Employee retention: exploring the relationship between employee commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and the decision to leave the organisation

Pascal Paillé
Département Management, Université Laval, G1K7P4, Québec, QC, Canada
E-mail: pascal.paille@fsa.ulaval.ca

Abstract: This paper examines the mediating effect of citizenship behaviour on the relationship between employee commitment and intent to leave at the organisational level. Two field studies involving three independent samples were conducted. The procedure used by Baron and Kenny (1986) was selected for the purposes of the mediation test. In study 1 (N = 704), the findings indicate a partial mediation of citizenship behaviour in the relationship between employee commitment and intent to leave the organisation. In study 2, the data show the same pattern in both sample A (N = 651) and sample B (N = 355). While sportsmanship was found to play a mediating role between employee commitment and intent to leave the organisation, no mediation was found for civic virtue. The findings are discussed.

Keywords: organisational citizenship behaviour; employee commitment; intent to leave the organisation; mediation.

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Biographical notes: Pascal Paillé is an Associate Professor of Human Resource Management at Université Laval, Québec, Canada. His research interests are employee retention, exchange social theory, organisational citizenship behaviour, and withdrawal behaviour.

1 Introduction

Chen et al. (1998) demonstrated that organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) affects the decision to quit the organisation. Employees exhibiting low levels of OCB are more prone to leave their employer. In view of these findings, Chen and her colleague (1998) suggested that OCBs may reflect the level of attachment of employees to their organisation. The literature has generally found that employee commitment is one of the key variables for the development of OCB (Morrison, 1994) and the enhancement of employee retention (Maertz, 2004). Given that previous literature has shown that OCB is
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an antecedent to the decision to quit, and that employee commitment is an antecedent to both OCB and the decision to quit, an interesting issue is to gain understanding of the relationships between these three variables. Specifically, the purpose of this paper addresses the issue whether OCB can be used as an intermediate variable in the relationship between employee commitment and the intention to leave the organisation.

The investigation of OCB as a possible mediator between employee commitment and intent to leave the organisation is based firstly on empirical data and secondly on theoretical arguments. Firstly, Chen (2005) suggested recently that a lack of willingness to exhibit OCB may indicate employee withdrawal from the organisation. Krausz et al. (1995) argued that leaving the organisation is the final stage of the withdrawal process. Harrison et al. (2006) reported findings that tend to support Chen’s (2005) contention that OCB reduction may be viewed as the first step of the withdrawal process. In addition, field studies indicated that employee commitment increases OCB (e.g., Becker, 1992; Bentein et al., 2002; Pohl and Paillé, 2011). Secondly, OCBs are a form of discretionary behaviour and are not formally required in the workplace (Organ et al., 2006). Therefore, when employees experience lasting dissatisfaction with their jobs or become less committed to their organisations and are unable to leave because of a lack of external professional opportunities, it is less risky for employees to reduce OCB than to express discontent by reducing their efforts at work. Employees who decrease their efforts at work may face sanctions from a supervisor, unlike employees who diminish their OCB.

The study begins with a literature review, focusing in particular on the links between employee commitment, OCB and intent to leave the organisation. The results of two field studies involving three independent samples are then presented. Finally, the findings are discussed in light of the literature review.

2 Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 Employee commitment and intent to leave the organisation

For several decades, the concept of employee commitment has generated a significant number of studies examining human resources management (e.g., Boshoff and Mels, 2000; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Paré and Tremblay, 2007; Redman and Snape, 2005; Vandenberghe et al., 2004). Employee commitment to the organisation refers to a psychological state in which the employee shares the values of the organisation and adheres to its objectives (Mowday et al., 1982): the greater the convergence between the employee’s values and objectives and those of the organisation, the stronger the degree of commitment; conversely, the greater the divergence in values and objectives, the weaker the level of employee commitment. It is now widely accepted that employees can commit to several foci, such as their organisation, their supervisor, their colleagues, their customers, etc. Based on the preliminary theoretical analysis conducted by Reichers (1985) and the first empirical investigations by Becker (1992), one of the current trends in the literature on employee commitment is to consider several foci in studies of the relationship with outcomes (e.g., Bentein et al. 2002; Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003; Vandenberghe et al., 2001, 2004). Vandenberghe et al. (2004) demonstrated that commitment to the organisation has a direct effect on the decision to leave, whereas commitment to the supervisor and commitment to colleagues have an
indirect effect. Based on these results, Vandenberghe et al. suggest that “the organization was psychologically more relevant in the eyes of employees when they were to generate their membership decisions (p.59)”. Employee commitment to the organisation is widely accepted as the key variable of research on retention/turnover (Maertz, 2004). Vandenberghe et al. (2004) went one step further by showing that among several foci of employee commitment, employee commitment to the organisation is the best predictor of employee retention.

