

HOW CAN WE TALK ABOUT COMMITMENT IN A CONTEXT WITH OUTSOURCING?

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ABSTRACT

Commitment has been studied for a long time, but recent discussion has focused on the importance of the context for this area. This study discusses the commitment in the Brazilian context, with deep changes in work legislation. The law of outsourcing was approved in Brazil and although some studies view this like a modernization, we argue it will negatively affect the company-employer relationship. The payments and benefits lower, the pseudo stability and no attention of the State promotes the work precariousness. That affects the individual's commitment to the organization and, consequently, the performance of the company. If, in the short term the outsourcing strategy demonstrate their important for cost reduction, in the long term affects the business sustainability.

Key words: outsourcing; commitment; Brazilian context.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational commitment has been investigated for at least half a century and is still one of the most studied constructs in area of organizational behavior. Klein, Molloy and Cooper (2009) argue commitment is a relatively convenient outcome to assess as well as the impact workplace commitments have been shown to have on individual-level outcomes important to organizations. Despite the great volume of research on this concept, few studies have reflected on the context in which people and organizations are inserted. However, Bastos *et al.* (2014) argue that area researchers recognize and identify the role of context in the formation and development of impairment.

In the Brazilian context, there are great transformations in labor relations. The acting Brazilian President sanctioned in 2017 a law that regulates the outsourcing of any business activity, core and support activities of business. In August 2018, the Federal Supreme Court considered the law sanctioned by the Brazilian president as constitutional. There is until the possibility of outsourcing for another already outsourced, thus, the authorization for the outsourced company to subcontract other companies for contracting services, remuneration and direction of work. The new law of outsourcing comes during a set of reforms that bring the country closer to a neoliberal policy. A labor reform advocated by the current president was approved in the Brazilian Congress that sees as important a relaxation of labor laws to "bring the market closer". It is important understanding of how macroeconomic events affect those employment and organizational context.

Outsourcing is relevant for the academic and managerial field, as it analyzes the impacts of these transformations on the relations between person and work. Given this

context, the objective of this work is to investigate the theoretical framework of the construct commitment to the phenomenon of outsourcing. We argue that the outsourcing precarizes the workforce. The arguments in the demonstration of this phenomena are based on articles from several areas that have already analyzed outsourcing as a management technique.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organizational commitment has been pointed out as an important theme among behavioral studies because it reflects on their performance and on the relationships between individuals and organizations. Organizations value commitment among their employees because it normally contributes to reducing abstinence behaviors, such as shortages and delays, leading to higher productivity (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Bastos, 1993).

The commitment began to be studied in the field of social sciences in the 1960s and since then it has been an increasingly researched topic in the area of organizational behavior, having been defined and measured in several ways (Wasti *et al.*, 2016). In early commitment research, commitment was defined as the propensity to engage in consistent lines of activity (Becker, 1960).

Commitment has been defined and measured in a number of ways, but these definitions share a common theme that organizational commitment is considered to be a link between the individual and the organization. (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Becker (1960) brings the idea of side bets and defines commitment as the propensity that the individual has to engage in a consistent line of activities. In this view, the term is related to the costs incurred when leaving an organization and the rewards obtained by staying in it. For the author, one of the reasons that people would be willing to continue in the organization would be the fear of losing stability or reputation, for example.

The second approach is commitment as an assignment. In this strand the term is seen as an attitude of commitment that the individual has with himself after engaging in behaviors that are volitional, explicit, and irrevocable (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980). The third approach is commitment as the congruence of individual / organizational goals. In this definition, the commitment occurs when the individual identifies himself and makes an extra effort to fulfill the organization's goals and values (Porter *et al.*, 1974). For these authors commitment is composed of the acceptance and belief in the goals and values of the organization, the willingness to exert extra effort to fulfill the goals of the organization and strong desire to be part of the company. Subsequently, Mowday *et al.* (1982) separated commitment in two aspects, behavioral and attitude.

For Reichers (1985), commitment is a multidimensional concept based on different commitment targets and for Morrow (1983) it is a combination of bases and targets. For Mowday *et al.* (1982) commitment can be characterized by the relative strength of an individual's involvement in a particular organization. Also, it can be divided in three factors: strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization and strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. With this definition the authors created an Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) to reflect these three aspects.

As the research grew, a complex and somewhat confusing set of findings appeared and approaches to commitment began to be developed. In 1980s and 1990s, the working of scholars gave rise to models that described commitment as a multidimensional model. (Allen, 2016). However, thus far, the multidimensional view of commitment that has received the

empirical attention is the three-component model (TCM) developed by Allen and Meyer in 1990 (Allen, 2016). According to the authors (1990), commitment can be divided in three approaches: affective, continuance and normative.

