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The Influence of Managerial and Job Variables on Organisational Commitment in the Police

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The influence of managerial and job variables on organisational commitment in the police

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Abstract

Police forces are under constant pressure to improve their performance through better management of existing resources. However, little research has been done that explains how officers' organisational commitment, an essential requirement for above average employee productivity, can be improved. Using a whole population survey of a county police force in the UK, managerial, job, and demographic variables are explored that influence officers' organisational commitment. Experiences of the way police officers were managed were found to have the strongest influence on officers' organisational commitment while job related variables were found to have a lesser influence. The decline in organisational commitment found in the early years of officers' careers should be a cause for concern for senior managers in the police. The key importance that management has in influencing organisational commitment confirms the importance of the current Police Leadership Development Board's agenda to improve workforce management skills to encourage transformational leadership styles. However, there clearly remains much to be done to make police HRM policies more effective in achieving promotion of officers who have the managerial competences needed to engender higher levels of organisational commitment.

Introduction

Whilst there is a myriad of research investigations that critique organisation and management in public sector agencies, the majority focus on health and local authority environments (Flynn, 1997). There are few scholars outside mainstream criminology and crime management that have developed critical discourses of police management systems and structures (Bayley, 1994; Lieshman et. al., 1995, 1996; Reiner, 1998; Loveday, 1999; an exception).

Given New Public Management (NPM) goals for cost effective police delivery, and improved mangerial systems (Lieshman et. al., 1995; Cope et. al., 1997), it is surprising that organisation scholars have largely ignored the managerial experiences of police officers. Our present study was stimulated by this concern particularly in relation to the nature of organisation commitment, since it is widely agreed that employee commitment contributes to improved organisation effectiveness.

Using survey data from a large UK police force[1] the study aims to provide a better understanding of the managerial and job influences affecting attitudinal commitment in a large United Kingdom police force. The paper firstly reviews the theoretical background to organisation commitment and the influence of demographic and managerial factors. After explaining our research methodology we analyse our survey data, which reveals that although demographic factors do have a small influence, commitment is predominantly linked to managerial factors and job variables. The discussion considers the implications for managing commitment.

Organisational commitment: theoretical background

Understanding organisational commitment has always been problematic for managers and remains a key interest in organisations today. An increasing number of organisations are devising HRM strategies that attempt to nurture allegiance to an organisation's goals and values, so understanding the nature of organisational commitment and the factors that affect it have become crucial to informing HRM strategy (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday, 1998; Baruch, 1998; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000).

The focus in this study is on the attitudinal approach to organisational commitment. Mowday et al., (1982), defined this type of organisational commitment as the "relative strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, a particular organisation". Organisational commitment can thus be seen as the extent to which employees identify with their organisation and managerial goals, show a willingness to invest effort, participate in decision making and internalise managerial values (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Higher commitment organisational benefits include lower absenteeism, lower turnover rates, and increased intention to stay with the firm (see Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday et al, 1982; Steers, 1977). Moreover, employees who are highly committed are more likely to 'contribute

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[1] We acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Christopher Williams, University College, Chester in administering the survey and suggesting job related variables.

to the organisation in more positive ways than less committed workers' (Aven et al, 1993: 63).

In this study we explore the influence of managerial and job related variables on organisational commitment along with individual influences. The managerial dimensions can be broadly described as management style and organisation climate, while the job related variables examine factors specific to being a police officer that could affect their organisational commitment.

In the following literature review we summarise the key antecedents of commitment. These are grouped under two broad headings. Firstly, individual factors, which includes an individual's position in the organisation, gender and length of service. Secondly, we review managerial factors, which include research linking commitment behaviours and attitudes to how an individual is managed and supported in an organisation.

Demographic variables and organisation commitment

Research on attitudinal commitment associated with gender is inconclusive. Mowday et al (1982) cites several studies that show that women are more committed than men (1982: 31; See also Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993). Maier (99) however notes that men and women experience similar levels of organisational commitment. Mathieu and Zajak's (1990) well cited meta analysis suggested there was a link between gender and commitment but the variations across professional groups led them to conclude that there was no consistent relationship between gender and commitment. Thus, there appears to be a lack of consensus as to whether gender and commitment are interrelated. It is also worthy of note that research into the perception of women's organisational commitment has reported that they are often perceived as less committed than their male counterparts (Marsden and Kalleberg, 1993; Dickens, 1998), specifically in professional groups (Dodd-McCue and Wright, 1996).

It would seem reasonable to expect organisational commitment to increase with hierarchical position in an organisation and there is some evidence for this. McCaul et al., (1995) found a relationship between organisational commitment and hierarchical level. Benkhoff also (1997a) found a similar relationship using alternative organisational measures. One would expect this to be replicated strongly in the uniform police with their rigid rank hierarchy, but there is little research available to confirm or deny this apart from Metcalfe and Dick (2001).

There appears to be some evidence that tenure and years of experience are positively associated with commitment. Previous studies have indicated that position tenure (Gregersen and Black, 1992; Mottaz, 1988) and organisational tenure (Mathieu and Hamel, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) have positive effects on commitment. This can be explained as a result of the organisation's socialisation process. The length of service in an organisation is positively related to the level of internalisation of organisational values, which results in greater commitment from the individual (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Hellriegel et. al., 1995; O'Reilly et. al., 1991). However, some studies, for instance Lok and Crawford (1999) and Brewer (1996), have not found this relationship.

