

Three Predictors of African American Male Faculty's Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

Survey responses from 74 participants were obtained from African American males employed full time as university faculty members across the United States. A multiple regression was performed to assess the effects of the three predictors: organizational culture, job involvement and prejudice across context on organizational commitment. Pearson correlations were computed to determine the relationship between organizational culture, job involvement, and prejudice across context on organizational commitment. Organizational commitment and organizational culture were significant: [$r(74) = 0.31, p \leq 0.006$]. This study indicated high levels of organizational culture were related to high levels of organizational commitment for African American male faculty.

Keywords: African American men, racial discrimination and organizational commitment.

Introduction

This research emerged from a desire to better understand the experiences of male African American faculty members. This study explored the effects of organizational culture, job involvement and prejudice across context, on job commitment. This research also addressed the structure of the work culture, and behaviors of colleagues directly supporting and/or impacting the ability of African American men to positively embrace their work environments (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998).

Over the past three decades, the number of African Americans receiving doctoral degrees has declined (DePalma, 1992; Maton & Hrabowski, 2004; Shears, Lewis, & Furman, 2003). A decrease in the number of African American graduate students enrolled in Ph.D. programs leads to fewer African American university and college professors. Studies have shown African American professors positively enrich their students and the overall academic environment. Positive effects include academic and social integration, knowledge and skills development,

support and motivation, and mentoring and advising (Maton, Kohout, Wicherski, Leaty, & Vinokurov, 2006; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Shears et al., 2003).

Academic and social integration alludes to the context of support provided by the community (Herman, 2009). This support is structural, cultural, and environmentally specific. The construct informs and influences identity development and behaviors (Herman, 2009; McMahan, 2007). The presence of African American professors indirectly supports African American students (Maton et al., 2006). This support integrates first-hand experiences and culturally literate practices into personal interaction. Students might not otherwise experience such in a traditional university setting absent of African American faculty and administrators. This indirect, familiar, and culturally literate support often leads to higher graduation rates for African American students and thus, larger pools of possible African American faculty and administrators (Maton et al., 2006; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Shears et al., 2003).

African American faculty members employed in White academic institutions frequently report low levels of job commitment and leave their positions for various reasons, often related to perceived racial inequities. African American professors and students at majority White academic institutions commonly report experiencing a multi-layered sense of social isolation which stretches across communities, including but not limited to: academic, general work environment, as well as the inter-personal environment (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Shears et al., 2003). The experience of solo status was identified by Niemann and Dovidio (1998), "Thus, racial/ethnic minorities who have occupational distinctiveness in academia are likely to suffer from the negative effects of this distinctiveness, especially when they have solo positions in their departments" (p. 66). Niemann and Dovidio reported, "Relatedly, the results of this study also supported literature indicating that the experiences of persons with observable, as oppose to non-observable, differences are subjectively unique" (p. 66). In other words, African American faculty members were at greater risk of discrimination because of their visual racial distinctiveness. Niemann and Dovidio's work concludes, many White administrators and faculty members believed that few, if any, of the minority faculty working at universities and colleges were truly qualified for their jobs. These findings provided insight into purported feelings of discrimination and unfair treatment of African American faculty members with solo status at primarily White educational institutions.

Issues of gender and race further affect African American male faculty members' level of job commitment. Although unable to specify the expressed difference of perceived racial discrimination between men and women, Sellers and Shelton's (2003) findings revealed that male descendants of the African Diaspora reported more frequent experiences of perceived racial discrimination than females. Sellers and Shelton reinforced the findings of Sidanius and Veniegas (2000) regarding the negative effects of multiple stigmas often referred to as double jeopardy. However, both sets of researchers indicated that one must first consider the more nuanced possibility that stigmas can be and are interactive rather than simply cumulative.

Factors challenging African Americans' job commitment (minority status, perceived racism, and low levels of job satisfaction) were considered by Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, and Jackson (2008). Their research found that minority status, especially on academic campuses, can result in low performance, low job satisfaction and lower levels of perceived psychological safety. These findings supported the work of Nieman and Dovidio (1998) and suggested that minority status had a more pronounced effect on individuals who were members of groups that were already stigmatized. Both studies confirmed the low levels of job satisfaction consistently reported by African American faculty, regardless of rank.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to the emotional ties that bind the individual and the organization. These ties are established and maintained through the individual's commitment to the goals and values of the organization. Organizational commitment is a significant factor in predicting employee retention rates (Ashman, 2007). Lok and Crawford (2003) found that high levels of organizational commitment positively correlate to high levels of employee performance. Organizational commitment was also found to be a predictor of workplace behaviors. This construct was linked with the level of employee contribution and employee withdrawal intentions. Age, position, and tenure were also positively related to organizational commitment. These findings further support the general belief that organizational commitment renders homogeneous findings when coupled with other qualitative tools. Due to the highly complex nature of the construct of organizational commitment, researchers have often organized this construct into a "multiple-dimensional construct"; however, organizational commitment is most often used as the measure of attitudinal approaches associated with variables of interest (Lok & Crawford, 2000).

