Enhancing organisational commitment through task significance: the moderating role of openness to experience

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ENHANCING ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT THROUGH TASK SIGNIFICANCE: THE MODERATING ROLE OF OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Researchers have extensively explored the factors influencing employees' organisational commitment. However, few studies make an explicit distinction between different commitment types when exploring its determinants, and the scholarly attention to individual differences is also limited. In this paper, we confirm that developing managerial interventions to enhance task significance can be useful to promote organisational commitment, but this relationship is contingent on the commitment type and the employees' openness to experience. We focus on two forms of organisational commitment: affective and continuance commitment. Our study shows that task significance is a better predictor of affective commitment than continuance commitment. We also find that increasing task significance is particularly good to promote more continuance commitment among employees with low levels of openness to experience. Based on data gathered from a sample of 403 employees working in Spanish firms, we find support for these ideas and develop practical implications.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hiring and retaining highly committed employees is crucial for effective organisational functioning (Markovits, Boer, & van Dick, 2014; Ng & Butts, 2009; Walsh, 2019). Allen and Meyer (1990) defined commitment as a psychological state that binds employees to their organisation, it being linked to several positive outcomes from the organisations' standpoint. Among other things, employees showing higher organisational commitment exhibit a stronger desire to achieve the company's goals and to continue working for the firm (Yu, Yen, Barnes, & Huang, 2019). Furthermore, they tend to be more satisfied with their job (Ellingson, Tews, & Dachner, 2016), exhibit higher organisational citizenship behaviour (Takeuchi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015), less turnover (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; de la Torre-Ruiz, Vidal-Salazar, & Cordón-Pozo, 2019), and less guilt-proneness (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012). Moreover, at the managerial level, highly committed managers are less authoritarian (Schaubroeck, Shen, & Chong, 2017).

Over the past years, organisational commitment has been the subject of numerous research contributions, most of which have recognised that commitment involves multiple components (Choi et al., 2015; Arciniega et al., 2018). For the purposes of this study, we focus on affective and continuance commitment as two distinguishable forms of organisational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The former refers to an emotional attachment between the employee and the organisation, in the sense that the committed individual identifies with and enjoys belonging to the firm (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin, 2009). The latter reflects the calculative or "side-bet" type of commitment and the tendency to remain in the organisation on the basis of the costs associated with leaving it (Uppal, 2017).

The present study aims to fill two existing gaps in the literature. First, research on task significance and commitment has not explored whether such relations vary when different forms of commitment are considered. Making this distinction explicit is important, since different forms of commitment are explained by different factors and have contrasting consequences on employees' behaviours (Luchak & Gellatly, 2007). Based on social exchange theory (Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we develop the idea that the emotional effect of higher task significance will mainly be channelled through greater levels of affective commitment. Second, we bring an important personality trait to the analysis—openness to experience (OE)—to test whether the relationship between task significance and organisational commitment is homogeneous among all employees. Employees with high levels of OE are fundamental assets in most current organisations. They cope well with knowledge diversity and new experiences, and tend to be broad-minded, curious, and original (McCrae, 1994). Thus, they are more imaginative and creative—two vital characteristics in today's competitive environment. However, a potential risk for organisations who have employees with high levels of OE is that they are more likely to explore new career paths (Li et al., 2015). Employees with high levels of OE are more attracted by the potential change offered by a new job opportunity, and are better equipped to deal with unexpected changes (Choi, 2011). Consequently, they tend to exhibit high job instability and turnover (Wille, De Fruyt, & Feys, 2010). It is, therefore, crucial to understand the extent to which certain managerial interventions (e.g. promoting task significance) are effective in enhancing the organisational commitment of employees. This perspective is aligned with the trait activation theory (Judge & Zapata, 2015; Tett, Simonet, Walser, & Brown, 2013), which helps explain the nature of the interaction between environmental cues and individual traits. In summary, we add to the literature on organisational commitment by examining the various effects of task significance on different forms of commitment and by integrating current

research on commitment and personality traits. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. In the second section, we provide a brief review of the antecedents of organisational commitment and formulate the hypotheses. In the third section, we describe the methodology, and in the fourth section, we present the results. Finally, we discuss our findings and present the theoretical contribution and managerial implications.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment is generally defined as an individual's attitude towards an organisation consisting of (i) a strong belief in, and acceptance of, the organisation's goals and values; (ii) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation; and (iii) a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation (Cao & Hamori, 2016; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). From an employee perspective, commitment is a psychological state that has direct implications on that employee continuing membership within the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Erdheim, Wang, & Zickar, 2006; Macedo, Pinho, & Silva, 2016; Markovits et al., 2014).