Meyer and Allen (1991) also argue that organizational commitment refers to a force that binds the individual to take a relevant course of action to achieve a goal. These authors present that the construct has three dimensions: affective, instrumental and normative. Such dimensions are based on the type of connection that the individual has with the organization in which he works. However, conceptual and empirical problems in the Meyer and Allen model (1991) have raised many discussions about its relevance: there is an overlapping of the affective and normative bases, inadequate psychometric properties, and empirical inconsistencies of the continuation basis (Bastos *et al.*, 2014).

The most current and well-defined construct of this construct was elaborated by Klein *et al.* (2014), which defines organizational commitment as a psychological bond that reflects dedication and responsibility for a particular target. The KUT model (K = Klein *et al.* (2014), U = one-dimensional T = target-free measure) derives from a study with strong evidence of content validity, supporting the relations between the items and the theoretical construct. The KUT model was designed to be easily adapted to any foci, while multidimensional frameworks were initially developed around a given commitment goal and not easily modified for all other goals (Klein *et al.*, 2014). The Klein's definition helps the literature of commitment to move forward in new contexts of work organization, such as alternative, temporary, contingent, non-standard and outsourced work. With KUT measurement it is possible to evaluate the commitment with any foci, including with the contracting company and with the outsourced company.

Organizational commitment has been prominent among behavioral studies because it reflects the relationships between individuals and organizations and their performance. The research on commitment has been based on the postulation that high commitment leads, for example, to lower turnover, lower absenteeism and improved performance (Bastos, 1993). Organizations value commitment among their employees because it usually helps reduce abstinence behaviors, such as shortages and delays, which leads to increased productivity (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990, Bastos, 1993). Commitment is related negatively to withdrawal cognition and turnover, and affective commitment had the strongest and most favorable correlations with organization-relevant (attendance, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior) and employee-relevant (stress and work-family conflict) outcomes (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Affective commitment was positively correlated with measures of performance (Meyer *et al.*, 1989, Budihardjo, 2013).

In addition to the background studies and the consequences of the impairment, researchers are beginning to understand how this phenomenon develops. Commitment is viewed as a consequence or outcome of organizational socialization, thus "deeper" workplace bonds of this kind may take more time to develop and change. In temporary work settings, rather than commitment, work place bonds may also be of another type. With the absence of an organization offering a sustainable work relationship characterized by job security, career development and positive attitudes, the short time frame may accentuate transactional obligations, rather than a relational bond involving reciprocity, mutual trust and commitment (Van Rossenberg *et al.*, 2018).

Despite being more affected by organizational practices, commitment to the organization can also be influenced by macroeconomic conditions. The Frone's (2018) study explored the effects of the Great Recession 2018 on U.S. workers who remain employed. The

results show that the recession was associated with a increase in both job and employment insecurity. Whereas job insecurity represents concerns about involuntarily losing one's current job, employment insecurity represents the perceived likelihood of not finding comparable new employment in the event of job loss. The recession was associated with a decrease in physical and mental health and affective organizational commitment.

The commitment has been studied in the context of formal and regulated work. However, the neoliberal changes in Brazil and in the world indicate that new forms of work will emerge and others will be intensified, including outsourcing. In a country that allows the outsourcing of all activities, it is necessary to investigate the commitment of individuals with the work can be impacted. In the next session outsourcing in the world and in Brazil is presented.

OUTSOURCING

The phenomenon of outsourcing was originated in the United States, shortly after the outbreak of World War II. With the objective of reducing costs, outsourcing presented itself as an important strategy worldwide. Nowadays, it is a modern management technique directed to the reduction of managerial structures, constituting an integral practice of the new forms of management, such as the formation of organizational networks and partnerships, allowing companies to focus on their end activities (Assunção-Matos & Bicalho, 2016). In the literature, outsourcing can be defined as the act of obtaining semi-finished products, finished products or services from an outside company if these activities were traditionally performed internally (Dolgui & Proth, 2013).

Initially, the focus of the field was to comprehend the decisions and the outcomes of the process. The outsourcing decisions came from most basic questions as when it is better to make and when it is better to buy, to more strategic questions as the better areas and functions for outsourcing. The outcomes can be measured as business performance, improvement of the relationship with the client and its perception of product/service (Chou, Techatassanasoontorn & Hung, 2015). With the development of the literature, the phenomenon started to be comprehended from various theoretical perspectives, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Theoretical approaches of outsourcing.

