

Nonwork Factors in Organizational Commitment

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Introduction

In 2002 the Military Family Research Institute was asked by the Office of the Secretary of Defense to build new indices to track the commitment of military members and their spouses. In so doing, we join a research literature reaching back several decades both inside and outside the military. Today, the most influential perspective is that of Meyer and Allen (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997), which proposes three types of commitment. The first is *affective* commitment, which involves an emotional bond with the organization or job. A person may want to remain in the military because he or she enjoys the particular job assignment, coworker, or the military lifestyle. In other words, people can be committed to staying in an organization simply because they are happy there. *Normative* commitment is based on a moral obligation to stay in the organization, due either to obligations to another person or to one's own beliefs or moral convictions. In the military, a prime example is duty to serve one's country. The third type of commitment pertains to *continuance*. In this case, a person stays in the organization because he or she perceives a need to stay. The person may be bound by constraints of the organization itself (e.g., a contract) or other life circumstances (e.g., retirement savings). Each of these dimensions of commitment may operate simultaneously within a single individual. Commitment has been studied in relation not only to work organizations but also to other social institutions, such as marriage. A three-factor structure of commitment to marriage quite similar to that proposed for commitment to organizations has been observed by Johnson (1999) in the form of personal, moral and structural commitment.

Regardless of whether the organization in question is work or marriage, commitment begins to develop at first contact with the institution, and existing research underscores the importance of events in the developmental trajectories of commitment over time. Affective

Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) suggests that events elicit emotional reactions from people, which in turn affect attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. When probed, individuals can often pinpoint events that precipitated changes in their commitment. Huston and colleagues (1981), for example, studied the development of commitment to a romantic relationship by asking participants to estimate during each month of the study the degree to which they thought they would marry their partner, and the event or condition associated with each change in slope or turning point in the line. The cumulative pool of turning points revealed systematic variation in both patterns of change and the reasons for it.

We found the Huston methodology intriguing, and as we searched the existing literature on commitment to work organizations, we found that it had been many years since workers had been given the opportunity to freely offer their own perspectives about the events and conditions precipitating changes in their levels of commitment. Quantitative measurement of organizational commitment is well-established and research participants are routinely presented with lists of pre-determined items. Yet, workforces, workplaces, and industrialized societies have changed a great deal over the past forty years. For example, relationships between workers and workplaces have been transformed by global competition, such that it is much less common today than in the past for workers to expect or want to spend their entire careers with a single employer. The boundaries between work and nonwork life have been made more permeable by the rising prevalence of two-earner families and technologies that allow work to be done anywhere at any time. And the U.S. military has been transformed by the transition to an all-volunteer force of members who are staying longer and being deployed longer and more often, and for more purposes than their drafted predecessors. They also are marrying spouses who want to have careers and have children.

As a result of all these factors, we decided to adapt the Huston methodology to begin our study of commitment to the military. Our approach goes “back to the drawing board” to allow military members themselves to drive our perceptions of the factors that propel changes in their levels of commitment to the military.

Sample

The sample for this research was diverse but not representative. Participants were recruited from various durations of service (1st, 2nd, or 3rd term), rank (enlisted or officer), and marital status (single or married). Data were collected in group sessions ranging in size from from 2 to 10 participants; groups consisted of people of generally the same tenure and rank.

A total of 160 members (36 female, 116 male, 8 unreported) participated, 119 of whom were enlisted (E1-CW2) and 31 of whom were officers (O1-O5). Military service branches were represented as follows: 36 Navy, 46 Army, 59 Marines, and 19 Air Force. The average age was 26 with a range from 18 to 50. Of those who told us their marital status (n=145), slightly less than half (n=63) were single and more than half (n=82) were married. The marriages ranged from less than one month to almost sixteen years’ duration, with an average of four years; 67 service members (42%) lived with at least one dependent. Education level ranged from less than a high school diploma to a graduate degree. On average, members had some college education, but not a degree.

Procedure

Data were gathered in June and July 2002 at four military installations, one for each service branch. Three installations were in the U.S.; one was in Europe. Each session lasted about two hours and consisted of two parts. In Part I participants were asked to respond to and give feedback about a list of candidate items for the commitment index (these data were used to

construct quantitative indices of member commitment, which as of April 2004 are being administered to representative samples of active duty military members and reservists on a quarterly basis).