Drawing upon this multifaceted nature of commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) separated commitment into three distinguishable forms: affective, normative, and continuance. These three components reflect distinctive angles of the psychological state that binds the employee to the organisation. Affective commitment is related to the emotional attachment to an organisation. It implies that employees are involved in achieving the organisation's goals because they identify themselves with the organisation. The employee perceives that they have the support of the organisation, and this is reflected in positive exchanges between the employee and the firm (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Shore, Tetrick, Lynch, & Barksdale,

2006). This attachment is mainly due to the employee's perception of fairness (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Zatzick, Deery, & Iverson, 2015). Normative commitment is related to the employee's sense of obligation to remain in the organisation from a sense of moral duty. It is thought to result from the internalisation of loyalty norms towards their organisation. Such internalisation often comes from early socialisation experiences with one's culture and family (Meyer, Allen, & Allen, 1997; Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). Finally, continuance commitment is closely related to a desire to stay in the firm based on the potential loss associated with leaving it (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Sü\s s & Kleiner, 2010). Leaving a job can be a plausible option for employees, particularly when facing challenging or disturbing situations within their organisation. However, employees who are more aware of the associated costs of leaving the firm will be less likely to quit, and may even channel their dissatisfaction into positive organisational outcomes (Ohana & Meyer, 2010; Zhou & George, 2001).

In the current study, we have decided to focus on two components of organisational commitment: affective commitment and continuance commitment. The decision to leave normative commitment out of the analysis can be justified on the basis of two arguments. First, although the prevailing conceptualisation of commitment makes an explicit distinction between affective commitment and normative commitment, the empirical distinguishability between the two concepts has been recurrently questioned. For instance, a meta-analysis reported that affective commitment and normative commitment are correlated at 0.63 (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), and other studies found that latent factors and scores of affective commitment and normative commitment are highly correlated (Chen & Francesco, 2003), thus leaving unclear whether normative commitment can be explained by antecedents that are very different from affective commitment. Second, normative commitment seems to be rather

homogeneous in similar cultures. The internalisation of loyalty norms towards organisations is higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures (Izogo, 2016; Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002). As our analysis is situated in a single cultural context (Spain), incorporating normative commitment would not increase levels of discrimination among our sample of employees.

2.2. Task significance, affective commitment and continuance commitment

We now turn to a potential antecedent of organisational commitment: task significance. Task significance has been defined as the judgment that one's job has a positive impact on other people (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). In current times, task significance has gained importance because employees are increasingly concerned about the contribution their work makes to society and to benefiting others (e.g. Colby, Sippola, & Phelps, 2001; Yan, Peng, & Francesco, 2011). Beyond merely experiencing their jobs as meaningful, task significance enables employees to create a psychological bond between their actions and potential positive outcomes for others. In fact, the awareness that one can act to benefit others signifies a perception of expectancy (effort will lead to effective performance) and instrumentality (effective performance will benefit others), and motivates employees to invest additional time and energy in their work to achieve these outcomes, as predicted by expectancy theory (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996; Vroom, 1964). Companies are aware of this tendency and try to implement HR practices that increase task significance to enhance job performance (Grant, 2008b), especially among knowledge workers (Yan et al., 2011).

Cultivating, increasing, and maintaining employees' perceived task significance calls for purposeful interventions on the part of the company. As task significance is a subjective

impression that is socially constructed through interpersonal interactions, employees' perception of it can be shaped through direct contact with the beneficiaries of their efforts, which in turn enhances employees' awareness of the effect of their actions (Hu et al., 2015). Job design and social information processing theories propose that when employees perceive their jobs as having a high degree of task significance, they experience their work as more meaningful—that is, more purposeful and valuable (Grant, 2008b; Zalesny & Ford, 1990). This experience of meaningfulness is believed to increase employees' commitment, motivating them to invest additional time and energy in completing their assigned tasks (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Parker & Wall, 1998), because when employees feel that their personal, unique efforts are valued, they are more motivated to contribute, which consequently strengthens their bond with the organisation. For instance, Bellé (2013) showed that nurses who are given more direct contact with health practitioners are more productive. Similarly, Grant et al. (2007) performed an experiment with employees from a university call centre tasked with soliciting donations. They found that employees who had a ten-minute face-to-face meeting with scholarship beneficiaries raised 171% more money than their colleagues who had no such face-to-face contact.

The above discussion suggests that, in general terms, individuals perceiving higher task significance will be more committed to their organisation. However, as not all types of commitment are the same, it seems reasonable to expect that the influence of task significance on organisational commitment will not be equal for different commitment types. We expect task significance to be more strongly associated with affective than continuance commitment. This distinctive influence is because affective commitment is mainly grounded on emotional cues, while continuance commitment is more often the result of a more rational cost-benefit analysis. This cost-benefit analysis is based on two dimensions: the perceived sacrifice associated with

leaving the company, and the availability of comparable employment alternatives (Vandenberghe et al., 2007). Concerning the first dimension, employees accumulate investments—or "side-bets"—that would be lost if they were to leave the organisation. Aspects such as retirement funds, accumulated seniority, or tuition benefits are often part of the equation. The second dimension implies that those employees with fewer employment alternatives will also develop greater continuance commitment (Uppal, 2017).

