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## The link (or lack thereof) among communication networks, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction: A case study

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The purpose of this study is to determine whether and to what extent communication networks come to influence employee commitment to, and satisfaction with, one's organization. Using social identity theory as a useful framework, the main argument is that those part of the same social and task networks will be as committed to, and satisfied with, their organization. The site for investigation is an organization whose main responsibility is to sell foot care products to medical facilities, trained professionals, and retailers. A total of 99 employees from the organization participated in this study and results indicate that neither one's social nor task network influences organizational commitment or job satisfaction. Future research must examine not only why it is that neither of these types of networks influenced these variables, but also whether or not there might be other organizational networks that do come to influence commitment and satisfaction.

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Scholars from the field of organizational communication have long been interested in understanding how one's socially constructed networks come to influence such things as productivity, motivation, identification, the use of power, decision-making, conflict resolution, organizational departure, and upward mobility (see, for example, Monge & Contractor, 2000). This area of scholarship is interested in the intersection between networks and organizational phenomena: how those with whom employees interact come to influence certain organizational variables. Based on decades of sociological, psychological, and communication research, there tends to be a homophilous effect within the organizational setting. In other words, employees will have very similar attitudes, and will engage in very similar behaviors, when compared to those who part of their communication networks.

This study attempts to determine whether and to what extent those within one's social and task networks, both of which are considered to be emergent (Monge & Eisenberg, 1987), come to impact one's commitment to, and satisfaction with, one's organization. In other words, are organizational commitment and organizational satisfaction, both of which are considered to be psychological (not behavioral) variables, a function of social influence? As such, one's communication networks (social and task) are the independent variables and organizational commitment and job satisfaction are the dependent variables.

## **Literature Review**

The first organizational variable under examination is one's communication networks. Scholars have long been interested in studying social networks, attempting to better understand how those with whom one communicates come to influence both attitudes and behaviors. Since the early 1930's, when Jacob Moreno began studying both the antecedents and effects of relational structures, researchers have been interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how people network with one another and what is to be gained from certain network ties. In short, from both methodological and theoretical perspectives, scholars are interested in understanding both overall network configuration (e.g. network density, network range, structural holes) and individual network position (e.g. centrality, structural equivalence, brokerage).

Although this area of scholarship began in the world of sociology, and later transcended to the field of psychology (cognitive and behavioral), it has, over the past several decades, been well documented in the organizational communication literature as well. For example, Sagie, Krausz, and Weinstein (2001) conclude that those part of an employees' social network influence the extent to which one is willing to occupationally relocate; Doerfel and Taylor (2004) found that dense social networks help to ease the flow of communication and information between and among organizations; McDonald and Westphal (2003) found that social actors considered part of one's network help alleviate the decision-making process by providing confirming (rather than disconfirming) and validating information; Reed, Heppard, and Corbett (2004) conclude that those part of one's social network provide resources that help entrepreneurs succeed during times of organizational innovation and turmoil; Doerfel and Fitzgerald (2004) found that those part of the same organizational social networks are likely to have shared perceptions about their job roles and job tasks; Kuhn and Corman (2003) conclude that actors in the same organizational social networks not only communicate about organizational change in similar ways, but also create feelings of homogeneity among network members; Burkhardt and Brass (1990) found that social networks influence whether and to what extent (using diffusion theory) employees come to adopt and utilize technological implementations.

Other research indicates that members who are part of the same social network will (a) engage in similar organizational behaviors and performance (e.g. Rulke & Galaskiewicz, 2000), (b) mutually influence one another during decision-making (e.g. Tushman & Romanelli, 1983), (c) socially influence one another during times of organizational ambiguity (e.g. Rice, 1993), (d) mutually influence one another during times of organizational change and turnover (e.g. Feeley & Barnett, 1997), (e) have similar attitudes concerning the introduction of new technology or forms of communication (e.g. Rice & Aydin, 1991), (f) share more information considered important for organizational processes (e.g. Hansen, 2002), (g) be more likely to engage in mutually unethical behavior (e.g. Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998), (h) be more likely to advocate organizational change during post-downsizing reconfiguration (e.g. Susskind, Miller, & Johnson,

1998), and (i) be more supportive during times of organizational turmoil (e.g. McDonald & Westphal, 2003).

Based on the results of these studies, some of which incorporated cognitive/attitudinal variables, while others included behavioral variables, one overarching claim is supported: communication networks come to influence how employees think (a cognitive perspective), how employees feel (a homophilous perspective), and/or how employees act (a behavioral perspective) within the organizational environment. The purpose of the current study is to assess networks from more of a homophilous or cognitive perspective: do those with whom employees network come to influence commitment to, and satisfaction with, their organization.

