



Organizational Commitment Levels Of Chinese Counselors By Gender, College Type, And Age

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Citation: Shengdong Xu, et al (2024), Organizational Commitment Levels Of Chinese Counselors By Gender, College Type, And Age, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30 (6), 2954 - 2962

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i6.4770

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Organizational commitment is the attitude of counselors toward an organization and reflects the specific embodiment of their devotion to and identification with the organization. Using a questionnaire, this study conducted an empirical study of the organizational commitment levels of 396 college counselors in Zhejiang Province, China. In the questionnaire survey, this study adopts convenience sampling technique. The results showed that the overall organizational commitment level of college counselors was above average. No significant difference was found in the level of organizational commitment among counselors by gender or type of college. There was, however, a significant difference in the level of organizational commitment between the generational groups, such that post-80s counselors' organizational commitment was higher on average than that of post-90s counselors. Accordingly, from the perspective of educational management practice, this study puts forward suggestions on how to improve the organizational commitment of college counselors. This study also provides theoretical support for building stable, specialized, and professional teams of counselors.

Keywords: counselors, organizational commitment, difference analysis, background variables

Introduction

In China, among all the "cultivating" teams of colleges, counselors are the people who care the most about students and have the deepest affection for and closest relationship with them (Zhu, 2020), and so constitute the main force in the daily political education and ideological guidance of college students (Pu & He, 2023). They are on the front line of student service work and face multiple and competing challenges within the counselor team, leading to mental symptoms such as stress, empathy, fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and counselor disorders, as well as reductions in their level of organizational commitment (OC) (Khan, Zahra, Bilal, Sufyan, & Naz, 2021; Mullen, Blount, Lambie, & Chae, 2017). Some studies have shown that counselors have a weak sense of professional perseverance and that their level of OC needs to be improved, which has a certain impact on the overall stability of the counselor team. It is necessary to pay attention to this situation during counselors' professional construction and development (Liu, 2021). In short, in the process of daily student service work, college counselors always accept the work requirements of various superior business departments, which is not conducive to improving their level of OC.

Some scholars have proposed that individuals' level of OC reacts back on the organization in which they work, affecting both organizational performance and individual turnover intention, teamwork, organizational citizenship behavior, and work dedication (Guzeller & Celiker, 2020; Lam & Xu, 2019; Rodriguez, Alberca, & Escalante, 2023; Soelton, 2023). For example, the level of OC has a significant positive effect on private high school teachers' organizational citizenship behavior (Lie, Sofiyani, Astiti, Lina, & Sudirman, 2022) and a positive effect on librarians' dedication (Cao & Zhao, 2021) and employees' job performance (Loan, 2020). In the practice of higher education management, administrators desire to create specialized and professional counselor teams. Thus, research on the OC level of college counselors is an inherent requirement for building a high-quality professional counselor team as well as an inevitable requirement for cultivating newcomers who can shoulder the heavy responsibility of national rejuvenation.

Background of This Study

Organizational willingness and commitment are dynamic and ever-changing (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017), so they require constant research and innovation. Occupational burnout among college counselors is becoming increasingly evident (H. L. Zhang, Ke, & Dai, 2022), resignation or job changes are becoming more serious (Tao, He, & Zhao, 2021), and levels of OC are decreasing (He, Tao, & Xu, 2022). In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff had low levels of OC (Chanana, 2021). Research has shown that a high resignation rate in organizations negatively affects organizational performance (Park & Shaw, 2013), which is often regarded as a primary management challenge to organizational development (Lazzari & Rabottini, 2022). Especially in China, college counselors have the responsibility of nurturing people (Shi, 2024), and their OC can directly affect students' growth (He et al., 2022). Hatim and Jamil (2023) suggested that the difference between gender and type of institution (public and private) in secondary school teachers' OC is not significant. OC varies according to demographic variables and should be further tested across cultures, industries, and institutional types. It is necessary to examine the differences in OC among higher education counselors with respect to sex, type of college, and age group. There are three research questions in this study, which are as follows:

1. Are there differences in the OC of higher education counselors across genders?
2. Are there differences in college counselors' OC across college types?
3. Are there differences in college counselors' OC to different age groups?