Organizational Commitment and Job Involvement

The Job Involvement Scale developed by Kanungo (1982) considered a person's psychological identification with their work as central to their personal identity (Wyk, Boshoff, & Cilliers, 2003). These researchers formulated that identification with a job role indicates the priority placed on work within their overall life context. High levels of job involvement often result in higher levels of productivity and efficiency. The psychological identification with one's job is traditionally an indicator of job involvement. Yet until the development of Kanungo's model, researchers focused on the relationship between performance and self-esteem, as well as the value of work as related to one's self images. These researchers decided that a redefinition of the term, job involvement, would help further clarify the tools required to properly evaluate one's level of job involvement and close the gap between the working definition of job involvement and the actual instrument used to measure this construct. Unique with the research of Wyk, Boshoff, and Cilliers is their consideration of variables such as dedication, lifestyle integration, career orientation, locus of control and self-concept. This approach clarified the significance of viewing job involvement in light of the process of mentally identifying with one's job (Wyk, et al).

Boyce and Franklin's (1996) research on organizational learning illustrated the importance of the cognitive process defining the path towards psychological discovery, especially if the learning informs how one identifies to one's work. This research illustrated how the factors isolated in Kanungo's (1979) job involvement scale directly informed the performance of the employees. Their research also directed attention to the psychological factors outlined in Kanungo's job involvement scale. Boyce and Franklin suggested that once the psychological factors are adjusted as a result of the introduction of a new kind of learning, an individual's learning processes can reproduce itself through the expression, reception, and sharing of mental models within an organization. These researchers formulated the position that identification with work is actually another kind of learning, which corresponds with other types of learning impacting values. Kin (1993) explained organizational learning as, "the process

through which individual learning becomes embedded in an organization's memory and structure 'is' at the heart of organizational learning" (p. 37). In this way, one distinguishes a natural progression from the psychological identification on the part of the individual to the collective and begins to understand how a culture within an organizational context is developed.

Organizational Commitment and Organizational Culture

The Organizational Culture Scale developed by Deshpande, Farley, and Webster (1993) measured the patterns of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptations and internal integration and the propensity to teach these patterns to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to the identified problems (Lok & Crawford, 2000). Lok and Crawford proposed that cultural dynamics, by nature, tend to influence every aspect of personal life and impact performance by resetting expectations that pertain to behavior, conduct and attitudes. However, upon the careful critique of organizational culture—values, beliefs and assumptions are often revealed as structures that assert the presence of systematic behavior pertaining to the organization of this mental construct (Carmeli, 2005).

Culture has been considered a significant component of the organization management field since Hofstede (1980) developed his four culture dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity. These four categories were the result of a worldwide survey distributed between 1967 and 1973 to more than 116,000 employees of multinational corporations. Hofstede explained power distance as the relationship of power hierarchies as viewed by the individual. Power distance examines whether or not power (the power to control financial, legal, and educational resources) is the right of all in a society or a select few? Uncertainty avoidance speaks to a society's need for clarity and certainty. The individualism-collectivism category addresses the extent to which humanity is expressed through support efforts and is considered a social norm through society. Hofstede uses occidental notions of masculinity to categorize other societal views of gender dimension.

Pettigrew (1979) suggested the consideration of "culture as the source of a family of concepts" (i.e. symbols, language, ritual and myth). This reasoning is in line with Hofstede's views and is similar to that of an anthropologist who is driven by historical, communal, and tacit features which define culture and are difficult to isolate, identify, and/or change (Carmeli, 2005). Argyis (1999) proposed that organizational culture provides the platform from which much of the organization's learning takes place. Accordingly, culture impacts learning, which nourishes an organization, and can disrupt feedback systems, which monitor productivity and connect the organization to external customers and the environment.

Carmeli (2005) considered the relationship between organizational culture and withdrawal intentions. Organizational culture serves as a gauge by which one can measure the degree of fit, between the individual and the organization. Although job skills and experience are usually considered key determinants in the selections process for hiring new employees, research conducted by Carmeli redirects one's focus towards the degree of fit between one's individual personal values. Thus, shifting one's perspective towards the attitudes and/or values of the individual, while consequently, placing a special emphasis on the degree of compatibility between the individual and organizational values.

