Role stressors and organizational commitment: public sector employment in St Lucia

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationships among role conflict, role ambiguity, the three dimensions of organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. In addition, the paper tests the moderating effect of perceived alternatives in the relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – The research was a cross-sectional study of employees in the public sector in St Lucia. In total, 226 usable questionnaires were obtained. Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses.

Findings – It was found that role ambiguity and conflict were negatively associated with affective and normative commitment. Also, there were negative relationships between the three dimensions of organizational commitment and turnover intentions. There was no significant relationship between employees’ role stressors and their continuance commitment. Employees with continuance commitment develop turnover cognitions when alternative jobs are available.

Research limitations/implications – More research using data from the public sector in developing countries is advocated. Studies should incorporate three dimensions of organizational commitment and also assess pay satisfaction. Moderators that might change employees’ normative and affective commitment should be explored.

Practical implications – It is suggested that the sector should reduce role stressors to enhance employees’ commitment. Employees should be offered competitive salaries to minimize turnover of employees with affective and normative commitment. This will serve to minimize retention of mainly employees with high continuance commitment.

Originality/value – This is one of the few studies that have examined organizational commitment in the public sector using data from a developing country.

Keywords Employee turnover, Public sector organizations, St Lucia, Caribbean, Job satisfaction

Paper type Research paper

Organizational commitment remains one of the most widely studied phenomena in the organizational behavior literature (Copper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005; Maertz et al., 2007) and one of the central concepts in psychology (Morrow, 1993). As noted in Addae and Parboteeah (2006), such strong interest is not surprising given organizational commitment’s relationship with many critical organizational variables such as organizational performance (Riketta, 2002), attendance and staying with an organization...
Extensive discussions of such relationships are found in the meta-analyses (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). However, despite the growing number of studies investigating organizational commitment, there is still very little work done in developing countries (Meyer et al., 2002). In fact, most organizational scholarship has focused on samples from North America (Markovits et al., 2007). Although studies have focused, for example, on Europe (Vandenberghhe, 1996), the Middle East (Yousef, 2002), East Asia (Chen and Franceseo, 2003), very few studies have been conducted in developing countries in the Caribbean (with the exception of Addae and Parboteeah (2006); Addae et al. (2006)). Given the growing importance of the Caribbean region to global trade and the context of globalization, there is an important need to extend our understanding of employees’ organizational commitment in the region.

Additionally, most of the studies conducted on organizational commitment have focused on private sector organizations. Few studies have examined public sector employees (for exceptions see Balfour and Wechsler, 1996; Goulet and Franke, 2002; Liou and Nyhan, 1994; Steijn and Leisink, 2006). Comparative studies of both sectors have consistently demonstrated that private sector employees exhibit greater organizational commitment than public sector employees. For example, Zeffane (1994) found significant relationships between management styles and organizational commitment. He contended that private sector managers were more flexible while their public sector counterparts tended to manage by rules and regulations. The flexibility in management style was associated with greater commitment in the private sector. Also, Buchanan (1974) found that public sector managers were less committed than private sector managers. He argued that broad public sector agencies goals lead to weak performance-outcome link. Therefore, managers in the public sector identify less with the broader organizational goals but with their immediate work environment. This makes public sector managers less likely to be committed to the overall organization as they relate less to the organization’s broader goals compared to private sector managers.

Furthermore, Liou and Nyhan (1994) pointed out that the relative lack of organizational commitment among public sector employees merits further attention. However, none of these studies examined organizational commitment using data from public sector employees in a developing country. As such, this study aims to contribute to the work on organizational commitment and fill the gaps identified above by investigating organizational commitment of public sector employees in St Lucia, a developing country in the Caribbean.

A literature review suggests that St Lucia has been mostly ignored by management research (see Lee-Ross (2004) and Jayawardena and Ramajeesing (2003) for studies focusing on the tourism industry). In St Lucia, as is the case in many developing countries, the public sector is the largest single employer. For this reason, the sector is recognized as the key agent in managing the socio-economic development and integration of the island. However, there is concern that the service has become inefficient and is unable to meet the challenges of its dynamic environment. Therefore, the government has embarked on public sector reform aimed at reducing rigidity and inefficiencies in the sector (Green Paper on Public Sector Reform, available at: www.stlucia.gov.lc/agencies/PublicSectorReform/green.html). To successfully implement the sectors’ reform initiatives, employees ought to clearly understand the goals and
objectives of the public sector in the context of the reforms as well as their roles in attaining them. The sector should therefore ensure role clarity and reduce role conflict to enhance employees’ commitment. This is important because even though the sector is the largest employer, the growing service industry in the island is providing employees with alternative jobs and higher wages.