Thus, we argue that the emotional effect of higher task significance will mainly be channelled through greater levels of affective commitment. As employees perceive a heightened psychological bond between their actions and others' well-being, they may consider that they owe greater allegiance to the organisation, exhibiting more affective attachment. A logical extension would be for this emotional reaction to be reflected towards the organisation, with higher levels of affective commitment than continuance commitment. This can be also explained within the framework of social exchange (Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen, & Wright, 2005). The basic tenet of this perspective is that social interactions are governed by reciprocity norms. In organisational settings, social exchange theories have been used to analyse the connection between employee perceptions of workplace aspects and their subsequent commitment (Sinclair & Tetrick, 1995). As employers transmit affective cues to employees though more task significance, such employees might tend to reciprocate with greater levels of affective commitment. Hence, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between task significance and organisational commitment will be greater for affective commitment than for continuance commitment.

2.3. Openness to experience as a moderator in the task significance / affective commitment relation

Organisational commitment is often a result of the combination of environmental aspects and dispositional antecedents (Choi et al., 2015). While the factors associated with the environmental approach are contextual (i.e. exogenous to the individual), the factors encapsulated by the dispositional approach refer to individuals' stable ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Erdheim et al., 2006). Previous studies have mainly focused on environmental factors such as work design (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007) or organisational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), but little attention has been given to the interplay between environment and individual dispositions. This interplay approach, often referred to as trait activation theory (e.g. Haaland & Christiansen, 2002; Lievens, Chasteen, Day, & Christiansen, 2006), has suggested that cues in the work environment (e.g. task significance) can activate the expression of traits in behaviour (Tett & Burnett, 2003). In other words, traits are depicted as propensities to behave in identifiable ways in light of environmental demands.

A sound framework to incorporate such individual differences is provided by the Five-Factor model of personality (Goldberg, 1999; Judge, Martocchio, & Thoresen, 1997). This model is often employed as a framework to explore connections between personality characteristics, job attitudes, and work outcomes (Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011; e.g. Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). The assumption is that personality traits are temporally stable and explain organisational attitudes, and not vice versa (Costa Jr & McCrae, 1994; Nieß & Zacher, 2015). In the present study, our interest lies in the role of a particular personality trait—openness to experience (OE)—as a contingency factor in the relation between task significance and organisational commitment. OE is a fundamental aspect of personality, capturing the extent to

which individuals are broad-minded, curious, imaginative, and original (Azagra-Caro & Llopis, 2018; Costa & McRae, 1985; Król, 2017).

Some scholars have explored the connection between OE and organisational commitment, with inconclusive results. For instance, Moss et al. (2007) found that OE was positively associated with both commitment forms (affective and continuance), but other authors have also found negative associations in this relation (Choi et al., 2015). To shed some light on this debate, our work considers the role of OE as a moderating factor between task significance and commitment, rather than as a direct predictor. According to the trait activation theory, (Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway, & Ferris, 2006), analysing how OE interacts with task significance is crucial because "personality alters the cognitive construction of an individual's environment and shapes the meaning of the various responses to that environment" (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006, p. 111; Erdheim et al., 2006). Other studies have confirmed that OE amplifies the influence of organisational-level characteristics on employees' attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Simmons (2011) found that procedural justice was more effective in promoting creative performance among employees with higher levels of OE, since they pay more attention to external cues. More recently, Harrison et al. (2016) found that open employees are more sensitive to the external feedback they received from their peers.

Following a similar rationale, we expect that task significance is more likely to increase affective commitment in more open employees than in less open ones. Open people are particularly sensitive, having a wide and subtle range of emotional reactions (McCrae & Costa Jr, 1985), heightened levels of emotional sensitivity and a predisposition to "feel both the bad and the good more intensely" (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998, p. 199). Task significance is a job characteristic that helps employees to perceive their jobs as more purposeful and valuable, and

lets them know that their jobs provide them with opportunities to benefit others (Grant, 2008b; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Such external cues related to higher meaningfulness will be particularly sensed and valued by individuals with higher OE, since they are more emotionally sensitive. This higher sensibility is likely to nurture positive affective states and "pleasant affect" (Saavedra & Kwun, 2000), which would be translated into a higher emotional attachment with the organisation. Additionally, since open-to-experience individuals are better equipped to express their emotions (Wu & Hu, 2013), they will be particularly receptive to transferring their emotional attachment into higher affective commitment. In contrast, as individuals with low levels of OE find meaningful cues from task significance more difficult to sense and value (Simmons, 2011), task significance should contribute less to promote their affective commitment to the organisation. Thus, our second hypothesis is stated as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Openness to experience positively moderates the relationship between task significance and affective commitment.

In the final hypothesis, we explore the potential moderating effect of OE on the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment. As previously stated, continuance commitment is understood to be a result of an employee's rational evaluation of potential job alternatives (Allen & Meyer, 1990). That is, employees perceiving that they have viable employment alternatives, who therefore have a lower bet in their current company, will exhibit weaker levels of continuance commitment.

We expect that the positive relationship between task significance and continuance commitment will be weakened as employees exhibit higher levels of OE. Individuals with higher levels of OE are more willing to explore alternative career paths (Li et al., 2015), and organisational investments seem to be less important for their rational evaluation of benefits and

costs (Erdheim et al., 2006). Indeed, evidence indicates that individuals with high levels of OE tend to experience higher job instability (Wille et al., 2010). Conversely, individuals with low levels of OE have more problems tolerating ambiguity, are less flexible, and thus desire more stability (Goldberg, 1999). Since individuals with low levels of OE seek higher stability, this reinforces the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment, while the opposite is true for individuals with high levels of OE. Second, as previously stated, we contend that for individuals with high levels of OE, the influence of task significance will mostly be reflected in more affective commitment, but not necessarily in more continuance commitment. As such, we propose the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Openness to experience negatively moderates the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment.

