

# EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AND INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT: AN ANALYSIS FROM INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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## **Abstract**

*Employee empowerment initiatives based on industrial democracy and the principle of participative management reflects a positive link between employee participation and job satisfaction, motivation and performance, individual commitment and organisational achievement. The importance of individual commitment to the bottom line of the organisation is highly essential for improved performance, improved production, higher employee loyalty, increased satisfaction, high quality of product and services, and customer satisfaction. In this paper emphasis is given to systematic review of the previous research works on employee empowerment and workplace commitment and has advanced some models to give clarity on workplace commitment through employee empowerment, commitment and outcomes, strategic empowerment and degree of commitment, and antecedents and outcomes of individual commitment. This paper hopefully contributes to the ongoing discussion of what constitutes empowerment and its impact on individual commitment.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Business organisations in competitive environment are facing major challenges like fast pace of changing technology, acute shortage of skilled manpower, and obsolescence of products and services which are compelling for reorienting of existing employees in order to survive and compete. A highly dedicated and committed workforce is essential for achieving organisational goals (Locke & Latham, 1990; Pinder, 1998). Cut-throat competition and a variety of

challenges in the post-liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG) era have initiated major changes in the human resource (HR) practices. Industrial units have started realising the need to be proactive rather than reactive (Narang & Singh, 2010). Since psychologically empowered workers feel competent and confident to influence their job and work environment in a meaningful way, they are likely to be proactive and innovative (Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie & Morin, 2009). Besides, there is a constant pressure on management to reduce costs and increase productivity, which is possible only through a satisfied and committed workforce.

Empowerment is a process of orienting and enabling individuals to think, behave and take action in an autonomous way. It helps the workers to own their work and take responsibility for their results. Due to technological up-gradation and automation, organisations are dependent on a high degree of creativity and learning attitude of employees which will require individual responsibility and risk taking effort (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1991). According to Kirkman and Rosen (1999), the performance outcomes of empowerment practices are higher productivity, and proactive and superior customer service, while the attitudinal outcomes comprise of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, team commitment, and individual commitment. Similarly, Mullins and Peacock (1991) have pointed out that empowered employees have a greater sense of job satisfaction, motivation and organisational loyalty. A satisfied and committed employee is a valuable asset to the organisation. Such an employee is psychologically attached to his job and is less likely to leave the organisation, takes pride in belonging to the organisation (Kuo, Ho, Lin & Lai, 2009) and makes greater contribution for the success of the organisation. Hence, the HR department of an organisation needs to focus on developing employee competencies and influencing employee behaviour in such a way that employees are satisfied as well as organisational goals being accomplished.

In this paper emphasis has been given to systematic review of previous research works on employee empowerment and workplace commitment and advances some models to give clarity on workplace commitment through employee empowerment, workplace commitment and outcomes, strategic empowerment and commitment, and antecedents and outcomes of individual commitment. This paper will hopefully contribute to the ongoing discussion of what constitutes empowerment and its impact on individual commitment.

## **EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT**

The basic objective of empowerment is redistribution of power between management and employees – most commonly in the form of increasing employee authority, responsibility, and influencing commitment (Handy, 1993;

Spreitzer, 1996; Greasley, Bryman, Dainty, Price, Soetanto & King, 2004). Managers in contemporary organisations pursuing performance improvement typically de-emphasize management control in favour of empowering employees to make work related decisions (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Blackburn & Rosen, 1993; Riordan & Gatewood, 1996; Renn & Fedor, 2001). Individuals feel empowered when they perceive and possess power to adequately cope with events, situations, or people they confront (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). According to Thomas and Velthouse (1990), an employee feels empowered due to a meaningful job, gaining confidence to perform the task, degree of autonomy in decision making, and perceives that the job and individual performance have a positive and vital impact on the organisation. Job autonomy is considered as significantly and positively related to organisational commitment (Westman, 1992; Brown & Peterson, 1994) and performance (Thomas & Tymon, 1994; Dewettinck & Buyens, 2006). Employee empowerment reflects a positive link between employee participation and job satisfaction, motivation and performance, individual commitment and corporate achievement (Doughty, 2004).