Meta-analyses of employee commitment to the organisation (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002) and employee turnover (Hom and Griffeth, 1995; Griffeth et al., 2000) provide evidence showing the link between the two variables. Mathieu and Zajac (1990) reported a corrected correlation of $r = -0.28$ ($k = 26, N = 8,197$). More recently, Meyer et al. (2002) reported a correlation of $r = -0.17$ ($k = 8, N = 2,636$). The results of the meta-analysis by Meyer et al. (2002) show that the link between affective commitment to the organisation and intent to leave the organisation has been widely studied and shows a high weighted average corrected correlation ($k = 24, N = 8,724, \rho = -0.51$). An update published by Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) reached the same conclusion ($k = 351, N = 136,270, \rho = -0.47$). Griffeth et al. (2000) found a corrected correlation of $r = -0.27$ ($k = 67, N = 27,540$). These results suggest the following conclusion: the greater the levels of employee commitment to the organisation, the less likely employees are to want to leave their employer. In view of the extensive data presented above, a negative relationship between commitment and intent to leave is predicted.

Hypothesis 1 Employee commitment to the organisation and intent to leave the organisation are negatively related.

2.2 Employee commitment and citizenship behaviour toward the organisation

In the last decade, the topic of OCB has grown considerably. Although there is no consensus in the matter (Turnipseed and Murkison, 2000), the definition given by Organ (1988) is the most widely shared and common among scientists with an interest in OCB (Hoffman et al., 2007). According to Organ (1988), OCB refers to “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. By discretionary, we mean that the behavior is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person’s employment contract with the organization; the behavior is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable (p.4)”. Helping, civic virtue and sportsmanship are the three principal forms of OCB studied by researchers following in Organ’s footsteps. Helping encompasses several types of behaviour, including altruism, courtesy and peacemaking. As such, helping involves the provision of assistance to others on work-related matters. Civic virtue refers to behavior in which an individual is involved in governing topics, defending the image and reputation of the organisation, and protecting the property of the organisation (among others). Sportsmanship is exhibited when employees demonstrate a capacity to tolerate pressure and heavy workloads without complaint. While helping reflects citizenship behaviour toward individuals, civic virtue and sportsmanship reflect citizenship behaviour toward the organisation. Williams and Anderson (1991) explained the usefulness of the
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A distinction in conceptual, empirical and methodological terms. A number of scholars have applied the distinction (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2003; Lee and Allen, 2002; LePine et al., 2002).

Most empirical studies have found that employee commitment and OCB are positively related, suggesting that the more an employee is committed to their organisation, the more likely they are to exhibit OCB (e.g., Becker, 1992; Bellou, 2008; Chen et al., 1998; Chen and Francesco, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 1993; Moorman et al., 1993; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Paillé, 2010; Schappe, 1998; Tepper et al., 2004; Williams and Anderson, 1991; Yoon and Suh, 2003). Employee commitment is of interest because this variable is linked to desirable work behaviour valued by managers, such as OCB (Shore et al., 1995). Although the vast majority of empirical relations are positive and significant (i.e., Bishop et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2003; Schappe, 1998), the literature review indicates that certain findings are based on data that tend to contradict this tendency, since an absence of relationship is sometimes observed (Shore et al., 2000; William and Anderson, 1991). Researchers using Organ’s expanded taxonomy have been unable to shed further light on the issue (e.g., Paillé, 2010; Rioux and Penner, 2001; Yoon and Suh, 2003). These studies have reported findings indicating that commitment to the organisation better explains citizenship behaviour toward the organisation than citizenship behaviour toward individuals. While Yoon and Suh (2003), Rioux and Penner (2001), and Paillé (2010) found positive correlations between commitment to the organisation and citizenship behaviour toward the organisation (civic virtue and sportsmanship), correlations between commitment to the organisation and citizenship behaviour toward individuals are somewhat unclear. Positive relationships between commitment to the organisation and altruism were found by Rioux and Penner (2001) and Paillé (2010), while no relationship was found by Yoon and Suh (2003). These findings suggest that employee commitment to the organisation is a better predictor of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation.