Theoretical perspective	Authors	Key premise	Key insights for outsourcing
Institutional theory	March and Olsen (1984), Scott (1995)	External forces pressure firms to behave in certain ways and not behave in others. Firms seek to acquire and maintain needed resources, minimize dependence on others for resources, but increase others' dependence on them.	Firms should outsource only if the approach fits the firm's strategy, not just because the approach is in or fashionable. Firms that lack resources should seek to establish relationship with others to obtain them.

Resource dependence theory	Boyd (1990), Casciaro and Piskorsky (2005), Pfeffer and Salancik (1978)	Firms seek to acquire and maintain needed resources, minimize dependence on others for resources, but increase others' dependence on them.	Firms that lack resources should seek to establish relationship with others to obtain them.
Network theory	Gulati et al. (2000), Thorelli (1986), Turnbull et al. (1996)	Inter-organizational relationships is central to success and should be well managed.	Outsource to firms that are central to the outsourcer's network.
Systems theory	Combs and Crook (2007), von Bertalanffy (1951)	An organization is a system with interconnected parts.	By outsourcing, the firm is externalizing one or more parts of the organization, thus efforts (e.g. through coordination, communication, etc) must be made to keep the externalized part connected to the system.
Resource/knowledge based views of the firm	Barney (1991), Wernerfelt (1984)	Unique assets and capabilities are the source of enduring competitive advantages	Firms should not outsource capabilities, functions or activities that create competitive advantage
Transaction cost economics	Bajari and Tadelis (2001), Rubin (1990)	Firms should make decisions on "make or buy" to minimize costs	Outsource when transaction costs are less than production costs.
Agency theory	Eisenhardt (1989), Jensen and Meckling (1976), Barthélemy (2003)	When one firm (the principal) delegates responsibility to another (the agent), the principal should monitor to ensure good representation.	Outsource when an agent is deemed more efficient than the firm to handle the activity and the principal will be well represented or trusted. Manage outsourcing relationship through trust and contract.
Strategic choice theory	Child (1972), Doty et al (1993)	The decisions managers make about strategic issues should align with the environment.	Decision to outsource should be driven by a firm's strategy.

Critical Theory	Benson (1977), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991)	Elimination of social domination resulting from economic and other considerations	Decision to outsource should consider how best it can contribute to improving the society.
Relational view	Barthélemy (2003), Samaddar and Kadiyala (2006), Satkunasingam and Ndubisi (2006)	A paradigm shift from transactional exchanges to relationship-based approaches.	Factors determining success from outsourcer and vendor perspectives include among others, the quality of relationship, trustworthiness, commitment, and technical competence

Fonte: (Ndubisi, 2011)

From the Table 1, it is possible to conclude that some perspectives complement each other and some of them are contradictory. For example, from the institutional theory and from the strategic choice theory, a firm should outsource if it fits its strategy. On the other side, from the critical theory the decision to outsource should consider the improvement of society.

Another discussion presented in the field are the pros and cons of the process. The most common benefits cited are cost saving, better performance, and flexibility (Tayauova, 2012, Ndubisi, 2011). Other advantages include reductions of the staff and minimization in the staffing variation (caused by demand's change), access to external technologies, skills and expertise. Also, it allows the employee to focus only in the core activities of the company, preventing them from spending time on secondary tasks (Dolgui & Proth, 2013). Some of these points, however, can have a reverse effect when certain contexts are considered, as exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2: Reverse consequences of outsourcing

Desired objectives	Possible adverse consequences
Search for a vendor whose prices are as low as possible	Unemployment in the country of the buyer Permanence of a low social status in the vendor's country Risk of quality problems if the vendor is involved recently in this type of product
Taking advantage of external expertise	This is only possible if the vendor has a high technological level, but in this case the prices it offers are probably less interesting
Free employees from tedious tasks	Unemployment in the buyer's country
Improve financial flexibility by selling assets that have become unnecessary as a result of outsourcing	The sale of assets reduces the possibility of future extensions of the buyer. This is a strategic constraint that the buyer applied to himself. In addition, he/she becomes dependent on the vendor
Gain access to external technology	This is an advantage only if the technology is used occasionally. If the need for this technology is

	permanent, then this may favour the vendor who becomes dominant partner
Vendor provide quality activities	Unwarranted assertion
Reduce staff in the buyer's company	Unemployment in the buyer's country

Fonte: (Dolgui & Proth, 2013).