In contrast, the studies of uniform police that we now review show a negative affect of tenure on organisational commitment.

Police studies of organisation commitment

The earliest study of policing and commitment was conducted by Van Maanen (1975) who examined the development trend of organisation commitment. He surveyed a group of recruits to the US police force over a period of thirty months during their induction and training. He reported that their organisational commitment decreased with tenure and experience and attributed this to the 'powerful character of the police socialisation process' (1975: 207), as well as their motivation to gain acceptance from their supervisors. Another significant finding was that police commitment is significantly higher than comparable public professions.

More recent research looking at organisational commitment in policing is sparse. Beck and Wilson's (1997) study of 739 officers in the New South Wales service also saw the inverse correlation between organisational commitment and length of service. They noted the significance of socialisation processes operating within police culture whereby new recruits were exposed to older, experienced, and more 'cynical' officers, whose views had a long-lasting 'destructive' effect on work attitudes. A further study of 479 Australian police officers by Beck and Wilson (2000) - using Porter and Smith's OCQ measure - analysed the development trend of affective commitment and also found that commitment decreased with tenure. These findings were significant for interpreting police commitment behaviours since they contradict the findings in mainstream research that indicates that organisational commitment increases with tenure. Although the data is limited, studies have found that commitment increases with tenure primarily due to an employees' greater sense of belonging (See Meyer and Allen, 1997: 49-50). In Beck and Wilson's study however they concluded that police agencies may have unique 'organisational characteristics' and 'managerial practices' that 'flag a lack of support, justice and value', as they build on an 'inventory of bad experiences' (2000: 132).

Police studies have thus emphasised the significance of managerial factors in shaping levels of organisation commitment. The findings also suggest that police employees have relatively negative attitudes to their working experiences, and imply shortcomings in the employee relations system (see Meyer and Allen, 1997: 68-81). However, it is difficult to draw general conclusions since these studies have relied on relatively small sample sizes. Moreover, any analysis of gender has tended to be excluded.

Police studies of gender

The majority of studies of gender in the police have focused on trying to unravel the discriminatory experiences of women officers (For example Martin and Jurik, 1996; Brown, 1997, 1998). It has also been highlighted that female officers are more likely to be allocated supportive police tasks with men more likely to be allocated leadership responsibility for criminal investigations than women (Brown et al, 1993; Brown and Heidenshohn, 2000). These gendered deployments may stem from the expectation that policewomen demonstrate lesser commitment to the police profession than their male officers. However,

the little research that has explored this finds that the actual organisational commitment of policewomen does not reflect these expectations of lower organisational commitment (Dick and Metcalfe, 2007).

Managerial factors affecting organisational commitment

Many studies have revealed that the level of organisational and managerial support an employee experiences, their involvement in decision making (Porter et. al., 1974; Mowday et. al., 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997), and the amount of feedback received about job performance and job role (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) influence whether a person has high or low organisation commitment. It is also suggested that bureaucratic work practices often result in negative employee commitment, while a supportive work environment could result in greater commitment and involvement among employees (Brewer, 1993). The wider importance of the degree of organisational and supervisor support experienced by police officers' is indicated by the link to reduced work-family conflict and increased job satisfaction (Howard et al, 2004).

The relationship between leadership style and commitment has been examined by Blau (1985). A consideration leadership style was found to have a greater influence than a concern for structure leadership style (or task-oriented style) on commitment. Confirmation is found in Williams and Hazer (1986) study that found consideration leadership style to be one of their antecedents to commitment. The important role of superiors in aspects of organisational commitment is also shown by Benkhoff (1997a) who found that employees who regard their superiors as competent, who like their management style and who trust their superiors, report, significantly more often, that they share the values of the organisation and feel proud to be members.

Insights on managerial influences can be found in research that examines the influence on organisational commitment of the quality of the relationship between supervisors and employees. Research using the Leader Management Exchange (LMX) construct indicates that job commitment is increased when employees experience good relationships with their supervisor which involves information sharing, participation and feedback opportunities (Epitropaki and Martin, 1999).

There is little in the literature to inform us whether the managerial factors discussed above apply to police organisational commitment other than Dick and Metcalfe (2001) who observed that similar managerial factors affect commitment in both police officers and civilian staff. However, there may well be other factors specific to being a police officer that will affect their organisational commitment since uniform police work is like no other work and requires officers to draw on a vast range of cognitive and physical capabilities (Kakar, 1998; Reiner, 1998). However, there appears to be little literature that can inform us of the influence of such job related variables on organisational commitment. Bohle and Tilley (1998) suggest dissatisfaction with shift work may be an influence while increased work loads are indicated from the research of Butterfield et al (2002). Therefore, we aim in this paper to extend our understanding of what other job variables could be an influence on organisational commitment.