The second organizational variable under examination, commitment, has been defined and interpreted several ways over the past three decades. One of the most cited definitions of this phenomenon comes from the work of Mowday, Porter, & Steers (1982), who are considered the first scholars to develop an operational definition for purposes of empirically investigating organizational commitment. They consider this phenomenon to be a combination of “[a] strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization” (p. 27). Based on this, as well as the accumulation of research over the years, a feasible description of this phenomenon is one’s physical, psychological, and/or emotional attachment to an organization. In other words, the more an employee is committed to his/her organization, the more likely he/she feels some level of attachment, either real, perceived, or assumed, to the organization as a whole.

From an organizational perspective it is beneficial and imperative to have a highly committed workforce, insofar as employee commitment is among the most significant predictors of organizational success (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 2001; Feather & Rauter, 2004; Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2001). That is, there is a strong, positive correlation among how committed employees are to their respective organization and organizational effectiveness, productivity, efficiency, and even reputation. A great number of scholars have found this relationship as early as four decades ago, including the following: Grusky (1966) found that the stronger one’s commitment to the organization, the more likely he/she is to engage in a task that presents obvious hurdles and obstacles; Buchanan (1974a) found that the more one feels that his/her work results in visible contributions to the organization, the more committed he/she will be to the organization, which ultimately leads to organizational stability; Buchanan (1974b) found that the more one is committed to his/her organization, the higher his/her level of job achievement, the more social network ties he/she has, and the more likely he/she is to advance up the organizational hierarchy in terms of rank and responsibility; Sheldon (1971) found that the more an employee considers himself/herself committed to the organization, the more involved he/she was with the future fate of the organization and the more invested he/she will be in the organization at large.

More recent studies have also attempted to determine the impact of one's level of commitment to his/her organization at both the employee and organizational levels and a review of the commitment literature suggests that this phenomenon has both micro (individual) and macro (organizational) level effects. For example, prior research indicates that the higher one's level of organizational commitment, the lower the probability of employee absenteeism (Blau, 1994; Blau, Paul, & St. John, 1993; Gellatly, 1995), the higher one's level of job involvement (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Meyer, Bobocel, & Allen, 1991), the lower the probably of employee turnover (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 2001; Begley & Czajka, 1993; Chang, 1997), the higher one's level of job satisfaction (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Tett & Meyer, 1993), the more communication there is between and among other employees (Cohen & Lowenberg, 1990; Luthans, Wahl, & Steinhaus, 1992), the higher one's job performance evaluations are (Angle & Lawson, 1994; Angle & Lawson, 1993; Somers & Birnbaum, 1998), and the higher one's level of organizational citizenship (Feather & Rauter, 2004; Kidwell, Mossholder, & Bennet, 1997; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it becomes evident that having committed employees is certainly a necessary prerequisite for organizational success, insofar as the more one is committed to the organization, (a) the less likely he/she will be to have intentions to leave, (b) the less likely he/she will be to exhibit frequent absenteeism, (c) the more likely he/she will be to create social networks within the organization, (d) the more likely he/she will be to exhibit high job involvement, (e) the more likely he/she will be satisfied with the organization, (f) the higher his/her job performance will be, and (g) the more likely he/she will be to engage in proper, ethical organizational citizenship. However, although the consequences of organizational commitment abound in the literature, there is strikingly less attention paid to two extraordinarily important questions: why do organizational employees feel the need to be committed to their organizations and what variables might predict the extent to which one becomes committed (Allen & Meyer, 1990)?

This is not to say that scholars have found no statistically significant predictors of organizational commitment, because they certainly have. For example, research indicates that the higher the job challenge, the higher the degree of individual autonomy, and the more social and financial rewards that one receives, the more likely it is that an employee will exhibit some degree of organizational commitment (see Gautam et al., 2004). Furthermore, results indicate that active participation in the decision-making process (Kim & Mauborgne, 1993), one's age (Gautam et al., 2001), and one's tenure in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1997) all have significant predictive power when addressing the phenomenon of organizational commitment. However, the research in this area is predominately conducted in an effort to understand the consequences, not necessarily the antecedents, of organizational commitment. As such, it becomes evident that organizational communication scholars understand more about organizational commitment as a predictor of organizational success, though remain less informed about the predictors of commitment.