2.3 Citizenship behaviour toward the organisation and intent to leave the organisation

Research on OCB has provided a fertile ground for exploring efficacy. The study of human resource performance in terms of OCB suggests that employees’ efficacy is based less on respecting instructions and production quotas at work than on the aggregation of voluntary daily efforts in carrying out their jobs. Research on OCB has focused almost exclusively on antecedents, while little research has been conducted on consequences. Podsakoff et al. (2000) found that OCB increases production, improves the quality of the service provided, raises client satisfaction or decreases customer complaints. One interesting issue is the nature of the link between OCB and retention. Data from previous studies (e.g., Aryee and Wah Chay, 2001; Shore et al., 2000; Wayne et al., 1997) indicate a direct negative effect by which the willingness of an individual to leave their employer decreases when they demonstrate OCB. Nevertheless, most studies have reported negative and significant zero-order correlations. These studies provide useful and interesting indications on the direction between OCB and turnover intentions.

Despite these data, Organ et al. (2006, p.239) claim that additional research is required on the relationships between OCB and employee retention (defined by Organ and his colleague as one of the most recognised indicators of organisational effectiveness). However, Organ et al. (2006) does not explicitly explain why additional
research is needed. This study posits that the decomposition of OCB into several facets might provide a fruitful avenue. In most previous research, OCB has been examined as a whole. Because results tend not to draw a distinction between OCB toward individuals and OCB toward the organisation in relationships involving intent to leave the organisation, it is not clear if helping behaviour better explains intent to leave than sportsmanship and/or civic virtue.

Although Chen (2005, study 3) found that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation in employee voluntary turnover was significantly higher than employee intention to leave, the results obtained by Chen need to be viewed with the specific cultural context in mind: Chen collected data among Chinese employees. Farh et al. (1997, p.428) found that “sportsmanship and courtesy, two dimensions in the Podsakoff scale, were not present in our citizenship behaviour scale, while interpersonal harmony and protecting company resources do not appear in Podsakoff’s scale”. This means that while some forms of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation exhibited by Chinese employees, such as interpersonal harmony and protecting the company, are emic (specific), others, such as identification with the company, altruism and conscientiousness, are etic (universal). Furthermore, Farh et al. (1997) argued that ‘identification with the company’ is very similar in definition to civic virtue (see Table 2, p.429). Chen (2005) used citizenship behaviour toward the organisation scales developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) to develop an overall citizenship behaviour toward the organisation index by averaging the scores on the three scales. Based on Chen’s results, it is not possible therefore to determine which dimensions of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation explain intent to leave the organisation.

Recent empirical research (Coyne and Ong, 2007) has reported more accurate data indicating a link between citizenship behaviour toward the organisation and variables that operationalise employee retention, such as intent to leave the organisation. First, based on three samples drawn from different cultures (Germany, Great Britain and Malaysia), Coyne and Ong (2007) examined how courtesy, altruism, conscientiousness, civic virtue and sportsmanship contribute to the variance of intent to leave the organisation. It was found that while courtesy, altruism, conscientiousness and civic virtue do not contribute to intent to leave the organisation, sportsmanship is the best predictor ($R^2 = 39\%$). Coyne and Ong (2007) used the arguments presented by Chen et al. (1998) to explain the absence of relationship between citizenship behaviour toward individuals and intent to leave the organisation. An employee may be close to some colleagues but distant from the organisation. The employee may therefore exhibit citizenship behaviour toward individuals (i.e., courtesy and altruism) but not toward the organisation (i.e., civic virtue). Coyne and Ong (2007) recommend introducing coherence into the examination of links between OCB and turnover intentions.