Regarding to the disadvantages, the main cons of the outsourcing consists in loss of control over the outsourced process, insecurity, reallocation of staff and reduction of quality (Tayauova, 2012). Other risks include employee's loss of social benefits, labor union's conflict and loss of the company's cultural identity (Heringuer, Ramos & Santiago, 2011). Moreover, when the focus of outsourcing is on cost reduction, if this goal is not achieved or some irregularity occur, all the process can be impaired (Imhoff & Morati, 2006). Outsourcing is a phenomenon that diverges in different countries, this requires considering the cultural and structural issues of each country for a better analysis. Below we present the Brazilian context.

Outsourcing in Brazilian context

Outsourcing in Brazil initiated around 1950, when national companies were privatized with the purpose of reducing costs and becoming more competitive than foreign firms. In the 1970s it began to be adopted by the public sector (Alves, 2006). Notwithstanding, the process was intensified in the country only in the 1990s. During this period, Brazil went through a neoliberal expansion, caused by the opening of trade to the international market, privatizations of public organizations and diminishing the role of the State. In addition, the Toyotist production model was intensifying in the country, characterized by the flexibilization of production and the reduction of factories (Aquino *et al.*, 2016). Since then, it has taken on a growing role in national labor relations.

The most recent data on the number of outsourced workers shows that Brazil had more than 12 million outsourced workers in 2014, representing 20% of the Brazilian workforce. In typical contracting activities, when the relationship between active links and broken links is observed in the same period, it is noted that out of every 100 active links, little more than 40 were broken. Already in the typically outsourced sectors, this ratio is 100 active links for 80 disrupted. This indicates that the links in typically outsourced activities have high turnover (DIEESE, 2017).

This high turnover of the workforce is one of the most worrisome indicators of the labor market (DIEESE, 2017). For employers, it represents a cost of selection and training that ends up being passed on to the final price, reaching all consumers. For workers, it represents the uncertainty of finding a new job in a short space of time and the risk of having to accept lower wages and benefits, as well as having impacts on the calculation of retirement. For the State, unemployment insurance expenses tend to increase with high turnover, leading to the decapitalization of the worker social security (*Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço FGTS - FGTS*)

This high turnover also can negatively affects the average duration of the employment bond and is significantly higher in typically outsourced activities. By 2014 (most recent data published by DIEESE) , bonds in typically outsourced activities lasted, on average 2 years and 10 months. In typical contracting activities, the average duration of the bonds was 5 years and 10 months. Regarding the nominal remuneration, the analysis shows

that, from 2007 to 2014, typically outsourced activities paid on average, between 23% and 27% less when compared to typically contracting activities.

In this way, with the new regulation of outsourcing, allowing it to occur at any stage of the company's productive activity, there it is probable that the differences pointed out before will deepen with an increase in the precariousness of working conditions and remuneration. If this occurs, there may be a worsening of the country's own income distribution, as well as an increase in insecurity among workers, at a time of worsening recession and of the federal government proposing restrictive institutional reforms such as social security.

OUTSOURCING: THE IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

The process of outsourcing involves a tripartite relationship composed by the outsourcing (agency) company, the client organization and the employees (Lilly, Gray & Virick, 2005). Therefore, more than understand the reasons for outsourcing, the pros and cons of it and the consequences of the process in the companies' business, it is fundamental to comprehend its impacts on the employees. Compared to core workers, the outsourced ones tend to receive lower payment and training, have less control over their jobs and the duration of their assignment (Galais & Moser, 2009).

Moreover, in this triple employment relationship, the outsourced worker is in a context of identification with two companies, the organization where they are hired and the temporary place where they offer the service. From the point of view of the formal contract, outsourced employees are part of the staffing agency, however from the perspective of their daily work, they can have a sense of belonging with the client company, as it is where they develop their activities, receive instructions and as they work together with the staff of the client company. This situation can lead to two foci of commitment (Fontinha, Chambel & Cuyper, 2012).

According to Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) the commitment with the client organization can be explained by the relationship of the staff with the contractor and its perception of the client company. The premise is that the commitment with the agency organization can have a favorable impact on client organization commitment, and that it is mediated by how the workers are treated by their contracting company (for example, how their psychological contract is fulfilled). The authors also propose that a positive impression of the client company (how it values the outsourced employees, care about their wellbeing, if it is a good place to work and how good is the relationship between the agency and client organization) can have a positive influence on client commitment.

