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The effect of psychological ownership on organisational commitment

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Article Info

Abstract

Many scholars have extended the theory of psychological ownership as it relates to employee behaviour in organisations, although only a handful of studies have examined the components of psychological ownership that impact an organisation. This study aims to verify the relationship between psychological ownership and organisational commitment, while scrutinising the main factors (constructs) in psychological ownership affecting organisational commitment. This study used survey responses collected from 349 staff members at a state-owned Thai telecommunications enterprise, the results from which indicated that only a 'sense of belonging' and 'work responsibility' significantly influenced organisational commitment. As such, organisations should provide a working environment in which employees feel they have a sense of autonomy and freedom of choice in their job. Furthermore, senior executives should be transparent and accountable for their actions, so that their behaviour can filter down throughout the organisation and be used as an example for other employees. Such practices can increase high levels of involvement and participation, ultimately leading to the creation of psychological ownership perspectives in an organisation.

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Introduction

The intense competition around the world for skilled workers has created an enormous problem in retaining employees in many organisations. However, talent, an intangible asset, and managing talent present many challenges. The retention process is becoming increasingly urgent, specifically with the new generation of the labour force, which is extraordinarily mobile and continually looking for better opportunities (Nguyen & Duong, 2020). When employees resign, it can cause a high turnover percentage, which can cause organisations to suffer considerable losses due to increased human resource costs, the interruption of various company work activities and overall employee performance effects (Jeffrey & Prasetya, 2019). Employee ownership perceptions are important pillars supporting organisations in understanding their staff. These perceptions have received considerable attention from academic researchers and practitioners, and they have become a commonly researched topic in the field of human resource management. Previous studies have suggested that a psychological sense of

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ownership may be an integral part of an employee's relationship with an organisation based on the theory of psychological ownership. Recent research by McConville, Arnold, and Smith (2016) suggested that when employees feel that an 'object' belongs to them, this feeling affects their attitude and behaviour. Furthermore, when employees embrace objects such as the aforementioned, it affects organisational commitment and employee loyalty. Pinto, Pimentel, and Cunha (2016) confirmed that a psychological sense of ownership is key to enhancing organisational competitiveness by promoting market share growth, improving services, and fostering innovation.

Although researchers have recognised that psychological ownership may be an important organisational phenomenon, the current organisational literature on this topic is rather fragmented and underdeveloped. Based on a review of the literature in the human resource field, psychological ownership can comprise of various factors (constructs) rather than just self-efficacy, self-identity, sense of belonging, and accountability. The aim of the current study is to gain an understanding of the association between organisational commitment and psychological ownership in terms of broader aspects. Therefore, this study proposes other factors, including autonomy and work responsibility, to extend the theory of psychological ownership and provide insight into the factors of psychological ownership that can be gleaned. Furthermore, the objective of this study is to verify the association between psychological ownership and the consequences of psychological ownership, such as organisational commitment. Consequently, this study scrutinises the factors of psychological ownership that affect employee organisational commitment at a state-owned Thai telecommunications enterprise.

Literature Review

Previous literature reviews have suggested that the psychology of possession is strongly rooted in a person's psyche. According to Ye and Gawronski (2016), it is common for people to psychologically experience the merging of the self with various targets of possession. For instance, individuals can feel a connection with households, or other persons. Possessions, therefore, play a leading role in an owner's identity and can even become an extension of a person. In general, ownership is primarily experienced in the context of an object, but it can also be manifested in non-physical objects, such as ideas and artistic creations. According to Brown and Zhu (2016), a feeling of ownership has significant psychological and behavioural effects. They argued that the acquisition of possessions can generate a positive and uplifting effect,

while the loss of possessions can weaken an individual's personality. Emotions spark when things that people feel belong to them are violated or encroached upon.