2.4 Beyond the direct effect: a possible mediating role for citizenship behaviour toward the organisation

The previous sections discussed three well-established direct effects. Given that employee commitment decreases the decision to leave and increases OCB, and OCB decreases the decision to leave, consistent with Chen (2005), the next step is to provide findings that go beyond the direct effects previously observed. Chen (2005) encourages research to improve our understanding of the relationship between citizenship behaviour toward the organisation, employee commitment and intent to leave the organisation.
Chen’s interest in this theme is connected with the results of a study (Chen et al., 1998) indicating that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation contributes to the variance of the actual departure ($\beta = -2.64$, $p < .001$), contrary to organisational commitment, for which the contribution is zero. Later studies point to contradictory relationships. While some data show that employee commitment alone predicts intent to leave the organisation and citizenship behaviour toward the organisation not at all (Grima, 2007), other data show that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation alone predicts intent to leave the organisation and commitment not at all (Chen, 2005).

Findings by MacKenzie et al. (1998) indicate a complete mediating effect of OCB on the relationship between employee commitment and the decision to quit the organisation. MacKenzie et al. (1998) created a single construct that measures OCB (referred to as extra-role performance in their study) by combining helping, sportsmanship and civic virtue scale scores. It is not possible therefore to identify exactly which dimensions of citizenship behaviours toward individuals or toward the organisation play a mediating role. Findings by Paré and Tremblay (2007) suggest a partial mediating effect because the direct effect of OCB (operationalised with a measurement capturing helping, a type of citizenship behaviour toward individuals) on intent to leave the organisation is greater than the direct effect of commitment on intent to leave the organisation (respectively $\beta = -.23$, $p < .05$, and $\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$). Finally, after having controlled organisational commitment in her regression calculations, Chen (2005, study 1) showed that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation explains intent to leave the organisation with an additional variance of 1.3%. Though low, the existence of this additional variance led Chen to question the role and respective place of citizenship behaviour and employee commitment in the prediction of employee intention to leave the organisation. The results presented in this section suggest that citizenship plays a possible mediating role in the relationship between commitment and intent to leave the organisation. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2** Citizenship behaviour toward the organization mediates the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intent to leave the organisation.

### 3 Study 1 method

#### 3.1 Participants

Public employees working in a government agency in Quebec were surveyed. Of the 943 questionnaires distributed, 704 were completed and usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 75.5%. The sample included 525 women (74.6%), with 52% having tenure. The average age of respondents was 30.6 years ($S.D. = 9.5$ years) and average overall professional experience was 7 years ($S.D. = 9.1$ years).

#### 3.2 Measurement

- **Commitment to the organisation**: To measure commitment to the organisation, the short scale (four items) developed by Bentein et al. (2002) was used. In Bentein et al. (2002), Cronbach’s alpha for the measure was .80 (time 1) and .71 (time 2).
• **Citizenship behaviour toward the organisation:** To measure citizenship behaviour toward the organisation, the short two-item scale developed by Bentein et al. (2002) was used. In Bentein et al. (2002), Cronbach’s alpha for the measure was .71 (time 1) and .66 (time 2).

• **Intention to leave the organisation:** To measure intention to leave the organisation, the three-item scale developed by Lichtenstein et al. (2004) was used. In Lichtenstein et al. (2004), Cronbach’s alpha for the measure was .83.

### 3.3 Procedure

In order to test the mediation effect of OCB on the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation, the three-step approach developed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used. For each step, a regression calculation was performed. The mediation test requires firstly a significant relationship between the independent variable (commitment to the organisation) and dependent variable (intention to leave the organisation). Secondly, the mediation test requires a significant relationship between the independent variable and the mediator (OCB). Thirdly, after controlling the effect of the independent variable, the mediation test requires a significant relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable. Finally, the mediation is supported if the full relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is insignificant. However, partial mediation is suggested if the magnitude of the regression coefficient ($\beta$) decreased but remained significant. In addition, the statistical test of mediation is performed using the Sobel (1982) test.