Literature Review

Organizational Commitment

The concept of OC has been defined by many scholars and some measurement methods have been proposed (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). OC has been defined as the emotion of attachment of an organizational member to his or her organization, including the extent to which an individual identifies with and trusts the organization's goals, values, and culture (Leong, 2008; Meyer & Allen, 1991). It also refers to an individual's willingness to maintain membership in and affiliation with the organization (Renaldo, 2023; Sutiye, Trismiyanti, Linda, Yonita, & Suheri, 2020), the extent to which an individual is loyal to the organization (Kim, 2007), and the individual's desire to contribute to the organization. Affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment are considered indicators of OC (Karakuş & Aslan, 2009; Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990).

Affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment to the organization as well as their recognition, participation in, and enjoyment of membership (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is central to OC (Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008) and is a greater predictor than OC of major organizational consequences such as organizational citizenship behaviors absenteeism, and turnover (Mercurio, 2015). Van Waeyenberg, Peccei, and Decramer (2022) studied 458 teachers and found that the relationship between teacher performance and perceived performance management process strength operates primarily through affective OC.

Continuing commitment refers to an individual's perceptions of the costs and expenses of disengaging from an organization (Meyer et al., 1990; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). As expected, continuing commitment is usually associated with the hypothesized antecedent variables (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Ahuja and Ranga (2021) conducted a study that empirically analyzed data from 300 faculty members of private higher education institutions and found a significant positive relationship between individual performance and continuing commitment. These findings support the notion that training and development, compensation and incentives, effective recruitment and selection, and work environment can increase individual continuance commitment (Ahuja & Ranga, 2021).

Normative commitment refers to individuals' responsibility and belief in the long-term service of their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer et al., 1990). In the three-component model, normative commitment has received the least attention (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Normative commitment is associated with the desired outcomes, albeit to a lesser extent (Meyer et al., 2002). Phungula, Dhanpat, and Braine (2022) indicate that the three factors of work value—work, rewards, and opportunities—are positively related to normative commitment (Phungula et al., 2022).

Demographic Variables and Organizational Commitment

Regarding gender differences in OC, earlier studies have found significant differences in the OC of individuals by gender (Chanana, 2021; Jena, 2015; Kiral, 2020; Kumasey, Delle, & Ofei, 2014; Mwesigwa, Tusiime, & Ssekiziyivu, 2020; Naseem, Nawaz, Khan, Khan, & Khan, 2013), which suggests that gender is an important predictor of individual commitment. Chanana (2021) conducted a study at a private school, of 181 teachers, finding that female teachers were more willing to continue working than male teachers in the dire situation of a pandemic. Other researchers have found no significant differences in individual OC with respect to gender (Fares, 2022; Hatim & Jamil, 2023; Savicki, Cooley, & Gjesvold, 2003; Tikare, 2016), implying that there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of their commitment to their organizations.

Regarding the differences in OC by types of college, in China, colleges can be divided into undergraduate and higher vocational colleges based on their level of schooling. Currently, fewer studies have focused on the differences in OC for different types of colleges. Some related studies, such as Hatim and Jamil (2023), have sought to determine the differences in institutional type (public and private) of OC, but no significant differences have been reported. In a study of 188 volunteer teachers, analysis of the level of the teachers' OC showed no significant differences in the dimensions of the different sectoral variables (Kiral, 2020).

Regarding age differences in OC, most studies in different fields have shown that age is a predictor of OC (Al-Haroon & Al-Qahtani, 2020; Ay, Ulusoy, & Tosun, 2015; Brimeyer, Perrucci, & Wadsworth, 2010; Karataş & Güleş, 2010). Some studies have shown that nurses of different age groups have significant differences in their commitment levels, with older individuals (> 40 years) being more loyal to the organization (Al-Haroon & Al-Qahtani, 2020). The results of a few studies suggest that there is no significant difference between age groups in terms of OC (Anari, 2012).