An organisation must provide opportunities for employee participation both at the shop floor and at higher levels. Participation improves communication and cooperation among members which contributes towards team-building. It refers to a work team consisting of a group of individuals who work independently to solve problems or perform an assignment (Nijhof, Jong & Beukhof, 1998). These self directed work teams make decisions and then act on those decisions. Empowerment opportunities are limited when employees perform routine, repetitive production and service jobs (Ford & Fottler, 1995; Yukl & Becker, 2006). Job characteristics such as challenging work, variety in tasks, autonomy and high involvement are found to be significantly correlated with employee commitment (Parker, Mullarkey & Jackson, 1994; Ongori, 2009) because they create intrinsic motivation. Re-engineering of jobs is a major intervention of employee empowerment. Both work redesign and empowerment generate positive and direct influence on employees' commitment (Kuo et al., 2009).

For an organisation to be effectively empowered, management must adopt high involvement practices where power, knowledge, information, and rewards are shared with employees in the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). Bogler and Somech (2004) identified six dimensions of empowerment such as: decision-making, professional growth, status, self-efficacy, autonomy and impact. They found professional growth, status and self-efficacy to be significant predictors of organisational and professional commitment. Yukl and Becker (2006) have outlined a few facilitators for effective empowerment: informal organisational structure;

flexible, participative and learning culture; reward and recognition system; non-routine and challenging jobs; access to resources and funds; degree of autonomy and selection of leader; leader as a role model; and mutual trust. If managed effectively, leadership can act as an important driver of the empowerment process (Ahearne, Mathieu & Rapp, 2005).

According to Bramham (1994), a sense of commitment can be developed in employees through the process of de-layering and empowerment. Arnold, Arad, Rhoades and Drasgow (2000) have found that empowering team leaders are giving emphasis to coach, inform, lead by example, show concern, and encourage participative decision-making. Hence, empowered employees report higher job satisfaction (Carless, 2004; Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004; Aryee & Chen, 2006), higher level of commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2000) and fosters innovation and creativity (Carter, 2009). Commitment has been examined as a determinant of job performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004). In fact, the rationale for introducing HR policies is to increase the level of employee commitment so that positive outcomes can ensue (Muthuveloo & Rose, 2005). Work, supervision, and co-workers as well as pay are found to be important elements that influence the level of employees' commitment but better career prospects and opportunities for training and education are found to be positively related to commitment (Caldwell, Chatman & O'Reilly, 1990). These strongly reflect management that must empower their employees so that they can be motivated, committed, and assist the organisation in achieving its objectives.

### **DRIVERS OF WORKPLACE COMMITMENT**

Most of the organisations in the present context have developed and implemented a number of key strategic drivers in a more planned and systematic way to empower their existing employees in order to increase the level of commitment for survival and sustainability of the organisation. But the degree of commitment towards the workplace is highly dependent on employee empowerment and involvement initiatives (Figure 1). Some key aspects that contribute towards development of a favourable climate for enhancing empowerment in organisations include:

- **Span of supervision:** It results in widening the span of control (Spreitzer, 1996) thereby, providing the employees greater freedom and control over their work (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).
- **HR Policies:** Emphasis on multi-skilling which will result in higher job flexibility and breadth of experience and confidence in multiple job-related skills (Guzzo, Yost, Campbell & Shea, 1993).
- **Role clarity:** It has been observed that role ambiguity and role overload reduced feelings of empowerment. Management should therefore ensure

clarity regarding defining jobs, work procedures, performance expectation, and areas of responsibility (Seibert et al., 2004).

- Challenging job: Successive increments in task complexity and responsibility along with training to acquire new skills makes an individual feel more capable of performing his job and therefore, empowered (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).
- Reward and recognition: Employees feel empowered when their efforts and contributions are recognised (Psoinos & Smithson, 2002). Rewards help to keep the workforce in high productive mode and provide greater level of satisfaction (Cunningham, Hyman & Baldry, 1996; Bushe, Havlovic & Koetzer, 1996).
- Attitude of top management: Empowerment must initiate from the top (Ripley & Ripley, 1992) and top management of an empowering organisation must be open-minded, trust building, and maintain transparency which are highly essential for effective empowerment (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).
- Supportive leadership: Employee centered leadership is crucial for sustaining continuous improvement of empowerment in organisations (Hamish, 2004).
- Upward performance appraisal: Obtaining employees' feedback through upward performance appraisal may also prove to be an effective empowerment mechanism. Providing feedback to an individual is relevant to improve his/her performance and competence (Dewettinck & Buyens, 2006).
- Access to information and other resources: Employees at lower levels of an organisational hierarchy can be empowered if they are granted access to opportunity, information, support and resources (Rothstein, 1995; Spreitzer, 2007).