### 3.4 Results

Table 1 provides the reliabilities, means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of the study variables. As shown in Table 1, reliabilities range from .71 (citizenship behaviour toward the organisation) to .91 (intention to leave). Regression diagnostics were performed to detect possible multicollinearity among variables. Data indicate the absence of multicollinearity if the VIF value ranges between 0.10 and 10 (Hair et al., 1998). In the present study, the VIF values for public employees ranged from 1.25 (intention to leave the organisation) to 1.65 (commitment to the organisation).

**Table 1** Correlation matrix ($N = 704$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Intent to leave</th>
<th>OCB-O</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent to leave</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>-.44 **</td>
<td>-.12 **</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCB-O</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.50 **</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **$p < .01$; coefficient $\alpha$s are reported on the diagonal**

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. The data contained in Table 1 show that commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation are negatively and significantly related ($r = -.44, p < .01$). Hypothesis 1 is supported.
Testing the mediating effect of OCB on the relationships between organisational commitment and intention to leave the organisation (N = 704)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Sobel test statistic</th>
<th>IV (\rightarrow) mediator</th>
<th>IV (\rightarrow) DV</th>
<th>Mediator (\rightarrow) DV</th>
<th>IV (\rightarrow) DV; mediator controlled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intention to leave the organisation</td>
<td>-10.07***</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>-.50***</td>
<td>-.12***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: All paths are \(\beta\)s; IV independent variable, DV dependent variable; \(*p < .05\); **\(p < .01\); ***\(p < .001\).

Hypothesis 2 predicted a mediating role of OCB between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. As reported in Table 2, a very low increased magnitude of the regression coefficient (from \(-.49\) to \(-.50\)) of commitment to the organisation is reported, and the significance of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation (\(\beta = -.12, p < .000\)), indicate that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation partially mediates the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. The results of the Sobel test (\(Z = -10.07, p < .000\)) confirmed that the indirect effect of commitment on the intention to leave the organisation through OCB was significantly different from zero. In addition, the inclusion of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation explained an additional 17.6% of the variance in intention to leave the organisation. Hypothesis 2 is supported.

3.5 Discussion of study 1 results

In line with the predicted outcome of study 1, the data underline the mediating effect of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation on the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. Likewise, the choice of measurement of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation does not allow determination of which dimension of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation plays a mediating role. However, it is important to note that one of the two items used in the scale developed by Bentein et al. (2002) captures a part of civic virtue (I preserve and protect organisational property). Following Organ’s framework at the organisational level, willingness to cooperate refers to the following forms of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation: civic virtue (a macro-level interest in the organisation as a whole) and sportsmanship (posture of tolerating inconveniences at work). Some arguments have been advanced to explain the process by which citizenship behaviour toward the organisation may help to predict employee retention. Although study 1 provides encouraging results, more data are required to determine whether civic virtue and sportsmanship (defined as salient forms of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation in Organ’s framework) plays a mediating role in the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation. The decomposition of OCB into its main components is a useful approach for the study of mediation effect on the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation. In study 2, Hypothesis 2 was reformulated to take account of civic virtue and sportsmanship. Hypothesis 2(a) tested whether civic virtue mediates the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. Finally,
Hypothesis 2(b) tested whether sportsmanship mediates the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation.

4 Study 2 method

4.1 Participants

Sample A: We sent survey forms to 2,441 employees who had been enrolled in the executive MBA programmes at a large university in Canada between 2004 and 2009. Of these, 731 responses were returned, for a response rate of 29.9%. After reading the invitation to participate (which explained the study’s overall goals) and the consent form (summarising the study’s ethical rules), 16 respondents decided not to continue and withdrew from the study. Of the 715 questionnaires that were completed, 64 were discarded, either because too much data was missing or because the respondent was not currently employed. The final study sample thus included 651 people who were employed at the time of the study. 69.7% of participants were women. 41.5% were aged under 40. 68% of respondents had over 15 years of professional experience.