In summary there is evidence that the practices and behaviour of line managers will affect the level organisational commitment. Generally, low commitment is indicated where individuals view the organisation as unsupportive, have a limited role in decision making and receive little feedback about their job role and performance. The prevailing management style and practices in organisations may thus serve to affect favourably or adversely organisational commitment along with other work experience determinants.

We now go on to discuss the methodology that we used to survey the total uniform police population of a county police force and detail our measurement model.

Research methodology

The analysis in this paper is based on data from a large police force in the United Kingdom. It follows on from earlier research by the authors that investigated factors associated with organisational commitment in the police (Metcalfe and Dick, 2000; Metcalfe and Dick, 2001) and the influence of gender (Metcalfe and Dick, 2002).

The original questionnaire was formulated after extensive semi-structured interviews with police operational and executive staff that allowed the identification of managerial and organisational themes that were considered to be important to, and have an influence on, commitment. The resulting research instrument sought to evaluate a broad range of management and employee relationships, with a specific concern to identify performance improvement behaviours and how management encourages or discourages these behaviours.

The commitment model embraces recent research themes on the nature and dynamics of commitment that considers the extent to which employees will engage and contribute to improving performance, and how far they identify and understand the organisations strategic objectives (See Iverson and Buttgrieg, 1999; Singh and Vinnicombe, 2000). The value of this measure is that it represents the organisation and managerial constructions of commitment and the subsequent HRM agendas that inform police management policy development. In this respect the research instrument reflects the real life concerns of trying to 'manage commitment' (Meyer and Allen, 1997: 66-67) in a changing policing context (See Baruch, 1998 for discussion on this).

Our research in this police force is extended to consider the influence of job related variables that are of current concern to front-line police officers and how they may influence organisational commitment.

The survey populations

The questionnaire was administered by the police force concerned to all uniform officers with official encouragement to respond anonymously via the post. The police force had a total population of approximately 1500 police officers and a return rate of 48% was achieved. This is significantly higher

than most police force surveys that typically achieve a return of only 25-30% (Brodeur 1998). Details of the respondents' profile are provided in Table I. Because of the agreements to keep details that could identify the forces concerned confidential, further contextual information on geography, policing demands and specific HR issues cannot be provided here. However it can be said that the force had typical county policing demands and included city populations and large rural areas.

Insert Table 1 around here

The survey data was tested for evidence of respondent fatigue (i.e. inconsistent responses to similar questions in different parts of the questionnaire). It was concluded that a bias of this kind was not present. In addition, a number of awareness tests were applied (i.e. where certain questions had a different tone or measurement scale to surrounding questions). Coefficients were calculated to test the hypothesis that respondents failed to pay attention to the change with the conclusion that there was little or no evidence of bias of this kind.

The Commitment Measure

The measurement model is a job based one and relies on trying to capture the nature of work experiences in the police. The original pool of items to measure organisational commitment were formulated after extensive semi-structured interviews with operational and executive staff at another police force and have subsequently been accepted by a number of police forces in the UK and Australia, to identify behaviours and attributes that officers agree as exhibiting commitment to the organisation. Drawing on the methodological concerns raised by Benkhoff (1997a, 1997b) and Siegal and Sisaye (1997), the dependent variable organisational commitment is a function of identification with the organisation and internalisation of its strategic goals and values. This can be a prime motivator since individuals who closely identify themselves with their employer's goals and values are more likely to take on a diverse range of challenging work activities, and are more responsive to change. They are thus motivated to direct their efforts towards organisational objectives (Siegal and Sisaye, 1997; Iverson and Buttigrieg, 1999). Consequently, to measure organisational commitment, questions are posed designed to assess three constructs, pride in the force, understanding of strategic direction, and employee involvement in service and quality improvements. These three constructs form an oblique model of affective commitment since extra involvement and effort is forthcoming from those employees who show an understanding, and commitment to corporate goals and objectives etc (Iverson and Buttigrieg, 1999; Meyer and Allen, 1997).

In all fifteen questions were posed on a five point Likert scale and these were factor analysed using a principal components analysis with a Varimax rotation. This replicated the previous studies' oblique three-factor model of commitment with factors clearly identified for six items under a factor called Pride, four items under a factor called Goals and five items under a factor called Involvement. Overall, the results from the factor analysis and reliability statistics strongly confirm the stability of the measurement model and factors.

A listing of the questionnaire items used to measure the variables can be found in Appendix Table 1a along with their scale reliability statistics.

<u>The managerial variables</u>

The independent variables pool was influenced by previous studies which have assessed the level of organisational and management support, the feedback given about role requirements and job performance (Mathieu and Zajak, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997), and the level of participation in decision making (Porter et al, 1974; Mowday et al 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997). A pool of fifteen questions were posed, on a five point Likert scale, of which nine loaded on a factor described as Management Support with another six loading on a factor described as Organisational Support. The factor Management Support is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of the respondent's supervisor or line managers listening and communication skills, while the factor Organisational Support is strongly influenced by whether there is blame or supportive organisational culture. The results from the factor analysis and reliability statistics strongly confirm the stability of the measurement model and factors. A listing of the questionnaire items used to measure the variables can be found in Appendix Table 1b along with their scale reliability statistics.