The theory of psychological ownership was proposed by Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2001). Over a number of years, researchers have developed and validated measurement instruments for this theory, which argues that a sense of possession directed toward an organisation satisfies three basic human motives: efficacy, self-identity, and having a place. Once this sense of organisational ownership is established among employees, an organisation is able to leverage these sentiments (Pierce et al., 2001). The conceptual definition of psychological ownership has been outlined in terms of three aspects, including the dimension of a psychological state, the paths to psychological ownership, and the consequences of psychological ownership. The comprehensive theory of psychological ownership thus offers a conceptual framework and direction for future theoretical development for researchers and practitioners.

Drawing on the organisational behaviour research, there is empirical evidence that people express a feeling of ownership toward their work, their company, their job, the products they make, the processes followed by their colleagues, and specific subjects in their enterprises (Brown & Zhu, 2016). Furthermore, a significant body of previous research has determined that psychological ownership affects organisational performance (Jafri, 2015). Researchers have also claimed that employees with a sense of psychological ownership feel that certain objects (e.g. a company) are their own, giving them a stronger sense of responsibility towards the object. When considering the term 'sense of ownership', many scholars have provided definitions for psychological ownership. The present study defines psychological ownership in the context of the organisation as an employee's mindset related to his or her organisation, which causes employee enthusiasm, striving for good habits, teamwork, collaboration, and considerations for improving their work.

Based on a literature review in an organisational context, this study proposes six factors that are potentially key with respect to a sense of ownership. These include self-efficacy, self-identity, sense of belonging, accountability, autonomy, and work responsibility. Self-efficacy is the motivation reflected in an individual's desire to control his or her environment, which results in a feeling of self-actualisation and work-happiness. Self-efficacy can be enhanced when individuals are given the opportunity to make complex decisions or be assigned more challenging work. Consequently, the success that comes from dealing with more complicated work enables employees to feel more efficacious (Dedahanov, Rhee, & Gapurjanova,

2019). The second factor is self-identity, which is what employees display when they are at work through their work style, personality, ability, imagination, effort, and approach to problem-solving. Pinto et al. (2016) argued that self-identity can be realised through work and can contribute to psychological ownership in employees. The third factor is sense of belonging, which is defined as a sense of personal involvement in a social system so that people see themselves as a crucial and integral part of that system. In other words, a sense of belonging can include the feeling that comes from the motivation for basic human needs such as housing and personal territory. Previous scholars confirmed that being part of an organisation is an important factor in making employees committed to their work and encouraging them to stay longer with an organisation (Esop & Timms, 2019). However, the sense of belonging does not mean that the organisation should use a 'micromanagement"' style, whereby the managers closely observe and control the work of their subordinates (Du & El-Gafy, 2015). Excessive micromanagement can lead employees to be uncomfortable and to build up frustration, reducing their organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2018). The fourth factor is accountability, which is reflected in the description of high levels of psychological ownership though descriptive behaviours, such as stewardship and self-sacrifice (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Employees can exhibit accountability when they have this sense of ownership. In particular, employees feel that they are accountable to others and realise that it is their obligation to act constructively for the good of their organisation (Jafri, 2015). The fifth factor is autonomy, which is defined as the capacity of a person to make rationally reflective choices about their ends and activities. Specifically, autonomy can be defined as privacy and freedom in working. The feeling of autonomy can drive employee work satisfaction while also creating a feeling of possession of one's job, along with the need for achievement (Olckers & van Zyl, 2017). The sixth factor is work responsibility, which can be considered the feeling of responsibility towards owned objects. Ramaprasad, Lakshminarayanan, and Pai (2018) found that a low level of organisational commitment reflects a lack of responsibility on the part of employees in carrying out their duties within a company. Stated differently, employees who have psychological ownership and, by proxy, strong organisational commitment, will participate fully in advancing the company.

