procedures, leadership style, and social dynamics at work may all have a substantial impact on employees' dedication, but these are ignored by the model. Also, the model further presupposes that commitment is an unidimensional and fixed concept. However, studies show that a person's level of commitment may change over time in response to external factors and internal developments (Jaros, 2017) [14]. The concept may oversimplify the intricate interaction between people and their organizations since it does not take into consideration the changing nature of commitment. Furthermore, the model may not sufficiently account for the distinctive difficulties and possibilities given by the digital age, since it was established before the broad use of digital technology. These new circumstances may have far-reaching effects on employee dedication, calling for a re-evaluation and expansion of the Model to account for the dynamics of the information age.

2.2. Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The SET sheds light on the factors that influence employee loyalty by highlighting the two-way nature of the connection between employees and their employers (Khan & Iqbal, 2020) [15]. Employees feel loyal to their employers when they believe they will get appropriate recognition, compensation, and other benefits for their efforts (Kilroy, Dundon & Townsend, 2023) [16]. According to SET, people are more likely to stay committed to a company if they feel that they are getting good value for their money. The necessity of trust, reciprocity, and a shared sense of duty in the workplace is emphasized by this paradigm, along with the use of successful HR strategies.

2.3. Psychological contract

Psychological contract theory looks at the unspoken agreements and anticipations of both employers and workers. It suggests that commitment from workers is affected by how well they feel their implicit promises and duties from the psychological contract are being met (Joel et al., 2022) [17]. People are more inclined to form a greater commitment when they feel that their company has

delivered on its promises and met their expectations. On the other hand, a loss of commitment and greater desire to leave might result from a broken psychological contract. According to this view, managing the employee-employer relationship and creating commitment depend on open lines of communication, openness, and justice.

2.4. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT proposes that the degree to which people sense autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the workplace is predictive of their level of commitment to the organization (Zhao, Chen & Liu, 2023) [18]. According to SDT, workers are more likely to display greater levels of commitment if they feel that they have some say in their job, are given chances to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge, and have strong relationships with their coworkers and superiors (Krajcsák, 2020) [19]. Supporting employee autonomy, offering opportunity to enhance employees' skills, and building a culture of cooperation and interpersonal support are ways in which organizations may increase employee commitment (Zhao, Chen & Liu, 2023) [18].

2.5. Job-Embeddedness Theory

According to this theory, employees are more invested in their job and the success of the company when they have a strong sense of belonging to both (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015) [20]. Links (relationships with coworkers), fit (personal and professional chemistry), and sacrifice (perceived costs of quitting) are all discussed in relation to one another. Strong social and professional links, a sense of belonging at work, and personal sacrifice all increase the likelihood that an employee will become fully invested in their work (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017) [21]. This idea emphasizes the value of strong interpersonal connections, encouragement of organizational identity, and the cultivation of a feeling of community as means to increase loyalty.

2.6. Current State of Research in Employee Commitment

Researchers have paid more and more attention to the concept of employee commitment in recent years (see Figure 2 below). Prior to 2010, there was a dearth of research that examined the topic of employee commitment in depth. However, there has been a substantial increase in study into this topic since 2011, with a peak expected in 2020. Several causes, including as the rising awareness of the value of devoted individuals for corporate performance and the changing dynamics of the contemporary workplace, have contributed to this growth in study.