A summary of the conceptual model and the underlying hypotheses is depicted in Figure 1.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

3. METHODS

3.1 Sample and data collection

The proposed research hypotheses were tested with a final sample of 403 individuals working in Spanish firms. Data was collected using a questionnaire containing items grounded in the literature and validated in previous empirical studies. In order to reduce potential response bias, pilot tests were performed with four professionals (see section 3.2). This procedure not only allowed us to ascertain the validity of the questions in our context, but also to confirm that they were properly understood. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed anonymously to avoid potential desirability bias in the responses (de la Torre-Ruiz et al., 2019).

The data was gathered by following a convenience sampling method (e.g. Farooq, Farooq, & Jasimuddin, 2014; Saavedra & Kwun, 2000); that is, we resorted to personal connections and requested participation by directly approaching employees or their supervisors (as in Jayasinghe, 2016). All respondents were offered the possibility of sending us their answers either in paper form or through an anonymous survey link. The data gathering procedure was structured in two stages. In a first stage, we targeted 240 individuals working in three firms from three different sectors (private security, sport and medical equipment, surgical and orthopaedic sector). We collected data from 161 employees, representing a 67% response rate. After discarding questionnaires with missing data and unreliable responses (Malik, Butt, & Choi, 2015), the final sample was 143 valid questionnaires from this first stage. In a second stage, in addition to the procedure implemented in the first stage, we also performed a snowball procedure, asking employees from different sectors to complete the survey and distribute it among their colleagues (Kushnirovich, Heilbrunn, & Davidovich, 2018). In this second stage, 260 questionnaires were collected, resulting in 260 valid responses from individuals employed in different Spanish firms

from diverse sectors (66.2% services; 12.3% manufacture; 21.5% other sectors, such as agriculture and construction). This second round of data collection was important to empirically validate our hypotheses in a rather heterogeneous sample, which allowed us to avoid restricting our findings to the specific context of the companies from the first stage and thus extend the potential generalisability of our results. Thus, the final sample analysed comprised 403 valid responses.

In studies where dependent and independent variables are obtained from a single source, common method bias concerns may arise. This risk was assessed with the Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) . This test revealed the existence of five differentiated factors with an eigenvalue greater than one (accounting for 60.33% of the variance). It also showed a reduced variance related to the first factor (16.12%). These results suggest that the estimations are not biased by common method variance (as in Fey and Birkinshaw, 2005).

3.2 Variables and psychometric indicators of the scales

The psychometric properties of the scales were evaluated according to accepted practices in the literature, including content validity and reliability. Content validity was established through a literature review and surveys with industry experts. Alpha coefficients were also calculated to evaluate the reliability of the scales. All scales showed acceptable alpha values (Ahire & Devaraj, 2001; Malhotra, 2008). In the next section, the variables used in the study are explained in detail.

Dependent variables

Affective commitment. To capture the affective commitment, we used the scale from Bogaert, Boone, & van Witteloostuijn (2012), which is an adapted version of Allen and Meyer's (1990) scale. This scale includes the following four items: 1) 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organisation'; 2) 'I feel as if this organisation's problems are my own'; 3) 'I

don't feel like part of the family at my organisation' (reverse scaled); and 4) 'This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning to me'. This affective commitment measure uses an eight-point Likert scale ranging from 1: high disagreement to 8: high agreement. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82.

Continuance commitment. We used Allen and Meyer's (1990) eight-item continuance commitment scale, which comprises the following questions: 1) 'I am afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up'; 2) 'It would be very hard for me to leave my organisation right now, even if I wanted to'; 3) 'Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organisation now'; 4) 'It would be too costly for me to leave my organisation now'; 5) 'Right now, staying with my organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire'; 6) I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organisation'; 7) 'One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organisation would be the scarcity of available alternatives'; and 8) 'One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organisation is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice—another organisation may not match the overall benefits I have here'. Items were presented on an eight-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (high disagreement) to 8 (high agreement). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84.

Independent variables

Task significance. To measure this variable we used the scale proposed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) included in their Work Design Questionnaire. Specifically, we used a scale comprising the following four items that respondents answered on an eight-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (high disagreement) to 8 (high agreement): 1) 'The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people'; 2) 'The job itself is very significant and

important in the broader scheme of things'; 3) 'The job has a large impact on people outside the organisation'; 4) 'The work performed on the job has a significant impact on people outside the organisation'. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86.

Openness to experience. This personality dimension has been widely discussed in the psychological literature. Specifically, personality traits were captured through the scale proposed by Donnellan, Oswald, Baird, & Lucas (2006). This scale is a twenty-item version of Goldberg's (1999) original personality scale, and presents high internal consistency. Specifically, participants responded to scale items to capture five personality traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. This study focused on the first trait—openness to experience (with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.72)—and the other four dimensions were used as control variables. All items related to personality traits were measured on an eight-point Likert scale.