In Part II participants were asked to graph the trajectories of their commitment over time and to describe the events associated with changes in levels of commitment. At the outset of Part II, the researchers described affective, normative, and continuance commitment based on Meyer and Allen's (1991) framework, using the examples of "I want to stay," "I ought to stay" and "I need to stay." An illustrative example of commitment to a romantic relationship was provided so as not to bias responses about commitment to the military. Participants were provided with four blank graphs: one for overall commitment and one for each of the three types of commitment (the researchers varied the order in which respondents were asked to complete the graphs). For each graph, participants first recorded their current level of commitment and then recorded the date and level of that type of commitment at the beginning of their current term of service. They then were asked to report the first time after that date they noticed a change in their level of commitment. For example, at the beginning of their current term, some participants felt they needed to stay for schooling opportunities, but after serving and receiving their G.I. Bill, they no longer felt that they had to stay, changing their continuance commitment. Participants then proceeded to fill in subsequent turning points until they reached the current date. For each turning point, participants were asked to respond to four questions: what happened, how they felt at that time, why the turning point changed their level of commitment, and whether the resulting change was sudden or gradual. Figure 1 displays an example of a completed graph. After completing the graphs, participants were asked to rank the importance of the three types of commitment and to complete a short demographic survey.

***** Figure 1 about here *****

Coding of Commitment Graphs

Turning points were coded via a multi-stage inductive process. In the first stage, two coders independently carried out a process of open coding by reading all the material provided by respondents about each turning point, and constructing a list of categories that could be used to classify each of the events. Next, the coders met to compare their lists of categories and reach consensus. Forty-four categories appeared on the lists of both coders. The most common type of discrepancy resulted from one coder developing a single inclusive category and the other developing several more specific categories. This discrepancy was resolved by breaking up the more inclusive category. The coders also decided to combine some existing categories and to develop some new ones to eliminate gaps in the original list. The final list comprised fifty-one categories.

In the second stage of coding, each coder independently decided whether each category was represented by each turning point. This required making a yes or no decision about 55 categories for each turning point. After all turning points were coded, agreement of the raters was evaluated using a Kappa statistic, which corrects levels of agreement for chance. The overall Kappa was .95; Kappas for individual categories ranged between .81 and 1.00.

Consensus about coding disagreements was reached by discussion.

The third stage consisted of axial coding, where the categories themselves were classified in two additional ways. First, each category was assigned to a *content* group based on whether it pertained to work, family, personal life, or military life. Second, each category was also assigned to a *type* group that indicated whether the category referred to a specific event or a

longer-term condition or change in status. Table 1 provides the details of the complete classification system.

***** Table 1 about here *****

Results

Commitment Histories

In total, 581 graphs were completed (159 of global commitment, 143 of affective commitment, 138 of normative commitment, and 141 of continuance commitment). Of the 161 respondents, 132 completed all four graphs. The period covered by the graphs averaged 941 days, or about 2.5 years, but durations ranged from 31 days to 4,048 days or about 11 years. On average, 25.5 months remained in members' current terms of service, with a range of 0 to 136 months. Table 2 summarizes characteristics of the graphs.

***** Table 2 about here *****

In all, 792 turning points were reported; all but 63 were accompanied by answers to the questions about the content of the turning point. On average, each graph included 1.4 turning points separated by an average of 415 days. Because the periods of time covered by the graphs varied so much across individuals, we calculated an "annual density rate," or the number of turning points per year that respondents actually reported (or might be expected to report if their chart covered an entire year). As Table 2 shows, annual density rates followed a pattern similar to that of the rates per entire graph, with the averages ranging from 0.4 to 1.4 turning points per year.

Some respondents reported completely stable commitment (i.e., no turning points) on at least one graph, and seven respondents reported no turning points on any graph, indicating that all types of commitment had been entirely stable throughout the current term of service.

Respondents who reported no turning points tended to cluster at high or low commitment levels. For example, the modal likelihood of remaining with the military reported by individuals with stable intentions was 100%, with a mean of 71% and a median of 97%. Reports of stable affective commitment followed a very similar pattern. Normative and continuance commitment, however, tended to cluster at low levels when stable, with the modal response for both being 0%, the median 20% and the mean 38% and 39% respectively.