<u>Job variables</u>

Anecdotal evidence suggests that front-line police officers are concerned about the increasing demands placed on them by extra reporting requirements and perceptions of reduced public support. To explore these job variables we included in our questionnaire ten questions suggested by constables that cover job demands and job experiences that they consider to be important issues (listed later in Table 6). Exploratory factor analysis indicated that these job variables could be combined into two factors but their poor scale reliability scores (Cronbach's alpha 0.45, 0.48) indicate that they do not represent a reliable latent construct. Therefore we will examine these variables individually.

Findings

<u>Correlations</u>

To test the strength of the relationships between the demographic, organisational commitment, and managerial variables derived from the factor analysis, correlation coefficients were calculated and are displayed in Table 2.

It is clear from Table 2 that there is a strong association between the level of organisational commitment and the degree of management support (0.50) and organisational support experienced (0.53). Demographic results show that gender has no bearing on any of the factors. However, seniority (0.27) and tenure (0.12) do have a modest influence on organisational commitment while tenure is negatively associated (-0.12) with both managerial factors. Overall it would appear that compared to management variables an individual's tenure and age have only a small influence on organisational commitment.

Take in Table 2 around here

Organisational commitment and time served

Before looking at the causal variables and their effects we need to judge the significance of tenure as a variable that affects organisational commitment. The findings in Table 3 reveal a shallow U shaped curve that shows organisational commitment declines with length of service but then hits a floor after ten years of service before rising again. The F-test significance of >0.001 shows that the differences in organisational commitment between groups is statistically significant. The finding for the first fourteen years is consistent with previous research (Van Maanen, 1975; Beck and Wilson, 1997). The rise in later years is also consistent with Van Maanen's (1975) and Metcalf and Dick (2001) observation of a higher level of commitment in 'veteran' officers, since we have found that constables with more than twenty years service demonstrate higher levels of organisational commitment than those between six to nineteen years of service. Overall these findings support Beck and Wilson's (2000) argument that the weak positive relationship found in most studies between affective organisation commitment and tenure may actually hide the decrease over the earlier years. A probable explanation for this increase in commitment in later years is that the leaving rate due to early retirement will be higher in those with low organisation commitment so leaving a pool of long serving constables with higher commitment.

Take in Table 3 around here

Overall, the level of organisational commitment for constables is close to the midpoint on the scale indicating scope for improvement. The standard deviation of the means clearly indicates that there is a substantial variation in the degree of organisational commitment that time served cannot explain.

Organisational commitment and rank

The results in Table 4 show that as we move up the hierarchy progressively higher levels of commitment are found, with the increase being greater as we move up each hierarchical level. It is also notable that the standard deviation of the mean decrease as we move up the hierarchy suggesting that there might be fewer variations in the factors that influence commitment for those in senior ranks. Overall, the statistics show that there is a statistically significant difference between rank groupings' organisational commitment (F-test $p < 0.001$). These findings support those of Benkfoff (1997a) and McCaul (1995).

Since it is likely that some of the commitment increases seen with rank seniority can be attributed to longer tenure, we will examine these demographic variables along with the managerial variables through multiple regressions.

Antecedents of organisation commitment

To investigate if there are differences between ranks in how the variables affect organisational commitment, we undertook separate regression analyses for constables and higher ranks (sergeants, inspectors, chief inspectors and above). In these regressions, we have included the demographic variables

that have significant correlations with organisational commitment but have chosen to exclude age as this is highly correlated with tenure. After removing a small number of outlier cases, tests for assumption of linearity and homogeneity of the regression equation were satisfactory and the overall test for goodness of fit for the regression equations is highly significant for all groups (significance F = 0.000) indicating that the regression equation is most unlikely to have occurred by chance.

The analysis in Table 5 shows that the regression equation accounts for over forty-four per cent of the variance in organisation commitment overall (all officers R^2 0.44, constables 0.38 senior ranks 0.45). Overall, these are very strong findings given that fifty-seven per cent of the data (i.e. residing in the five factors) was incorporated into the regression equation.

Take in Table 5 around here

The findings in Table 5 show the beta weights in different columns for all officers, constables and senior staff. The beta weights signify the relative contribution of each of the factors to the overall change in organisational commitment found in these police officers. We can see that for both constables and senior staff the dominant factors affecting organisational commitment are organisational support (constable beta 0.41; senior staff beta 0.36) followed by management support (constables beta 0.27; senior staff beta 0.22). The beta weights indicate that organisational support is moderately more important to constables than higher ranks, while management support has a greater affect on constables than their superiors.

The preceding analysis provides support for the findings in the literature on supportive management behaviours affecting organisational commitment (Porter et al., 1974; Mowday et al., 1982; Beck and Wilson, 1997; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Like them we have found that having the opportunity to participate in decision making and receiving regular feedback on performance were strongly valued by both constables and senior ranks, and shaped their level of organisation commitment. Our results also provide support for the finding in the literature on the link between an organisations culture, managerial style and organisational commitment (Brewer, 1993; Blau, 1985; Williams and Hazer, 1986; Benkoff, 1997a). Like them we have found that organisational support is an important antecedent of organisational commitment. Both constables and senior ranks felt there was little scope for them to make mistakes, they were limited in how they expressed themselves, they perceived there was a lack of openness and honesty between ranks and they disliked the management style they experienced.