In their oft-cited article dealing with what they term the “three-component conceptualization,” Allen and Meyer (1990) explain the importance of organizational commitment from an organizational perspective and differentiate among affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment, all of which combine to create an overall measure of attitudinal commitment toward an organization. Affective commitment refers to the idea that employees are committed to an organization because of the desire to fulfill an emotional need for attachment (e.g. “I want to be a committed employee because it will make me more content”), continuance commitment refers to the idea that employees are committed to an organization because of the costs involved in leaving the organization (e.g. “I want to be a committed employee because I fear what will happen if I am not”), and normative commitment refers to the idea that employees are committed to an organization because of the perceived pressure from social others about one’s obligation to the organization (e.g. “I want to be a committed employee because social others tell me that I must and I do not want to let them down”) (Allen & Meyer, 1990, pp. 2-4).

It is the combination of these variables (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) that provides the rationale for Allen and Meyer’s (1990) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), which presents the organizational communication scholar with an appropriate instrument by which to assess reasons for, attitudes toward, and the importance of, organizational commitment. In other words, this questionnaire allows the researcher to determine whether and to what extent one is committed to the organization for affective reasons (“I want to”), continuance reasons (“I need to”), and/or normative reasons (“I ought to”), the combination of which creates Allen and Meyer’s (1990) “three-component conceptualization.” Although each of these “types” of commitment is important and informs organizational communication scholarship, the normative and affective commitment scales are used for purposes of this study because, as Allen and Meyer (1990) claim, studying these components allows one to “... assess acceptance of organizational values, willingness to exert effort, and desire to maintain membership in the organization” (p. 64).

As this discussion indicates, organizational commitment is something that should be considered salient for both the employee (at the micro-level of analysis) and the organization (at the macro-level of analysis). In essence, the more one is committed to the organization, the more social actors he/she communicates with in the organization, the higher level of success he/she experiences, the more involved he/she is within the organization, and the more content he/she is being a member of the organization. In turn, the more committed one is to his/her organization, the less he/she will consider leaving the organization, the less he/she will arrive to work tardy or exhibit frequent absenteeism, and the higher his/her job performance will be. Thus, it becomes evident that organizational commitment is not only something that both the organization and the individual want, but it is also something that both the organization and the individual need.

There exists somewhat of a gap in the scholarly literature relating to organizational commitment, insofar as there was a surge of scholarly investigations in the 1970s, 1980s, and early-to-mid 1990s, followed by nearly a decade of drought, and suddenly scholars became interested in this phenomenon again, evidenced by the slight resurgence over the last five years (see Meyer et al., 2002). Although this gap does exist and is certainly noticeable, perhaps unconsciously presenting a call for more scholarly work in this area, results from research relating to this phenomenon have provided a wealth of knowledge about the relationship between employee commitment and organizational success. As such, one of the overarching purposes of this study is to aid in the resurgence of organizational commitment research by examining whether and to what extent one's communication networks (both social and task) can significantly predict one's level of organizational commitment: studying why and how employees become committed, rather than studying the effects of such commitment.

The third and final variable under examination in this study is job satisfaction, which, according to a meta-analysis conducted by Dormann and Zapf (2001), is one of the most widely researched phenomena in the fields of organizational psychology, management, administrative science, organizational behavior, and organizational communication. One of the earliest cited definitions for job satisfaction is that provided by Locke (1976), where he argued that job satisfaction is the "positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1300). Based on a more recent definition offered by Cranny, Smith, and Stone (1992), job satisfaction can most aptly be defined as "an affective (that is, emotional) reaction to one's job, resulting from the incumbent's comparison of actual outcomes with those that are desired (expected, deserved, and so on)" (p. 1). According to both of these definitions, to the extent that one is satisfied with his/her job, the outcomes, rewards, and benefits that one expects are analogous with the outcomes, rewards, and benefits that one receives.

Much research exists to support the notion that there are certain predictor variables associated with job satisfaction, including task variety (Gerhart, 1987), role ambiguity (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981), task complexity (Abdel-Halim, 1981), role conflict (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), task significance (Haynes, 1979), organizational leadership (Gladstein, 1984), and organizational supervision (Podsakoff, Todor, & Skov, 1982). That is, employees are more satisfied when their tasks are varied, when their roles are unambiguous, when their tasks are not complex, when their roles are not in conflict with one another, when the significance of their tasks is high, when their leaders are effective, and when their supervisors do not attempt to be controlling. However, what is interesting is that, based on Glisson and Durick's (1988) review of the job satisfaction literature, although variables associated with one's job tasks (role conflict, role ambiguity, skill variety, task identity, task significance) and one's organization (workgroup size, workgroup budget, organization age, workgroup age, leadership) have been found to predict job satisfaction, very few studies have found network membership to be significantly predictive.