Re-enlistment intentions tended to change more frequently than the other types of commitment, with 2.3 turning points per graph, separated by an average interval of 337 days. Only 15.7% of the sample reported completely stable re-enlistment intentions. Normative commitment was the most stable form of commitment, with only 0.7 turning points per graph and an average of 549 days between changes; more than half of the sample (53.6%) reported stable normative commitment.

Figure 2 displays average levels of each type of commitment at the beginning and end of the graphing period. Participants reported a 65% chance of re-enlisting at the beginning of the term and a 55% chance on the day of data collection; affective, continuance, and normative commitment followed similar patterns. There was considerable variation in the sample, however, with some individuals reporting 100% changes in their level of the commitment. The smallest average absolute magnitude of change was associated with global commitment, which changed an average 28.8 points (out of 100) with each turning point (see Table 2). The largest changes, averaging 33.4 points, were reported on graphs of affective and normative commitment.

***** Figure 2 about here *****

Groups of Turning Points

Next, we examined groups of turning points according to their content category: work, family, personal, or military life (see Table 3). We created an “impact index,” calculated as the average absolute change associated with that group, weighted by the frequency with which the group of turning points was reported. Thus, the highest impact indexes were generated by turning points that were reported on many graphs and were associated with large changes in commitment. We used the absolute change for this calculation because most turning points were associated with both positive and negative changes in commitment. Overall, more than 85% of all the codes assigned pertained to work or military life. Slightly more than one third pertained to family life, and approximately one quarter of the codes assigned pertained to personal life. Although the average absolute changes were largest for the family and personal categories, impact indices were lower for these categories than the others because they were observed somewhat less often. We also examined the degree to which the categories of events or conditions in each group were associated with positive changes in commitment: turning points related to military life and work were the most likely to be reported as having positive impact. Turning points related to personal life were least likely to be reported as having positive impact.

***** Table 3 about here *****

Individual Turning Points

Next, we examined individual turning points. Table 4 identifies the five categories in each group with the highest impact indices. The ten categories with the highest overall impact indices are indicated in boldface; one of these was in the family group and the others were evenly divided among the work, military and personal life groups. Absolute changes in

commitment associated with these “top” turning points ranged from 27.6 to 41.6 points (out of 100).

In the work category, three of the top turning points were associated with career opportunities (job change, civilian opportunities, and promotion). Note that promotion was associated with positive changes in commitment 84% of the time but that civilian opportunities were associated with positive changes only 18% of the time. The other two top turning points pertained to work conditions: job dissatisfaction and leadership.

In the family category, most of the top turning points were associated with changes in family structure – adding members through marriage or childbirth or losing members temporarily through family separation. Most of the time, marriage and childbirth were reported as having positive influences on commitment. Finances was the turning point associated with the largest absolute change in commitment in the entire sample, and again was mostly associated with increases in commitment. In contrast, family separation was almost always reported as decreasing commitment.

Being treated poorly was the most impactful turning point in this category. More than 90% of the time this was associated with downturns in commitment, with an average negative change of almost 40% in level of commitment. Future goals were the next-most impactful turning point in this category, but these were evenly divided between increasing and reducing commitment.

Moving was not only the most impactful turning point In the military life category, but also in the sample as a whole. Moving was about equally likely to be seen as increasing or decreasing commitment; the same was true of members’ perceptions of their duty location and the military people around them.

***** Table 4 about here *****

Groups of Turning Points by Type of Commitment

We examined the types of commitment by broad turning point category. Many more turning points were reported on the global commitment graphs than for any other type of commitment, followed by affective commitment. The smallest number of turning points were reported on the graphs of normative commitment.

***** Figure 3 about here *****

Figure 4 presents the same data as Figure 3, but makes each bar the same height so the proportional representation of the components can be examined. Proportionally, turning points associated with work were the single most prominent group for each type of commitment (in terms of number of turning points reported). When combined with military life, these two groups accounted for 50% or more of the turning points, although never more than 70% for a particular type of commitment. For global commitment, affective commitment and normative commitment, the next-largest group of turning points was personal. Family turning points were least prominent for affective commitment, followed by global commitment and normative commitment. For continuance commitment, family turning points were more prominent than turning points associated with military or personal life.

