

## **Affective, Calculative and Normative Commitment: An Assessment of Relationship**

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*Commitment is a psychological state regarded in the literature of marketing as a key concept in business relationships (Fullerton, 2005, Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In marketing, literature commitment is often regarded as comprising affective, calculative and normative components. Rylander (1997) Anderson & Weitz (1992) and Martín (2008) suggest mutual interaction between these components, which means that a single actor may have elements of all these components at the time of a single commitment. This perspective on commitment implies that variations of commitment will influence the relationships in question in different ways. Recent research has focused on factors leading to and reinforcing commitment, but knowledge on the relationship between the three components identified is lacking. Further general studies of commitment are required but studies of how the three components also interact in particular, in order to gain an understanding of how commitment works in relationships and networks. This paper aims to develop a model that describes how the three components interact. The model is illustrated by an empirical case concerning two large Swedish companies and their sponsoring relationships with the local ice-hockey club. Data have been gathered through interviews and a survey that has been analysed qualitatively. We found the affective component, when present, to be a significant component in relationship commitment building, almost replacing the calculative and moral ones. The moral and calculative commitment components were, however, significant for initiation of interaction and relationship building between the parties at the start of the relationship.*

**Field of Research:** Marketing and Management

### **1. Introduction**

The contents of business relationships may be analysed in many ways. Some of these are linked to markets and hierarchies (Williamson, 1981), transactional and relational agreements (McNeil, 1981), transactional, simple and integrated relationships (Ford et al., 1998), loyalty (McMullan & Gilmore, 2008) and commitment (Fullerton, 2005). The commitment term has frequently been used in organisational research, but recently also by an increasing number of marketing researchers. In marketing, the research on commitment has mainly been focused on measuring how committed partners behave in purchase and sale relationships, distribution channels, customer and supplier relationships, international business relationships, strategic alliances and strategic networks. Further studies have focused on factors influencing commitment and researchers in this line of research define the term commitment to comprise two or three components such as affective, normative and calculative (Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006). However, few have studied how these components are related to one another.

Sharma et al (2006), Bansal (2004) and Martín (2008) have found that the affective and normative components are correlated, and that the key component is the affective one. To understand business relationships from a commitment perspective

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it is necessary to have knowledge of how the various components of the term work together. Present studies indicate that this issue is important and interesting, but argue at the same time that much remains to be explored. The purpose of this paper is therefore to discuss, from an attitude-based commitment perspective, how the components of the commitment interact with one other, firstly by means of a literature review and secondly illustrated by an empirical case concerning two large Swedish companies and their sponsoring relationship with the local ice-hockey club. Finally, the results are summarised, followed by conclusions. Our intention is to contribute to the understanding of the commitment mechanism in a way that may help managers when managing their relationships.

## 2. Litterature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of Commitment

Commitment is commonly defined differently depending on the perspective from which the concept is studied. Examples of perspectives are social exchanges (Cook & Emerson, 1978), marriage (Thompson & Spanier, 1983), organisations (Meyer & Allen, 1984, Meyer & Allen, 1991), business relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and strategic networks (Andrésen, Lundberg & Roxenhall, 2012, Roxenhall, 2011). The last of these, business relationships and strategic networks, means that the committed actors consider a relationship to be worth working on to ensure that the relationship lasts. Commitment has also been defined slightly more generally as a lasting wish to retain a relationship which is considered valuable (Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande, 1992).

The definition thus means that commitment relates to a valuable relationship. Morgan & Hunt (1994) argue that commitment is present when an actor in a relationship considers the relationship so important that he makes maximum efforts to preserve it indefinitely. Another definition is that commitment is an implicit or explicit agreement that the relationship has to continue between the actors in the relationship (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987). These definitions demonstrate that commitment is a willingness to make sacrifices in the short term in order to attain long-term benefits.

In the research context a distinction is usually made according to whether commitment is attitude-based or behaviour-based. An attitude-based commitment relates to the way in which a party to a relationship views a relationship or this person's intention to commit himself or herself in a particular relationship, while the behaviour-based relationship is more concerned with what one actually does (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). In the literature of marketing and organisation attitude-based commitment is most frequently used.

