

Introducing the concept of 'Importance Attachment' in studies in quality management

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ABSTRACT

Surveys are the most commonly used research approach in the study of peoples' attitudes. A new construct termed 'Importance Attachment' is introduced to provide better insight in studies of quality management. It is operationally defined as the importance orientation of various areas to the company and / or to the individual respondents as indicated by their willingness to contribute their best efforts in these respective types of areas. This is analogous to egotism and altruism. The adoption of "Importance Attachment" can be used to discern the quality perception patterns of different groups. In this self completed questionnaire survey among 19 respondents, the attitudinal organizational commitment levels are also measured. The interrelationship between the organizational commitment and importance attachment is examined in this empirical study.

Keywords: Importance Attachment, Attitudes, Egotism, Altruism

1.0 Study of peoples' attitudes

Allport (1929) defines an attitude as a disposition to act which is built up by the integration of numerous specific responses of a similar type, but which exists as a general neural 'set' and when activated by a specific stimulus result in behavior that is more a function of the disposition than of the activating stimulus. This definition implies attitudes as broad, generic (not specific) determinants of behavior. An attitude is a mental disposition of the individual to act for or against a definite object (Droba, 1933). It is important to understand people's perception (Tao et al. 1999, Koo¹ et al. 1999, Koo² et al. 1999, Koo et al. 1998)

Tao (1999) claims that behavior toward a given object is a function of many variables, of which attitude is only one. The best single predictor of an individual's behavior will be a measure of his intention to perform the behavior. Behavior is affected by behavior intention, which in turn is affected by attitude and subjective norm. Subjective norm is a function of belief about the expectations of the importance of referent others, the normative belief and motivation to comply these referents.

2.0 Introducing the construct of Importance Attachment

2.1 Orientation to Self and to Employer

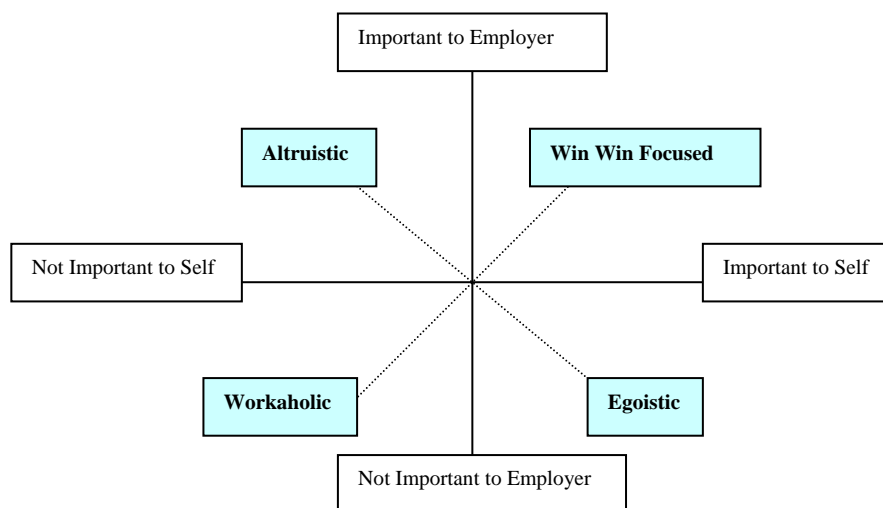
“Importance Attachment” is an attitudinal construct operationally defined as the importance attached to certain areas as indicated by the respondents’ willingness to contribute their best.

- Areas which are both important to the employer and to self (**Win-Win Focused**)
- Areas which are important to the employer but not to self (**Altruistic**)
- Areas which are important to self but not to employer (**Egoistic**)
- Areas which are not important to both employer and self (**Workaholic**)

A total of eight questions with 5-point Likert scale was developed, of which four are for self perspective measurement and the other four are general observation perspective measurement. The self perspective measure being a self description can be biased and the general observation (i.e. coworker) perspective approach using projective research technique tends to provide unbiased description of the true picture.

The Importance Attachment can be depicted graphically along two dimensions. One is the Win-Win Focused vs. Workaholic dimension (operationally defined as the difference between the scores from Win Win Focused and Workaholic). The other dimension is Altruistic vs. Egoistic (i.e the difference of the scores between Altruistic and Egoistic). These scores can be treated as vectors with magnitude and direction. A single point with the corresponding Cartesian coordinates, can be calculated as a single aggregate measure of ‘Importance Attachment’. This resultant aggregate point would suggest whether the respondent is Self Oriented or Employer Oriented.

The concept of ‘Importance Attachment’ could be a useful way to discern different respondent groups, viz.



2.2 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is widely reckoned as an important factor in understanding employment behaviors and an important determinant of behavioral inclinations (Koo, 1994). Organizational commitment is characterized by three factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al. 1982). This is more than just passive loyalty to the organization, but involves active contribution from the employee to make the organization be successful. A modified short form of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire was used in empirical study. The nine positively worded questions are:

- I am willing to put in extra effort to help my company be successful
- I praise my company to my friends as a great organization to work for
- I would accept almost any reasonable type of job assignment in order to keep working for my company
- My values are very similar to my company's values
- I am proud to tell others that I work for my company
- My company inspires me to perform to the best of my ability
- I am extremely glad I chose my company to work for
- I really care about the fate of my company
- For me, my company is the best organization to work for

3.0 Findings

3.1 Comparison between Organizational Commitment and Importance Attachment

The following table summarizes the 19 responses in descending order of Organizational Commitment.