Based on previous research, there are four oft-cited pieces of scholarship that have studied whether or not there exists a correlation between one's communication network and one's level of job satisfaction. Hurlbert (1991) found that employees who claim that others within their organization offer social support have a significantly higher level of job satisfaction than those who do not have social network ties to those who offer social support. As such, results indicate that one's social network influences one's level of job satisfaction. Results from Snadowsky's (1974) study indicate that job satisfaction is not only influenced by one's communication network, but also the type of communication network: employees were more satisfied when they were part of decentralized, as opposed to centralized, networks. Therefore, membership in networks characterized as emergent and informal leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction than membership in networks characterized as dictated and formal. Brass (1981) did not find a significant relationship between job satisfaction and communication networks when he studied issues of employee centrality. Results indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between one's level of degree centrality and how satisfied one is to his/her organization. Based on the results from Flap and Volker's (2001) study, increased social capital (one of the results of having degree, betweenness, and closeness centrality) on behalf of employees does not lead to an increase in job satisfaction.

The results of these studies, which analyzed the relationship between job satisfaction and one's communication networks, are mixed. As such, it makes scholars question whether such antecedents as the mental challenge of one's job, one's autonomy in completing one's job, the stimulation of the job itself, the variety of job tasks, one's personal interest in one's job, one's pay, one's opportunity for promotion, one's working conditions, and the impact of one's job on self-esteem are, in fact, more important predictors of job satisfaction than interpersonal relationships (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1987). This study attempts to challenge this claim by proposing the idea that one's social and task networks come to influence one's level of job satisfaction, adding to the already accumulated body of knowledge in this area.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Employees will have similar levels of organizational commitment when compared to those part of their social network.

H2: Employees will have similar levels of organizational commitment when compared to those part of their task network.

H3: Employees will have similar levels of job satisfaction when compared to those part of their social network.

H4: Employees will have similar levels of job satisfaction when compared to those part of their task network.



## **Theory**

The theory used to explain why networks likely come to influence organizational commitment and job satisfaction is social identity theory. In its most basic form, social identity theory proposes that individuals act in accordance with what other individuals within their social group(s) consider acceptable. As Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue, all social behavior is predicated on what similar others would do in similar situations under similar circumstances. According to these scholars, "...the essential criteria for group membership, as they apply to large-scale social categories, are that the individuals concerned define themselves and are defined by others as members of a group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, p. 15). That is, not only do social beings have to see themselves as being part of a particular in-group, but that those part of the in-group must substantiate and legitimate one's membership. The major contribution of this theory to the social science literature is that individuals begin to act in accordance with the expectations set forth by associated group members. As Tajfel and Turner (1986) explain, "...in the relevant intergroup situations, individuals will not interact as individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups" (p. 10). This assertion explains how social behavior is a function of in-group norms.

Although Tajfel and Turner's (1986) original theory extended to all facets of social life, scholars subsequently began to limit the scope of analysis by studying more specific, micro contexts. Among these contexts is social identity within an organizational setting. As much research indicates, organizational members strive to create both personal and organizational identities (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). In fact, among the major driving forces behind one's desire to identify with an organization is the necessity to bridge the chasm between one's individual identity and one's socially shared identity (e.g. Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). In other words, it is important for employees to construct these two separate identities, though have them work in a mutually beneficial and rewarding way (e.g. Pratt & Foreman, 2000). This brings up the intriguing, salient, and often discussed issue of multiple identities and how to manage them.

According to social identity theory (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989), human beings come to define themselves in terms of the groups in which they are members. Based on the groups in which individuals become a part, distinct social identities are constructed. Within the realm of organizations, social beings create a plethora of different identities, both individual and professional. These identities not only define an organizational member as being part of the in-group (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1986), but also help to distinguish this individual from an out-group. In other words, organizational members come to see themselves as part of a distinct "group" based on the social identities they create. These social identities allow for self-reference (e.g. Scott & Lane, 2000) and social comparison (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989), whereby organizational members judge their goals, behaviors, and

outcomes, against a comparative out-group. Organizational employees categorize themselves into in-groups, what many scholars call self categorization theory (e.g. Hogg, 1992; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg & Terry, 2000), in effort to identify with an organization. These categories become necessary insofar as they allow employees to produce, reproduce, construct, and reconstruct their identities (e.g. Hogg, 1992).

