

**COMMITMENT IN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE:
EXPERIENCES OF A GROUP OF FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVANTS**

Doctor of Philosophy in Management

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ABSTRACT

A great deal has been learnt about organizational commitment since research began over 50 years ago. In recent years the focus has been on the relationship between commitment and human resource management (HRM) practices; (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton and Swart, 2005) commitment as an element of motivation; (Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe, 2004) and the ongoing paradoxical nature of commitment and its relationship to performance (Wright and Bonnett, 2002; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Siders, George and Dharwadkar, 2001; Kibeom, Carswell and Allen, 2000; Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert, 1996; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Allen and Smith, 1987). It seems that the more researchers delve into this multidimensional construct, the more complex it becomes.

This thesis steps back from this level of complexity and revisits the construct of commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public service employees. Little is known about the form that commitment takes in the public sector in general and in this context in particular; consequently this study sought to address this.

Allen and Meyer's three component model of organizational commitment (1990) being affective, normative and continuance commitment, was adopted for the purposes of this research. Firstly, it was of interest to determine if these particular employees experienced a dominance of continuance commitment as has been presented in the literature as common to public sector employees (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2006). Secondly, this thesis explores the form that continuance commitment takes for these Australian federal public service employees, and if it is experienced in a manner that is similar to Allen and Meyer's definition of continuance commitment, or if it is varied in its form, as the literature suggests is possible (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Finally, this thesis considers the implications these findings may have on the way that human resource management (HRM) practices and policies are implemented in this context, in line with the literature that shows clear linkages between organizational commitment and HRM functions (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and

Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant, Dutton and Russo, 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong, Law, Change and Xin, 2009)

Three research questions were posited:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

An initial quantitative study sought to measure the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment, relative to normative and affective commitment, for these employees in a public sector organization. Following this a qualitative approach explored the form that continuance commitment took for these employees and in doing so also explored the form that affective and normative commitment took, however, to a lesser degree. The focus of this thesis is on the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment and the form it takes, for these particular Australian federal public servants, and the implications of this on current HRM practices, set within the public sector context. The process of measurement and exploration of continuance commitment, relative to affective and normative commitment states resulted in data being gathered and analyzed on all three forms of commitment, with a clear focus on continuance commitment, in line with the intention of this study.

The greater interest in continuance commitment and what it looks like in this public sector setting rests on two key issues. The first issue reflects the literature that suggests this component of commitment is dominant in public sector organizations (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2006). The second issue reflects the literature that shows a relationship between commitment and performance that includes a negative correlation between continuance commitment and performance (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and

Zajac 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson 1989; Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert 1996; Kibeom, Carswell and Allen, 2000; Siders, George and Dharwadkar, 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002). At a time when the Australian Public Service (APS) is implementing reforms that aim to place the APS in the top performing public services in the world (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. v).seeking a better understanding of the formation of commitment and its influence on HRM and invariable, on performance, is well timed.

The findings of this research were less supportive of the literature than expected. It was expected that continuance commitment would be dominant for these employees and this was supported through qualitative data. It was also expected that continuance commitment would present in a manner typical of Allen and Meyer's (1990) definition, however, this was not found to be true for these public sector respondents. Rather, it appeared through the qualitative data that continuance commitment took a varied form for these employees. It was expected that the quantitative stage of this research would accurately measure the level of continuance commitment experienced by these respondents, relative to affective and normative commitment and yet the quantitative data failed to present an accurate measurement of the experience of commitment for these employees. This was despite the fact that the questionnaire used in this study was widely accepted as reliable and despite two pre-tests that confirmed its applicability. It was concluded that the reduced applicability of the questionnaire in this study may have been a consequence of the influence of this particular context on this tool. If this were the case, it may throw into question previous research into how organizational commitment is measured and experienced in public sector organizations and may identify a problem in this field.

It was expected that a dominance of continuance commitment would present as problematic, as it has done so in the past (Allen and Smith 1987; Goffin and Jackson 1989; Iles, Mabey and Roberston, 1990; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert 1996; Kibeom, Carswell and Allen, 2000; Chen and Francesco 2001; Siders, George and Dharwadkar, 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002). However, consideration of a commitment profile resulted in the conclusion that this dominance was less problematic than expected. It was also unexpected that both affective and normative commitment appeared to vary in their form, as well as continuance commitment.

It became apparent that the variation on all three forms of commitment not only formed a rather unique commitment profile for these individuals, but was likely to be reflective of the employment context in which they worked, which supports the literature on this relationship (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005).

Finally, the implications of these findings resulted in theoretical discussions on a number of issues:

- 1) the applicability of research methodology and the possibility that a dominance of quantitative research in this field is resulting in a lack of exploration and consideration of variances in all three components of commitment;
- 2) the possibility that there is a problem with the way commitment has been measured in public sector organizations if it presents in an atypical manner;
- 3) the value of exploring commitment profiles and the link between this and performance as opposed to considering only separate components of commitment and how they relate to performance;
- 4) the role that commitment plays as a mediator between HRM practice and organizational performance and the possibility that the psychological state of commitment sits in the 'black box' of HRM (Edwards and Wright, 2001; Conway and Monks, 2009);
- 5) the possibility that continuance commitment as it is experienced by these particular employees, is perpetuated by a process of bulk recruitment, supporting the literature that suggests that continuance commitment can be developed through actual HRM practices (Gong, Law, Chang and Xin, 2009); and
- 6) the possibility that there is a lack of understanding of the commitment construct by employees themselves which may impact on individual's performance management, professional development and career planning.

This study was not intended to build theory from data collated and analyzed from multiple case studies or larger sized groups. Rather, this study sought to contribute to research into organizational commitment as it is experienced within a public sector context as there is less known about commitment in public sector organizations than there is about commitment in private sector organizations. It was not intended that the findings of this study be extrapolated beyond the experiences of the individuals who took part in this study. A single, illustrative case study was undertaken to determine if commitment, in particular continuance commitment, looked the same for these public service employees as had been reported for public sector employees elsewhere. This study showed that all three components of commitment presented in Allen and Meyer's three component model, being affective, normative and continuance commitment, were atypical for these employees. Although it was considered possible that continuance commitment may be varied in its form for these employees, as Allen and Meyer have suggested in their work (1990) it was not expected that affective and normative commitment would also be varied in their forms. Consequently a key finding of this study is that commitment for these public sector employees differs more than expected and, if this were found to be true of other public sector employees, there may be a problem in the way commitment in public sector organizations has been measured in the past. It may be that a dominance of quantitative research, well tested in the private sector and applied in the public sector may not have measured commitment as well as was expected. The research into commitment in public sector organizations may, therefore, be incomplete. Further qualitative research into commitment as it is experienced by public sector employees may shed light on this issue and would confirm the degree to which this is true for other public sector organizations. Thus, the literature that suggests that commitment is low or non-existent in public sector organizations (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006) and which adopts Allen and Meyer's three component model and measures through quantitative methodologies, may not be as accurate as thought. If commitment is varied in its form, then commitment as defined through Allen and Meyer's model may be low or non-existent, but commitment in its varied form, reflective of the public sector context, may not be.

The key contributions that this thesis makes to the literature on organizational behaviour and organizational commitment are, therefore:

- As expected, continuance commitment was the dominant form of commitment experienced by these public sector employees, however, in a varied form;
- variances were found in the forms that all three components of commitment took for these Australian public sector employees which may suggest that there is a problem with the way commitment has been measured in public sector organizations in the past;
- a unique commitment profile formed reflecting these variances that appeared to be reflective of the culture and congruent with the context;
- variations in the forms of all three commitment components resulted in the quantitative research process failing to accurately measure commitment as it was experienced by these respondents;
- the unique commitment profile and its congruence to the culture and context suggests that the dominance of continuance commitment was less problematic than expected;
- the dominance of continuance commitment may be, theoretically, a direct consequence of a specific HRM practice known as bulk recruitment; and
- theoretically, commitment may sit in the 'black box' of HRM and mediate the relationship between HRM practice and organizational performance.

This thesis presents a mixed methodology study; with findings from each of the quantitative and qualitative stages of this study presented and discussed. It also presents several theoretical considerations and suggestions for further research into the field of organizational commitment in public sector environments, and in general.

Certificate of Authorship of Thesis

Except where clearly acknowledged in footnotes, quotations and the bibliography, I certify that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted today entitled –

Commitment in the Australian Public Service: A New Perspective

I further certify that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The material in the thesis has not been the basis of an award of any other degree or diploma except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The thesis complies with University requirements for a thesis as set out in *Gold Book Part 7: Examination of Higher Degree by Research Theses Policy, Schedule Two (S2)*. Refer to <http://www.canberra.edu.au/research-students/goldbook>

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Signature of Candidate

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Signature of chair of the supervisory panel

Date:

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces and defines the construct of organizational commitment and offers some insight into the research that has been done over the last five decades and the gaps that have been identified in the literature that still require exploration and consideration. It will link organizational commitment to individual performance and human resource management (HRM) practices and thus present the three key areas of focus of this thesis. In this chapter the research questions will also be presented along with a brief outline of the contribution this thesis makes to the fields of management and organizational behaviour and why this study is important now. Finally, it will offer a brief summary of each of the chapters of this thesis.

Research into organizational commitment dates back to the 1960s and offers over 50 years of exploration into the psychological state that binds an individual to their organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Much of this exploration has focused on the relationship between commitment and performance (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Allen and Smith, 1987; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert, 1996; Kibeom, Carswell and Allen, 2000; Siders, George and Dharwadkar, 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002; Grant, Dutton and Rosso, 2008). Breaking this relationship down has seen commitment linked to such things as effective time management; innovation and team work (Allen and Smith, 1987); to organizational citizenship behaviours (Cohen, 1993; Bishop and Scott, 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001); promotability (Meyer et al., 1989; Shore, Barksdale and Shore, 1995); the ability to cope positively with change (Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999); and to job satisfaction (Bateman and Strasser, 1984; Curry, Wakefield, Price and Mueller, 1986; Vandenberg and Lance, 1982).

Commitment has also been associated with negative behaviours such as tardiness and absenteeism (Balu, 1986; Blau and Boal, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989); employee discrimination practices (Petersen and Dietz, 2008); and generally low performance (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al., 1989; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and

Bonnett, 2002). The literature shows very clearly the complexity of commitment and its contradictory influence on individual performance at work. It is widely accepted that being committed to the organization is not always as beneficial as some may think. As research into the construct of commitment has gone on it has become increasingly evident that commitment is a very complex construct indeed.

However, despite the wealth of knowledge that has been gained about organizational commitment, there remains a call for further research on what commitment looks like in different employment sectors (Allen and Meyer, 1990), on possible variances in the form continuance commitment takes (Allen and Meyer, 1990), on the exploration of commitment and its role in the link between human resource management and performance (Conway and Monks, 2009); on commitment in public sector contexts (Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978; Liou and Nyhan, 2004); and on commitment profiles (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Sinclair et al 2005; Gellatly et al 2009).

This study goes some way in answering these calls for ongoing research into organizational commitment. It will be an exploratory study into commitment as it is experienced in the Australian context and in particular, by a group of Australian federal public service employees.

The literature suggests that public sector employees experience low levels of commitment (Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2006) or perhaps more specifically, low levels of affective commitment and high levels of continuance commitment (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005) This study will contribute to this literature by considering three key issues:

- Is this also the case for a group of Australian federal public service employees?
- Are there variances in the form that continuance commitment takes for this group of employees?
- Are there implications from these findings for human resource management practices used in the Australian public sector context?

More details regarding the focus of this thesis are offered later in this chapter. However, at this point a brief explanation of the construct of organizational commitment is presented along with the key aspects of the research that are relevant to this thesis.

The Construct of Organizational Commitment – A Brief Overview

Definitions of Organizational Commitment

Over the years researchers and scholars have delved deeper and deeper into the construct of commitment to improve understanding, refine definitions and explore possible variances. Early research defined commitment as a single construct. Becker's early work showed that people engage in 'consistent lines of activity' and stay with their organization because of the perceived costs they associate with discontinuing the activity, or leaving the organization (1960).

In the late 1970s commitment was studied in a US federal government agency. This pre-dated the current three component model that has dominated the field since. However, a difference between an economical commitment and a psychological commitment to the organization was identified and it was agreed that 'commitment is a complex facet of organizational behaviour' (Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978 p. 394).

Ongoing research redefined the construct of organizational commitment as 'the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization' (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1979, p.226) and as relating to the 'attachments that form between employees and their employing organization' (Mowday, 1999 p.387). The definition was further refined following Allen and Meyer's work in 1990 in which they tested a new three component model of commitment. As a result of this work they suggested that commitment has 'various conceptualizations' and that each of these is quite different (1990, p.1). Allen and Meyer explored the 'psychological state reflected in commitment, the antecedent conditions leading to its development and the behaviour (other than remaining) that result from commitment' (1990, p.1).

Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment defined commitment as either affective (AC) which refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization (1990, p.1); normative (NC) which refers to an employee's attachment based on the individual's belief system relating to the organization expecting loyalty (1990, p. 4); or continuance (CC), which refers to an individual's attachment to the organization based on the magnitude of or number of investments they have made in the organization (i.e. side-bets) and the perceived lack of alternatives (1990, p.4). Allen and Meyer saw these as 'distinguishable components, rather than types, of attitudinal commitment' (p.3-4) and argued that 'employees can experience each of these psychological states to varying degrees' (p.4). They simplified these three states by describing affective commitment as relating to an individual 'wanting to stay' with the organization; normative commitment relating to an individual feeling they 'ought to stay' with the organization and continuance relating to the individual believing that they 'need to stay' with the organization (p.3).

Allen and Meyer found in their research (1990; 1991) that their three component model of commitment was sound. The statistical results showed clearly that the 'affective, continuance and normative components of attitudinal commitment are conceptually and empirically separable and that each of these represents a somewhat distinct link between employees and an organization that develops as a result of different experiences' (p.13). They suggested that although 'commitment refers to a psychological state that binds an individual to the organization this may be where the similarity ends' (p.14).

The definition of commitment today includes five components of commitment as more recent research has taken the component of continuance commitment and broken it down into two further components: 'high sacrifice' and 'low alternatives' (Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Stinglhamber, 2005). For this thesis, however, the focus will remain on Allen and Meyer's well established three component model of commitment and, in particular, how this model of commitment is experienced by a group of the Australian public sector employees.

Organizational Commitment in the Public Sector: Key Studies

Over 100 studies into commitment have taken place in the private sector. Some 26 studies into commitment have taken place in public sector environments. From these 26 studies, there are two recent studies in particular that suggest that more exploration of commitment in public sector organizations is warranted. These two studies will inform the expected findings of this research.

The first study was undertaken in 2005 by Abbott, White and Charles who studied the relationship between values and organizational commitment in two organizations, a state government communications organization and a welfare organization, both in New South Wales, Australia. They found that employees in the communications organization showed significantly higher levels of continuance commitment and lower levels of normative commitment than those in the welfare organization (Abbott et al., 2005).

The second study took place a year later, in 2006 in Canada, by Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins who investigated the variation in general values and organizational commitment among private and public sector employees and found that private sector employees reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment than did public sector employees (Lyons et al., 2006). Although this research did not appear to adopt Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment, the values based commitment that was studied may suggest that the lack of commitment identified was analogous to affective commitment. However, this is speculative. Regardless of this speculation, the findings were not dissimilar to those identified by Abbott et al., in that commitment appeared stronger and more positive in private sector employees than in public sector employees.

Other researchers have also suggested that commitment is low in public sector organizations or that affective commitment could be increased in public sector organizations (Goulet, and Frank, 2002; Liou and Nyhan, 2004) and as such they support the findings from Abbott, White and Charles and Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins.

A common theme has emerged from these studies regarding commitment in public sector organizations that reflects low affective commitment, or low commitment altogether. The link

between continuance commitment and lower levels of performance (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al., 1989; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al. 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002) deems these findings potentially problematic and worth further consideration.

The Relationship Between Commitment and Performance

The research in this field has also focused on Allen and Meyer's three components of commitment and their relative influence on various aspects of individual performance. This research has shown consistently that performance is enhanced by affective commitment, mediated by normative commitment and that continuance commitment is generally negatively correlated to performance (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel, 1995; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen and Wright, 2005; Gong, Law, Change and Xin, 2009).

The combined findings of high continuance commitment as a public sector tendency (Abbott et al., 2005) and continuance commitment being the least conducive psychological state to underpin high performance (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al., 1989; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002) is concerning for public sector environments and raises a number of questions:

- If a group of Australian federal public servants experiences a dominance of continuance commitment, as is expected and consistent with the literature, then what does this mean for performance for these respondents?
- Does it mean that performance will be compromised, as the literature suggests?
- Does it mean that HRM practices should be reconsidered, given the suggestion that commitment is influenced by HRM practices (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant, Dutton and Russo, 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong, Law, Change and Xin, 2009)?

- Is there a relationship between certain HRM practices and a dominance of continuance commitment and levels of performance in this group of respondents?

This thesis will explore these questions. In doing so, it will also consider the issue of commitment profiles, which has been raised as an important element to consider in the relationship between commitment and performance (Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova, 2012; Allen and Meyer, 1990)

Commitment Profiles and Performance

Having ascertained that commitment consisted of separate, distinguishable elements, Allen and Meyer also put forward the premise that these differing psychological states can be experienced by an individual, to varying degrees, simultaneously (1990, p.4). This introduces the concept of commitment profiles: of individuals experiencing combinations of commitment components which make up the 'net-sum of a person's commitment to the organization' (1990, p.4).

Exploring a commitment profile brings into consideration the commitment-performance relationship. Accepting the premise that affective, normative and continuance commitment each has a different influence on performance, which is clearly established in the literature, means also accepting the possibility that an overall commitment profile will have a different influence upon performance. Given this, it seems worthwhile exploring commitment profiles as well as the components of commitment and the influences of all of these on performance levels.

This thesis will consider commitment profiles as well as explore the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment, the form it takes, and implications for human resource management (HRM) practices. This thesis will link what is currently known about commitment and what is currently not known. It will adopt Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment, already well-established in the field, and explore these three components as they are experienced by a group of Australian public servants. It will also consider possible variations in the form that continuance commitment takes, given the research that suggests that there is more to learn, through qualitative research methodologies, on the variances in continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Questions have been raised recently about the degree to which commitment

exists in certain contexts or the variations in its manifestation and this research will reflect upon those questions by exploring commitment's existence and manifestation in a context that has not yet been explored in this manner.

Calls for Further Research into Organizational Commitment

New Definitions of Commitment through Qualitative Research to Inform HRM

Practitioners

The exploration of commitment has reached a point where scholars in this field are now posing new questions about when commitment is, in fact, not commitment at all (Bentein et al., 2005) and whether there are some employment contexts where commitment is virtually non-existent (Lyons et al., 2006). Consequently, refining the definition and construct of commitment appears to be a continuing process. Does this mean that Allen and Meyer's widely accepted definition of commitment is under question? Does it mean there is simply more work to do to understand commitment in different contexts? Allen and Meyer themselves suggest that there is more work to do and that context must be considered, profiles must be considered and variations in the definitions of commitment must be identified (1990). More recent research by Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova (2012) found that context does in fact influence commitment profiles and that a new person-centred approach rather than the traditional variable-centered approach be considered in commitment research.

A qualitative research methodology would be conducive to the exploration of variances in the forms commitment may take, particularly undertaking this exploration in the natural setting in which commitment is experienced (Creswell, 1994). This issue raises another discussion about the dominance of quantitative methodology in this field and the benefit of exploring commitment through a qualitative methodology. If it is accepted that the definition of commitment needs more work and qualitative methodology is worth considering, then perhaps a qualitative exploration of commitment will offer variations in the definitions of affective, normative and continuance commitment. This research assumes this to be the case and as such will explore how commitment is experienced for a group of Australian public servants through a qualitative process which will allow for possible variations in definitions of affective, normative and

continuance commitment in this context; with a key focus on variations in continuance commitment.

Contributing to research on the variances that may exist in the forms continuance commitment may take can inform discussions on the link between HRM practices and organizational commitment. In particular, the link between actual HRM practices and the development of varied forms of continuance commitment (Conway and Monks, 2009). Scholars suggest that there is a great deal more to understand about how HRM practices and commitment states combine (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Buckley, Ferris, Bernadin and Harvey, 1998; Mowday, 1998; Ferris et al., 1999; Wood, 1999; Guest, 2002;) and that gaining this understanding should result in informing HRM practitioners of how they can influence performance through HRM practices that influence commitment (Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley et al., 2009).

This thesis will determine if continuance commitment is dominant for a group of Australian federal public service employees; if continuance commitment is experienced as defined by Allen and Meyer in their three component model, or varied in its form; and will consider implications for HRM practices currently taking place in this context. This thesis will therefore contribute to all three areas of further research into commitment, including exploring this construct further in a public sector organization.

Contribution of this Thesis to the Field of Organizational Commitment

In response to the various calls for ongoing research into organizational commitment, this thesis explores commitment as it is experienced in the Australian context and in particular, as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants. It seeks to determine if continuance commitment is dominant for these respondents, if continuance commitment is experienced in a way that is considered typical and conducive to Allen and Meyer's model, or alternatively, if continuance commitment is varied in its form. It will explore this through a qualitative methodology. It will also consider what can be learnt from this research to inform HRM practitioners regarding the links between commitment, human resource management practice and individual performance. It will consider what is well-established in this field regarding the definitions of commitment and the relationship between commitment and

performance. It will consider what is less well known regarding commitment profiles and performance. To do this, three research questions are posited:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

Given the nature of these three questions, two-thirds of this thesis has adopted a qualitative approach, with one third adopting a quantitative approach. This split is discussed at length in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Commitment in the APS: Why this is Relevant Now

A final point presented in this introductory chapter relates to the relevance of this research study to the Australian Public Service (APS). Every year the Australian Public Service Commission, a central body that supports all other departments within the APS, reviews elements of performance across the APS and reports to the Australian Federal Government. The report is submitted in an internal document called the 'State of the Service Report.' Along with this annual review, the Australian Government has recently reviewed the APS with the intention of identifying key areas of reform that will improve the overall performance of the Australian Public Service. Both the annual review and the current reform process focus predominately on the success of current human resource management processes in driving organizational performance (APSC, 2010). The literature has recently called for exploration of the construct of organizational commitment as a mediator between HRM practices and organizational performance (Wood, 1990; Edwards and Wright, 2001). This suggests that there is benefit in exploring organizational commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public service employees, while consideration is underway regarding the degree to which current HRM practices are enhancing organizational performance.

Employee commitment in the APS is, as stated, measured annually and reported to the Australian Federal Parliament in an internal audit document called the 'State of the Service Report'. It is important to note that this is an internal government document and is neither peer-reviewed nor included in the scholastic literature.

In 2010 it was reported that commitment in the APS was very high with 76% of Australian federal public servants surveyed reporting that they were committed to the APS and 60% reporting that they were committed to their department (APSC, 2010, p.218).

At the same time as these figures were being reported, the Parliament began the most significant performance reform process that the APS has seen in over 20 years (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010). A review of performance and effectiveness had been undertaken during 2009 and 2010 and from this 28 recommendations were made to facilitate 9 significant areas of reform, all aimed at improving the performance of the APS at the level of the individual worker, to bring it to the forefront of Western public services (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

It appears that there is a high level of commitment and a reduced level of performance in the APS. The question arises regarding the way commitment is measured and reported to parliament. Those surveyed were asked only if they are committed; there is no suggestion that there may be separate components of commitment experienced by individuals (APSC, 2010). Having recorded that they are committed, there is likely an assumption that this is a positive finding and results in high performance. There is no evidence of commitment being measured as a multi-dimensional construct.

However, given the complex and rather contradictory relationship between commitment and performance there is a potential problem here, as high commitment is not always as straightforward and positive as it might be imagined. Arguably, until commitment in this context is understood and shared with HRM practitioners, this problem will remain; commitment will be incorrectly measured and reported and may result in incorrect conclusions being formed regarding the success or otherwise of HRM practices and individual performance levels.

This misunderstanding may be explained by the lack of knowledge of the construct of organizational commitment within this context, as has been discussed, and the lack of exploration of this construct in the Australian federal public service. Thus there is a current gap in the organizational commitment literature that relates to what this construct looks like in the Australian context and in particular in the Australian federal public service and what this means for HRM practitioners in this context. This study will contribute to filling this gap.

Outline of this Research Study

Chapter 2: This chapter provides a review of the literature and gives the proposed study its relevance by including literature on the need for greater understanding of the variance of commitment profiles; on the lack of understanding of commitment in public sector organizations; on the links between commitment and HRM practice; and on the need for HRM practitioners to have a greater understanding of the complex nature of commitment and its role in both HRM practice and organizational performance.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides a review of the research purpose and the methodological approaches that are required to answer these questions. It offers a discussion on the benefits of a mixed-method approach and discusses why this approach is appropriate to this study. It details the proposed methodology including the decision to separate this study into two stages; the first addressing the first research question through a quantitative method and the second stage addressing the second question through a qualitative method. The third research question is answered through consideration of the qualitative data. Pre-testing is presented in this chapter along with discussion on the use of an embedded case study, focus group sessions and the identified population and respondent group.

Chapter 4: This chapter will present the quantitative results of the study. It will include a discussion on the alpha coefficient scores reflecting the reliability of the questionnaire in measuring commitment as it is experienced by this group of public service employees. It will also offer a discussion on what can be determined through the depiction of data as it is presented on the bell curve. Preliminary conclusions and speculation drawn at this stage of the study will be discussed as well as study limitations.

5: This chapter will present the results of the qualitative stage of this study. These results will be presented with some analysis that will contribute to the understanding of commitment as it is experienced by this group of employees. In particular, findings relating to how continuance commitment is experienced will be presented. Some discussion on self-perceptions of performance will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6: This chapter will discuss the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative stages of the study and what this means for research into how commitment is experienced by this group of Australian public service employees.

Chapter 7: Having discussed the findings that emerged from both the qualitative and quantitative data in chapter 6, this chapter will consider some theoretical issues that emerged from this study. Looking at the construct of organizational commitment from a broader perspective, this chapter will consider how these issues might impact on HRM practice in this department and the APS as a whole. It will also look at some theoretical issues for ongoing research into organizational commitment, particularly how it is experienced in the public sector context.

Chapter 8: This chapter will provide overall conclusions drawn from this study. It will restate the purpose of this research and the contribution that it makes to the fields of organizational commitment, organizational behaviour and human resource management. It will summarize the findings and the implications and conclusions drawn from this research.

This chapter offered a brief definition of the multidimensional construct of organizational commitment and touched on key studies that are relevant to this study, particularly those that have taken place in the public sector, which is the context of this particular study. It has introduced the three key aspects of this study: 1) organizational commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian public sector employees; 2) the commitment-performance relationship; and 3) the link between commitment, performance and HRM practices. It has presented the research questions for the first time and briefly addressed the relevance of this study now and the contribution it makes to the fields of management and organizational behaviour.

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the previous chapter the purpose of this research study was presented and discussed in some detail. By way of summary, this study is designed to explore the following key issues:

- how organizational commitment is experienced by a group of Australian, federal public servants and if continuance commitment is dominant;
- if continuance commitment presents as defined in Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990) or if it is varied in its form for these respondents; and
- implications that may emerge and be relevant to HRM practices currently operating in the Australian public service.

The literature that is relevant to these issues is presented in this chapter. Beginning with the 'big picture' issues and progressing to a more specific focus on the elements of organizational commitment, literature is presented on the following areas of interest:

- the relationship between HRM practice and organizational performance;
- the measurement of HRM-generated organizational performance;
- identifying and understanding the mediators of the HRM – performance relationship;
- theory about HRM and performance; and how they are linked and the role of organizational commitment in this relationship;
- the organizational commitment and organizational performance relationship;
- the link between HRM practices, organizational commitment and performance;
- the multi-dimensional nature of organizational commitment;

- commitment in the Australian Public Service; and
- commitment across other public sector organizations.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the context for this research and to identify the relevance of this research in the fields of organizational commitment and HRM. This chapter will identify where this research study fits in the current literature on HRM and organizational commitment with particular reference to organizational commitment in public sector organizations and the apparent dominance of continuance commitment relative to affective and normative commitment; the commitment construct being explored through qualitative research methodologies; variations in the form continuance commitment may take; the influence employment context has on commitment; and the benefits gained in exploring the relationship between commitment and HRM practice and sharing this with HRM practitioners.

This chapter begins by considering the broader HRM context and its role in building employee performance on the assumption that the call for ongoing research into organizational commitment will ultimately bring benefits to this field and contribute to improved performance. This chapter also presents a considerable amount of literature on the connection between HRM, organizational commitment and performance as this sets the broader context for this research study. It flows on to present the relevant research into organizational commitment to align the focus of the literature with the focus of this research.

The Relationship between HRM Practice and Organizational Performance

Research in the field of HRM dates as far back as the 1920s when the first formal personnel functions were established within organizations (Ferris, Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook and Frink, 1999). By the 1960s the personnel function had begun developing towards HRM as we know it today, with linkages made between personnel strategies and organizational strategies and relationships identified between ‘individual personalities and company personalities’ (Ferris et al., 1999, p.387). Reviews of the evolution of HRM reflect on various relationships between HRM and organizational performance and the complexity that lies within these relationships. A great deal of research has taken place in this field and, although a review of every piece of

research is not possible in this thesis, a snapshot of key research into the relationships between HRM practices and organizational performance is summarized in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: A Snapshot of Research into the HRM-Performance Relationship

Year	Researchers	Research and Findings
1987	Schuler and Jackson	HRM practices are critical for organizational performance and competitive advantage. HRM practices include planning, staffing, appraising, compensating and training – a ‘menu’ approach to effective HRM.
1989	Schuler	Strategic HRM (SHRM) must reflect strategic business needs of the organization; Five-P model integrates HR strategies and strategic business needs to show value of SHRM to organizational performance.
1990	Gerhart and Milkovich	Pay systems impact on organizational performance; specifically, contingent pay influences performance but base pay does not. Single HR practices themselves, such as pay systems, can affect organizational performance.
1992	Wright and McMahan	Identified 6 theoretical models of SHRM; defined SHRM to differentiate it from HRM; sought to establish a sound theoretical framework for SHRM so as to ensure its contribution to organizational performance.
1994	Arthur	Identified two HRM subsystems: control (rules and procedures to improve labour costs and efficiencies) and commitment (influence

		psychological links between worker and organization to shape employee attitude and behaviour). Found commitment system improved manufacturing performance in steel minimills and reduced turnover by about 50%. Thus HRM systems based on employee compliance with rules and procedures were less likely to bring improved manufacturing performance than HRM systems that shaped employee attitude and behaviour.
1995	Huselid	High performance work practices or strategic HRM systems such as comprehensive recruitment and selection procedures, incentive based compensation packages, performance management systems and employee training reduce employee turnover, increase motivation and bring greater productivity and corporate financial performance by encouraging poor performers to leave.
1995	Dyer and Reeves	Bundles of HRM practices; forming HRM strategies, are more effective in improving organizational performance than individual HRM practices themselves; however, different bundles have different benefits.
1995	MacDuffie	Assembly plants using bundles of HRM practices that are integrated into the production or business strategy have a significant impact on organizational performance improvement.
1996	Becker and Gerhart	HR systems and an HR function require aligned HR policies to truly affect performance; single HR 'best-practice' components will not increase organizational performance to the same degree as complete HR systems will.

1997	Huselid, Jackson and Schuler	For HR practices to affect organizational performance they require implementation by skilled HR managers with professional HR qualifications and capabilities; skilled HR practitioners contributed to improved organizational productivity, cash flow and firm market value.
1998	Ulrich	HR practices alone will not bring performance improvement; they need to focus on outcomes not HR activities; need skilled, professional HR professionals at the 'board table' and managers who support the HR function.

Table 2.1 offers a brief look at the road that HR practice took in the journey to offer value to an organization by way of contribution to organizational performance. In the early days of HRM, single HR practices, such as planning, staffing, appraising, compensating, training and development appeared to bring organizational improvement (Schuler and Jackson, 1987; Gerhart and Milkovitch, 1990). With time and ongoing research it became obvious that this relationship, between individual HRM practices and organizational performance, failed to satisfy researchers in explaining the HRM-performance link and consequently scholars separated operational HRM practices from strategic HRM (SHRM) practices by identifying new HR strategies that aligned to strategic business goals (Schuler, 1989; Wright and McMahan, 1992). As time progressed bundles of HRM practices were identified and put forward to explain the HRM-performance relationship (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Dyer and Reeves, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995). These bundles later became complete HR systems (Becker and Gerhart, 1996) that required implementation by skilled and highly capable HR professionals as opposed to HR staff (Huselid, Jackson and Schuler, 1997). Finally, a strong statement was made by leading HRM scholar and consultant Dave Ulrich who suggested that for HRM to truly improve organizational performance it must be strategic and bundled, it must be delivered by skilled professionals, supported by senior managers and line managers and it must be measured according to outcomes rather than activities (Ulrich, 1998). This issue of measuring outcomes highlights the importance of identifying the measurement of performance; in other words, it is all very well to argue the

existence of an HRM-performance relationship, but work is needed to explain what HRM-generated performance improvement actually looks like.

The Measurement of HRM-Generated Organizational Performance

Researchers such as Huselid (1995) measured performance predominately as organizational financial performance, which reflected improvements in the 'bottom line'. Organizational performance improvement has also been identified as improvements in stock performance, productivity, company profits and long term organizational survival (Becker and Gerhart, 1996). Huselid and his colleagues identified performance improvement as improved competitive advantage. They suggested that this occurred where HRM strategies resulted in employees adding value to production processes and should be seen as a 'unique resource' that was difficult to replicate or substitute (Huselid et al., 1997). Bundles of HRM strategies were identified as bringing performance improvement by way of reduced employee turnover, enhancing productivity and stock market performance (Arthur, 1994; MacDuffie 1995; Dyer and Reeves, 1995). Quality improvement was measured through employees' 'being right the first and every time' where there was commitment to quality and continual improvement and where performance improvement meant greater productivity with fewer staff and reduced costs (Schuler et al., 1987). Productivity improvement has been measured as a dollar value relating to a standard deviation increase in employee performance (Boudrea, 1991; Schmidt, Hunter, MacKenzie and Muldrow, 1979 cited in Huselid, 1995) which is suggested to represent roughly 40 per cent of employee salary (Becker and Huselid, 1992 cited in Huselid, 1995). More recent research has considered the measure of performance to include performance improvement as identified through multiple stakeholders such as customers, investors and employees, thus assessing performance through a 'balanced scorecard' measure of performance (Ulrich, 1997). All in all, the dominant measure of performance appears to relate to improvements in organizational financial performance, identified through such activities as reduced employee turnover, increased employee productivity, reduced staffing numbers, organizational longevity, stock performance and, with Ulrich's balanced scorecard technique, customer and employee satisfaction.

This reflected a fascinating journey of HRM and organizational performance, which showed, year by year, the true complexity in this relationship. With Ulrich's argument that success is determined by outcomes not activities, came a new line of HR research that rejected the claim that HRM practices alone improved organizational performance. This line of research was set to continue the search to identify why and how HRM practices; or indeed SHRM practices; improved organizational performance.

Despite the extensive research into the HRM-performance relationship, it became apparent that although there was strong agreement that this relationship existed, no researcher was able to offer an explanation as to how or why these relationships existed or what may have mediated them. There was acceptance that a relationship existed, but it appeared no one completely understood why it existed.

Identifying and Understanding the Mediators of the HRM – Performance Relationship

The exploration of mediators or moderators in the HRM-performance relationship began with consideration of the workers themselves and how they perceived HRM practices. The premise was that the perception of the HRM practice in fact had more influence on the practices' success and impact of performance than the actual practice itself (Kuan, 2003). Gardner and Wright (2009) agreed that perception played a role in mediating the HRM-performance link. However, they suggested that where employee perceptions were considered by researchers, they were skewed by an implicit performance theory that influenced their ratings of HRM practices and performance. That is, where individuals believed that effective HRM practices would result in organizational performance they identified this to be the case in their organization (Gardner and Wright, 2009 p.67). Therefore, it is not the practice itself that influences performance, nor the perception of the practice, but the combination of this perception and people's inherent expectation of the practice (Kuan, 2003; Gardner and Wright, 2009). The more exploration of the HRM - performance link occurred the more apparent the complexity became. As the level of complexity increased, so did further research.

Researchers went on to argue that worker attitude and behaviour mediated the HRM – performance relationship (Guest, 2002). Guest argued that these early links between HRM practices and performance failed to consider the role the workers themselves played in this relationship. Guest is among a growing number of researchers who believe that it is the understanding of people in the middle of this relationship that has been neglected. Further, in order to truly understand how and why HRM practices influence performance or to truly understand the process through which HRM impacts on performance, a focus on the workers themselves must be considered (Wood, 1999; Guest, 2002). In a similar vein other researchers argued that ‘if HRM activities are to have an impact on HRM outcomes and firm performance, it will take place only if worker attitudes and, in particular, worker behaviour, are affected (Guest, 1997; Purcell et al., 2003; cited in Hope-Hailey, 2005 p. 50). The missing link between HRM practice and performance continued to point to the workers themselves.

To test the relationship between HRM practices and performance from a different angle, Truss looked at a high performance organization and sought to identify whether or not its HRM practices influenced this level of performance. Her research showed that this link was far from clear. She claimed that even a high performing organization with a reputation for excellence in HRM could not show a clear link between these practices and the firm’s overall performance. She concluded that there remained a significant gap in understanding the link between HRM practice and organizational performance (Truss, 2001).

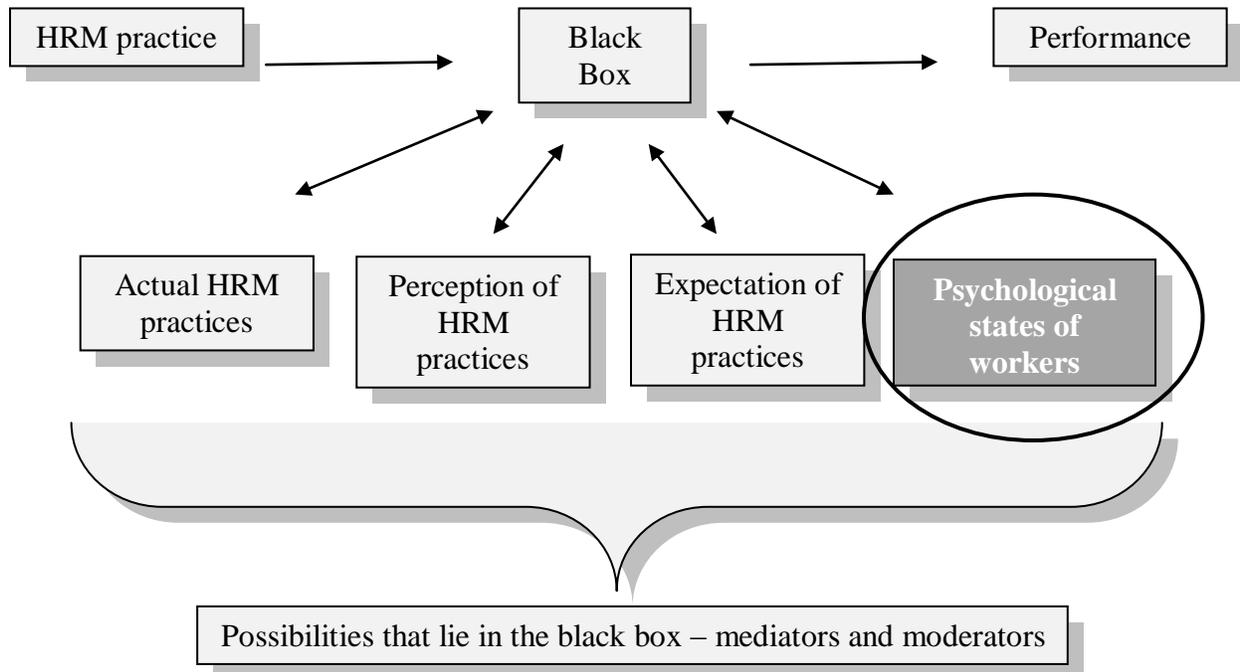
An earlier review of the literature that links HRM practice to performance is in agreement with the findings of Truss and Guest claiming that there had been an ‘increasing disregard for the mechanisms that link HRM and performance’ (Wood, 1999 p.408). This argument went further to claim that there had been a significant neglect of the psychological processes that mediate or moderate the link between HRM practices and performance. Indeed, Wood (1999) argued that the road to understanding this link was to explore these psychological mediators and moderators in considerably more depth (1999, p.409.)

Others have agreed, suggesting that this link remains sufficiently unclear to warrant giving this research ‘a high priority by HRM scholars’ and that improving the understanding of this relationship ‘might also prove to be the most convincing evidence to practitioners of the value of

the HRM function' (Ferris et al., 1999). This journey to understand exactly how and why HRM practices influence performance has led researchers to search for what they consider to be the 'holy grail' of HRM; an understanding of what lies within the 'black box' that links HRM practices to organizational performance (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood 1999; Truss, 2001; Guest 2002; Bosalie Dietz and Boon, 2005; Hope-Hailey, Farndale and Truss, 2005; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Conway and Monks, 2008; Gong et al., 2009). The 'black box' represents everything that is not yet known or understood about why or how HRM practices improve organizational performance. Researchers argue that the 'holy grail' of decisive proof that the relationship between HRM and performance exists, remains elusive (Bosalie et al., 2005; Conway and Monks, 2008). Further, researchers such as Bosalie and his colleagues suggest that we 'still require a theory about HRM, a theory about performance and a theory about how they are linked' (Guest, 1997 cited in Bosalie et al., 2005). In addition to this, Edwards and Wright suggest that '...it remains rare for studies to assess all the links in this chain (between HRM and performance), with the effects on employee commitment being a particularly rarely studied issue (2001, p.570). Ostroff and Bowen (2000 as cited in Conway and Monks, 2009) suggest that the 'prospect of unlocking the 'black-box' that represents the complex HR-performance relationship requires a multi-level approach, with more attention needing to be paid to employee attitudes (such as commitment) (Conway and Monks, 2009). Organizational commitment as an employee attitude may be a missing link in the chain between HRM and performance and thus an element of the 'black box' of HRM. Consideration of this role of organizational commitment, therefore, does indeed seem warranted.

To illustrate the discussion of the 'black box' of HRM, diagram 2.1 brings together some of the possible mediators that lie within it, linking HRM functions to organizational performance. The fourth box in this diagram is presented in a darker shade of grey and is identified as a possible moderator, labeled 'psychological states of workers' it relates to a key aspect of this research study: the possibility that one of the psychological states of workers that influences performance may be their state of organizational commitment.

Diagram 2.1: The ‘Black Box’ of HRM



A Theory about HRM, A Theory about Performance, and a Theory about how they are linked. A Theory about the role of Organizational Commitment in this Relationship.