St Lucia and the public sector

Before we consider specific hypotheses, it is important to consider some general information on St Lucia. It is one of the Windward Islands of the Eastern Caribbean with an estimated population of 170,649 in 2007 (CIA World Factbook, available at: www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/) and is a member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). It is a former British colony that achieved independence in 1979. In 2005, it had an estimated unemployment rate of 18.7 percent (St Lucian Statistics, 2007, available at: www.stats.gov.lc/). St Lucia has been actively involved in finding ways to diversify from agricultural products as European Union reforms and competition from Latin American countries have made the environment mostly unfavorable for bananas. It currently has a stable economy and relies mostly on tourism and offshore banking for its economic development (CIA World Factbook, 2007). The public sector in St Lucia is based upon the concepts of the Westminster Whitehall model of government and in 2007, it employed an average of 9,729 employees (St Lucian Statistics, 2007) making it the single largest employer in the country.

Hypotheses

Organizational commitment

Although various conceptualizations and operationalizations of organizational commitment abound, currently most of the research in the area has been based on Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three-component conceptualization of the construct. In their three-component model of organizational commitment, they proposed that organizational commitment explains the strength and nature of an individual’s identification with and attachment to an organization. Thus, organizational commitment determines employees’ motivation to maintain their membership in an organization.

Meyer and Allen (1991) postulated that employees develop affective, normative, and continuance commitment to their organizations. Affective commitment is the extent to which employees are involved with and have emotional attached to their organizations because they identify with the goals and values of their organizations. Thus, employees with high levels of affective commitment stay with their organizations because they want to. Normative commitment reflects employees’ sense of obligation to their organizations. As such, employees with strong normative commitment remain with their organizations because they feel they ought to. In contrast, continuance commitment refers to commitment based on employees’ recognition of the costs associated with leaving their organizations. Therefore, employees with strong continuance commitment remain with their organizations primarily to avoid costs of leaving. It should be noted that the different forms of commitment are not mutually exclusive as employees can experience varying degrees of affective, normative, and continuance commitment.

The determinants of organizational commitment include, but are not limited to, role characteristics (Allen and Meyer, 1990). In this study, we investigated role conflict and
role ambiguity as antecedents of organizational commitment and the effect of the latter on employees’ turnover intentions. In addition, we examined perceived alternatives as a moderator between employees’ organizational commitment and their turnover intentions.

To develop our hypotheses, we rely on research developed in North America and Anglo countries. While most cultural theorists such as Hofstede (2001) and the GLOBE group (House et al., 2004) have mostly ignored St Lucia in their research, there is evidence that many of the Caribbean countries share similar cultural traits compared to Anglo cultures (Punnett et al., 1994, 2006), given the long periods of British rule. Our assumption that research done in North America and Anglo cultures would also apply to St Lucia is therefore legitimate. In addition, although some research point to significant differences between the public and private sector on work values and commitment (Markovits et al., 2007), there is other research that point to the lack of significant difference between the two sectors (Lyons et al., 2006). We build our hypotheses on the more general commitment literature with specific reference to the public sector whenever possible.

Organizational commitment, role conflict, and role ambiguity
According to role theory, when employees perceive conflicting demands or that carrying out one role expectation makes carrying out another more difficult, they experience role conflict. Role ambiguity occurs when employees perceive a lack of clarity in the behavioral requirements of their job (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Sufficient evidence indicates that both role conflict and role ambiguity lead to psychological strain (Cooper et al., 2001) and can affect employees’ job and organizational outcomes (Perrewè et al., 2002). Such psychological strain is expected to affect employees’ organizational commitment. Thus, it is expected that those who perceive higher levels of role conflict and role ambiguity would generally be less committed to the organization.