Given this context where employees can develop a different commitment, the key difficulties of people management is how the area can stimulate outsourced employees and how leaders should deal with these workers (Magalhães *et al*, 2010), knowing that one of the consequences of this process can be the breakdown of the bond between employees and companies (Castro, 2002). Nishii *et al*. (2008) in their study propose that how the workers perceive the reasons why a company develops certain human resource can have an impact on organizational commitment.

Fontinha, Cambel and Cuyper (2012), with the purpose to test the relationship of HR practices and the commitment of workers with the client organization, points out that this relationship is positive when employees perceive the practices as focused on workers

wellbeing and quality strategy. Nevertheless, if the practices are perceived as being stimulated by cost reduction and exploitation, it has a negative impact on commitment. Also, it was verified that commitment with the agency company is positively related with the commitment to the client one, so, even though the foci are different, the two commitments are substantially related to each other.

Other point of the discussion is that cross cultural studies demonstrated that commitment is a phenomenon that diverge according the culture. Casper *et al.* (2011) compares Brazilian and Anglo cultures and their influence on commitment. Supervisor support may be even more important in Brazil than in Anglo cultures. Brazilians are more collective, care more about harmonious relationships, and are more sensitive to hierarchy than Anglo. This combination of collectivism and hierarchy often result in supervisory styles which are highly paternalistic. Given paternalistic leadership is expected in Brazil, one would expect supervisor support to relate to organizational commitment.

In the national context, the results of Fernandes and Carvalho Neto (2005) indicate that, while there is an evolution of HR practices in general, there is a distancing of the treatment to outsourced employees compared to employees hired in aspects such as reward for goals achieved, commitment to results, autonomy and learning. The authors point out that Brazilian companies are unprepared to deal with the complexity arising from the proliferation of professionals with multiple contractual bonds.

Also, studies discussed the commitment to different foci and argued how is the conflict between foci career, organization, union and others. At Brazil, it was observed that academic research in union commitment has declined with a corresponding increase in organizational and career commitment research. It was attributed both trends to Brazil's economic growth (Wasti *et al.* 2016). It demonstrates that commitment to the union grows in times of recession or an environment conducive to rights reduction but improves commitment to organizations in an environment of economic growth.

Another issue concerns the way Brazilian employee deal with work-capital conflict. A way the worker deals with this conflict influenced by his commitment as actions of the organization or with collective actions (unions). The changes in the economic context influence political ideologies and the commitment in the country may reflect a tendency in the changes of psychological contracts, far from the employed relation employed (Wasti *et al.* 2016). Nowadays, Brazil is experiencing a long recession, but also a reduction in the workings of the unions, resulting from the approved labor reform. This can prejudice the worker's ability to bond with the union that could fight for their rights because it will not be as representative as in previous years.

Faced with the arguments about organizational aspects: 1) lower payments, less training and autonomy; 2) the conflict between foci of commitments: commitment to the hiring organization and the client organization; 3) outsourcers' perception that training practices are not directed at them; 4) the expectation of organizational support in a paternalistic culture and 5) the lack of preparation of Brazilian companies for this context of outsourcing, demonstrate that Brazil does not currently have conditions to guarantee the commitment of outsourced employees in the same proportion as contracted employees.

However, structural and institutional aspects also indicate that the impacts of unrestrained outsourcing are negative on society. It is not the reduction of costs that increases the number of jobs, like Brazil in the years of 2002 to 2012. During this period, there was a sharp drop in the unemployment rate and the informal rate, from 9.1% to 6.2%. The decrease in the unemployment rate was due to the strong employment generation, due to the economic

growth and the change in the composition of the sectors that the country experienced with this growth (Moura & Barbosa Filho, 2014).

Therefore, we argue that outsourcing is a cost reduction strategy that works in the short term, but which affects business and society in the long run, with the de-characterization of the labor bond, precariousness of labor and, consequently, psychological bond, the commitment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal of this work is that the law of outsourcing, recently approved in Brazil, will impact negatively the relationship between people and business. The law allows companies to outsource the core activities to reduce costs. Through outsourcing, companies get rid of labor obligations, only needing to manage contracts with outsourced companies. However, this distances the worker from the company for which he or she effectively works, reducing his or her commitment and affecting performance at work.

Analysing individual context, such changes directly impact the way people relate to each other, to organizations, and to their work. Brazilian employees tend to see the work environment as a family environment, which tells a lot about their work bonds. We point out in this paper that in the short term the outsourcing strategy proves important for cost reduction, but in the long term the performance of the non-committed workers can negatively affect then the performance of the company, which is not positive for their sustainability. In Brazilian context, outsourcing reinforces the marginally of the people by the precarization of the world of labor.

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