Organizational Commitment	Self perspective: Altruistic vs. Egoistic	Self perspective: Win Win vs. Workaholic	Coworker Perspective: Altruistic vs. Egoistic	Coworker Perspective: Win Win vs. Workaholic
4.78	2.00	3.00	.00	.00
4.71	-1.00	4.00	-3.00	3.00
4.71	-1.00	4.00	-3.00	3.00
4.56	.00	1.00	-1.00	2.00
4.56	.00	1.00	.00	.00
4.56	-1.00	1.00	-1.00	2.00
4.44	.00	1.00	-1.00	1.00
4.33	3.00	2.00	.00	1.00
4.33	1.00	3.00	1.00	2.00
4.22	.00	3.00	-1.00	3.00
4.00	2.00	4.00	-4.00	-1.00
4.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00
3.89	-1.00	.00	3.00	1.00
3.67	1.00	2.00	-2.00	.00
3.56	.00	2.00	.00	.00
3.50	.00	4.00	-2.00	2.00
3.44	1.00	2.00	-1.00	1.00
3.11	-1.00	1.00	.00	2.00

1.67	-2.00	4.00	-2.00	3.00
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There is no pattern of clear relationship between the importance Attachment and the Organizational Commitment level. This is evidenced by the Pearson correlation coefficients among Organizational Commitment and the Importance Attachment variables as below:

- - Correlation Coefficients - -

	OC	S_A_E	S_WW_W	C_A_E	C_WW_W
OC	1.0000 (.19) P= .	.3338 (.19) P= .162	-.1388 (.19) P= .571	.0400 (.19) P= .871	-.1113 (.19) P= .650
S_A_E	.3338 (.19) P= .162	1.0000 (.19) P= .	.0735 (.19) P= .765	.0189 (.19) P= .939	-.5985 (.19) P= .007
S_WW_W	-.1388 (.19) P= .571	.0735 (.19) P= .765	1.0000 (.19) P= .	-.6964 (.19) P= .001	.3157 (.19) P= .188
C_A_E	.0400 (.19) P= .871	.0189 (.19) P= .939	-.6964 (.19) P= .001	1.0000 (.19) P= .	-.1570 (.19) P= .521
C_WW_W	-.1113 (.19) P= .650	-.5985 (.19) P= .007	.3157 (.19) P= .188	-.1570 (.19) P= .521	1.0000 (.19) P= .

- OC = Organizational Commitment
- S_A_E = Self perspective: Altruistic – Egoistic
- S_WW_W = Self perspective: Win Win – Workaholic
- C_A_E = Coworker perspective: Altruistic – Egoistic
- C_WW_W = Coworker perspective: Win Win – Workaholic

It is however interesting to note that S_A_E is significantly and negatively correlated with C_WW_W. Similar negative correlation exists between S_WW_W and C_A_E.

This can be interpreted as when respondents claim they are pro employer (i.e. Altruistic) they would think their coworkers to be workaholic. Alternatively when they claim they are pro self (i.e. Egoistic), they would presume their coworkers to be Win-Win Focused (i.e. work hard only for areas important both to themselves and the employer)

3.2 Cronbach Reliability test and Factor Analysis

The Cronbach alpha for the nine Organizational Commitment items is 0.90.
 The Cronbach alpha for the four Self perspective Importance Attachment items is –0.07.
 The Cronbach alpha for the four Coworker perspective Importance Attachment items is 0.55.

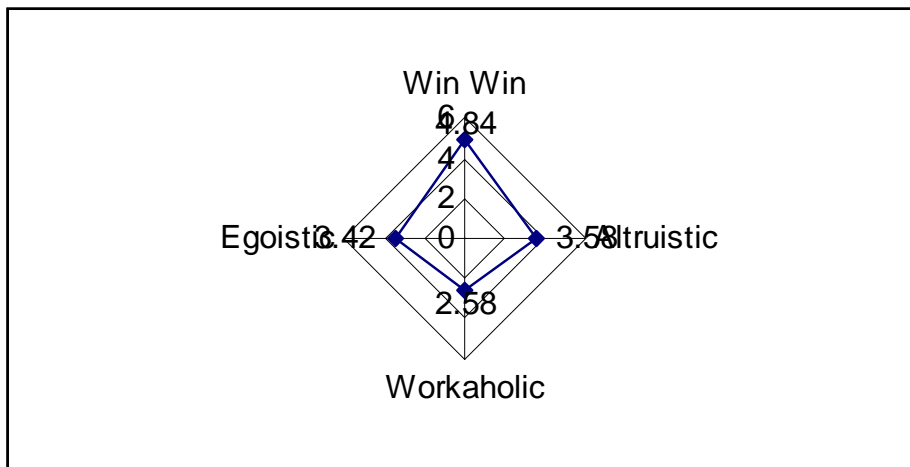
The low Cronbach alphas for the Importance Attachment indicate that the individual questionnaire items are not additive in nature. They may in fact refer to different concepts (such as the Altruistic vs. Egoistic and the Win Win vs. Workaholic). Indeed when the four self perspective question items were subject to Factor Analysis, such two factors emerge.

3.3 Recommendation for Future Researches

The Importance Attachment concept, interesting as it stands, still requires much improvement before wide scale application. This concept provides fresh insight as to future researches on peoples' attitude on their employment.

In this current research instrument, four questions for self and coworker perspectives for the importance attachment possibilities were used respectively. The Cronbach tests already suggest that these are not additive construct components. Multiple questions should be designed for each dimension (i.e. Altruistic vs. Egoistic and Win Win vs. Workaholic). The other approach would be to construct multiple questions on the dimensions on Importance to Self and Importance to Employer respectively.

The Importance Attachment characteristics of a group of respondents can be succinctly depicted by a radar chart. The diagram below is the radar chart for the 19 respondents using the means scores of the four Self perspective questions.



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