Research Methodology

Participants

In this study, college counselors in Zhejiang Province, China, were selected as research participants. We distributed 425 official questionnaires, of which 396 were valid and 49 invalid, for a validity rate of 93.18%. The valid questionnaires were included in analysis, and the sample size was approximately proportional to the actual population distribution population. By generation, there were 119 participants in the post-80s group, accounting for approximately 30.1% of the total sample; the post-90s group comprised 227 participants, accounting for approximately 57.3% of the total sample; and there were 39 participants in the post-00s group, accounting for approximately 9.8% of the total sample, and 11 participants in the pre-80s group, accounting for approximately 2.8% of the total sample. Thus, participants from the post-90s and post-80s generations made up the majority of the sample. In terms of gender, there are more female than male students participating in the research. Of the whole sample, 179 were male (approximately 45.2% of the total) and 217 female (approximately 54.8%). Regarding the type of college, 223 participants (56.3%) were from undergraduate colleges and 173 (43.7%) were from higher vocational colleges. Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic Information of the Variables for the Sample ($N = 396$)

Variables	Type	Number	Percentage
Generation Groups	Post-80s	119	30.1%
	Post-90s	227	57.3%
	Post-00s	39	9.8%
	Pre-80s	11	2.8%
Gender	Male	179	45.2%
	Female	217	54.8%
Type of colleges	Undergraduate college	223	56.3%
	Higher vocational college	173	43.7%

Research Instrument

OC has been conceptualized and measured in various ways. The OC Scale used in this study was designed and developed by X. N. Zhang and Gu (2010) and includes three dimensions: affective commitment, continuing commitment, and normative commitment. This scale is consistent with the definition of the three dimensions of OC in this study and has been used in China, where it has been reported to have adequate validity and reliability.

The OC Scale contains three dimensions and includes 16 question items distributed as follows: affective commitment (Questions 1 to 6), with a total of 6 questions; normative commitment, with 4 questions (Questions 7 to 10); and continuing commitment (Questions 11 to 16), with a total of 6 questions.

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses are conducted to examine the appropriateness of the overall scale or test items, which can be used to group items that are more reflective of the variable, remove items that are less reflective of it, and identify potential constructs or items (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

The results of the preliminary analyses showed that the correlation between each question item in the OC Scale and the total mean score ranged from 0.668 to 0.830, which were all greater than the reference value of 0.400. The upper group was defined as the top 27% of the overall mean scores, whereas the lower group was defined as the bottom 27%. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted on the two groups, with C.R. values ranging from 4.097 to 10.095, which are all greater than the reference value of 3. Furthermore, the *p*-values were all less than 0.001, suggesting that the scale has strong discriminant validity, because each item on the scale differed significantly between the higher and lower groups. The Cronbach's alpha values after item deletion were all less than or equal to the overall Cronbach's alpha value of 0.934. In summary, Question 16 of the OC

Scale was eliminated because two of its indicators did not fulfill the standards of reference values as determined by the three major categories of item analysis and the results of the four judgment criteria. Thus, 15 items from the OC Scale were retained through item analysis.

Validation Factor Analysis of the Formal Questionnaire

Multivariate Normality Test. The skewness value in the sample data for all OC Scale questions fell between -1.397 and -0.037 , with an absolute value less than 2. The kurtosis value ranged from -0.989 to 3.689 , with an absolute value less than 10. Table 2 presents the skewness and kurtosis values of each item on the OC Scale, demonstrating that the values of the variables follow a normal distribution (Kline, 2016).

