

## **2005 Conference on Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions**

### **Conference Summary**

*Prepared by:*

*Elfi Ettinger (University of Linz) and Rolf Van Dick (Aston University)*

The first international conference on “Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions” was held from October 28th to 30th, 2005 at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The conference was organized by Howard Klein (Ohio State University), John Meyer (University of Western Ontario), and Thomas Becker (University of Delaware). The response to the call for papers greatly exceeded expectations with submissions received from authors in 16 different countries (48% from outside of North America). Only 30% of the submissions were chosen, resulting in a very strong program consisting of 27 presentations. The goal of the conference was to bring together a community of scholars interested in commitment to present conceptual and empirical work, review the current status of commitment research, and discuss future research directions. Nearly 65 researchers took advantage of the opportunity to fulfill these goals and make strong professional contacts.

The day before the conference officially started, the visiting attendants were offered the opportunity to take part in a guided tour of The Ohio State University and its Stadium (capacity: over 100,000 visitors). Participants were given the chance to informally exchange ideas and socialize at a shared dinner which took place at a restaurant and brewery located in Columbus.

The large presence of notable names enriched the conference. To name a few of the participants: Gary Blau (Temple University); Jacqueline A-M. Coyle-Shapiro (London School of Economics and Political Science); Robert Eisenberger (University of Delaware); Stephen Jaros (Southern University); Paula Morrow (Iowa State University); Denise Rousseau (Carnegie Mellon University); Robert Vandenberg (The University of Georgia); Christian Vandenberghe (École des Hautes Études Commerciales); Rolf Van Dick (Aston University); Arzu Wasti (Sabanci University). Many other researchers, from 8 different countries, also attended.

Organizational commitment is an extensively studied and significant construct within the field of Organizational Behavior and Organizational Psychology. Over the last 40 years, commitment researchers predominantly analyzed the connections between employees and their organization. However, during the conference it was made clear that individuals are increasingly not only experiencing a bond to their organization, but with numerous other foci like colleagues, professions, branches, customers, family, just to name a few. The conference was split into 9 core topics: 1. The Nature of commitment, 2. Methodological and Cultural Considerations, 3. Commitment to Change, 4. Identification and Commitment, 5. Career Commitment and Occupational Commitment, 6. Promise and Commitment, 7. Organizational Influences on Commitment, 8. Multiple Commitments, and 9. Commitment to Other Foci. Each of these 9 core topics was further illustrated by 3 presentations, and included one featured presentation for each topic.

*Thomas Becker* raised captivating issues and inspired the audience to rethink questions such as: "Is commitment those forces which bind or the bond itself?" Becker emphasized that it would be better to conceptualize commitment as a psychological bond rather than a force which binds. Doing something out of necessity creates alienation, not commitment.

*Robert Vandenberg* discussed methodological weaknesses in commitment research and questioned the use of certain accepted analysis procedures. Vandenberg declared that we also need more clarity about the meaning of commitment, its antecedents, and consequences within different cultures.

*John Meyer* described vividly that no change can occur without willing and committed followers. He revealed that employee commitment is essential to effective change in the workplace. Meyer senses upcoming challenges in the development of relevant metrics for workplace commitment. In future, it will be fundamental to understand how multiple foci of commitment relate to each other.

*Rolf Van Dick* showed that identification with the work group and the organization are inter-agitating, and that this supports positive outcomes. If employees identify with the work group as well as with the organization, the resulting job satisfaction is significantly higher than with employees who identify unilaterally with either one or the other foci.

*Gary Blau* introduced new definitions regarding occupational commitment, and reported on his research concerning the connection between this form of commitment and occupational extra-role behavior.

*Denise Rousseau* discussed commitment's relationship with perceived workplace justice. She explained that, for instance, when individual colleagues receive a bonus that is different from the bonus others receive, the commitment of the co-workers may be put at risk.

*Robert Eisenberger* shared results from 3 different studies demonstrating that the impact of favorable work conditions (organizational rewards, justice, and support by supervisors) on affective employee commitment are mediated by perceived organizational support.

*Jacqueline Coyle-Shapiro* and *Paula Morrow* highlighted commitment to multiple organizations within contract employment and other contemporary work relationships. They also discussed the role of social exchange theory as a key mechanism for understanding the development of affective organizational commitment

Concluding, *Howard Klein* argued for the need to reach consensus on the core nature, role, and boundaries of commitment, and asserted that confusion regarding the conceptualization of commitment has hindered our research advancement. Klein also argued for more clearly distinguishing between commitment and the rationales or self-evaluations individuals make about their commitments and for a more intelligible integration of the different research streams on different commitment targets.

Participants agreed that the conference will play an important role in future research and international cooperation. Participants enjoyed receiving insights into different areas of commitment research, and many expressed the desire in repeating conferences on commitment.

The most outstanding contributions and ideas of the conference will be published as an edited book. The conference program can be viewed at: [http://fisher.osu.edu/~klein\\_12/ComConf05/Program.htm](http://fisher.osu.edu/~klein_12/ComConf05/Program.htm)