Organizational Commitment and Prejudice Across Context

Krieger (1999) examined the Measures of Prejudice Across Context Scale developed by Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1990). Krieger provided insight into the scale's functionality by highlighting its ability to detect perceived discriminatory interactions between individuals—whether in their institutional roles as employers/employees or as public or private individuals. Cohen (1993) espoused the view that the field of human resource development should consider the effects of non-work influences upon performance. Jasinkaja-Lahti, Liebkind, and Perhoniemi (2006) found that non-work influences such as perceived racial discrimination have far reaching effects that negatively impact performance.

The agreed upon definition of racism used by most psychologists is the belief, attitude, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotype characteristics or ethnic groups affiliations (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Brondolo, Kelly, Coakley, Gordon, Thompson, & Levy, 2005). The production of notions of race as a social-cultural construct within the body-politic of the United States is a topic which is far too dynamic to be addressed in this study (Adams, & Sanders, 2003; Collins, 2009; Hooks, 1992; Jackson, 2008). However, this study addressed some often overlooked components (historical, economical and cultural), which may have altered the perspective within the American psyche as related to the issue of race. The most significant of which would be the verdict of the *Punch* case of 1660 (Adams & Sanders, 2003).

Punch was a legal case in the State of Virginia that changed the status of African slaves, from indentured slaves to that of perpetual slaves (Adams & Sanders, 2003; Blackburn, 1997; Klarman, 2004; William, 1944). The verdict from this case did more than revise legislation. The verdict psychologically legitimized the transformation of African people into products, compromising their humanity through systematic means, in this case, legal and economic systems (Adams & Sanders, 2003; Blackburn, 1997; Klarman, 2004; William, 1944). Hence, the systematic, economic, and psychological oppression of African people (only considered here in brief), was, and is, often collapsed into racial presumptions. Not only has the origins of slavery historically been coordinated through power centers within government (as evidenced by the *Punch* case), research shows this was premeditated, exploitive by nature, decidedly hostile and specifically directed towards people of the African Diaspora for the purpose of financial gain (Adams & Sanders, 2003; Blackburn, 1997; Klarman, 2004; William, 1944). Blackburn further argued that if one is to understand the formation of the construct of race in the minds of African American men one must have an intimate understanding of the pretense from which the construct has evolved. Brondolo, et al. (2005, p. 155) also suggested “the psychological correlations of racism may vary depending on the socio-cultural history of the group.”

Some factors associated with perceived racial discrimination are depression, anxiety, and attitudinal variables such as: dispositional hostility and cynicism (Brondolo et al., 2005). These attitudinal variables resulting from perceived racial discrimination often have a negative effect on organizational commitment (Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Hargrow, 2001). The links between attitudinal variables are obvious when one considers organizational commitment “as the measure of attitudinal approaches associated with variables of interest” (Lok & Crawford, 2000, p. 596). Franklin-Jackson and Carter found trauma, general psychological distress, cultural mistrust, poor quality of life, and depression as negative outcomes of perceived racial discrimination. Franklin-Jackson and Carter's research illustrated that African Americans who

experienced racism on either the individual, institutional or social/cultural level also experienced (whether consciously or subconsciously) physical and psychological stressors.

Recent research conducted by Geronimus, Hickens, Keene, and Bound (2006) suggested the negative overall health consequences (both physical and psychological) of continued racial discrimination as experienced over a lifetime. This process of extreme exposure to high levels of racism was referred to as “weathering.” Similar to any natural material left to experience high levels of exposure to corrosive extremes such as temperature, weather, or ultra-violet rays, the human psyche and human body can also experience a similar level of deterioration as a result of high levels of exposure to racism. Geronimus et al. (2006) found the effects of weathering to be more profound in “Blacks engaged in high-effort coping” (p. 826). This notion of “weathering” acknowledged racism as comparable to any other form of physical and psychological violence, possibly differentiating itself only in the speed of articulations and the quality of respect victims are denied.