Control variables

To avoid variability in the results, we controlled for several aspects relating to the respondents. The first of these was age, which has been included in previous research as a control variable for individual commitment (Ozag, 2006). Secondly, hierarchical positions were also included as they may have an influence on commitment (McCallum, L. Forret, & Wolff, 2014). Finally, as mentioned above, we controlled for individual traits and sector.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 shows mean values, standard deviations and the correlations for the variables of the sample distribution, as well as the correlations among the variables. As expected, there is a

positive and significant correlation between task significance and continuance commitment ($r = 0.123$, $p<0.05$). The correlation between task significance and affective commitment is also positive and greater than for continuance commitment ($r = 0.330$, $p<0.01$).

We performed additional analyses related to potential multicollinearity problems to check VIF values. None of the VIF values reached the critical value of ten, which would be the maximum accepted value (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996). Thus, our data does not suffer from multicollinearity problems.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

4.2. Regression analyses

Both dependent variables, *affective commitment* and *continuance commitment*, follow a normal distribution, which suits the construction of lineal regressions. We opted to run hierarchical analyses because this procedure allows us to introduce the different variables in steps and verify the individual effect of new variables introduced into a baseline model. We analysed a first model that only included the control variables. The second model considered the control variables and the independent variable of the model—namely task significance. The third model added the variable openness to experience to the previous model. The fourth and final model incorporated the moderation effect related with OE. We followed the same procedure for both dependent variables and reported it in Table 2 (for *affective commitment*) and Table 3 (for *continuance commitment*).

The model's goodness of fit was assessed through the coefficient of determination R^2 (reported in Table 2 and Table 3), which indicates the percentage of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent and control variables introduced. Regarding the regression

models for *affective commitment* (Table 2), the control variables included in Model 1 explain 15.3% of the variance. Introducing the variable task significance (Model 2) increased the explained variance by 7% (to 22.8%). Conversely, introducing the variable OE (Model 3) did not significantly increase the explained variance. Finally, the introduction of the interaction between task significance and openness to experience (Model 4) did not affect the explained variance (R^2 remained at 22.9%), and therefore, did not improve the fit of the overall model. Regarding the regression models for *continuance commitment* (Table 3), the results of Model 1 show that control variables explain 11.7% of the variance, and that the inclusion of the variable task significance (Model 2) significantly improves the fit of the model by 1% (to 12.7%). Model 3 introduced the variable EO, resulting in a significant increase of R^2 by 2.5% (to 15.1%). Finally, Model 4 included the interaction of task significance and openness to experience, which significantly improved the goodness-of-fit of the model, with a significant increase of R^2 by 1.1% (to 16.2%).

(Insert Table 2 about here)

(Insert Table 3 about here)

To test whether task significance is more positively related to affective commitment than to continuance commitment (Hypothesis 1), we compared the task significance coefficients from the two regression models shown in Table 2 (explaining *affective commitment*) and Table 3 (explaining *continuance commitment*). In Table 2, the independent variable task significance introduced in the model is significant and explains affective commitment ($\beta=0.29$, $p<0.01$). In Table 3, the inclusion of the variable task significance also contributes to explaining continuance commitment in a significant way ($\beta=0.09$, $p<0.05$). To assess the difference between both coefficients, we performed a post-estimation analysis (Clogg, Petkova, & Haritou, 1995). First,

we ran a seemingly unrelated estimation to account for differences between the dependent variables and potential correlations in the error terms. Second, we performed a test to validate whether coefficients are similar or different. Results provide strong evidence ($\chi2 = 7.98$, p=0.00) against the proportionality of coefficients. This indicates that the difference between both coefficients is statistically significant. The effect of task significance on affective commitment is greater than the effect of task significance on continuance commitment, which supports Hypothesis 1.

To test the two remaining hypotheses addressing the moderating effect of openness to experience, we turn to the results for the interaction between task significance and OE (Model 4 in Tables 2 and 3). For the case of continuance commitment (Table 3), our results support that openness to experience moderates the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment (Hypothesis 3), more specifically, that it weakens the relationship as indicated by a negative and significant coefficient on the interaction between task significance and OE. For illustrative purposes, Figure 2 depicts the interaction effect of OE on continuance commitment when task significance and openness to experience are fixed by their arithmetic mean +/- their double standard deviation. Simple slope analyses revealed a null effect of high levels of openness to experience on the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment (t= -0.71, p = 0.48), but a positive effect for low levels of openness to experience (t= 3.12, p < 0.01). Hence, at low levels of OE, as task significance becomes higher, so does continuance commitment (see Figure 2). Conversely, Hypothesis 2 is not supported, since the variance increase in Models 3 and 4 is not significant for affective commitment. A summary of our main results is presented in Table 4. As a robustness check, we restricted the sample only to the

observations collected in stage 1 (n=240). We performed the same analyses and results did not change.