***** Figure 4 about here *****

Turning Points and the Characteristics of Individuals

We examined patterns of turning points associated with the gender, marital status and parental status of the respondents. Treating turning points as the unit of analysis, we ran simple 2 X 3 analyses of variance where the between-groups factors were the individual characteristics (i.e., men vs. women, single vs. married, parents vs. nonparents) and the type of commitment the

turning point was associated with (i.e., global commitment, affective, normative, continuance). The dependent variable was the absolute magnitude of the change associated with the turning point.

Gender. Overall, the absolute magnitude of changes in commitment varied by gender. Analysis of variance revealed a trend for type of graph ($F = 2.487, p < .10$) and a significant interaction between gender and type of commitment for the absolute change in commitment ($F = 2.848, p < .05$). On average, women reported larger changes in normative and continuance commitment than in global and affective commitment, whereas men tended to report larger changes in affective commitment than the other three types.

Men and women perceived similar reasons for changes in commitment. Other military people, moving/PCS, being treated poorly, and leadership heavily impacted both males and females. Future goals, although mentioned equally often by both males and females, was associated with stronger changes in commitment for women. In addition, men mentioned expectations, changing jobs, and the end of their commitment term as important factors in their changes in commitment.

Marital Status. The analysis of variance revealed trend-level main effects for both marital status and type of commitment ($F = 2.878$ & $F = 2.413, p < .10$, respectively). Married members reported larger changes in commitment than single members. Married members reported the largest changes in affective commitment and the smallest changes in global commitment.

For married members, the top three issues were unmet expectations, moving/PCS, and being treated poorly. Also important to those who were married were leadership and job changes. For single members, the top three issues perceived as affecting commitment were future goals, moving/PCS, and other military people. Unlike those who were married, single members

reported having their commitment affected more by duty location and promotion. In addition, single members reported being affected more than married individuals by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Parental Status. Parents tended to react more strongly to turning points than nonparents ($F = 4.846, p < .05$). The average amount of change associated with turning points did not differ as a function of type of commitment, however. For parents, turning points perceived as having the largest impact on commitment were those associated with unmet expectations, being treated poorly, leadership, and moving. Finances and having a baby also were important for parents. For non-parents, the top three categories were other military people, moving, and future goals. Finances were less important for this group than for parents.

Discussion

Although the procedure used here provided interesting exploratory information regarding turning points in commitment, we must acknowledge several limitations. Our data document respondents' claims that these issues affected their commitment to the military, but not the prevalence of each turning point throughout the entire sample. For example, it could be that there were more people within our sample who got promotions than those who mentioned it. Those who mentioned certain event or circumstances must have both remembered that it occurred during the time-span studied and feel that it influenced their commitment levels.

There is likely to be memory bias in the information provided to us. We asked people to think back, some over several years. The nature of this process means that individuals probably selected certain events to report and omitted others, either intentionally or because they simply did not recall them, and we have no way of telling the difference.

Using this adapted methodology, we learned that military members recalled their levels of commitment changing about once per year. Their global commitment changed the most often, probably because it was fed by each of the other types of commitment, but the magnitude of the changes was small relative to those of other types of commitment. Affective commitment was the next-most volatile and displayed larger changes than the other forms of commitment. In contrast, normative commitment tended to be more stable, not changing at all for a large portion of the sample. Global and affective commitment were about 20% higher than the other forms of commitment, and each type of commitment fell about 10% across the enlistment period.

Consistent with existing literature, most turning points pertained to work or military life, where key events were career opportunities, promotions, and moving. Personal turning points were #2 for global, affective and normative commitment; a key personal turning point was being treated poorly. Family turning points were #2 for continuance commitment; key turning points here were finances and changes in family structure.

Across the sample, each turning point was associated with both positive and negative implications for commitment, although there was variation. For example, promotion was almost always associated with increases in commitment while family separation and being treated poorly were almost always associated with decreases. Moving was about evenly split between increases and decreases.

Women reported larger changes in global, normative and continuance commitment, while men reported larger changes in affective commitment. Interpersonal factors were important for both men and women, such as other military people, leadership, or being treated poorly.

Married members and parents reported larger changes in commitment than single members or nonparents. Interpersonal factors such as being treated poorly and leadership

appeared more important for married members and parents than the other groups. Moving also was more important for married individuals and parents. Parents also highlighted finances and childbirth. Single members emphasized duty location and promotion.