The regression shows that these combined managerial factors have a powerful affect on organisational commitment. Together the managerial factors beta weights for constables indicate that a change of nearly seventy per cent of one deviation in organisational commitment is predicted for each standard deviation improvement in the managerial factor scores. Although the balance in the importance of each managerial factor varies between constables and senior ranks overall the findings demonstrate that these managerial factors are important antecedents of organisational commitment regardless of hierarchical position. This is an important finding as it shows that

organisational commitment for all grades is influenced by the same managerial factors. The organisational commitment scores that are reported in Table 5 are slightly below the midpoint of the scale (organisational commitment constables 44.8, midpoint 45) indicating that the majority of constables experience unsatisfactory levels of managerial support and organisational support. However, the standard deviations of the organisational commitment for constables (SD 7.1) indicate that there are significant differences in the means of organisation support and managerial support experienced by constables. This implies that poor overall human resource management is the norm but that islands of good HRM practice exist where higher levels of organisational commitment are found.

We note that rank seniority has a substantial bearing on organisational commitment for police officers overall (beta 0.31). Amongst higher ranks seniority has a considerable influence (beta 0.36), which confirms the findings reported in Table 4 where sergeants' organisational commitment were considerable lower than those above them in the hierarchy. We also see confirmation of our earlier finding that time served does have a modest affect on organisational commitment for constables (beta 0.11). It can now be seen that organisational commitment of senior ranks is shaped by seniority (beta 0.36) but is not influenced by time served (beta –0.03).

<u>Job related variables and organisation commitment</u>

Table 6 lists the means scores for the job related variables that were suggested by constables as having an impact on their feelings about the job and the force. To test for the influence of these job related variables they were added to the regression equation that was analysed in Table 5. Overall, the job related variables explain an additional fourteen per cent of the variations found in organisational commitment. The table lists the job variables in descending order of their impact on organisational commitment for all officers. The findings in Table 6 indicate some variation between constables and higher ranks but here we will focus on the results for all officers.

The strongest impact by far on organisational commitment is the variations in responses to the question 'My work experiences and accomplishments in the Force increase my confidence, enabling me to perform well within the organisation' (note: most questions are shortened for presentation purposes in Table 6). This variable has a beta weight of 0.25 that is well above the range of the other significant variables (0.09 to 0.12). The mean score of 3.67 and standard deviation of 0.88 suggests that most constables feel that they have sufficient experience in the job to be confident that they can cope with its demands. One might expect that this variable would be correlated with tenure but the correlation is weak (-0.019) and non significant. This suggests that the variable measures confidence and competence that is not gathered over time but is the result of more recent positive experiences and accomplishments.

The next four job variables all have a statistically significant but modest influence on organisational commitment with beta's in the range 0.09 to 0.12. The first of these 'the job is extremely boring' has a mean score of 1.88 (SD

0.74) well below the midpoint of 3 on the scale which suggests that nearly all officers find the work interesting with senior officers finding this more so. The question 'as a public servant my behaviour must be exemplary at all times' has a high mean of 4.10 (SD 0.80) indicating the nearly all officers strongly agree with this expectation. The next question 'the job must be done, but how well I do it is another matter' is an interesting question as it reflects the difficulties experienced in doing the job well when under pressure. The below midpoint score (2.53) and wide standard deviation (1.16) indicates a wide variation of experiences amongst officers with some clearly finding it difficult to discharge their duties without compromising how well the job is done. More detailed analysis suggests that this is predominantly an issue for operational patrol officers. The last question that has an impact on organisational commitment is 'I am finding some aspects of the work demeaning'. The below midpoint score (2.66) and wide standard deviation (1.01) indicates a minority agreement with this statement.

Insert Table 6 around here

The other job related questions were found to have no statistically significant influence on organisation commitment. This is despite many of these variable reflecting specific difficulties relating to the job such as shift-work, difficulty in taking rest breaks and the unrealistic expectations of the public. Given the widely reported complaints about the increase in paperwork due to NPM's demands for performance reporting and increased legislative requirements the mean finding of 2.31 (SD, 1.03) is surprising for the question 'the paperwork is getting me down' as it suggests that most officers are coping reasonably well with these extra bureaucratic demands.

Finally, we report that organisational factors such as type of division or division size were found to have no statistically significant influence on organisational commitment compared to the managerial factors and job related variables we have reported. This suggests that these managerial factors are universal in their impact on organisational commitment. The variations in organisational commitment we have found strongly suggest that islands of better human resource management do exist in this force, where perceptions of higher levels of management and organisational support result in better levels of organisational commitment.