HRM Practices Can Influence the Development of Commitment

Researchers have long agreed that the role of human resource management policies and practices in any organization is to ensure the effective recruitment, development and retention of committed and competent workers (Guest, 2002; Dick and Metcalf, 2001; Whitener, 2001; Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005; Swailes, 2004). This role is realised in part through certain HRM practices that appear to influence the development of organizational commitment in workers (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong et al., 2009). Reflecting on the most recent research suggesting that organizational commitment plays a role in the HRM-

performance relationship, Gong and his colleagues separated HR systems into performance-orientated and maintenance-orientated systems. They defined performance-orientated systems as HR practices that ‘provide motivation and enabling mechanisms through such activities as training and task participation’ (Gong et al., 2009). Maintenance-orientated systems, on the other hand, focused on employee-well-being, equality of remuneration and employment security (Gong et al., 2009). Gong and his colleagues suggest that performance-orientated HR systems have a positive influence on organizational performance and that this is mediated by middle managers’ affective commitment to the organization. They also suggest that maintenance-orientated HR systems have no positive impact on organizational performance; but do have an influence on the development of continuance commitment (Gong et al., 2009). In their words, their study offered the ‘first empirical examination of managerial commitment as a link between systems of HR practices and firm performance’ (2009, p.272).

Conway and Monks (2009), in their research identified the way in which HR practices can influence the development of organizational commitment. Their research found that employees’ attitudes to HR practices had a greater impact on affective commitment than they did on either normative or continuance commitment. This meant that some HR practices were associated with increasing affective commitment. In agreement with this premise, slightly earlier research identified a positive relationship between the HR practice of offering employee support programs and the development of affective commitment (Grant et al., 2008). Contrary to the original premise that offering employee support programs would positively affect the development of affective commitment, Grant and his colleagues found that this HR practice brought higher levels of affective commitment by enabling employees to *give* support to colleagues thus ‘triggering a process of pro-social sense-making about the self and the (organization) that strengthened employees’ affective commitment to the (organization)’ (2008, p.912).

Prior to these studies taking place, researchers Steijn and Leisink (2006) agreed that studies into HRM practices and organizational commitment were limited and in their attempt to address this they undertook a study into the antecedents of organizational commitment in the Dutch public sector. Their results concurred with Kuan’s (2003) premise that the perception of HRM practices has a greater impact on employee performance than the actual practices themselves. In

this study it was the perception of such practices that influenced the development of affective and to a lesser degree, normative commitment (2006, p.199). This research is not dissimilar to Meyer and Smith's (2000) study in which they also stated that 'the potential impact of HRM practices on commitment has received far less attention than it deserves' (2000, p.319) and in which they found that although there was a relationship between HRM practices and the development of affective and normative commitment, it was mediated by employees' perception of organizational support and to a lesser extent, their perception of procedural justice. A key point in this research relates to the relationship between HRM practices and the development of continuance commitment.

Although Meyer and Smith did not find a relationship between the perception of HRM practices and continuance commitment, they speculate that HRM practices probably do influence the development of continuance commitment. Indeed they suggest that 'rather than being related to the evaluation of HRM practices, continuance commitment might be influenced by specific practices that increase the cost of leaving' the organization (2000, p.328). This offers an interesting dimension to the mediating relationship of organizational commitment in the HRM-performance relationship.

The mediating role of affective and normative commitment in the HRM-performance relationship appears to be linked to employee perceptions of HRM practices. Conversely; the mediating link of continuance commitment has more to do with the actual HRM practices themselves. Research suggests that the 'black-box' is multi-leveled (Conway and Monks, 2009); that it might include the complex construct of organizational commitment; and that it may be that the HRM-performance relationship is independently influenced by actual HRM practices that bring about higher levels of continuance commitment. In this research study this last point is of great importance due to the particular interest in continuance commitment in an APS department, its variance and its role in the HRM-performance relationship in this public sector context.

To explore this possibility, it is necessary to look further into the relationship between HRM and organizational commitment; into the organizational commitment construct itself; and into the relationship between organizational commitment and organizational performance.

The Organizational Commitment and Organizational Performance Relationship

According to research, there is evidence to show that HRM practices influence the development of organizational commitment (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong et al., 2009). Diagram 2.2 depicts this relationship.

Diagram 2.2. HRM Practices as antecedents to Organizational Commitment States



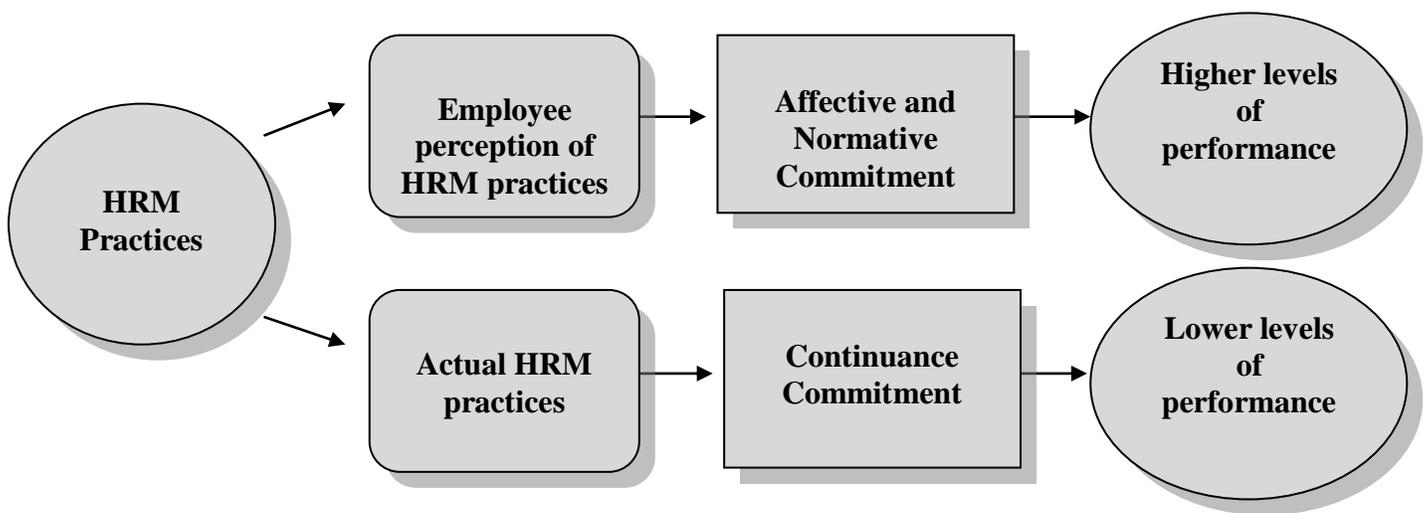
There is also evidence to suggest that organizational commitment influences organizational performance. Performance has been found to be enhanced where there are high levels of affective commitment (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer et al., 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001) or where a commitment profile is such that workers become ‘devoted’ to their organization rather than ‘trapped’ in it (Gellatly et al., 2009). This relationship is depicted in diagram 2.3.

Diagram 2.3 Organizational Commitment States Mediating Organizational Performance



Considering these two relationships it becomes apparent that the HRM-performance relationship may be linked through organizational commitment, as has been suggested (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong et al., 2009). A key aspect of this relationship may be the way in which employee perceptions of HRM influence the development of affective and normative commitment and how actual HRM practices influence the development of continuance commitment. This relationship between actual HRM practices and the development of continuance commitment is of particular importance and relevance as there is evidence to suggest that high levels of continuance commitment are not conducive to high performance. This issue is discussed further in this chapter, but suffice it to say at this point, that understanding the complex nature of organizational commitment becomes paramount in the search for the ‘holy grail’ of HRM because of the links between actual and perceived HRM practices and the development of affective, normative and continuance commitment and their influence on performance levels. The split between actual and perceived HRM practices, their links to the development of the elements of commitment and the apparent performance consequences are depicted in diagram 2.4.

Diagram 2.4 The HRM-Performance Relationship: The Mediating Effect of Organizational Commitment



Understanding the Link Between HRM Practices, Organizational Commitment and Performance

Despite the clear empirical links between HRM practices, organizational commitment and organizational performance, there appears to be a surprising lack of understanding of this relationship by HRM practitioners and a lack of reflection of this relationship in HRM models (Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley et al., 2009). This lack of understanding is of little surprise to researchers who suggest that there is ‘a disconnect’ between scholarly research into HRM and the work that HRM practitioners do; and a gap between the science of HRM and its practice (Buckley, Ferris, Bernadin and Harvey, 1998; Ferris et al., 1999; Becker and Gerhart, 1996).

In line with this, researchers such as Lawler (1985) argue that scholars must undertake more ‘useful’ research, which means it must meet two criteria: 1) research findings must facilitate practitioners’ understanding of organizations and result in improved practices; and 2) research findings must also contribute to the theory and body of knowledge generated in the science of HRM (p. 407, cited in Ferris et al., 1999). Seeking an understanding of the ‘black box’ meets both of these criteria. Scholars suggest that part of the unknown of the ‘black box’ relates to understanding the various psychological processes that may mediate or moderate the link between HRM and performance. Such psychological processes include the psychological state that binds the individual to the organization which refers to their state of organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990 p.14). Practitioners have not yet grasped the possibility of this relationship or its significance (Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley et al., 2009). As such further exploration of the mediating role of organizational commitment on the HRM-performance relationship would potentially impact on both the science and practice of HRM. Understanding the mediating role of organizational commitment requires discussion of the multi-dimensional nature of commitment and how it is related to performance and HRM practice.

The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Organizational Commitment

Early research into organizational commitment defined it as the ‘strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization,’ with commitment ‘generally characterized by at least three factors:(a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization;

[and] (c) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership' (Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974 p.604). This early research identified the link between organizational commitment and employee turnover. The key finding was significant in that it identified the attitude relating to organizational commitment as a clearer indicator than job satisfaction, of an employee's decision to leave an organization (p.607). In 1978, Mowday and his colleagues explored the concept of organizational commitment further in their research that developed their Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1978). However, more recent research by Allen and Meyer in their leading work on organizational commitment identified commitment as a multi-dimensional construct and as such they re-defined the concept, adding to the research previously undertaken by Porter and Mowday and their colleagues. Allen and Meyer's model of commitment identifies three components or states of commitment. These differences involve the psychological state reflected in commitment, the antecedent conditions leading to its development, and the behaviours (other than remaining with the organization) that are expected to result from commitment (1990). Allen and Meyer measured these three dimensions of commitment and found each to be empirically distinguishable constructs with different correlates. The dimensions of commitment they identified are affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. Normative commitment refers to the employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization while the third, continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the costs that an employee associates with leaving the organization. Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment is summarized in table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Allen and Meyer’s Three Component Model of Organizational Commitment

Affective Commitment	Normative Commitment	Continuance Commitment
Where an employee has an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. They are committed on the basis that they <i>‘want to’</i> stay with the organization.	Where an employee has feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. They are committed on the basis that they believe they <i>‘ought to’</i> stay with the organization.	Where an employee perceives the costs associated with leaving the organization to be too high. They are committed on the basis that they believe they <i>‘have to’</i> stay with the organization.

Allen and Meyer reported in the findings of their research (1990) that all three of these dimensions of commitment are distinguishable components, rather than three separate types of commitment and as such an individual can experience each of these psychological states to varying degrees. The ‘net sum’ of a person’s commitment to the organization reflects each of these separate psychological states (1990, p. 4).

Allen and Meyer state further that it should be recognized that all three dimensions of commitment give a clear understanding of the employee-organization link. However, they must be considered simultaneously because it is the combination of these dimensions that offers the most interesting insight into what could be considered as commitment profiles that are specific to certain industries or workplace cultures (Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova, 2012; Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Further research has added another two dimensions of commitment to Allen and Meyer’s three component model. These dimensions are ‘low alternatives’ (LA) and ‘high sacrifice’ (HS) bringing the components of commitment to 5; with these last two being sub-elements of continuance commitment. ‘Low alternatives’ refers to the individual perceiving few alternative employment options and thus staying with the organization because they perceive there is

nowhere else to go. 'High sacrifice' refers to the individual believing that there is too great a sacrifice to leave the organization (McGee and Ford, 1987; Meyer, Allen and Gellatly, 1990; Bentein et al., 2005). It can be seen clearly by these definitions that they are sub-elements of the continuance commitment component. This conceptualization of organizational commitment is currently considered the dominant model in organizational commitment research. However, the complexity of the nature of commitment remains sufficiently high to explain ongoing dispute and disagreement about the nature of commitment itself (Bergman, 2006; Solinger, van Olffen and Roe, 2008). Despite disagreements in the literature regarding the concept of organizational commitment, in this research Allen and Meyer's three component model is adopted, as despite this ongoing clarification of the construct of commitment, it remains accepted as the dominant model in this field (Bergman, 2006; Solinger et al. 2008).

Commitment Profiles

Considering these components of commitment together allows for exploration of commitment profiles. For example, the combination of affective and continuance commitment leads to a commitment profile described as 'devotion' to the organization. Conversely, a profile that is based almost entirely on continuance commitment is considered to lead to a state of feeling 'trapped' in the organization (Gellatly et al., 2009). It is the trapped profile that is the most problematic and that leads to lower levels of performance; the goal of HRM practices is to perpetuate a devoted profile and in doing so bring the highest levels of performance possible (Gellatly et al., 2009). In this research it will be important to explore the existence of a commitment profile and if a profile is identified, whether or not it is high in continuance commitment, as previous research suggests may be the case (Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). It will then be instructive to consider whether or not this would lead to the development of a trapped commitment profile in this organization and what the implications of this may be for the successful implementation of HRM practices. This issue may be considered in the data analysis.

The Relationship between Organizational Commitment and Performance

Over the last 25 years the complex nature of organizational commitment has been explored and on every occasion it has been reaffirmed that the components of organizational commitment are

empirically distinguishable (McGee and Ford, 1987; Allen and Meyer, 1990). These components differ in their antecedents and in the way that they influence an individual's performance at work (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer et al., 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002). Chen and Francesco (2001) found a direct relationship between organizational commitment and work performance. Studying a large pharmaceutical manufacturer in South China they found that affective commitment related positively to in-role performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB). They also found that continuance commitment was negatively correlated to OCB and that normative commitment moderated the relationship between commitment and in-role performance as well as OCB (2001). These findings were consistent with similar findings suggesting a positive relationship between affective commitment and in-role performance (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996).

Over the years researchers have shown a number of positive correlations between affective commitment and various aspects of performance. For example, it is suggested that there is a positive correlation between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment (Shore and Wayne, 1993; Dick and Metcalf, 2001; Whitener, 2001; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001; Mohamed, Taylor and Hussan, 2006). It is also accepted that employees with higher levels of affective commitment have higher levels of promotability (Meyer et al., 1989; Shore et al., 1995). Affective commitment is linked to higher levels of creativity and innovation, improved time management and more effective team work (Allen and Meyer, 1987). As already stated, employee support programs have recently been identified as antecedents to affective commitment because employees respond in a positive manner to the opportunity to give support to others (Grant et al., 2008). Affective commitment, when coupled with job experience and tenure, improves individual performance (Stevens et al., 1978; Wright and Bonnett, 2002; Hunter and Thatcher, 2007); and individuals who experience affective commitment are better able to cope positively with change (Stevens et al., 1978; Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999).

As there is little doubt that the affective commitment attitude improves individual performance, there is also a significant body of research that suggests that continuance commitment is not

conducive to work performance (Meyer et al.,1989; Meyer et al., 1993; Becker et al., 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003). Continuance commitment has also been linked to higher levels of tardiness at work and absenteeism (Balu, 1986; Blau, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989). The body of literature that has explored this relationship is quite extensive and is summarized in table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Literature Exploring the Relationship between Commitment and Performance

Researchers	Commitment State	Performance Relationship
Allen and Smith, 1987	Affective	Positively related to effective time management at work, to innovation and creativity and to effective team work.
Meyer et al.,1989; Shore, Barksdale and Shore, 1995	Affective	Has a positive effect on promotability; ie affectively committed employees are more likely to be promoted.
Chen and Francesco, 2001	Affective	Positively related to in-role performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB).
Chen and Francesco, 2001	Normative	Moderated the relationship between AC and in-role performance and AC and OCB
Chen and Francesco, 2001	Continuance	Negatively correlated to OCB and not associated with in-role performance.
Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978; Iverson and Buttigieg,1999	Affective	Positive relationship with the ability to cope with organizational change
Balu, 1986; Blau, 1987; Blau and Boal 1989)	‘low’ commitment	Linked to tardiness at work and absenteeism

Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999	Affective	Linked to higher acceptance of change and lower absenteeism
Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999	Normative	Lined to lower levels of absenteeism
Iverson and Buttigieg, 1999	Continuance	Linked to lower acceptance of change – higher levels of inflexibility

The Complex and Contradictory Nature of Commitment

Organizational commitment is the *‘psychological state that binds the individual to the organization’* (Allen and Meyer, 1990, P.1). It is interesting that Allen and Meyer chose the word *‘bind’* rather than another word such as *‘connect’* to describe the state of commitment. According to the Macquarie Dictionary, to *bind* something means to make *‘fast with a band or bond; encircle with a band or ligature’* (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1981 p 204). *‘Binding’* an individual to an organization conjures up a different image to *‘connecting’* an individual to an organization. This is an interesting reflection given that being committed to an organization is a good thing. Or is it? Perhaps this definition is more accurate after all. Is it possible to have individuals who are *‘bound’* to an organization and in fact should be *‘cut loose’*? Can committed individuals be a bad thing for an organization? Since the state of continuance commitment can develop a ‘trapped’ profile that may manifest in behaviours such as tardiness, absenteeism and poor performance (Gellatly et al., 2009; Balu, 1986; Blau and Boal, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989) then certainly it is probable that there are some individuals whose commitment to their organization is problematic and whose bond should indeed be broken.

It is fair to assume that there would be some of these individuals in every employment sector; individuals who appear on the surface to be highly committed but whose performance may be surprisingly low. Individuals who are influenced by HRM practices that have a direct impact on their commitment state, but who contradict the expectation that effective HRM practices improves performance; and thus cause confusion. How can it be that HRM practices bring high levels of commitment but that some highly committed individuals fail to excel in the workplace? There has been a great deal of research into the relationship between organizational commitment

and performance over the last 40 years to try to explain this contradictory relationship; however it has been done predominately in the private sector (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005). Relatively few studies have explored commitment in public sector organizations despite an acceptance that the employment context itself is believed to influence the level of commitment an individual feels towards their organization (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005). The minimal research into commitment in public sector organizations is concerning for a number of reasons notwithstanding the fact that they employ large numbers of people, spend significant amounts of public sector revenue and engage in HRM practices that are designed to bring about high levels of commitment and organizational performance. Table 2.4 outlines much of the research into organizational commitment in public sector organization since the early 1970s. The research undertaken prior to the early 1970s is not listed as the definition of commitment has evolved considerably and early studies did not measure commitment as multidimensional; nor did they adopt Allen and Meyer's three component model (TCM) of organizational commitment. For this reason this literature is less relevant to this research study.

Table 2.4: Previous Research into Organizational Commitment in Public Sector Organizations

Year	Researchers	Research and Findings
1974	Buchanan	Found higher organizational commitment in business executives than government managers.
1979	Van Maanen and Schein	Explored the development trend of organizational commitment for recruits to a US police force; findings showed that OC decreased with time and experience.
1983	Bruning and Snyder	Examined gender and position as predictors of OC in US federally funded social service organizations; found no relationship between gender, position and OC.
1989	Farkas and Tetrick	Considered the relationship between commitment and job satisfaction of male Navy recruits in the US. Findings suggested a relationship between commitment and satisfaction (Allen and Meyer's TCM was not used).
1992	Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday	Investigated the effect of commitment propensity on the development of organizational commitment in a longitudinal study of new cadets in the United States Air Force Academy. Found that situational factors and the experience of the cadets in their first year at the Academy had a significant effect on the development of organizational commitment.
1994	Liou and Nyhan	Looked at affective and continuance organizational commitment in US County Government employees; found differences between professional and non-professional public sector employees and levels of affective commitment and found stronger affective than continuance commitment.
1995	Wilson	Investigated the effects of power and politics on organizational commitment and found that they have a significant effect on

		the commitment of senior executive officers in the US Civil Service.
1997	Beck and Wilson	Explored the development of organizational commitment amongst police officers in New South Wales (Australia) and found that it decreased with time and rank.
1999	Iverson and Buttigieg	Examined the multi-dimensional construct of commitment amongst Australian male fire-fighters; found that affective commitment and normative commitment were related to lower levels of absenteeism and affective commitment was related to higher acceptance of change, continuance commitment was related to lower acceptance of change
1999	Nyhan	Assessed the relationship between affective commitment and trust in three public sector organizations in the US and found that supervisory trust was positively related to affective commitment.
2000	Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman	Studied antecedents to organizational commitment, being power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Studied a state government department in the USA and found that these antecedents influence different components of commitment.
2001	Metcalfe and Dick	Studied commitment amongst UK police officers and determined that employee experiences of behaviour that encourages teamwork, participation, personal development, and feedback influences commitment across all ranks of the police force.
2001	Dick and Metcalfe	Studied the antecedents of organizational commitment of civilian support officers in the UK police force, as compared to police officers. Found that how individuals feel they are managed and supported has a strong effect on organizational

		commitment.
2002	Goulet and Frank	Compared organizational commitment in three US sectors: public, non-profit and for-profit; found for-profit employees were the most committed followed by non-profit employees. Workers with the lowest level of commitment were in the public sector.
2004	Perry	Re-examined Nyhan's premise that supervisory trust is positively correlated to commitment; studied two organizations, one being a municipal fire department in a large city in America. Found supervisory trust to be weakly correlated to organizational commitment.
2004	Swales	Explored organizational commitment profiles amongst private and public sector accountants in the United Kingdom. Results found overall lower levels of commitment in public sector accountants across all foci, than private sector accountants.
2005	Redman and Snape	Studied the nature and consequences of employees' multiple commitments in the workplace, samples drawn from private and public sector organizations in the United Kingdom. Found several foci of commitment rather than a 'global' commitment to the organization which was influenced by the nature of the job and the work context.
2005	Freund	Studied the relationship between commitment and job satisfaction amongst community service welfare employees in Israel. Findings showed that job satisfaction was influenced by both affective commitment and continuance commitment.
2005	Karsh, Brooske and Sainfort	Considered whether job characteristics, the work environment, participation in quality improvement activities and improvement in the quality of facilities predicted job satisfaction and commitment amongst nursing home staff; part

		of a not-for-profit nursing home association in the USA. Results showed that job and organizational factors influenced commitment.
2005	Abbot, White and Charles	Explored the relationship between values and organizational commitment in a government communications department in New South Wales (Australia) and in a welfare organization also in New South Wales and found that employees in the communications department showed significantly higher levels of continuance commitment than workers in the welfare organization.
2005	Payne and Huffman	Study of US Army officers explored the relationship between mentoring, organizational commitment and actual turnover behaviour. Found officers who were mentored had higher levels of both affective and continuance commitment than their non-mentored counterparts.
2006	Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins	Explored differences in general values, work values and organizational commitment across the public sector, para-public sector and private sector (knowledge workers) in Canada. Found that private sector employees displayed greater organizational commitment than employees in the other two sectors.
2006	Carson, Carson Birkenmeier and Toma	Study explored commitment to the organization; commitment to the union; those with dual commitment and the uncommitted; within five police departments in the USA. Found those committed to the organization; those committed to the organization and the union, but not those committed only to the union reported higher levels of job satisfaction, promotion satisfaction, supervisory effectiveness, occupational identity and control over work.

2006	Mohamed, Taylor and Hassan	Explored the relationship between perceived organizational values, affective commitment and the moderating effect of career commitment, work-family balance and child-care availability for corrective officers in a public prison system in the United States. Found a negative relationship between affective commitment and intent to quit; a positive relationship between affective commitment and perceived organizational values, work-family balance and child-care support.
2008	Reid, Allen, Riemenschneider, and Armstrong	Identified a negative relationship between role ambiguity and affective commitment and a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment with public sector information technology (IT) workers in the USA.
2008	Reid, Allen, Riemenschneider, and Armstrong	Found a positive relationship between psychosocial mentoring and affective commitment amongst public sector IT workers in the USA.

Commitment in the Australian Public Service

The Australian Public Service (APS) employs 164,596 people, making it the largest employer in Australia (APS, 2010). In the Government's annual internal auditing document called 'State of the Service Report', employee commitment levels are measured and reported to the Australian Government. In 2010 this data was reported in reference to employee loyalty/commitment to their agency and to the APS as a whole. The data reported was that in a sample group of 5,607 public servants (APSC, 2010 p. xiv) 76% were loyal to and committed to the APS, 60% were committed to their agency, 21% were 'neutral' and 3% were neither loyal nor committed (APSC, 2010 p. 218). What is of relevance to this research with regard to the measurement of commitment by the Australian Public Service Commission, is that the construct of commitment appears to be measured and reported as a single construct. The State of the Service report fails to make reference, at any point, to the distinguishable components of commitment, but rather refers

only to the issue of 'commitment or loyalty' itself. The assumption appears to be that employees are either committed or they are not and that if they are, this is a positive reflection on the APS and the employing agency. It is important to reiterate that this internal government report is not part of the body of academic literature and is not peer reviewed, nor does it draw from the literature in its definition or understanding of the construct of commitment. Rather, it is an annual, government report that, for the purpose of this study, shows the relevance of this research in the Australian public service as commitment is currently considered worth measuring and the apparent lack of understanding of the construct by HRM practitioners who take part in the drafting of the report.

Inherent in this data reporting are two very important assumptions. The first is that these high levels of commitment - 76% commitment to the APS and 60% commitment to employing agency, (APSC, 2010 p. 218) - are unequivocally positive in nature, that they are commendable and fundamentally good. The second is that the current HRM practices in place are contributing to these figures and should, therefore, be retained. This latter assumption is made in light of the reference in the preface of the 2010 report that 'the State of the Service Report 2009-2010 details the activities and human resource management practices of APS agencies during 2009-2010.' (APSC, 2010, p.xiii). These inferences are significant at a time when the Australian Federal Government is undertaking a review of the APS and seeks to implement reforms that will render it 'the best public service in the world' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. v). The suggestion that HRM practices influence commitment levels is consistent with recent research (Kuan, 2003; Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton and Swart, 2005; Gong et al., 2009). The problem lies in two assumptions: that commitment is inherently and consistently positive and always brings benefits to an organization; and that HRM practices currently in place affecting apparent high levels of commitment, should remain and retain these commitment levels, if not increase them.

The most recent literature suggests that this assumption is indicative of a significant lack of understanding of the commitment construct by HRM practitioners (Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley et al., 2009). This lack of understanding is evidenced in the measuring and reporting of commitment as a single construct; in the assumption that commitment is inherently positive; and

in the fact that there does not appear to be reference in the State of the Service Report that identifies which HRM practices in particular directly influence commitment. This issue is a key issue in this study, as is the apparent lack of understanding of the construct of commitment by HRM practitioners in the APS.

Commitment across other Public Sector Organizations

The literature on commitment in public sector organizations supports the premise that in the case of the APS in 2010, commitment is misunderstood and misreported. The literature suggests that affective commitment is low and continuance commitment is high (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006), which begs the question of whether the data reported to the Australian Parliament reflects high continuance commitment. Of particular relevance to this study is research undertaken by Abbott, White and Charles (2005) and Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2006). Abbott et al. (2005) studied the relationship between values and organizational commitment in two organizations, a government communications department and a welfare organization, both in New South Wales, Australia. They found that employees in the communications department showed significantly higher levels of continuance commitment and lower levels of normative commitment than those in the welfare organization.

Lyons et al. (2006) investigated the variation in general values and organizational commitment among private and public sector employees in Canada. They found that private sector employees reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment than did public servants. The researchers noted the significance of the influence of public and private sector contexts on the level of commitment an individual feels, and suggested that their research be repeated in other national contexts to better establish the nature of these differences.

The research into the state of organizational commitment in public sector organizations supports the need for an exploratory study of commitment in the Australian Public Service. Further, improving an understanding of the commitment construct in the APS will shed more light on the premise that the employment context influences the development of commitment (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005). Allen and Meyer support

further research that considers more variance in continuance commitment. They propose allowing workers themselves to generate and weigh the importance of specific investments they have made to the organization and to determine the form of continuance commitment that they experience (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Given that one of the key differentiators between the Australian public and private sectors is the generosity in remuneration and working conditions offered in the APS, a study of commitment in the APS may offer the opportunity to explore what continuance commitment looks like in this context. The exploration of the form of continuance commitment is a key aspect of this study.

The search for the ‘holy grail’ of HRM that will give greater insight into the components of the ‘black box’ that lies between HRM practice and performance also suggests that research into commitment in the APS would be valuable. Considering what commitment looks like in this context and how it relates to HRM practices will help determine if organizational commitment mediates the relationship between HRM and performance.

To recap, three research questions are posited:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

In light of the literature presented in this chapter, several expected findings are now identified and follow a summary of the most relevant aspects of the literature to this research.

Summary of the relevant Literature

The literature is clear in the following aspects of organizational commitment:

- Affective commitment relates to an emotional connection to the organization; normative commitment reflects a sense of obligation towards an organization and continuance commitment reflects a perception of loss should one leave an organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990);
- Public sector employees experiences low levels of affective commitment in comparison to private sector employees (Goulet, and Frank, 2002; Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005);
- Public sector employees are generally less committed to their organizations than private sector employees (Lyons et al. 2006);
- Public sector employees experiences higher levels of continuance commitment than private sector employees (Goulet, and Frank, 2002; Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005)
- Variances may be evident in continuance commitment and would be best identified through qualitative research methodologies (Allen and Meyer, 1990)
- High levels of continuance commitment are not conducive to high performance ((Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel, 1995; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen and Wright, 2005; Gong, Law, Change and Xin, 2009)
- High performance requires an attitude of affective commitment (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel, 1995; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Sinclair, Tucker, Cullen and Wright, 2005; Gong, Law, Change and Xin, 2009)

- Commitment can have multiple foci (Redman and Snape, 2005)
- Commitment profiles offer greater insight into the psychological state of commitment than do assessments of the distinguishable components of commitment (Meyer, Stanley and Parfynova, 2012; Allen and Meyer, 1990)
- Commitment is influenced by organizational context (Abbott, et al.; 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, 2000; Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995)
- Commitment is an untapped aspect of human resource management and as such should be explored as a possible mediator in the relationship between strategic HRM and organizational performance (Edwards and Wright, 2001; Gellatly, Hunter, Currie and Irving, 2009; Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Bentein, 2009)

Considering this understanding of the construct of organizational commitment, exploration of commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants would expect the findings presented in table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Expected Findings from this Research in Line with Literature in the Field

Research	Findings	Expected findings from this research
Allen and Meyer (1990)	Ac – emotional connection to the organization; NC – obligation towards the organization; CC – perceived cost of leaving the organization	All three distinguishable components of OC will be evident in this group of Australian public servants and will be consistent with these definitions
Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova (2012) Allen and Meyer (1990)	CC may be varied in different employment contexts	The form CC takes in this context is unknown; it may be as defined by Allen and Meyer (1990) or it may be varied, as also proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990).
Lyons et al. (2006)	Public sector employees experience low levels of organizational commitment.	Australian public service employees experience low levels of commitment.
Abbott et al. (2005)	CC is the dominant form of commitment experienced by Australian public servants in the NSW state government.	CC is the dominant form of commitment experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants.
Goulet, and Frank (2002) Liou and Nyhan, (2004)	Public sector organizations would benefit from increased levels of AC	AC levels are low for this group of public service employees.
Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova, (2012)	Employment contexts influence organizational	The commitment experienced by this group of Australian

<p>Abbott, et al. (2005)</p> <p>Chen and Francesco (2001)</p> <p>Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, (2000)</p> <p>Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, (1992)</p> <p>Nyhan (1999)</p> <p>Pierce and Dunham (1987)</p> <p>Perry (2004)</p> <p>Swales, (2004)</p> <p>Wilson (1995)</p>	<p>commitment.</p>	<p>public servants will be influenced by the agency's context.</p>
<p>Meyer, Stanley and Parfyonova, (2012)</p> <p>Allen and Meyer (1990)</p> <p>Sinclair, Tucker, Wright and Cullen (2005)</p> <p>Gellatly, Hunter, Currie and Irving (2009)</p>	<p>Commitment profiles are more informing than exploration of the separate distinguishable components of commitment.</p>	<p>A commitment profile may be evident and informative in this setting.</p>

Each of these expected findings will be explored in this thesis and the degree to which they hold true for these Australian public service employees will be presented in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter the literature relevant to this study was reviewed and discussed. The contribution of this thesis on organizational commitment to the fields of organizational behaviour and human resource management were discussed and the expected findings of this research were presented.

This chapter presents and discusses the methodology proposed to be used in this research. Consideration of qualitative and quantitative approaches and their place in social science research will be included. Having considered each of these approaches, a discussion is presented on the appropriateness of using a mixed methodology approach in this particular study as opposed to a single approach that adopts either a quantitative or qualitative methodology. Why each approach was adopted, what approaches were planned and how the research would be undertaken are presented in this chapter.

Review of the Research Purpose

This thesis addresses three research questions that seek to determine if organizational commitment is experienced by these respondents in a similar manner as is presented in the literature. The literature suggests that public sector employees are more likely to experience a dominance of continuance commitment than private sector employees (Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). The literature is clear on commitment being multi-dimensional in nature and comprising affective, normative and continuance psychological states that operate as separate and distinguishable components of commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The literature also suggests that commitment is influenced by employment context (Meyer et al. 2012; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005) and that variances may be identified in the form that commitment takes, particularly for continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). This thesis explores commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public sector employees and seeks to determine if, as the literature suggests, continuance commitment is dominant and if it presents as defined in

the literature. If continuance commitment is not dominant for this group of respondents, or if it does not present as defined in the literature, further questions may seek to identify why this is the case and how these findings may contribute to what is known about commitment in public sector environments.

In this chapter the research methodology proposed to answer the research questions is presented and discussed. Given that a research approach must be determined, at least in part, through consideration of the research question or questions being asked (Creswell, 1994; Bryman, 2005), this chapter begins by discussing the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions: An Overview of Methodological Approaches

Question 1: What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?

This first question seeks to identify if continuance commitment is the dominant state of organizational commitment experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants as the literature suggests would be expected (Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). To date it appears that this question has neither been asked nor answered.

The answer to this question rests in data that can determine the degree to which this particular group of public servants experiences continuance commitment, relative to the degree to which they experience affective and normative commitment. Since the measurement of dominance is relative, all three components of commitment must be measured. The nature of this question suggests a quantitative approach is the most appropriate approach to use. A more detailed analysis of this question and the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that suggest a quantitative approach is most appropriate are offered in table 3.2, following directly on from table 3.1, which identifies the ontological, epistemological and methodological paradigm differences between quantitative and qualitative research.

Question 2: In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?

This second research question seeks to identify if continuance commitment is experienced by these respondents in a manner that is congruent with Allen and Meyer's definition of continuance commitment (1990). This definition is widely accepted as accurate in all settings in which it has been tested and as such it is expected to be accurate in this setting as well.

However, in an almost contradictory manner, the research also suggests that continuance commitment may vary in its form given differences that exist in remuneration and conditions across different employment sectors and organizations. Differences in employment conditions may represent different perceived losses for employees should they change employers or employment sectors (Allen and Meyer 1990). Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment is very widely accepted as the leading model of commitment and the reliability and validity of this model has been tested repeatedly. However, there is some tension between the ideas that Allen and Meyer's model accurately and reliably defines commitment in different environments and that commitment is influenced by employment contexts (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005). As there are no peer reviewed publications that have explored commitment in the Australian federal public service, it seems worthwhile that this study consider if continuance commitment is dominant, as would be expected, and if it fits the definition presented in Allen and Meyer's model.

The answer to the second research question cannot be found in the quantifiable levels of continuance commitment that would have already been measured and thus factually determined. Rather, the knowledge required to answer this question will be found in the experiences and perceptions of the respondents themselves which makes this knowledge subjective and highly varied: it must be drawn from the respondents by the researcher and it will reflect respondents' personal values and will be influenced by individual experience. This stage of the study requires an inductive rather than deductive approach because the knowledge sought will emerge through the study itself and is neither predetermined nor categorized. This second question therefore

requires a qualitative approach to answer it accurately and effectively. A further analysis of this discussion is presented in table 3.2.

Question 3: What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

Recent research in this field links organizational commitment and HRM practices and asks specific questions about the role that HRM practices themselves play in influencing continuance commitment (Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Meyer and Smith, 2000; Guest, 2002; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong et al., 2009) and in the role that commitment may play in the link between HRM practices and organizational effectiveness (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood 1999; Truss, 2001; Guest, 2002; Bosalie et al., 2005; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Conway and Monks, 2008; Gong et al., 2009). Researchers suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the commitment construct by HRM professionals and that this should be addressed (Conway and Monks, 2009; Stanley et al., 2009) particularly since the role of HRM is, in many ways, to enhance performance and staff commitment (Whitenes, 2001; Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005 Swailes, 2004). This thesis, therefore, responds to calls to consider HRM practices as part of the research into commitment, and as such it will discuss HRM implications that may become evident having measured the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment as it is experienced by these respondents and having explored the degree to which it fits Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990).

If there are HRM implications they are expected to emerge from this research and as such they have not been predetermined. However, as with research question two, answering research question three requires subjective knowledge to be drawn from the respondents themselves by the researcher and therefore cannot be measured in an independent, objective, unbiased, quantitative manner. Along with question two, this question will be answered through a qualitative method. A summary of this reasoning is presented in table 3.2.

Given the nature of the three questions presented, this study requires the adoption of a mixed method approach. The study is intended to be run in two stages: The first will adopt a

quantitative approach and address the first research question. The second stage will adopt a qualitative approach to address the second question. The findings will then allow for consideration of the third research question., These approaches will be presented in detail in this chapter following a general review of quantitative and qualitative approaches and of the benefits of using a mixed methodology.

A review of Research Methodology: Quantitative or Qualitative

Researchers have for many years argued that the traditional quantitative research methodology was, and still is, favored over the more contemporary qualitative approach (Smith 1983; Smith and Heshusius, 1986 as cited in Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). However, in the social and behavioural sciences this has been an issue of some contention as social scientists have argued extensively for the benefits of qualitative research (Thompson, 2004; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004; Bryman, 2006; Bryman, Becker and Sempik, 2007; Fielding, 2009).

Despite the depth of consideration that is reflected in the literature on research methodologies, for the purpose of this chapter it is neither appropriate nor necessary to relay the long and complex philosophical arguments presented on both sides of this debate. It is sufficient to note that the choice of research methodology was once a controversial and sensitive discussion that rested upon very different research paradigms, as summarized in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Quantitative or Qualitative Approaches: A Summary of Paradigm Differences:

Assumption	Question	Quantitative	Qualitative
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is objective and singular, apart from the researcher.	Reality is subjective and multiple as seen by respondents in a study.
Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to that researched?	Researcher is independent from that being researched.	Researcher interacts with that being researched.
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Value-free and unbiased.	Value-laden and biased.
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	Formal, based on set definitions, impersonal voice, and use of accepted quantitative words.	Informal, evolving decisions, personal voice, accepted qualitative words.
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Deductive, cause and effect, static design – categories isolated before study, context free, generalizations leading to prediction, explanation and understanding. Accurate and reliable through validity and reliability.	Inductive process, mutual simultaneous shaping of factors, emerging designs, categories identified during research process, context bound, patterns, theories developed for understanding, accurate and reliable through verification.

Sources: Creswell, John W. Research design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 1994; Vanderstoep, Scott W and Johnston, Diedre D. Research Methods for Everyday Life: Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 2009

The debate over research methodology has progressed for a number of years. Today, however, most researchers and scientists in the social science field agree that this great divide between approaches, based on contradictory paradigms, no longer holds the weight that it once did. Indeed, many argue that a mixed method approach is superior to mono-method approaches to research (Howe, 1992; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004; Creswell, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Fielding, 2010).

These paradigm differences are presented again in Table 3.2, against each of the three research questions being asked in this research study. Through consideration of the quantitative and qualitative paradigm assumptions, the reasons for choosing a mixed method approach are illustrated further.

Quantitative or Qualitative Approaches: A Summary of Paradigm Differences: Answering the Research Questions in this Study through a Mixed Method Approach

Table 3.2

Question 1: <i>What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?</i>		
Assumption	Question	Quantitative
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Determining the levels of continuance commitment that exist for this group of employees requires the identification of facts that are objective and that have no reference to or relationship with the researcher.
Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to that researched?	There is no relationship between the researcher and the question being answered at this point in the research study. Researcher is independent at this point.
Axiological	What is the role of values?	There is no role for values at this point in the study. The answer to this question is values-free and unbiased.
Rhetorical	What is the language of Research?	Continuance commitment is to be measured, relative to affective and normative commitment, using formal descriptions, pre-determined and previously tested for reliability and validity.
Methodological	What is the process of research?	The categories of organizational commitment being measured are static and pre-determined; they are not developed specifically for this study. These categories are proven in the literature to be reliable and valid and have not been modified for this study. They therefore remain context free.

		The findings at this stage of the study offer factual knowledge regarding the levels of commitment experienced by this particular group of Australian public servants.
Question 2: <i>In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?</i>		
Assumption	Question	Qualitative
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Identifying and exploring the form that continuance commitment takes requires subjective information from the respondents themselves; to draw accurate conclusions about this, several respondents must be consulted and common themes identified.
Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to that researched?	The researcher guides the respondents through managed conversation (focus group sessions) to draw out perceptions, thoughts and opinions that will offer insight into the formation of continuance commitment, to identify the existence of variances in the form of this commitment. The assumption is that respondents may not be practiced in articulating their state of commitment or the unique variances within it and thus will require guidance from the researcher through specific questions, to draw out the elements of this state of commitment. It is also assumed that respondents' consideration of each-others' input into the discussion will facilitate insight and allow for relevant perceptions and thoughts to be generated and shared. There is a relationship between respondents and the researcher; the information

		sought requires interaction between the researcher and the respondents.
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Exploring the form that continuance commitment takes for this group of public servants requires consideration of personal values; invariably the researcher will pose questions and generate discussion that may reflect the researcher's values. The perceptions, thoughts, opinions and experiences shared by the respondents will reflect individual values and personal biases; these cannot and should not be removed because exploring the form of continuance commitment as a psychological attitude must incorporate personal values and biases.
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	The process of seeking personal perceptions, experiences, thoughts and opinions requires a personal relationship between the researcher and the respondents and a comfortable rapport. This is developed through informal language and personal stories and contributions. Themes will emerge that inform the researcher as to the form of continuance commitment for these employees and this emergent process requires informal, personal and evolving discussions.
Methodological	What is the process of research?	The researcher enters this stage of the study without pre-determined ideas or categories, but with an open mind to allow themes to emerge through discussion that reflect the psychological state of continuance commitment for these employees. These themes are then reflected back

		to respondents, explored, verified and understood by the researcher through the discussions being held.
Question 3: <i>What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public service context?</i>		
Assumption	Question	Qualitative
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	The reality being sought to answer this question is subjective and is identified through discussions with respondents in this study; the researcher is not able to determine this objectively, but must draw conclusions through discussions that reflect the state of commitment experienced. Themes emerge through discussions with several respondents who work within this context.
Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to that researched?	The researcher draws information and themes from the respondents through questions and directs conversation in order to facilitate the sharing of information. This information may identify unforeseen theoretical issues relevant to discussions on commitment and HRM. The researcher facilitates this discussion through questions that are designed to draw out relevant information. This approach invariably requires the sharing of personal experiences and benefits from a comfortable, personal rapport being developed.
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Sharing personal experiences and stories will facilitate sharing personal values and biases as these are accepted as playing a role in determining experiences, perceptions, thoughts and opinions.