Employee involvement defines and describes how business units can improve their performance by cultivating employee interest and dedication. Major efforts to involve employees in meaningful ways include:

- Joint decision making: Spreitzer (2007) argued that decisions can better be made by involving those who are likely to be affected by the decision. Employees may participate in goal-setting, designing a job or deciding the time required for completion of a routine task.
- Collective Bargaining: Collective bargaining may be described as a democratic decision making process and an institution for regulating bipartite relations in industry (Patil, 1993).
- Job enrichment: Increased complexity in a job requires more thought and involvement in it, thereby resulting in more contribution from the job holder (Griffin, 1991). Job enrichment is a widely practised empowerment

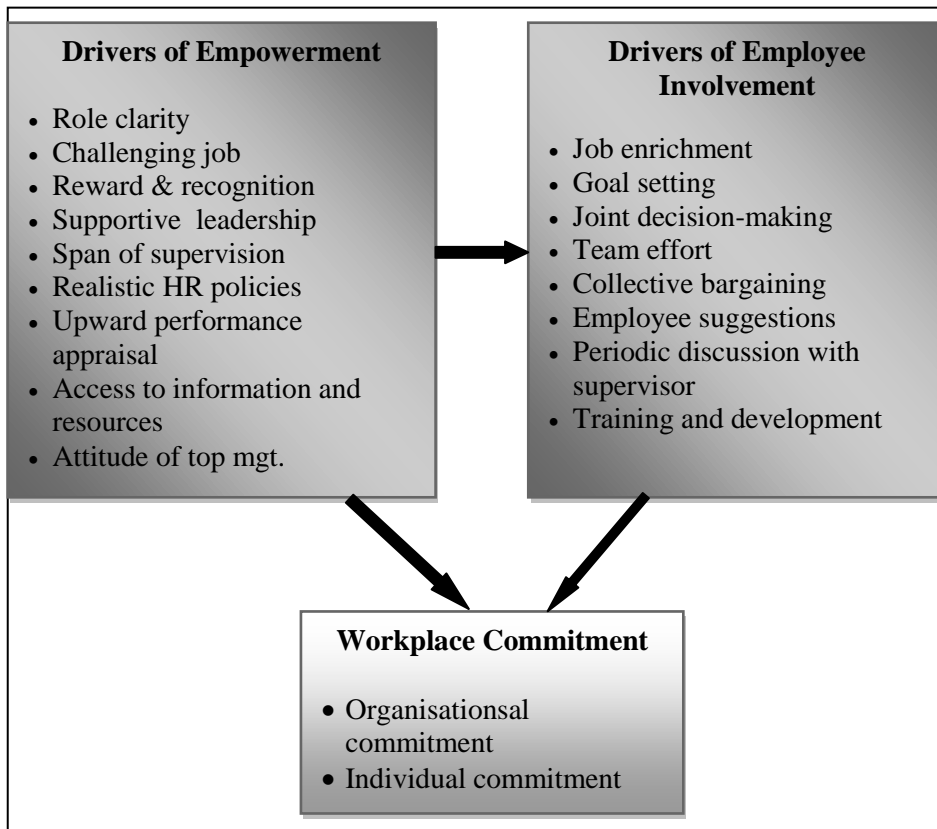
mechanism in high performance organisations because it involves more effective use of skills and knowledge.