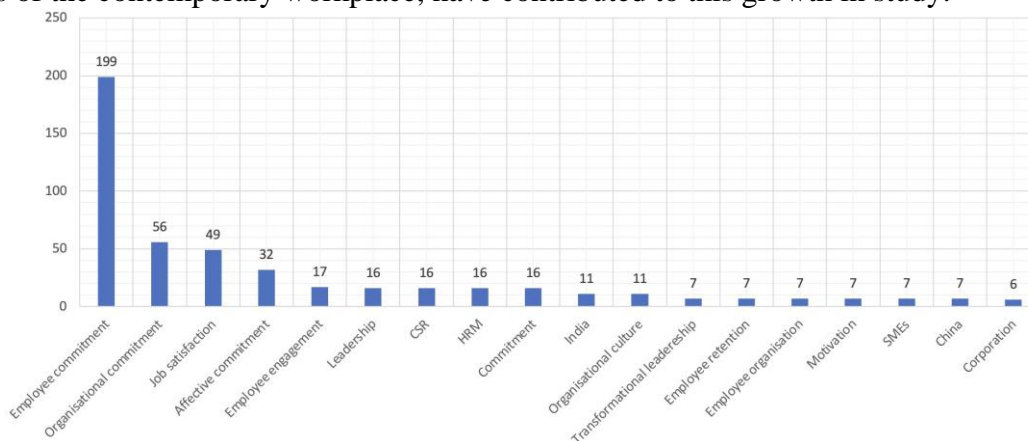


Figure 2: Current research trends on employee commitment from 2013-2023

In 2020, when the Covid-19 epidemic broke out, the nature of employment was drastically altered, and telecommuting became more common. The importance and ramifications of employee commitment increased as firms made the move to remote work as the norm. To better understand how commitment functions in virtual work contexts, how it is impacted by remote work characteristics, and how businesses might nurture commitment in dispersed or hybrid work environments, researchers have begun to examine these questions.

Also, it can be seen from Figure 2 that quantitative research methodologies have been used in the vast majority of studies on employee commitment. The three-component model presented by Meyer and Allen (1991) [8] has been the primary focus of many of these investigations on commitment. Researchers have investigated the ties between commitment and factors including work satisfaction, organizational support, desire to leave, and performance on the job. Besides, the study on employee commitment has strayed from its conventional emphasis on commitment kinds to investigate its causes and implications. It has become increasingly clear that understanding employee commitment necessitates taking into account the significance of psychological processes and individual variances. This move toward investigating the psychological factors that contribute to commitment has improved our comprehension of the many dynamics at play.

3. Employee Commitment in Virtual Teams

3.1. Digital Paradigm Shift

Technology now plays a pivotal part in moulding employee mindsets and actions, which in turn influences employee dedication in the modern workplace. Several theoretical frameworks offer insight on the ways in which technology affects dedication in online workplaces. Technological determinism is one view, which holds that technology may and will influence people's actions, including their loyalty to an organization (Asatiani et al., 2021) [9]. Advocates of this theory say that technological advancements, such as online meeting spaces and remote work platforms, may foster feelings of belonging and efficiency, hence increasing employees' dedication (Singh, 2022) [22]. Differently, social constructionist theories stress the importance of free will and interpersonal dynamics in moulding commitment (Youmans, Canby & Córdova, 2022) [23]. That is, technology is seen as a tool that, depending on how it is utilised and incorporated into the organisational environment, may either help or hurt in terms of fostering employee commitment.

3.2. Virtual Work Environment and Employee Commitment

The commitment dynamics of businesses have been profoundly affected by the growth of remote labour. The problems and possibilities for developing employee commitment are particular to virtual work, which is characterised by geographically scattered teams and minimal face-to-face connection (Asatiani et al., 2021) [9]. The theoretical viewpoints provide light on the impact of virtual labour on commitment levels. According to the social exchange hypothesis (i.e. Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018) [4], people form loyalties to others as a result of the shared advantages and obligations they experience in social interactions. Strong social interactions may not be as easy to cultivate and sustain in virtual work settings due to the physical distance and restricted face-to-face engagement (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018) [4].

However, studies show that there are ways to encourage commitment even in electronic workplaces. Leader-member exchange (LMX) is proposed by Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe (2000) [24] as a critical factor in building commitment, even in virtual teams. They contend that increased loyalty results from leader-member interactions that are strong in trust, respect, and support. This indicates that strong leadership practises, such as open lines of communication, timely feedback,

and access to necessary resources, are crucial in today's increasingly virtual workplaces.

More specifically, a person's level of commitment might be influenced by the degree to which they feel supported and connected through digital communication channels. Employees are more likely to establish affective commitment to the organisation when they feel encouraged by their coworkers and superiors (Sharma & Dhar, 2016) [12]. Virtual social support, defined as emotional, instrumental, and informational aid supplied via digital means, has been shown to favourably affect organisational commitment by Norouzi et al.'s (2022) research [25]. This emphasises the need for a positive online community where workers may confide in one another, learn from one another's experiences, and feel encouraged. However, it is equally crucial to be aware of the risks associated with using online channels of communication. For instance, if people often rely on asynchronous communication—in which exchanges happen at various times—it might slow down decision-making and lessen their sense of belonging (Vuchkovski et al., 2023) [3]. Furthermore, misunderstandings or disagreements may arise due to the absence of nonverbal indications in text-based communication, which may have an effect on commitment levels (Presbitero, 2021) [2].