Employees’ interpretation of role stressors might have differential impacts on the relative strength and type of their commitment to the public sector in St Lucia. Meyer and Allen (1997) posited that theoretically the relationship between employees’ role stressors and affective commitment would be influenced by their perception of organizational support and fairness. This is because incompatibility among role expectations and insufficient information needed to perform their roles would hinder employees’ effectiveness. Thus, high levels of both role stressors would cause employees to perceive the organization as unsupportive and unfair, diminishing their affective commitment. In fact, several studies have found negative relationships between affective commitment and both role ambiguity and role conflict (King and Sethi, 1997; Yousef, 2002; Irving and Coleman, 2005; Glazer and Beerh, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002). Based on the above discussion, we extend the logic of the overall findings in these studies to the public sector in St Lucia and offer the following hypotheses:

\[ H1a. \] There will be a negative relationship between role conflict and affective commitment.

\[ H1b. \] There will be a negative relationship between role ambiguity and affective commitment.
Meyer and Allen (1997) suggested that when organizations make certain investments in employees that may be difficult for the employees to reciprocate, they develop normative organizational commitment because they feel a sense of obligation and indebtedness to their organizations. In St Lucia, public sector employees are provided with scholarships and study grants to pursue further education. Therefore, it can be argued that employees who have taken advantage of such benefits would have high normative commitment to the public sector.

However, Meyer and Allen (1997) pointed out normative commitment could also develop on the basis of the psychological contract between employees and their organizations. Therefore, it is expected that in spite of organizational investments, employees would perceive their relationship with the public sector as an exchange relationship in which the organization is expected to also have reciprocal obligations. Thus, employees who primarily respond to organizational investment with a sense of obligation could later reassess these feelings if they believe that the organization has violated some aspect of the psychological contract.

Role stressors are likely to weaken employees’ performance and could be viewed as a violation of the psychological contract. In turn, such perceptions could lead to employees’ diminished sense of obligation to the public sector. Unfortunately, few studies have examined the effects of role stressors on normative commitment. Indeed, in a meta-analysis Meyer et al. (2002) indicated that there were insufficient studies linking role stressors to normative commitment and reported no meta-analytic results. Nevertheless, Yousef (2002) found a negative relationship between role ambiguity and normative commitment. Based on the above reasoning, we offer the following hypotheses:

\[
H2a. \text{ There will be a negative relationship between role conflict and normative commitment.}
\]

\[
H2b. \text{ There will be a negative relationship between role ambiguity and normative commitment.}
\]

When employees recognize that they have limited employment alternatives and also perceive that the costs of leaving their organizations are high, they are likely to have strong continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Under these circumstances, such employees are more susceptible to the effects of work-related stressors. This is because employees with high continuance commitment perceive they have less control over their work environment (Coleman et al., 1999). Consequently, employees with high continuance commitment are less likely to leave the public sector even in the face of role stressors because they believe they need to remain in the public sector. Empirical evidence demonstrates that both role stressors are positively related to continuance commitment (King and Sethi, 1997; Glazer and Beerh, 2005; Meyer et al., 2002). We therefore offer the following hypotheses:

\[
H3a. \text{ There will be a positive relationship between role conflict and continuance commitment.}
\]

\[
H3b. \text{ There will be a positive relationship between role ambiguity and continuance commitment.}
\]
Employee turnover intentions is defined as employees’ estimated probability that they will leave their organization (Cotton and Tuttle, 1986). In a meta-analysis, Griffeth et al. (2000) showed that turnover intentions is the strongest single predictor of actual voluntary turnover. Since employees with high turnover intentions would most likely quit the organization, it is important to identify factors that influence turnover intentions with the aim of reducing actual turnover (Maertz and Campion, 1998).

Meyer and Allen (1997) theorized that organizational commitment is a determinant of turnover intentions. In addition, they asserted that all three components of organizational commitment should be negatively correlated to employee turnover intentions. In fact, the relationship between turnover intentions and organizational commitment has been empirically established. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) in their meta-analysis found a large correlation between employees’ intentions to leave and their organizational commitment. However, the studies used in their meta-analysis were based mainly on affective commitment. Meyer et al. (2002) found significant negative associations between the three commitment scales and turnover.

Although the above studies were mostly based on the private sector, at least one study in the public sector also provides evidence of similar relationships. For instance, Maertz et al. (2007) found significant negative relationships between affective and normative commitment and turnover intentions of public service employees. Given the above, we offer the following hypothesis:

H4. There will be a negative relationship between affective, normative, and continuance commitment and employees’ turnover intentions.