This approach also reflects the behavioural-science literature in the area where commitment is viewed as an important cornerstone of the relationship between employees and employers (Meyer & Allen, 1991, Meyer & Smith, 2000). This literature is highly relevant as marketing and organisation researchers have borrowed the definitions and thoughts of behavioural scientists on the phenomenon of commitment (Fullerton, 2005, Gilliland & Bello, 2002, Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000, Harrison-Walker, 2001, Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The dominant attitude in the literature of behavioural science is that commitment consists at least of an affective and calculative component (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This breakdown of the concept also receives support in the literature of marketing (Fullerton, 2005; Gilliland & Bello,

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2002; Harrison-Walker, 2001). However, it is most common for the concept to be operationalised solely as affective commitment (Fullerton, 2005). Morgan & Hunt (1994), for example, were inspired by Meyer & Allen's (1991) operationalisation of affective commitment (Fullerton, 2005). However, Meyer & Allen (1991) also believe that there is another component which should be adopted, namely the normative or obligation-related component. There are also several marketing studies that categorise the concept of commitment in the same ways as Meyer & Allen (1991) do (Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000, Roxenhall, 2011, Andrésen, Lundberg & Roxenhall, 2012).

Common to the three components (affective, calculative and normative) is their description of a psychological state characterising the relationship of the committed person to someone else. This will then significantly impact on whether the committed person wishes to continue or break off the relationship. Despite these similarities there are quite significant differences between the three components.

### **2.2 The Affective Component**

The affective component is strongly linked to the concepts of common values, trust, benevolence and relationships. Affective commitment arises when the committed person has feelings for, identifies himself or herself with and feels psychologically bound to the person he or she has a relationship with (Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004, Fullerton, 2005, Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). In the literature of marketing the affective component is closely related to the concept of loyalty (Gilliland & Bello, 2002). The committed person does not correctly see the economic and rational advantages of the relationship and finds it difficult to value its effects through economic calculations. However, it feels right to become involved in the relationship. The person who has a strong affective commitment wants, for emotional reasons, to preserve the relationship concerned (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

For an affective commitment to arise, trust (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, Gilliland & Bello, 2002, Morgan & Hunt, 1994) for the party in the relationship is required and the committed person is required to have good experience of (satisfaction with) the relationship in question (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Very strong correlations have been found for example in organisational research between job experience and affective component (Irving & Meyer, 1994, Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytski, 2002). Trust has been found to have a strong impact on development of affective commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytski, 2002). Trust and good experience have been shown to be important in customer relations (Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004).

### **2.3 The Calculative Component**

The calculative component is based on the committed person feeling more or less compelled to continue the relationship in question. In older behavioural-science literature this component of commitment is usually called "continuance commitment", which means that the committed person will continue to be employed in the organisation due to the costs (both economic and social) that arise in connection with the termination of employment. In many cases, the committed person therefore has no other choice than to continue, and consequently feels locked in (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006). The person who has a strong

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calculative commitment must, in other words, for business (economic and social) reasons try to preserve the relationship.

The calculative component consists of two dimensions – negative and positive. The negative dimension means locked-in values, such as the committed person being aware that relationship-specific investments already made in time, effort, money, knowledge etc. may be lost, that new costs may arise and that new relationship-specific investments must be made ('switching costs') if the relationship concerned comes to an end. The positive dimension relates to future values, such as anticipating future gains in terms of time, effort, money, knowledge etc. (Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006, Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004). These two dimensions are closely linked to past and present investment and returns.

Empirical studies in both organisational and market research indicate that if the committed person feels that there are locked-in and future values or that there is a lack of alternative relationship partners, this gives rise to calculative commitment (Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004).