The effects of racism have been clearly documented and studied in the past by numerous researchers, yet the structural systems of power which reinforces and sustains racism, have often been overlooked (Collins, 2009; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Geronimus et al., 2006; Jackson, 2008; Jasinkaja-Lahti et al., 2006). Swanson and Holton III (2001) found that “Performance systems are simply purposeful systems that have a special mission. All organizations are performance systems, but some performance systems are not organizations” (p. 137). Collins (2009) developed the Domain of Power framework to organize one’s understanding of racism within a system’s paradigm and to help talk about racism during what she terms the post-Civil Rights period (1980 to the present); where color blind racism is expressed in more systematic and structural ways that lack the full frontal assault of the pre-Civil Rights era. Jackson (2008) explains this transitional moment in history as “the moment when America went from de jure to de facto racism, from a racism steeped in the law to a racism that perpetuated itself without the same degree of explicit resources to our legal system” (p. 43). Jackson went even further to say that in this day of de facto racism the real question or real concern is what lies in people’s hearts. When political correctness is the mask that informs social performance, who is to be trusted? For how is anyone to truly know what others beliefs, values and attitudes are? Jackson continued, “Social analysts should take note of the features of this need, this search for de cardio racism, seriously—this racism attributed to the hearts of other—than—explicitly racist actors” (p.78).

Brown (1996) suggested that organizational commitment develops from a “combination of work experiences, perception of the organization and personal characteristics.” Relationships between the predictors (perceived racial discrimination, job involvement, and organizational culture, on the degree of organizational commitment) align with Brown’s notions of how various factors influence organizational commitment. However, little, if any, research has been conducted that considers other factors that might impact commitment. Studies that have focused on racial and ethnic differences often fail to consider the multi-dimensional dynamic of racial difference. Additionally, minimal attention has been given to how racial/ethnic differences manifest themselves within the organizations through psychological processes that supports racist behaviors and work place discrimination.

Research Design

Four self-administered surveys were used to collect data. The surveys not only included basic demographic information, but they also focused on the participant’s level of perceived racial discrimination, job involvement, organizational culture and organizational commitment. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the influences of the independent variables, perceived racial discrimination, organizational culture and job involvement and the effects they have on African American men’s level of organizational commitment, while working in institutions of higher learning. The primary analysis was regression, which permits analysis of the relationship between large numbers of variables within a given study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The regression analysis determined the effects of single predictor or a combination of predictors upon the reviewed pattern of behavior (Spiegel & Stephens, 2008).

Descriptive Data for Demographic Information

Data from electronically distributed surveys, completed by African American men, employed at institutions of higher learning were analyzed. Of the 589 surveys, electronically distributed, 74 (12.5%) were completed. All participants were male, Black, had their doctorate degree and worked at an institution of higher learning.

Table 1 shows the variability of participants’ ages. The majority of participants, 31 (41.9 %) were between 36 and 45 years of age.

Table 1
Age Distribution of African-American Males with Completed Questionnaires

Number	Frequency	Percent
Age 25 and Under	1	1.3%
Age 26 to 35	12	16.2%
Age 36 to 45	31	41.9%
Age 46 to 55	10	14.9%
Age 56 to 65	14	18.9%
Age 65 and Older	5	6.8%

Research Findings

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was performed to assess the strength of the relationship between the variable, organizational commitment and the variables:

job involvement, organizational culture, and perceived racial discrimination. This process is used to determine how well a linear or other correlation describes or explains the relationship between variables (Spiegel & Stephens, 2008). Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between organizational commitment, job involvement, organizational culture, and prejudice across context. Organizational culture was the only variable that was significantly correlated with organizational commitment [$r(74) = 0.315, p \leq 0.006$]. However, only 9.6% of the variance in organizational commitment was accounted for by the variable organizational culture.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Organizational Commitment, Job Involvement, Organizational Culture and Prejudice Across Context

	OCo	JI	OC	PAC
Organizational Commitment (OCo)				
Pearson Correlation	1			
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0			
N	74			
Job Involvement (JI)				
Pearson Correlation	.160	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.174	0.0		
N	74	74		
Organizational Culture (OC)				
Pearson Correlation	.315**	.335**	1	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.004	0.0	
N	74	74	74	
Prejudice Across Context (PAC)				
Pearson Correlation	-.129	.095	-.129	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.273	.422	.274	0.0
N	74	74	74	74

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

A regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the dependent variable organizational commitment and the independent variables: job involvement, organizational culture, and prejudice across context. The results displayed in Table 3, show the largest variance occurred in organizational culture. Similarly, the scores on organizational commitment, and prejudice across context reflected a wide variance within the population. The variance of African American male faculty's level of job involvement was lower than all of the other variables measured, which suggests this variable's score was reflective of a cohesive outlook on job involvement.