Although, employees’ type of organizational commitment may influence their turnover cognitions, Mobley et al. (1978) proposed that it is unlikely that employees will quit their jobs if they perceive that are no alternative jobs available to them. It has been established that employees with affective commitment stay with their organizations because they want to. Therefore, it is unlikely that such employees would want to leave even if there are alternative jobs available to them. Similarly, employees with normative commitment would not leave in favor of alternative jobs because they feel obligated to stay. Conversely, it is probable that employees whose organizational commitment is based on necessity might be willing to leave their organizations if there are alternative jobs available. Based on the preceding, we offer the following hypothesis:

H5. The relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions will be moderated by perceived alternatives. Specifically, the continuance-turnover intentions link will be more pronounced for employees with low perceived alternatives.

Methodology
Sample and procedures
Data for this study were collected from public sector employees in St Lucia. Three hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered to respondents from seven ministries. Data were collected by the third author. Each questionnaire contained a cover letter that indicated that participation in the study was voluntary and responses were strictly confidential. Of the 350 questionnaires administered, 226 usable
responses were returned yielding a response rate of 65 percent. The mean age was 31 years and average tenure was three years. About 77 percent were female, 81 percent were single and 19 percent were married.

Measures

Role conflict and role ambiguity. Both role conflict and role ambiguity measures used for this study were developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). The role conflict scale consisted of eight items and the role ambiguity scale consisted of six items. Respondents indicated their responses on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”. Coefficient alphas were 0.80 and 0.71 for role conflict and role ambiguity, respectively. Items for role conflict included “I receive assignments without the manpower to complete it.” Items for role ambiguity included “I know exactly what is expected of me.”

Organizational commitment. The three components of organizational commitment – affective, normative, and continuance – were assessed using the Meyer and Allen (1997) 19 item measures. Employees indicated their responses on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” The affective commitment scale comprised six items and measured the extent to which employees stayed in the organization because they wanted to. Items for this scale included “This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was 0.74. The normative commitment scale also comprised six items and measured the extent to which employees stayed in the organization because they felt they ought to. Items included “I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was 0.77. The continuance commitment scale comprised seven items and measured the extent to which employees stay in the organization because they felt they had to. Items included “If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was 0.74.

Perceived alternatives. This was measured using the Peters et al. (1981) three-item scale. The responses ranged from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree.” Items included “It is possible for me to find a better job than the one I have now.” The coefficient alpha was 0.51.

Turnover intentions. This was measured using the Mitchel (1981) four-item scale. Responses ranged from 1 “very unlikely” to 5 “very likely.” Items included “I will be in the service five years from now.” The coefficient alpha for this variable was 0.82.

Results

Table I presents descriptive statistics, reliabilities and inter-correlations among the variables. Except for perceived alternatives which had a low reliability of 0.51, the reliabilities for all the other variables in the study were acceptable. The inter-correlations also demonstrate that most of the direct relationships predicted in the study were supported.

Regression analyses were used to test our hypothesized relationships. Studies have consistently found that age, tenure, and gender are significantly related to organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). We therefore, controlled for these variables in our analyses to ensure that their effects were taken into consideration.
Table I. Correlations and descriptive statistics of study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30.80</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>7.39</td>
<td>0.81**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative commitment</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuance commitment</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>-0.13*</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.22**</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived alternatives</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intentions</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.39**</td>
<td>-0.43**</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
<td>-0.26**</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.19** (0.82)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: n = 226. * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01. Reliabilities are in parentheses. Gender was coded as 1 = male and female = 0.
H1a and H1b predicted that both role stressors will be negatively related to affective commitment. Regression analysis (Table II) revealed (Model 1) that role conflict ($\beta = -0.20, p < 0.01$) and role ambiguity ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of affective commitment. Thus, H1a and H1b were supported. H2a and H2b predicted that there will be a negative relationship between both role stressors and normative commitment. As Model 2 demonstrates, role conflict ($\beta = -0.12, p < 0.05$) and role ambiguity ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of normative commitment supporting H2a and H2b. However, there were no significant relationships between both role conflict and role ambiguity and continuance commitment (Model 3), disconfirming H3a and H3b which predicted that both role stressors will be negatively related to continuance commitment.