Table 2 Normality Test of the Organizational Commitment Model

Category	Items	Skewness	kurtosis
Affective Commitment	1	-1.079	2.567
	2	-.940	1.328
	3	-1.397	3.689
	4	-.568	.145
	5	-.779	.416
	6	-1.168	2.469
Normative Commitments	1	-.863	.552
	2	-.836	.814
	3	-.637	.239
	4	-.856	1.066
Continuing Commitments	1	-.441	-.411
	2	-.037	-.861
	3	-.170	-.737
	4	-.316	-.744
	5	-.158	-.989
Coefficient of Mardia: 207.862 (91.582)			

Convergent Validity Test. According to the findings of the validation factor analysis, the standardized weighted regression coefficients of the OC Scale ranged from 0.640 to 0.905. The C.R. value for affective commitment was 0.940 and the AVE value was 0.723. Normative commitment had a C.R. of 0.934 and an AVE of 0.780, while the C.R. value for continuing commitment was 0.881 and the AVE value was 0.599. Thus, it is evident that the three indicators meet the requirements of an AVE value greater than 0.500, an SRW value greater than 0.500, and a C.R. value greater than 0.700. As Table 3 shows, the convergent validity of the measurement model for OC was good (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3 Convergent Validity Analysis of the Organizational Commitment Measurement Model

Category	Item code	SRW	C.R.	AVE
Affective Commitment	1	.876	.940	.723
	2	.885		
	3	.833		
	4	.885		
	5	.772		
	6	.846		
Normative Commitments	1	.905	.934	.780
	2	.905		
	3	.871		
	4	.851		
Continuing Commitments	1	.640	.881	.599
	2	.731		
	3	.808		
	4	.868		
	5	.804		

Measurement Model Fit. The researchers proposed that the fit of the model can be judged by reference indicators such as χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, NFI, NNFI(TLI), CFI, IFI, RFI, PNFI, and PGFI. The standard values of indicators such as GFI, AGFI, NFI, NNFI(TLI), CFI, IFI, and RFI should be greater than 0.800 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019), the RMSEA metrics should be greater than 0.100, and the PNFI and PGFI metrics should be greater than 0.500.

As shown in Table 4, the OC Scale model fitness indicators are as follows: $\chi^2/df = 4.277$, GFI = 0.901, AGFI = 0.853, RMSE = 0.091, NFI = 0.937, NNFI(TLI) = 0.936, CFI = 0.951, RFI = 0.918, IFI = 0.951, PNFI = 0.723, and PGFI = 0.608, indicating an acceptable model for measuring OC (McDonald & Ho, 2002).

Table 4 Organizational Commitment Model Fit Analysis

Statistical Test	Quantitative	Standard Value	Organizational Commitment	Model Fit Judgment
Absolute Fit Indicator	χ^2/df	1.000–5.000	4.277	adapted
	GFI	>.800	.901	adapted
	AGFI	>.800	.853	adapted
	RMSE	<.100	.091	acceptable
	NFI	>.800	.937	adapted
	NNFI(TLI)	>.800	.936	adapted
Incremental Fit Indicator	CFI	>.800	.951	adapted
	RFI	>.800	.918	adapted
	IFI	>.800	.951	adapted
Streamlined adaptation index	PNFI	>.500	.723	adapted
	PGFI	>.500	.608	adapted

Reliability Analysis of the Official Questionnaire

After the confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach’s alpha was used to test the construct and internal consistency of the formal measurement instruments of OC. The results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 Reliability Analysis Table of Formal Measurement Instruments

Scale	Dimension	Number of Items	Dimension Reliability	Scale Reliability
Organizational commitment	Affective Commitment	6	.935	.818
	Normative Commitments	4	.933	
	Continuing Commitments	5	.878	

The overall Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.818, while the values for the three dimensions were 0.935 for affective commitment, 0.933 for normative commitment, and 0.878 for continuous commitment. In general, the dimensions and overall value of the OC Scale have great stability and consistency (Hair et al., 2019).