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

(Insert Table 4 about here)

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion and theoretical contribution

Our study aims to contribute to the literature in several ways. A first conceptual contribution concerns to the role of task significance as a potential antecedent of commitment. Previous research has suggested that, when employees feel that their jobs have more significance, they are more attached to their organisation (Joo & Lim, 2009). However, these studies have tended to overlook that organisational commitment can take many forms (Luchak & Gellatly, 2007). The explicit distinction between commitment forms that we consider in this paper allows us to tackle this limitation, thus extending work on the connection between task significance and organisational commitment.

In particular, we develop a theoretical rationale to argue that task significance should be particularly effective in promoting affective commitment, but its influence on continuance commitment might be more limited. Our underlying argument is that both task significance and affective commitment share positive emotional underpinnings. According to the social exchange framework (Sinclair et al., 2005), task significance affects employees' emotions by triggering their positive emotional cues. Such cues are likely to turn into positive affection feelings to the organisation, expressed through more affective commitment, but its impact over continuance commitment seems to be less evident. Thus, organisations aiming to develop strong emotional bonds with their employees need to craft jobs in a way that increase task significance. In this

regard, the literature has offered a number of relational mechanisms (Grant, 2008b) to expand task significance. For instance, favouring direct interactions with beneficiaries (either colleagues or people beyond the organisations), or gathering data highlighting the positive impact that employees' activities have on third parties can be effective interventions to help employees perceive that their actions are positively related and connected to other people. Furthermore, our finding regarding the greater influence of task significance on affective commitment than on continuance commitment is in line with prior research addressing the distinctiveness of continuance commitment compared with other commitment forms (Choi et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2002).

Another theoretical contribution of this paper concerns the moderating role of OE for organisational commitment. Scholars in the field have called for more empirical research on dispositional antecedents of commitment, such as personality traits (Choi et al., 2015). Probably due to the limited number of contributions in the literature, existing research has not yet reached a consensus on how employees' levels of OE affect their degree of commitment with their organisation. For instance, in their meta-analysis, Choi et al. (2015) predicted a direct and negative association between OE and continuance commitment, but their empirical findings were inconclusive. Moss et al. (2007) found that OE promotes affective commitment but subject to leaders' transformational behaviours. Our paper is framed in this discussion, since we conceive OE as a dispositional factor affecting the relation between task significance and commitment (Erdheim et al., 2006). We build on the assumption that personality traits are intraindividually consistent and intraindividually distinct propensities to behave in certain ways (Hochwarter et al., 2006; Tett & Guterman, 2000), to explore how OE can modulate the task significance / organisational commitment relationship. We find that the positive relationship between task

significance and affective commitment is not moderated by employees' levels of OE; thus refuting our hypothesis that employees with high levels of OE would accentuate the positive relation between task significance (Saavedra & Kwun, 2000) and affective commitment. This finding suggests that, overall, all employees translate task significance into higher levels of positive affection towards their organisation, irrespective of their degree of OE.

Furthermore, our results confirm the existence of a negative moderation effect of OE on the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment. In particular, we find that this effect is only significant for employees with low levels of OE. Conversely, when employees have high levels of OE, our results indicate that task significance does not translate into more continuance commitment. High OE employees are particularly concerned about finding new career opportunities to develop their creative potential (Li et al., 2015; Wille, De Fruyt, & Feys, 2010). Our findings suggest that this greater tendency to evaluate external options in a more positive way remains for high OE employees, even when they perceive high levels of task significance.

5.2 Managerial implications

This study has implications for managers. First, the results show that if firms aim to generate a climate to enhance affective commitment, designing tasks that have a positive impact on others is an appropriate direction to follow. Existing literature has suggested several managerial interventions to design tasks with greater levels of task significance. For instance, signalling to employees that their efforts influence the well-being of other people (which can be achieved by enhancing the magnitude, scope and frequency of contact with others) will make employees perceive their work as more purposeful and valuable (Grant, 2008b, 2008a). According to our

findings, this feeling will also translate into a higher affective commitment towards the organisation and, to a lesser extent, more continuance commitment.

Second, managers should be aware that such interventions towards enhancing task significance will not be equally effective for all employees. For instance, our results show that promoting task significance can be counterproductive for those employees with greater levels of OE. Instead, managers who aim to increase the continuance commitment of employees with high levels of OE should think about alternative dimensions of job design. For instance, crafting tasks in a way that they offer a high degree of autonomy and creativity may allow these "creative" employees to fully realise their potential. In addition, managers should take care of the knowledge leakage involved associated to the departure of these employees. Consequently, the firm would benefit from implementing knowledge-sharing mechanisms that integrate and retain knowledge within the organisation.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of this paper and their implications for future research. One limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of the data. Cross-sectional research presents drawbacks when data changes over time. Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to control for time variance. Second, due to the characteristics on the data collection, it has not been possible to compute the response rate and the non-response bias, although various procedures have been implemented to minimise the latter. Third, qualitative research could be conducted in the future to provide a deeper understanding of the determinants of commitment. Future research could also consider the replication of our findings where OE employees are particularly valuable (i.e. in highly innovative or creative sectors), or non-profit organisations, where task significance could be particularly relevant.