### 2.4 The Normative Component

The normative component is concerned with the committed person feeling a more or less moral duty and feeling a responsibility for the relationship to continue (Meyer & Smith, 2000). The person who has a strong normative commitment feels that one should continue the relationship for moral or duty-related reasons (Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004, Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). The concept "should" refers to common standard that an individual is unable to change or influence. This is related to a sense of obligation and has its basis in formal and informal rules, regulations, social norms and customs. These rules are implicit and are rarely written down in contracts etc. The party to the relationship and the people around the committed person expect the committed person to follow these rules and norms (Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006). In other words it is quite easy to end a relationship for business reasons (the calculative component), but all the more difficult to end a relationship based on social pressure (the normative component) (Gilliland & Bello, 2002, Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006).

### 2.5 Relationship between the Components

The three components should be regarded as components and not as different types of commitment (Anderson & Weitz, 1992, Martin, 2008, Rylander, Strutton & Pelton, 1997). One and the same person has elements of all the components at one and the same time of commitment. It is therefore not meaningful to regard them as separate forms, only as components. A committed person may, for example, have both an emotional (affective) and business (calculative) commitment to preserve a particular relationship, but may at the same time not feel a particular moral duty (normatively) to the relationship. And another person may be less committed in terms of business, but all the more so emotionally and morally. Considering commitment in this perspective implies that variations of commitment affect the relationships in question in different ways (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Research findings suggest that in long-term and lasting relationships the affective component is stronger and plays a more important role than the other two components (Meyer & Allen, 1991, Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006). Some

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research has been conducted on how the various components influence one another (Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004, Martin, 2008). Martin (2008) points out that there is a correlation between the affective and normative components. The person who is affectively committed creates emotional ties that mean that this person may develop a sense of both responsibility and obligation, i.e. the normative component.

Someone who is committed may, on the other hand, have both a calculated (business-related) and emotional commitment to retain a relationship, but at the same time not feel particularly morally bound by this. Another committed person may, however, be less committed in business terms but all the more committed emotionally and morally.

It appears reasonable that a strong affective component can more or less replace less strong calculative and normative components. Thus, a relationship founded on affective commitment is based on common values, confidence and trust in many studies found to be a strong foundation. A strong calculative component may furthermore assume the need for less strength in the normative and affective components. It is difficult, however, to see how a relationship can be built mostly on a strong normative component when the two other components are weak at the same time. The normative component is probably the component that is most difficult to change due to the fact that it is based on norms and values.

### 3. Methodology

The objective of this paper is to study the three identified components forming the concept of commitment, affective, calculative and normative, and to discuss how these components interact with each other. A review of the literature shows that research results from past studies are more or less lacking. The case study method stands out as a particularly strong research strategy when the available knowledge is limited, when earlier studies point to different results, and when the aim of the research is to increase insight into the topic of study (Halinen & Törnroos, 2005, Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002, Yin, 1994), and we have consequently chosen to use the case study method.

Single-case design is a supremely justified research design if the case sheds light on existing theory in the field, or if the case is rare or unique, or if the researcher has unique access to it (Yin, 1994). The multiple-case design has both advantages and disadvantages compared to the single-case design. Evidence from multiple cases is often considered to be more convincing, and such studies are consequently viewed as being more robust. At the same time, the reasons for using the single-case approach cannot be accommodated through multiple cases (*ibid.*). Two semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with two participants in a network that consists of eight sponsors and an elite ice-hockey club. The sponsorship can be regarded as business relationship since the sponsors were not giving away resources to the ice-hockey club, but were buying different services.

The interviews were conducted in 2008 with the communications director (and sponsorship manager) of the Alpha company and the CEO of the Beta company. After the interviews had been conducted, the respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire on their own on how committed they were to the network. The questionnaire consisted of fixed alternative responses on a six-point scale. The advantage of a six-point scale is that there is no "in-between response", and the

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respondents are forced to decide for or against the statement. The lowest value on the scale was called “completely disagree” and the highest “strongly agree”. The result of the interviews was interpreted by a qualitative method, while the results of the questionnaire were measured quantitatively.