Sample B: Data were collected from a sample of 355 French white collar workers. The sample included 182 women and 173 men, with an average age of 30.6 (ranging from 21 to 60 years of age) ($SD = 7.26$) and a mean of seven years of professional experience (ranging from 1 to 37 years) ($SD = 6.5$). Participants worked in a variety of industries, including consulting (20%), logistics and distribution (19%), healthcare (18%), computer science and new information technologies (16%), banking (14%) and business services (13%).

4.2 Measurement

To measure both commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation, the same scales as those used in study 1 were selected. For citizenship behaviour toward the organisation, the scales developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994) capturing civic virtue (3 items) and sportsmanship (4 items) were used.

4.3 Procedure

The same procedure used in study 1 was also used for the mediation test in study 2.

4.4 Results

Table 2 presents the reliabilities, means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of the study variables. As shown in Table 1, data for both samples are generally similar. For sample A, reliabilities ranged from .67 (sportsmanship) to .92 (commitment to the organisation). For sample B, reliabilities ranged from .65 (sportsmanship) to .90 (intention to leave the organisation). Regression diagnostics were performed to detect possible multicollinearity among variables. While VIF values in sample A ranged from 1.14 (sportsmanship) to 1.53 (commitment to the organisation), in Sample B VIF values
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ranged from 1.13 (civic virtue) to 1.70 (intention to leave the organisation). Therefore, in both sample A and sample B, the VIF values indicate that multicollinearity does not affect the results (Hair et al., 1998).

Table 3  Correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample A (N = 651)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sample B (N = 355)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Commitment</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Civic virtue</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sportsmanship</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Intent to leave</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>−.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** p < .01; * p < .05; coefficient αs are reported on the diagonal

Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. The data contained in Table 3 show that commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation are negatively and significantly related (sample A, \( r = −.46, p < .01 \); sample B, \( r = −.56, p < .01 \)). Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 4  Testing the mediating effect of civic virtue on the relationships between organisational commitment and intention to leave the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Sobel test statistic</th>
<th>IV → mediator</th>
<th>IV → DV</th>
<th>Mediator → DV</th>
<th>IV → DV; mediator controlled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample A (N = 651)</td>
<td>Intention to leave the organisation</td>
<td>−8.46***</td>
<td>.408***</td>
<td>−.461***</td>
<td>−.146***</td>
<td>−.478***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample B (N = 355)</td>
<td>Intention to leave the organisation</td>
<td>−2.48***</td>
<td>.351***</td>
<td>−.556***</td>
<td>−.140**</td>
<td>−.578***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: All paths are βs; IV independent variable, DV dependent variable.
* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Hypothesis 2(a) predicted a mediating role of civic virtue between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. Table 4 reported no decreased magnitude of the regression coefficient (for sample A and sample B) of commitment to the organisation, and despite the significance of civic virtue (sample A, \( β = −.146, p < .000 \); sample B, \( β = −.140, p < .000 \)), the results indicate that civic virtue does not mediate the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. Hypothesis 2(a) is not supported.
Table 5  Testing the mediating effect of sportsmanship on the relationships between organisational commitment and intention to leave the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Sobel test statistic</th>
<th>IV → mediator</th>
<th>IV → DV</th>
<th>Mediator → DV</th>
<th>IV → DV; mediator controlled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample A</td>
<td>Intention to leave the organisation</td>
<td>–6.90***</td>
<td>.314***</td>
<td>–.461***</td>
<td>–.294***</td>
<td>–.409***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 651)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample B</td>
<td>Intention to leave the organisation</td>
<td>–4.98***</td>
<td>.307***</td>
<td>–.556***</td>
<td>–.443***</td>
<td>–.454***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 355)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: All paths are βs; IV independent variable, DV dependent variable. 
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 2(b) predicted a mediating role of sportsmanship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. As reported in Table 5, the decreased magnitude of the regression coefficient (sample A, from –.461 to –.409; sample B, from –.556 to –.454) of commitment to the organisation, and the significance of sportsmanship (sample A, β = –.294, p < .000; sample B, β = –.443, p < .000), indicate that sportsmanship partially mediates the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave the organisation. The results of the Sobel test (sample A, Z = –6.90, p = .000; sample B, Z = –4.98, p = .000) confirmed that the indirect effect of commitment on the intention to leave the organisation through sportsmanship was significantly different from zero. In addition, the inclusion of sportsmanship explained an additional 19.3% (sample A) and 18.1% (sample B) of the variance in intention to leave the organisation. Hypothesis 2(b) is supported.