In an organisational context, the theory of psychological ownership supports the positive relationship between psychological ownership and organisational commitment (Esop & Timms, 2019). The term 'organisational commitment' has been investigated in many previous studies. Many scholars have confirmed that commitment can imply an intention to persist in a course of action. Therefore, many companies attempt to foster commitment in their employees to achieve stability and reduce costly turnover (Ennis, Gong, & Okpozo, 2018). The more psychological ownership an employee feels, the more committed they are to an organisation. This commitment could involve work satisfaction and self-esteem, which can be reflected through work performance. Consequently, some researchers have concluded that a sense of ownership in employees can lead to organisational commitment (Ramaprasad et al., 2018). Goldman (1992) defined organisational commitment as a strong belief in an organisation's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a strong desire to remain a member of the organisation. In this study, organisational commitment is described as an individual's feelings and or beliefs as they relate to wanting to maintain their membership in a particular organisation.

The components of organisational commitment were originally proposed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), who defined organisational commitment as a combination of three component processes, namely, affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is commitment that is related to the emotions of employees in circumstances in which they wish to remain at an organisation (Dávila & Garcia, 2012), such as those that want to be members of an organisation as opposed to mere individuals in an institution. Such commitment could result from psychological rewards, positive experiences employees have as a result of being part of the organisation. Consequently, employees devote themselves to the organisation when such commitment exists, resulting, in some cases, in a lower rate of absenteeism. A previous study by Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky (2002) indicated that of all of the commitment components, affective commitment is the one component that has the strongest connection with staff turnover. Affective commitment can be perceived in the form of employee dedication and sacrifice in the interest of an organisation's success; employees feeling that they have been treated with fairness and supported by the organisation; and employees who are proud to be part of their organisation.

Continuance commitment is the feeling of employees who want to continue to be employed by an organisation. Dávila and Garcia (2012) explained that continuance commitment is based on an acknowledgment of the costs related to leaving a company and the lack of work substitutes available. This continuance commitment can occur when an employee expresses satisfaction with their fringe benefits or

recognises that it would be challenging to find new employment, ultimately resulting in their staying with an organisation. The previous study by Meyer et al. (2002) also confirmed that employees with high continuance commitment intend to remain with their employer to avoid the costs associated with leaving, regardless of their level of affective or normative commitment. Continuance commitment can be perceived through employee reasoning or benefits accrued to them for working at one organisation instead of others, and employees who have received advancement in their career path as well as other opportunities.

Normative commitment reflects a perceived obligation to remain in an organisation (Dávila & Garcia, 2012). This commitment results from an employee's desire to keep his or her status within an organisation. Consequently, being a member of the organisation is appropriated. Kaplan and Kaplan (2018) claimed that normative commitment can refer to an employee's importance to a company. Employees who have a high level of normative commitment feel that they should remain at the company to which they belong. Normative commitment is rooted in personal values, including the consideration of entrepreneurial pursuits, as opposed to remaining loyal to one's current company, while others may prefer to keep their present job (Meyer et al., 2002). Clugston (2000) suggested that culture and work ethic can prompt employees to stay with an organisation, resulting in them developing feelings of loyalty to an organisation and, in turn, influencing the normative commitment of other employees.

The studies from the literature review contribute to this study's research model. This study aimed to investigate and verify the relationship and impact between a sense of ownership and organisational commitment. In this study, there are six potential dependent factors, which include self-efficacy, self-identity, sense of belonging, accountability, autonomy and work responsibility, whereas organisational commitment serves as the lone independent factor. To assess this relationship, a multiple regression analysis was suitable for this research and was used in analysing the following hypotheses:

H1: Self-efficacy has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

H2: Self-identity has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

H3: Sense of belonging has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

H4: Accountability has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

H5: Autonomy has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

H6: Work responsibility has a significant impact on organisational commitment.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was quantitative using a self-administered questionnaire. The items used to assess factors in the model were operationalized from existing measures developed and employed in previous organisational research. The measures of each factor were modified to fit the purposes of the present study: self-efficacy (3 items; e.g. 'I am confident in my ability to contribute to my organisation's success') was adopted from Avey, Avolio, Crossley, and Luthans (2009); self-identity (3 items; e.g. 'I feel this organisation's success is my success') was adopted from Lee and Suh (2015); sense of belonging (3 items; e.g. 'I am totally comfortable being in this organisation') was adopted from Lee and Suh (2015); accountability (3 items; e.g. 'I would challenge anyone in my organisation if I thought something was done wrong') was adopted from Lee and Suh (2015); autonomy (3 items; e.g. 'I feel that I can engage in creative activities in my organisation') was adopted from Pedersen (1997); work responsibility (3 items; e.g. 'I always try to do my work in due time') was adopted from Girardi et al. (2015); and 18 items measuring organisational commitment were adopted from the revised scale of TCM (Three-Component Model Employee Commitment Survey) developed by Meyer and Allen (2004). A 5-point Likert scale was utilised to assess the employees' attitudes towards psychological ownership and organisational commitment. The responses were weighted 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, in regard of direction, for 'strongly disagree', 'mildly disagree', 'no difference', 'mildly agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Pilot testing was conducted before the survey process with the purpose of reviewing design errors. The instruments were initially examined to establish the reliability of the scales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.617 to 0.889, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.50 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), showing good internal consistency among the scales.

The total population consisted of 22,000 employees from a Thai state-owned telecommunications company that specializes in line and mobile telephony. The human resources department of this company was contacted to assist us in distributing the survey questionnaire via the departmental heads through their subordinates in September 2018. A total of 368 respondents participated in the study. However, 19 of the questionnaires were incomplete, leaving 349 that were deemed usable—a response rate of 94.84 percent. According to the sampling method recommended by Comrey and Lee (1992), sample size appropriateness might be assessed very generally on the following scale: 50-very poor; 100-poor;

200-fair; 300-good'. Consequently, the sample size of 349 in this study was suitable for processing.

Results

The descriptive results were used to describe the respondent sample. Among all respondents, 57.3 percent were male, the majority of whom were aged 46 to 55 and held a bachelor's degree and master's degree (50.14% and 61.89%, respectively). Their primary source of income was between 45,000 to 60,000 baht, and most respondents were operator staff (67.34%).

Means and standard deviations of all variables in this study were calculated and Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to detect multicollinearity. Multicollinearity is defined as the degree of correlation between the independent variables. Verifying multicollinearity can be done using bivariate correlations of all of the independent variables. Multicollinearity increases the variance of the regression coefficients and threatens the validity of the regression equation (Hair et al., 2010). The values of Pearson's correlations indicate the relationship between the independents variables and analysing them is a method for diagnosing multicollinearity. The general rule of thumb is that the Pearson's correlation value should not exceed 0.75 (Hair et al., 2010). Cooper and Schindler (2006) indicated that correlations of 0.8 or higher are problematic. The results are presented in Table 1, revealing that no multicollinearity existed between the independent variables because the Pearson's correlation indicators for all the independent variables were less than 0.7. Table 1 reveals that there were positive relationships between psychological ownership and organisational commitment. The results indicated support for previous studies as all factors associated with psychological ownership were significant to organisational commitment at the 1 percent level. Further, the highest mean response value was 'self-efficacy', with a score of 4.32, whereas the lowest mean response value was 'sense of belonging' at 3.57.

To disclose the component factors in a sense of ownership that have an effect on organisational commitment, Table 2 shows the results from a multiple regression analysis of psychological ownership and organisational commitment. The multiple regression revealed that psychological ownership had an effect on organisational commitment among a relevant sample of staff. The equation representing that dynamic is expressed as shown in Equation (1).

$$Y = 1.687 - 0.036\,(X1) + 0.082(X2) + 0.380(X3)* - 0.001(X4) - 0.141(X5) + 0.297\,(X6)* \qquad (1)$$

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that a sense of belonging and work responsibility are the most important factors with respect to ability to positively influence organisational commitment at a 5 percent significance level. This would seem to imply that if a sense of belonging or work responsibility were to change among employees,

Table 1 Pearson's correlation analysis

Research variables	Mean	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6
Self-efficacy	4.32	0.502	0.93						
Self-identity	3.73	0.717	0.76	0.236**					
Sense of belonging	3.57	0.813	0.90	0.364**	0.497**				
Accountability	3.95	0.681	0.88	0.470**	0.422**	0.510**			
Autonomy	3.87	0.629	0.94	0.376**	0.363**	0.407**	0.420**		
Work responsibility	3.94	0.693	0.72	0.425**	0.372**	0.364**	0.427**	0.342**	
Organisational commitment	3.98	0.771	0.84	0.352**	0.420**	0.423**	0.320**	0.468**	0.487**

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 1% level.