		Personal values and biases are drawn out and may influence the themes that emerge. The researcher shares values and biases only in an attempt to facilitate honesty and develop a comfortable rapport.
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	The process of sharing personal experiences requires a personal voice and comfortable, honest and open discussion. Personal descriptions are drawn out and personal interpretations, thought and opinions included. The language is subjective, highly varied and contextual.
Methodological	What is the process of research?	The answer to this question emerges and as with question 2 the researcher remains open minded and accepting of the issues that may emerge through this stage of the study. An inductive process allows for themes and issues to develop and for implications to be identified. These are verified through reflection back to respondents.

Philosophically, it is apparent that a mixed methodology is appropriate for this study.

The Advantages of a Mixed Method Approach

Many contemporary researchers and scholars have expressed the numerous benefits of a mixed methodology approach. They agree that the approach undertaken must relate directly to the research question being proposed and result in a richer, deeper and more accurate understanding of a phenomenon (Thompson, 2004; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Bryman, 2006; Bryman et al., 2007; Fielding, 2009). Fielding’s research suggests that a mixed method approach is even more relevant where the effect of policy is explored in a government context (2009). He also suggests that the benefits of this approach in exploring complex phenomenon as it occurs in a social context is so great as to deem mono-method

approaches a threat to the advancement of social science research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004). In recent years much has been published about research methodology that promotes the benefits of a mixed-method approach and a summary of this is outlined in table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Recent Research into the Benefits of Mixed-Method Approaches

Year	Researchers	Research Findings
2004	Thompson	Mixed-method provides social researchers with the means of avoiding research that uses ‘one eye rather than two’ and should be accepted as a middle way of researching that allows for a ‘zigzag’ approach across qualitative and quantitative methods resulting in a full and mutual exploration: ‘a sociology using both eyes to the full’.
2004	Johnson and Onwuegbuzie	Mixed-method research can be superior to mono-method research; qualitative research following quantitative research that taps into respondents’ perspectives and meanings can help avoid potential problems with experimental research; the goal in mixed method research is not to search for corroboration in findings from the different approaches but to expand understanding of the phenomenon. Mixed method approaches can be conducted concurrently or sequentially. However at some point the findings must be integrated to offer a complete understanding of the phenomena being studied.
2004 and 2005	Onwuegbuzie and Leech	Qualitative data can help investigators to explain relationships emerging from quantitative data; one method verifies findings stemming from the other and enhances interpretation of significant findings. Mono-method research is a threat to the advancement of social sciences and contrary to contemporary pragmatic research; there are similarities between quantitative and qualitative approaches in observation, data interpretation and speculation. Both approaches are required to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena.
2006	May	Adhering to one research method can bring about conservatism of

		thought and of repeatedly asking the same questions while failing to ask new questions that would shed new light on social phenomenon. Data is not objective but are heavily influenced by the method that generated them. Data is understood in relation to the purpose for which they are created and therefore different methods are complementary as they represent different perspectives. Mixed methods provide the best way to ‘connect the dots’ and create something above and beyond two sets of data.
2006	Bryman	Spirit of pragmatism prevails with regard to combining qualitative and quantitative research methods where a research question is suited to the mixed-method approach. The ‘paradigm wars’ are over and mixed-method research is now promoted in social research.
2007	Bryman, Becker and Sempik	Research into social policy researchers’ views on using a mixed methodology approach showed general agreement that the approach adopted should be relevant to the research question; should be transparent; and mixed-method findings should be integrated. General support for mixed-method approaches indicated acceptance of combining qualitative and quantitative methods where the benefits were clearly stated through a research rationale.
2010	Fielding	Mixed-method research is not a research technique but an approach to inquiry that is designed to ensure an adequate understanding of social phenomena. Mixed-method research is increasingly relevant in understanding the complex effects of policy interventions in government. This is evidenced by increasing requests for mixed method approaches in government research tender invitation.

Further, researchers have suggested that there are five key reasons to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches:

Triangulation

- Using mixed methods can facilitate the testing of results and therefore seek to determine the degree to which each methodology's results converge;

Complementary

- Using a mixed methods approach may also allow for the exploration of a possible overlapping of findings and for further identification and exploration of phenomenon;

Developmental

- Using a mixed methods approach may allow for the first method to sequentially help inform the second method used and therefore test the reliability of the findings from the first method used;

Initiation

- A mixed methods approach may also allow for contradictions in findings or new perspectives to emerge from the research; and

Expansion

- Mixed methods may add scope and breadth to a study that might otherwise be missed in a single method approach (Creswell, 1994:175).

A mixed methodology approach is deemed the most appropriate method for this study. In line with Creswell's five point summary, the benefit of a mixed method approach is developmental, as the preliminary quantitative study to determine if continuance commitment is dominant for this group of public servants will inform the second, core aspect of this study, to explore the form that continuance commitment may take within this group of respondents and to identify any theoretical issues that arise that may contribute to broader HRM discussions. It allows for a deeper exploration of commitment as it is experienced by a small group of Australian federal public servants and the opportunity to explore this from the respondents' perspectives themselves. It will allow for greater breadth of understanding and for new issues to emerge in the development of organizational commitment in this context. It may also enable a better understanding of the effect HRM policies and practices have on this development. Given the benefits of a mixed method approach and the paradigm assumptions based on the research

questions that have already been discussed in detail, it seems clear that adopting a mixed method approach in this instance is both appropriate and beneficial.

The Methodology Proposed for this Research Study

Apart from the brief overview presented on the approaches deemed suitable for each of the three research questions to be answered in this study, much of this chapter has focused on philosophical issues relating to research methodology. The remainder of this chapter outlines the methodology adopted and will touch further on why the approach is deemed appropriate, what the approach entails and how the research will be undertaken. To begin with, the research conditions that were agreed to are discussed as these conditions influenced some aspects of the research methodology.

Research Conditions

This research study was welcomed in the case agency and although such research had not taken place in the past, there was a sense of enthusiasm and excitement portrayed by the senior managers about this study. However, there was also a tendency for conservatism and, therefore, there was a request that care to be taken to ensure respondents felt comfortable while they took part. This request resulted in four conditions being agreed to by the researcher.

The first condition related to the way the study would be managed with agreement that this be done internally. The researcher agreed not to approach staff personally to request their involvement in the study. Rather, this was to be done by line managers. To ensure that involvement was both anonymous and voluntary, line managers agreed not to nominate respondents. They also agreed to encourage respondents to be open and honest and ensured them of managements' support for the study. A response rate for the quantitative stage of this study was 73%, reflecting 44 of the 60 respondents who completed and returned questionnaires. This was very pleasing and suggested that line managers were encouraging of participant involvement in this study.

The second condition related only to the quantitative stage of this research. The researcher agreed to have all items in the questionnaire positively worded. This request reflected some inexperience with academic research on behalf of the division's management. Although they were supportive of the study and were genuinely interested in the findings, they were careful to ensure that the questionnaire itself did not entice a sense of discomfort in the respondents. The assumption that discomfort could occur through the process was challenged in discussions with the case agency's management, however, their insistence on positively wording all items was unable to be influenced. With some initial hesitation, this condition was agreed to.

This re-wording resulted in the need to run two pre-tests to ensure that the re-worded questionnaire remained effective, which it did, as explained later in this chapter. A copy of the modified questionnaire is included in this thesis at Appendix A.

The third condition that was agreed to was that a report be written and provided to the managers of the Corporate Services Division on the findings of the study once data collection and analysis were completed. The management team was genuinely interested in the findings of this study and therefore there was agreement that these be provided to the team at the conclusion of data analysis. This information was intended to inform HRM practices in the department. This condition had no impact on the methodology used in this study.

The final condition agreed to was that the department remain anonymous. For this reason it is not named in any part of this thesis. Therefore only 2 of the 4 conditions influenced the research methodology used in this study.

Choice of Case Agency

It is important, at this point, to explain why the research remained within this agency, despite these conditions being placed upon the researcher and how the researcher's relationship with the agency contributed to the overall study and influenced the research methodology.

This case agency exemplifies Australian federal government departments in its culture, age, size, degree of stability and political influence. This is one of five central agencies in the Australian

Public Service that is considered exemplary and truly typical of the core of the Australian federal government. Despite the existence of four other similar agencies, it was important to remain with this agency because of the researcher's relationship with the agency, the researcher's understanding of the culture and context of this agency and the researcher's relationship with the respondents. Gaining access to a central Australian Federal Government department was somewhat exceptional and to the researcher's knowledge it is more common for this type of access to be granted to researchers by the larger service delivery departments such as those that administer health programs, welfare programs and education programs.

Examining organizational commitment as it was experienced by a group of generalist public servants drawn from a central government agency was preferred over those employed in service delivery departments because of the stable nature of the central agency and the expectation that there would be a strong, stable public sector culture and a deeply embedded public sector attitude from employees. It was considered unlikely that these employees were committed to a professional field such as public health, public education, environment and climate change for example and it was unlikely that they would be committed to a profession such as accounting, law, information management or engineering etc. The public servants employed in this particular government department and in this corporate services division were very likely to be career public servants whose commitment rested with this department as a core public service department, rather than to a program management or public policy department or personal profession.

It was also considered beneficial to this research to use the insight into this department that had been gained through consultancy services. This insight enabled the researcher to work with the managers and focus group respondents effectively as the established trust and rapport facilitated openness and willingness to be involved. It was considered less likely that respondents would refuse to take part in the research, or present a 'company line' in sharing their thoughts on commitment in focus group sessions because of the trust and rapport that was already established. The qualitative nature of the study, in particular, was deemed to benefit from this relationship.

This benefit is supported in the literature that suggests that there have been significant studies that have begun through direct contact with organizations through activities such as running training programs or consulting to the organization (Daft, 1983). Significant findings can be obtained where researchers feel passionate about their research, where they believe in an idea that 'feels' good in its ability to 'throw light on a previously hidden aspect of an organization' and where the research originates in the organization as opposed to an academic environment (Daft, 1983, p. 543). This research study reflects the researcher's professional interest in consulting into Australian federal government agencies with the objective of understanding how these organizations work and how best to achieve high individual performance levels. The case agency was known to the researcher following several years of consulting within it and the researcher was particularly interested in undertaking this research within this department.

Finally, in line with the literature, this study seeks to bring together over ten years of consulting experience with six years of academic research, where the researcher sought to 'bring together what [she] was doing intellectually with what [she] was doing as a person; trusting [her] own experience' which is considered to be 'the mark of a mature scholar' (Daft, 1983 p.543). Through an embedded, illustrative case study and the use of focus group sessions, the study is designed not to test a hypothesis that allows for the extrapolation of findings across a broader environment, but to explore how organizational commitment is experienced by a very specific group of individuals. This study seeks to 'take a deep slice into [an] organization and convey a rich conceptualization [with] the goal to simply understand a tiny piece of organizational reality, with insights used to raise new questions for future research, [given the possibility that] substantial insights about organizational relationships can be uncovered from an assessment of a few key dimensions' (pp.541, 542).

However, it is also important to note that the complexity of undertaking qualitative social research within the work context is not underestimated and has not been taken for granted in this research.

Undertaking a study such as this poses a number of challenges. The researcher must be granted permission to undertake the study within the organization. The researcher must be mindful of the fact that for this research to be successful, respondents must interrupt their normal working

day to take part. It is important to respect the impact of such a request on an individual's workload and to be considerate of the generosity that respondents offer in agreeing to take part. The researcher must be mindful not to request more than is reasonable and required or to take this generosity for granted, thus, a degree of sensitivity and political understanding is required. Further challenges relate to the degree to which respondents feel comfortable sharing their personal feelings and experiences about their employment, with an external researcher, but also knowing that there is some knowledge of the research by senior management. As has been discussed already in this chapter, the relationship the researcher has with this agency was thought to have a positive influence on respondents' willingness to be open about their experience of commitment.

Mixed methodology studies are particularly challenging in these environments where history suggests that the data collected and analyzed from different research methods can contain confusing and contradictory results and yet quantitative data collections alone may fail to capture the complex nature of management research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Given these realities it is important to acknowledge the challenges that are inherent in a study such as this and the limitations that these challenges may bring to the research. This study was not free of these challenges. Earlier in this chapter four conditions were presented that reflect the complexity of undertaking researching inside organizations and much discussion has been offered regarding the importance of the relationship the researcher had with the respondents of this study and the degree to which this assisted in overcoming some of the challenges of undertaking research inside organizations. Finally, the limitations that are inherent in this study are presented at various points in this thesis.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss in more detail the research method used to address the three research questions posited in this study.

Measuring the Levels of Continuance Commitment in a Public Sector Agency

Continuance commitment, although defined previously in this thesis, refers to a state of commitment that is based upon a perception that the cost of leaving the organization is too great, resulting in an employee feeling compelled to stay with the organization: they feel they 'have to

stay' with the organization. By contrast, affective commitment occurs where a person feels that they 'want to stay' with the organization because they feel a personal connection to the organization, an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. Normative commitment refers to employees' attachment based on the individual's belief system relating to the organization expecting loyalty from the individual. This means they tend to believe they 'should stay' with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Understanding the construct of organizational commitment offers insight into an individual's performance at work, including their success as a team member and their time management and tendency to be innovative (Allen and Smith, 1987); the likelihood that they will adopt organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Cohen, 1993; Bishop and Scott, 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001); and their levels of absenteeism (Balu, 1986; Blau, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989). The research suggests that positive behaviours and high performance levels are most likely experienced where the individual feels affective commitment; are present but modified where they feel normative commitment; and are unlikely where they feel only continuance commitment (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Allen and Smith, 1987; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Becker, Billings et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002; Grant et al., 2008). The research that suggests that continuance commitment is high in public sector organizations (Abbott et al. 2005; Lyons et al., 2006) and affective commitment is low in public sector organizations (Liou and Nyhan, 2004) is, therefore, potentially concerning because of the clear relationship between commitment states and performance.

This part of the research study was designed to determine whether this was also the experience of a group of Australian federal public servants, in other words, if continuance commitment was the dominant form of commitment that they experienced.

A Quantitative Approach

What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?

A quantitative approach was considered appropriate for this stage of the study because it meant data could be gathered objectively, factually and reliably, to measure the possible dominance of continuance commitment, relative to affective and normative commitment, for a group of Australian federal public servants. From a philosophical perspective, the reason this approach was deemed appropriate to answer question one, was presented in table 3.2.

The quantitative approach that was considered suitable for this stage of the research was to use a modified version of Allen and Meyer's Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) to determine the levels of affective, normative and continuance commitment experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants, to determine if this group was typical of other groups of public servants who have shown higher levels of continuance commitment than affective and normative commitment (Abbot et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006; Goulet and Frank, 2002).

This questionnaire has been used previously by an Australian researcher (Chen and Francesco, 2001) in measuring levels of affective, normative and continuance commitment and was deemed reliable in its capacity to do so. The questionnaire required some minor modifications that were requested by the case agency and related to having all items positively worded. This questionnaire is included in this thesis at Appendix A.

The data gathered through this stage of the research will be analyzed using SPSS to generate the appropriate descriptive statistics required.

Pre-Testing of the Questionnaire

Two pre-test studies were deemed necessary prior to the research taking place.

The first pre-test took place where the questionnaire was administered to a group of respondents drawn from a separate population and employment context that had no relation to the target population of this study. The result of this pre-test indicated that the questionnaire was understood by all respondents and was effective in its ability to measure their attitude towards organizational commitment.

A second pre-test took place several weeks later following the request by the case agency to have the questionnaire's items positively worded to determine the applicability and effectiveness of the tool following changes to the wording of some of the items. The same respondents who took place in the first pre-test were approached and asked to test the questionnaire a second time, with slight changes to the wording of the items. This second pre-test had the same results as the first; all respondents understood the questionnaire and it effectively measured commitment states. It was considered unlikely that the respondents remembered and replicated their answers from the first pre-tests given the fact that several weeks had passed between pre-tests taking place. There was no difference recorded in the results on the first and second pre-test studies and as such the conclusion was reached that the changes to the wording of the questionnaire did not reduce the questionnaire's effectiveness or reliability.

Testing the reliability of the three components of commitment or of the organizational commitment questionnaire (Allen and Meyer 1990) or Chen and Francesco's (2001) slightly modified version, was not considered necessary given the substantial amount of literature published that has already proven the model and the questionnaire to be highly reliable. Consequently, identical results gained from two pre-tests that affirmed the questionnaire's effectiveness was considered sufficient pre-testing.

Identified Population and Respondent Size

The research took place in the Corporate Services Division of a Commonwealth Government Department. The department is a medium sized government department with approximately 1000 staff and it is located in Canberra, Australia (APSC, 2010). The department is stable in its role and central to the workings of the Australian Government; as such it is somewhat typical of government departments in Australia.

The Corporate Services Division of this Department employed a total of 98 staff. Of these 98 staff, approximately 40 held management, supervisory or technical positions and as such they were not included in the target population. The target population was those employees who held generalist, administrative roles and who did not hold management or supervisory positions and this consisted of approximately 60 employees. Therefore, the target population from which respondents could be drawn was small, consisting of approximately 60 employees.

Respondents

Respondents were drawn from a population of approximately 60 permanent, full time and part time staff employed in non-managerial, non-supervisory, generalist administrative positions in information technology, human resources and corporate support. These officers could be employed in any government department in similar generalist corporate management roles. This was important as it was anticipated that this group of employees would be more likely to experience organizational commitment than professional commitment given the fact that they could follow their chosen career paths in any one of a number of government departments.

The department's most senior managers gave permission for this research to take place within the department and it was apparent that this was the first time such permission had been granted. Consequently, there was little experience within the department concerning research of this type and this resulted in some conditions being placed upon this study.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the researcher was not permitted direct access to individuals in the target group which resulted in the Manager of the Corporate Services Division assisted in this stage of the study. This person contacted all line managers in the Division by email, informing them of the study and requesting that they encourage their staff to take part. This email contained a number of attachments that outlined the researcher's background, the nature of the research and instructions for taking part in either or both of the qualitative and quantitative stages as well as a copy of the modified organizational commitment questionnaire itself. Respondents were advised in writing that participation in either part of the research was voluntary and that responses were confidential and anonymous unless respondents chose to nominate for involvement in a focus group session. There was no indication in any of these documents of

attendance at or observation of the focus group sessions by managers or anyone else. Present in the room during the focus group sessions were the researcher, the researcher's assistant and the respondents themselves.

The documents included in the email received by the target population are at Appendix B of this thesis.

Line managers were asked to forward the documents to all of their staff in Australian Public Service 1 to 6 levels who were neither managers nor supervisors nor technical specialists and to encourage them to take part in the study. Respondents were invited to print off the commitment questionnaire, complete it in hard copy, seal it in an envelope and take it personally to one of two departmental security points where it would be held by security officers for the researcher to personally collect. This process ensured that confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

A total of 44 of the 60 respondents returned completed questionnaires (73%) after two additional reminder emails were sent to individuals in the target group during a period of 4 months. Of these 44 respondents, 12 took part in follow up focus group sessions.

The time frame for completing the questionnaire was considerably longer than expected or preferred. However, given the busy nature of the division, the workloads that respondents were managing and the lack of work related urgency associated with completing the questionnaire, it became apparent that more time would be required in order to have a reasonable response rate. It was important to be mindful of the conditions that were agreed to at the commencement of this study, in particular, that the researcher would communicate only with the manager of the Corporate Support Division. Maintaining a positive relationship with this person was important as it ensured that focus group sessions would go ahead, and as such there was reluctance to place the manager under any pressure to have the questionnaire completed in a more timely manner.

Single Stage Sampling Design

Despite the inability to access individuals personally, a single stage sampling design was adopted for this study for two reasons. Firstly, the small population size and the consistency of key

characteristics negated the need to cluster groups for a multistage process. Secondly, the researcher was informed by the manager of the Corporate Services Division that individual involvement in the research study could be hampered by lengthy survey processes and, therefore, the likelihood of achieving a sound response rate depended in part upon a process that was perceived by those in the population to be simple and efficient.

A Qualitative Approach

In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of Australian Public Servants?

What Implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

Why Adopt This Approach to Answer this Question?

Proponents of qualitative research methodologies believe strongly in the benefits of this methodology in social research, particularly when the researcher seeks to explore and understand a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural setting (Creswell, 1994). This research takes place in its natural setting which in this case is an Australian government department. Answering this research question requires exploring and understanding the form that continuance commitment may take for a group of generalist, non-managerial public servants employed within this government department. Since previous research supports the premise that the state of commitment is indeed influenced by the context in which individuals work (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005) it is considered that exploring commitment for this group of public service employees in the APS context is done most effectively in their natural setting. A qualitative approach is thus deemed appropriate because it will allow for exploration of continuance commitment, as it is experienced and described by the respondents themselves, while remaining in their natural setting.

The data analysis technique considered most appropriate in analyzing the qualitative data gathered through this stage of the research is drawn from grounded research methodology in

which a thematic analysis is adopted through the use of free, open and axial coding. Given the importance of identifying any possible variances in the form that continuance commitment might take for these particular public service employees, it is important to identify data that not only reflects affective, normative and continuance commitment, but also variations of these, particularly continuance commitment. The free coding process would allow the qualitative data to be coded and the key themes identified along with new themes that, although related to affective, normative and continuance commitment, may also be somewhat varied. The process of open coding would allow this data to be sorted, grouped and labeled according to its category of either affective, normative or continuance commitment or to be labeled to reflect a variation. Finally, axial coding would allow this data be pulled back together and refined to identify clear variances and possible influences of the employment context on the way commitment is experienced by this group of public service employees (Pandit, 1996).

Exploring the second research question within the natural setting of the department requires the adoption of a qualitative methodological approach. The ontological assumption adopted in this study is that the state of organization commitment as it is experienced by this group of public service employees is known only by those within this group and is understood only by these individuals themselves. It is understood subjectively and individually and although it may be shared by a group of individuals who work in the APS environment, it cannot be explored, understood or in fact assessed outside of the environment in which it is currently occurring. The premise here is that the state of organization commitment does not sit independently within the individual. It may manifest and develop within each individual in a personal and subjective manner, but it is, in some part, influenced by the context and the environment in which that individual operates. This assumption suggests that exploration must take place within the actual work place, where the strength of the environment is strongest and therefore its influence is pure and more readily depicted as each respondent in this study articulates their perception of their commitment to the organization.

Qualitative approaches are most conducive where the researcher seeks a personal involvement in the research being explored. This is also the case where the researcher's own values, experiences and opinions are accepted as influencing factors in both data collection and data

analysis; thus objectivity of the researcher is neither expected nor required (Creswell, 1994). This axiological and epistemological approach to qualitative research has been at the core of much of the 'paradigm wars' that have traditionally separated the positivists and interpretivists. (Howe, 1992; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Bryman, 2006). These perspectives were based on the belief that the epistemological differences were insurmountable and the proponents of each side of the argument were virtually incapable of agreeing with the premise that despite their differences, each was within itself a valued, respected and appropriate approach to gaining knowledge through research (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). However, over the years this war between the approaches has settled considerably and today there is much stronger acceptance of the value of qualitative research and the legitimacy of the qualitative epistemological and axiological assumptions (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004). Indeed, many scholars have argued that the quantitative epistemological assumption of separation, independence and objectivity is in itself flawed since a researcher in any quantitative study will make decisions on data collection and analysis that cannot be inherently objective. They have suggested that the very nature of the researcher's decisions and involvement in the study must bring in some element of subjectivity (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005).

In light of this argument, the premise in this research study is that the researcher is subjective, will bring personal opinion and thoughts to the study and will interact openly with the respondents during focus group sessions.

The exploration of the construct of organization commitment as it is experienced by this group of public servants is of particular interest to the researcher. In this study the researcher does not suggest objectivity because the researcher has a strong personal drive to explore and understand these issues and comes to this study with personal opinions about how this construct may look for some Australian federal public servants and why this is important for every HRM scholar and practitioner to understand. The researcher seeks to play a role in this research and as such cannot undertake this part of the study using any methodology other than a qualitative one. The researcher brings knowledge, expectations, opinion and a genuine personal interest which has developed as a direct consequence of several years consulting to the Australian Public Service.

The researcher has first-hand knowledge and experience of the culture of the case agency and is known personally to many employees who may be involved in this research.

An inductive research process is considered appropriate in this part of this research. The researcher is comfortable with the ambiguity and uncertainty that may arise in this study and was keen to allow those uncertainties to drive the study as it unfolded. The nature of this exploratory part of the study and the information that is sought sits well with this approach as the researcher is not seeking to test a predetermined hypothesis but to gain insight into the psychological states that relate to the construct of organizational commitment as it is experienced by a group of employees who work within the APS context. Indeed, arguably this research adopts a constructivist approach, whereby the predetermined and scientifically accepted definition of commitment is put aside in preference for an exploration of how commitment is experienced for this group of respondents, as a social construct that is defined and interpreted at this time, in this setting. The researcher is open to exploring new and alternative ideas around commitment as it is experienced by these employees and is not seeking only to measure commitment as it has been defined and presented in Allen and Meyer's three component model (Young-Eisendrath, 1997).

A Case Study Approach

Adopting a case study research method has, at times, been considered problematic. Once a popular research methodology prior to World War Two, they later lost popularity when quantitative techniques were favoured in the 1950s. However, following the 1980s they regained popularity, particularly in educational research (Atkinson and Delamont, 1985; Mitchell, 1983; Platt, 1992 as cited in Tight, 2010 p. 333). Advocates of case study approaches, Robert Stake and Robert Yin have both presented strong arguments in support of the case study approach and in Yin's case, this includes an embedded case study. An embedded case study differs from a holistic case study which is likely to adopt a purely qualitative methodology and focus on a complete unit (Scholz and Tietje, 2002). An embedded case 'allows for a multiplicity of [research] methods that may be applied within sub units of a case' (Scholz and Tietje, 2002, p.11) rather than across the broader case. In this study the respondents are drawn from the sub unit of the Corporate Support Section of the government agency in which they were employed

rather than from a variety of sections across the case agency itself. The embedded case study approach is discussed more, later in this chapter.

Stake defines a case study as an approach that ‘is expected to catch the complexity of a single case [through] the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances’ (1995 as cited in Tight, 2010 p. 331). In Tight’s (2010) review of the case study approach he also cited work by Punch (2005) who supports the case study approach and defines cases as either ‘simple or complex...the case may be an individual, or a role, or a small group, or an organization, or a community, or a nation’(2010 p. 330).

The purpose of a case study, according to Stake, may be as simple as ‘gaining a better understanding of a particular case or may provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization’(2010 pp.331, 332). Although much of the criticism of case studies has been based upon the degree to which the findings drawn from them can be extrapolated beyond the case study, it is also argued that ‘the validity of the extrapolation depends not on the typicality or representativeness of the case but upon the cogency of the theoretical reasoning’ (Mitchell, 1983, p. 207 as cited in Tight, 2010, p. 334). Mitchell’s suggestion sits comfortably with the conclusions drawn by Tight in his review of case study methodology, in which he suggests that it is not this research method as such that should be cause for concern, but the loose use of the term ‘case study’, given that it is used commonly in social research and can mean many different things. Tight concludes his review by stating that ‘the essence of case study is the detailed examination of a small sample – at its extreme a single sample – of an item of interest, and typically also from a particular perspective. The case study will, presumably, be of some interest (at least to the researcher) in itself [and] further interest may be generated by the techniques used to study the case, and by the findings, particularly if these seem to resonate with, or contradict, what other researchers...are finding’(2010, pp. 335).

This study adopts a case study approach in line with the arguments presented here. The researcher is indeed interested in the case and the perspective that this case offers in commitment research. This study seeks to gain a better understanding of how commitment is experienced, in a very specific and bounded context and will do this through examination of a small group of

employees. The case study approach adopted in this study is both interpretative and embedded in its approach.

An interpretative case study is one in which the researcher seeks to gather data from individuals in a particular social setting. In so doing, the researcher seeks to develop an understanding of the meanings inherent in social structures along with the motivators and the rules that guide human practices and interactions (Macpherson, Brooker and Ainsworth, 2000, p.51). Macpherson and his colleagues also describe case studies as offering ‘thick’ contextual descriptions that provide a basis for seeing anew and providing a reflection of human experience (2000, p.52). They offer the opportunity to explore in depth the phenomenon being studied: rather than offer generalization through statistical inference, they offer theoretical reasoning that allows the researcher to develop insights that have resonance in other sites thus allowing theoretical connections to be explored and established (2000, p.52).

Earlier in this chapter discussion was presented on the relationship the researcher has with the case agency and in this discussion literature was presented that supported the decision to use an illustrative case study that included focus group sessions. Much of this discussion was drawn from Daft’s work on undertaking research within organizations in the early 1980s. The purpose of this study has been discussed in this thesis already, however, to reiterate, this study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which a group of Australian federal public service employees experience organizational commitment. This study seeks to identify if their experience is typical of others whose commitment has been presented in the literature (Abbot et al. 2005; Lyons et al. 2006) and if it is reflective of Allen and Meyer’s popular and well regarded three component model (1990). It is not possible to extrapolate these findings beyond this group of individuals and it is not the intention of this study to do so. What is intended is improving the understanding of commitment as it is experienced by public sector employees and add to the literature in this field. However, in line with Mitchell’s suggestion that a strong theoretical argument may be drawn from a case study and be relevant beyond that study, should theoretical implications of this study be considered strong enough to raise questions beyond this case study, they will be presented in this thesis, particularly those that address the third research question that focuses on possible theoretical issues for HRM practices in this public sector context.

An Embedded Case Study Design

There is an abundance of research into the construct of commitment, whether it be organizational commitment or commitment to another foci such as manager and supervisor (Becker, 1992; Becker et al., 1996; Becker and Kernan, 2003); work team (Becker, 1992) or profession (Wallace, 1995; Becker and Kernan, 2003). The focus of this study is commitment to the government department as the employing organization in which the public service employee works. The research questions relevant here do not relate to commitment to the manager or supervisor, to the team or to the profession. Of interest in this study is whether or not there is a dominance of continuance commitment to the employing government department for this group of public servants relative to affective and normative commitment and if continuance commitment appears as it has been presented in the literature and in line with Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990); and finally how insight into this may inform discussions on commitment and HRM more generally in the Australian public sector context. Given these research parameters it was decided that the respondent group would be generalist, non-managerial, administrative employees within the corporate support section of the department who are most likely to be committed at the organizational level.

In general terms, Australian Public Servants have their careers influenced by the strong hierarchy and clearly divided roles that are found in large government bureaucracies such as the APS. This means that, for the most part, people are often recruited into lower levels within the department and then promoted to more senior levels. The lower levels tend to have a stronger focus on general duties and administrative functions and the more senior levels focus more on management and leadership functions. This can be contrasted with non-government careers where a specialist can be recruited into a firm in a junior specialization role such as a junior accountant, lawyer or engineer and throughout their career rise to more senior, specialist roles. One might assume that in the latter case commitment may more readily be focused on one's profession. The issue of relevance here relates to identifying a respondent group of Australia, federal public servants who are more likely to be committed to their employing organization and less likely to be committed to their profession. This is because in this case it is not professional commitment that is of relevance. Having said that, it is possible that in some areas within a government department there may be teams of professionals whose careers follow similar lines

to private sector careers; for example, where a department may recruit qualified lawyers who take on legal roles in a legal section and whose career progression is a kind of hybrid between that found traditionally in the private sector and in the public sector. The commitment focus of these individuals may, arguably, be split between organizational commitment and professional commitment; that is, it may be that they choose to work for a particular government department as well as choose a career in a particular profession.

In exploring the construct of organizational commitment as it is experienced by a particular group of Australian federal public servants, and only organizational commitment, it was important in the methodology design stage to eliminate or avoid respondents who may have strong commitment focused towards something other than the organization. Rather, it was important to isolate public service employees who are more likely to be committed to the department itself, than to a particular profession. To achieve this, an embedded case study approach was adopted which allowed for this study to take place within a sub-unit of the case agency. The sub-unit of the case agency was the Corporate Support Section. An embedded case study approach allowed for exploration of the way commitment is experienced by employees of this sub-unit of the agency rather than the agency as a whole (Scholz and Tietje, 2002). According to Scholze and Tietje, the embedded case study is the most appropriate form of case study ‘to approach real, complex, current problems that cannot be treated simply by one of the known analytical methods, such as experiment, proof or survey’ (p.5) because the embedded case study supports a mixed methods approach and allows for the integration of knowledge drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data (p.15), which addresses a phenomenon that is explored within a sub-unit of a case (Scholze and Tietje, 2002). Scholze and Tietje’s approach to embedded case study designs is in line with Yin’s premise that there is a difference between an holistic and an embedded case study approach that relates specifically to this issue of studying either an entire case or a selected unit within it (Yin, 2003a, p.39).

A Focus Group Approach

A focus group approach is particularly helpful when identifying why respondents think or feel the way they do. In allowing for small group interaction it offers greater insight into why certain positions are held (Krueger, 1994, p.3). This approach is adopted specifically to generate

perceptions held by the respondents themselves on their current state of organizational commitment. It was intended that the groups be non-threatening and that respondents felt comfortable and forthcoming. Focus group sessions allow the research to take place inside the organization with direct contact with employees of the organization and although focus groups require relatively small groups of respondents, the depth of exploration is what is of interest. Focus group sessions that facilitate deeper insight into the experiences of a few can offer the opportunity to improve understanding and explore what is expected and what is experienced. This means that qualitative methodologies that incorporate case studies and adopt focus group approaches assume that there remain elements of uncertainty and the unknown. Daft (1983) suggests that one of the greatest differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches is that quantitative approaches 'assume[s] that investigators know a substantial amount about the phenomenon under investigation...(but) if we are to acquire knowledge that is really new, then we do not know the answer in advance. The significant discoveries, the good science, require us to go beyond the safe certainty of precision in design.' (p.540). He states further that it is 'ok to ask research questions without the answer in advance (p.540)...(and that) the significant studies often approached the problem as an open-ended question to be answered rather than a hypothesis to be tested ' (Lundberg, 1976, cited in Daft, 1983, p. 540). Exploring the experiences of a group of Australian federal public servants, through an illustrative case study and through open discussions held in focus group session is designed to do exactly this. Through the focus group sessions held within the department itself with a select group of employees who are likely to experience organizational commitment, it is anticipated that this study will explore experiences and difference for these individuals in the way they experience commitment. Although there is research that suggests certain findings are likely, this research seeks not to measure the accuracy of this research through hypothesis testing, but to be open to whatever the employees share and how they shed light on their experiences. Focus group sessions are ideal for this type of exploration.

Three focus group sessions were planned during which respondents' perception of their commitment to the department were openly discussed. During these sessions the respondents were asked to describe, in their own words, why they chose to join their employing government department, what they believe was their basis of commitment and how they would describe their

level of performance. There was no involvement of departmental managers in these focus groups nor was raw data reported back to managers. It was important that respondents in the focus group sessions did not feel compelled or obliged to present a 'company line' regarding their experience of commitment but that they felt comfortable presenting their personal experiences without fear of any adverse consequences. The case agency and the researcher were in agreement regarding this issue and the researcher was clear in informing respondents of this expectation.

During the process of completing the questionnaire, respondents were invited to self-nominate to take part in a follow on focus group session. Self-nomination required simply ticking a box beside a statement of intention to take part in the focus group session and agreeing to waive anonymity. Twelve people self-nominated to take part in the second stage of this study and as a consequence three focus groups were held, each with four participants. Of those 12 people, 9 were women. All came from the corporate services area of the department and none were in management roles. Further details regarding age, tenure and gender of the 12 respondents who took part in these focus group sessions is provided in table 5.1. For the most part these respondents appear typical of the population from which they were drawn.

Table 5.1 Focus Group Respondents

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12
Age (yrs)	50	42	40	24	50	28	24	45	50	34	50	30
Tenure (Yrs)	30	3	4	3	10	6	6	17	9	7	5	4.5
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M
F/T or P/T *	FT	PT	PT	FT	FT	FT						

*F/T = Full time employee; P/T = Part time employee

A respondent group of 12 people is small. However, this group was drawn from an equally small population of 60 people and from a relatively small government department consisting of just over 1000 staff (APSC, 2010).

A research assistant was employed during the focus group sessions to take detailed notes to ensure accurate recording of the respondents' comments. These sessions were held in the department's meeting rooms in the department itself during normal working hours and over a period of 2 to 3 months. As stated, there was no involvement of organization managers and all discussions were held behind closed doors, without discussions recorded by audio tape or video so to avoid any sense of discomfort or insecurity by the respondents and to facilitate open and honest communication. At no times were any focus group sessions interrupted by another person.

As has been stated already, the researcher has had a 10 year career as a management consultant during which she has held literally hundreds of focus group sessions. This experience was believed to be valuable in this study. As an experienced and skilled facilitator she was comfortable working with groups of individuals and skilled in facilitating their comfort, openness and honesty. The researcher was also skilled in using a variety of questioning techniques to ensure the conversations held in the focus group sessions were appropriate and effective in exploring the construct of commitment.

Conclusion

Debate of research methodology has settled in recent years. This has resulted in an agreement amongst many scholars that mixed-methods approaches offer many benefits in social science research. This approach was the preferred approach for this study because it allowed all three research questions to be answered accurately and effectively and this ensured that the objectives of this study were met. This study adopted an embedded case study approach which allowed for an in-depth exploration to occur. Personal input about how they perceived their states of organizational commitment was sought from respondents in their natural setting. A two stage process was used: stage 1 adopted a quantitative method to determine the relative levels of affective, normative and continuance commitment as they were experienced by a group of generalist, Australian federal public servants. In the second stage a qualitative methodology was used to explore possible variances in the form that continuance commitment took for this group of public servants.

In the following chapter the findings from the first stage of the research - the quantitative stage - are presented and discussed. The findings of the second stage of the research study - the qualitative stage - are presented and discussed in chapter 5. A discussion on the findings of the data will be presented in considerable length, in chapter 6. Theoretical issues that emerged from this research study are presented and discussed in chapter 7. Final conclusions from this research study and contributions to current scholarly research into organizational commitment and HRM are presented in chapter 8 of this thesis.

Chapter 4. FINDINGS FROM THE QUANTITATIVE DATA

The previous chapter reviewed the purpose of this study and discussed the appropriate research approaches to the three research questions posited, which are:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

Much of the previous chapter was focused on discussing the philosophical differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches to social research and the benefits of a mixed methods approach. It also offered an in-depth discussion on the reason a mixed methods approach was adopted in this study. To recap, the first research question was addressed through a quantitative method; the second was addressed through a qualitative method; and the third question will draw from the both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study to identify implications for HRM practices currently used in the APS.

The first stage of this research study adopted a quantitative methodology to collect data to address the first of three research questions: *What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?*

As was discussed in the previous chapter, a modified version of Allen and Meyer's Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was used to measure the levels of affective, normative and continuance commitment experienced by a group of Australian federal public service employees, to determine if this group was typical of other groups of public service employees who have shown higher levels of continuance commitment than both affective and normative commitment (Abbot et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006; Goulet and Frank, 2002).

A total of 44 respondents from a population of 60 returned completed questionnaires, making a 73% return rate.

Although this chapter is heading ‘findings’ from the quantitative data, the actual data analysis that is presented in this chapter is akin to results and identifies areas for discussion and speculation rather than accurate, conclusive findings. As will be explained in this chapter, although conclusive findings were not identified in this stage of the study as was expected, there is speculation and discussion emerging from the quantitative research that is identified through consideration of the patterns in the quantitative data that is presented in this chapter and contributes to discussions throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Measuring the Levels of Continuance Commitment in a Public Sector Agency

Continuance commitment, although defined previously in this thesis, refers to a state of commitment that is based upon a perception that the cost of leaving the organization is too great, resulting in a worker feeling compelled to stay with the organization: they feel they ‘*have to stay*’ with the organization. By contrast, affective commitment occurs where a person feels that they ‘*want to stay*’ with the organization because they feel a personal connection to the organization, an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. Normative commitment refers to employees’ attachment based on the individual’s belief system relating to the organization expecting loyalty from the individual. This means they tend to believe they ‘*should stay*’ with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Understanding the construct of organizational commitment offers insight into an individual’s performance at work, including their success as a team member and their time management and tendency to be innovative (Allen and Smith, 1987); the likelihood that they will adopt organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Cohen, 1993; Bishop and Scott, 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001); and their levels of absenteeism (Balu, 1986; Blau, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989). The research suggests that positive behaviours and high performance levels are most likely experienced where the individual feels affective commitment; are present but modified where they feel normative commitment; and are unlikely where they feel only continuance commitment (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Allen and Smith, 1987; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Becker,

Billings et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002; Grant et al., 2008). The research that suggests that continuance commitment is high in public sector organizations (Abbott et al. 2005; Lyons et al., 2006) and affective commitment is low in public sector organizations (Liou and Nyhan, 2004) is therefore potentially concerning because of the clear relationship between commitment states and performance.

This part of the research study was designed to determine whether this was also the experience of a group of Australian federal public servants, in other words, if continuance commitment was the dominant form of commitment that they experienced.

Reliability of the Commitment Questionnaire

The modified questionnaire used in this part of the study comprised of 18 statements: 7 of these related to affective commitment; 7 related to normative commitment; and 5 related to continuance commitment.

In completing the questionnaire respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with each of these statements. A Likert scale of 1 to 7 was used, where:

1= strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = somewhat disagree

4 = neither agree nor disagree

5 = somewhat agree

6 = agree

7 = strongly agree

It is common practice when using a questionnaire such as this to test the reliability of each statement. The statistical formula considered the most appropriate to test for reliability is

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and it is accepted that scores above 0.7 indicate reliability (Pallant, 2001). This questionnaire was based on Allen and Meyer's well regarded organizational commitment questionnaire which was well established in the literature as reliable and valid. Previous tests on this modified version indicated that this questionnaire was both valid and reliable as the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient scales were .91, .86 and .78 for each of the three states of commitment (Chen and Francesco, 2001 p. 496).

Alpha coefficients were run on this questionnaire and the results suggest that the reliability of the questionnaire was reduced. The scores were 0.859 for affective commitment, 0.669 for normative commitment and 0.606 for continuance commitment, lower than previously identified in research carried out by Chen and Francesco (2001). These are presented in table 4.1. These results were surprising, given the wide acceptance of this questionnaire's reliability and the results of two pre-tests.