5 General discussion

5.1 Implications of the study

The results of this study support a direct relationship firstly between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation in study 1 and study 2 (samples A and B), and are consistent with previous research (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005). Secondly, the results support a direct relationship between employee commitment and citizenship behaviour toward the organisation in study 1 and study 2 (samples A and B), and are consistent with previous findings (Bellou, 2008). Finally, the results support a direct relationship between citizenship behaviour toward the organisation and intention to leave the organisation and are consistent with previous data when citizenship behaviour toward the organisation is measured as a whole (study 1) (Chen et al., 1998). When citizenship behaviour toward the organisation is broken down into its two main facets, i.e., sportsmanship and civic virtue (study 2, samples A and B), the results are consistent with previous research (Coyne and Ong, 2007). Although the findings add to the literature, this paper has addressed the issue of the mediating effect of citizenship behaviours toward the organisation on the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation.
In the literature on human resource management, the importance of both OCB and employee commitment for studying employee retention is well established. However, several researchers (Chen et al., 1998; Chen, 2005; Shore et al., 1995) have used a range of different arguments to suggest that OCB may reflect the degree of employee commitment. This raises an interesting issue that needs to be addressed. As noted above, MacKenzie et al. (1998) and Paré and Tremblay (2007) reported findings that contribute to resolving this issue. However, further research was required in view of the specific measurement choices made in previous studies. Following these previous studies, the present study provides data that improve our understanding of the relationship between OCB, employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation. The findings underline the mediating effect of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation on the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation. In study 1 based on a sample of public employees, the data indicated a partial mediation of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation. While both encouraging and interesting, these preliminary findings were not sufficient to conclude that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation is a mediator. Citizenship behaviour toward the organisation was measured using a short scale that did not consider more specific forms of citizenship toward the organisation, such as sportsmanship and civic virtue. In study 2, two independent samples were used to ensure that the results could be replicated and generalised, and above all that they were not artefactual to particular samples and/or settings (Jawahar and Hemmasi, 2006). The results obtained for both samples showed a similar pattern. While a partial mediation was found for sportsmanship, no mediation was found for civic virtue.

Another key contribution of the study is shown by dividing citizenship behaviour toward the organisation into two facets reflecting sportsmanship and civic virtue. The results indicate that while sportsmanship partially mediates the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation, civic virtue plays no such role. While providing mixed support for Hypotheses 2(a) and Hypotheses 2(b), these results serve to improve our understanding of the relationship between OCB and employee commitment for the study of employee retention. The result indicating that sportsmanship has a mediating role in the relationship between commitment to the organisation and intention to leave is compatible with previous research (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Cropanzano et al., 2003) associated with the literature on job demands. In support of the results of their literature review, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) suggested that employees may work under pressure if they feel supported by their work environment. In addition, it has been said that sportsmanship reflects the willingness to “staying with the organization despite hardships or difficult conditions” [Coleman and Borman, (2000), p.34]. The results of the present study suggest that sportsmanship can be used as an indicator of the degree of pressure to which an employee is subjected in their decision to form an intention to leave or remain in a work environment that is highly demanding in terms of time, pressure and workload. Markoczy et al. (2009, p.331) argued that “forbearance from complaining about trivial matters is likely to help the organization”. Sportsmanship thus reflects the extent to which employees are committed to their organisation. Sharing the values and objectives of their organisation may help employees to work under pressure (i.e., as good sports). In this case, employees feel no desire to leave the organisation.