One of the key reasons for undertaking this study was to examine the role of nonwork factors in the commitment of workers. Given substantial changes in workforces and workplaces in recent decades, we wondered whether nonwork factors had become more prominent in organizational commitment than traditional measures might suggest. We gave respondents the opportunity to identify any factor that they saw as precipitating a change in their organizational commitment. While half of the factors identified factors were indeed associated with work, a substantial proportion, approaching half in some cases, came from the family or personal domains.

References

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Table 1
Glossary of Categories

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
WORK	
Advanced training	A School. Officer Training School or any other form of advanced training within the military. Skills gained are also included here.
Basic training	Boot camp or basic training.
Civilian opportunities	Opportunities outside of the military. Other jobs, what they "could" be doing - member only
Deployment	Deployment or being away from home base without family for a substantial length of time - real or potential.
First duty station	This is the first place person has been stationed.
Forced out	Being told that they had no choice and had to leave.
Graduated basic	Graduated basic training/boot camp
Job change	Changed units, changed jobs, job requirements changed (e.g., longer hours), etc., including changing ships
Job dissatisfaction	Not satisfied with job, got a job they didn't ask for or want.
Job satisfaction	Likes job
Just entered	Just started
Leadership	Compliments or complaints with leadership
Made a difference	Teaching younger military, have knowledge to pass on, able to do something to help the country, etc.
Not promoted	Passed up for promotion.
Raise	Getting a bonus or pay raise
Performance issues	Performance issues - getting better at job, feeling like did a good job at work - member only
Pride	Proud to be a military member - member or spouse
Promotion	Got promoted, increased rank - member only
Recognition	Passed qualifications or was certified for something, was recognized for effort, given award; failed qualification - member only
Retirement	Retirement issues, time and investments put in to the military - member only
Sense of duty	Feeling like they have a sense of duty to serve their country or their fellow service members
Terrorism	Terrorist attacks of 9-11, war as a result of 9-11 attacks
FAMILY	
Baby	Pregnant, baby was born, or new children in the household (e.g., custody issues)
Children	Any general children issues other than a pregnancy or birth
Family death	When someone in their family died - included in one case a father of a girlfriend.
Family separation	Anything related to being away from family, not getting to spend time with family, etc. - real separation, not hypothetical based on future family
Finances	Big purchases (e.g., car), financial trouble, etc.
General family	Family issues that don't fit under other family categories. Mention of needing to support family, etc.
Married	Either got married or got engaged

Relationship	Support of spouse (e.g., whatever he chooses, I support him), trouble with marriage/significant other
Spouse career	Spouse going to school/not able to go to school, spouse job issues/ career development, ability or inability to get a job, etc.
Family time	Being able to spend time with family

MILITARY LIFE

Adjustment	Adjustments to the military lifestyle.
Benefits	Medical, educational, etc. Anything that a person mentions about the 'programs' of the military - member or spouse
Expectations not met	Mention of anything that was different from what they expected it would be - spouse or member
Comfort	Only used if mentioned something about the safety of the military. Another category was created for job security and feeling like they belong was put in other military people - but later consensus was to collapse these categories. - member or spouse
Dislike military life	Later split liking and disliking of military life - member or spouse
Location	The particular station geographical location is liked (e.g., nice to be close to home) or not liked (e.g., nothing to do, don't like being overseas, etc.)
Military life	Liking the military lifestyle - member or spouse
Military people	Mention of good or bad things about other military people - including military spouses, morale and comments made by other military members of equal rank or no mention of rank - member or spouse
Moved	Moving into new house (only a few cases of this), PCS to new location

PERSONAL

End of commitment	Mention of their commitment being over (with no other substantial explanation) or they put in their share of time.
Future	Possibilities of what might happen in the future (e.g., going up for promotion - put under both future and promotion); came in with or currently have specific goals (e.g., to become an officer in the Navy)- member or spouse
God/religion	Prayer, being where God wants him/her to be
Got into trouble	Got in legal trouble (e.g., arrested); was in trouble with the military for something.
Lonely	Mention of loneliness
Maturity	Growing up, maturing, learning how to be independent - spouse or member
Medical	Physical ailments, being diagnosed with some medical condition, etc. - member or family member
School outside military	Classes or degrees outside of the military training
Treated poorly	Something person felt was unfair happened, prejudice - member or spouse, usually caused by military or representative of the military