Table 4.1 Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Affective commitment	.859	7
Normative commitment	.669	7
Continuance commitment	.606	5

Despite these lower coefficient scores, the questionnaire's pre-determined reliability was not believed to be in question, which suggested that there was some other reason the questionnaire's reliability was reduced, albeit only slightly. Inter-item correlations were run to determine if certain items in the questionnaire reduced the reliability, however, the results suggested that this was unlikely. To the researcher's knowledge, this questionnaire had not been used in the Australian federal public service and arguably and retrospectively it seems that there would have been benefit in testing its reliability in this setting. However, the clear acceptance of this questionnaire in the field, positive results from several previous reliability tests and the two pre-tests resulted in the researcher deciding to accept the questionnaire as both reliable and effective for this group of respondents and therefore not determining alpha coefficient scores prior to

undertaking the first stage of this study. The second pre-test in particular was considered reflective of the questionnaire's reliability because it specifically sought to determine the effectiveness of the questionnaire following re-wording of the items, as requested by the case agency. As was stated in the previous chapter, several weeks had passed between the first and second pre-tests and consequently it was thought unlikely that the pre-test respondents remembered and replicated their earlier answers to the questionnaire. Thus the questionnaire was considered to be effective.

It became apparent that it was possible that the reduced reliability of the questionnaire was reflective of the context in which it was used and this particular group of public service employees. It is not possible to extrapolate from the reduced reliability in this instance or to draw absolute conclusions from this. However, it does lead to the question of how appropriate this questionnaire is in this particular context. Given the acceptance of this tool in this field and its proven reliability in previous studies, it seems very possible that the reduced reliability does not indicate a problem with the questionnaire itself, but with its use in this context and with this group of respondents. Further, given the positive results of the pre-tests, this seems even more likely, as those who took part in the pre-tests were more typical of respondents of previous studies and were dissimilar to the respondents used in this study.

However, regardless of this it remained the case that the reliability of this questionnaire was, in this instance, reduced and that meant that statistical analyses become problematic and presented a limitation to this stage of the study. To this end it was decided to consider the skewness of the data in the bell curve to see if this could offer insight into the way in which these respondents responded to the questionnaire.

Insight From the Skewed Data

The way in which the data was skewed in the bell curve was considered to offer insight into the respondents' responses to the questionnaire. A visual representation was able to offer an indication of the tendency of respondents to react positively or negatively to the items in the questionnaire that reflected affective, normative and continuance commitment. Considering the way the data is skewed allows for determination of the extent to which the 'distribution deviates

from symmetry and it is possible to visualize a very close replica of the actual appearance of a given frequency distribution' (Sirkin2006, p. 106) Thus, exploring the data skewness allows for consideration of the patterns of distribution of the quantitative data in the bell curve and therefore a way to describe the data and draw conclusions that relate to the way these respondents responded to the questionnaire. Through this it is possible to speculate what may have happened in the quantitative research process. Data skewness describes the quantitative data and as such offers some insight into responses to the questionnaire.

It must be noted that it is not suggested in this thesis that the consideration of data skewness is presented as a conclusive statistical finding. Given the reduced reliability of the questionnaire the findings from this stage of the research are put aside and the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment must be reconsidered through the qualitative stage of this research. However, it is also noted that according to researchers such as Keller, there is value in exploring data skewness and the insight this may offer for social research. As Keller states, data skewness is 'generally ignored in social research [and] it is unclear to what extent this approach has resulted in the systematic misrepresentation of data...' (2006, p.39). To this end the presentation of data skewness and the discussion relating to this are presented here as offering insight into how these respondents responded to the questionnaire that might not otherwise be identified and which may contribute to the outcomes of this study

The skewness suggested higher levels of continuance commitment may be experienced by this group of federal public servants than affective commitment and a greater tendency toward normative commitment than expected. If this were found to be true, it would be unexpected as it had not been found in previous research. A finding that affective commitment is the least identified state of commitment in this particular group would be consistent with previous research (Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbot et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006) and therefore would not be surprising. The 'skewness' of the data suggests that this may be possible and is presented in table 4.4.

The total affective commitment scores were skewed to the left (.183) at the low values which suggested that a higher number of the respondents tended to disagree with the statements that

related to affective commitment. This may suggest that in this group of public service employees affective commitment was not the dominant form of commitment, as more respondents disagreed than agreed with the statements relating to a state of affective commitment. However, this speculation would require further exploration.

The normative commitment scores were skewed to the right (-.290) as were the continuance commitment scores (-.104) which suggested a greater tendency for these respondents to agree than disagree with the statements that were indicative of either normative or continuance commitment. The higher figure associated with normative commitment may suggest that more respondents in this group tended to agree with the statements relating to normative commitment. Again this is speculation drawn from the visual depiction of data in the bell curve and would require further testing.

TABLE 4.2 Means, Standard Deviations and ‘Skewness’ of Data

(N = 44)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
Total affective commitment	38	13	46	28.76	7.964	.183	.383
Total Normative Commitment	44	12	38	24.95	5.961	-.290	.357
Total Continuance Commitment	41	9	27	17.76	4.779	-.104	.369
Valid (listwise)	N 37						

Data skewness offers insight into responses to the questionnaire that may suggest a difference to previous findings (Abbott et al., 2005). The literature suggests that in this context the highest level of commitment that would be expected is continuance commitment (Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). However, data skewness presented in this chapter suggests that this may not be the case for this particular group of Australian federal public service employees. The skewness presented here may be more supportive of the literature that claims that affective commitment appears to be the lowest form of commitment experienced by public sector employees (Liou and Nyhan, 2004).

The answer to the research question ‘*Are high levels of continuance commitment experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants*’, therefore, is not quite as straightforward as had been hoped. The depiction of responses identified through the way in which the data was

skewed suggests that continuance commitment may indeed be more dominant than affective commitment for this particular group of respondents. However, it may be less dominant for this group than normative commitment.

A Possibility that Respondents were Undecided about Organizational Commitment

The data may also have suggested that some of these respondents may have been unsure of their state of organizational commitment. This may be reflected through a tendency for many of these respondents to score in the mid-range of the questionnaire, which could indicate that they felt unable to either agree with or disagree with questionnaire statements. What may be suggested here relates to the degree to which the respondents could relate to the items in the questionnaire. If they could not relate to these items because, for instance, the way they experienced commitment differed to what has been seen as typical through previous research, then it is likely that the responses would be mid-range and show neither agreement nor disagreement. This seems to be consistent with the reduced reliability of the questionnaire. In other words, an inability to relate to the questionnaire because of the context in which these respondents work and their particular experience of commitment supports the conclusion that the low reliability scores are a consequence of the context.

However, it may also be the case that these respondents were conservative in their responses and adopted more moderate responses, thus avoiding strong responses at either end of the likert scale. It would be worth testing this in future studies into the way commitment is experienced by Australian federal public servants.

Table 4.5 shows the percentage of respondents who were undecided, in other words, the percentage of respondents who responded to a statement in the questionnaire with the response of 'neither agree nor disagree'.

TABLE 4.3 Percentage of Respondents Appearing Undecided About Commitment

Items	Valid Percent who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement
Affective Commitment	
Rest of career	14.0
Desire to stay	18.6
Org's problems are my own	21.4
Belong to org	11.4
Emotionally attached to org	18.6
Feel part of the family	22.0
Org has personal meaning to me	31.8
Normative Commitment	
Owe my org	29.5
Obligated to people	22.7
Org deserves loyalty	20.5
Feel guilty if leave	20.5
Not right to leave org now	6.8
Obligated to remain	25.0
Continuance Commitment	
Necessary to stay	15.9
Hard to leave if wanted to	15.9
Leaving disrupt life	16.3
Would leave but too much invested	25.0
Few options to leave	20.9
Few alternatives	13.6

Breakdown of The Responses To Individual Items In The Questionnaire

Affective Commitment

The data skewness suggests that responses to items in the questionnaire that reflected affective commitment as it is defined in Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990), ie an emotional attachment to the organization, may be the least commonly experienced state of commitment for this particular group of respondents.

Where affective commitment is experienced by these respondents it appears to relate predominately to three general beliefs:

- respondents feel they would happily remain with the department for the rest of their career;
- staying with the department is based upon desire (as opposed to need); and
- there appears to be a sense of belonging to the department.

These items all measure affective commitment and the skewed data suggests some agreement with these beliefs. This data is presented in table 4.6.

To a lesser degree, the skewness indicated that respondents tended to agree with the idea that they were part of a family at the department, which also suggests an attitude of affective commitment. This is also presented in table 4.6.

However, there were three items in the questionnaire that, arguably, go to the heart of affective commitment because they suggest that: respondents personally take on the issues and problems of the department; they acknowledge an emotional attachment to the department; and they accept that the department represents something personal to them. According to the way the data was skewed appeared, there may have been a tendency to disagree with these statements. This may suggest that affective commitment, as experienced by these particular public servants relates to a feeling of comfort and belonging to the department more than to an emotional connection or

a personal connection to the department. This raised the question about whether affective commitment is varied in its form for these respondents and does not reflect the widely accepted definition presented in Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990). This possibility will be explored further in the qualitative stage of this research, since clear conclusions cannot be drawn from this stage of the research.

It will be of great interest to determine what this state of commitment actually looks like and if there are variances that are specific to this group of employees. Appendix C includes the more detailed statistical analysis undertaken in the first stage of this study.

Table 4.4 'Skewed Statistics against Each Affective Commitment Item

Affective Commitment Item	'Skewness'
Rest of career	-.624
Desire to stay	-.528
Org's problems are my own	.412
Belong to org	-.339
Emotionally attached to org	.015
Feel part of the family	-.098
Org has personal meaning to me	.078

Normative Commitment

Consideration of the skewed data relating to normative commitment suggested that this commitment was present for the most part in relation to one's workmates and normative commitment towards the organization did not appear to be evident for this group of employees. A breakdown of the skewed data against every item measuring normative commitment is presented in table 4.7.

This is of particular interest, given that the skewed data suggested that the dominant form of commitment for this group of public service employees may have been normative commitment.

A breakdown of the skewed data suggests that it is more likely that there was agreement with the items that related to obligation to people and loyalty to the organization and it was this that suggested that normative commitment was the dominant state. However, the data may indicate a focus toward the people who work in the department and not the department itself per se.

Thus it may be worth considering if normative commitment to the department is not the dominant state of organizational commitment after all. Rather, a dominant state of commitment may be normative commitment focused towards work mates and not the organization. The key issue here relates to where the attitude of commitment is focused. There is much published in the literature that suggests that Allen and Meyer's three component model of affective, normative and continuance commitment relates not only to the construct of organizational commitment, but also to other types of commitment, including commitment to managers and supervisors and work mates (Becker, 1992; Becker et al., 1996; Becker and Kernan, 2003). Indeed, the data skewness may indicate that it is not normative commitment to the *organization* that is dominant. The majority of respondents appeared to disagree with the 5 items that suggest normative commitment to the organization and agreed with only two statements; one reflecting a strong sense of obligation towards the people within the organization and the other reflecting a belief that loyalty to the organization is deserved.

Therefore it may be that affective commitment, as it is experienced by this group of respondents, presents in a varied form and does not appear to be consistent with the definition presented in Allen and Meyer's model (1990). This requires exploration in the second stage of this study and is presented here as speculation drawn from the way the data was skewed in the bell curve.

Table 4.5 ‘Skewed Statistics against Each Normative Commitment Item

Normative Commitment Item	‘Skewness’
Owe my org	.169
Obligated to people	-.339
Org deserves loyalty	-.162
Feel guilty if leave	.257
Not right to leave org now	.631
Would leave but too much invested	.933
Obligated to remain	.160

Continuance Commitment

A closer look at the skewed data that depicts responses to the state of continuance commitment suggests that respondents agreed with two of the items that measured this state of commitment and disagreed with the remaining three.

The two items of the questionnaire that respondents agreed with related to the idea that staying with the department was necessary and that deciding to leave would be personally disruptive. It may be that it is only against these ideas that there is an attitude of continuance commitment. The majority of these respondents appeared to disagree with the ideas that it would be difficult to leave the department or that there were few options or alternatives open to them. Therefore, it is worth considering if the data skewness reflects the possibility that continuance commitment is also varied in the form it takes, for this particular group of Australian federal public servants. The skewness that is indicative of the degree to which respondents agreed with and disagreed with the items that measured continuance commitment is presented in table 4.8.

Table 4.6 ‘Skewed’ Statistics against Each Continuance Commitment Item

Continuance Commitment Item	‘Skewness’
Necessary to stay	-.297
Hard to leave if wanted to	.775
Leaving disrupt life	-.656
Few options to leave	.297
Few alternatives	.351

The data skewness does not offer statistical conclusions from which to draw findings or conclusions. Rather, it offers a visual depiction of the way the data is distributed in the bell curve and to this end offers some insight into the way respondents responded to the questionnaire. Speculation drawn from this visual depiction must be tested. In this project the possibilities presented through the data skewness will be reconsidered in the qualitative research.

Conclusion

This stage of this research study was able only to present the way data was skewed in the bell curve and therefore some insight into how these public servants responded to the questionnaire, due to reduced statistical reliability of the questionnaire. The skewed data allowed for speculation that affective, normative and continuance commitment may be varied in their forms for these public service employees. However, this cannot be considered conclusive and so these ideas must be tested.

The modified questionnaire used in this stage of the project was unable to accurately measure the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment for these respondents and was found to be unreliable, despite its use in the past, its strong origin and two pre-tests being run in the early stages of this study. It is thought that this may be reflective of the unique context of this research. Although no conclusions can be drawn from this stage of the research, data skewness offers speculation that there may be value in questioning the way commitment is experienced by

these employees and whether or not it is typical of other employees represented in the literature, or if the experience of commitment is varied due to the employment context.

Possible variances in the components of commitment and the reduced reliability of the questionnaire meant that the question of dominance could not be identified in this stage of the study and therefore is to be reconsidered in the second stage of the study.

The next chapter in this thesis presents the findings of the second stage of this research study, the qualitative stage.

Chapter 5. FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

As explained in chapter 3 of this thesis, this study has used a mixed methods research approach to answer three research questions relating to the way that a group of Australia federal public servants experience organizational commitment and the implications this may have for the way human resource management (HRM) is currently practiced within the Australian Public Service (APS) context. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research methods and was divided into two research stages.

In the previous chapter the results of the first stage of this research were presented. The limitations of this data was discussed and the focus on a visual depiction of the data in the way it was skewed in the bell curve was considered to offer some insight into the respondents' tendencies towards affective, normative and continuance commitment. No conclusions were able to be drawn from the quantitative data. However, as was discussed, the skewed data suggested the these particular respondents' were likely to have experienced normative commitment as the most dominant form of commitment, however, likely to be focused towards workmates and colleagues rather than the organization; to have experienced some affective commitment relating to a desire to stay with the organization for an entire career; and continuance commitment that suggested respondents would feel leaving the organization a disruption to their life and staying with the organization a necessity. This speculation drawn from the skewed data was tested through the qualitative study, the findings of which are is presented in this chapter.

As the reliability of the questionnaire was low, the first stage of the research was able only to offer an indication of the way in which these particular public servants responded to the questionnaire and therefore their tendency towards a dominant state of organizational commitment. The quantitative data was not accepted as sufficiently reliable to answer the first research question: "*Are high levels of continuance commitment experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants*". Although the depiction of the data in the bell curve offered some insight into this issue, the question of the dominance of continuance commitment was hoped to be explored further in the qualitative stage of the research.

In this chapter the qualitative data is presented. Some preliminary interpretation is offered in this chapter to facilitate an understanding of the data and to present it categorically. However, the findings drawn from the data collation and analysis are discussed in considerably more depth in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Revisiting the purpose of this study, data was gathered to explore the way in which a group of generalist federal public servants employed in the corporate support division of an Australian Commonwealth Government Department, experienced organizational commitment, as this had not previously been published in the literature on organizational commitment. An embedded case study was undertaken with respondents from APS 1 to 6 level staff, employed in generalist, administrative positions drawn from a population of approximately 60 non-managerial corporate employees. It was assumed that this group of public servants would be more likely to experience organizational commitment given the generalist nature of their jobs and the fact that they could be employed in any one of a number of Commonwealth Government Departments to undertake very similar corporate support roles. Of interest was determining if continuance commitment was dominant for these respondents and if continuance commitment presented typical of Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990).

This chapter presents key themes that emerged from this stage of the study.

Key Themes

A number of themes emerged during these focus group sessions which reflected the states of affective, normative and continuance commitment as they were experienced by these respondents. These themes were considered to accurately reflect how commitment was experienced by this group of public service employees.

It was of particular interest to determine if continuance commitment presented in a manner typical of the widely accepted definition that was first proposed by Allen and Meyer in 1990. Despite the strength of Allen and Meyer's three component model, it is also widely accepted that commitment is influenced by employment context (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004;

Swailles, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005), appears to manifest differently in public sector organizations (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006) and can be varied in its form (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Given that these assumptions are almost contradictory, it was not automatically assumed that continuance commitment would meet Allen and Meyer's definition; rather, the exploration of continuance commitment as it was experienced by these individuals was based upon the assumption that it may in fact appear different.

Several themes emerged from the qualitative stage of this research and offered insight into how commitment was experienced by these respondents. The conclusions drawn from these themes are summarized below:

- Continuance commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Normative commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Affective commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Commitment in this group of respondents appears to have multiple foci;
- Some respondents may have felt confusion about their commitment; and
- Some respondents may have experienced low self-awareness regarding their commitment.

The many statements presented in this chapter were made by the 12 public service employees who nominated to take part in this stage of the research. The statements reflect the thoughts and discussions that took place in three focus group sessions, and have been isolated as statements that are likely to reflect or indicate a sense of either affective, normative or continuance commitment. The statements themselves are analyzed and linked to a state of commitment; the number of statements presented against each of the states of affective, normative and continuance commitment is representative of the degree to which these particular respondents made reference to their feelings and attitudes regarding their decision to work for this particular government organization. The focus of this thesis is to explore a possible variance in the form that continuance commitment takes for these employees also means that continuance

commitment was explored in more depth than affective and normative commitment. Therefore, there is more data on continuance commitment than either affective or normative commitment in this chapter and the overall thesis.

To this end, the aggregate data has been divided into six separate themes; one on each of the states of affective, normative and continuance commitment; one on the possible variances in the forms these take; one on the possibility that there is some confusion regarding one's state of commitment; and the final on a series of statements that reflect self-reported performance measures. This final theme is included in this assessment to offer some insight into the thoughts of this particular group of public servants regarding their state of commitment and their self-perceived levels of performance.

Each of these themes is discussed in depth in chapter 6. It is hoped that each will offer a contribution to the understanding of the construct of organizational commitment as it was experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants; and with some reference to self-perceived levels of performance, the links between commitment and performance can be considered, from a qualitative perspective. Self-reported measures of performance are problematic and this data cannot be considered conclusive or representative beyond this particular group. Further, given that performance was not defined in these discussions, this data can be considered nothing more than a contribution to the overall qualitative picture that is of interest in this study.

These six themes are presented and briefly considered in this chapter. A detailed discussion on issues arising from these themes, how they may reflect the APS culture and how they may influence the relationship between current HRM practices used within this department and organizational performance are presented in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Affective Commitment Themes

This study began with Chen and Francesco's (2001) adaptation of Allen and Meyer's (1990) organizational commitment questionnaire. The results showed that there was evidence of affective commitment to the department experienced by a group of Australian public servants.

Specifically, there was evidence that respondents felt they would happily remain with the department for the rest of their careers, they would stay with the department because they chose to or desired to (as opposed to needing to stay) and that there was a sense of belonging to the department. There was no clear evidence of a strong sense of emotional commitment to the department or a strong sense of involvement with the department that emerged from the quantitative data.

A number of questions were asked in the focus group sessions to explore the existence of and possible variance of affective commitment further. Responses that are particularly insightful are presented in table 5.2 along with some preliminary discussion. A more in-depth discussion on these themes is presented in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Table 5.2 Themes Reflecting a State of Affective Commitment

Responses

'I love the work that I do...there is a variety of work...my role now is fundamental to the operations of the department and we play a major role for the Australian government. I'm just part of the department...I'm comfortable here.'

'I can put my ideas forward and they sometimes act on them which makes me feel good...'

Reflection of affective commitment attitude

The statement '*...my role now is fundamental to the operations of the department and we play a major role for the Australian government...*' suggests a sense of involvement by this respondent with the department and the government and perhaps a personal connection to the work of the department. This may be reflective of affective commitment in this person's attitude.

Reference to being '*comfortable*' may also suggest some continuance commitment as well as, possibly, that losing comfort may be perceived as a reason to stay.

This statement may suggest a state of affective commitment since feeling good about one's ideas at work is likely to reflect a positive emotional connection to the work and a personal involvement in one's work. This respondent may be reflecting that they feel value

'I feel I've contributed and add value and that (the department) has a role in the community and contributes.'

'I have a sense of personal value and there is some integrity about working in (this department).'

in their contribution to the work of the department; they may be experiencing personal connection to the work.

There is a clear reference in this statement to a personal contribution made to the work of the department; although this does not necessarily reflect an emotional connection to the organization, the reference to the department's contribution to the community may reflect a values-based connection and a belief in the work of the department. Making reference to one's personal contribution to the work of an organization that has a seemingly positive role to play in the community is likely to be suggestive of a personal belief in the work of the department and a sense of personal connection to this work. This may reflect state of affective commitment in this respondent.

This appears to be quite a clear statement reflecting a personal connection to the department, reflecting personal values and integrity and suggesting an emotional attachment and involvement in the department. The reference to 'personal value' and 'integrity'

'(I don't feel) passion (about the work of the department) but (I do feel) an interest...there are opportunities...(to) make a difference.'

is suggestive of congruence in values and beliefs and perhaps an affective commitment to the organization.

This is a rather contradictory statement and although this respondent is clear in not being 'passionate' about the work of the department, there does appear to be some acknowledgement of the opportunity to 'make a difference' which may reflect personal involvement in the work of the department and an attitude of affective commitment, wanting to play a part in the role of the department, assuming that this statement is made with reference to the department 'making a difference' in the community. This may suggest there is some consideration of the value of the work, the purpose of the department and recognition of the value of being part of this contribution which is more likely to reflect affective commitment than normative or continuance given the likely reference to a values based connection between the employee and the organization.

'I have felt (the) passion (for the work of the department) at times, more so in later years...seeing stuff in the press, you can see you are part of it...'

This statement makes a clear reference to 'feeling passion for the work of the department' and as such is likely to be reflective of affective commitment, albeit felt somewhat periodically, 'at times' and when the department is mentioned in the press. However, the sense of being part of the department, of belonging to it and being connected to it may suggest that this respondent has some degree of affective commitment.

'...I feel passionate and when at functions there are comments, something inside you goes, you know.'

A clear acceptance of feeling passion towards the department and experiencing emotion towards the department is obvious in this statement and suggests that this respondent may have a personal connection to the department along with a sense of belonging and therefore may be experiencing affective commitment.

'I am proud of saying that I work in (this department), I'm part of something special and important.'

A sense of pride and believing in the purpose of the work and the role of the department is clearly indicative of a sense of affective commitment.

'What it represents in the big wide world, you are part of it.'

This statement reflects a personal connection to the department and a sense of pride in belonging to it which suggests affective commitment.

'I feel more attached today. (This department) is so involved with key decisions you feel you are in the thick of it. I like the fact that I am so involved.'

A clear sense of belonging to the department and feeling personal involvement in it and believing in the role of the department which is indicative of a sense of affective commitment.

'(This department) has been a big part of my life for a long time...I have a big emotional attachment to the department.'

A clear and strong reflection of affective commitment evidenced through an unequivocal statement of an emotional attachment to the department.

'(I like) the fact that you can add value to the department and that you are accepted as a necessary 'cog in the wheel'.'

There is some suggestion of affective commitment in this statement, although it is not strong. Adding value to the department shows a sense of involvement and perhaps interest in the work of the department, however, being a 'cog in the wheel' dilutes this somewhat as it does not suggest an emotional connection to the department.

'I wouldn't leave, there are things I want to do and I don't want to move as I might miss out on them. There are projects I want to see through (in this role) and I can look forward to what I am doing next.'

'The guys I work with have an input into changes in Australia and that's important and makes a difference for Australia. I have a passion and commitment towards the work those guys do...and if I can assist them to do their job, that's great.'

'I feel more part of the family in the section, not the division...'

An interesting statement that shows a personal interest in the work and a commitment to continuing to contribute to the work, this may suggest a sense of affective commitment to the department.

A sense of involvement in the work of the department and a personal agreement that the work of the department is important and valued, a clear reference to being passionate and committed to the work that is performed in the department and a sense of involvement in that work. This is indicative of affective commitment.

A reference to 'being part of the family' indicates a sense of belonging and an attitude of affective commitment. Here the affective commitment is focused towards the immediate section that this person works in, and not beyond. Affective commitment is evident, but it is perhaps more likely to be felt in relation to team mates than to the work of the department.

'(I feel like) part of the family for our section only, not the department.'

A sense of affective commitment is evident in the reference to feeling part of a 'family' at work, however, the focus of this attitude is towards the section which suggests it is focused on colleagues and workmates, not to the department or organization itself.

'...my section is like a family, like a connection to a family group.'

Further evidence of affective commitment towards the section and the immediate work mates and colleagues, but not felt towards the department.

The discussions that were held in the focus group sessions brought out considerably more information regarding the strength of affective commitment experienced by this group of employees than had been identified in the quantitative data. For the most part it appears that respondents who made these comments felt a *'personal'* attachment to the department, but not necessarily an *'emotional'* one. At the risk of *'splitting hairs'*, it is apparent from these comments that respondents were happy to stay with the department for the rest of their working lives, which is an element of affective commitment as defined by Allen and Meyer (1990), but perhaps not for the same reasons as those who are truly affectively committed. Being affectively committed, according to Allen and Meyer's definition, conjures up an image of an employee who is passionate about the organization for which they work; someone who truly believes that there is great value in the work the organization does; who believes that their personal purpose in life is linked to the purpose of the organization and to that end, their emotional attachment to and involvement with the organization brings about the very highest levels of performance. There is no question that this type of commitment is both powerful and commendable.

However, the commitment that is depicted in the statements presented by these respondents does not appear to match this description. Rather than gaining a strong sense of emotional attachment to the department, these respondents talk about a sense of comfort being part of the department; a strong sense of family; a sense of happiness about working there for their careers; a sense of pride about working for one of the country's most prestigious federal government departments. Although this too is commendable, it seems to fall short of the passion and emotional connection expected from an affectively committed employee.

Several comments relate to a sense of personal satisfaction as seen in references such as:

- *'...my role now is fundamental to the operations of the department and we play a major role for the Australian government;'*
- *'I can put my ideas forward and they sometimes act on them which makes me feel good;'*

- *'The guys I work with have an input into changes in Australia and that's important and makes a difference for Australia. I have a passion and commitment towards the work those guys do...and if I can assist them to do their job, that's great;'*
- *'(I like) the fact that you can add value to the department and that you are accepted as a necessary 'cog in the wheel;'*
- *'I wouldn't leave, there are things I want to do and I don't want to move as I might miss out on them. There are projects I want to see through (in this role) and I can look forward to what I am doing next;'* and *you feel you are in the thick of it. I like the fact that I am so involved.*

Other comments are more reflective of pride, such as such as:

- *'I am proud of saying that I work in (this department), I'm part of something special and important;'* and
- *'...I feel passionate and when at functions there are comments, something inside you goes, you know;'* and *seeing stuff in the press, you can see you are part of it;'* and
- *'...there is some integrity about working in (this department).'*

These comments, and others presented in table 5.2 are considered to reflect affective commitment. It is clear that these employees work for this department because they *'want to'*, which reflects affective commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990 p.1). One respondent makes it clear that they do feel an emotional connection to the department, with the words: *'I have a big emotional attachment to the department;'* however, this statement sits alone and is not repeated by other respondents, and as such although the affective commitment inherent in this statement is clear, it does not appear to be felt by other respondents in this group.

It is not clear that the general desire to stay with the department for an entire career as indicated through these comments is based upon an emotional connection to the

organization, a belief in the values and purpose of the organization; a passion to be part of the organization and the work it does. In fact, there are statements that state this unequivocally, and yet still reflect elements of affective commitment, such as:

- *'(I don't feel) passion (about the work of the department) but (I do feel) an interest...there are opportunities ...(to) make a difference.'*

In conclusion affective commitment is reflected in these statements. Preliminary analysis suggests that affective commitment for these respondents seems to reflect a sense of comfort in the job, a sense of pride related to being in this department and a desire to stay in the department for one's entire career. What appears to be missing from these comments is a clear reflection of an emotional connection, a sense of passion, of desire to work nowhere else based on values and an affective attitude. It seems there is a 'personal' connection more than an 'emotional connection' and this may represent a variation in the form that affective commitment takes for these respondents.

Normative Commitment Themes

In the process of exploring variations in the form that continuance commitment takes for these respondents it was necessary to explore all three dimensions of commitment and in doing this it was apparent that a varied form of normative commitment was evident. The earlier quantitative research had also identified a variation in the form normative commitment took for these respondents which reflected a focus towards team mates and colleagues rather than the department itself; and as such it appeared that normative *organizational* commitment was not experienced by these respondents.

Normative commitment, as defined in the literature and supported by Allen and Meyer in their three component model (1990) reflects a sense of loyalty and obligation to the employing organization, or in this case, government department. Normative commitment results in an employee feeling that they '*should stay*' with their organization because it is the 'right thing to do' (Allen and Meyer, 1990). This attitude is explored in the focus group sessions and statements that reflect this attitude are presented in table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Themes Reflecting a State of Normative Commitment

Responses

I have a sense of loyalty, if someone says anything against (my department), against my team or my section.'

'If I left I would feel guilty...but not a lot.'

'I definitely (feel emotional) towards my team. (I'm) not (emotional) to the department but to the people in my team.'

Reflection of normative commitment attitude

A clear reference to normative commitment evident in the reflection of loyalty to the department, team and section.

This reflection of feeling guilty may suggest evidence of normative commitment. However the statement is also clear in reference to not feeling significant guilt. Thus although it suggests normative commitment, it suggests that it is experienced at a low level and is unlikely to be the core of this person's commitment to the department.

Clearly referencing a connection to the people with whom this person works and differentiating this from an emotional connection to the department. Again this could suggest loyalty and normative commitment to the people.

'I'm committed to the people in this section...'

A clear indication of commitment focused towards people who could suggest some loyalty and normative commitment.

'The department has been good to me so I am willing to put something back.'

This statement clearly reflects a sense of obligation, in return for the positive experience that this respondent is reflecting upon. This is undoubtedly reflection of normative commitment.

'I have a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the people of the organization.'

This respondent clearly refers to their loyalty towards the people they work with and this identifies normative commitment focused towards workmates and colleagues as opposed to the department itself.

'...there is no-one else in my department with my skills so it would be hard to replace what I do. It's just my personality.'

This respondent is reflecting some normative commitment in that they seem to feel some obligation to remain in the department given their perception of the lack of relevant skills in other departmental officers. It is interesting that this person reflects

their attitude as ‘personality’ and perhaps assumes that this attitude will not change.

‘(Staying here is about) loyalty’.

A clear statement that reflects a sense of loyalty as the core element of choosing to stay with the department and clearly a reflection of normative commitment.

‘I don’t like to leave people in the lurch, to disadvantage people. I would feel more comfortable if I could replace myself. I feel a sense of obligation (to the department) because it gave me a job and gave me good money so I feel obligation – to the group of people I think.’

This respondent is clearly reflecting normative commitment however is unsure as to whether the focus is on colleagues and work mates or the department itself.

‘I would feel guilty (if I left) like I was selling out...I feel a sense of obligation to the section more than to the whole department, I’m not sure I feel it for the department.’

A clear reference to normative commitment focused on the section in which this respondent works, which is most likely to reflect a focus on the people they work with in this section of the department.

'I would feel guilty (if I left), absolutely, more to my section, although I'm not saying that I am unique, there would be a gap for a time for someone to come in and do what I do.'

Another statement that reflects a sense of obligation to stay with the section. The underlying attitude may be that it would not be right to leave because of the skills gap and this reflects obligation and normative commitment.

'I agree that there is a sense of obligation to the people.'

Unequivocal statement in agreement with a sense of obligation towards the people with whom this respondent works and thus indicating normative commitment focused on people rather than the department itself.

The qualitative data is almost exclusively reflective of an attitude of normative commitment focused on colleagues and work mates; which is consistent with the data that emerged from the quantitative stage of this study. For the most part, respondents appeared to easily identify loyalty and obligation towards colleagues and not towards the department itself. Further, consistent with the findings from the quantitative data, this form of commitment was strong for these respondents.

Identifying the references to loyalty towards colleagues or work mates, shows a clear variance in this component of commitment:

- *'I definitely (feel emotional) towards my team. (I'm) not (emotional) to the department but to the people in my team.'*
- *'I'm committed to the people in this section...'*
- *I have a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the people of the organization.'*
- *I feel a sense of obligation (to the department) because it gave me a job and gave me good money so I feel obligation – to the group of people I think.'*
- *I feel a sense of obligation to the section more than to the whole department,*
- *'I would feel guilty (if I left), absolutely, more to my section...'*
- *'I agree that there is a sense of obligation to the people.'*

The quantitative data suggested that it was normative commitment that the respondents were most able to relate to, when compared to affective and continuance commitment. In line with this, these comments appear to clearly reflect a sense of loyalty; this is not a difficult concept for respondents to grasp. Arguable, this concept is easier to grasp than effective commitment or continuance commitment, from a layperson's perspective. To this end, normative commitment is clear and evident for these respondents. The variation in this component of commitment relates not to the concept of loyalty or obligation, but to the focus of the commitment. There are some statements suggesting some respondents focus normative commitment towards the department, statements such as:

- *'I have a sense of loyalty, if someone says anything against (my department), against my team or my section.'*
- *'The department has been good to me so I am willing to put something back.'*

However, it is likely that in this instance and for this group of respondents, normative commitment is focused more towards colleagues and team mates than the department, as commitment towards the department is mentioned only twice.

Normative, Affective and Continuance Commitment: Relative Commentary

Overall, there were relatively few comments reflecting a sense of normative commitment, and similarly there were few comments reflecting affective commitment in any of the focus group sessions. Consequently there are relatively few comments presented for analysis in this chapter. In each focus group session the conversations were dominated by commentary reflecting continuance commitment. When the construct of commitment was raised in each of the focus group sessions, many of the responses that reflect continuance commitment came readily and were the focal point of the sessions. Questions were asked to direct conversation towards affective and normative commitment to ascertain the degree to which these components of commitment existed, for interest sake and to ensure some balance in exploring the construct of commitment. These responses are offered for analysis in this chapter.

Although it is both unexpected and interesting to identify variances in affective and normative commitment, the few statements made reflecting these components of commitment mean that these conclusions are weak. As such, a great deal more research is required to explore in more depth, the variances that may be possible in affective and normative commitment.

The focus of the qualitative stage of this research was to explore continuance commitment and determine if it existed in a way that reflected Allen and Meyer's definition (1990). Continuance commitment was separated from affective and normative commitment for the purposes of exploration of variance for two reasons. Firstly, the

literature makes reference only to variations in the form that continuance commitment takes and as such this research sought only to test this in this instance (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Secondly, the likely dominance of continuance commitment in public sector organizations and the implications for this on performance and possibly HRM practices meant that the focus of this research was, for the most part, on continuance commitment.

In this chapter, therefore, there is more data presented reflecting continuance commitment than affective or normative commitment; in summary this is because the focus of this research was to measure the dominance of and explore the form of continuance commitment (relative to affective and normative commitment, which could not be ignored, but were secondary to the focus of continuance commitment) and because the respondents in this research spoke more readily and easily about their sense of continuance commitment than normative or affective commitment and consequently there is more data on continuance commitment presented in this chapter.

Continuance Commitment Themes

Throughout the focus group sessions there emerged a very strong theme that reflected continuance commitment and many of the statements made in the focus groups are presented in table 5.4. However, there was such an abundance of data reflecting this state of commitment that not all is included in table 5.4. The complete record of comments is included at Appendix D.

Continuance commitment had split foci, for many respondents it was focused on the department itself while for many others it was focused on the public service as a whole and for some it appeared that their continuance commitment was focused on both.

This data also showed a variance in the elements of continuance commitment. A very strong theme to emerge suggested that an element of continuance commitment was comfort and complacency and this data is presented in table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Themes Reflecting a State of Continuance Commitment

Responses

'The salary (here) was a big draw-card (to join the department).'

'This department is very supportive and family friendly, I had no problem working part time in an Executive Assistant's role and that's hard to get.'

'I would not go back to the university (where I worked before), even if they offered work that inspired me.'

Reflection of continuance commitment attitude

This statement is clear in its reference to the financial benefits of joining this department and thus suggests a state of continuance commitment.

The conditions offered to this respondent with regard to balancing work and family suggest that this respondent is staying with the department because of the perceived loss of these benefits if they left, or the perceived lack of alternatives. This suggests continuance commitment.

There may be an assumption underlying this statement that what this person believes they currently have in their current position is too great to lose to consider returning to a previous employer, despite the promise of inspiring work. This suggests a state of

continuance commitment.

'My work-life balance is just right at the moment.'

A statement that infers that to leave the department would adversely impact on this person's work-life balance and that perhaps this would be too much to lose to consider moving. This suggests a state of continuance commitment.

'Most people don't take a pay cut.'

An interesting statement that suggests that this respondent agrees with a commonly held view (according to this person) that if a person were to lose income as a consequence of leaving the department they would choose not to. This attitude reflects a state of continuance commitment.

'I wanted to join the APS and (this department) offered me a job. Others had told me that (this department) was a good place to work.'

This statement is interesting as it not only reflects a state of continuance commitment, it suggests that the unique elements of the APS were the foci of the commitment and it also suggests that this attitude developed prior to joining the department. It appears

therefore that the commitment is focused on both the APS and the department and that for this respondent it is based on a state of continuance commitment.

'I was studying economics and (this department) offered to pay for my final year of study, so I joined.'

This statement suggests that a state of continuance commitment developed at the point of recruitment, as this respondent's decision to join this department was, at least in part, determined by the offer of tertiary support. The assumption therefore that had this respondent not joined this department they would have lost this financial benefit.

'They (the department) gave me my degree, they up-skill you a lot, the training opportunities are great.'

This suggests continuance commitment as the respondent appears to have some commitment based upon the training opportunities they experience. However, it is possible that having had their university degree supported by the department, there may be underlying normative commitment for this respondent as well.

'The conditions of service are very good. Obviously I don't want to lower (my) pay if I go somewhere else, but the conditions of service in the public service are very good...I was keen to join the public service...I have a passion for HR and conditions of service. My Dad was a long term public servant so he was always talking about good pay and conditions.'

'I have thought about leaving over the years but the work is very interesting, there is a large variety and you get opportunities to work on new projects. (The department has) a reputation of (having) high quality people. I have talked to other (people) and they say their HR policies are not as good, and their senior officers are not necessarily as good.'

'The pay is good compared to the private sector.'

A clear statement here of continuance commitment and the benefits that are experienced in the APS.

This respondent seems to be expressing continuance commitment as there is a suggestion that there would be too much to lose if this person left. They would lose interesting and varied work and conditions of service that they perceive to be unique to this department. They even perceive their managers to be superior to those in other departments. The tone of this statement seems to be one of fear of losing these benefits despite some consideration of leaving the department.

A statement that reflects the generous pay and conditions that the Australian Public Service is known for, which suggests that this

respondent feels some continuance commitment perhaps focused towards the APS instead of the department itself.

'The superannuation payments make you stay.'

This statement makes a direct link between one of the conditions of working in the APS, which is high superannuation contributions and commitment, indicating continuance commitment.

'The leave entitlements are very good.'

A clear indication of continuance commitment reflected in reference to generous leave entitlements that are one of the conditions of employment for APS staff.

'I wouldn't go to the private sector. I want to have a baby next year so the conditions of service are very important.'

Comparison between the public and private sector conditions of service and the reference to those conditions that are beneficial for new parents reflects a state of continuance commitment in this respondent.

'I wouldn't go to a job with a drastic drop in pay and conditions.'

A clear perception of loss associated with leaving and thus continuance commitment being experienced.

'I'd quit without a thought if I won the lottery!'

A statement reflecting continuance commitment as this respondent may be indicating that they stay with the department for the income alone.

'If you have to work, this is a good place to work because the pay and conditions are good.'

A statement that suggests the perception of a risk of loss associated with working elsewhere, the risk of reduced pay and conditions.

'I have only 15 years left, I'm thinking about the pension. I need the pay.'

A possible reflection of perception that this respondent cannot afford to leave this department, which reflects continuance commitment.

'I have commitments outside of work so I can't afford to work anywhere else, I need job stability and the pay and conditions.'

A clear reflection of continuance commitment based on the perception of losses associated with leaving.

The pay and conditions offered in the Australian Public Service as a whole; and the specific pay and conditions offered in this department, both emerged as key components of continuance commitment. Although the strength of this state of commitment is seen to be much greater in the qualitative data than was identified in the quantitative data, the result are not surprising and indeed are consistent with earlier findings (Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2006).

The focus on pay and conditions is evident through statements such as:

- *'The salary (here) was a big draw-card'*
- *'Most people don't take a pay cut'*
- *'The pay is good compared to the private sector'*
- *'I have a passion for HR and conditions of service. My Dad was a long term public servant so he was always talking about good pay and conditions.'*
- *'...I have talked to other (people) and they say their HR policies are not as good...'*
- *'The leave entitlements are very good.'*
- *'...I want to have a baby next year so the conditions of service are very important.'*
- *'I wouldn't go to a job with a drastic drop in pay and conditions.'*
- *'I'd quit without a thought if I won the lottery!'*
- *'If you have to work, this is a good place to work because the pay and conditions are good.'*
- *'I have only 15 years left, I'm thinking about the pension. I need the pay.'*
- *'I have commitments outside of work so I can't afford to work anywhere else, I need job stability and the pay and conditions.'*

These statements make it quite clear that these respondents stay with the department because of the pay and conditions that they perceive they would lose if they left the department, or the broader APS. Although this is not entirely inconsistent with the currently accepted definition of continuance commitment, including Allen and Meyer's

definition (1990), there does not appear to be reference to side-bets or to ‘the magnitude of or number of investments’ (Allen and Meyer, 1990, p.1) made by these respondents. Thus, it is possible that continuance commitment is varied in relation to perceived losses; they are clearly evident, but not necessarily related to personal investments in the organizations, rather, the perceived losses reflect employment entitlements.

What is also evident is the lack of commentary about few alternatives for employment. Indeed, there are no statements claiming that there are few employment alternatives. Thus, continuance commitment is based upon perceived losses of pay, conditions, stability and comfort; there is no mention of personal investments being too great or few employment alternatives.

These variations form the core of continuance commitment as it is experience by these respondents. Continuance commitment appears to be the dominant form of commitment and it appears to be varied in its form; and given that it relates mostly to the pay and conditions that are offered in this public service, it is likely that this variation is reflective of the overall employment context. This is discussed in more depth in chapter 6 of this thesis.

In the following table, statements are presented that offer more clarity around the variances that appear evident in affective, normative and continuance commitment, as experienced by this group of Australian federal public service employees.