Flexibility, a trait often linked with remote employment, may also affect levels of commitment. According to Ali, et al. (2023) [6], remote employees whose jobs allow for some degree of autonomy have higher levels of affective commitment. Having the freedom to choose one's own hours and work from anywhere they like increases motivation since it promotes responsibility and independence. Excessive adaptability, however, without enough limits and support networks, may result in feelings of isolation and diminished commitment (Tautz, Schübbe & Felfe, 2022) [5].

4. Work-Life Balance and Employee Commitment

4.1. Work-Life Balance Challenges in the Digital Age

The evolving nature of work due to technology development has added new challenges to maintaining a satisfactory WLB. The boundaries between an employee's professional life and their personal life are becoming more porous as they are expected to be reachable and contacted outside of regular business hours (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017) [21]. The inability to clearly demarcate work and personal life may have an adverse effect on employee commitment (Dunn, 2020) [26]. Because of the accessibility and constant connectivity of today's technology systems, there is a shift towards more open borders and higher standards. According to Caringal-Go et al. (2022) [27], having constant access to work-related information through digital devices might hinder rest and recovery, lead to increased fatigue, and decrease dedication. This suggests that the constant presence of work-related commitments and the inability to entirely retreat may have a major influence on commitment levels.

One theoretical perspective that helps clarify the impact of poor WLB on loyalty is the conservation of resources (COR) hypothesis (Zhang et al., 2019) [28]. According to the COR theory, people put forth effort to amass and protect their resources like free time, good health, and psychological serenity (Talukder, 2019) [29]. When work starts to intrude into one's personal life, it may have negative consequences on both fronts. Research by Haar and Brougham (2022) [11] reveals that work-family conflict is negatively connected to organisational commitment, suggesting that it is a common effect of an imbalanced work-life.

Many theoretical lenses may be used to the study of technology's effects on the WLB, illuminating the ways in which people separate their professional and personal lives. Boundary theory sheds light on the difficulties people have in drawing a line between their professional and private lives (Adisa, Mordi & Osabutey, 2017) [30]. This finding implies that setting and maintaining appropriate limits is essential for a healthy WLB. Marques and Berry's (2021) [10] study emphasises the significance of boundary control, defined as the freedom to choose one's own

working hours, location, and environment. Boundary control may be helped or hurt by technological advancements. While technological progress has made remote work possible and increased workplace mobility possible, it may also confuse professional and personal spheres and make it difficult to switch off.

One alternative theoretical framework is work-home interference, and it investigates how stress and tension from work might seep into one's domestic life (Akanji, Mordi & Ajonbadi, 2020) [31]. Based on their findings, Xu, Kee and Mao (2021) [32] conclude that frequent use of digital communication tools like email may increase work incursions into non-work time, hence leading to work-home interference. The capacity to maintain WLB and the degree to which a person is committed may both suffer as a result of this disruption.

A healthy WLB is a major factor in determining an employee's degree of dedication to their employer. Employees value WLB and other personal resources, according to the COR (Zhang et al., 2019; Talukder, 2019) [28, 29]. Similarly, WLB and commitment are conceptualised within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) paradigm (Fernet, Austin & Vallerand, 2012) [33]. WLB, according to this paradigm, is a personal resource that affects workers' happiness and drive. Employees' commitment might suffer if they are unable to effectively combine their work and personal lives. This can lead to feelings of stress (Akanji, Mordi & Ajonbadi, 2020) [31], burnout (Tuğsal & Ülgen, 2017) [34], and dissatisfaction on the job (Bhende et al., 2020) [35].