Table 2 Multiple regression results of psychological ownership and organisational commitment

Sense of ownership		Organisational commitment				
		B	SE	Beta	t	p
Hypothesis Result	Constant	1.687	0.824		2.048	.46
H1: Rejected	X1: Self-efficacy	−0.036	0.187	−0.026	−0.195	.846
H2: Rejected	X2: Self-identity	0.082	0.116	0.105	0.706	.484
H3: Supported	X3: Sense of belonging	0.380	0.123	0.538	3.091	.003*
H4: Rejected	X4: Accountability	−0.001	0.156	−0.001	−0.006	.996
H5: Rejected	X5: Autonomy	−0.141	0.177	−0.144	−0.795	.431
H6: Supported	X6: Work responsibility	0.297	0.127	0.510	2.542	.004*

Note: $R^2 = 0.394$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.374$, F = 3.696, $p \leq .05$.

organisational commitment would change accordingly. Based on the R-squared value (0.394), we see that 39.4 percent of the variation in the sample's organisational commitment can be attributed to the psychological ownership of employees, with the remaining 60.6 percent being explained by other variables. However, contrary to the concept of sense of ownership, the results of this study only supported Hypotheses 3 and 6, which hold that sense of belonging and work responsibility have a significant relationship with organisational commitment.

Discussion

The research conducted in this study applies the theory of psychological ownership to an organisation and showed which of the key factors of psychological ownership has an impact on organisational commitment. Interestingly, 'sense of belonging' and 'work responsibility' were the only two factors found to have an effect on employee organisational commitment at the Thai state-owned telecommunications company sampled. The other four factors: self-efficacy, self-identity, accountability, and autonomy, were not found to have a relationship with organisational commitment. The results show that despite the employees being competent in their roles, they did not promote organisational commitment. A possible explanation for this result lies in the characteristics of the organisation in which the respondents worked. The organisation in this study was a state-owned company controlled by the government of Thailand. This organisation had no remuneration system that promotes organisational commitment. Workers at this company were not motivated to go the 'extra mile' and commit to the organisation due to a lack of performance bonuses or incentives. Additionally, as this was a large, state-owned company, employees were typically siloed in their departments or teams, and thus had a narrow operational perspective rather than a wider strategic view of the organisation. The employees also viewed the organisation as 'not innovative' or 'not exciting to work for' due to the bureaucratic nature of state-owned organisations and their place in the infrastructure industry.

Regarding the two factors found to be significant in this study, our results support findings from previous studies. Mousavi, Hosseni, and Hassanpour (2015) also confirmed that a sense of belonging would strengthen the sense of responsibility among employees in an organisation, with Dávila and Garcia (2012) noting that a sense of belonging could be perceived as an important element for the mental health and social

wellbeing of employees. As such, managers should not only focus on creating a sense of belonging within a company, but also deliver a work atmosphere where staff have autonomy and freedom in their career. High levels of involvement and participation are thus critical to the creation of psychological ownership and responsibility. Dedahanov et al. (2019) also suggested that appraisals openly discussed between superiors and subordinates can build psychological ownership in both parties and enhance the performance of subordinates. This study recommended that organisations should not often resort to micromanagement, as it is generally associated with a lack of freedom in the workplace (Maissiat, Lautert, Pai, & Tavares, 2015). Therefore, organisations, must afford their employees time and personal space to foment a sense of choice and control in the work environment while also giving them the freedom to openly share their ideas and opinions. Managers should also give subordinates decision-making responsibilities to such an extent that they can make decisions without consulting managers, irrespective of circumstances in which such decisions surpass the subordinate's level of authority. Arshad and Abbasi (2014) found that psychological ownership is an important part of an employee's relationship with the organisation, as employees who have psychological ownership within an organisation are more willing to invest their time and effort, which is key to organisational competitiveness. Consequently, the managers at Thai Telecommunication Enterprise should encourage greater involvement and commitment from their staff by fostering a feeling of belonging among their employees.