Discussion of findings

The objectives of this paper were to explore the determinants of police commitment and consider any implications the findings may have for management development. In addition to being one of the few published studies to capture the total police population, one of the major strengths of this study was the use of measurements models that represent the real life concerns of police managers faced with trying to manage and improve commitment in turbulent and changing social and economic contexts. The officers' conceptualisation of commitment were rooted in how officers could identify with the goals of the organisation and how far they would contribute to performance improvement. This thinking resonates with NPM and HRM approaches that highlight the importance of nurturing commitment to the

cultural values and strategic objectives of an organisation, since the commitment of employees is seen as a key lever in improving organisational effectiveness. Although our findings are derived from only one police organisation they echo the findings in earlier exploratory whole police force analyses of commitment antecedents (Metcalf and Dick, 2001; Dick and Metcalf, 2001) which indicates that our findings are not unique to one particular force. So, given the focus on real life management concerns we feel our analysis can help inform other studies of commitment, especially those in the police and public sectors.

Although we have found that time served does have a negative influence on the organisational commitment of constables in their earlier years, it is not a major factor compared to the influence of the other variables. The findings demonstrate that regardless of rank, police officers' organisational commitment is profoundly affected by their experience of the two managerial variables that we have analysed. Having the opportunity to participate in decisions, feeling that you have the support of your superiors, and good communication, all have a strong bearing on the degree of organisational commitment expressed in the survey. Also, we have found that job related variables suggested by constables have some additional influence.

While there were only small differences in what shaped commitment, there were significant differences in the levels of commitment between different ranks. Senior ranks have high levels of commitment compared to constables whose organisation commitment levels decrease in the first ten years of employment, which suggests erosion due to prolonged exposure to poor management. However, across the ranks those with higher organisational commitment were found to have experienced a consistent pattern of stronger management support and organisation support, indicating the universal importance that they have at any level of the organisation. The lower level of organisational commitment of constables could be attributable to inappropriate selection and promotion procedures which lead to the perpetuation of managerial style and behaviour that has a negative effect on the organisation commitment of subordinates. For example Loveday (1999) highlights the significance of command and control cultures while Butterfield et al (2005) reports on their persistence in the UK police despite NPM initiatives.

The variances in organisational commitment found predominantly reflect differing employee experiences of management and organisation support, and suggests that where management skills and behaviours are poor, there tends to be lower commitment levels. In contrast there is evidence that there are islands of good HRM practices. This suggests there is considerable scope for improved human resource management policies and systems at both a strategic and operational level.

In view of NPM and the moves to adopt strategic HRM there are several management areas that need to be developed. Acknowledging that committed employees are more likely to be concerned with improving their own and organisation performance, a way forward for the force would be to develop HRM strategic approaches and procedures that facilitate organisational

attachment. The analysis of organisational and management support and its significance for the Force is discussed below in relation to HRM strategy.

The majority of constables reported there were limited opportunities for them to contribute to decisions that affect their work and also to be involved in broader decisions concerning their departmental objectives. Constables also expressed the feeling that the organisation environment was generally unsupportive. Our detailed results showed that lower ranks rarely contradicted, or offered alternative suggestions to officers above them. This 'rank mentality' does little to foster openness and honesty, nor does it allow a team based approach to problem solving, an approach highlighted as part of NPM. These work experiences go against strategic HRM approaches which highlight work systems and planning are best organised by the person (rank) who is actually responsible for the job (Storey; 1992; Legge 1995; Sparrow and Marchington 1998), and also that to nurture commitment employees should be aware/understand the strategic priorities of their organisation. This goes hand in hand with a working culture where employees feel able to freely express themselves, and where mistakes are treated as a learning opportunity.

To improve lower level officers' involvement in decision making and thus commitment would mean restructuring existing rank and power structures. This could be achieved by redesigning police decision making and accountability processes across the ranks so that lower level officers are responsible for a broader range of police decisions and activities. This needs to done with care to avoid overloading supervisors since there is some evidence (Butterfield et al, 2005) that a consequence of extra managerial responsibilities placed on sergeants is less time for leadership and support of their constables.

Sharing power and encouraging more team based decision making suggests that rank would lose some of its power status, since police tasks and solutions would be planned and executed in a collaborative way, as opposed to traditional command and control styles (See Loveday 1999). The implementation of more team based working structures is congruent with HRM and NPM strategic approaches to job design which stress the importance of increased decision making and accountability. In addition team-based arrangements also encourage supportive and co-operative behaviours between ranks. To further encourage trust and participation the force could also improve formal and informal communication mechanisms. These operational changes however would need to be supported by a force wide management development programme at both senior and operational levels (See also Beck and Wilson 1997).

The results suggest that commitment is shaped by the behaviour of line managers and this is reinforced by an unsupportive organisational work culture. This is significant because it suggests that the rank culture reinforces a management style that is distant and unsupportive. The recommendation for management training would also apply here, since the development of interpersonal skills would enable police managers to illustrate more supportive behaviours, as well as provide guidance on how to conduct effective

performance feedback. The encouragement of regular feedback would also go some way to improve communications between and within ranks which is something Beck and Wilson (1997) highlighted in their study. Their police respondents overwhelmingly reported that commitment could be nurtured by fostering closer relationships between ranks. We would agree with this suggestion and argue that the encouragement of more informal and formal two way communication between ranks would go someway towards this.