Table 5.5 Themes Reflecting Unique Variances of Organizational Commitment

Responses

Possible reflection of affective, normative or continuance commitment, with varied and unique elements

'I would stay until someone else was trained in my job.'

This statement reflects a sense of 'doing the right thing' and not leaving the team in a disadvantaged position, which may suggest some degree of normative commitment. The use of the conditional tense in the word 'would' suggests that leaving the organization would occur but the condition would be that the role could be taken on by others, possibly trained by the incumbent. There may be a sense of obligation behind this statement.

'My main commitment is to myself to do the job to the best of my ability, but my allegiances are to a whole range of people, managers, to the division as a whole, that's what my heart is telling me.'

This statement seems to reflect a sense of normative commitment focused on the people with whom this respondent works, more than anything else. However, it is interesting that a reference is made to being committed to self rather than to the department.

'I feel emotionally attached to the people.'

An interesting comment that could reflect either affective commitment focused on colleagues and work mates, or could lie behind the evidence of normative commitment focused towards the people. It is possible that an emotional connection to the people would result in some sense of loyalty towards them and this could result in an attitude of normative commitment.

'I definitely feel emotional towards the people...'

A further reference to an emotional connection to the people with whom one works, which could reflect a sense of loyalty and obligation and thus normative commitment focused on colleagues rather than the department.

'I (would) feel mixed emotions (if I left) as I would miss the people but I would want to go to a new job. If I left this job it would be one I would leave with some reluctance. In other jobs...the work was boring and the people were unpleasant and it was just for money. Here there is a lot of deadline work and the

This statement seems to indicate some loyalty towards the people, reflecting in the reference to leaving reluctantly and thus could indicate some normative commitment focused on colleagues and work mates. The reference to being treated well may also reflect a unique variance of continuance commitment, choosing to stay with the department for fear of losing the benefits of being treated well. Yet recognizing that there is more to lose than simply money, if

people treat you well.'

'This department paid for my final year of study. I felt some loyalty. I wasn't indentured...I'm not feeling that now to the same extent – I could walk out of here tomorrow and wouldn't feel disloyal. But I do have loyalty to the organization.'

'There is loyalty to the department there, but it has decreased over past years. There is so much extra work and so it's hard to feel loyal when you are over worked.'

one left this department reinforces the unique elements of continuance commitment.

An interesting statement that reflects some confusion around a sense of normative commitment. Perhaps this respondent felt normative commitment at some stage but no longer does, and is somewhat uncomfortable with this shift in attitude. Perhaps there is some commitment which is no longer normative and is not identified. However, the statement does show that there was some normative commitment felt at some point and now there is confusion.

This statement appears to reflect normative commitment, although it is almost conditional normative commitment; it exists when the workload is reasonable but not when it increases. If this respondent does not feel 'loyal' when overworked, and yet remains with the department, the question is, why do they stay? What state of commitment dominates when the work load is high? Perhaps it is continuance commitment.

'There are definitely times when you feel more committed and other times when I think I could be more interested. But mostly I just stay.'

An interesting reflection on the shifting states of commitment; the difference between being committed and being interested; the latter might reflect affective commitment but the respondent does not recognise this feeling as a form of commitment. The reference to 'just staying' is interesting. It may reflect a misunderstanding of the construct of commitment and low awareness about this person's current state of commitment, which is possible continuance commitment and possibly based on comfort and complacency.

'I wouldn't feel guilty if I left because I would only leave if I was disgruntled.'

This statement appears to reflect continuance commitment, perhaps by default. There is no suggestion of affective commitment and dismissing a sense of guilt suggests that loyalty or normative commitment is not strong. Leaving only if disgruntled suggests that perhaps this respondent stays simply because they are not disgruntled, which could indicate continuance commitment; they stay because they have to rather than want to or should.

'I would hate to think I had to retire because what

An interesting reflection on commitment attitude that perhaps reflects continuance commitment based upon a sense of purpose

would I do with myself.'

'If you had to work this is where you'd choose to work.'

'If (Secretary's name) were the Secretary (of the department) I would stay. I feel loyalty to him and have a sense of personal connection and loyalty because in my previous job I got to know him on a personal level so I could see him, I saw him with his tie off.'

and value; a daily role to play. Leaving work would bring boredom, which is perceived as a loss and thus influences a state of continuance commitment.

This is possibly a reflection of both affective and continuance commitment that, when combined, have been called a devoted profile (Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989) which is considered highly beneficial. The reference to 'having' to work reflects continuance commitment and the reference to 'choosing to work' may reflect affective commitment.

This respondent appears to feel normative commitment towards the Secretary of the department himself; which is normative commitment focused on work mates and colleagues, in this instance on one particular colleague.

'My commitment is 70% to the people I work with and only 30% to the pay and conditions.'

A clear breakdown of a commitment profile split between normative towards colleagues and continuance commitment.

'For me it's 50% to the people and 50% to the pay and conditions.'

Another clear split that shows a balanced commitment profile between normative and continuance commitment.

'Pay is quite a big thing for me, also progression. I have stalled at the moment so that would make me change jobs – pay and promotion. My commitment is 60% to being paid well and promotions opportunities and 20% to the work I do and 20% to the people.'

A reflection of a commitment profile split between continuance commitment (60%) and normative commitment (20%) and affective commitment (20%).

'People are very important, for me they are 50% of the reason I stay, the work is 20% and the pay and conditions are 25 to 30%.'

A commitment profile that shows normative commitment to be dominant for this respondent; normative commitment focused on colleagues.

'I am 100% committed to the people.'

A strong and absolute attitude of what may be normative

	commitment focused towards colleagues.
<i>'I am 70% committed to the people and 30% committed to the work.'</i>	A dominance of normative commitment focused on colleagues.
<i>'I've got 'zip' commitment to the organization, but 100% to the people.'</i>	A clear indication of normative commitment focused on colleagues and not to the department itself.
<i>'I'm 50/50 (committed), even to the people and to the work.'</i>	An even split between normative and affective commitment; normative focused on colleagues.
<i>'If I left I would feel disloyal to my manager, but if she left I don't think I would worry. That might decrease my loyalty.'</i>	This statement shows loyalty and therefore normative commitment focused on this respondent's manager only.
<i>'When our Secretary leaves, that might make a difference for me, I'd be less loyal.'</i>	Normative commitment focused only on the Secretary of the department.

'I am comfortable here.'

This statement suggests continuance commitment based on a sense of comfort that might be lost if this respondent were to leave; they stay because they are comfortable.

'I'm in my comfort zone.'

Another statement that clearly shows the strength of comfort as a variance of continuance commitment.

'If I enjoyed the work but the manager was horrible then I wouldn't stay. I like the people and the work.'

This statement suggests that a sense of comfort is important and perhaps the basis of commitment for this person; there is no suggestion that there is an emotional connection to either the work that the organization does or to the people and therefore this does not suggest affective commitment. Nor is there a reference to loyalty or a sense of obligation towards the department or the people. The reference to 'liking the people and the work' is likely to be more of a reflection of continuance commitment since leaving would mean risking this sense of comfort, and yet if the comfort with the work and people were lost, the person would consider leaving the department.

'I have security.'

Job security became a theme of this discussion and was presented as a unique form of continuance commitment, something that most of these respondents felt they would lose if they left their current department, and they tended to suggest that this would be too much to lose.

*'Flexitime is important; 'time in lieu' is not the same.
I would stay where I am so that I don't lose flexitime.'*

Flexitime refers to an arrangement whereby staff earn extra leave from work for extra hours worked every day. Flexitime offers flexible work hours, control over time spent at work and time off and appears to be a unique element of continuance commitment, something that was suggested as too great to lose and therefore worth staying in the department for. This suggests that flexitime is a unique element of continuance commitment.

'The downside is that they (management) expect you to go up the levels (promotions) but because you would lose flexitime, it's really not acceptable.'

Another reference to the value of flexitime, reflected in the fact that flexitime is offered only at the administrative levels and not at high levels in the department (this is not uncommon across the APS). This statement suggests that the flexitime as a unique form of continuance commitment results in a sense of continuance

commitment not only to the department but in fact to the particular position and level within that department. Continuance commitment appears here to be focused on the position the person is in, or a category of positions within the department and this suggests that continuance commitment not only has unique variances but unique foci as well.

'(This department) is not seen as poorly as other departments, the feedback (about working here) is quite positive, so why would you leave?'

This statement may suggest continuance commitment, reflecting the idea that there would be something to lose if this respondent chose to work elsewhere in the APS. It may be a fear of the unknown that is influencing this statement, as this person is reflecting on feedback from others, assuming comparative feedback about working in this department compared to others. This statement does not reflect personal experience of working elsewhere but does suggest that this respondent is choosing to stay with the department due to a belief that leaving may be detrimental and therefore would come at a cost.

'It's easier to be here, I know what I am doing. I hate

An interesting statement by this respondent that reflects

going to new jobs, (experiencing) anxiety and getting to know new people. I am comfortable. I could become complacent.'

'I get a bit complacent and think I will apply for (another) job and then I don't. I would have to spend hours typing up an application. I would have to find the dream job and then I would make the effort.'

'It's quiet here, comfortable, they look after staff here.'

continuance commitment based on a desire to maintain comfort and reduce the anxiety experienced with a change in department. Thus there is a perceived loss associated with leaving that drives the decision to stay and the basis for the loss may be unique. Certainly this basis was not identified in the questionnaire administered in this study.

This respondent appears to stay with the department because of comfort and complacency. They state a desire to move on for the 'dream job' but also refer to the hard work required to facilitate a successful move from the department. There is an assumption here that this person is not currently in their dream job, and yet has chosen to stay with the department despite this. It appears that this commitment is continuance and is reflective of a sense of comfort as opposed to an emotional connection to the department or a sense of loyalty.

A reference to the sense of comfort that many of these respondents have raised and that appears to offer a unique variance of

'Free parking, flextime, 'family', it is a nice feeling to be here as it's not a big department, there is a closeness feel.'

'It's a comfortable environment, fairly friendly around here, wages are very good in the public sector, parking, pay and training opportunities.'

'I think if I had the same job in a different department I wouldn't be as happy because I have a network. Money would entice me to leave but it would have to be a huge amount. I have worked in several areas and in dynamic teams and with people I would

continuance commitment.

This statement is perhaps another reflection of the sense of comfort that appears to be emerging as a theme and a possible variance of the state of continuance commitment. The reference to free parking and flextime also indicates continuance commitment as it has been seen in previous research.

A clear reflection of continuance commitment but with a reference to comfort, which is emerging as a unique variance of continuance commitment in this group.

This statement appears to reflect commitment focused on the benefits of having a network and working with people with whom this respondent would consider friends. It is inferred that working with friendly people and having a network is more important than money, as although an increase in pay would be enticing, it would

choose to be friends with.'

'If I didn't have to work I would still want to work, less hours but still do it for the social interaction here. This is such a nice place to work.'

'It's a comfort thing, why move?'

have to be a 'huge amount' for this person to give up the people and the networks. This indicates an interesting variance in continuance commitment relating to comfort and connections to other people.

A reference to commitment based upon the enjoyment this respondent gains from social interaction and the relationships that have formed. The statement of working even if this respondent did not need to, but would choose to work because of the social gains is interesting. It may suggest that the fear of losing the connections to people and the networks is so great as to ensure this respondent works without the need to earn an income. The commitment is clearly focused upon the people in the organization and the benefits gained from social interaction, even outweighing the need to earn an income.

This statement is indicative of a variance of continuance commitment reflecting comfort in the department and the choice to stay in the department to maintain comfort.

'Why leave? It's good here and many people come back.'

A statement that also suggests continuance commitment based upon the perceived benefits of working in the department as opposed to other departments; or a perception that whatever is 'good' in the department is sufficiently beneficial to promote a basis of commitment. This statement does not suggest that commitment is based on affective or normative states and so presents an interesting insight into a unique variance of continuance commitment suggesting comfort.

'I have worked in other departments and this is "Christmas".'

The reference to 'Christmas' invokes a sense of enjoyment and happiness and may suggest that commitment is based upon comfort and enjoyment, that is perceived to be unique to this department and thus is probably indicative of a variance of continuance commitment.

'I work part time and have no intention of working full time again. It takes time to build up credibility as a part time officer and I don't want to have to do that again. If someone paid me substantial 'bucks'

This respondent reflects continuance commitment that is based upon credibility as a part time officer. There is also reference to flexibility of working hours and this is presented as being an important element of commitment to this department. It is inferred

(dollars) and I had the same flexibility and hours that I have at the moment, then I would leave.'

It would have to be a very good offer (to leave)! I don't even know if money would do it. It would have to be more than \$20,000 (per year in salary) because I think there would be substantial trade-offs in conditions. It would be the people, the role and the opportunity and more than \$20,000 more in pay.'

'Flexibility is the thing.'

that it is even more important than income. Thus the variance of continuance commitment relates to part time work and flexibility of working hours that is offered in this department and the credibility that comes with longevity in a department.

This is a very clear statement that reflects what this respondent believes to be important in a job and what would alter their commitment to this department. They suggest that money is not the most important element of their commitment, but conditions of employment seem to be the important factor. They then go on to add 'the people, role and pay' as enticing elements. This may suggest that commitment for this person at this time is continuance commitment based upon these elements; ie good working conditions and a connection to the people with salary priorities next. This statement gives some insight into the elements of continuance commitment at play for this respondent.

This respondent suggests that the key to their continuance commitment is flexibility and that this is a benefit that they would

choose to stay for or indeed to leave for.

'I have access to part time work...and I know if I took a more senior role in this department I couldn't do those hours.'

A statement that reflects part time work and flexibility as the basis of commitment, indicative of a variance of continuance commitment.

'Free parking, general leave conditions, flexible working hours (are all available here).'

Another statement that suggests these conditions are an element of continuance commitment, as they may not be offered elsewhere and are thus something that the respondent risks losing if they were to leave the department.

'I wouldn't leave, for not much more pay and to lose flextime.'

This respondent indicates that the flextime available is worth more than a small pay increase and is thus a deciding factor in remaining with the department suggesting that flextime is a variance of continuance commitment for this person.

'It's the hours for me, if you need to leave at 5 o'clock you can...to earn an extra \$20,000 would mean working an extra hour each day.'

'I would not move into the private sector in this stage of my life.'

'I would consider leaving but I don't know that I would take the job. If things went 'to pot' here I would consider it. I don't have many years left and I want to enjoy what I do.'

'I would go (leave the department) if my job changed and the people changed here and if things got worse, even if the job wasn't as interesting I would go.'

This statement also reflects flexible hours as a condition of employment that is valued by this respondent and may be an element of continuance commitment.

Although this statement is not particularly clear in its meaning, it is possible that it reflects a state of continuance commitment with this respondent perceiving too much to lose to change sectors. These losses could be pay and conditions or comfort and security.

Another statement that reflects continuance commitment based upon comfort and security and enjoying work. The indication here is that while work is enjoyable and comfortable there appears to be strong commitment.

This statement suggests that this respondent's continuance commitment is based upon comfort, status quo and perhaps security; reflecting that if things changed they would leave. While they remain the same, this person appears committed.

'...I do a good job here, (if I left) I would have to learn a new job.'

The theme of comfort and security is reflected in this statement, the loss that would be experienced with leaving the department appears to be comfort in knowing one's job and doing it well. This may be a variance of continuance commitment.

'...I would have to learn a new job. I wouldn't go there (to a new department) and get chucked into the frying pan.'

A similar sentiment is reflected here in that unknown elements of a new position reflect a perceived loss, the loss of being comfortable in knowing one's job. The reference to the 'frying pan' may reflect fear of the unknown and a perception that in other departments the level of comfort currently experienced may not be possible.

'In other departments there is a risk after every election that the department will be broken up. There's no risk of that here. Things stay the same.'

Continuance commitment based on comfort and the knowledge that things will stay the same. The perception suggested here is that this would be lost if this person were to leave this department.

We get more people (wanting to work here) because

Further indication that stability and comfort are a strong theme and

we are a stable department.'

reflect a variance of continuance commitment that appears to be common to this group of public servants.

'I'm comfortable here. Things would have to change dramatically for me to leave.'

Continuance commitment possibly based on comfort.

'I think I would probably put off looking for other work because I am comfortable here and I would need to start over.'

Continuance commitment based upon comfort in the job and the perceived loss of comfort.

'I don't like changing jobs too often because I don't like being a 'fish out of water.'

This statement reflects comfort and status quo as an element of continuance commitment.

'...job security and stability (are) reasons I stay. I feel more secure here than in the private sector.'

Continuance commitment based upon job stability and security of the APS, not necessarily of the department.

'I really like the public service superannuation, money was the driver and formed part of my decision to join the public service. I know what the superannuation was as part of the package to (this department) and (it) was a factor.'

'I wouldn't move into the private sector because they don't have the same pay and conditions.'

This statement is indicative of the belief that the pay and conditions of the APS influence the decision to work in the public service and for this respondent in this department. It may reflect continuance commitment to both the department itself and the APS as a whole.

Pay and conditions of the APS as a whole as an element of continuance commitment.

Table 5.5 showed in great detail the variances in the construct of organizational commitment experienced by this group of respondents; and the strength of the themes was evident in their repetition across the focus groups. This data suggests the following themes:

- normative commitment exists focused on colleagues, work mates and managers more than on the department itself;
- affective commitment that is based upon a sense of pride working for this department and both comfort and a positive type of complacency and stability;
- continuance commitment that is based on the unique pay and conditions that are offered in the Australian Public Service and in this department; and do not appear to include personal investments or a lack of alternatives. Also, a perception of a loss of comfort, with comfort including:
 - stability of employment
 - sameness of position and role
 - complacency
 - friendships
 - networks
 - knowledge of job
 - knowledge of overall employment experience in this department
 - ease of living
 - balance of work and life
 - a sense of value to the department

It was not anticipated that variances would be identified in all three components of commitment, and although it was accepted as possible that continuance commitment was varied, the degree of variance is greater than expected. Likewise, the level of uncertainty around one's sense of commitment was also greater than expected.

There are 5 currently accepted components of organizational commitment (Allen and Myer, 1990; Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Stinglhamber, 2005):

1. Affective commitment (AC)
2. Normative commitment (NC)
3. Continuance commitment (CC)
4. High sacrifice (HS)
5. Low alternatives (LA)

Considering the themes identified as apparent for this group of public sector employees, it seems that the closest component of commitment from the list above is 'high sacrifice'. High Sacrifice is considered a possible fourth dimension to Allen and Meyer's original three component model as is defined as being able to '...better characterize the CC dimension...[and relating to]the perceived sacrifice associated with leaving (McGee and Ford, 1987, cited in Bentein et al., 2005, p.469). For the public service employees who took part in this research, it may be that continuance commitment has a dominance of high sacrifice that describes a reluctance to leave the organization, not based upon a lack of alternatives or losses associated with investments of side-bets, but on sacrifices that are associated with the pay and conditions that are experienced by these individuals. The elements that appear to be sacrificed if an employee were to leave were such things as stability of employment and perhaps also of role; friendships, networks and colleagues; work-life balance; and personal ease, comfort and complacency. In the following chapter these elements are discussed in more depth and presented as contributing to a variation of continuance commitment as it is experienced by these individuals.

Uncertainty about Commitment

Table 5.6 presents the findings from the qualitative data that show uncertainty about an individual's state of commitment. This data helps to clarify the high level of uncertainty that was first identified in the quantitative data. It is possible that this data shows evidence of a poor understanding of the construct of commitment and a low level of self-awareness about commitment states.

As has been discussed already in this thesis, there is acceptance of a lack of understanding of the commitment construct by HRM professionals (Kuo-Tsai and Nyhan, 1994; Roche, 1999; Conway and Monks 2009; Stanley et al., 2009; Gellatly and Hunter, 2009). The comments presented in this chapter suggest that this lack of understanding may go beyond those in the HRM profession and may be experienced by other employees. Comments such as '*I am committed to (the section) but loyal to (the department)*' are interesting in that they suggest that loyalty and commitment are separate constructs. It is logical that in order to understand one's state of commitment, people must firstly understand the construct of commitment and the fact that it is multi-dimensional and includes elements of loyalty. Comments such as this suggest that a layperson's definition of commitment may be far from the definition presented in the literature.

The significance of self-awareness regarding commitment states has not been explored in this thesis as that was not a purpose of this research. The idea that there may be an issue of self-awareness and understanding that goes beyond HRM practitioners was not considered until data analysis took place. For the purpose of this thesis, this issue is presented as unexpected and perhaps worth further consideration and exploration.

Other suggested implications of uncertainty regarding commitment states are discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Table 5.6 Themes Reflecting Uncertainty about the State of Organizational Commitment

Responses

‘Yes, I would feel guilty if I left, but not necessarily towards the section. The division hired me and gave me lots of opportunities so I think that because I came into (this department) through the division that my loyalty lies with (the department) not just the section. I am committed to (the section) but loyal to (the department).

‘This department paid for my final year of study. I felt some loyalty. I wasn’t indentured...I’m not feeling that now to the same extent – I could walk out of here tomorrow and wouldn’t feel disloyal. But I do have

Reflections of various commitment states or an uncertainty about a commitment state

An interesting statement that shows a misunderstanding of the construct of commitment; and perhaps a split between normative commitment focused on the department and normative commitment focused on the section in which this person works. This suggests normative commitment as this respondent reflects a feeling that they ought to stay because leaving would generate feelings of guilt, thus their commitment is probably obligatory for the most part.

An interesting statement that reflects some confusion around a sense of normative commitment. Perhaps this respondent felt normative commitment at some stage but no longer does, and is somewhat uncomfortable with this shift in attitude. Perhaps there is some commitment which is no longer normative and is not

loyalty to the organization.'

'I'm in my comfort zone but there are new challenges everyday. The people here are great. I'm sure that if I was unhappy in my job, if the environment changed dramatically I would be out of here. But I think I add value to (the department) and am a valued team member.'

'...I stay because I have a good divisional support role in (this section) and I like my role, and they (managers and colleagues) are supportive of me, I like the people.

identified. However, the statement does show that there was some normative commitment felt at some point and now there is confusion.

There are several references in this statement that suggest that this respondent may be unsure as to their commitment state. Overall the statement reflects a combination of normative and continuance commitment. There is reference to continuance commitment through reflection of being in a 'comfort zone' and working with 'great people' and reference to normative commitment with a possible sense of loyalty through a sense of value as a team member. There is, perhaps, a lack of clarity in this respondent about their commitment: they know they are happy to stay with the department but are not clear on why they stay..

There is some swaying between the role this respondent is performing and the people with whom this respondent works, both seem to influence the state of commitment. However, it

The role is important, but if the people were horrible...well! If I enjoyed the work but the manager was horrible then I wouldn't stay. I like the people and the work.

appears that having a positive relationship with the manager and with colleagues is slightly more important than enjoying the work. This respondent seems to be reflecting on the state of commitment without a great deal of clarity which may suggest that this is not something they have given a great deal of thought to in the past, or at least, have had some confusion about. This statement may reflect continuance commitment, as there is no suggestion of loyalty to colleagues, only the benefits of feeling comfortable with others, which may be lost if the person were to leave.

Self-Reported Performance Levels

The final table presented in this chapter is table 5.7 which relates to respondents' perception of their performance levels. This is important information as the relationship between commitment and performance is a key relationship considered in this research. Previous research suggests that high levels of affective commitment are conducive to high performance (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001) and likewise that high levels of continuance commitment are not conducive to high performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan 2003). Further, previous research suggests that public sector organizations tend to experience higher levels of continuance commitment and lower levels of affective commitment (Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins, 2006). The conclusion suggested here is that performance may be an issue in public sector organizations.

However, if one considers the complex and varied nature of commitment experienced by this group of respondents, along with the reflection of performance they offer, then the conclusion drawn is quite different. Indeed, the statements presented in table 5.7 offer insights into expected and actual performance levels as they are perceived by these employees themselves and incorporating their knowledge and understanding of the context in which they work. These employees suggest that the performance levels they experience are considered generally high and for the most part acceptable if not appropriate for the context, given the expectations of working to a particular level. They present insight into how they see performance determined and measured in their environment and how that influences their self-perception of commitment.

Table 5.7 Participants' Reflection and Self measurement of Perceived, Expected and Actual Performance Levels

Participants were asked to describe their current performance level and to rate it on a likert scale of 1 to 5; 1 being reflective of low performance and 5 reflecting high performance.

'I would say (I currently perform at the level) 4 as I have been doing my job for a while. Definitely a 4 because I give it all I've got.'

'I would like to say 4 but inside I think 3.5 because I have so much to learn. I can get lots of good feedback but then something inside says that I have stuffed up. It would change to 5 when I work weekends if I have to get something done.'

'I'd say 4.5.'

'This department expects high performance all of the time, from everyone.'

'It's the credibility that you work so hard for here, (this department) has expectations of high performance.'

'The whole department wants high performance, not just our section.'

'It was 5 a year ago, but maybe a 4 now or a 4.5.'

'When I was in a private company I was doing enormous amounts of work to keep up. Here I don't have the time to do that to keep up. Now I'm not being 'put on the spot' as much, the culture of performance is different. They want you to do well but do not expect you to be a 'wiz-kid.'

'I think I am doing better than what is expected of me because I want to know more.'

'I'm doing better than expected, but not over a 3. I'm not up there, at 5 because of the expectations of me at my level. I think I am probably cruising, but I do put in some extra bits sometimes.'

'I'm doing more than is expected I think, maybe because the structure of the team has changed, so I'm doing more even though my level is the same. I'm doing it because I want to and because I have to. '

'I have periods when I go 'flat-out' and then I get told to back off, and then I get sick of plodding and take off again. There are

times when I feel more driven.'

'Mediocrity is not accepted here, you are expected to be the best you can be.'

'The expectation of hard work is there, but it is unwritten.'

'They would always like you to do more.'

'Here your performance is measured at your level, they measure you at what you are expected to do.'

'There are expectations to perform the best all the time, by both the bosses and yourself.'

'It's interesting because if you do too much they question you and ask you why you are working at one level when you are paid at a lower level.'

'The system partly allows mediocrity, because of levels and hierarchy. The system expects you not to perform above your level, because then you should be promoted.'

'The system says that the highest performance ranking you can get, says you are performing tasks at the level above you. If you are getting the top classification the manager is asked why this person is doing all this but not getting paid for it.'

There is no suggestion by these employees of individuals operating with low levels of performance. Nor is there a suggestion that low performance levels are acceptable in this workplace. Given the dominance of continuance commitment, albeit varied in its form, there is an apparent contradiction here; commentary that reflected a greater acceptance of mediocrity would be more closely aligned to what is presented in the literature regarding the relationship between continuance commitment and performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan 2003).

However, what is clear is a performance framework that reflects hierarchical levels, evident in statements such as *'Here your performance is measured at your level, they measure you at what you are expected to do;'* and *'The system says that the highest performance ranking you can get, says you are performing tasks at the level above you. If you are getting the top classification the manager is asked why this person is doing all this but not getting paid for it.'*

This adds another element to the performance-commitment discussion which relates to context. Is it possible that to date the relationship identified between performance and commitment states has been done without direct consideration of employment context? That is, high continuance commitment is least conducive to high performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson 1989; Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker, Randall and Riegel 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan 2003) is widely accepted. However, perhaps what must also be considered in this relationship is the influence of the context in which the individual works. The widely accepted view between continuance commitment and performance suggests that a healthy and highly productive workplace would require a dominance of affective commitment. However, what if it were the case that the employment context actually inhibited the development of affective commitment and supported a dominance of continuance commitment, partly because that was more reflective of required performance levels? It is accepted that employment context influences commitment states (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005) so it would seem logical that employment context would influence the relationship between commitment and performance.

What if the relationship between continuance commitment and performance isn't always as expected? What if there are some employment contexts where continuance commitment is varied in its form in such a way that it does not result in lower levels of performance? What if high performance in one employment context is over performance in another? How would this affect the commitment – performance relationship? Is it possible that there is more to this relationship than thought? To what degree is the commitment-performance relationship moderated by the employment context?

This issue is explored in more detail in chapter 6 of this thesis.

Conclusion: General Findings from the Qualitative Stage of this Research Study

. There is clear affective commitment shown in this data. It may be that the items of the questionnaire used in the quantitative research failed to identify affective commitment, perhaps because affective commitment appears to be experienced in a different way to what has been seen in previous research. What is clear is that these participants expressed more affective commitment in their own words than was identified in the questionnaire statements used in the quantitative stage of this research. This raises a question regarding the way in which commitment is measured. Had qualitative research not been undertaken with these respondents it is possible that the conclusion would have been made that affective commitment was virtually non-existent, which is in line with the literature (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006).

What is apparent here is that affective commitment does exist for these particular public service employees, but it does not fit Allen and Meyer's definition of affective commitment closely enough to allow it to be accurately measured through quantitative processes that rely upon this definition. If this is the case for this group of employees, is it possible that it is also the case for those employed in other public sector organizations that have previously had low commitment or low affective commitment reported? Is it possible that there is a problem with the way commitment has been measured in the public sector in the past? Is it possible that there are more variations in all three components of commitment than expected and that measuring commitment

as it is defined in the three component model (1990) is not as accurate in the public sector environment as thought?

The data from both stages of this research study suggest that normative commitment is experienced in relation to people, workmates and colleagues, rather than to the department itself. This data suggests that respondents can differentiate between loyalty to the department and loyalty to their colleagues and it seems clear from this data that the dominant form of normative commitment experienced here is focused on the people and not the department itself. Again this brings into question the way commitment has been measured in the past. If Allen and Meyer's definition of normative commitment is the only form of normative commitment measured, then it is possible that for respondents such as those who took part in this research, normative commitment, as it is defined by Allen and Meyer (1990) does not exist. However, the commentary provided by these respondents suggests that a variation of normative commitment may exist. Again this brings into question the literature that suggests that commitment in public sector organizations is low (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Lyons et al., 2006). Again it may suggest that there is a problem with the way normative commitment has been measured in the public sector in the past.

There is a strong theme of continuance commitment emerging from the qualitative data that was less evident in the quantitative data in this study. Further, there appear to be unique variances in the state of continuance commitment experienced by these respondents which may include elements of the fourth dimension of 'high sacrifice' (Bentein et al., 2005). It seems that measuring the multi-dimensional construct of commitment; having accepted that it is influenced by context (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005) and that it appears to differ between the private and public sectors (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006); may be problematic when quantitative methods are used that assume all three components of commitment appear as defined by Allen and Meyer in their three component model (1990). Rather, it appears that qualitative methodologies offer scope to explore variances that go beyond those expected only in continuance commitment and that may be closely reflective of the influence of context. Therefore, in all three components of

commitment for these respondents, variations are seen that may suggest that there is more commitment in the public sector than thought; it is simply that commitment looks different in this sector. Therefore, it may not be the case that it does not exist, but that Allen and Meyer's typology does not exist. It may be that to measure commitment accurately in the public sector context, it must be done using different measuring techniques. Has commitment in the public sector been measured incorrectly?

Finally, there appears to be evidence of confusion around commitment states in the qualitative data, which was also initially identified in the quantitative data. This informs an interesting discussion about the degree to which individual employees know and reflect on their state of commitment. Is it possible that the uncertainty seen in this study is seen elsewhere and if so what does this mean for our understanding of commitment states or for the way they have been measured in the past? There may be benefits of exploring low self-awareness of commitment in further research.

Overall the qualitative data paints a clearer picture than the quantitative data did. From a theoretical perspective this raises the question of whether more qualitative research should be done to identify greater variances in commitment states and gain a better understanding of organizational commitment and the way it is experienced across public sector organizations in particular. It may be that commitment is not as low or non-existent as previously suggested (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006), but that it presents differently and is more in line with context and is better identified through qualitative processes. Further, a new question may be asked regarding the possibility that a unique commitment profile has developed, evident where all three components of commitment appear to be experienced differently by a group of employees from the same workplace. The qualitative data presented in this chapter supports the possibility that unique commitment profiles may exist, as opposed to clear tendencies to experience either affective, normative or continuance commitment.

Preliminary Findings

The findings presented in this chapter are summarized below:

- Continuance commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Normative commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Affective commitment as it is experienced by these respondents is varied in its form;
- Commitment in this group of respondents appears to have multiple foci;
- Some respondents may have felt confusion about their state of commitment;
- Some respondents may have experienced low self-awareness regarding their commitment state;
- Commitment may form a unique commitment profile for these respondents;
- The commitment profile may be reflective of the employment context; and
- High continuance commitment as it is experienced in its varied form by these respondents may not be as problematic as expected with regard to levels of work performance, as the commitment-performance relationship may be moderated by the employment context, particularly in the public sector.

One of the most interesting and important issues to arise from the findings presented in this chapter relates to the fact that commitment does not appear to be experienced in a manner that is typical of Allen and Meyer's well accepted descriptions. In the early stages of this study it was considered very possible that continuance commitment would be varied in its form for these respondents. However, it was not foreseen that affective and normative commitment would also be varied in their forms for these employees.

The variances identified across all three forms of commitment means that for these employees their experience is not reflective of Allen and Meyer's well accepted definitions presented in their three component model (1990) and this calls into question the reliance on this model as a starting point to measuring commitment in all contexts. Relying on this model may be even more problematic if it results in a tendency to measure commitment through quantitative methods that seeks only to measure the levels of affective, normative and continuance commitment, as they are defined by Allen and Meyer.

The findings of this study suggest that it may be worthwhile reconsidering the way that commitment is measured in different contexts. If commitment does not look like Allen and Meyer's model in some contexts then commitment cannot be measured through a quantitative method that is based upon the assumption that commitment is typical of the three component model (1990). More research using qualitative methods that explore variances in all three components of commitment may be warranted and, as has been stated already in this thesis, this is in line with the literature that suggests that commitment is influenced by employment context (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005).

The findings of this study are discussed in more depth in chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. In chapter 6 the discussion will focus on the empirical findings from the quantitative and qualitative stages of this study. In chapter 7 the discussion will focus on the theoretical issues that have emerged from this study that are considered worthy of a focused discussion.

Chapter 6 DISCUSSION

Between the years of 1974 and 2006, twenty-six scholastic studies have been identified as relevant to considering organizational commitment in public sector organizations, in comparison to over 100 studies exploring commitment in private sector organizations. Of these, 16 studies have taken place since 2000, suggesting that prior to 2000 little was known about the state of organizational commitment in public sector organizations. Indeed, there is still little known as 26 studies is few in itself.

Of the research that has been done it has become clear that there is dispute around the way that public service employees experience organizational commitment. Some researchers have suggested that organizational commitment in these settings is non-existent while others have suggested that it exists, but is very low (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). Others still have agreed that public servants are committed to their organizations but that their commitment declines with time (Beck and Wilson, 1997; Van Maanen, 1975; Lee et al., 1992). The literature that has informed this research study most significantly is research undertaken by Abbott, White and Charles in 2005 and Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins in 2006. The former study suggested that continuance commitment was higher than expected in a state government department in New South Wales, Australia and the latter identified higher levels of organizational commitment in private sector employees than in public sector employees in Canada. All in all, the literature seems to paint a rather bleak picture of organizational commitment as it is experienced by employees of public sector organizations.

The data presented in this thesis and discussed in this and the following chapter presents an alternative view of how organizational commitment is experienced by a group of Australian federal public service employees. Key findings presented in this thesis include variations in the forms that all three components of commitment take, which was unexpected, and the identification of a unique commitment profile that appears to be reflective of the employment context. These findings result in a question regarding the way commitment has been measured in public sector organizations to date and if there is a problem with this.

In summary, the quantitative data allowed speculation that:

- Normative commitment may be dominant;
- Continuance commitment may be strong;
- Affective commitment may be low; and
- Uncertainty about commitment, as defined through the items of the questionnaire, is high.

In summary, the qualitative findings suggest the following:

- Affective, normative and continuance commitment are varied and atypical of the three component model (1990);
- Uncertainty about commitment is not as low as anticipated;
- Continuance commitment, in a varied form, is the dominant form of commitment for these employees;
- Combining all three varied components of commitment forms a unique commitment profile that has not been seen in the literature, particularly in the work undertaken by Abbott, White and Charles (2005) and Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2006);
- The overall commitment profile offers an alternative perspective on the commitment-performance relationship for this group of public service employees; and
- The commitment-performance relationship may be less problematic than expected and presented in the literature, for this group of respondents.

The possible dominance of normative commitment speculated from the skewed data and the dominance of continuance commitment identified in the qualitative data, presents as contradictory and, therefore, may be somewhat confusing. An explanation for this can be found in the varied forms that commitment appears to take for these respondents.

The questionnaire used in the quantitative stage of this study measured commitment as it is currently defined in the literature and typical of Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990) and consideration of the skewed data suggested normative commitment as the likely dominant form of commitment relative to affective and continuance commitment.

However, this cannot be compared to the findings offered in the literature and therefore cannot be presented as deviating from the literature. This is because the definitions of the three components of commitment do not appear to hold true for these respondents. Therefore, measuring the components of commitment as they are currently defined, in this context, has proven to be misleading. For this reason, a possible dominance of normative commitment reflected in the skewed data is not accepted as an accurate reflection of how commitment is experienced by these public service employees. The speculation of a dominance of normative commitment is rejected due to a discrepancy in the definitions of affective, normative and continuance commitment between the questionnaire and the respondents themselves and due to the fact that this study was not able to conclusively determine that this was the case.

The variations of commitment are presented with clarity in the qualitative findings and the degree of uncertainty that was considered apparent in the early stages of this research were less so in the qualitative stage. Therefore, where the qualitative stage was originally proposed to identify variances in continuance commitment, in fact it went much further and identified variances in all three components of commitment and was then able to shed more light on which of the three components of commitment was the dominant form experienced by these respondents. The dominance of a variation of continuance commitment is accepted as accurately reflecting commitment for these respondents. This is based on the qualitative data that showed most respondents described a variation of continuance commitment as the dominant form of commitment for them.

In this chapter, speculation drawn from the quantitative data and conclusions drawn from the qualitative data are presented in depth along with a discussion on research methodology. Although it is important to discuss what was actually found regarding the state of organizational commitment as it is experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants, what is also offered in this thesis is a discussion on the contextualization of organizational commitment and the possibility that there is a problem with the way commitment has been measured in public sector environments in the past. This discussion is potentially even more interesting than the research findings themselves.

In the following chapter of this thesis, chapter 7, two additional issues that are deemed worthy of consideration are presented, each of these having emerged, somewhat unexpectedly, from this research. The first issue relates to the consideration of commitment profiles as opposed to the separate, distinguishable states of commitment and how these profiles may affect the commitment-performance relationship.

The second additional issue presented in chapter 7 relates to the influence of HRM practices on the development of commitment profiles. Implications for HRM practice were intended to be considered in line with the third research question. However, consideration of HRM practices in relation to commitment profiles was not anticipated and as such is presented in chapter 7 as an additional, theoretical issue.

These issues are presented not as empirical findings from this research, but theoretical discussions that may contribute to current thinking about commitment profiles and the influencing role of HRM practices on their development (Sinclair et al., 2005; Gellatly et al., 2009). Further research is required to test these propositions and determine the degree to which they actually exist in this, or any, context. For now, these issues are presented as discussions that are expected to contribute to the fields of organizational commitment, human resource management and organizational behaviour. This discussion answers the third research question posited in this thesis relating to implications for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context.

As stated, these theoretical discussions will follow in chapter 7. In this chapter a discussion that is drawn from the data is offered, following on from the presentation of data in chapters 4 and 5.

Commitment, As Experienced by a Group of Australian Public Service Employees:

The Quantitative data

The data presented in chapters 4 and 5 tells an interesting story about how organizational commitment may be experienced by a group of generalist Australian federal public service employees. However, the quantitative data failed to give a clear picture of the make-up of affective, normative and continuance commitment and therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions from this data. What insight could be speculated was done so by considering skewed data, which suggested that there may have been weak affective commitment, reasonably strong continuance commitment and somewhat surprisingly, strong normative commitment. This insight was tested in the qualitative stage of this study. However, despite the inability to determine the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment through the quantitative study, further discussion on all three components of commitment and the way were experienced by the respondents of this study is presented below, beginning with the insight made possible through consideration of the data skewness as presented in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Affective Commitment

Affective organizational commitment as it was experienced by this group of public servants and as it could be determined through the distribution of data on the bell curve, appeared to relate to a desire to work in the department for one's entire career; to a sense of value for the work that the department does, a sense of pride in the department and a sense of family with regard to colleagues in the department. That is, it was apparent that these individuals chose to work in this department and therefore stayed with the department due to a genuine desire to *want* to stay as opposed to *having* to stay or feeling they *should* stay, as would be expected from continuance and normative commitment states.

However, what was not as evident from this data for this particular group was an indication that these respondents felt an emotional connection or a values based connection to the department itself or to the purpose of the department. Rather, it was more evident that their desire to work for this organization for an entire career seemed likely to relate to a personal sense of comfort and complacency; a theme that also emerged from the data measuring continuance commitment

and from the qualitative data. To the degree that the state of commitment for this group of public servants could be determined through consideration of skewed data it seemed that the one aspect of affective commitment that was least evident related to a desire to work in the department for one's career because of a clear emotional connection to the organization itself.

The data skewness, therefore, suggests that aspects of affective commitment may exist for this particular group of public servants, a finding that is not consistent with the literature (Liou and Nyhan, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). However, if there is less evidence of an emotional connection to the department it may be that affective commitment is varied in its form for this group of Australian federal public servants. The items of the questionnaire that the respondents agreed with may give insight into the form that affective commitment takes for these respondents. Those items the respondents disagreed with may represent elements of affective commitment that are not experienced by these respondents.

As was stated in chapter 1 of this thesis, leading scholars in this field, Allen and Meyer, define affective commitment as a separate, distinguishable state of commitment which refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization (1990, p.1). For this group of public service employees there was a possibility suggested through the data skewness of a sense of identification with the organization. The lack of evidence suggesting a personal connection to the work and overall purpose of the organization may suggest that there is less of a sense of emotional attachment to or involvement with the department. To this end, it may be that although affective commitment is apparent, it is varied in its form.

The suggestion, therefore, is that affective commitment is apparent if one considers the way the data was skewed. However, its presentation differs from the definition currently accepted in the literature (Allen and Meyer, 1990) and required further testing, which was undertaken in the qualitative stage of this study.

Normative Commitment

In the quantitative stage of this study data skewness was considered and suggested that normative organizational commitment may be the strongest commitment experienced by this group of public service employees. This was speculated because the skewed data suggested that more respondents in this group of individuals agreed with the items of the questionnaire that measured normative commitment, than they did with any of the other items in the questionnaire.

However, there was also an indication in the skewed data that, for the most part, the sense of loyalty and obligation that reflects a state of normative organizational commitment was focused on work colleagues and team mates and was not focused on the department itself. To recap Allen and Meyer's definition of normative commitment, it refers to an employee's attachment to the organization based on the individual's belief system relating to the organization expecting loyalty (1990, p. 4). For this particular group of respondents there appeared to be evidence of a belief system relating to the expectation of loyalty at a more immediate level; reflecting the possibility that this loyalty was focused not towards the organization itself but towards one's closest work colleagues.