Furthermore, this study has focused on one moderating variable that seems to be critical for analysing the connection between task significance and commitment: OE. We recommend that future research examine other dispositional variables, which may also shed light on the analysed connection. Finally, our study is bound to task significance as a key job-related characteristic linked to commitment. It would be interesting to explore other models considering additional aspects of the job characteristics model (Fried & Ferris, 1987) such as job feedback, autonomy or variety. An empirical examination of the influence of all other job characteristics will be instrumental to developing a deeper understanding of how jobs can be crafted to magnify different forms of organisational commitment.

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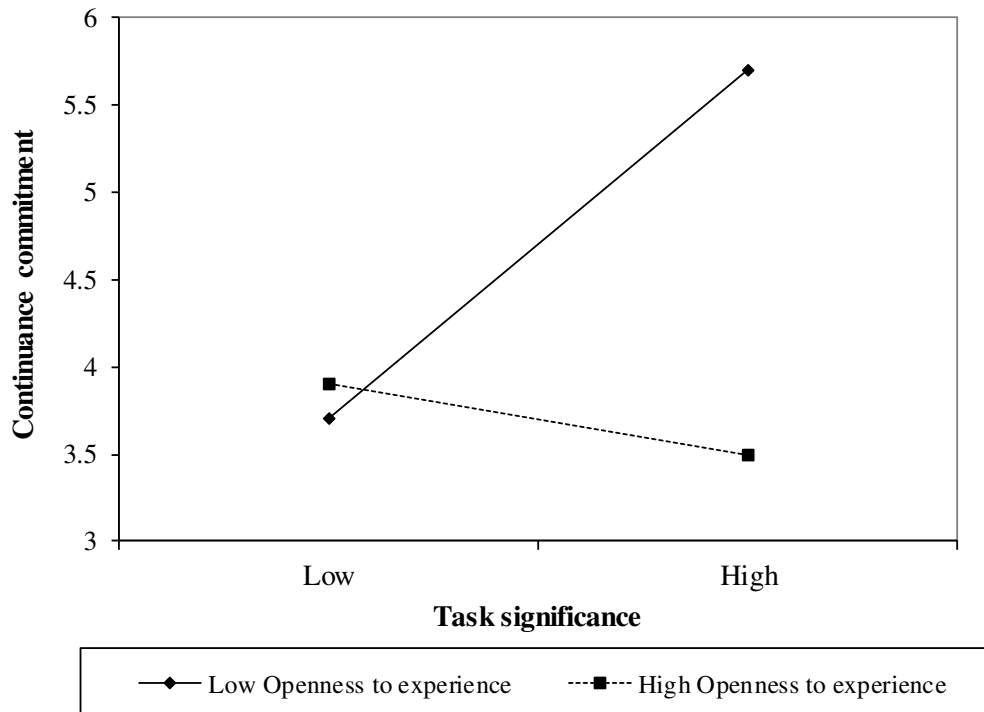
FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual model
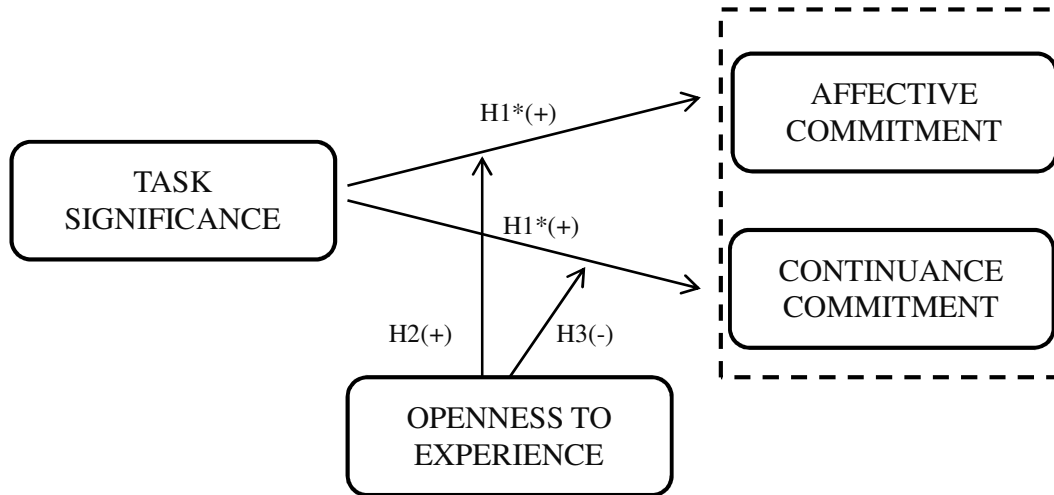
*Note: Hypothesis 1 expects the positive relationship between task significance and affective commitment to be significantly greater than for continuance commitment.