- Goal setting: When teams set production targets and schedules, monitor customer feedback, get trained for quality improvement and assume ownership for the completion of an assigned task, they have high production/service responsibility and are hence, empowered (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).
- Employee suggestions: Individual employees possess innumerable innovative ideas regarding improvement of work methods, material and cost-reduction and time-saving (Mills & Ungson, 2003).
- Team effort: Teams responsible for quality of products or services frequently collect data to measure discrepancies and take corrective measures to ensure improved quality, thereby, gaining autonomy and discretion over their job (Guzzo et al., 1993).
- Encouraging initiative: Outstanding performance by an empowered employee cannot be achieved without risk taking. (Mills & Ungson, 2003). At the same time, care must be taken to reward and appreciate the initiatives taken, even though they may not always be successful.
- Training and development: Empowerment initiatives invariably create the need for new skills in various fields. Training and development are the means to assist employees to increase their strength in one or more knowledge areas (Guzzo et al., 1993).
- Periodic discussion with supervisor: Regular meetings may be conducted at the workplace which provide a platform for the employees to voice their feelings and opinions. Employees should also be encouraged to ask questions and discuss day to day work related problems.

An empowering organisation emphasizes autonomy, recognition, rewards, management support and encouragement, proper information and individual participation for organisational excellence.

### **STRUCTURE OF WORKPLACE COMMITMENT**

Commitment to the organisation is related positively to a variety of desirable work outcomes including employee job satisfaction, motivation, and performance, and related negatively to absenteeism and turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Workplace commitment includes both organisational commitment and individual commitment (Fornes, Rocco & Wollard, 2008). Organisational commitment is defined as the psychological and emotional attachment of employees to their respective organisations (Morrow, 1993) while individuals committed to the organisation exert extra effort, desire organisational membership, protect company assets, and share company goals and values (Meyer & Allen, 1997).



**Figure 1: Empowerment, Involvement and Workplace Commitment**

*Source: Authors' own*

Organisational commitment includes supervisory, attitudinal and calculative commitment which depends on organisational attributes such as values and organisational behaviours. Supervisory commitment is defined as the strength of identification and recognition with the supervisor and the internalisation of the supervisor's values. Internalization occurs when the subordinate adopts the attitudes and behaviours of the supervisor because the supervisor's attitudes and behaviours are congruent with the subordinate's value systems (Gregersen & Black, 1993). Attitudinal commitment is the employee's emotional attachment and identification with the organisational commitment (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993). Employees continue with the organisation because they want to do so and feel proud to be part of the organisation, respecting its values and accomplishments. Calculative commitment, also referred to as continuance and compliance, signifies the extent to which

employees feel committed to their organisation by virtue of the cost that they feel is associated with leaving it and their need to remain with the organisation (Becker, 1992).

Individual employee commitment is guided by attributes that directly affect the person and is defined as the psychological and emotional attachment of individuals to their jobs, careers, work groups or teams, and peers (Cohen, 2003). Individual commitment is the strength of the employee's identification with the values of other individuals and peers within the organisation - team commitment, and his/her work - job commitment, and careers - career commitment. Team commitment is an individual's identification and sense of cohesiveness with other members of a group which enhances social involvement and reinforces the degree of affiliation of individuals with the organisation (Randal & Cote, 1991). Job commitment is the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his/her work. Career commitment is defined as the magnitude of an individual's motivation, attitude, affect, belief, and behavioural intentions toward an occupation or the degree of centrality of one's career to one's identity (Blau, 1995). Employees with strong organisational commitment are emotionally attached to the organisation and have a greater desire to contribute meaningfully to the organisation. Individual commitment and commitment to work groups improves team performance, pro-social behaviour and group cohesion, and enhances individual job performance and satisfaction (Gunz & Gunz, 1994). Those committed to their jobs and careers are absent less and have lower intentions to quit, increased job satisfaction, and increased intrinsic motivation (Figure 2).