This also suggests a variance in the way normative commitment was experienced by this group of public servants, with the variance relating to the focus of the commitment; in this case it appears to be the people of the department as opposed to the department itself.

This is consistent with those of Lyons and his colleagues in that the focus of commitment does not appear to be the department itself. Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins speculated that the target of commitment in public sector organizations was an issue warranting further consideration, given that this was less obvious than identified in the private sector. Lyons et al suggested that the focus of commitment was the public service as a whole rather than any particular department within it (2006, p. 614), a suggestion which fits comfortably with the findings of this research, particularly in relation to the state of continuance commitment as it was depicted in the qualitative data.

The speculation identified through the skewed data, therefore, is that normative commitment is apparent. However, its presentation differs from the definition currently accepted in the literature (Allen and Meyer, 1990). It is not accepted that normative commitment, relative to affective and continuance commitment, is the true dominant state of commitment for these respondents because of the variances in all three components of commitment and the consequent unreliability of the questionnaire to measure commitment as these respondents experience it. The insight offered here has been gained by considering the skewed data and although this is an accurate depiction of the way these respondents answered the questionnaire, it is speculation only and must be tested further.

Continuance Commitment

Continuance organizational commitment appeared, for this group of public servants, to be relatively strong when compared to affective commitment but weaker than normative commitment when considered through the way the data was skewed. It appeared to be based upon two elements: the first being a necessity to stay employed in the department and the second to the perception that leaving would cause personal disruption. The remaining items of the questionnaire that measured continuance commitment were skewed in a way that suggested that they may not have been relevant to this group of respondents. Agreement with only two of the items of the questionnaire measuring continuance commitment suggested that this component of commitment may be weaker than expected. In the skewed data there was no indication that continuance commitment was based upon a perception of significant personal loss or few alternatives or options, which are two key aspects of continuance commitment. The assumption made as a consequence is that continuance commitment may not be as strong for this group of public servants as is shown in the work of Abbott et al.(2005) and Lyons et al.(2006). Rather, it is possible that the need to stay with the department relates to the need for employment and a sense of comfort and complacency about employment in this department. The speculation of complacency was considered on the basis that the only apparent reason for not leaving related to the personal disruption that it would cause to the individual.

Recapping on Allen and Meyer's definition of continuance commitment as an individual's attachment to the organization based on the magnitude of or number of investments they have made in the organization (i.e. side-bets) and the perceived lack of alternatives (1990, p.4) there was less evidence of continuance commitment, as it is defined here, than was expected, when considering the way the data was skewed

The data suggested that continuance commitment was not the dominant form of commitment experienced by this group of employees, which was unexpected and contrary to the literature. However, as has been stated, the variances in all three forms of commitment have deemed the questionnaire unreliable and as such the results of the questionnaire are not considered to be accurate. Further, the qualitative exploration of continuance commitment was to shed light on this result and confirm the unreliability of the questionnaire in this instance.

Possible Themes

Considering the data that depicts affective, normative and continuance commitment as it was experienced by this particular group of Australian federal public servants it becomes evident that variations exist in the way that affective, normative and continuance commitment were experienced by these respondents which may bring into question the definitions currently accepted in the literature, at least with regard to their applicability and accuracy in this employment context.

Reflecting on the way respondents responded to the questionnaire, as seen through the data skewness, it was considered possible that these respondents' commitment was based upon a desire to stay in this department for the rest of their career because of a sense of belonging and feeling like part of the departmental family; because of a sense of obligation and loyalty to their workmates, and to a slight degree to the department; because of the need to work; and because it was easier and required less effort to stay than to leave. Drawn together this may be indicative of an attitude of comfort, ease and complacency. It does not suggest a commitment focused upon achieving goals for the good of the people or passion for being a public servant per se. Nor does this depiction suggest that these respondents are trapped unhappily within the department with nowhere else to go and no other options available. The respondents indicate that they are

working there because they chose to and would indeed stay for life; that they are connected to the people with whom they work and happy with the remuneration and working conditions they enjoy. However, given the inability of the quantitative process to provide clear data on which to draw accurate conclusions, these possibilities were tested through the qualitative stage of this study.

Apparent Uncertainty Regarding Commitment – Quantitative Data

It was unexpected and surprising that respondents were unable to agree or disagree with many of the items of the questionnaire, assuming that their responses were reflective of this and not simply a preference for choosing middle range scores on a likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of 19 items and the percentage of respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with these items ranged from 6% to as high as 31%. It was speculated that this may have reflected a lack of personal awareness and understanding of their commitment to the department. Questions were raised such as if it were possible that for some people the decision to stay with an organization was in fact poorly considered? Was it rarely reflected on and therefore difficult to access when asked? Were these respondents ‘committed’ to the department for reasons they themselves were unaware of?

The final point of consideration relates to the possibility that the respondents were unsure about their commitment states as they were presented through the items of the questionnaire. In other words, while exploring their own state of commitment, these particular public servants pondered the items of the questionnaire but found themselves truly unable to relate to them and therefore unable to either agree or disagree. If this were the case it suggested that the items of the questionnaire were unable to measure commitment as it was experienced by these particular respondents. This supports the conclusion that affective, normative and continuance commitment, as they were experienced by these respondents, were varied in their forms and did not reflect the established definitions in the literature. This raises questions about the accuracy of these definitions in all contexts. Allen and Meyer acknowledge the likelihood that continuance commitment is varied in different contexts and that their established definition does not necessarily define continuance commitment as it is always experienced (1990). It is possible

that this is true also for affective and normative commitment. If this is the case it also raises the possibility that there is a theoretical problem with the way commitment has previously been measured in public sector organizations. This issue is discussed further in this chapter in light of the findings from the qualitative research.

Commitment as Experienced by a Group of Federal Public Servants:

The Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data was able to offer clarity that was not gained through the quantitative data and offered a more accurate perspective of how commitment is experienced by this group of non-managerial, generalist Australian federal public servants. The data gathered from this stage of the study showed strong themes and offered variances in the forms of commitment that were experienced and a clear picture of what commitment looks like for these respondents.

Reduced Uncertainty Regarding Commitment

The qualitative data clarified the issue of uncertainty regarding the basis of commitment as it showed greater clarity and self-awareness on commitment states than was seen in the quantitative data. The degree of uncertainty regarding commitment appeared to be lower than the quantitative data suggested.

Qualitative analysis showed that the uncertainty indicated through the quantitative data may have reflected variances in the forms of commitment as they were experienced by these respondents. When faced with the items of the questionnaire many respondents indicated they were unsure about how they felt with regard to those statements. However, when asked to discuss their basis of commitment in their own words they were forthcoming and appeared clear and capable. What became obvious was the choice of words used. Through the focus group sessions respondents were able to articulate what they believed to be the basis of their commitment. Although there were commonalities in the data there was greater variation which explained the uncertainty experienced when faced with the items of the questionnaire. There also emerged more clarity

around the variations in how affective, normative and continuance commitment appeared for these respondents.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment in the questionnaire sought to measure an emotional attachment to the organization. Affective commitment in the focus group sessions, however, appeared to relate not so much to an individual's sense of being emotionally connected to the department itself or the work of the department, but to a sense of pride relating to being part of the department and some personal comfort in working there, rather than in any other government department. This seemed to be varied and did not reflect an emotional connection to the department in line with the accepted definition of affective commitment. This variation may have caused initial confusion resulting in an apparent inability to agree or disagree with questionnaire items.

Affective commitment for this group of public servants could be defined as reflecting a sense of pride relating to being part of an organization and personal comfort and stability.

Normative Commitment

Likewise, normative commitment in the questionnaire sought to measure a state of loyalty and obligation to the organization whereas it became clear in the focus group sessions that respondents felt loyalty and obligation, for the most part, towards their colleagues and not to the department. Again this difference may have caused confusion when attempting to complete the questionnaire. In the qualitative data there were more statements reflecting loyalty and obligation to one's immediate colleagues and work mates than to the department itself.

Normative commitment for this group of public servants could be defined as reflecting a sense of loyalty and obligation towards colleagues and workmates.

Continuance Commitment

Finally, continuance commitment in the questionnaire sought to identify whether respondents believed they had too much to lose if they left the department given the investments they had made or whether they perceived few options or alternatives to make leaving a viable option. In the focus group sessions it became clear that this definition of continuance commitment did not resonate with this group of public servants: the conditions of service that sat at the core of continuance commitment for these respondents were associated as much with the entire Commonwealth public service as with the department itself. Further, there appeared minimal consideration of what had been invested in the department and more of a focus on losing overall benefits that were common to all public servants, regardless of level of personal investment.

The abundance of opportunities within the APS meant that respondents did not perceive there to be few alternatives or options. Consequently it seemed they may have felt ill-equipped to agree or disagree with many items of the questionnaire on continuance commitment.

Continuance commitment for this group of public servants could be defined as reflecting a sense of stability and comfort, reflecting perceived losses relating to leaving the broader Australian public service. Losses relating to leaving the actual organization related to the loss of comfort experienced in the current organization.

To clarify the variances in how commitment appears to be experienced by these respondents, these variations are presented in comparison to the current established definitions in the literature in table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Key Differences Between Current Definition of Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment and Variations of Commitment Experienced by Respondents

Established definition (Allen and Meyer, 1990, p.4)	Variation	Key Differences
Affective Commitment		
Refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization.	Refers to a sense of pride relating to being part of an organization and personal comfort and stability.	Current definition of AC refers to a strong, personal attachment to the organization. Variation relates only to the additional sense of comfort experienced working in the organization, akin to identification with the organization. Less emotional attachment and involvement in the organization.
Normative Commitment		
Refers to an employee's attachment based on the individual's belief system relating to the organization expecting loyalty.	Refers to an employee's attachment based on the individual's belief system relating to colleagues and teammates expecting loyalty.	Current definition has NC focused towards the organization. Variation has NC focused towards colleagues.
Continuance Commitment		
Refers to an individual's attachment to the organization based on the magnitude of or	Refers to an individual's attachment to the organization based on a sense of stability	Current definition of CC relates to commitment to the organization, losses relative to

<p>number of investments they have made in the organization (i.e. side-bets) and the perceived lack of alternatives.</p>	<p>and comfort, reflecting perceived losses relating to leaving the broader Australian Public Service. Losses relating to leaving the organization related to the loss of comfort and familiarity.</p>	<p>side bets and perception of low alternatives.</p> <p>Variation has CC split between organization and broader APS; perceived losses relate to loss of stability, comfort and conditions but not necessarily based on side-bets.</p> <p>No perceived lack of alternatives within the broader APS.</p>
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Key Discussion Points

1) **Measuring commitment in public sector environments:** *A possible theoretical problem.*

The discrepancy found in this study between the skewed data and the qualitative data resulted in two conclusions. The first conclusion suggests that there is value in adopting a qualitative research method to explore variances in how organizational commitment is experienced. The second relates to the benefit of using a mixed methods approach in organizational commitment research. Both contribute to a discussion on the possibility that there may be a problem with the way commitment has been measured in public sector organizations in the past, which appears to have been based upon the assumption that it is typical of Allen and Meyer's three component model (1990). In this study the quantitative data was unable to shed light on the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment as it was experienced by this group of public sector employees. As such data skewness was all that could be considered from the quantitative stage of this study. Data skewness has been discussed at length in this thesis, despite the fact that it does not offer conclusive findings but instead offers a visual depiction of the data and therefore insight into how the respondents responded to the items of the questionnaire and speculation around their commitment states. Considering the data skewness offers the opportunity to consider some points of comparison between the quantitative and qualitative research methods and contributes to further discussion on research methodology and the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research in the study of organizational commitment.

The literature is clear in its suggestion that organizational commitment is influenced by employment context (Abbott et al., 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston et al., 2000; Lee et al., 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995) and as such may be varied in different settings. Yet it appears that the components of commitment are repeatedly measured using quantitative tools that are reliable in their ability to measure commitment based upon the widely accepted three component model (1990). There may be a contradiction occurring here.

Firstly, it appeared that assuming that the questionnaire would accurately identify organizational commitment as it was experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants may have been erroneous. It further appeared that variances in organizational commitment can invalidate the statements of currently used commitment questionnaires in certain environments. To clarify this point, there have been many researchers who have confirmed the reliability and validity of Allen and Meyer's questionnaire (Hackett, Bycio and Hausdorf, 1994; Irving, Coleman and Cooper, 1997; Meyer, et al., 1993) and this thesis does not question these findings. However, given the dominance of commitment research in the private sector (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005; Lyons et al. 2006); 26 public sector studies compared to over 100 private sector studies; it may be that the reliability and validity of the tool was reaffirmed through non-public sector research. If this is the case there may be a problem with using this questionnaire in public sector environments.

It is worth considering the benefits that can be gained by adopting a qualitative approach to identifying variances in the components of commitment. Qualitative tools are inherently better placed to explore these variances than are quantitative ones: the very nature of this exploration suggests qualitative ontological and rhetorical assumptions, as set out in chapter 3.

If commitment components vary in different employment contexts and as such are atypical of the three component model (1990), quantitative tools measuring commitment as typical of this model will have their reliability compromised when used in different employment contexts. Consequently, it seems that more qualitative research to explore variances in commitment in different contexts seems worthwhile.

A second point of consideration relates to the benefits to be gained in undertaking mixed methodology research in this field.

The depth of understanding of the commitment states found in a group of Australian public servants came, for the most part, from the qualitative data and so this stage of the research was invaluable in identifying organizational commitment for this group of respondents. Thus, as stated, there is a legitimate role for qualitative research in this field.

However, there is also benefit in the use of a mixed methodology and in comparing the different stories that can emerge from the same study but from different research processes.

Different stories emerged from the skewed data drawn from the quantitative research and the qualitative data in this study. This may suggest that adopting only one research methodology may tell only half the story. The differences in the quantitative and qualitative data in this study support the literature that suggests that this is one of the major benefits of undertaking a mixed methods approach when researching within the social sciences. That is, rather than studying a phenomenon to offer corroboration with the literature, using a mixed methods approach can offer a more thorough understanding of a phenomenon (Thompson, 2002; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Supporters of mixed methodology approaches suggest that a further benefit is found through the opportunity gained from qualitative research to ‘join the dots’, to ask new questions and seek new information and in so doing avoid the risk of repeatedly asking the same questions to find supportive answers (May 2006). The complementary and contradictory data obtained through the quantitative and qualitative study presented in this thesis support these arguments; in this thesis new insights and new perspectives on how one group of public servants experience organizational commitment, are offered as a direct consequence of using a mixed methods approach.

Is Continuance Commitment in its Varied Forms Always The Least Conducive to Performance?

Finding commitment variances for this group of public servants opens another conversation that is relevant to the findings of this study and that relates to the issue of whether there should be further consideration of the relationship between continuance commitment and reduced levels of performance. It is true that the literature is consistent in its acceptance of continuance commitment being the least conducive to high performance. However, this relationship rests for the most part on the accepted definition of continuance commitment adopted through Allen and Meyer’s three component model (1990). Continuance commitment as it is currently defined in the literature does appear to bring lower levels of performance and this is not in any way in dispute in this thesis. Instead what is posited here relates to whether this would also be the case

for *varied* forms of continuance commitment and if so, would it be to the same degree? Further qualitative research may contribute to exploring the variances of continuance commitment and the influence these varied forms may have on performance levels. It may be that the varied form of continuance commitment identified for this group of public servants has less of a negative effect on performance than expected. Of course the opposite may hold true as well, which reinforces the call for further qualitative research on the variances of commitment components and their influence on performance.

It is important to reflect on the fact that all three components of commitment, as experienced by this group of public servants, appear varied in their forms. It was anticipated that continuance commitment may have shown variances in its form, as has been suggested in the literature (Allan and Meyer, 1990). Since the literature also confirms that commitment is influenced by the employment context (Abbott et al., 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston et al., 2000; Lee et al., 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995) it should not be surprising that affective and normative commitment differed as well. However, despite this, the actual extent of variance was not foreseen.

Recognizing the extent of variances in the components of commitment supports the need to continue to explore the construct of organizational commitment in different settings using mixed methodologies so they complement each other; shed new light on phenomena and allow the researcher to use 'both eyes to the full'. A mixed methodologies approach will enable the researcher to avoid the risk of undertaking research that continually asks the same questions rather than new ones (Thompson 2002; May 2006) to try and identify contextual differences such as those suggested in this research study.

- 2) **The influence of the varied commitment forms on performance:** *Commitment as experienced by respondents is conducive to the performance levels they perceive they are required to meet.*

The findings of the qualitative study in this research included a preliminary analysis of self-reported measurements of performance. As part of the qualitative stage, respondents were asked to rate their general performance levels. This was explained in chapter 5: respondents reported

their perception of their performance against a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 reflecting low levels of performance and 5 reflecting high levels of performance. The aim was to explore how these respondents saw their commitment states and how they identified the relationship between their commitment state and their general performance levels. The findings suggest that performance in this environment is highly idiosyncratic.

Respondents, for the most part, reported that performance was closely managed by more senior staff and that it was expected to be appropriate to one's formal, hierarchical level in the department. Indeed, there were suggestions that where someone performed too far above and beyond what was expected of their level they were often encouraged to modify their performance to realign it to pre-determined expectations that more accurately reflected levels and formal, stated competencies and job descriptions. This suggests that, at least for this group of public service employees in this environment, performance is not expected to extend too far above and beyond the requirements of the position; perhaps even that organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) are not expected to the level that they may be in other employment sectors.

It must be added at this point that this discussion is in relation only to the experiences shared by this group of public servants who were employed in low to mid-level generalist, administrative positions and who did not have senior, management roles. The narrow profile of these employees is important to remember and the way in which they described the performance levels expected of them reflects only their perceptions and may be limited to their levels, roles and responsibilities. To this end a similar discussion with public servants employed in specialist or managerial roles may appear in stark contrast. This discussion is not intended to describe performance across this or any other public service, but to reflect the personal perspectives of this group of non-managerial, administrative public servants.

This discussion is intended to explore and challenge the premise that high performance is paramount and to be strived for in all environments and with all employees and that affective commitment is required to achieve this. For these particular public service employees this premise may not hold true at all. Rather, the reality of high continuance commitment, as part of the departmental culture, the unique variances of commitment identified and the performance

levels described by these public servants may fit together very comfortably. The issue put forward here is intended to challenge the suggestion that the combination of high performance and high affective commitment is strived for in all workplaces. Considering the discussions held in the focus group sessions by this small group of employees, is it possible that performance can be managed, or indeed, to some degree ‘capped’ and that high levels of affective commitment are not necessarily ideal in themselves, or not necessarily sought after because of their congruence to high performance and OCB.

Is it possible that the high levels of performance recognized in the literature as resulting from high levels of affective commitment (Meyer and Bobocel, 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al., 1989; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002) are neither required, nor identified as most suitable for groups of employees such as this? If this is indeed possible, then the commitment levels identified here may be less problematic than may have been suggested; instead they may be seen as entirely suitable and effective for this particular group of public service employees. Indeed, it may even be that the performance requirement identified by this group of employees is a contributing factor to the development of the commitment variances that were identified. In other words, if performance is managed and is relative to a role and level and if significant deviation from this is discouraged, then is it possible that affective commitment levels are inadvertently reduced? Is it possible that this group of public servants felt their commitment profile was congruent to the performance expectations they perceived for themselves? Is it possible that their modified affective commitment state was in line with their managed performance levels? Is it possible that had they experienced a strong sense of affective commitment typical of the three component model (1990) which resulted in higher performance levels than their positions required, that both the performance levels and the affective commitment states would be realigned to be reflective of the roles and expectations required of them?

In line with these questions, the literature identifies a situation where affective commitment is increased through employee assistance programs where employees are able to give assistance to their colleagues (Grant et al., 2008). Thus affective commitment is promoted through this

behavior and through this HRM policy. The relationship between this HRM policy and an increase in affective commitment may suggest that if this behavior were discouraged, or indeed forbidden, the level of affective commitment experienced by workers in this environment would be reduced. In other words, encouraging workers to support colleagues, increases affective commitment; perhaps discouraging this behaviour would decrease affective commitment.

Can a similar argument be put forward in respect to the respondents of this study? Where the commitment experienced by this group of employees is considered not to be conducive to high levels of performance, is it possible that this may be because the levels of performance required, encouraged and rewarded for this group, are such that they inadvertently inhibit the development of affective commitment? That is to say that where performance levels are set at a predetermined level; where 'over-performance' may be considered problematic because it does not fit comfortably with structured performance levels; then this managed and controlled level of performance may reduce the development of affective commitment. Is it possible that if high performance is capped by level, role and responsibility, then the commitment profile that develops is one that is conducive to this level of performance and is inadvertently managed by both HRM practices and senior managers?

If this is the case, it strengthens the argument that the commitment levels and variations experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants may be appropriate to the level of performance that they perceive is required of them and may not necessarily be cause for concern. It is possible that for these respondents lower levels of affective commitment are as much a consequence of the performance culture they perceive as they are antecedents to the performance these respondents offer.

3) **Self-Awareness Regarding Commitment** *–These Respondents May Not Truly Understand Their basis of Commitment to the Department.*

A final issue that has emerged from the qualitative data relates to what may be a lack of self-awareness regarding commitment. What appeared to be uncertainty in the quantitative data, was reconsidered in the qualitative study as reflecting confusion on the basis of one's commitment. Whether there appears to be uncertainty or confusion, the same conclusion can be drawn: it may

be that some respondents are unsure about why they stay in their department. It is possible that rather than making a clear and considered decision about staying with the department, there may be some individuals who simply stay, without deeply considering why.

Confusion regarding commitment was particularly evident with references such as being *'committed to the section but loyal to the department'*; and *'I could walk out of here tomorrow and wouldn't feel disloyal. But I do have loyalty to the organization.'* There had been an assumption that respondents would be aware of the basis of their commitment to the department and consequently would be able to share their perspectives on commitment. However, it appeared that this was not as simple as first thought, given that some respondents were unclear about where their loyalty lay and exactly what the basis of their commitment was.

It may be worth considering this issue further and perhaps also considering HRM strategies to encourage people to increase their self-awareness regarding commitment given acceptance of the relationship between commitment and performance. Indeed if an organization were to adopt HRM and management strategies deliberately to increase affective commitment in the workplace it seems a logical and important addition would be to discuss the components of commitment with employees themselves so that they not only developed increased levels of affective commitment but become more self-aware about their commitment. This may result in an increased ability to articulate one's basis of commitment; recognize the way commitment develops and changes in oneself as well as in others; and encourage peers, colleagues and managers to be open about the benefits of increasing affective commitment.

Perhaps the lack of understanding of the construct of commitment in the HRM profession is a consequence of a more general lack of self-awareness and self-reflection regarding commitment in individuals. Thus the issue of increasing the understanding of the construct of commitment may be expanded beyond the HRM profession and into the workplace in general.

There would be benefits of increasing this understanding to managers who are charged with managing team performance levels. Managing a subordinate's performance through formal performance management systems is likely to be more successful if managers understand the role that commitment plays in one's performance level and consequently ensures that their

performance expectations of subordinates are consistent with one's state of commitment. A situation where a manager seeks high levels of performance, akin to that which is likely where there is clear affective commitment; as defined in the three component model; from an individual who shows continuance organizational commitment, is more likely to be avoided if the manager understands the complexity of commitment and the influence it has on performance levels.

Another benefit to openly discussing commitment in the workplace may be experienced in the field of leadership. A leader who seeks to be inspiring and motivating is more likely to succeed if they are affectively committed to their department. Where there is a dominance of continuance commitment in a leader it is likely that their ability to inspire and motivate others may be reduced.

Thus it is worth considering the role that commitment plays in both the management and leadership fields and the benefits that could be gained from increasing one's self-awareness of their commitment state. It is also worth considering the benefits that could be gained from encouraging employees themselves to seek greater levels of affective commitment than continuance commitment, which may be possible through such processes as career planning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that there are variances in affective, normative and continuance commitment for these respondents. These variances deemed the quantitative process less reliable than expected and support the call for further qualitative research to explore variations in the forms of commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). They also raise the possibility that there may be a theoretical problem with the way commitment has been measured in the past, in public sector environments. Where the questionnaire was chosen to measure the dominance or otherwise of continuance commitment relative to affective and normative commitment, it became apparent that it was ineffective in determining this because of the degree of variance in the forms that commitment took for these respondents.

The degree of variance identified in this study and the inability of the questionnaire to accurately measure commitment for this group of respondents brings into question the assumption that the

widely accepted definitions of affective, normative and continuance commitment are found in all settings and invite more qualitative research in this field.

Further, variances in the forms that commitment takes for these respondents calls for further consideration of the assumption that high continuance commitment and low affective commitment in public sector organizations is likely to result in low performance, and should be rectified. Although this remains somewhat speculative, the performance requirements perceived by these respondents and the commitment profile they experience may be more suitable than previously thought. To test this more thoroughly would require assessing the accuracy and appropriateness of performance as it is perceived by the respondents' managers. That is, it is all very well to have these respondents describe their commitment states and their perceived performance levels and to conclude that there may be congruence here. However, this is a narrow and speculative discussion that requires testing which would include interviewing respondents' managers to test the accuracy of perceived performance requirements and levels achieved. If these respondents are misunderstanding the performance levels required of them, then this discussion would require reconsideration.

However, for the purposes of discussion, if it were the case that performance levels required and received were congruent with the way organizational commitment is experienced by this group of respondents, then this may suggest that the dominance of continuance commitment for these employees is less problematic than may have been expected. It may be worth considering further exploratory research in the Australian public service to explore the relationship between performance and commitment states to test these assumptions.

There remain other issues that may benefit from further consideration, such as a possible need to increase self-awareness of commitment states and the role this increased self-awareness may play in individual career planning, management, leadership and performance.

In the following chapter two issues that call for further consideration will be discussed: the relationship between commitment profiles and performance and the influence of HRM practice on the development of commitment profiles. The manner in which commitment is experienced by the group of respondents in this study suggests that affective, normative and continuance

commitment may all exist in varied forms and therefore may come together to form a commitment profile that may also be conducive to the respondents' perception of performance levels required of them. Given this, it may be more relevant to consider the influence of this commitment profile on perceived performance than the influence of the distinguishable elements of commitment on performance; there is a deeper understanding to be gained of commitment and performance through this exploration. Further, this understanding will become even richer if it is combined with an understanding of how these profiles are influenced through HRM practices. If HRM professionals are to gain an understanding of how performance is achieved in any organization there is little doubt that there is significant benefit in understanding how HRM practices influence commitment profiles which in turn influence individual performance.

Chapter 7. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The conclusions drawn from the findings of this research study were presented and discussed in the preceding chapter. They can be summarized as follows:

- The skewed data explored through the quantitative research and the qualitative data told different stories about the way these public servants experienced organizational commitment. This suggests that there may be benefits to further qualitative or mixed method approaches to research into organizational commitment and the variances that may exist in different employment contexts;
- The variances identified in all three components of commitment for these respondents may suggest that there is a problem with the way commitment in the public sector has been measured in the past, if it holds true that the widely accepted three component model is measured but is not typical of public sector environments;
- These respondents experienced varied forms of commitment that may be unique to the department in which these public servants work;
- There appeared a common theme of job comfort and complacency underlying the commitment variances for these employees that may warrant further exploration;
- Apparent uncertainty regarding commitment forms apparent may suggest low self-awareness of commitment states;
- The dominant commitment component appeared to be a variation of continuance commitment;
- There may be benefit in considering the role of commitment self-awareness in the fields of management, leadership, career planning and performance management; and

- There may be benefit in considering the formation of commitment profiles in particular settings and whether unique commitment profiles develop. There may also be a benefit in further consideration of the role that HRM practices may play in the development of variances in commitment and commitment profiles.

These issues were discussed in some detail in chapter 6. The final two points relating to the possible formation of commitment profiles and the role that HRM may play in the formation of commitment profiles were not discussed in the previous chapter because they were not findings drawn from this research study. Rather, these two issues have been separated from the general findings and are presented in this chapter as theoretical issues that emerged from this research and that are thought to be worthy of discussion.

This chapter focuses on these two issues alone:

(a) the formation of commitment profiles and the value of considering profiles as opposed to the separate components of commitment; and

(b) the role that HRM practices may play in the development of commitment profiles, the role that commitment profiles may play in influencing performance and the conclusion that organizational commitment may indeed sit within the 'black box' of HRM, linking HRM practices to organizational performance.

Commitment Profiles and their Influence on Performance

The first key issue that emerged from this research study and is considered worthy of discussion relates to the value of considering commitment profiles as opposed to focusing only on the separate, distinguishable elements of commitment when exploring in particular, the way in which commitment influences performance. The proposition presented is that measuring the distinguishable components of organizational commitment and their individual influences on performance may not offer the most accurate picture of commitment-related performance. There is an abundance of literature on the relationship between affective, normative and continuance commitment and how each of these influences workplace performance (Meyer and Bobocel,

1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Allen and Smith 1987; Chen and Francesco 2001; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Meyer et al., 1989; Becker et al., 1996; Kibeom et al., 2000; Siders et al., 2001; Wright and Bonnett, 2002). However, there is surprisingly little literature that has explored an overall commitment profile and its influence on performance (Allen and Meyer 1997; Gellatly et al., 2009). Despite this it is quite reasonable to conclude that a commitment profile is likely to result in a more accurate indication of performance, an idea that is consistent with the literature that suggests that a commitment profile gives a more accurate picture of the employee-organization link (Meyer et al. 2012; Meyer and Herscovitch 2001; Gellatly et al., 2009).

Having explored what commitment looks like for a group of Australian, federal, generalist public servants, and having identified what appear to be unique variances in the components of commitment, this thesis supports recent research that attests to the importance of considering commitment profiles in organizations as opposed to the elements of commitment in isolation, and the effects of these profiles on performance, as well as their relationship to HRM practices (Meyer et al. 2012; Sinclair et al., 2005; Gellatly et al., 2009).

The literature on organizational commitment in public sector organizations that has been influential in this study suggests that public service organizations may have a tendency towards a dominance of continuance commitment that is greater than that seen in private or welfare sectors (Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). This tendency toward continuance commitment was considered worth exploring for a group of public servants employed within the Australian public service for the following reasons.

Firstly, if it holds true it is potentially concerning given the literature that shows a relationship between continuance commitment and performance. It is widely accepted by scholars of organizational commitment that high levels of continuance commitment are unlikely to facilitate high levels of performance in an organization (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer et al., Smith 1993; Becker and Kernan, 2003; Becker et al., 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan 2003). However, the findings presented in this thesis are in line with recent literature that suggests that high levels of continuance commitment may be less concerning than previously

thought, when they are considered as part of a commitment profile and in relation to their context (Meyer et al. 2012).

Secondly, it would be particularly interesting to explore the dominance of continuance commitment at a time when the APS has undergone a significant performance review and is implementing recommendations for performance improvements. These recommendations were influenced by data reported in the annual, internal APS document entitled the *State of the Service Report* that reports to the Australian Parliament on the success or otherwise of HRM activities in the APS. In the 2010 report, commitment was measured and reported as a single construct and showed that 60% of staff surveyed were committed to their department and 76% were committed to the APS as a whole (APSC 2010, p.218). Despite an acceptance by scholars of the multi-dimensional nature of commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Jaros, 1997; Jaros et al., 1993; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986) it is measured and reported annually in the APS as a single construct. This appears to support the literature that suggests that there is a poor understanding of the construct of commitment among HRM professionals (Liou and Nyhan, 1994; Roche, 1999; Conway and Monks 2009; Stanley et al., 2009; Gellatly and Hunter, 2009). The implication of this inaccurate reporting to the Australian Parliament and the misunderstanding of the construct of commitment are discussed in depth later in this chapter, when the relationship between HRM practices, commitment and performance are discussed.

This study intended to measure the levels of continuance commitment experienced by a group of generalist, federal public servants to determine if it was dominant for this particular group and what the implications of this might be. The results of this research showed that this did, in fact appear to be the case; the dominant form of commitment for this group of public servants appeared to be a varied form of continuance commitment.

However, the mixed methodology approach used in this study highlighted an unforeseen occurrence and that was that commitment, as it was described in the questionnaire, did not appear to match the concept of commitment as it was understood by the respondents to the questionnaire. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of high levels of uncertainty identified through a large percentage of respondents who indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed

with many of the items of the questionnaire. Thus in the qualitative stage of this research, variances in the forms that affective, normative and continuance commitment took for this group of public servants, were explored. The results suggested that all three elements of commitment may in fact have been varied and may have been quite unique to the employment context.

It appeared that affective commitment was focused on a desire to remain with the department throughout one's career by choice as opposed to need. However, there was no clear, emotional or values based connection to the department itself. There was no discussion in the focus groups that showed a sense of passion for the work of the department or that the decision to work in the department was based upon the work that it does or the role that it plays in the Australian government. There did appear to be a sense of pride associated with being part of the department and respondents agreed that the department played an important role in government and community but that this did not underpin their decision to work there. The sense of 'family' that is associated with affective organizational commitment was associated with the people with whom the respondent worked but was not associated with the department itself. There was also a sense of job comfort and employment complacency that led respondents to form the conclusion that they would choose to stay with the department for their entire careers. The sense of comfort and complacency appeared through discussion on choosing to work in the department because people were comfortable in their stable roles, they knew their jobs well and enjoyed the daily tasks they were required to undertake; they knew the people with whom they worked and knew what was expected of them. The sense of complacency appeared to be derived from a reluctance to leave the department and thus lose the comfort they experienced in knowing their job, the people with whom they worked, what was expected of them from managers and from an acceptance that for the most part these respondents enjoyed their daily work. The stability of their roles and of the department appeared to contribute to this sense of comfort and complacency. There were many statements made in the focus group sessions such as '*if you have to work anywhere, this is a good place to work...*' and it may be that this reflects a positive aspects of comfort and complacency.

Likewise, normative commitment differed from what was expected and was shown in the qualitative data not to be focused on the department itself but on the people they worked most

closely with, that is, on immediate team mates and colleagues. Thus the variation here rested for the most part on the focus of their normative commitment. There were clear statements suggesting that loyalty was experienced in relation to workmates and not in relation to the organization itself or the organization's senior executive group.

Continuance commitment, for this group of public servants appeared to relate to the specific pay and conditions of the department in which they worked and to job security and stability as well as a sense of job comfort and complacency, as has been discussed in relation to affective commitment. Continuance commitment appeared to be the most dominant form of commitment experienced by this group of public servants at this time.

Overall it appeared that the findings from this study support those from previous research into commitment in public sector organizations only in as much as it supported the conclusion that continuance organizational commitment was likely to be dominant, relative of course to normative and affective commitment.

In other ways the findings drawn from this study differ from the literature and the most significant of these comes from considering the possible mediating effect that affective and normative commitment have on the dominance of continuance commitment. Considering a commitment profile as opposed to the separate components of commitment changes the interpretation of these findings and offers a different conclusion than that formed when the separate elements of commitment are identified in isolation from each other. The findings of this research, therefore, are more closely aligned with those of Sinclair and his colleagues and Gellatly and his colleagues in their premise that the study of commitment profiles is more telling of how an employee feels about their organization and how they are likely to perform, than the study of the separate components of commitment (Sinclair et al 2005; Gellatly et al 2009). They are also in line with the findings from recent research conducted by Meyer and his colleagues that restated the importance of considering commitment profiles and their context and the relationship between high levels of continuance commitment and performance, suggesting that this relationship may not be as problematic as previously thought (Meyer et al. 2012). These issues are discussed in depth in this chapter.

Organizational Commitment, HRM Practices and Performance

The second issue discussed in this chapter relates to the relationship between organizational commitment, HRM practices and organizational performance. It will focus particularly on the first element of this relationship, that is, the link between HRM practices and the formation of a dominant commitment profile. A theoretical discussion will be presented to raise the possibility that for this particular group of Australian federal public servants it may be that one specific HRM practice, explained later in this chapter, is playing a key role in the development of the commitment profile that was identified and more precisely, the dominance of the form of continuance commitment that was apparent for these people in that commitment profile. This discussion contributes to those presented by Gellatly and his colleagues, in which they determined connections between certain HRM practices and the development of commitment profiles (Gellatly et al 2009). It is also in line with recent research by Conway and Monks suggesting that certain HRM practices influence employees' attitudes including affective, normative and continuance commitment (2009).

In this instance and for this particular group of public servants it is also suggested that this relationship is currently operating inadvertently. That is, the intertwined relationship between this particular HRM practice and the development of a commitment profile is neither recognized, understood nor managed by HRM professionals who work in this context in any deliberate manner.

The missing link between HRM practices and organizational performance has been referred to as the 'black box' of HRM (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood 1999; Truss, 2001; Guest 2002; Bosalie et al., 2005; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Conway and Monks, 2008; Gong et al., 2009) and has been mentioned already in this thesis. Recent HRM research focuses heavily on identifying the elements that sit within this 'black box' and that includes consideration of the role that organizational commitment may play (Edwards and Wright 2001; Gong et al., 2009). This discussion is included in this thesis because this study contributes to consideration that organizational commitment may indeed sit in the 'black box' of HRM and may link HRM practice to organizational performance.

The theoretical premise put forward in this discussion is that in the public service setting in which this study took place a specific HRM practice known as ‘bulk recruitment’ plays a role in directly influencing the development of the unique commitment profile identified and consequently affects organizational performance in a manner that until now has not been recognized.

These two issues are discussed in detail in this chapter.

A Unique Commitment Profile

The findings of this study show the existence of a dominance of a varied form of continuance commitment; relatively strong normative commitment focused on people rather than the organization itself; and low affective commitment that was also somewhat unique in its variance.

Considering these commitment states separately suggests that these Australian federal public servants are similar to employees in other public sector environments with regard to the dominant state of continuance commitment and the low apparent levels of affective commitment (Nyhan et al., 2000; Goulet and Frank, 2002; Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). A high performing public service may be stifled by a dominance of continuance commitment since the literature is clear on the fact that continuance commitment is the least conducive to high performance (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer et al., 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker et al., 1995; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003).

However, if the separate components of commitment are combined to offer a commitment profile, the overall conclusions drawn from this research are quite different. A more positive conclusion emerges when considering the commitment profile than it does when considering the separate components of commitment.

Leading researchers Allen and Meyer state that it should be recognized that all three dimensions of commitment give a clear understanding of the employee-organization link but must be considered simultaneously. They state further that it is the combination of these dimensions that offers the most interesting insight into what could be considered as commitment profiles specific

to certain industries or workplace cultures (1990, pp. 14 -15). The findings of this study suggest that a commitment profile identified in a group of Australian federal public servants is not only unique and interesting in itself, but may reflect the unique characteristics of their employment context. It is also suggested that the congruence between the commitment profile and the Australian public service culture results in the commitment profile being less problematic than first thought.

The APS Culture that Led to the Formation of the Commitment Profile – A Theoretical Case

A snapshot of the APS in 2009 showed some challenges relating to managing employee recruitment and retention and attracting skilled professionals (APSC, 2009 p. 49). Likewise, a decade earlier in 1999, the APS reported similar challenges, with new graduates showing a median length of service of 3-4 years and only 1-2 years for other new employees. From 1992 to 1999 the APS was managing a retention rate of 55.9% (APSC, 1999, p. 54).

In the years following 1999 APS agencies were able to develop certified agreements and individual employment agreements that would allow them to negotiate remuneration rates independently of each other. This is something they could not do prior to 1999 under the previous Public Service Act 1922 (APSC, 1999, p. 54). These arrangements were put in place in part to facilitate greater mobility across government agencies thereby encouraging stronger and broader APS careers and improving attraction and retention figures (APSC, 1999, p. 54). They resulted in agencies competing for employees and offering generous pay and conditions in doing so.

The generous pay and conditions that are now associated with the APS were designed in part to attract and retain highly skilled professionals within the APS, which was a key message from the then Prime Minister (APSC, 2009, p. 49). In 2009, 65% of APS staff stated that they were most attracted to their current position because of the remuneration offered, while 83% claimed that job security was the key reason they chose their position. A further 67% stated that job location was a key element and 63% stated that good work practices were very important in their decision to take their particular job. These figures are consistent with the findings of this study in relation

to the dominance of continuance commitment for this group of public servants. Continuance commitment in this research included pay and conditions of the APS as a whole as well as the employing department.

This dominance of continuance commitment that consequently emerged for this group of public servants may have resulted in the development of a unique commitment profile.

The commitment profile identified as evident for this group of public servants suggests that as well as experiencing a sense of continuance commitment, respondents developed a degree of loyalty and obligation towards their team mates, colleagues and managers, identified as normative commitment, and affective commitment based very much on a sense of comfort and complacency in the job. It is theoretically possible that one dimension of commitment brought about the others.

The theoretical assumption is that an individual joins a specific APS department because of the generous pay and conditions, which 65% of employees in 2009 stated was a key factor in their decision to join their department (APSC, 2009). Having joined the department they then also gain the benefit of job stability which was identified by 83% of people as a factor in joining their department (APSC, 2009, p. 54). Theoretically, generous pay and conditions and job stability come together to influence the development of continuance organizational commitment.

Once settled in the job, it is speculated that a sense of obligation and loyalty may develop between the employee and their manager who may have been instrumental in placing them in their job. The satisfaction with the pay and conditions and job security is at this point paramount and a key factor in an individual's decision to remain in the position. The high level of job security that is also unique to employment in the APS means that the opportunity to remain with the department and enjoy the pay and conditions is recognized by the employee who accepts the reality that they are likely to reap these benefits for many years to come.

This level of satisfaction perpetuates loyalty and obligation to managers and workmates as these are the people, particularly managers, who make it possible to enjoy the practical benefits that come with employment in the APS. Thus loyalty and obligation focused towards these people

may develop and manifests as normative commitment. This theoretical concept supports a similar premise put forward in the literature that suggests that employment benefits such as generous pay and conditions may be viewed by employees as an employer obligation and as such they are part of the psychological contract of employment. Once these conditions are received and the contract is fulfilled by the employer, the employee feels a need to reciprocate and does so through a sense of obligation and by remaining loyal to the organization (Meyer and Smith, 2000). The theoretical variation of this concept as presented in this chapter relates to this reciprocated sense of obligation focused on managers and teams rather than the organization. However, the idea behind the formation of normative commitment is consistent: it comes as a consequence of continuance commitment.

Affective commitment develops as a final stage as the employee settles into the position for an extended period of time and develops job comfort and some degree of complacency. The combination of satisfaction with the practical benefits of pay, conditions and stability, coupled with the emotional connection towards colleagues and workmates forming loyalty and obligation result in a sense of personal involvement with and emotional commitment to the team. Each of these was depicted as clear variances in the components of commitment experienced by the group of public servants involved in this study and this was particularly evident in the qualitative data. They thus combine to form a unique commitment profile.