Results and Analysis

Overall Level of Counselors’ Organizational Commitment

To understand the performance of counselors’ OC in Zhejiang Province, China, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted in this study, and the statistical results concerned both means and standard deviations (see details in Table 6). The overall mean score for OC was 3.778, while the mean values of affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuing commitment were 4.119, 3.908, and 3.265 points, respectively.

The surveyed college participants had the highest mean scores for affective commitment, followed by normative and continuing commitment.

According to the above results, college counselors in Zhejiang have an OC that falls into the higher middle range.

Table 6 Summary Table of Means and Standard Deviations of Organizational Commitments

Category	Item Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
Affective Commitment	1	4.119	.695
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
	6		
Normative Commitments	1	3.908	.838
	2		
	3		

Category	Item Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
Continuing Commitments	4	3.265	.919
	1		
	2		
	3		
	5		
Overall scale mean \pm standard deviation: 3.778 \pm .693			

Analysis of Differences in Counselors' Organizational Commitment Level Differences by Gender

Table 7 presents the *t*-test results for OC ($t = 1.602$), with a significance value of $p = 0.0110$ ($p > 0.050$). Thus, there was no significant difference in OC between genders in this study.

Table 7 Independent *t*-Test Analysis: Gender Table

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Comparison
Organizational Male commitment	179	3.839	.655	1.602	.110	-
Female	217	3.727	.720			

Note 1: $**p < .01$

Note 2: The source of information is organized for this study.

Differences in Different Types of Colleges

The *t*-test results presented in Table 8 indicate that there is no significant difference in the OC of the different types of colleges, as the result of the *t*-test for OC is 1.310, with a significance value of $p = 0.191$ ($p > .050$).

Table 8 Independent *t*-Test Analysis: College-Type Table

Variables	Types of Colleges	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>t</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Comparison
Organizational commitment	Undergraduate College	223	3.818	.669	1.310	.191	-
	Higher vocational college	173	3.726	.722			

Note 1: $**p < .01$

Note 2: The source of information is organized for this study.

Generation Group Differences

According to Table 9, there appears to be a significant difference in counselors' OC across different generation groups, as indicated by the *t*-test result of OC of 4.644 and a significance value of $p = 0.003$ ($p < .001$). Because the age groups all have the same variance, the Scheffé method with unequal *n*-values was used for testing. The results showed that post-80s counselors had higher OC than post-90s counselors did.

Table 9 Independent *t*-Test Analysis: Age-Group Table

Variables	Generation Groups	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>F</i> -Value	<i>p</i> -Value	Comparison of Variances
Organizational commitment	Post-80s	119	3.904	.654	4.644	.003	Post-80s > post-90s
	Post-90s	227	3.682	.690			
	Post-00s	39	3.815	.750			
	Pre-80s	11	4.255	.622			

Note: $**p < .01$

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, there were no significant gender differences in OC among counselors. This finding aligns with the findings of Hatim and Jamil (2023) for secondary school teachers and those of previous studies conducted by other researchers (Fares, 2022; Palta, 2019; Savicki et al., 2003; Tikare, 2016).

There were no significant differences in OC by the types of college where the counselors were located, which is similar to the findings of previous studies (Hatim & Jamil, 2023; Kiral, 2020; Palta, 2019). For instance, a study conducted in public and private schools with a sample of 200 teachers showed no significant difference in teachers' OC by type of institution (Hatim & Jamil, 2023).

There was a significant difference in OC among counselors by age, which is consistent with the findings of most of the studies discussed earlier. For example, Ay et al. (2015) noted that college academicians' level of OC increases with age and work experience. The German sociologist Mannheim (1952) contended that the shared experience of significant social changes among adolescents of different age groups is the primary source of intergenerational identity, through which they have different values and behavioral tendencies from their parents' generations. Counselors from the post-80s age group can be said to have higher OC and are more willing to embrace their careers than counselors from the younger generation. This may be related to the motivation of individuals who have been working in an organization for many years, where they have accumulated expertise and invested time and effort, leading to higher OC.

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