Table 3
Standard Deviations of Organizational Commitment, Job Involvement, Organizational Culture and Prejudice Across Context

Variable	Standard Deviation
Organizational Commitment	47.4189
Job Involvement	29.0270
Organizational Culture	50.1757
Prejudice Across Context	43.6730

The Beta coefficients show to what extent the variables: job involvement, organizational culture, and prejudice across context influenced organizational commitment. Since the prejudice across context had a different measurement than all of the other scales the Beta coefficient was especially important to consider. The Beta coefficient for organizational culture was 0.27. This Beta coefficient shows that organizational culture had the most significant effect on organizational commitment in African American male faculty employed at colleges and universities. The resulting equation from the unstandardized variables is: organizational commitment score = 36.112 + (0.101) (job involvement score) + (0.203) (organizational culture) - (0.042) (prejudice across context discrimination). Based on these findings the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4
Coefficients for All Predictors

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	36.112	5.687		6.35	0.000
Job Involvement	0.101	0.159	0.077	0.636	0.527
Organizational Culture	0.203	0.089	0.276	2.275	0.026
Prejudice Across Context	-0.042	0.048	-0.101	-0.878	0.383

Summary of Results

The null hypothesis stated no correlations exist between the three predictors: job involvement, organizational culture, and prejudice across context, on the variable organizational commitment. The correlation matrix yielded a significant correlation of $r [(74) = 0.315, p \leq 0.05]$, between organizational commitment and organizational culture. This correlation suggests that high levels of organizational culture were related to the organizational commitment scores. These findings support the rejection of the null hypothesis. Correlation and multiple regression analysis indicated that one variable (organizational culture) was significantly associated with organizational commitment. The analysis demonstrated that organizational commitment and prejudice across context were related to organizational culture.

Conclusions

This study builds upon previous research that examined organizational commitment in African American male faculty. Additionally, this research provides new insights on African American male faculty's level of organizational commitment by examining levels of prejudice across context, job involvement and organizational culture. Although much research has focused on the area of mentorship and the education pipeline as such pertains to minorities, there is a paucity of research chronicling the career paths of African American men who have received their doctoral degrees (Warde, 2009). Based on this study's research findings, universities and colleges interested in recruiting and retaining African American male faculty will need to consider the overall organizational culture which defines their institutions as well as the interaction and overlap between departments, professions, and surrounding communities.

Discussion

The levels of prejudice across context scale, though not statistically significant, were negatively correlated with organizational commitment. The higher the score on the prejudice across context scale, the lower the score on the organizational commitment scale. These findings suggest that if a male African American faculty member experiences discriminated at their college or university of employment, he is less likely to be committed to that organization. Therefore, academic institutions need to look at their policies and practices that are or appear to be discriminatory. This finding supports the observed relationship between organizational commitment and organizational culture; especially when one views prejudice across context as another form of cultural expression.

Job involvement and organizational culture were positively correlated. Since job involvement considers the psychological fit of one's profession, one can plausibly argue that in a profession where knowledge production, promotion, and professional standing are subjected to a peer-review process, one would view the effects of organizational culture and job involvement as relevant and reciprocating. These findings also suggest that when the rules for faculty are clearly and consistently enforced, job involvement and organizational commitment levels will be higher among African American male faculty members.

Recommendations

A future mixed method's study which considers the possible correlations between culture and the predictors: prejudice across context, job involvement and organizational commitment; coupled with a qualitative research studies method, such as phenomenology, would allow for a more nuanced exploration into the lived experiences of African American men working within the academic institutions.

One of the three major paradigms within human resource development is the meaning of work paradigm. This paradigm considers how individuals make meaning in reference to their work life. Since job involvement considers one's psychological fit with their chosen occupation, the meaning of work paradigm might further help one understand why the levels of job involvement were so low in this study. The meaning of work paradigm also connotes the negative attributes associated with the extraction of meaning from work. The research participants throughout this study reported these experiences. Many of these tenure survivors went so far as to report how their workplace mobbing experiences resulted in a decreased sense of psychological safety (Dirkx, 1995; Duffy, & Sperry, 2007; Goffman, 1963; Roberts, Vines, Kaufman, & James, 2007). Future studies should examine the connection between the reported lower levels of job involvement as they relate to the meaning of work paradigm.

Final Considerations

Although three variables were considered as possible predictors of organizational commitment, significant variance was not explained. Other explanatory variables need to be postulated and examined. The need for further research focusing on the experiences of African American males within the academy is apparent. One would anticipate that such research will promote further exploration into the factors that impact the levels of organizational commitment and the significance of organizational culture on African American men who work in higher education. One would also presume that further research would examine the differences in reported levels of discrimination within other minority populations.

Furthermore, the findings in this study supported the research hypothesis of multiple correlations between the three predictors (prejudice across context, job involvement, and organizational culture) on the degree of organizational commitment of African American male faculty. The result of this research demonstrated a positive correlation between the levels of organizational commitment and organizational culture for African American men working in the academy. The goal of this research is to provoke more complex quantitative and qualitative research focused on the experiences of African American men within academic institutions.

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