According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), and salient for social identity theory and self categorization theory, (a) individuals strive to achieve or maintain positive social identity, (b) positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-group(s), and (c) when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct one or make their existing group somehow more positively distinct (p. 16). Thus, it becomes evident that individuals within organizations must and do strive to identify with a salient, relevant, and rewarding in-group, ultimately creating a positive self-concept (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In sum, and to reiterate, social identity theory proposes that social action is predicated on the behaviors and attitudes of other employees considered part of one's in-group. The overarching claim is that one's decisions within the organizational realm will shadow others within one's in-group, based primarily on the knowledge of group membership. Comparison with a comparable out-group provides a rationale for appropriate, acceptable behavior. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory certainly contributes heavily to the theoretical framework of this study. Social identity theory provides employees with a rationale for interpretation of organizational events and organizational behavior(s). There is a very general and basic component of the theory to help explain and understand employee behavior: if one's in-group substantiates a particular behavior or attitude, it is acceptable. As such, the driving thesis behind this study is that network members will be similarly committed to, and satisfied with, their organization.

## **Method**

All data were obtained from full-time employees working at a large company, located in the northeastern United States, involved in making orthotics and other footwear products. The total number of participants was 99 (a response rate of 79.2%) and these employees are part of the following organizational departments: production, sales, customer service, shipping, technology, accounting, marketing, purchasing, administration, and operations. The survey instrument included three major sections. The first section was tapping into communication networks, using Burt's (1992) Name Generator and Name Interpreter techniques. For example, employees were asked with whom they communicate for social (e.g. gossip) and task (e.g. information) reasons, and were also asked to describe the nature of these relationships (e.g. if the relational partner is dependable, supportive, helpful). Based on Burt's (1992) discussion, these methodological techniques allow one to

tap into emergent networks, rather than merely contrived. Since the overarching goal of this study is to determine the existence or absence of a link among commitment, satisfaction, and communication networks, obtaining information related to emergent networks ultimately provided the data necessary to test the proposed hypotheses.

The second section of the survey measured organizational commitment. Although the first scale for empirically examining organizational commitment was created by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979), it has since been adapted by Meyer and Allen (1991). Statistics indicate that the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire has received high levels of reliability, including 0.92 (Sass & Canary, 1991), 0.91 (Eisenberg et al., 1983), 0.89 (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 2001), 0.87 (Allen & Meyer, 1990), 0.85 (Feather & Rauter, 2004), and 0.84 (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Overall, Mowday et al.'s (1979) survey reports average reliability coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.93 (Eisenberg et al., 1983). In an effort to empirically assess employee commitment, a series of close-ended questions, derived from Meyer and Allen's (1997) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, are included in the survey instrument. Respondents are asked to indicate whether and to what extent they are in agreement with each statement, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a 7-point Likert scale, each of which assesses commitment to the organization. Meyer and Allen's (1997) scale assesses three types of organizational commitment: affective (based on a real or perceived attachment to one's organization), continuance (based on a strong desire to remain part of one's organization), and normative (based on a real or perceived pressure from social others to remain part of one's organization). For purposes of this study, however, only affective and normative commitment were measured since the main interest was in determining the link between network affiliation and organizational commitment (Gautam, Van Dick, & Wagner, 2001).

The third section of the survey measured job satisfaction. Based on the recommendation offered by Monge, Edwards, and Kirste (1983), the most profitable way to empirically assess job satisfaction is to have participants complete the Job Description Index (JDI), which asks respondents to indicate their overall level of satisfaction regarding five major domains: work itself, pay or salary, opportunity for promotion, supervision or management, and relationships with co-workers. The JDI, which was originally developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969), has been used to conduct organizational research for the past four decades and, according to Monge et al. (1983), "...has among the highest discriminant and convergent validity of any instrument currently utilized" (p. 91). As such, the Job Description Index was used to assess employees' level of job satisfaction. Respondents are provided with a list of several adjectives and are asked to indicate whether the adjectives correctly describe their own job or organizational experiences, indicating either "yes," "no," or "cannot decide."

In order to test the four proposed hypotheses, it was important to (a) create similarities matrices, (b) create network factions, and (c) compute external-internal indexes. In order to test the network hypotheses and how networks might