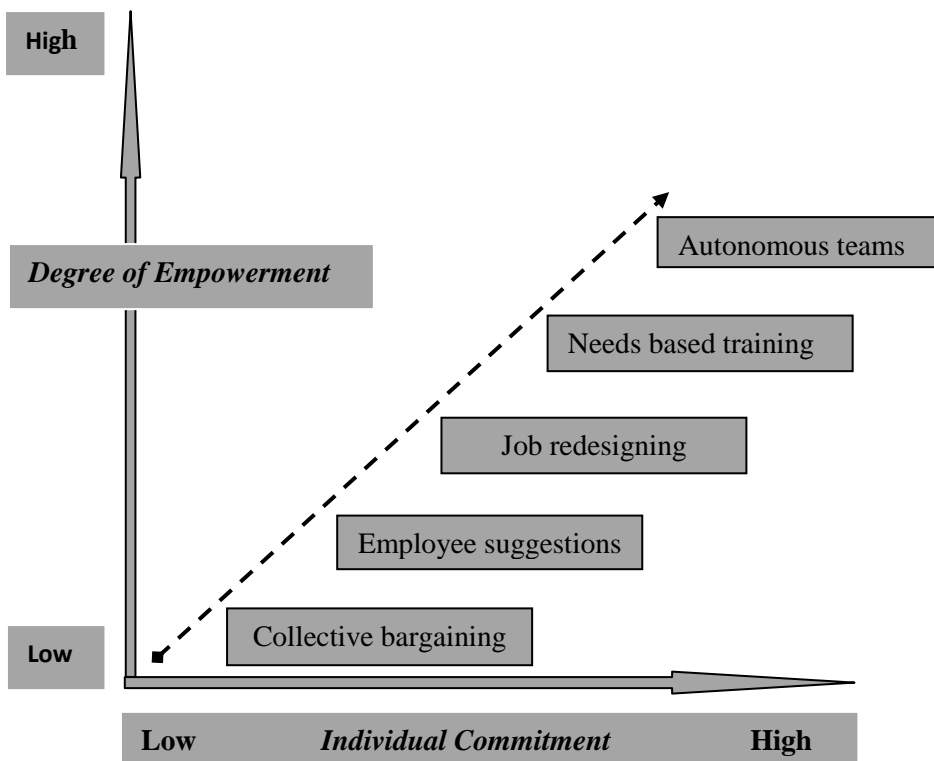
**Figure 2: Framework of Commitment**

*Source: Authors' own*



### DEGREE OF COMMITMENT

Commitment is a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Previous studies have concluded that organisational commitment predicts important variables such as absenteeism, organisational citizenship, performance and turnover. Employee commitment can be enhanced by providing a participative climate that supports employee development programmes and by creating a positive organisational culture that believes in trust, confidence, openness, and transparency. Employee empowerment is one such strategy implemented by organisations to develop workplace commitment among the employees. Employees are more committed when they can be empowered through involvement programmes such as greater emphasis on collective bargaining, offering encouragement for suggestions, attempts made towards job redesigning and needs based training, and giving autonomy to teams (Figure 3).



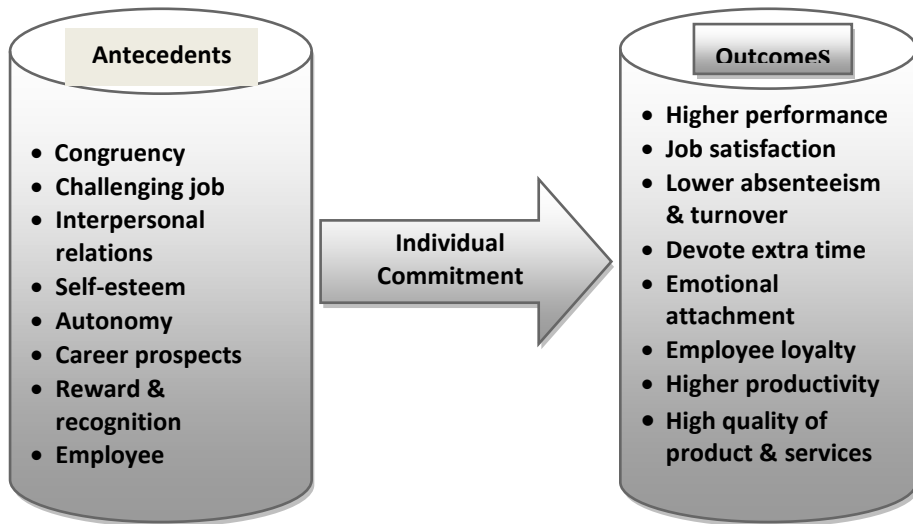
**Figure 3: Strategic Empowerment and Commitment**