In H4, it was predicted that there will be a negative relationships among affective, normative, and continuance commitment and employees’ turnover intentions. The results (Model 4) demonstrate significant negative relationship between affective ($\beta = -0.16, p < 0.05$), normative ($\beta = -0.30, p < 0.001$), continuance commitment ($\beta = -0.21, p < 0.01$) and turnover intentions. Therefore, H4 was supported.

Finally, moderated hierarchical regression analysis was used to test our assertion in H5 that the relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions will be moderated by perceived alternatives. First, control variables were into the model. In the second step, continuance commitment, perceived alternatives, and the interaction terms between perceived alternatives and continuance commitment were entered. The findings presented in Table II (Model 5), illustrate a significant interaction between perceived alternatives and continuance commitment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.12, p < 0.01$). We plotted the interaction effect using the standard procedure of (mean + 1 s.d.) to represent high perceived alternatives and (mean - 1 s.d.) to represent low perceived alternatives. As Figure 1 demonstrates, although there is a negative relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions, this relationship is more pronounced for employees who perceive a low probability of finding alternative jobs. Thus, H5 was supported.

Discussion
The main objective of this article was to investigate the relationships among role ambiguity, role conflict, affective, normative, and continuance commitment. We also examined the moderating effect of perceived alternatives on the relationship between employees’ continuance commitment and turnover intentions. Our study is unique because it examined these relationships in the public sector in St Lucia, a developing country in the Caribbean. Overall, the results of the study supported the relationships predicted and make important contributions to the understanding of these relationships in the public sector of St Lucia.

Affective and normative commitment had the expected negative relationships with role ambiguity and role conflict. Such results are consistent with previous research (King and Sethi, 1997; Yousef, 2002; Meyer et al., 2002) and indicate that employees who experience higher levels of role ambiguity and conflict are less likely to identify with the goals and values or feel a sense of obligation to stay in the public sector.

The results demonstrated that there were no significant relationships between both role stressors and continuance commitment. These results suggest that employees' role conflict or ambiguity did not affect their need to stay with their organization.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Affective commitment model 1</th>
<th>Normative commitment model 2</th>
<th>Continuance commitment model 3</th>
<th>Turnover intentions model 4</th>
<th>Turnover intentions model 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Tenure</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.33**</td>
<td>-0.34**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>-0.14*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affective commitment</td>
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<td>Normative commitment</td>
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<td>Role conflict</td>
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<td>Role ambiguity</td>
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<td>continuity commitment</td>
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<td>Step 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.05**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
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<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.06**</td>
<td>0.05**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$
However, although speculative, such results may reflect the job security afforded to employees in the public sector. In fact, Meyer et al. (1998) posited that continuance commitment is more likely to develop for individuals who value job security. Thus, it is expected that public sector employees with high levels of continuance commitment would value their job security. As such, role stressors would not affect their need to stay in the sector. The lack of significant relationships between role stressors and continuance commitment in our study is consistent with that obtained by Yousef (2002).

Our findings of the moderating effect of perceived alternatives in the relationship between continuance commitment and turnover intentions suggest that for employees who have a relatively low need to stay in the public sector, the presence of perceived alternatives increases their turnover cognitions. The service industry in St Lucia is growing (CIA World Factbook, 2007). Hence, employees have the opportunity to find alternative jobs outside the public sector. Therefore, in spite of the greater job security afforded by the public sector, employees with lower levels of continuance commitment are likely to leave the public sector if there are other jobs available to them.

**Theoretical implications**

Theoretically, this study lends support to previous studies in organizational commitment that investigated private or public sector employees. We examined
perceived alternatives as a moderator in the continuance commitment and turnover intentions relationships. It is important to investigate other possible moderators that would change the relationship between both affective and normative commitment and turnover intentions. For example, Addae et al. (2006) found that employees with high affective commitment are more likely to have turnover cognitions if they perceive that the psychological contract has been breached. It is likely that similar underlying processes might exist for employees with normative commitment.