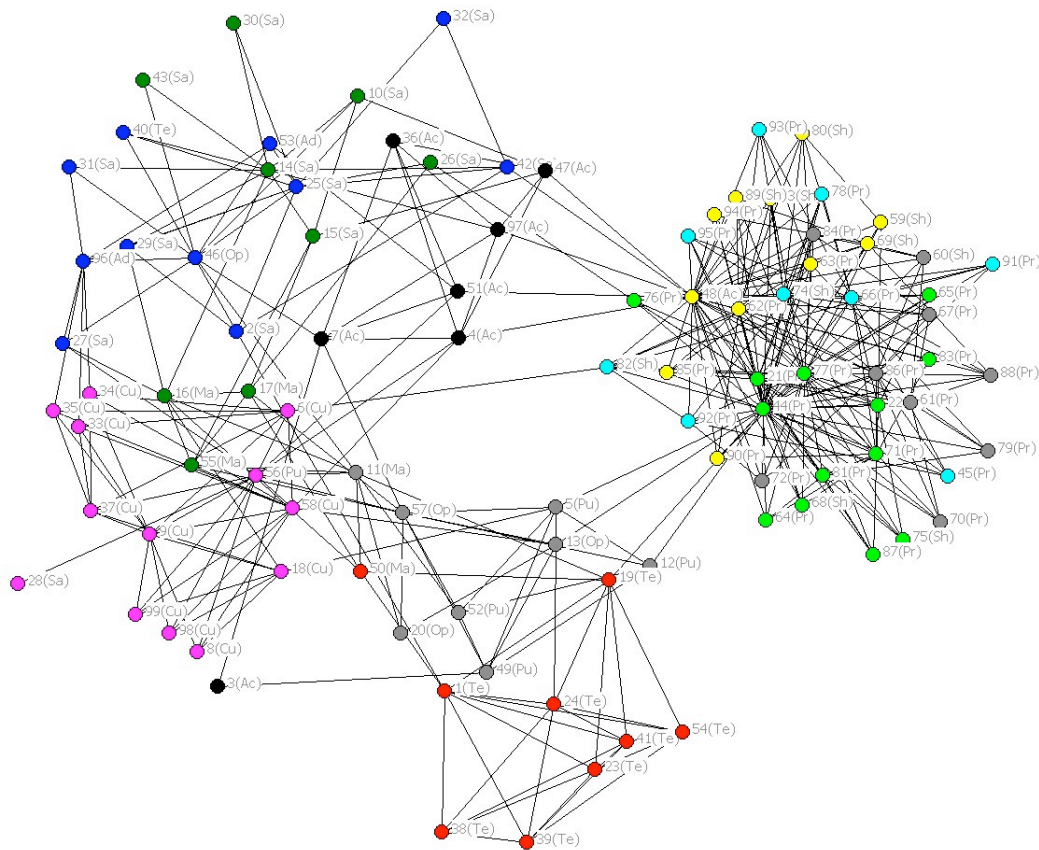
come to influence commitment and satisfaction, similarities matrices were created for each participant to determine how similar employees were in their commitment and satisfaction levels as compared to their fellow coworkers. Similarities matrices were constructed using dichotomous matrices, in which two employees were similar because they had similar levels of commitment and satisfaction. In other words, a 1 in cell  $ij$  represents a similarity between individuals  $i$  and  $j$ , whereas a 0 in cell  $ij$  represents a dissimilarity between individuals  $i$  and  $j$ . Initial matrices included each employees' commitment and satisfaction levels (for a total of two separate rectangular matrices of employees by commitment scores and employees by satisfaction scores). In order to create these four similarity matrices (commitment and satisfaction for both the social and task networks), matrix algebra was used in UCINET. The procedure first requires the creation of a transpose of each matrix. By creating the transpose of the rectangular matrix, and then post-multiplying the original vector by its transpose, the employees-by-employees similarities matrices were created. The four resulting similarities matrices indicated how similar employees were to others regarding commitment and satisfaction. Again, the resulting similarities matrices produce dichotomous numerical values: a 1 indicates that  $i$  and  $j$  are similarly committed and/or satisfied and a 0 indicates that  $i$  and  $j$  are not similarly committed and/or satisfied. The resulting similarities matrices allowed for the E-I analysis to determine whether those part of the same social and task factions similarly cluster in terms of commitment and satisfaction.

A faction provides a way of placing similar social actors, based on the similarity in communication ties to others, in the same sub-group structure or clique. Based on the underlying logic of a faction, to the extent that individual  $i$  both communicates with individual  $j$  and also has ties to the same social actors as individual  $j$ , both  $i$  and  $j$  will be part of the same faction. Factions, therefore, provide the possibility of creating communication-based sub-groups: those social actors in a given network who communicate with the same individuals come to share common faction membership.

After determining employees' communication practices in both the larger social and task networks, factions were created to separate these larger networks into smaller sub-group structures. Based on the advice offered by Hanneman and Riddle (2005), determining the number of factions to divide each larger network into is a difficult endeavor because there is no straightforward answer or rule of thumb. The decision, however, is not arbitrary either. It is important to create factions based on two numerical calculations: the number of faction errors and the density within each faction. The number of faction errors represents the number of errors within a given faction: the number of social actors that should be in a given faction but are not and the number of social actors that should not be in a given faction but are. Ideally, if all social actors are in the correct faction, meaning that all members communicate with all (and only) members of their own group, there will be zero resulting errors.