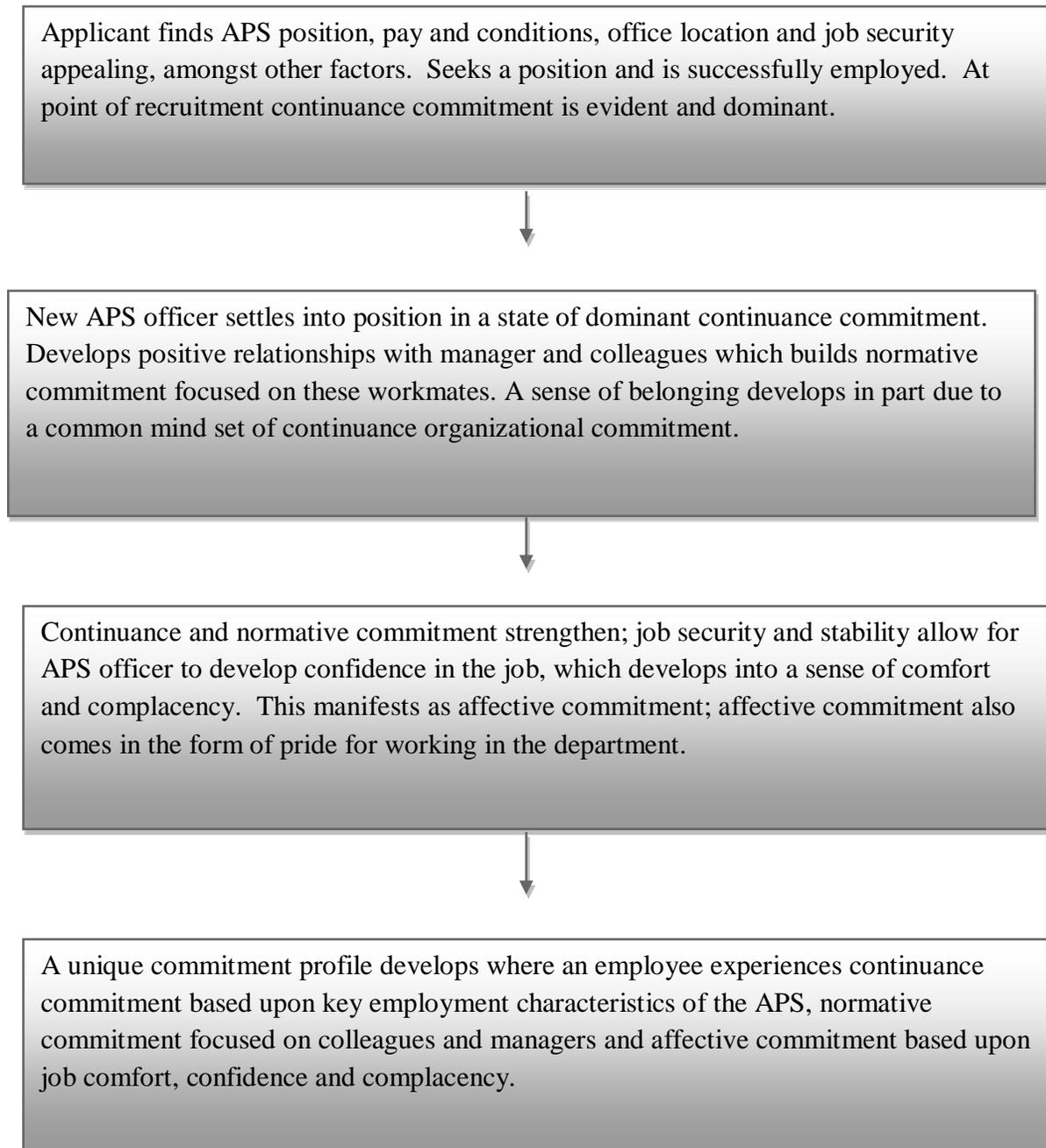
This theoretical depiction of the development of this particular commitment profile is presented in diagram 7.1. The purpose of this theoretical premise is to contribute to two relevant discussions: one relating to the suggestion in the literature that there is considerable value in exploring commitment profiles (Meyer et al. 2012; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001; Sinclair, et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2009; Gellatly et al., 2009) and the other relating to the discussion that commitment profiles form as a consequence of certain HRM practices (Gellatly et al., 2009).

As a profile, the form of commitment appears quite different compared to how it is considered as separate components. A clear example of this is evidenced in this research study. The literature shows that continuance commitment is most often the dominant form of commitment in public sector organizations (Abbott et al., 2005); the literature also shows clearly that continuance

commitment is the least conducive to high performance workplaces (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer et al., 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker et al., 1995; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Becker and Kernan, 2003). Together the logical conclusion is that high continuance commitment in public sector organizations may result in lower levels of performance.

The results of this study confirmed a dominance of continuance commitment for one group of generalist Australian federal public servants. However, if this component of commitment is considered in light of the overall commitment profile that has been identified for this group of people, it paints both a unique and more positive picture of commitment as it may be experienced within this group of public servants. Indeed it may suggest that the dominance of continuance commitment is, as part of a commitment profile, less problematic. It is not suggested that this dominance is ideal as the relationship between continuance commitment and performance is solid. However, what is suggested is that the dominance of any component of commitment within a particular context be interpreted in light of a commitment profile of which it is a part. The relationship between commitment and performance should then be considered in respect of this commitment profile. This may give a more accurate indication of the commitment-performance situation in an organization or for particular employees.

Diagram 7.1 A Theoretical Premise – The Development of a Unique Commitment Profile



The second point to be made here relates to the relationship between the formation of a commitment profile and organizational HRM practices. In diagram 7.1 a theory is represented on the formation of this unique commitment profile given what is known about APS

characteristics of generous pay and conditions and job stability. The obvious suggestion is that these profiles do not form in isolation of the characteristics of the organization, a point which is consistent with the literature that shows employment context influences the development of commitment (Meyer et al. 2012; Abbott et al., 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston et al., 2000; Lee et al., 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995).

Given the mediating effects of the components of commitment on each other and the consequential evolving of a commitment profile that is embedded in an organization's culture, there is value in exploring these in other public sector organizations or further within the Australian public service context, to test the variances of continuance commitment in particular, its connection to organizational culture and its influence, as part of a profile in overall performance.

Considering commitment profiles and the way they may be embedded into a specific culture or context leads into another key theoretical consideration to be presented in this thesis. It relates to the specific role that certain HRM practices play in the development of commitment profiles.

Commitment Profiles and HRM Practice – Understanding the linkages

The literature presented in chapter 2 clearly states that organizational commitment is considered a core element of HRM practice (Whitenes, 2001; Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005 Swailes, 2004). It also shows that HRM practices relate directly to the development of organizational commitment (Ouchi 1981; Peters and Waterman 1982; Meyer and Smith 2000; Guest 2002; Kinnie et al., 2005; Steijn and Leisink, 2006; Grant et al., 2008; Conway and Monks, 2009; Gong et al., 2009) which is supported by the literature that confirms that organizational commitment and HRM are linked (Iles et al., 1990;). Despite this it also shows that HRM practitioners know little about the multi-dimensional construct of organizational commitment (Liou and Nyhan, 1994; Roche, 1999; Conway and Monks 2009; Stanley, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Bentein 2009; Gellatly and Hunter, 2009).

In other words, there appears to be acceptance in the literature that understanding organizational commitment is fundamental to understanding performance in the workplace. Further, it is important to understand the relationship between HRM practices and commitment. Despite this, however, HRM practitioners, for the most part, do not appear to have grasped these connections. Indeed, there appears to be a distinct lack of reference in HRM models and educational material on organizational commitment and the role it plays in both retention and performance (Liou and Nyhan, 1994; Roche, 1999; Conway and Monks 2009; Stanley et al., 2009; Gellatly and Hunter, 2009).

In a similar vein is the discussion in the literature regarding the ‘black box’ that lies between the implementation of HRM practices and performance improvement. The literature similarly discusses the ‘holy grail’ of understanding HRM as understanding what lies within this ‘black box’ (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood 1999; Truss, 2001; Guest 2002; Bosalie et al., 2005; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Conway and Monks, 2008; Gong et al., 2009).

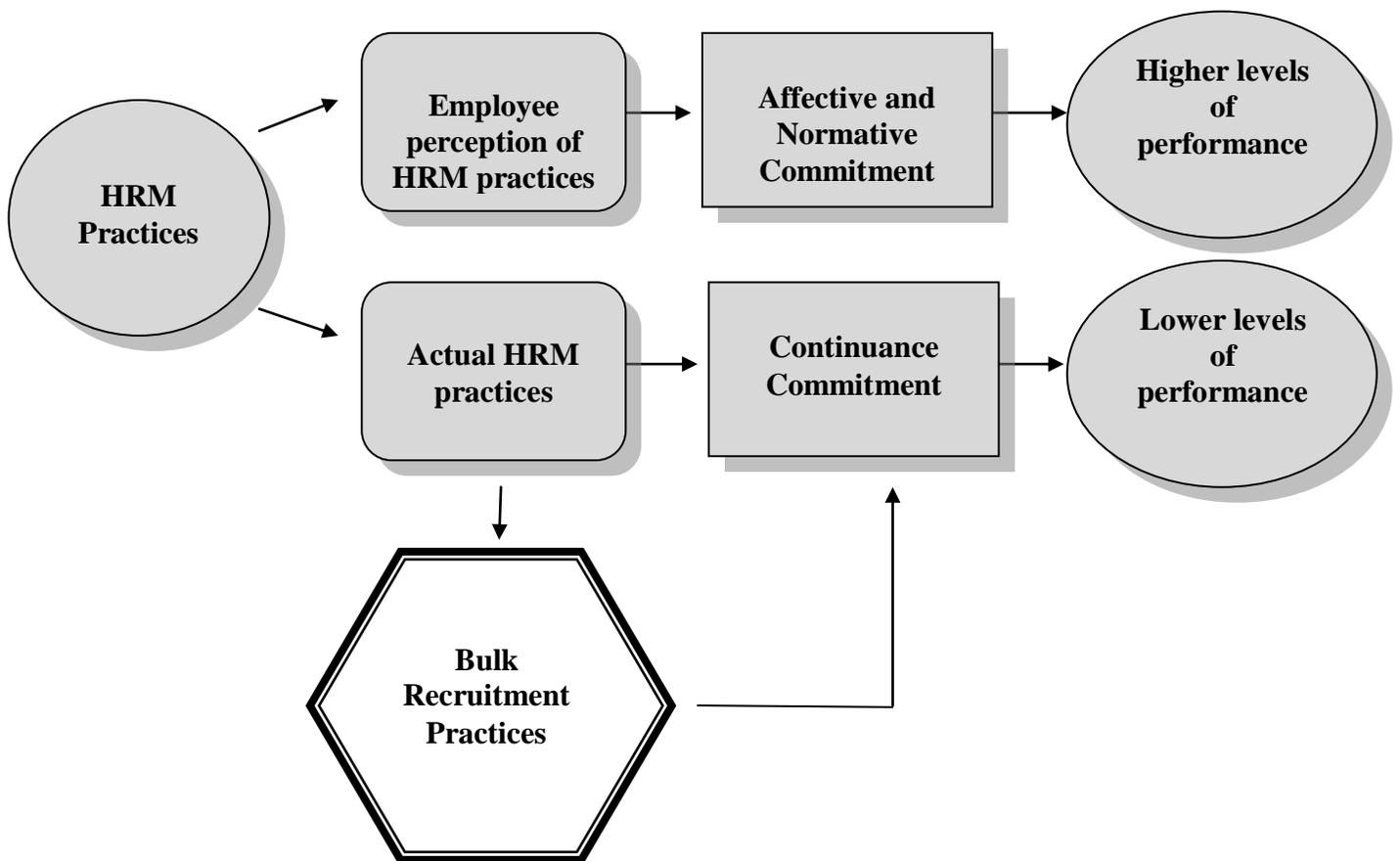
The premise that the lack of understanding of organizational commitment and the lack of understanding of what lies within this ‘black box’ are, to some degree, one and the same, is presented in this thesis. Other researchers have suggested that it is possible that if HRM practitioners understood organizational commitment better, they would also have a better understanding of what lies within the ‘black box’ and why and how HRM practices influence organizational improvement (Edwards and Wright, 2001). The theoretical discussion presented in this chapter contributes to this discussion.

The unique commitment profile that was identified for this particular group of Australian federal public servants included a dominance of continuance commitment. In considering the implications of this, certain HRM practices were reviewed. One practice particular stood out: a commonly preferred recruitment practice used throughout the Australian Public Service referred to as Bulk Recruitment.

In chapter 2 of this thesis, diagram 2.4 was presented to depict the HRM-performance relationship and the mediating effect of organizational commitment. This diagram is reproduced

here as diagram 7.2 to introduce this particular HRM practice known as bulk recruitment and to suggest that it may perpetuate a dominance of continuance commitment and consequently mediate performance.

Diagram 7.2: Reproduction of the HRM-Performance Relationship and the Mediating Effect of Organizational Commitment. The HRM practice of Bulk Recruitment Perpetuating Continuance Commitment and Therefore Mediating the HRM-Performance Relationship.



Theoretically, it is thought that this process of bulk recruitment may influence the development of the commitment profile identified in this study. This idea has not been tested in this research and as such is presented as a theoretical discussion only. Empirical research into the relationship between bulk recruitment and the development of a commitment profile in this setting would

therefore be needed to determine whether commitment lies within the 'black box' between this specific HRM practice and performance.

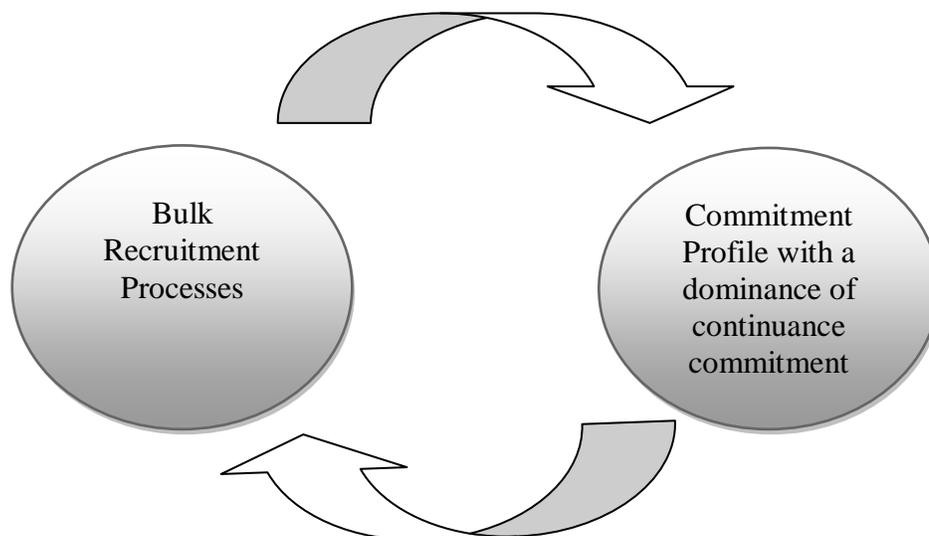
Large-scale recruitment, or bulk recruitment, is readily practiced in Australia and other countries (Synnerstrom, 2007), yet research into this type of recruitment is scarce. However, the research that is available suggests that bulk recruitment is most effective when organizations seek significant cost savings. A study undertaken by Bergmann and Martin (1987) assessed the cost effectiveness of bulk recruitment through mathematical modeling and they agreed that this type of recruitment results in reduced recruitment activity costs. However, they also suggest that qualitative reviews be undertaken on this type of recruitment process to explore the degree to which it facilitates adequate applicant assessments for suitability against specific roles. They suggest that this may be a limitation of the process and should cause organizations to use bulk recruitment processes carefully (1987, p. 100).

The bulk recruitment process used in the APS is designed to implement the efficiencies identified by Bergmann and Martin by inviting candidates to apply for numerous positions within a department as opposed to one clearly defined role. Interviews with former public sector senior executives explained the process as appointing applicants who are found suitable at a particular level to a role at that level or placed on a merit list until a suitable role at that level becomes available. The benefit of this is that it allows the organization to recruit groups of individuals, each of whom could be placed into a position that needs to be filled. Although there may be some option for applicants to refuse a position that they may not like, for the most part they usually accept a role to which they are appointed in order to secure employment in the organization at the preferred level.

In the financial year 2009-2010 the APS engaged 10,221 ongoing employees and 14,004 employees were promoted within the APS (APSC, 2010 p. 129). This means that over 24,000 people were involved in a recruitment process in a 12 month period. This places a very significant recruitment load on the APS and suggests that HRM recruitment practices play a major role in the daily operations of the APS. Bulk recruitment processes may indeed occur on a daily basis in at least one of the 98 Commonwealth Government departments that make up the

APS (APSC, 2010 p. xiii). This HRM practice thus potentially plays a major role in shaping the broader culture of the APS. The premise presented in this chapter is that bulk recruitment does shape the culture of the APS, although it may be doing this inadvertently, by shaping the commitment culture that in itself has a broad reach in influencing performance and HRM practices themselves. Thus the relationship comes full circle, with the HRM practice of bulk recruitment perpetuating a unique commitment profile that then perpetuates the use of bulk recruitment, as depicted simply through diagram 7. 3.

Diagram 7.3. Circular Relationship Between Bulk Recruitment and Commitment: A Theory



There is considerable research linking recruitment processes to the formation of organizational commitment and identifying selection processes as an antecedent to commitment. Meyer and Smith cite research undertaken by Ogilvie in 1986 as identifying a link between the perception of fairness and accuracy in recruitment and the development of commitment (2000, p. 320) along with research that links employment security to commitment (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989 as cited in Meyer and Smith, 2000). Iles, Mabey and Robertson linked recruitment practices and commitment, stating in particular that HRM practices that appear on the surface to promote commitment may in fact have an unintended and paradoxical effect including the reduction of performance. They suggested that ‘organizations which seek to bind employees

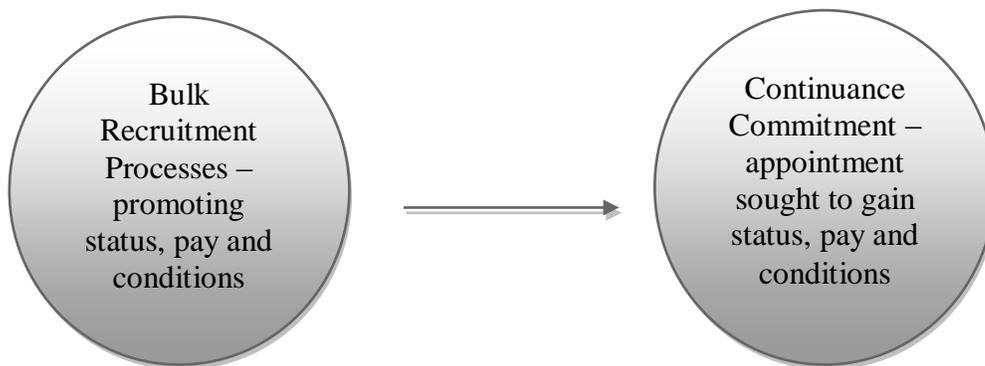
through...specific benefits such as (financial gains) may find that they end up with employees who may not wish to leave but who merely perform at a minimum level sufficient to retain their jobs and benefits'(1990, p.153) Research was also conducted in 1990 by Caldwell, Chatman and O'Reilly in which they suggested that '[an] individual's commitment to an organization may be shaped by the process through which he or she enters the organization,' and that 'factors related to an individual's decision to accept a job offer can influence his or her subsequent commitment'(1990 p.246). Caldwell and his colleagues concluded through their research that a 'clear formal reward system may undermine normative commitment...while simultaneously promoting instrumental based commitment' (1990 p.257). Instrumental based commitment is defined as 'attachment undertaken for specific rewards' (p.247) and so may be similar to continuance commitment.

The link between HRM practices and the development of continuance commitment was shown in research undertaken by Meyer and Smith in which they speculated that 'HRM practices might also affect continuance commitment by making it costly for employees to leave' and that 'continuance commitment might be influenced by specific practices that increase the cost of leaving' (2000 pp 327, 328). More recent research undertaken by Gong and his colleagues was presented in chapter 2 of this thesis and relates to their suggestion that maintenance-orientated HRM practices such as those that focus on remuneration and job security have an influence on the development of continuance commitment (Gong et al., 2009). Thus the link between the practice of bulk recruitment and the development of continuance commitment and the unique commitment profile seen in this research study contribute to these discussions linking certain recruitment processes in particular to the development of continuance commitment.

The suggestion is that continuance commitment is more likely to develop where people are encouraged to seek promotions or employment to levels rather than into specific roles. Seeking applications from individuals to apply for numerous, unknown positions at a particular level in an organization links directly to continuance commitment. This is because applicants are asked to prove their worth in relation to specific competencies in order to be found suitable to operate at a specific level. They are then employed in the APS at that level and reap the benefits of the pay and conditions set at that level. The focus of employment seems very much on rewards and

as such promotes an attitude of continuance commitment from the onset. It may be expected that if the recruitment process focused upon the value of the work, the emotional connection between the role and individual values, the social importance of the work and similar values, then affective commitment would be encouraged. Likewise, a recruitment campaign that focused on developing long term reciprocal relationships and offering certain types of enticements would encourage an attitude of normative commitment. Paying for studies towards formal qualifications where successful applicants agree to be employed for a minimum of 5 years is an example of such an enticement. A recruitment campaign that focuses almost entirely on job status, pay and conditions is likely to inadvertently promote continuance organizational commitment to the detriment of the other components of commitment. Diagram 7.4 shows this link in a clear, simple manner.

Diagram 7.4 The Theoretical Link Between Bulk Recruitment and Continuance Commitment



A Theoretical and Reciprocal Relationship between Bulk Recruitment and Continuance Commitment

The premise has been presented that the process of bulk recruitment promotes continuance organizational commitment because of its focus on job status and level, on pay and conditions. A second premise is now presented that suggests that bulk recruitment would work as an effective recruitment process in the APS if there were a dominant continuance commitment culture. Thus, the relationship is likely to be reciprocal. Once the culture is dominated by

continuance organizational commitment there develops an acceptance that seeking employment or promotion in relation to levels rather than actual positions, becomes the norm. Thus, having adopted this mind set as an employee of the APS or a potential employee of the APS, the ability and willingness to respond to the bulk recruitment process becomes effective.

The point to this reciprocal argument is that a review of HRM practices and their success in achieving their goals cannot always be done in isolation of mediating influences such as commitment. This brings the discussion back to the links between HRM practices, psychological states such as commitment and organizational effectiveness. In this case, the success of this particular HRM practice cannot be determined accurately through an independent review of the process, but through consideration of the influence the process has on the culture of the organization. To put this more simply, assessing HRM strategies and assessing organizational performance may also require the ability to assess mediators such as organizational commitment.

Another issue to consider with regard to this reciprocal relationship is the potential for misunderstanding. It has been stated already that there appears to be a lack of understanding of the commitment construct in the HRM profession. If this holds true in this setting, then it is fair to assume that the apparent success of the bulk recruitment process is determined without consideration of its influence on commitment states and the development of a commitment profile. A more simplistic review is more likely, that bulk recruitment is meeting recruitment needs and as such is successful. As a consequence HRM professionals continue to use it.

At the same time HR professionals measure commitment incorrectly, as a single construct, and report apparently high levels of commitment. This message supports the conclusion that bulk recruitment is effective, given an assumption that the high levels of commitment are in part due to the use of bulk recruitment.

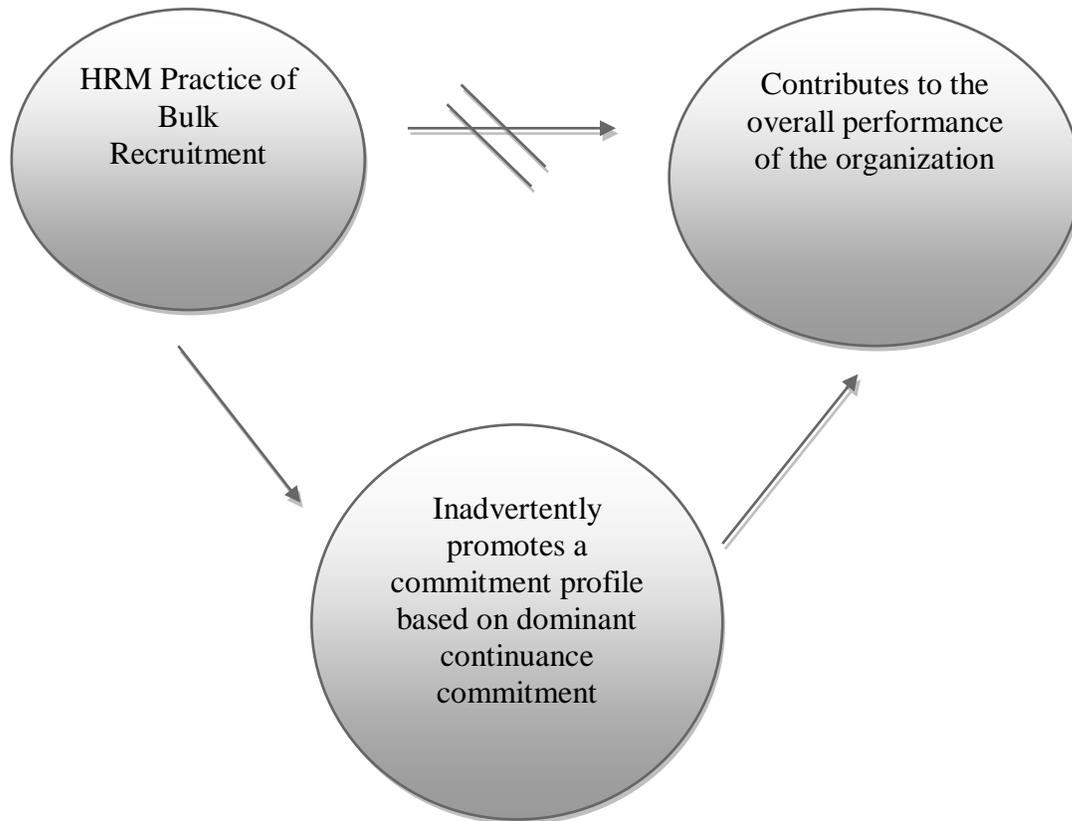
The picture forming in the mind of the HRM professional is that this particular HRM practice is effective and employee commitment is high.

Imagine however, that the HRM professional then implements other strategies designed to improve organizational performance, strategies such as those relating to leadership development,

performance management and career development for example. It is fair to assume that the HRM professional is operating from a basis that suggests these strategies should be effective in improving performance. Yet they find that when they measure performance it remains stifled, or that performance management remains problematic, or leadership remains weak. The HRM professional can easily become frustrated and confused, without realizing that certain HRM practices may in fact be competing with each other. The practice of bulk recruitment may be promoting a commitment profile that is dominated by continuance commitment which is not conducive to high performance. This becomes very deeply embedded in the culture of the organization and consequently jeopardizes the success of other HRM practices designed to build higher levels of performance. The result is consistent with the literature that suggests that certain HRM practices may inadvertently promote one component of commitment to the detriment of others (Stanley, et al., 2009).

It is suggested that this may be occurring for this particular group of public servants in this specific Australian public service context and it would be interesting to undertake further studies in the APS to test the premise. In line with previous research, (Abbott, et al., 2005) continuance commitment is dominant in this setting, albeit in a varied form. This has developed in part due to one particular HRM practice known as bulk recruitment. The dominance of continuance commitment that has resulted from the bulk recruitment process works reciprocally to improve the effectiveness of the bulk recruitment process and as such both the process itself and the commitment profile become deeply embedded in the organization. This results in a culture that may influence the success or otherwise of other HRM practices. Consequently, the need to improve the understanding of the role that commitment plays in the relationship between HRM practice and organizational performance becomes clear. The possibility that commitment sits in the 'black box' of HRM also becomes more evident, at least theoretically. This final point is illustrated through diagram 7.5.

Diagram 7.5 A Theory Linking the HRM Practice of Bulk Recruitment to Organizational Performance Via Organizational Commitment



The HRM practice of bulk recruitment influences overall organizational performance. However, how it does so is not clearly understood by HRM professionals in the APS. This is due to a lack of understanding of the construct of commitment, as evidenced through its misrepresentation in the annual internal document, the *State of the Service Report*. It is the premise of this thesis that bulk recruitment influences organizational performance, in part, through its influence on the development of continuance commitment.

Conclusion

This chapter presented two theoretical discussions that emerged from this study. The first premise contributes to current discussions in the field of organizational commitment concerning, at the very least, the importance of exploring commitment profiles in organizations. In addition,

this premise also contributes to current discussions about continuing the exploration of the components of commitment and how they vary in different settings. It was suggested in this thesis that commitment as it appeared to be experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants exists in a unique form and as a commitment profile, appears to fit comfortably within the culture of the department in which they work. The conclusion drawn is that the dominance of continuance commitment is less concerning than has been suggested in previous research (Meyer et al., 1989; Meyer et al., 1993; Becker and Kernan 2003; Becker, et al., 1995; Chen and Francesco 2001; Becker and Kernan 2003) because of the consideration of the mediating effect of the components of commitment on each other and thus the overall effect of the commitment profile and because of its fit within this context.

The second premise put forward in this chapter relates to a theory linking the particular HRM practice of bulk recruitment to the development of this commitment profile and in particular the dominance of continuance commitment. Considering this link generates further consideration of a possible reciprocal relationship between HRM practices and organizational commitment. Further consideration contributes to current thinking that organizational commitment sits within the 'black box' of HRM as it may be that in this particular setting the effectiveness or otherwise of the HRM practice of bulk recruitment is determined, at least in part, by its relationship with organizational commitment. These theoretical premises and the contribution they make to the body of knowledge on HRM and organizational development have been recognized by the Academy of Management. In August 2011 the findings of this research were presented in a symposium on commitment foci at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas. An abstract of this presentation is included at Appendix F. In August of 2009, elements of this research relating to the identification of commitment profiles that may be congruent with an employment context was also recognized by the Academy of Management in the presentation of a paper on this research at the Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois. This paper is included at appendix E.

In the final chapter of this thesis the research study presented here is summarized and the conclusions are briefly restated. The relevance and currency of this research to the Australian

Public Service is also restated, as is the contribution this work makes to the fields of organizational commitment and more broadly, human resource management.

Chapter 8. THESIS CONCLUSION

This thesis explains and discusses an exploratory study that looked at how organizational commitment is experienced by a group of non-managerial, generalist APS employees within a corporate support area of a federal government department in Australia. The aim of the research was to consider and answer three research questions:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

The research took place in a medium-sized central government department based in Canberra that has existed since Australia's federation in 1901. This is the first research of its kind to have taken place within this government department. Respondents were drawn from administrative levels within the Corporate Services Division of the department. This was a group of public servants who, arguably, could perform similar roles in many other government departments in Canberra. Thus it was assumed that the basis for their employment in this department reflected an attitude of organizational commitment.

A mixed method approach was considered the most effective and appropriate research methodology. The first research question, however, failed to be addressed through the quantitative process and was reconsidered in the qualitative process. The third research question invited a theoretical discussion that was informed by the overall research.

This study offers important and timely knowledge and insight that is relevant in both the academic and practitioner contexts. The contribution of this research to these contexts is discussed in this chapter and addresses the following key issues:

1. The importance of understanding the unique form of organizational commitment that appears to exist for a group of Australian federal public servants and the questions this raises about the applicability of Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment for these respondents
2. The overall contribution of this study to the field of organizational commitment and in particular the questions it raises about the way commitment is currently measured, the reliance on Allen and Meyer's model, the existence of a unique commitment profile that reflects the APS context and the role of a particular HRM practice in perpetuating the unique commitment profile;
3. The contribution that can be made in social research of considering data skewness and the role it plays in interpreting data as it is presented in the bell curve;
4. The theoretical contribution of a mixed methods approach in studies of organizational commitment, the benefits of more qualitative research taking place in the public sector and the, to explore possible variations in the forms that commitment may take in this particular context; and
5. The theoretical contribution of this study to understanding the mediators between HRM practices and organizational performance, with a particular discussion on the relationship between the HRM practice of bulk recruitment and its role in the existence of a unique and context specific commitment profile that is atypical of Allen and Meyer's definitions of commitment.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, table 1.1 was presented that outlined the expected findings from this research, based on the literature in this field. In this chapter this table is presented here again as table 8.1, however, with an additional column identifying what was actually found in this study.

Table 8.1. Expected and Actual Findings from this Research in Line with Literature in the Field

Research	Findings	Expected findings from this research	Actual findings from this research
Allen and Meyer (1990)	<p>Ac – emotional connection to the organization;</p> <p>NC – obligation towards the organization;</p> <p>CC – perceived cost of leaving the organization</p>	All three distinguishable components of OC will be evident in this group of Australian public servants and will be consistent with these definitions	All three distinguishable components were evident in this group of public servants however none reflected the current definitions presented in the literature; rather, all three components of commitment appeared varied in their forms and atypical of Allen and Meyer’s three component model
Allen and Meyer (1990)	CC may be varied in different employment contexts	The form CC takes in this context is unknown; it may be as defined by Allen and Meyer (1990) or it may be varied, as proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990).	CC was varied in its form as expected and the form appeared to be reflective of the employment context. The variation was identified through a qualitative methodology.

<p>Lyons et al. (2006)</p>	<p>Public sector employees experience low levels of organizational commitment.</p>	<p>Australian public service employees experience low levels of commitment.</p>	<p>Low levels of commitment were not apparent. Commitment appeared high, particularly evident through the qualitative research. However, commitment was varied and as such was not accurately measured through quantitative processes. Unique, varied commitment profiles may be best identified through qualitative processes.</p>
<p>Abbott et al. (2005)</p>	<p>CC is the dominant form of commitment experienced by Australian public servants in the NSW state government.</p>	<p>CC is the dominant form of commitment experienced by this group of Australian federal public servants.</p>	<p>A varied form of CC appeared dominant for this group of public service employees, identified only through the qualitative research because its varied form made the quantitative questionnaire unreliable; consequently it failed to reliably identify dominance.</p>

<p>Goulet, and Frank (2002)</p> <p>Liou and Nyhan, (2004)</p>	<p>Public sector organizations would benefit from increased levels of AC</p>	<p>AC levels are low for this group of public service employees.</p>	<p>AC levels were lower than NC and CC levels as expected. However, AC levels were more evident than expected, particularly through the qualitative research and were varied in their form.</p>
<p>Abbott, et al. (2005)</p> <p>Chen and Francesco (2001)</p> <p>Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, (2000)</p> <p>Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, (1992)</p> <p>Nyhan (1999)</p> <p>Pierce and Dunham (1987)</p> <p>Perry (2004)</p> <p>Swailles, (2004)</p>	<p>Employment contexts influence organizational commitment.</p>	<p>The commitment experienced by this group of Australian public servants will be influenced by the APS context.</p>	<p>The commitment experienced by this group of respondents did appear to be influenced by the context. It may also be influenced by specific HRM practices, particularly the practice of bulk recruitment.</p>

Wilson (1995)			
Allen and Meyer (1990)	Commitment profiles are more informing than exploration of the separate distinguishable components of commitment.	A commitment profile may be evident and informative in this setting.	A commitment profile was evident in this setting for this group of respondents, it appeared reflective of the context and unique to this group of employees. It potentially altered the commitment-performance relationship and suggests that a dominance of continuance commitment and a low level of affective commitment may not be problematic in this context.

The contribution of this study to the field of organizational commitment

Identifying a commitment profile for a group of Australian federal public servants: Offering New Insight into Commitment as it is experienced by this group of federal public servants, as atypical of Allen and Meyer's three component model.

Table 2.4 in chapter 2 of this thesis outlines much of the literature resulting from research undertaken on organizational commitment in public service organizations across the world. As few as 4 studies have taken place in the Australian context. This research contributes to the literature by offering further insight into how commitment is experienced by a group of public service employees within the Australian Public Service.

None of the previous studies cited in this thesis identifies commitment profiles. Rather, they consider various aspects of organizational commitment or various relationships and antecedents of the elements of organizational commitment. The result of this tendency to study the distinguishable components of organizational commitment in public sector organizations appears to be a general agreement that affective commitment is low and continuance commitment is high (Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006; Nyhan, 1999; Goulet and Frank, 2002). This has been interpreted as potentially problematic as high levels of continuance commitment are not conducive to achieving high levels of performance. Consequently, researchers such as Liou and Nyhan (2004) suggest that public sector organizations would benefit from developing higher levels of affective commitment in their organizations. The literature thus far supports this claim.

This research set out to explore the separate components of commitment as they were experienced by a group of federal, generalist public servants employed in an Australian Commonwealth Government department. Specifically, the purpose of the research was to determine whether these particular respondents experienced a dominance of continuance commitment and whether continuance commitment was varied for these individuals. The findings suggested that continuance commitment is dominant for this particular group of public servants and is varied in its form. The dominance of a form of continuance commitment is consistent with the literature.

What was unexpected and emerged from the data was the identification of a rather unique commitment profile based on varied forms of affective, normative and continuance commitment. This is a new contribution to the literature on commitment and is particularly important as it raises a question about the applicability of Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment to all employment contexts and the possibility of commitment being atypical of the three component model in certain contexts. The literature shows very clearly that the vast majority of studies in this field have adopted Allen and Meyer's model. This tendency to use the three component model appears to be despite an acceptance that employment contexts influence commitment states (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005) and that commitment states can be varied (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The findings of this study show that the model is not reflective of the experience of these respondents.

It is not the intention of this thesis to bring into dispute the accuracy and reliability of Allen and Meyer's well tested and widely accepted three component model of commitment. Nor is it the intention of this thesis to suggest that Allen and Meyer's model is not applicable in public sector organizations. There is no attempt to extrapolate the findings of this study beyond this group of respondents.

However, it is the intention of this thesis to raise the question about the degree to which the employment context really is taken into consideration when commitment is measured. In this study it became clear that the employment context was, as suggested in the literature (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005), profoundly influential on the experience of organizational commitment. To this end it also became clear that Allen and Meyer's definition of affective, normative and continuance commitment, as presented in their three component model, were not reflective of the commitment experience of the respondents of this study. Allen and Meyer themselves suggest that continuance commitment may differ from their definition in particular contexts and suggest that qualitative research is required to explore this possibility (1990). Clearly, Allen and Meyer themselves are open to the possibility that their model is not applicable in all settings as it does not necessarily reflect all variations of

continuance commitment. This study shows that it is not only continuance commitment that is varied in this context and for these respondents, but also affective and normative commitment and thus a quantitative measurement of commitment using Allen and Meyer's three component model, in this instance, was not reliable.

It is not possible to know if all three components of commitment are varied in other employment contexts. However, the findings of this study suggest that it is worth exploring possible variances in all three components of commitment in other contexts. That is, since Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment was not experienced by the respondents of this study it may be that it is also not experienced by other workers in other contexts. Perhaps the starting point for further exploration of variances in all three components of commitment is in another public sector context.

Analysis of the atypical commitment states identified for this group of respondents led to the consideration of a commitment profile. A study of commitment profiles in public sector organizations has not been undertaken despite general agreement that it is the commitment profile, that is, the combination of all three states of commitment, affective, normative and continuance, that offers the greatest insight into the link between the individual and the way in which they commit to their employer. This, in turn, offers the most accurate information in exploring the implications of commitment on such outcomes as individual performance at work (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Sinclair et al., 2005; Stanley et al., 2009; Gellatly et al 2009).

The unique commitment profile identified in this research for this group of employees shows a different picture to that generally depicted in the literature. Although continuance commitment was found to be the dominant form of commitment for these employees, consideration of the moderating effects of normative and affective commitment on continuance commitment, and the variations identified in the forms of all three components of commitment, resulted in a different conclusion being reached. Rather than seeing the impact of only high continuance commitment and only low affective commitment; as defined in the literature; on these employees, a commitment profile considers the mediating effects of the components of commitment on each other and how they work together to affect individuals at work. The conclusions gathered from these different perspectives are not consistent with the literature.

The commitment profile identified in this study suggests that the dominance of continuance commitment experienced by this group of public servants is less problematic than has been suggested in the literature. A suggestion is put forward to consider if the dominance of this variation of continuance commitment is indeed appropriate to the culture of the department and perhaps even the APS. It would be interesting to explore this issue through further research into organizational commitment profiles and performance levels in other Australian public service departments.

Although the commitment profile appears less concerning and perhaps somewhat appropriate to the culture of the department, this does not mean that the commitment profile identified is ideal. To facilitate high levels of performance it remains important to increase the levels of affective commitment experienced, at least to the degree that they balance high levels of continuance commitment and result in a devoted commitment profile rather than a trapped commitment profile (Gellatly et al., 2009).

It may be unlikely that the high level of continuance commitment experienced by this group of public service employees is going to change in the near future, if one accepts its congruence with the culture and its tendency to be perpetuated through certain HRM practices, namely the practice of bulk recruitment. Assuming this, the recommendation is that the antecedents to continuance commitment that are particularly strong for these public servants should be known and understood by HRM practitioners, particularly if further research suggests that this is also occurring in other Australian government departments. It is further recommended that the levels should be managed so that they are not inadvertently increased to the detriment of affective and normative commitment. At the same time, an improved understanding of the construct of commitment and the antecedents to the elements of commitment should result in more deliberate HRM strategies to increase affective commitment. This should, therefore, promote a commitment profile that is most effective at gaining both high retention and high performance, otherwise known as the devoted profile (Gellatly et al., 2009). Given that all three components of commitment were varied for these respondents it is also worthwhile doing more exploratory research into how commitment is experienced in the Australian Public Service. Gaining a better understanding of this is important as it is the unique and varied commitment profile that HRM

practitioners in this context must understand, at least as well as the definitions of commitment presented in Allen and Meyer's three component model.

Exploring the variances of the components of commitment

This thesis answers Allen and Meyer's call to continue identifying commitment profiles in specific contexts and to consider variances in continuance organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). It achieved this by adopting a mixed methodology approach as it was decided that both quantitative and qualitative methods were required to answer the research questions posited.

What emerged unexpectedly was variance in all three components of commitment, not just in continuance commitment. For the group of Australian public servants involved in this study, affective commitment reflected a desire to remain with the department for an entire career based, for the most part, on a sense of job comfort and complacency. Normative commitment was varied because it was focused on workmates and colleagues rather than on the department itself. Continuance commitment was related to the specific remuneration and conditions of employment in the department and the APS. It had split foci between the department and the APS and did not include a perception of few alternatives or lack of choice. The actual extent of these variances was not foreseen.