Work responsibility is another factor that organisations should not overlook. This study supported findings from prior studies by Ramaprasad et al. (2018), who highlighted the relationship between organisational commitment and work responsibility. The results from our study are consistent with task commitment, which is characteristic of organisations in general. Therefore, organisations should educate their employees about internalising a sense of work responsibility, including towards tasks, colleagues, and collaborators. Supervisors, in particular, need to act as role models for their subordinates. This suggestion supports Kaplan and Kaplan (2018), who confirmed that a supervisor's responsibility is positively associated with the extent to which an employee assumes responsibility for a task, as well as the extent to which they feel responsible for colleagues and collaborators. If the company cannot create an environment where all employees, starting with those in the highest position, feel responsible for their duties, it may be difficult to get lower-level employees to take responsibility, ultimately impacting individual and

organisational performance in the long run. In cultures characterised by high-power distance, such as Thailand (Hofstede, 2013), hierarchical systems and structures have long existed in society. Although subordinates always look to fulfil their superior's request and take responsibility for their careers, if their supervisors do not take responsibility for their own jobs, it would not be unreasonable to expect lower-level staff to follow suit. Such behaviour could be transferred from one generation to the next, ultimately dooming the culture of an organisation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To foster a sustainable level of organisational commitment from employees, this study proposes that organisations need to create a healthy culture by emphasising practices such as empowerment, employee involvement, teamwork, reliability, compliance, and a strong internalisation of enterprise goals. The culture related to work environments, such as warm wishes from colleagues and being accepted as a member of the organisation, needs to be designed when developing organisational programs or policies. Such programs can make the organisation to which an employee belongs feel like home rather than an office. By the same token, companies should not ignore the factors that contribute to a desirable physical environment, such as the building, facilities, and work tools. A policy that supports these facilities for employee convenience should also include aspects that address physical and mental safety. Such a policy will serve as proof of an organisation's respect for and sense of responsibility to their employees. In turn, in making employees feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves, the employees will exhibit a greater degree of commitment to their organisations.

To create a sense of belonging, the organisations need to eliminate employees feeling like outsiders in the workplace. Some employees may feel that they are distinctly unique from their colleagues. Human resource managers must strive to establish a workplace culture in which individuality is both noticed and valued, which can lower the probability of a person feeling like an outsider. Furthermore, managers should encourage employees to value what each individual brings to the organisation by advocating for everyone's voice to be heard. Incorporating employee input into organisational values will demonstrate to individuals that they have a meaningful, equitable role in creating a more inclusive workplace. Moreover, managers must demonstrate that they care about their employees by understanding their need for communication and

success. In practice, organisations must build an effective communication field and express care by providing benefits. Benefits applicable to all demographic groups, such as flexible work scheduling and emotional wellness programs, signal to employees that the company is concerned about employees' distinct needs and demands both inside and outside of work. Such signs of admiration improve and drive a sense of belonging. All of these methods can make employees feel as though they are accepted by and belong in the organisation, which finally leads to them committing to the organisation.

Future research should explore the relationship between organisational commitment and other factors such as employee satisfaction, individual performance, and compensation, which is a limitation of this study. These factors can help the state-owned organisations understand the wider view of their employees' perspective in making a long-term commitment to their management and workplace. Moreover, the researchers recognize that this study was conducted in the state-owned Thai telecommunications enterprise context that may not offer an ideal foundation for generalizing the results of this research in other contexts. It is suggested that future research could be on state-owned telecommunications organizations of other countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe, so that cross-cultural issues and the differences of stated-owned enterprise structures in each country could be resolved.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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