Conclusions

The results show that organisational commitment is significantly affected by the way the force's employees are managed, and this has ramifications for personnel and management systems. The weaknesses reported in terms of poor managerial skills are not surprising since forces across the UK have been criticised in the past for their failure to develop appropriate management competencies to cope with changing police structures and accountabilities (Merrick 1997). Loveday's (1999) review of the HMIC reports of Gwent, Gloucestershire, Kent and North Yorkshire constabularies found that many lower level staff felt disgruntled about the lack of 'consultation' (Gwent, Kent) 'not being listened to' (North Yorkshire) and raised concerns about 'management style' and the 'limitations' of human resource policies.

However, our analysis of commitment should offer some confidence to UK Home Office strategists and police managers because it suggests that forces have been successful to some extent in avoiding a gender bias in their management of their officers and the organisational support they provide for them. However, the relatively low levels of organisational commitment should be a cause for concern for the forces. Clearly the importance of good management for organisational commitment has been shown by our findings and this indicates the importance of the current Police Leadership Development Board's agenda to improve workforce management skills to encourage transformational leadership styles (see Dobby, Anscombe and Tuffin, 2004). Moreover, there clearly remains much to be done to make HRM policies more effective in avoiding promoting officers whose managerial behaviours adversely influence organisational commitment.

We accept that survey methods such as ours do not capture the entirety of employee feelings and working experiences. However, survey methods do have the advantage that it is possible to generalise from the results and thus this study and its confirmation of previous exploratory studies allows us to suggest that the findings can be viewed as providing insights to other UK police forces in particular, and to the broader field of the antecedents of organisational commitment in general. We are not suggesting that the antecedents of commitment identified in our research are exhaustive; indeed only fifty-eight per cent of the variation in commitment that we have observed is explained by the antecedents we have examined. We would agree with Meyer and Allen (1997) that what is needed is to examine "the impact of entire HRM systems". Thus, future research on police and commitment should consider the nature, variety, and differentiation between HRM systems and explore how they influence management behaviour and commitment attitudes of all police staff.

To conclude, our findings strongly support the proposition that having the opportunity to participate in decisions, feeling that you have the support of your superiors, good communication on the requirements of the role and job performance, all have a strong impact on organisational commitment, and do so at all levels of the police hierarchy. Our results reveal that although there are a range of commitment levels, there is only a small proportion of force employees who are highly committed. Our analysis highlights the importance of re-evaluating HR policies in order to improve commitment. HR efforts should focus on a broad range of policies directed at breaking down barriers between ranks and encouraging a work culture that fosters open communication. Specifically we cite ways to encourage employee involvement and how management development training could help nurture commitment by encouraging employee participation, demonstrating supportive behaviours and providing improved communication. However, we would argue that the implementation of leadership and interpersonal skills training is only a starting point since what is required are direct challenges to police cultures that have evolved to support the importance of command and control, and rank authority (see Leigh et al, 1998; Loveday 1999).

Given that many operational policies still reflect traditional police management styles and practices, particularly at senior levels within the force, we would suggest that what is needed is a long term process of cultural change that specifically addresses management skills development, but wonder whether this can be achieved with the existing management ethos (and the existing management skills) that prevail (See Leigh at al 1998)?

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The influence of managerial and job variables on organisational commitment in the police

Table 1

Sample characteristics

Rank	In Service	Returns		Demographic data		
Constable		501		Gender		
Sergeant		100		Female	121	19%
Inspector		34		Male	526	81%
Chief Inspector		9				
Superintendent or above		3		Time served		
Unspecified		23		< 2 years	85	13%
Officers Total	1500	670	46%	2-5 years	124	19%
				6-9 years	89	14%
				10-14 years	113	17%
				15-19 years	101	16%
				20 or more	138	21%

Table 2

Correlations of demographic variables with organisational commitment and managerial factors

	Organisational commitment	Organisational support	Management support
Gender	-0.07	0.03	0.05
Age	0.19*	-0.03	-0.05
Tenure	0.12*	-0.12*	-0.12*
Seniority	0.27*	-0.04	-0.07
Management support	0.50*	0.69*	1
Organisational support	0.53*	1	0.69*

* Correlations significant at > 0.01

Table 3

Organisation commitment and time served constables

Years served	Cases	Mean	Std deviation.
Up to 2	78	45.0	6.08
2 to 5	119	44.9	7.33
6 to 9	71	44.2	6.65
10 to 14	81	43.8	7.43
15 to 19	55	43.1	7.02
20 and above	81	47.1	7.23
Average	485	44.8	7.07

Organisation Commitment Scale mid-point = 45

F-test between groups = 2.80, significance < 0.017

Correlation ratio (Eta squared) = 0.028

Table 4
Organisation commitment by seniority

Rank	Cases	Commitment mean	Std deviation
Constables	486	44.8	7.1
Sergeants	98	46.8	7.0
Inspectors	34	52.4	6.5
Chief Inspector	9	58.7	3.9
Superintendent and above	2	53.5	2.1
All ranks	629	45.7	7.4

Organisation Commitment Scale mid-point = 45

F-test between groups = 18.6, significance < 0.001. Correlation ratio (Eta squared) = 0.107

Table 5

Managerial factors and their influence on organisation commitment

Independent variables	Constables		Higher ranks		All Officers	
	Mean [SD]	*Beta weight*	Mean [SD]	*Beta weight*	Mean [SD]	*Beta weight*
Organisations support	18.02 [3.75]	*0.41***	17.43 [4.03]	*0.36***	17.82 [3.85]	*0.39***
Management support	31.36 [6.17]	*0.27***	30.14 [6.39]	*0.22***	30.99 [6.29]	*0.25***
Seniority		*na*		*0.36***		*0.31***
Time served		*0.11**		*-0.03*		*0.08**
Per cent OC explained		*38%*		*45%*		*44%*

Beta weights: ** t-tests are significant at < 0.001 level, * t-tests are significant at the < 0.005 level.