UNCODABLE

Uncodable	Things that didn't fit into other categories.
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Table 2
 Characteristics of Commitment Graphs (n=161 members)

Type of Graph	Number of Graphs	Total Turning Points	Average Turning Points per Graph (Range)	Estimated Turning Points per Year (Range)	Average Interval between Turning Points	Respondents Reporting No Turning Points	Average Absolute Change (out of 100 pts)
Global commitment	159	364	2.3 (0 – 6)	1.4 (0 – 18)	337 days	25 (15.7%)	28.8
Affective Commitment	143	205	1.4 (0 – 7)	0.7 (0 – 5)	448 days	40 (28.0%)	33.4
Normative Commitment	138	97	0.7 (0 – 4)	0.5 (0 – 12)	549 days	74 (53.6%)	33.4
Continuance Commitment	141	126	0.9 (0 – 5)	0.4 (0 – 3.7)	483 days	65 (46.1%)	32.4
Total	581	792	1.4	1.3			31.1

Table 3
Content Groupings of Turning Points

	Number of Times Observed (% with positive impact)	Impact Index	Average Absolute Change	Average Positive Change	Average Negative Change
Work	465 (43.2%)	19.7	30.9	+30.7	-30.9
Family	186 (37.1%)	8.4	33.0	+31.7	-34.2
Personal	247 (25.9%)	11.6	34.4	+30.7	-35.7
Military Life	300 (44.7%)	12.8	31.1	+28.0	-33.7

Table 4
Individual Turning Points

	Number of Turning Points (% with positive impact)	Impact Index	Average Absolute Change	Average Positive Change	Average Negative Change
Work					
Job change	67 (42%)	3.2	34.3	+32.1	-35.8
Leadership	67 (22%)	3.0	32.6	+25.2	-34.8
Civilian opportunities	77 (18%)	2.9	27.7	+29.6	-27.9
Promotion	45 (84%)	2.3	37.7	+37.5	-38.8
Job dissatisfaction	56 (4%)	2.2	37.7	+37.5	-38.8
Family					
Finances	55 (58%)	2.6	34.9	+32.5	-37.6
General family	43 (21%)	1.8	30.6	+20.7	-33.2
Baby	31 (61%)	1.6	36.9	+37.9	-35.4
Family separation	35 (3%)	1.4	28.9	+30.0	-28.9
Got married	29 (55%)	1.3	32.5	+32.6	-32.2
Personal					
Treated poorly	67 (4%)	3.4	36.6	+20.3	-37.3
Future	86 (50%)	3.2	27.4	+31.0	-23.9
End of commitment	52 (6%)	2.9	40.1	+25.7	-41.0
Medical illness	30 (17%)	1.4	35.1	+25.0	-37.1
School outside of the military	23 (26%)	1.2	37.5	+33.8	-38.8
Military Life					
Moving	84 (48%)	3.7	32.0	+24.1	-39.5
Other military people	80 (50%)	3.4	31.0	+26.9	-34.9
Unmet expectations	59 (7%)	3.4	41.6	+43.3	-41.5
Location	56 (50%)	2.1	27.6	+25.5	-29.5
Dislike military lifestyle	39 (13%)	1.6	29.5	+30.0	-29.3

