

Seminars for Valencia

Magnus Sverke

Department of Psychology, Stockholm University
mse@psychology.su.se; cell phone: +46 70 635 1961

Seminar 1 (Wednesday 25 October, 4pm – 8pm)

Work Motivation and Organizational Commitment: Antecedents and Consequences

The concept of work commitment continues to be a topic which fascinates researchers at both the theoretical and applied levels. To a large extent, this growing research attention is attributable to a general interest in the factors that contribute to employees' motivation to exert themselves on behalf of their organizations. Over the past decades, the concept has attracted empirical research attention both as an antecedent and as a consequence of other work-related variables. Commitment also has normative connotations and has been valued by practitioners as reflected in an assumption – explicit or implicit – that management prefers loyal employees who identify with the goals and values of the organization. Unfortunately, however, the rising interest in commitment as a phenomenon and the growth of commitment related concepts have not been accompanied by careful theoretical consideration of its conceptual domain.

An important issue in terms of work commitment concerns the distinction between various foci of commitment. Employees can commit themselves, for instance, to the organization they work for, the workgroup, the job itself, their career, and the union. Although there are important differences between these foci, there is certain overlap between the different domains that have implications for the understanding of the nature of commitment. Another important issue concerns the dimensionality of commitment. A major focus in most definitions of commitment has been on employees' affective attachment to their organization. Conceptualizations of commitment typically also focus on employees' continued membership in the organization and/or a normative identification with the organization. A striking characteristic of research on the nature of commitment is that various fundamental dimensions of commitment are sometimes assigned different labels, thus increasing the risk of concept redundancy.

This seminar will discuss similarities and differences between various forms of work motivation and commitment, as well as between different dimensions of commitment, in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the fundamentals of commitment. Since a crucial issue in commitment research concerns the processes through which the different aspects of commitment are assumed to develop, the presentation will also summarize research evidence on the antecedents of commitment. The relation of commitment to various potential outcomes will also be highlighted.

The seminar will also point out some future challenges. One issue associated with the study of commitment is the extent to which self-reported levels of commitment are either static or variable over time. If commitment is based on strong ideological or normative grounds, then one would expect both the level and meaning of commitment to be relatively stable; to the extent it is, rather, based on instrumentality and cost-benefit estimates, one would expect the construct to fluctuate over time. The seminar will discuss methodological issues in capturing change/stability over time.

Given the increased flexibility of working life, another question concerns the extent to which existing theories of work commitment are relevant to employees hired on fixed-term contracts. Equally questionable is the extent to which existing theories of employment are based upon frameworks which assume the presence of a single and identifiable employer–worker relationship.

Seminar 2 (Thursday 26 October, 12pm – 2pm)

Publishing internationally in work and organizational psychology

There is a saying (at least in Sweden) about research that “it doesn’t matter how nice a research design one has or how sophisticated analyses one conducts, unless one is also able to wrap this up in a nice parcel”. Another saying posits that “research involves 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent transpiration”. Both these sayings highlight the major challenge of research – that of writing up the results in a way that makes them interesting and relevant to readers as well as reviewers and editors. How should the research problem be outlined? How general or specific, and how broad or narrow should one make the overview of previous theory and empirical studies? What aspects of the particular study could and should be described in the method section? How to find a balance between tables and text in the presentation of results? What are the vital things to bring up in the discussion, and how could the limitations of the study be handled? Obviously, the answers to these questions will vary depend on who you ask. Magnus Sverke will present his views on how to write an internationally publishable article based on his experience as author of scientific papers, editor of several books, journal Editorial Board member, and reviewer for numerous journals

Seminar 3 (Friday 27 October, 9am – 11am)

Teaching work and organizational psychology in Sweden

This seminar will present a brief overview of the Swedish university system and describe the major options for studying W/O psychology. Illustrations of W/O related content at Stockholm University will be given for the three major paths at the undergraduate level – the Psychology Program (for those studying to become licensed psychologists), the Personnel, Work and Organization Program (for those planning some kind of HR career), and the separate courses (for those putting together a Bachelor’s degree with psychology as the major) – as well as the Master’s Program and the PhD Program. The seminar will also outline the challenges to the “old” system posed by the Bologna process. I will also make my personal reflections based on my experience from teaching W/O psychology at these different levels. The aim is that the seminar will allow for a discussion on similarities and differences between the Spanish and Swedish system as well as concerning “hot” issues in W/O psychology.