Civic virtue occurs when an employee is concerned by governing affairs and contributes to protecting the property, image, and reputation of the organisation. The
results of the present study indicate that civic virtue does not mediate the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to leave the organisation. To date, the link between civic virtue and intention to leave the organisation has only been examined by Coyne and Ong (2007). Their data indicate no association between civic virtue and intention to leave the organisation. Given the paucity of research investigating the role of civic virtue on the decision to leave, it is difficult to interpret this result. Civic virtue reflects constructive participation in organisational governance, where an employee exhibits a mindset to monitor the organisational environment (Organ et al., 2006). This kind of mindset appears to be more compatible with the decision to pursue the relationship with the organisation, and may therefore explain why civic virtue does not play a mediating role between commitment to the organisation and the decision to quit.

5.2 Practical implications

Given that citizenship behaviour toward the organisation is discretionary, citizenship behaviour toward the organisation may be used by an employee as a means of sanctioning the organisation without fear of reprisal. Managers should bear this factor in mind in order to improve employee retention: the more employees are committed through citizenship behaviour, the less likely they are to contemplate leaving or seeking better employment alternatives elsewhere. In others words, citizenship behaviour toward the organisation may be viewed as a possible indicator of employee withdrawal from the organisation. Shore et al. (1995, p.1596) hold that “citizenship behaviour, and to a lesser extent fulfillment of job requirements, can be used by a manager to make inferences about an employee’s motivation to remain with the organization” and recommend that “managers think that citizenship behaviour reflects how employees are committed to their organization”. However, managers need to take care when considering citizenship behaviour toward the organisation as an indicator of employee disengagement from the organisation. For example, an employee may not formulate new ideas during work meetings (thus exhibiting low levels of civic virtue), yet easily tolerate the pressure of the work environment (thus exhibiting a high level of sportsmanship).

From a practical point of view, and consistent with Harrison et al. (2006), the present study suggests that the use of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation makes sense for the purposes of detecting the decision of an employee to engage in withdrawal behaviour. Furthermore, the use of intention rather than behaviour to examine the decision to leave the employer is explained by the following proposals outlined by Chen (2005, p.437) in discussing lower levels of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation: “the stronger the indication of the unwillingness of the employee to be part of the organization, and thus the higher the possibility that the employee would have the intent to leave and would leave the organization”. In other words, Chen (2005) does not dismiss the possibility of using citizenship behaviour toward the organisation (behaviour) as a means of predicting intention to leave (attitude).

5.3 Limitations and future research

Despite its contribution to the literature, the present study has a number of limitations. First, although the research used three independent samples, the data collection process was based on a cross-sectional research design for each sample. For these reasons, the data need to be approached with caution. The results were obtained by collecting data
from three independent samples. The recommendations given by Murphy (1983) were followed. However, it is clear that in the design chosen for this study, the difficulty of inferring causality implies a significant limitation (Bobko and Stone-Roméro, 1988). Duplication of the study using a longitudinal design should mitigate this limitation. Secondly, although the rating source of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation is currently an object of controversy and appears to be a thorny methodological issue, the decision to collect data using self-reported measures may nonetheless cause a common variance bias tending to overestimate research results, particularly because of a latent positive-negative evaluation of the organisation by participants or the phenomenon of social desirability (Spector, 1987).

Future research might add more sources (self-rating and supervisor-rating) to avert the risk of common variance. One particular limitation of study 1 relates to the measurement of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation. Short scales for two items borrowed from Bentein et al. (2002) were used. This is explained by the agreement entered into with the management of the organisations where the data collection was performed. Because the surveys were conducted in the workplace, and in order to avoid disturbing work organisation, it was important to limit response times. In so doing, the meaning of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation was diminished. Therefore, in study 1, participants were not encouraged to draw a distinction between civic virtue and sportsmanship. Although the results of study 2 underline the mediation of citizenship behaviour toward the organisation in the relationship between employee commitment and intention to leave the organisation, a consideration of civic virtue and sportsmanship might have provided more precise results in study 1. One final limitation concerns the cultural contexts in which the study was conducted. There is much evidence to suggest that culture influences relations between variables. Evidence of this has been found for employee commitment (Cohen, 2003), turnover (Thomas and Au, 2002), and citizenship behaviour toward the organisation (Pailié, 2009). Since the results were obtained from samples of employees in Quebec (study 1, and study 2, sample A) and employees in France (study 2, sample B), any generalisation of the results of this study to contexts other than western countries should be viewed with caution.

References