Organisation Support Scale mid-point = 18. Management Support Scale mid-point = 27

Table 6
Job related variables and their influence on Organisational Commitment

	Constables		Higher ranks		All Officers	
	Mean	*Beta*	Mean	*Beta*	Mean	*Beta*

	[SD]	weight	[SD]	weight	[SD]	weight
Experience gives me the confidence to perform well	3.67 [0.88]	0.25**	3.80 [0.86]	0.18*	3.69 [0.88]	0.23**
Job is extremely boring	1.88 [0.74]	-0.09*	1.73 [0.74]	-0.22**	1.84 [0.76]	-0.12**
Exemplary behaviour expected	4.09 [0.79]	0.11**	4.15 [0.84]	0.19*	4.10 [0.80]	0.11**
Job must be done but how well I do it is another matter?	2.53 [1.16]	-0.11**	2.40 [1.12]	-0.11	2.49 [1.16]	-0.11**
Some job aspects demeaning	2.66 [1.01]	-0.10**	2.48 [1.02]	-0.05	2.60 [1.06]	-0.09**
I protest if given too much work to do	2.92 [1.02]	0.03*	2.97 [1.04]	-0.04	2.93 [1.02]	0.02
Satisfied with work facilities	2.67 [1.11]	0.07	2.88 [1.12]	-0.02	2.71 [1.11]	0.04
Paperwork is getting me down	2.25 [1.03]	0.04	2.51 [1.03]	-0.03	2.31 [1.03]	0.03
Shift work creates problems for me	2.71 [1.02]	0.03	2.57 [1.13]	-0.05	2.66 [1.06]	0.02
Difficult to take rest breaks	3.66 [1.14]	-0.00	3.94 [1.05]	-0.09	3.69 [1.17]	-0.03
Public expect too much of the police	3.70 [1.07]	-0.05	3.63 [1.20]	-0.01	3.35 [1.16]	-0.04
Additional per cent OC explained		14%		16%		14%

Mean scores: strongly agree =5, strongly disagree =1, scale midpoint 3.

Beta weights: ** t-test significant at the <0.005 level, * t-test significant at the <0.05 level

Appendix 1a

Factor analysis of questionnaire items loading on variables that are components of Organisational Commitment

Item	Factor loading
***ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT** combined Pride, Goals and Involvement*	
Scale reliability 0.86	
Pride factor	
Scale reliability 0.78	
I am proud to be working for the Force	0.72
I hold the Force in high regard	0.64
The quality of the work within my division/department is excellent	0.57
I'm not really interested in the Force its just a job *	0.42
My role is considered important within the Force	0.57
Generally my division/department is taking action to improve the quality of its work	0.59
Goals factor	
Scale reliability 0.83	
I understand the links between the Police Authority's annual plan and the policing priorities of the Force	0.90
I am aware of the goals/vision of the Force	0.67
I understand the links between the Police Authority's annual plan and my division/dept plan	0.89
I am aware of the priorities and strategic direction of the Force	0.62
Involvement factor	
Scale reliability 0.80	
Please indicate your level of involvement in improving your division/dept quality/work standards	0.68
Please indicate your level of involvement in developing objectives for your division/dept	0.66
Please indicate your level of involvement in negotiating your own work objectives	0.73
I contribute to decisions that affect my work	0.73
I have considerable freedom in negotiating my work priorities	0.74

*Reverse coded items

Appendix 1b

Factor analysis of questionnaire items relating to Organisational Variables

Item	Factor loading
Management Support factor	
Scale reliability 0.91	
My supervisor/manager does a good job of negotiating clear objectives	0.82
My supervisor/manager is good at encouraging teamwork	0.81
My supervisor/manager provides the right information for me to do my job properly	0.79
My supervisor/manager does an effective job in keeping me informed about matters affecting me.	0.81
Personal development is encouraged by my supervisor/manager	0.76
My supervisor/manager holds back information on things I should know about *	0.78
My supervisor/manager is usually receptive to suggestions for change	0.72
In my division/dept the supervisor/manager is very interested in listening to what I have to say	0.63
In my division/dept there is not enough opportunity to let supervisor/manager know how you feel about things that effect you *	0.48
Organisational Support factor	
Scale reliability 0.72	
I have confidence in the decisions made by the executive team of my Force	0.70
Most of the time you can say what you think without it being held against you	0.41
If I make a mistake it would be treated as a learning opportunity	0.40
There is openness and honesty between different grades	0.72
I regularly spend time on dealing with issues arising due to inadequate communication *	0.15
How do you rate the management style you have experienced?	0.12

*Reverse coded items