4.2. Strategies for Promoting Work-Life Balance and Improving Employee Commitment

Organisations may play a significant role in fostering WLB and increasing employee commitment via the use of a variety of tactics, such as the introduction of supporting practises (Kelliher, Richardson & Boiarintseva, 2019) [36], the establishment of clear boundaries (Adisa, Mordi & Osabutey, 2017) [30], the management of technology usage, and the encouragement of self-care (Wang, Gao & Lin 2019). The establishment of flexible work arrangements is one organisational practise that has been shown to be successful in fostering WLB, according to Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva (2019) [36], as less hours and more flexible scheduling helped employees feel more committed to their jobs and their personal lives. By adopting these procedures, employees have more discretion over their timetables and are better able to balance professional and personal commitments.

Boundary management may be a useful tool in the fight for WLB. Separating one's professional and private lives requires setting firm boundaries. Asatiani et al. (2021) [9] found that those who use boundary management tactics like mental compartmentalization (keeping work and personal life separate in one's mind) and physical segmentation (keeping one's work and personal places physically apart) had a more favourable WLB. Organisations may aid workers in boundary establishing by promoting time off, prohibiting contact outside of work hours, and building a culture that values personal time (Bader, Froese & Kraeh, 2018) [37].

Fostering care for one's own well-being is crucial to sustaining a healthy work-life balance and increasing dedication. Organisations can offer wellness programmes, stress management classes and seminars on striking a good WLB and improving employee health and happiness. Exercise, mindfulness, and other forms of self-care, as those advocated for in the research of Caringal-Go et al. (2022) [27], have been shown to improve WLB and commitment. Also, WLB is more achievable and employee dedication is higher when there is strong leadership support and a positive organisational culture (Lee et al., 2021) [38]. Kibozi and Michael (2018) [39] study on effective leaders emphasises the need of displaying traits including modelling a healthy WLB, encouraging people to set personal goals, and being accommodating to their needs.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This article has discussed a number of theoretical frameworks and ideas that are important for increasing employee commitment in the digital age. Several major conclusions and ideas have come from a careful review of the literature. The virtual teams has brought about a shift in the elements that influence employee commitment, and these influences are both personal and institutional in nature. Leadership credibility, job autonomy, and job significance are personal variables; effective communication, positive reinforcement, and career advancement chances are organisational ones. Building and maintaining employee commitment may be aided by awareness of and attention to these variables. Overcoming these obstacles and increasing employee commitment may be achieved via the use of technology, the promotion of a healthy work culture, and the adoption of new leadership behaviours.

5.2. Implications for Organisations

Businesses must understand why it is crucial to modify established procedures to accommodate the modern digital workplace. This entails creating clear expectations and norms for remote work arrangements, as well as investing in technical infrastructure that promotes successful communication and cooperation (Tautz, Schübbe & Felfe, 2022) [5]. By adapting business procedures to the online setting, companies may encourage employee commitment and output. Also, fostering a culture of trust, open communication, and social connection is essential to fostering employee commitment (Adisa, Mordi & Osabutey, 2017) [30]. Virtual team meetings, social events, and other platforms for open dialogue among staff members are all effective ways to foster this goal. Organisations may increase employee commitment and engagement by creating a welcoming and supportive workplace.

Besides, companies in the modern day need to use techniques that encourage boundary management and employee well-being in order to handle WLB issues and increase employee commitment. This involves establishing a culture that prioritises work-life balance, which includes encouraging people to set clear boundaries between work and personal life (Adisa, Mordi & Osabutey, 2017) [30], providing flexible work arrangements (Kelliher, Richardson & Boiarintseva, 2019) [36], stressing the significance of taking breaks and vacations (Bader, Froese & Kraeh, 2018) [37], and offering these opportunities.

5.3. Future Research

Long-term consequence of remote work on employee commitment is an issue for further study. Increased remote work calls for research on the long-term effects of telecommuting on employee dedication, fulfilment on the job, and productivity. Leadership behaviours may also have a role in developing employee commitment in virtual teams, which might be the subject of future study. Understanding successful digital leadership would be aided by research on the exact acts and behaviours that leaders may take to develop trust, encourage distant staff, and promote a feeling of belonging. Exploring the efficacy of various technology tools and platforms for boosting employee commitment in virtual work settings may also provide useful information for businesses. It would be helpful for businesses to understand how different forms of communication impact employee attitudes, relationships, and loyalty as they go forward in the digital age.

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