Since this study is based on only one case with two respondents from different industries and different contexts, the conclusions are to be regarded as illustrations, suggestions or propositions, and not as a causal statement.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1 The Alpha Company

Alpha is principally concerned with forestry raw materials, sawn timber products, pulp and paper products and transport. Its customers are principally larger companies located abroad, who process the company's products in their own production. In other words there are no direct consumer customers, and there are few corporate customers in the region. This in turn means that Alpha does not use its local and regional sponsorship to communicate with its customers. Sponsorship is focused instead on the company's local employees. It wishes to contribute in ways other than just providing jobs. The employees must feel proud of being employed by Alpha. They must also feel that they live in a secure community. Sponsorship is therefore focused on local sports clubs, equestrian, ice-hockey, football, basketball etc. but also more socially oriented functions such as musical performances and similar events.

Many of Alpha's employees like ice-hockey. They watch ice-hockey matches and many of the employees have children who play ice-hockey. Alpha therefore spends large sums on sponsoring local ice-hockey. It is important for Alpha that the employees feel that their employer supports and invests in their team. Alpha's sponsorship of the ice-hockey club is principally focused on supporting the youth team, not the elite team. The communications director expresses this in terms of it being more important to be seen in the B hall than the A hall, that is to say where the youth team trains and plays and where the parents of the members of the youth squad spend their leisure time. Although Alpha rents a lounge in the A hall, which is principally used for entertaining customers and suppliers who attend matches and for internal meetings, the sponsorship effect is principally concentrated on the company's employees.

Alpha feels that they are a part of the region, and another important goal of Alpha's sponsorship is that the society should understand Alpha's business and its role in the community. Alpha views sponsorship of the ice-hockey club as being associated with one another, and common values and participation are keywords in this context. Alpha's sponsorship budget is around 200,000 euros annually, which is shared between some 100 sports clubs, with the ice-hockey club receiving around 10,000 euros annually.

How committed is Alpha to the ice-hockey club? The results of the questionnaire filled in by the communications director show very low values regarding the calculative component. It is not anticipated that their sponsorship is of any significance to their future business. Nor is it anticipated that the sponsorship will lead to future benefits or profits. It is also stated that there is a long-term relationship

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with the ice-hockey club and it is anticipated that it will persist, but this is not due to having spent time and money or having made any investments that force them to stay in the relationship. The result with regard to the moral component is different. Higher values are generally obtained here, but taking part in the relationship is not felt as an obligation. It is a choice that has been made. Nor is there felt to be an obligation to continue the relationship because it sends the right signals to customers and other important business partners. On the other hand, it is felt that the signals to the suppliers are to some extent important and that it is very important that the right signals are sent to people employed locally in Alpha. The emotional component is, however, scored very highly. Alpha feels that it is entirely right to continue the relationship, that there are positive feelings and that there is a strong sense of attachment to them. To summarise, we thus argue that Alpha is strongly committed to the ice-hockey club in the moral and emotional components.

### 4.2 The Beta Company

Beta is one of Sweden's largest property owners. The ultimate goal of Beta's sponsorship is to reach the local public, existing and potential tenants. Beta is interested in sponsoring local sports clubs in areas where it is active. The company invests around 100,000 euros in the region annually.

With regard to sponsorship of the local ice-hockey club, Beta has made large investments in its arena. For example, Beta helped the ice-hockey club with resources for the preparation and planning of the arena construction. Over a period of many years Beta has employed the ice-hockey club's players and sports manager in its organisation, which is also viewed as part of the sponsorship. In addition, advertising is purchased on kit and arena boards, and a lounge is rented. The purpose of the sponsorship is to reach a large local public and in that way to create a profile and strengthen the brand of Beta as a serious-minded actor that contributes to positive development and change in the local community. Beta also wants the sponsorship to be cost-effective and wants to have close cooperation with the board of the ice-hockey club.