Figure 2: Moderator effect of Openness to experience

TABLES

Table 1: Descriptives (N=403) and correlations

	Mean	SD	VIF	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. Continuance commitment	4.89	1.52	-	1.00												
2. Affective commitment	5.35	1.69	-	.201***	1.00											
3. Task significance	5.31	1.66	1.06	.123**	.330***	.125**										
4. Openness to experience	5.73	1.15	1.11	-.135***	0.057	0.046	1.00									
5. Conscientiousness	6.22	1.15	1.05	0.025	.147***	0.024	.106**	1.00								
6. Agreeableness	6.41	0.97	1.17	0.026	.157***	0.048	.221***	.158***	1.00							
7. Neuroticism	3.65	1.41	1.06	.147***	-0.056	0.062	-0.063	-0.053	-0.087*	1.00						
8. Extraversion	5.38	1.20	1.17	0.036	.129***	0.035	.181***	0.096*	.301***	-.165***	1.00					
9. Age	40.17	10.08	1.05	.210***	.168***	0.097*	-0.007	0.020	0.034	-0.040	-0.081	1.00				
10. Services	0.78	0.41	1.50	.184***	.124**	-0.091*	0.054	0.035	0.055	0.089*	0.023	-0.045	1.00			
11. Manufacture	0.08	0.27	1.51	-.118**	-0.001	-.141***	-.111**	0.023	-0.031	-0.019	0.009	-0.088*	-.556***	1.00		
12. Low hierarchical level	0.74	0.44	3.15	0.082*	-.235***	0.064	-0.067	0.037	0.002	0.071	-0.096*	-.107*	0.048	-0.059	1.00	
13. Medium hierarchical level	0.19	0.39	3.08	-0.086*	.132***	.125**	0.071	-0.057	-0.042	-0.090*	0.072	0.055	-0.010	0.025	-.816***	1.00

* $p<0.10$. ** $p<0.05$. *** $p<0.01$

Table 2: Lineal hierarchical regression. Dependent variable Affective Commitment (N=403)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables				
Services[a]	.80***	.72***	.72***	.72***
	(.23)	(.22)	(.22)	(.22)
Manufacture[a]	.65*	.76**	.74**	.74**
	(.35)	(.34)	(.34)	(.34)
Low hierarchical level[b]	-1.33***	-1.03***	-1.03***	-1.03***
	(.31)	(.30)	(.30)	(.31)
Medium hierarchical level[b]	-.67*	-.48	-.47	-.47
	(.35)	(.34)	(.34)	(.34)
Age	.03***	.03***	.03***	.03***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Conscientiousness	.17**	.15**	.15**	.15**
	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
Agreeableness	.17*	.17**	.18**	.19**
	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)
Neuroticism	-.03	-.05	-.05	-.06
	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Extraversion	.10	.08	.08	.08
	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)
Independent variables				
Task significance		.29***	.29***	.29***
		(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Openness to experience			-.05	-.05
			(.07)	(.07)
Interactions				
Task Significance X Openness to experience				-.01
				(.04)
Constant	5.79***	5.58***	5.59***	5.59***
	(.36)	(.34)	(.34)	(.34)
R^2	.153	.228	.229	.229
Adjusted R^2	.134	.208	.207	.205
Increase in R^2		.074***	.001	.000

Note: standard errors in brackets. * p<.10. ** p<.05. *** p<.01
[a] The reference category is Other sectors.
[b] The reference category is High hierarchical level.

Table 3: Lineal hierarchical regression. Dependent variable Continuance Commitment (N=403)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Control variables				
Services[a]	.67***	.65***	.63***	.61***
	(.21)	(.21)	(.21)	(.21)
Manufacture[a]	.07	.10	-.01	-.02
	(.32)	(.32)	(.32)	(.32)
Low hierarchical level[b]	.24	.33	.34	.32
	(.29)	(.29)	(.29)	(.29)
Medium hierarchical level[b]	-.14	-.08	-.02	-.02
	(.32)	(.32)	(.32)	(.32)
Age	.04***	.04***	.04***	.03***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Conscientiousness	.01	.01	.02	.02
	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)
Agreeableness	-.01	-.01	.03	.06
	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)
Neuroticism	.16***	.15***	.15***	.14***
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Extraversion	.11*	.10	.12*	.11*
	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)
Independent variables				
Task significance		.09**	.11**	.12***
		(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Openness to experience			-.22***	-.22***
			(.06)	(.06)
Interactions				
Task Significance X Openness to experience				-.08**
				(.03)
Constant	4.20***	4.14***	4.15***	4.20***
	(.33)	(.33)	(.32)	(.32)
R^2	.117	.127	.151	.162
Adjusted R^2	.096	.104	.128	.136
Increase in R^2		.010**	.025***	.011**

Note: standard errors in brackets. * $p<.10$. ** $p<.05$. *** $p<.01$

[a] The reference category is Other sectors.

[b] The reference category is High hierarchical level.

Table 4: Summary of main results

Hypotheses	Results	Evidences	
		Affective commitment	**Continuance commitment**
H1: The positive relationship between task significance and organisational commitment will be greater for affective commitment than for continuance commitment	Supported	$\beta = .29$ p-value = .000	$\beta = .09$ p-value =.036
		$\chi^2 = 7.98$ p-value = .000	
H2: Openness to experience positively moderates the relationship between task significance and affective commitment.	Not supported	$\beta = -.01$ p-value = .759	
H3: Openness to experience negatively moderates the relationship between task significance and continuance commitment.	Supported		$\beta = -.08$ p-value = .027