*Source: Authors' own*

## **INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT**

Commitment has been considered both as a dependent and an independent variable. As an independent variable, it significantly influences employee turnover, intent to quit, job satisfaction, and individual as well as organisational performance. The antecedents to individual commitment such as congruency, feedback and recognition, autonomy and interesting work lead to meaningfulness of work, career, peers, and self by creating an attachment to the job along with individual commitment (Fornes et al., 2008). Job characteristics such as task identity, skill variety, task significance, and autonomy will increase motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. Those committed to their jobs and careers are absent less and have lower intentions to quit, increased job satisfaction, and increased intrinsic motivation (Bishop & Scott, 1997). Committed employees are likely to perform high quality work; they are willing to devote extra time to solve complex problems (Kuo et al., 2009) and provide better service to their customers. Employees who are emotionally attached to their workplace feel happy and proud of their work. As a result, they show low propensity to quit the organisation or to remain absent from work. This helps to reduce the cost of recruitment and training. Such employees are loyal, resourceful and innovative. They give extra effort and go beyond scheduled time for raising the profitability of their organisation (Lynch, Eisenberger & Armeli, 1999). They are also risk-takers and enjoy accepting new and difficult tasks. Carter (2009) concluded from his study that more responsibility generates a higher productivity, morale and commitment. Lawler, Mohrman and Ledford (1995) conclude that commitment and involvement have positive effects on productivity, quality and competitiveness. Gallie and White (1993) found that committed employees are more satisfied and individuals with low organisational commitment are primarily interested in pursuing self-interest while those with high organisational commitment consider the achievement of organisational goals as important.

Employee commitment and job involvement affect job satisfaction, turnover intention, role stress, productivity, and job migration (Gunz & Gunz, 1994). Hence, the outcomes of employee commitment can be summarized as better performance, less absenteeism, high productivity and company's enhanced image and market share. Employees who receive formal career management help from their employers reported higher levels of individual commitment (Sturges, Guest, Conway & MacKenzie Davey, 2002). Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between the antecedents of individual commitment and outcomes. Antecedents precede the employee perception stimulating commitment and outcomes which influence individual and organisational success.



**Figure 4: Antecedents and Outcomes of Individual Commitment**

*Source: Authors' own*

## CONCLUSION

It has been observed that employee empowerment initiatives lead toward employee satisfaction. Employee wellbeing measures motivate individual employees and inspire a person to succeed. Self-goal setting and self-leadership characterise empowered employees as they know company goals and their roles within those goals. Hence, empowered employees become competent and committed to the company. In the highly competitive environment, employee empowerment is essential to be more competitive, productive and gaining competitive advantages for all-round development of the organisation. Employees should be empowered because it is through empowerment that an organisation will develop a culture which reflects employee commitment in order to survive, grow, compete, and face challenges posed by globalisation with confidence.

Managers must give due attention to several measures in their respective organisations for effectively empowering employees such as: realign management systems consistent with empowerment principles; clearly define goals and objectives, responsibilities and authority for important work activities; employee involvement; listen to dissenting views without getting defensive and be tactful in expressing concerns about a suggestion; removal of bureaucratic constraints and unnecessary controls; and recognise important

contributions and achievements and ensure that rewards are commensurate with new responsibilities.

If commitment behaviour is not transferred from individuals and subgroups to the total organisation, dysfunctional behaviour can exist among individual employees whose goals are in conflict with the goals of the organisation (Cohen, 2003; Yukl & Becker, 2006). When the employee is committed at both levels, optimal organisational and individual performance occurs and individual employee satisfaction increases. When employees are neither committed to the organisations nor to the job, career, or work group, distress within the organisation leads to organisational performance problems and low-performing workers. When employees are committed to the organisation, but not committed at the individual level or committed at the individual level, but not committed at the organisational level, conflict between organisational and individual values and goals leads to stagnant or lower than expected performance (Fornes et al., 2008). The importance of individual commitment to the bottom line of the organisation needs to be considered one of the determining factors in which the organisation will make the changes needed to increase it. Furthermore, human resource (HR) practitioners must help their organisational leaders understand the importance of outcomes of individual commitment: improved performance, improved production, higher employee loyalty, increased satisfaction, high quality of product and services, and customer satisfaction. If HR practitioners fail to step up and command the approaches that build commitment, they may be hijacked by business processes that quickly undermine the hard work of building commitment—creating equity, fairness, autonomy, giving feedback and recognition, designing interesting work, and having clear congruency between organisational mission and values and personal needs.

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