Figure 1
Sample Commitment Graph

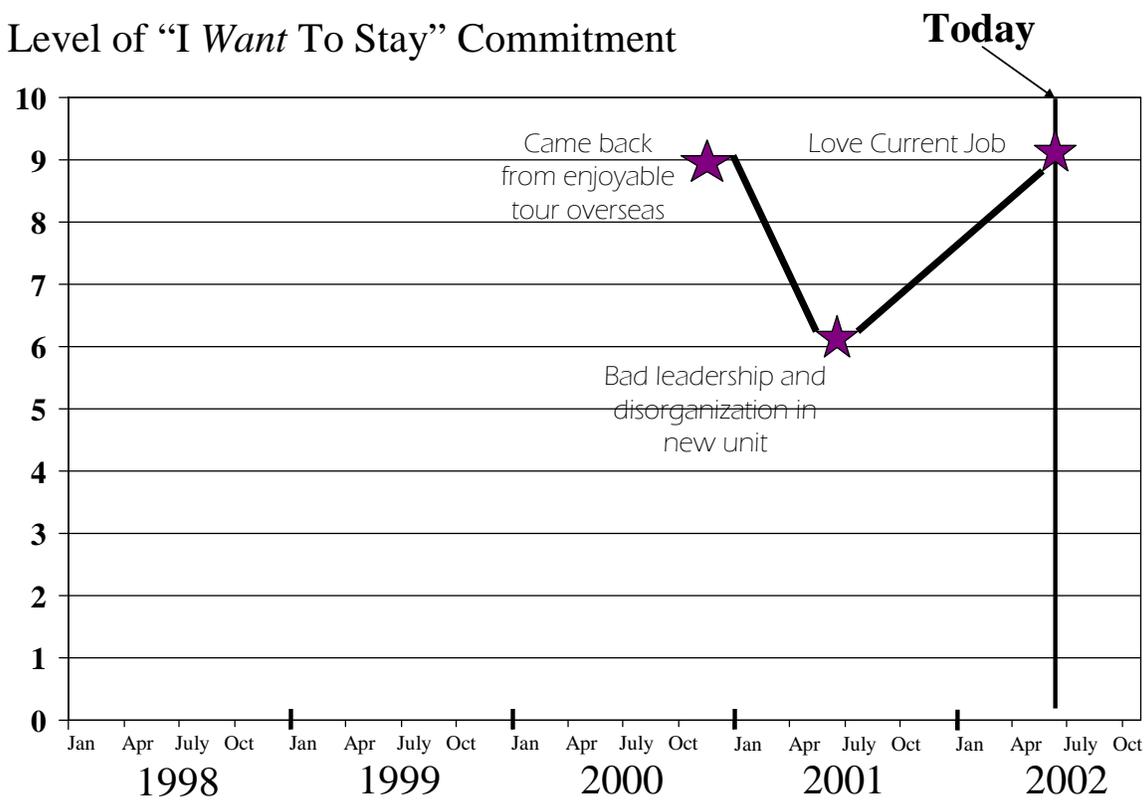


Figure 2
Average Commitment at Beginning and End of Graphing Period

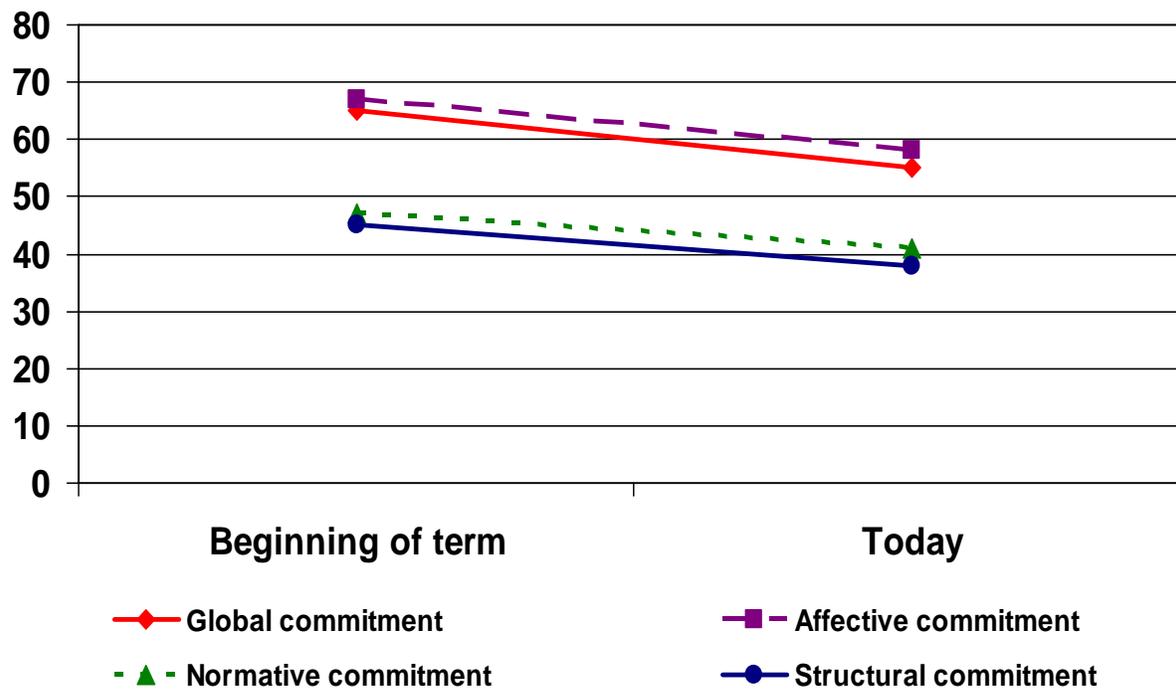


Figure 3