Figure 2. Task Network by Faction



An employees' E-I (External-Internal) Index is a measure of whether or not social actors have the majority of their network ties to homophilous or heterophilous others. Krackhardt and Stern (1988), who developed the E-I index measure, determined that this measure was a useful way of representing the number of communication ties one has within one's own group (based on such things as gender, ethnicity, race, and age) as compared to the number of communication ties one has external to one's own group. This index is a statistical procedure in UCINET that compares the number of ties that social actors have within their own group with the number of ties that social actors have across other groups. The E-I Index, therefore, is used to determine the relationship between group membership and the amount of communication ties that one has to both members internal and external to one's group (Krackhardt & Stern, 1988).

For purposes of this study, factions were used to obtain an E-I index score: how similar are those within one's social and/or task faction regarding commitment and satisfaction? An E-I index score of -1.0 indicates that a social actor has all communication ties to others part of one's own group and an E-I index score of

+1.0 indicates that a social actor has all communication ties to others external to one's own group. An index score of -1.0 translates into homophilous ties to others part of one's group and an index score of +1.0 translates into heterophilous ties to others external to one's group. Thus, an index score of -1.0 indicates that those within a particular faction are similarly committed to and satisfied with one's organization and an index score of +1.0 indicates that those part of the same faction are not similarly committed to and satisfied with one's organization.

## **Results**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that employees will have a similar level of commitment when compared to those part of their social network. The mean score for employee commitment was calculated ( $M = 5.26$ ). The results indicate that those part of the same social network do not have similar commitment scores, EI Index = 0.777,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that employees will have a similar level of commitment when compared to those part of their task network. The mean score for employee commitment was calculated ( $M = 5.26$ ). The results indicate that those part of the same task network do not have similar commitment scores, EI Index = 0.779,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that employees will have a similar level of satisfaction when compared to those part of their social network. The mean score for employee satisfaction was calculated ( $M = 2.68$ ). The results indicate that those part of the same social network do not have similar satisfaction scores, EI Index = 0.777,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that employees will have a similar level of satisfaction when compared to those part of their task network. The mean score for employee satisfaction was calculated ( $M = 2.68$ ). The results indicate that those part of the same task network do not have similar satisfaction scores, EI Index = 0.779,  $p < .05$ . Thus, hypothesis 4 is not supported.

## **Discussion**

Although there is an abundance of research that links communication networks to several organizational phenomena, this study provides statistical evidence that networks do not necessarily predict the extent to which one might be committed to, or satisfied with, his/her organization. Based on a review of the extant literature, both commitment and satisfaction can be considered to be psychological phenomena: employees might feel committed to, and might feel satisfied with, their organization. Taking these out of the psychology literature and studying them from a communication perspective, however, forces scholars to reconsider the nature of commitment and satisfaction.

From a communication perspective, of importance is how communication is either an antecedent to, or an effect of, commitment and satisfaction. That is, one area of study is to determine whether employees are committed and satisfied because of those with whom they communicate. This, in short, is the antecedent perspective. The other area of study is to determine how being committed and satisfied leads to certain communication practices on behalf of employees. This, in short, is the effects perspective. This particular study took the antecedent approach to the study of organizational commitment and job satisfaction by attempting to determine whether and to what extent those with whom one communicates for both social and task reasons come to influence how committed one is to, and how satisfied one is in, an organization.

None of the four hypotheses driving the current study were supported: those part of one's social and task networks do not come to influence commitment or satisfaction. These results run counter to the underlying logic employed by social identity theory, which posits that those part of the same "in-group" will hold similar attitudes and engage in similar behaviors. Based on the results of this study, although this theory is intuitively sound, it cannot explain patterns of commitment and satisfaction based on network membership. It is important, therefore, to determine why networks might not come to influence organizational commitment or job satisfaction. Several explanations exist to shed light on the null findings.

First, the nature of the survey items tapped into only strong ties, as opposed to both strong and weak ties. According to Granovetter (1973), ties are strong to the extent that they are emotionally-driven, intimate, reciprocal, and enduring, whereas weak ties are less emotional, less frequent in terms of communication and interaction, and more instrumental and purposive. By asking the questions in the survey (e.g. list the five people with whom you communicate most, who are your most important contacts for continued organizational success, who are your most important contacts for professional growth, who are your most valued contacts), strong ties were "forced" and weak ties did not emerge. Krackhardt's (1992) idea that those with whom one shares strong ties are influential is questioned, and Granovetter's (1973) idea that those with whom one shares weak ties are influential, becomes intriguing. Consistent with Granovetter's (1973) thesis, it is possible that if emergent networks within this organization do influence commitment and satisfaction, it is important to not only capture who has strong ties to others within the organization, but also with whom people cultivate weak ties: what some refer to as the strong vs. weak ties argument (Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1991) and what others refer to as the core vs. periphery argument (Borgatti & Everett, 1999; Morgan, Neal, & Carder, 1996). The main conclusion, therefore, is that if emergent networks are influential, it is likely that the strength of weak ties, as opposed to strong ties, may influence these two organizational variables.