As we have indicated, the public sector is the largest single employer in St Lucia. Furthermore, it is in the process of implementing reform initiatives with the aim of making the sector more effective and efficient. To successfully implement any reform, public sector managers should ensure that employees in the sector clearly understand their roles and identify with its goals and values. The findings of this study suggest that affective and normative commitment could be fostered in public sector employees through interventions that lower employees' role ambiguity and conflict. Furthermore, according to the St Lucia Civil Service Association (www.csastlucia.org/), public sector employees in St Lucia have opportunities for further education without losing their jobs. Employees are offered study leave with or without pay depending on how long they have been employed in the service. Public sector employees are also more likely to receive scholarships and study grants to pursue their studies through various funding agencies. However, these opportunities are not readily available to private sector employees. Such benefits make the public sector more attractive for some employees. These benefits have the potential for enhancing employees' affective and normative commitment.

Finally, we note that our study also provides some support for our contention that the relationships among the role conflict and role ambiguity and commitment in the St Lucia cultural context may be similar to the US. The long periods of British colonial rule has probably resulted in a more Anglo orientation consistent with many other Caribbean nations (Punnett et al., 2007). As such, although we did not measure cultural attributes of St Lucia, our results provide some more indirect insights into the culture. Furthermore, the results supporting arguments based on research done in the private sector adds to the burgeoning literature of minimal differences between the private and public sectors (Lyons et al., 2006).

Conclusions, limitations, and future research
Our study demonstrates that public sector employees in St Lucia are less likely to develop affective or normative commitment to the service if they experience role conflict and ambiguity. Furthermore, those employees with continuance commitment will stay regardless of any role stressors if they perceive few job alternatives available to them. However, employees with greater probabilities of finding alternative employment, employees with continuance commitment are more likely to leave if they experience role stressors.

Since continuance commitment is based on necessity, it is plausible to expect that employees with such commitment may do what is minimally required of them to maintain their jobs. In addition, it is logical to expect that such employees may join the service to take advantage of the various training incentives provided and leave once alternative jobs are available. Obviously, under such circumstances, the service will be better off with fewer employees with continuance commitment.
Our paper adds value to research in organizational commitment because it examined the concept using data from the public sector in a developing country. Organization commitment research in both public and developing countries are scarce. In addition, unlike most of the research in the area that tends to examine affective commitment we investigated all the three dimensions. This is important because Meyer and Allen (1997) postulated that the three components of organizational commitment should not be viewed as individual types of commitment but as part of the same construct. Thus, it is valuable to include all three dimensions in one study to understand how the different forms of employees’ commitment affect their attitudes and behaviors.

There are a number of limitations of our study. First, our study is based on cross-sectional self-reported data. Therefore, the hypothesized causal relationships cannot be demonstrated. Furthermore, because data for the dependent and independent variables were collected from the same employees concurrently, common method variance is a potential problem (Spector, 2006). Nevertheless, we believe that assessing the effect of employees’ job related attitudes on their attitudes towards their organization in the same questionnaire is less prone to significant common method variance than if we had asked them to describe their work and evaluate it in the same questionnaire.

Second, our study was based on public sector employees so this may affect the generalizability of our results to the private sector employees. However, meta-analyses of studies conducted in private sector organizations suggest generalizable relationships for most of our study variables (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002). Moreover, the public sector is the single largest employer in St Lucia so we can speculate that our findings could reflect general employee tendencies in St Lucia. Third, the reliability for the perceived alternatives scale was low (0.51). This may be due to the fact that at the time of data collection, employees were concerned about how public sector would affect their jobs. On the other hand, the items were generated in North America so employees may have different interpretations of items. Such differences could lead to questions regarding the validity of the scale in our study. Despite the low reliability the perceived alternatives scale, it yielded significant results with its associated variables.

Future research should specifically find out employees motivation for joining the public sector and assess their pay satisfaction. This will help determine if employees leaving the service do so out of dissatisfaction with their salaries. In fact, Perry and Wise (1990) indicated that generally, public service employees have rational, normative, and affective motives for joining the public service. While similar assertions can be made of public sector employees in the public sector in St Lucia, empirical evidence is needed. In the light of public sector reform and the new public management initiatives, it will be insightful to conduct longitudinal studies to track the effects of reform on employees’ behavior and attitudes. Due to the scarcity of research on the antecedents and outcomes of organizational commitment in developing countries and the public sector, it is hoped more studies are conducted in public sector organizations. Such studies should make significant contributions to both theory and practice in the area because the public sector tends to be the largest single employer in most developing countries.
References


**Further reading**


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