Frequencies of Groups of Turning Points by Type of Commitment

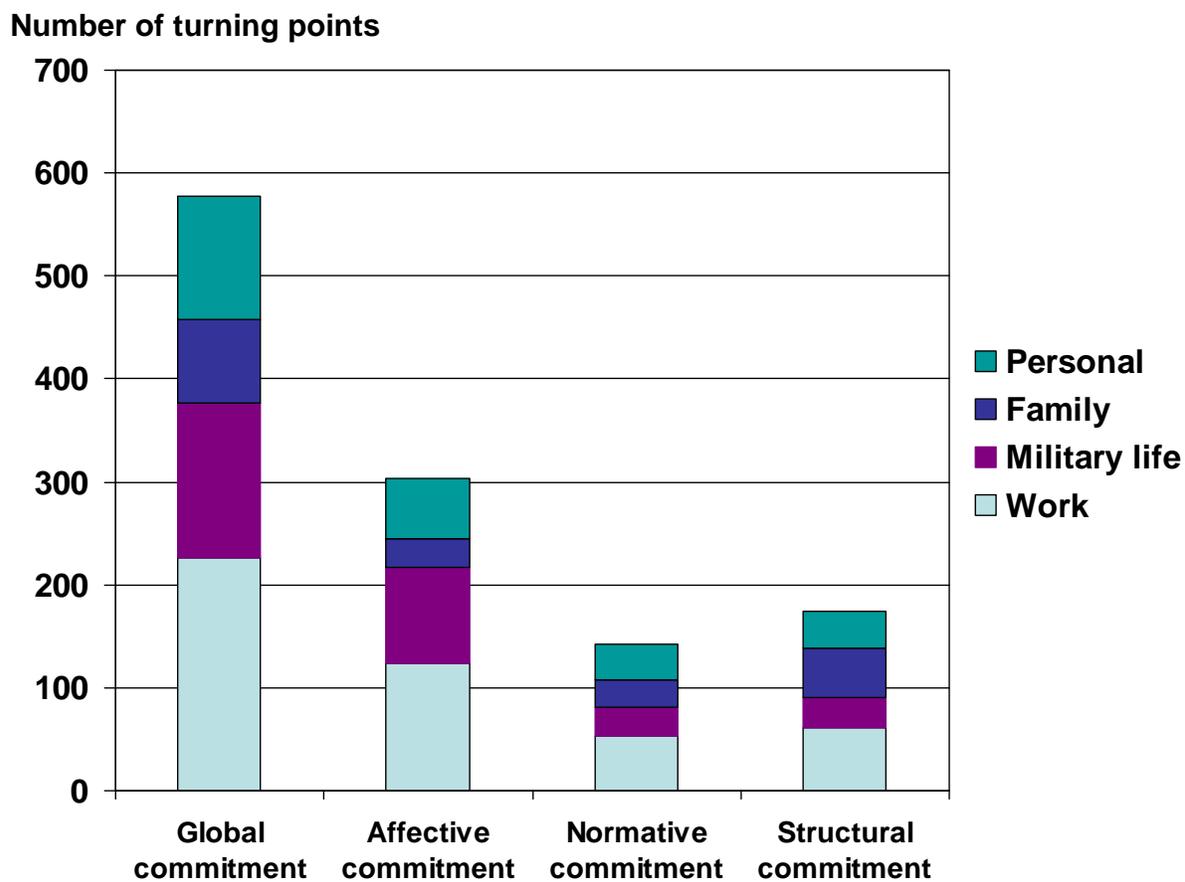


Figure 4
Proportional Representation of Groups of Turning Points by Types of Commitment