Second, not only were strong ties the only types of links explored, but also there were no survey items that assessed one's communication practices with



individuals outside of the organization. In other words, although the survey items did tap into who communicated with whom and for what reasons within the organization, there are many social groups to which employees belong that extend beyond the workplace, such as friend networks, family networks, professional colleague networks, client networks, and other socially constructed networks. Based on the results of this study, if, again, networks are to influence commitment and satisfaction, it is likely that others part of non-organizational social webs become influential. Again using social identity theory, it does not necessarily have to be only those with whom one shares social or task relationships that influence employees, but can also be social beings in other walks of life. One might naturally assume that one's organizational life and one's personal life are mutually exclusive and, as such, not mutually influential. That is, even the most cursory review of organizational literature might lead one to assume that social beings have the cognitive ability to separate their "work" and "private" lives. However, it can also be argued that there is great overlap between these two types of networks. "Work" networks can influence "private" networks and "private" networks can influence "work" networks (Hochschild, 2003).

Ibarra (1992) found support for this idea when she found that it was a managers' "range" of contacts external to the organization that are important for access to information. One of Ibarra's (1992) main reasons for studying the impact of external social agents on managerial networks was to question the longstanding notion that one's most important contacts come from within one's organization, as opposed to externally. Again, the nature of the survey questions in this study did not assess the "private" or "personal" networks that employees have membership in that extend beyond the organizational environment. In retrospect, it would be important to consider networks that extend beyond the confines of the organization.

Third, and perhaps most important, is a problem that frequently surfaces in the social network literature: can scholars make great claims about the link between networks and other variables by studying perceptions as opposed to behaviors? There does exist some controversy in the scholarly literature, insofar as some scholars claim that perceptions cannot explain behaviors and some scholars claim that perceptions can be linked to behaviors. From an organizational communication perspective, our perceptions of communication partners, rather than actual communication partners, is what truly matters (Corman, 1990; Marsden, 1990). Based on this logic, the survey items for this dissertation only tapped into perceptions (studying who employees think they communicate with), rather than including observations that would tap into behaviors. Thus, the two different networks that emerged (a social network and a task network) are cognitive networks as opposed to behavioral networks. Future research should consider Killworth and Bernard's (1976) argument that, within the organizational setting, people do not necessarily know with whom they communicate and for what reasons. Perhaps in order to determine whether and to what extent one's networks influence commitment and satisfaction, it is important to study networks comprised of people sharing weak ties and also equally necessary to study

behavioral networks. That is, perhaps it is important to study not only actual vs. perceived links (Diesner & Carley, 2005), but also actual vs. perceived behavior (Corman & Bradford, 1993). Perhaps Killworth and Bernard's (1976) claim that "people simply do not know...with whom they communicate" has credibility in light of the findings of this study (p. 253).

In the end, this study set out to determine whether or not one's emergent networks come to influence organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Based on decades of psychological, sociological, and communication research, it seems logical that those considered part of one's communication networks will come to influence attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and cognitions. However, results of this study indicate otherwise. This, therefore, makes one question not why networks are not influential, but rather what types of networks come to influence these organizational phenomena. For example, formal networks (e.g. department) were not analyzed. Perhaps it is membership in a formal network, as opposed to emergent networks, that comes to predict commitment and satisfaction? Future research must assess how membership in other networks (intra-organizational, inter-organizational, and extra-organizational) comes to influence these organizational variables.

This study, however, must be framed as a case study. As such, it is important to realize that the results of this study are not necessarily going to be uniformly the same across organizational settings. Perhaps networks do come to influence commitment and satisfaction among employees, just not at this particular organization. It is extremely important to examine several organizations, using the same method, to determine whether and to what extent results are similar, and whether and to what extent results can be generalized to organizations at large.

In conclusion, although overall levels of commitment and satisfaction were high, employees' emergent communication networks did not come to influence these two variables. These results, again, question the "birds of a feather flock together" mentality. Had this underlying logic been correct, those in the same networks would have been similarly committed to, and similarly satisfied with, their organization. However, results indicated otherwise. Future research must determine what types of networks do come to influence commitment and satisfaction and, perhaps, why membership in emergent social and task networks might not be as predictive as one might prematurely assume. This study has taken yet another step at advancing network research in organizations from a communication perspective and, although the hypotheses were not supported, the null results do add to the already accumulated body of knowledge related to networks within the organizational setting.

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