How committed is Beta to the network? The results of the questionnaire show a medium to high value on the calculative component, in both the positive and negative dimensions. Beta thus feels that it is pretty good for business and that some future benefits and profits can be obtained if the relationship with the ice-hockey club is continued. In the same way it is thought that substantial resources have been spent and investments have been made that would be lost if the relationship ceases, and they do not want to be a party to that. With regard to the moral component, Beta feels that it is obliged, but not duty-bound, to continue the relationship. And it is thought that the relationship should be continued as it gives the right signals to customers, suppliers, other important business partners and people employed locally in Beta. It is further noted that the result points to very high values on the emotional component. Beta has very strong feelings for the ice-hockey club and feels that it is right to continue the relationship with it.

5. Summary and Conclusions

Variable	Alpha	Beta
<i>Calculative commitment</i>		
The positive dimension	Does not anticipate future gains and benefits	Anticipates certain future gains and benefits
The negative dimension	Has spent time and money but this does not affect the future relationship at all	Has spent time and money and this leads to some extent to the relationship having to be continued
<i>Normative commitment</i>	Does not feel duty-bound	Does not feel duty-bound
<i>Affective commitment</i>	Wishes to continue the relationship in order to send the right signals to Alpha's employees  Continued relationship feels completely right	Wishes to continue the relationship because it sends the right signals to customers, suppliers, important business partners and the employees of Beta  Continued relationship feels completely right

There are some differences between how Alpha and Beta are committed to their ice-hockey club sponsorship. Alpha is less committed in the calculative component than Beta. Alpha does not feel that it wants to or is able to obtain a return on its sponsorship in economic terms. It is also felt that the time and money already spent would be reason enough to continue with the relationship. In addition, the two companies are approximately equally committed according to both the normative and affective components. There is, however, a substantial difference between the companies' commitment in that Alpha feels the relationship to the ice-hockey club to be entirely right as it sends the right signals to Alpha's local employees. Alpha is entirely focused on them. Beta also considers it important to send the right signals to the company's local employees. They furthermore stress that the sponsorship sends good and valuable signals to customers and other important business partners.

In both cases the affective component is the strongest, and the two relationships are thus, based on feelings, trust and confidence. Relationships based on these factors have been found to be both deep and lasting, which is entirely in line with the observation by Sharma et al (2006) that the affective component is the most important one. A question relevant to raise is thus related to the strength of the affective component and whether this strength was present from the start or developed over time. Studies of regional strategic networks have shown that social activities and informal interaction may spur on relationship building between actors in such created networks comprising actors who often do not know each other from the start, and thus the development of trust, an open communication and strong commitment (affective) between the parties over time (Andrésen, 2011). The representatives in the case may have had a long and close relationship with their counterparts in the ice-hockey club generating such an (affective) commitment.



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Another factor influencing development of relationship commitment is the experience of perceived benefits argued by Morgan & Hunt (1994). In the case both respondents express their contentment with the outcome of their sponsoring relationship. We may thus assume, in line with Morgan & Hunt (1994), that the interaction with the ice-hockey club representatives has worked well. Studies of interaction in strategic networks have generated similar results (Andrésen, Lundberg & Roxenhall, 2012) emphasising the importance of fulfilling expectations on perceived relationship benefits. The normative component is very weak or insignificant in these cases. A conclusion is thus that the presence of a strong affective component does not necessarily generate a strong normative component as Bansal (2004) and Martin (2008) claim.

Another conclusion may be that the moral commitment component was present before the affective one. It might have been the one linking the actors together at the start. The respondents stressed the importance of showing their employees (Alpha and Beta) and their customers the kind of values their companies represented and such kinds of values are related to norms and thus moral commitment. So even if the questionnaire showed the commitment not to be obligation-related, the moral commitment present from the start may have initiated interaction, in turn generating the affective commitment that emerged at the time of the study. Another conclusion from the case may be that strong affective relationship commitment developed between interacting parties will more or less replace the significance of the other two components. This assumption adds a time and process perspective to the development of commitment and the way the commitment components are linked to each other and to interaction related activities performed by the parties.

An implication for practitioners and managers related to these findings and their efforts to strengthen and generate close relationship to counterparts is to be aware of the importance of formal as well as informal interaction and the fulfilment of perceived relationship-related benefits when planning activities and managing relationships.

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