This research contributes to ongoing research that explores variances found in commitment components in different employment contexts. The variances in the components of commitment identified support the literature that suggests that organizational commitment is influenced by employment contexts (Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Lee et al., 1992; Wilson, 1995; Nyhan, 1999; Clugston et al., 2000; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005). It also supports the premise that employees may experience commitment that has several foci in the workplace rather than a state of commitment focused entirely on the organization (Redman and Snape, 2005). The contribution this research makes to the literature is summarized in table 8.2

Table 8.2 Summary of contribution to the literature

Empirical Contribution

Found evidence of affective, normative and continuance commitment for this particular group of Australian public servants

Found continuance commitment was the dominant form of commitment for this group of respondents, supporting literature

Found continuance commitment was varied in its form for this group of public sector employees

Found variances in the forms of affective and normative commitment for this group of public sector employees

Found commitment may be influenced by the employment context for this group of public sector employees

Found the combination of the variances of all components of commitment formed a unique commitment profile

Findings supported the finding of several foci of commitment for this group of public sector employees as opposed to a 'global' state of organizational commitment

Found the commitment profile may be congruent with the culture

Found the dominance of continuance commitment may have been less problematic than suggested

Theoretical Contribution

Qualitative approach identified limitations of quantitative approaches in this field due to variances and contextual influences

Qualitative approach identified possible confusion in commitment states, suggested low self-awareness; an understanding of commitment is needed in the HRM profession and beyond

Qualitative approach identified that HRM professionals in this context appeared to show a lack of understanding of the commitment construct

Qualitative approach contributed to theoretical discussions that actual HRM practices may influence the development of continuance commitment, supporting previous research

Qualitative approach suggested a possible theoretical link between one particular HRM practice and continuance commitment

The dominance of continuance commitment for these individuals may have brought about the development of a unique profile

Theoretical Contribution of Mixed Methods Approach

Much of the literature in the field of organizational commitment appears to reflect a quantitative methodology. Much of it also perhaps reflects a previously-held long term preference for quantitative research over qualitative research (Smith 1983; Smith and Heshusius, 1986 as cited in Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). However, consistent with a recent acceptance of the value of qualitative research in the social sciences and a tendency to promote the benefits found in mixed methods approaches (Thompson, 2004; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Bryman, 2006; Bryman et al., 2007; Fielding, 2009) this study undertook a mixed methodology. The benefits of this approach offer another contribution to this field.

The contribution this thesis makes to support the literature on the benefits of mixed method approaches is summarized in table 8.3. Overall this approach allowed for two significant outcomes. The first was that it allowed the research questions to be answered because it was the appropriate method to use given the nature of this research.

The second outcome offers a theoretical contribution to the field of organizational commitment: by identifying variances in continuance, affective and normative commitment; several foci of commitment; and a unique commitment profile that may be congruent to the employment context. This suggests that there is value and benefit in undertaking further research into organizational commitment through qualitative approaches. The findings presented in this thesis and the discussions presented offer a new perspective, different from that which dominates the literature. It allows for deeper insight to be gained regarding commitment variances and commitment profiles as they are experienced by individuals. The data that emerged from the qualitative process offered a much more accurate and insightful look into how commitment for this group of public sector employees is experienced, than did the quantitative approach, as commitment for this group of respondents was not typical of Allen and Meyer's model. It is suggested that this supports the premise that there is value in exploring this phenomenon through qualitative research methodologies.

Table 8.2 The contribution of a mixed methods approach to the field of social science research

Year	Researchers	Research Findings	Thesis contribution
2002	Thompson	Mixed method provides social researchers with the means to avoid research that uses ‘one eye rather than two’. It should be accepted as a middle way of researching that allows for a ‘zigzag’ approach across qualitative and quantitative methods that results in a full and mutual exploration: ‘a sociology using both eyes to the full’.	Literature concerning organizational commitment in public service organization was predominately quantitative and suggested a general agreement that organizational commitment was low or problematic due to high levels of continuance commitment. This qualitative study identified a different viewpoint which suggested the commitment was varied and unique to the context, was higher than previously thought and less problematic.
2004	Johnson and Onwuegbuzie	Mixed method research can be superior to mono-method research; qualitative research that follows quantitative research and taps into participants’ perspectives and meanings can help avoid potential problems with experimental research; the goal in mixed	The qualitative data in this thesis showed respondents’ perspectives on commitment and did not support all previous findings; rather this perspective increases the understanding of the phenomena of organizational commitment and what

method research is not to search for corroboration in findings from the different approaches but to expand understanding of the phenomenon. Mixed method approaches can be conducted concurrently or sequentially. However at some point the findings must be integrated to offer a complete understanding. it looks like for different employees.

2004 Onwuegbuzie Qualitative data can help investigators to explain Thesis sheds light on the relationship between high
and and Leech relationships emerging from quantitative data: one CC and performance; a possible commitment
2005 method verifies findings stemming from the other and profile that mediates high CC levels and their effect
enhances interpretation of significant findings. Mono- on performance suggests that the commitment
method research is a threat to the advancement of social profile may be reflective of the context. This offers
sciences and contrary to contemporary pragmatic new consideration of the impact of OC on
research; there are similarities between quantitative and individuals in specific contexts.
qualitative approaches in observation, data
interpretation and speculation. Both approaches are
required to gain a more complete understanding of
phenomena.

2006 May

Adhering to one research method can bring about conservatism of thought and a practice of repeatedly asking the same questions while failing to ask new questions that would shed new light on social phenomenon. Data is not objective but is heavily influenced by the method that generated it. Data is understood in relation to the purpose for which it is created and therefore different methods of data collection are complementary as they represent different perspectives. Mixed methods provide the best way to 'connect the dots' and create something above and beyond two sets of data.

A predominance of quantitative research into OC in public sector organizations led to a general agreement that CC is high in this context and that commitment was somewhat problematic when compared to commitment levels and states in other employment sectors. Identifying a commitment profile of varied components and foci of commitment and a stronger congruence to the organizational culture may shift this perspective and offer new insight into unique and context specific commitment profiles.

The contribution to the field of HRM

Organizational Commitment as a Mediator in the HRM – Performance Relationship: A Psychological State that Sits within the ‘Black Box’ of HRM.

A theoretical contribution.

This thesis explored the state of organizational commitment as it was experienced by a small group of generalist, federal public servants in a department of the Australian Public Service. The intention of the research was to explore the state of continuance commitment as it was experienced by this group of public sector employees to determine if it was the dominant form of commitment and was as high as had been indicated in the literature on commitment in public sector organizations. The level of continuance commitment was measured and, through a qualitative process, explored to identify variances in its form. The research succeeded in achieving these goals. Data analysed went further to show that the variance in the form of continuance commitment was coupled with variances in the forms of both affective and normative commitment. Finding all three components of commitment to be varied in their form was somewhat unexpected. Together, it was concluded that these varied components of commitment came together to form a unique commitment profile that was considered to be congruent with the culture of the employing department and perhaps even beyond, into the wider APS.

Having measured continuance commitment, explored variances and identified a commitment profile, the final goal was to consider any possible implications of this for the practice of HRM in the Australian public service. This was deemed to be particularly important during a time of public sector reform. A key HRM practice known as bulk recruitment was thought to be linked to the development of the unique commitment profile. It was posited that the commitment profile, the culture of the department and the bulk recruitment process all become entwined to form a circular relationship that perpetuates each of these elements. This relationship appeared to be most evident in the process of bulk recruitment. It became apparent that the practice of bulk recruitment and the unique elements of continuance commitment were likely to be related. It appeared theoretically possible that the dominant state of continuance commitment that these

public servants experienced may have been facilitated the success of this particular recruitment process. Indeed, it was speculated that bulk recruitment may even perpetuate a dominant state of continuance commitment in this context. Thus, the idea was presented that this particular HRM practice may influence the development of continuance commitment which appeared to evolve into a unique commitment profile. Likewise, this commitment profile and in particular the dominance of continuance commitment may lead directly to the success of this HRM practice. .

Affective and normative commitment in this environment may develop subsequent to continuance commitment if continuance commitment presents strongly at the point of recruitment and is perpetuated by this recruitment process.

Of interest here is not only the link between one particular HRM practice and the state of continuance commitment, but the relationship itself and the possibility that the success of this HRM process is mediated by a state of continuance commitment. Recent researchers have suggested that the exploration of the mediators between HRM practices and organizational performance is of value and should be encouraged so that the ‘black box’ of HRM, the missing link that connects HRM practices and organizational performance can be better understood (Guest 1997 cited in Bosalie et al., 2005). In chapter 2 of this thesis it was stated that researchers such as Bosalie and his colleagues suggest that we ‘still require a theory about HRM, a theory about performance and a theory about how they are linked’ (Guest 1997 cited in Bosalie et al., 2005). Researchers also suggested that ‘...it remains rare for studies to assess all the links in this chain (between HRM and performance), with the effects on employee commitment being a particularly rarely studied issue (Edwards and Wright, 2001:570). Ostroff and Bowen (2000 as cited in Conway and Monks, 2009) suggest that the ‘prospect of unlocking the ‘black-box’ that represents the complex HR-performance relationship requires a multi-level approach, with more attention needing to be paid to employee attitudes (such as commitment) (Conway and Monks, 2009).

In this thesis this link has been explored, albeit in a specific department with a small group of respondents and through a specific HRM recruitment practice. However, the theoretical discussion presented in this thesis contributes to broader discussion that explores the ‘holy grail’ of HRM to identify what lies inside the ‘black box’ and mediates the relationship between HRM

practices and performance (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Wood 1999; Truss, 2001; Guest 2002; Bosalie et al., 2005; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Conway and Monks, 2008; Gong et al., 2009). It is posited that in this particular context a preference for a specific bulk recruitment process perpetuates a state of continuance commitment, which in itself is developed and strengthened as people are recruited and promoted in this manner. Theoretically it appears that the commitment profile identified for this group of public servants and the HRM practice of bulk recruitment may be intertwined. Further, the commitment profile identified may sit between the practice of bulk recruitment and the performance of the department.

Consideration of the implications of this profile on HRM practices used in this department also brought agreement with Meyer and Smith's (2000) premise that actual HRM practices can influence the development of continuance commitment. In this thesis it is suggested that the actual HRM practice of bulk recruitment may have led directly to the development of continuance commitment.

Lack of Understanding and a Lack of Self-Awareness of Commitment: A Theoretical Discussion

This thesis also supports the suggestion by recent researchers that there appears to be an apparent lack of understanding of the construct of organizational commitment on the part of HRM practitioners (Stanley et al., 2009; Conway and Monks, 2009). It seems that the preference for bulk recruitment in this APS department is not based upon an understanding of the relationship of this type of recruitment with continuance commitment; nor is there evidence to suggest that this state of commitment is recognized in itself and attributed to this recruitment process. It seems more likely that HRM practitioners in this department are inadvertently perpetuating a dominance of continuance commitment through a preferred HRM practice. By measuring commitment as a single construct and reporting it as such, HRM practitioners fail to recognize the complex and contradictory nature of commitment. In a rather naïve manner they assume any commitment to be good commitment. This assumption may lead to the ongoing implementation of certain HRM practices that influence the development of one component of commitment to the detriment of others.

It is presented in this thesis that there is some evidence that in the Australian Public Service commitment is generally poorly understood by HRM practitioners, seen mostly in the way it is measured internally and reported to the Australian Parliament. There appears to be a failure of such practitioners in this context to measure and report commitment as multidimensional, or in the very least, as a complex construct that does not always equate to positive outcomes. It is further suggested that commitment itself is an area that may require greater focus by individual employees to facilitate the development of more self-awareness in relation to commitment. Presently, HRM professionals are not the only ones who may fail to understand the multidimensional construct of commitment and the complex role it plays in individual performance and the success of HRM practices. It is suggested that employees in general would benefit from understanding the multidimensional nature of commitment and from using this knowledge to inform their career planning, management duties and approach to leadership.

This thesis concurs with recommendation that more must be done to facilitate an understanding on the part of HRM practitioners of the multidimensional construct of commitment, both organizational and other forms of commitment and of the varied forms that commitment can take. Only then will the 'holy grail' of HRM be found and the links between HRM practice and performance better understood.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the psychological state of organizational commitment in a group of federal public servants employed in the corporate support section of a particular department within the Australian Public Service. Using a mixed methodology approach this thesis offers a new perspective on the state of commitment as it is experienced by a group of Australian federal public service employees. The findings of this thesis are consistent with the views in the literature that suggest that continuance commitment is dominant for public sector employees (Abbott et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006; Nyhan, 1999) but does not entirely support the premise that this reality is problematic. Rather, it suggests that commitment looks a little different for the individuals involved in this study and in this Australian context. This became apparent through a qualitative process which revealed that all three components of commitment were varied in their form for these employees and as such were atypical of affective, normative and continuance

commitment as defined in Allen and Meyer's three component model. Together, these varied components of commitment combined to form a unique commitment profile that may be congruent with the culture of this department. This thesis also contributes to discussion in the literature that suggests that some employees in some organizations have several foci of commitment (Redman and Snape, 2005). This is because the commitment profile had split foci on the department itself, the APS as a whole and immediate workmates and colleagues. This thesis offers a theoretical contribution to ongoing research by exploring the possibility of commitment being a mediator of the effectiveness of HRM practices in achieving organizational performance and thus sitting in the 'black box' of HRM. Finally, it raises an important issue regarding the applicability of Allen and Meyer's three component model in all employment contexts and posits that if commitment is atypical for this group of public sector employees, perhaps it also looks different for other public sector employees. Consequently, it may be worth re-examining the measurement of commitment, particularly in public sector organizations, through qualitative research methods that allow for variations in the form commitment takes to be identified.

This research has met requirements put forward by Lawler (1985) as stated in chapter 2 of this thesis. To recap, Lawler suggested that scholars must undertake more 'useful' research and as such meet two criteria: 1) research findings must facilitate practitioners' understanding of organizations and result in improved practices; and 2) research findings must also contribute to the theory and body of knowledge generated in the science of HRM (p. 407, cited in Ferris et al., 1999). The findings of this study will facilitate practitioners' understanding of their organization. It may also result in improved practices, specifically around the measurement and reporting to the Parliament of organizational commitment as it is experienced by APS employees and in recognizing possible relationships between commitment, HRM practices and organizational performance. This study also met the requirement of contributing to the theory and body of knowledge generated in the science of HRM as it offers insight into how commitment is experienced by a group of employees in an unexplored context and its relationship to a particular HRM practice. The study also offers consideration of the influence of commitment on performance and the importance of measuring commitment profiles as opposed to the separate components of commitment, particularly in determining the impact of commitment on

organizational performance. Finally, this study also offers consideration of the benefits of qualitative methodologies in exploring the way in which commitment is varied in different employment contexts.

This thesis adds to the wealth of knowledge on organizational commitment and goes some way in answering calls for further research on what commitment looks like in different employment sectors (Allen and Meyer, 1990), on possible variances in the form continuance commitment takes (Allen and Meyer, 1990), on the exploration of commitment and its role in the link between human resource management and performance (Conway and Monks, 2009); on commitment in public sector contexts (Stevens, Beyer and Trice, 1978; Liou and Nyhan, 2004); and on commitment profiles (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Sinclair et al 2005; Gellatly et al 2009). Overall, this study shows that commitment for this group of public sector employees is varied in its form; and may be linked to the HRM practice of bulk recruitment and through this mediate performance. Finally, although this study shows a dominance of continuance commitment for these employees, considering the variances in the forms of commitment and the overall commitment profile, in the context of the culture of the department and the APS, this may not be as problematic as otherwise thought.

Three research questions were posited in this thesis:

- 1) What levels of continuance commitment are experienced by a group of Australian federal public servants?
- 2) In what way, if any, does continuance commitment differ for this group of public service employees?
- 3) What implications are evident for HRM practices in the Australian public sector context?

High levels of continuance commitment were found for these employees. Continuance commitment, along with affective and normative, was atypical of Allen and Meyer's definitions in their three component model and as such did not present as currently defined in the literature. Implications for HRM appear, theoretically, to be evident and further consideration of the role of

practices such as bulk recruitment in the development of commitment profiles and as a mediator in the HRM-performance relationship, is worth exploring.

The study of organizational commitment appears to be far from over as there is scope for a great deal more research into where it may be atypical of Allen and Meyer's three component model and how this can be measured and explored, where it might be reflective of the culture and how it might be linked to HRM practices and organizational performance. Indeed, it is, arguably, very exciting to look into future studies on organizational commitment, particularly in public sector organizations, and test further the premise that commitment may be atypical of the three component model (Allen and Meyer, 1990). New perspectives, new definitions and new conclusions about commitment may be in store.

APPENDIX A

Allen and Meyer's Organizational Commitment Questionnaire - Adapted for use in this Research Study.

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Allen and Meyer) (1990)

Please respond to each of the following statements in relation to your employment with your current department.

Please indicate your response to each statement by ticking one box in the appropriate column to the right of the statement, showing your response on the scale - 1 indicating you strongly disagree with the statement through to 7 indicating you strongly agree with the statement.

Please note that this information will be treated as confidential at all times.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.							
2. I owe a great deal to my organization.							

3. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity and desire.							
4. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.							
5. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.							
6. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.							
7. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.							
8. This organization deserves my loyalty.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.							
10. I feel emotionally attached to this organization.							
11. I would feel guilty if I left this organization now.							

12. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.							
13. I feel like part of the family at my organization.							
14. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.							
15. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.							
16. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.							
17. I feel obligated to remain with my current employer.							
18. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.							

Demographic Details and Involvement in stage 2 of this Research Study

Name (OPTIONAL):

Age Group (please circle)(OPTIONAL):

18 – 25 26 – 34 35 – 44 45 – 54 55 and above

Would you like to take part in a follow up focus group on commitment and performance? Yes No

Would you like to have a one-on-one interview with the researcher regarding this research? Yes No

Explanation for the Ethics Committee:

The identifying information on this sheet will be separated from the questionnaire in the following manner:

- 1. all identifying information will be coded and analysed separately from the survey responses themselves*
- 2. page 3 of every survey returned will be separated physically from the survey itself and filed separately without any link whatsoever to the survey data itself*

APPENDIX B

Information to Participants

HOW DO PEOPLE COMMIT TO THEIR EMPLOYING GOVERNMENT AGENCY, IN THE APS?

This research study is being undertaken by Samantha Johnson, BA Grad Dip HRM, PhD Candidate, School of Business and Government, University of Canberra.

The study aims to identify how a group of public servants, in an Australian government agency, commit to their agency, why they believe they commit the way they do, and how this commitment is recognized through the performance appraisal process.

This research is the first to look at the issue of organizational commitment in the Australian Public Service (APS) and allows for an improved understanding of staff commitment, retention and performance in the APS.

Understanding how and why people commit to their agency can give insight into how to recognise potentially highly committed individuals during the recruitment process.

Understanding commitment will also inform HRM policy development, and lead to practices to build and maintain high levels of commitment in staff. As commitment influences performance, developing strategies to build commitment will result in higher levels of productivity. Finally, acknowledging a link between performance and commitment will allow for consideration of commitment issues in the performance management process.

This study has three stages. During the first stage statistical information will be gathered that identifies how this group of people commit to their employing agency, against three recognized levels of organizational commitment.

The second stage will explore why this group of people commit the way that they do. A series of focus groups and interviews will be held with participants who volunteer to take part in these,

during which the reasons why people commit the way they do will be explored.

The third stage will focus on the relationship between commitment and performance. It is important to identify commitment issues when performance is measured. This part of the study may include some exploration of the agency's performance management system, but will not require further input from participants.

Participants will be invited to complete a short questionnaire, administered by email.

Participants who have completed the questionnaire and have volunteered to take part in a focus group will be invited to do so. Focus groups sessions will have 4 to 6 participants and will run for approximately 1 hour at a time that suits the participants and the organization. The information that participants give to the researcher will be anonymous and personal details will not be recorded. The information that is recorded may be taped and will be taken down verbatim, in order to maintain accuracy.

One-on-one interviews will be offered to participants who wish to speak with the researcher privately, or where information identified in a focus group session requires follow up on an individual basis, and where the participant is willing to do so. No personal details will be recorded in the individual interviews and they will be held at the agency and at the participant's convenience.

Participants will not be involved in the third stage of the study.

The researcher is the only person who has access to the information provided by participants. A report will be submitted to the General Manager, Corporate Services, identifying commitment levels in the agency and the reasons for these. However, individuals will not be identified in any way and the information reported to the agency will be generalized and broken into categories and themes. It will not be possible to identify individuals from this report.

The information collected will be stored without any personal details relating to the participants involved in this study. Participants who choose to complete the questionnaire can choose not to identify themselves in any way and will be asked to return the questionnaire to the researcher by

placing it inside a sealed envelope, in a sealed collection box inside the agency, so that there is complete anonymity.

Participants who take part in focus group sessions or interviews will not have their names or any other details recorded by the researcher. They will, of course, be asked to nominate their involvement, however, their anonymity will remain as the information they offer will not be connected to any individual in any way.

All information will be stored in locked filing cabinets at the researcher's home and on the researcher's private computer, which cannot be accessed by anyone else. All information will be kept confidential and no personal details will be recorded at any time. At the conclusion of the study, all information will be stored securely at the University of Canberra.

This research study has been approved by the Committee for Ethics in Human Research of the University of Canberra and is supported by the Public Service Commissioner.

Queries and Concerns

For further questions, queries or concerns about this study, please contact either:

Samantha Johnson

Ph: (W) (02) 6255 3988 (MB) 0414 258 843

Email: Samantha.Johnson@cpm.org.au

Professor Deborah Blackman

Associate Professor, School of Business and Government

University of Canberra

Ph: (02) 6201 5076

Invitation to Participate

HOW DO PEOPLE COMMIT TO THEIR EMPLOYING GOVERNMENT AGENCY, IN THE APS?

This questionnaire is the first part of a study being undertaken by Samantha Johnson, PhD Candidate with the School of Business and Government at the University of Canberra.

This questionnaire will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete and will provide important information about why you choose to work for your department.

Completing this questionnaire is voluntary and your participation is greatly appreciated.

This questionnaire is anonymous, there is no requirement for you to identify who you are and it will not be possible for you to be identified when this information is collected and analysed.

The second stage of this research involves participation in small, 1 hour focus group sessions and/or one-on-one interviews with the researcher. At the end of this questionnaire there is an opportunity for you to identify whether or not you wish to be involved in the second stage of the research. To nominate you must include your email address on the questionnaire, and this will identify who you are. This identifying information will be used purely to contact you for a focus group session or interview and for no other purposes. All information you offer in the second stage of this research will also be anonymous.

When you have completed this questionnaire, please place it in a sealed envelope and place the envelope in a box at Security Desk A, for Samantha to collect.

Please read the attached information sheet about this study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short questionnaire.

Invitation to take part in a focus group session

INFORMATION REGARDING PARTICIPATION IN A FOCUS GROUP SESSION OR INTERVIEW

This information is for participants of a doctoral study being undertaken by Samantha Johnson, PhD Candidate with the University of Canberra. Having already taken part in an on-line survey, participants are now invited to take part in either a focus group session or a one-on-one interview, with the researcher.

Focus group sessions

Focus groups sessions will have 4 to 6 participants and will run for approximately 1 hour at a time that suits the participants and the organization. The purpose of the focus group session is to explore the reasons why some people commit to their organization the way that they do.

In this session participants will be invited to share with the researcher their thoughts, experiences and interpretations of the basis of their commitment to their employing organization.

In order for the researcher to ensure that the participants' contribution in this session is included in this study with absolute accuracy, the focus group sessions will be recorded using a tape recorder or similar audio recording device. Participants' names or other identifying information will not be recorded on the tape. No other person will have access to this tape and at the conclusion of the research study it will be stored at the university in a confidential and secure manner.

The researcher will also invite a scribe into the focus group session who will be responsible for recording the session in writing. This scribe will be a research assistant who will not have any association with the case study agency or the participants whatsoever. The scribe may allocate numbers to individuals to facilitate accurate note taking, no names will be recorded in the script.

This script will not be read by any other individual other than the researcher herself and at the conclusion of the research, it will be stored in a secure and confidential manner at the university.

One-on-one Interviews

One-on-one interviews will be offered to participants who wish to speak with the researcher privately, or where information identified in a focus group session requires follow up on an individual basis and where the participant is willing to do so, and at their convenience.

These interviews will be focused on why people commit to their employing agency the way they do, and will therefore cover the same information that will be covered in the focus group sessions. Being held as interviews simply allows the researcher and participant the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on commitment privately and perhaps in more depth.

Any information gathered through these interviews will be collated with the themes that are identified in the focus group sessions and individuals will remain anonymous.

This study has been approved by the Committee for Ethics in Human Research of the University of Canberra and is supported by the Public Service Commissioner.

Queries and Concerns

For further questions, queries or concerns about this study, please contact either:

Samantha Johnson

Ph: (W) (02) 6255 3988 (MB) 0414 258 843

Email: Samantha.Johnson@cpm.org.au

Professor Deborah Blackman

Associate Professor

School of Business and Government

University of Canberra

Ph: (02) 6201 5076

APPENDIX C

Statistical Data on Items on Affective Commitment

	N	Minimum		Maximum		Mean	Std. Deviation		Skewness		Kurtosis			
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error		
REST OF CAREER	43		1		7		4.95		1.676		-.624	.361	-.555	.709
DESIRE TO STAY	43		2		7		4.95		1.344		-.528	.361	-.658	.709
ORGS PROBLEMS ARE MY OWN	42		1		6		2.86		1.646		.412	.365	-1.083	.717
BELONG TO ORG	44		2		7		4.77		1.492		-.339	.357	-.425	.702
EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO ORG	43		1		6		3.74		1.498		.015	.361	-1.316	.709
FEEL PART OF THE FAMILY	42		1		7		3.93		1.614		-.098	.365	-.922	.717
ORG HAS PERSONAL MEANING TO ME	44		1		6		3.73		1.387		.078	.357	-.894	.702
Valid N (listwise)	38													

Statistical Data on Items on Normative Commitment

	N	Minimum		Maximum		Mean		Std. Deviation		Skewness		Kurtosis			
		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error		
OWE MY ORG OBLIGATED TO PEOPLE ORG DESERVES LOYALTY FEEL GUILTY IF LEAVE NOT RIGHT TO LEAVE ORG NOW WOULD LEAVE BUT TOO MUCH INVESTED OBLIGATED TO REMAIN	44			2		7		4.02		1.517		.169	.357	-.978	.702
	44			1		7		4.00		1.628		-.339	.357	-.961	.702
	44			1		7		4.52		1.470		-.162	.357	-.514	.702
	44			1		6		3.41		1.468		.257	.357	-1.151	.702
	44			1		6		2.82		1.435		.631	.357	-.446	.702
	44			1		7		3.00		1.329		.933	.357	.614	.702
	44			1		6		3.18		1.435		.160	.357	-1.038	.702
Valid N (listwise)	44														

Statistical Data on Items on Continuance Commitment

	N	Minimum		Maximum		Mean	Std. Deviation		Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
NECESSARY TO STAY	43		1		7	4.16		1.703	-	.361	-1.237	.709
HARD TO LEAVE IF WANTED TO LEAVING	44		2		7	3.50		1.607	.775	.357	-.666	.702
DISRUPT LIFE FEW OPTIONS TO LEAVE	43		1		6	4.07		1.370	-	.361	-.514	.709
FEW ALTERNATIVES	43		1		6	3.26		1.498	.297	.361	-1.223	.709
Valid N (listwise)	44		1		6	3.25		1.658	.351	.357	-1.146	.702

APPENDIX D

Record of Respondent Comments Reflecting (some) Continuance Commitment

- I am comfortable here – I know the people and my job and leaving would mean starting over again
- Feel like I am respected and liked by others – established myself as belonging to the agency
- Feel that I add value and contribute to the team
- Wanting to be comfortable, relaxed and enjoy the work and people for the rest of my career – heading into retirement (up to 20 years away!)
- Enjoy my job and the people I work with – most important factors
- Important to be happy at work
- A sense of rapport with the people in the agency
- Agency offers a lot of support by way of training, part time work and variety of work
- Leaving would require replacing self “I would feel more comfortable if I could replace myself” (FG 01)

Perception that other government agencies are not as ‘good’ as theirs; not as supportive, harder work, fewer conditions etc

Perception that the agency is somewhat of a ‘haven’ – they’re lucky to be there and won’t give it up

- “Salary was a big draw-
- card” (FG 01)
- “The fact that you can add value to the department; it’s accepted that you are a necessary cog in the wheel” (FG 01)
- “I don’t like changing jobs too often because I don’t like being a fish out of water.”(FG01)
- “If you have to work, this is where you’d choose.”(FG01)

- Feel a sense of pride and status working for this agency
- “(I’m) proud of saying that I work at (this department) part of something special and important” (FG01)
- “(Proud of) what it represents, in the big wide world you are part of it.”(FG01)
- “In corporate services there isn’t a huge promotion path...so there is nowhere to go.” (FG01) (only comes up once)
- “I hate going to new jobs, anxiety, and getting to know new people. I am comfortable. Could become complacent.” (FG02)
- “I get a bit complacent and think I will apply for the job and then I don’t. I would have to spend hours typing up an application. I have done many selection criteria over the years and it’s very tiring. I would have to find the dream job and I would make the effort.” (FG02)
- “There are definitely times when you feel more committed and other times when I think I could be more interested (than I am) but I (just) stay.” (FG02)
- “It’s a comfort thing. Why leave” (FG03)
- “I don’t want to move until I retire (in 15 years).” (FG03)
- “Why leave? It’s good here...” (FG03)
- “I think I would probably put off looking for other work because I am comfortable here, and I would need to start over.” (FG03)

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE – CC

- Part time work available
- Family friendly
- Have a network in the agency that I would lose if I left
- Salary
- Free parking is an issue, wouldn’t look for a job in the city because of the cost of parking
- Good conditions and good pay makes me loyal
- “Pay, promotion and interest in the work”(FG01)
- “Pay – this department is quite high compared to other departments, so even if you take a lower job here, the pay is still good.”(FG01)

- “I really like the public service superannuation. Money was the driver...”(FG01)
- “Stability, holidays, sick leave, this is the first time I’ve had paid sick leave. Super etc, so for me (it’s) like heaven. So this is wonderful. Flexitime.” (FG01)
- “Our conditions of leave are really good. The Certified Agreement (CA) is an enticing factor”(FG01)
- Work-life balance, stability of employment and salary
- “I guess in a sense I work to have the lifestyle I want. Work is a necessity.” (FG01)
- “I like the style of the public service” (FG01)
- “I work Part time and I have no intention of working FT again. It takes time to build up credibility as PT and I don’t want to have to do that again. Work life balance.” (FG02)
- “To earn an extra \$20,000 would mean working an extra hour a day, I wouldn’t do it.” (FG02)

WHY STAY?

- “50% pay and conditions and 50% the people” (FG01)
- “30% pay and conditions and 70% people” (FG01)
- 60% pay and conditions, 20% the work I do and 20% the people (FG01)
- “I would stay where I am so I don’t lose flex.” (FG01)
- “Couldn’t afford to drop in salary and conditions.”(FG01)
- “I’m comfortable here. Things would have to change dramatically (for me to leave).” (FG01)
- “Having a baby next year so conditions of service are very important.” (FG02)
- “Would only leave if I was disgruntled.” (FG03)

OTHER INTERESTING QUOTES

- “(It’s) a downside that they expect you to go up a level but losing (flexitime) is not really acceptable.”(FG01)
- “conditions of service in PS are very good, enjoying the work and the people is what its about...”(FG02)
- “My dad a long term public service so he was always talking about good pay and conditions.” (FG02)
- “I could walk out tomorrow and wouldn’t feel disloyal” (FG02)
- “The pay is good compared to the private sector” (FG03)

APPENDIX E

Paper accepted at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Chicago USA, 2009.

Commitment in the Australian Public Service: what form does it take and does this matter?

ABSTRACT

Research was undertaken in an Australian Commonwealth Government Department using both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the level of continuance commitment in the department, the form it takes and whether it differs from continuance commitment levels found in the private sector. The research demonstrated a unique role played by continuance commitment which consisted of different elements to those identified in previous research. The research also indicated the existence of a unique commitment profile. Allen and Meyer identified that people with strong levels of continuance commitment stay with their employer because of a *need to stay* (1990, p. 3). However, this research indicated that although there is a strong level of continuance commitment in the department, people stay because of a desire to do so as well as a need. The research identified an overall commitment profile which consists of high levels of continuance commitment, normative commitment focused on people rather than the department, and affective commitment formed through high levels of job competency and comfort in the department. The research argues that the current understanding of commitment, drawn from the private sector cannot be applied across to the public sector and that further research is needed to determine whether the case example is representative as, if so, there are serious implications for recruitment, retention and HR management practices in the Australian Public Service specifically and the Public Service in general.

INTRODUCTION

There has been significant research into the relationship between organizational commitment and performance showing that performance is directly influenced by the level of organizational commitment an individual feels at any given time (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001). Although a great deal of research has been done in the field of organizational commitment, little research in this field has been conducted in the Australian Public Service (APS) and, as a consequence, little is known about commitment patterns or profiles in Australia's commonwealth government departments. Further, most of the research in this field has been quantitative; very little exploration has been done using a qualitative methodology to identify how employees themselves perceive and describe their levels of commitment. In a time when the new Federal Government is expecting more from the federal public servants than arguably ever before, with separation levels being higher than they have been in the last decade and recruitment slowing to its lowest rate since 2004 (State of the Service Report 07-08 p. 31), understanding the way public servants commit to their agencies and how this affects their performance is of considerable importance.

Performance in Australia's largest employer is a serious issue, as not only does a significant amount of tax payer revenue fund 160,000 public sector jobs, but the public sector sets a benchmark for the private sector to follow when it comes to effective and appropriate performance expectations, management and work standards. The APS should have human resource management (HRM) policies and practices that set the standard for the country and its managers should be leaders in all aspects of management including performance management and work life balance. Further, managing the increased separation, a reduction in recruitment and high government expectations requires HRM policies and practices that can effectively manage this challenging combination.

This paper considers the levels of commitment of one commonwealth government department based in Canberra, a medium sized, central department that plays a key role in the government's financial management of the country. We were interested to see if these public servants committed to their government department in a way similar to that found in the private and other

employment sectors. We were also interested in how public servants described their level of commitment and how they felt it influenced their performance. Previous research has identified the need to look at the dimensions of commitment and how they impact on performance and on commitment profiles that form in particular the work environments (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Dunham, Grabe and Castaneda, 1994). This paper describes the commitment profile identified in one government department and its impact on performance as perceived and described by the respondents themselves.

The Status of the Australian Public Service

The Australian Public Service (APS) employs just over 160,000 people and is the largest employer in the country (State of the Service 07-08, p.2) and yet the current employment environment is characterised by skills shortages and increased competition to attract, recruit and retain talented staff (MAC Report, 2005). In recent years the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), the department responsible for monitoring, reviewing and advising the public sector on performance, amongst other things, has identified problems with declining retention levels across commonwealth government departments and the crucial role that effective human resource management (HRM) policies and practices play in addressing this problem (MAC Reports, 2003 and 2005). Further, the APSC has documented the importance of continued improvement in effective performance management across commonwealth government agencies (MAC Report, 2001). The latest State of the Service Report of 2008 shows that the public service continues to struggle with these performance problems, it continues to struggle to recruit young people, in fact in 2008 the number of employees under the age of 25 fell to 4.9%. In 2008 recruitment into the APS slowed and separations from the service were higher than they have been for almost a decade (State of The Service Report 07-08, pp.5, 11 and 16).

The challenge in the APS is to address these problems through a greater understanding of effective HRM and improved policies and practices aimed at addressing issues relating to staff performance. Without these the APS jeopardizes its capacity to successfully address the adverse affects of high staff turnover and poor performance (MAC Report 2001, State of the Service

Report 07-08). For the APS to meet the challenges of the future and to continue to be internationally renowned, it must improve the performance of all agencies and get workforce issues right (State of The Service report 07-08, pp.4 and 11).

In June 2008 the median age of employees in the APS was 42 years with older age groups having the largest proportional growth, as the 60 years and over age group increased by almost 15% (State of The Service Report 07-08, p.27). The future of the APS is dependent upon the successful recruitment, retention and performance of younger workers and the ability of the APS to manage and lead these younger staff effectively, keeping them committed and performing well.

For the APS to develop HRM policies and practices aimed at improving retention and performance it must first ensure that these issues are understood, particularly in the current APS context. Although there has been considerable research into the relationship between organizational commitment and performance, there has been no in-depth research into this relationship in the Australian commonwealth public service. Our research, therefore, has sought to identify the grounds on which a targeted group of commonwealth public servants commit to their employing government department and then to explore the affect that this level of commitment might have on the department's performance.

The Role of Organizational Commitment in Performance Management

Within the fields of HRM and organizational effectiveness there has been considerable research into organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Meyer et al., 1989; Allen and Smith 1987; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, 2000; Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995). The concept of organizational commitment sits at the core of effective HRM, in fact, it has been argued that the rationale for introducing HRM policies is, in itself, to increase levels of commitment and thus ensure improved organizational productivity, retention and individual performance (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005). Research has also found significant positive relations between effective HRM policies and practices, perceived organizational support and organizational commitment, thus further

supporting the idea that organizational commitment is a core component of effective HRM (Dick and Metcalf, 2001; Whitener, 2001) .

According to Allen and Meyer commitment refers to ‘a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization’ (i.e. makes turnover less likely) (1990, p.14). Their model of commitment identifies three components or states of commitment. These differences involve the psychological state reflected in commitment, the antecedent conditions leading to its development, and the behaviours (other than remaining with the organization) that are expected to result from commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

Allen and Meyer measured three dimensions of commitment and found each to be empirically distinguishable constructs with different correlates (Allen and Meyer, 1990). The dimensions of commitment they identified are affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment refers to the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. Normative commitment refers to the employees’ feelings of obligation to remain with the organization while the third, continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the costs that an employee associates with leaving the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Allen and Meyer reported in their findings that all three dimensions are distinguishable components of organizational commitment rather than three separate types of commitment and as such an individual can experience each of these psychological states to varying degrees. The ‘net sum’ of a person’s commitment to the organization reflects each of these separate psychological states (1990, p. 4). Allen and Meyer state further that it should be recognised that all three dimensions of commitment give a clear understanding of the employee-organization link but must be considered simultaneously and that it is the combination of these dimensions that offers the most interesting insight into what could be considered as commitment profiles that are specific to certain industries or workplace cultures (1990, pp. 14 -15).

The Relationship between Organizational Commitment and Performance

Chen and Francesco (2001) found a direct relationship between commitment and work performance: studying a large pharmaceutical manufacturer in South China they found that affective commitment related positively to in-role performance and organizational citizenship

behaviours (OCB). They also found that continuance commitment was negatively correlated to OCB and that normative commitment moderated the relationship between commitment and in-role performance as well as OCB (Chen and Francesco, 2001). These findings were consistent with similar findings suggesting a positive relationship between affective commitment and in-role performance (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990).

Several other studies have explored the relationship between commitment and performance (Meyer et al., 1989; Allen and Smith, 1987). These studies identified relationships between supervisors' ratings of overall performance and the promotability of their subordinates and commitment levels, affective commitment scores related positively to these ratings while continuance commitment scores had a negative relationship with performance and promotability (Meyer et al., 1989). Further, self report measures of employee innovativeness related positively with affective commitment and negatively with continuance commitment. In the same study, affective commitment and normative commitment scores, but not continuance commitment scores, were positively related to self-report measures of employees' consideration for co-workers and their efficient use of time (Allen and Smith, 1987).

Commitment and Performance Management in the APS

The employment context has been considered to influence the level of commitment an individual feels towards their employer (Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, 2000; Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swales, 2004; Wilson, 1995). Further, although research into organizational commitment has been significant over the past 25 years, it has been done predominately in the private sector (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2005).

Of particular interest to this study is the research undertaken by Abbott, White and Charles (2005) and Lyons, Duxbury and Higgins (2006). Abbott et al. (2005) studied the relationship between values and organizational commitment in two organizations, a government communications department and a welfare organization, both in New South Wales, Australia. They found that employees in the communications department showed significantly higher levels

of continuance commitment and lower levels of normative commitment than those in the welfare organization. This poses the question of whether high levels of continuance commitment would be found in other government agencies and whether commitment levels in the APS differ from those in other employment sectors, and if so do we find a particular commitment profile in the APS.

Lyons et al. (2006) investigated the variation in general values and organizational commitment among private and public sector employees in Canada and found that private sector employees reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment than did public servants. The researchers noted the significance of the influence of public and private sector contexts on the level of commitment an individual feels, and suggested that their research be repeated in other national contexts to better establish the nature of these differences.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative part of this research was designed specifically to answer the question: *'Are there high levels of continuance commitment in the APS?'*

The qualitative part of the research was designed to answer the question: *'If there are high levels of continuance commitment in the APS, what form does it take and can it describe a 'commitment profile' specific to the APS?'*

The first stage of the research aimed to confirm the existence of the three commitment states in the public sector and so a short quantitative process was used. The commitment states were measured using the scales identified by Meyer et al. (1993) which were then incorporated into a questionnaire by Chen and Francesco (2001). The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient scales for this questionnaire were .91, .86 and .78 for each of the three states of commitment indicating a valid and reliable questionnaire (Chen and Francesco, 2001 p. 496). However, this questionnaire has been used only in private sector research and, therefore, has not been applied in a public sector context to the researcher's knowledge.

Having confirmed the existence of the three states of commitment in this department a qualitative process was used as a secondary stage to explore these states further considering the

elements of commitment from the perspective of government employees and their perspectives of their commitment states. This explorative stage was designed to offer insight into the form that continuance commitment takes in the department and the overall commitment profile that exists. It was necessary to identify the existence of the commitment states and, in particular, continuance commitment before it was possible to explore the form that continuance commitment took. Therefore, a quantitative process through which an organizational commitment questionnaire was used was a necessary pre-requisite to the qualitative process of exploring the elements of continuance commitment from the respondents' perspectives.

The research took place in the Corporate Services Group of a Commonwealth Government Department, a medium sized (950 staff), government department located in Canberra, Australia, that is stable in its role and central to the workings of the Australian Government; it is seen as representative of the Australian Public Service and falls under the Public Service Act of 1999. This department has been in existence since 1901 and this is the first time research of this type has been conducted in the department.

Respondents were drawn from a population of 98 permanent, full time and part time staff employed in non-executive, generalist positions in information technology, human resources and corporate support. These officers could be employed in any government department in similar generalist corporate management roles and the employment levels represent just over 104,000 of the 160,000 APS employees (State of the Service Report 07-08 p. 22). A total of 44 respondents returned completed questionnaires (43%) after two additional reminder emails were sent to individuals in the target group during a period of 4 months. Of these 44 respondents 12 took part in follow up focus group sessions.

Participants were approached by the department's General Manager, Corporate Services who sent an email inviting them to take place in the research. This email contained a number of attachments that outlined the researcher's background, the nature of the research and instructions for taking part in either or both of the qualitative and quantitative stages as well as a copy of the organizational commitment questionnaire itself. Participants were advised in writing that

participation in either part of the research was voluntary and that responses were confidential and anonymous unless respondents chose to nominate for involvement in a focus group session. Confidentiality and anonymity of this part of the research was maintained by respondents printing off and completing the questionnaire in hard copy and sealing it in an envelope that was held by department security guards and personally collected by the researcher. In this questionnaire documents respondents identified themselves only if they chose to take part in later focus group sessions and of the 44 respondents, 12 agreed to do so.

Having completed the questionnaire the researcher ran three focus group sessions each with 4 participants during which we explored the respondents' perception of their commitment to the department. During these sessions the researcher sought to have the respondents describe, in their own words, why they chose to join their employing government department, what they believed was their basis of commitment and how they described their level of performance. A total of 12 respondents were involved in one of three focus group sessions, 9 female and 4 male, drawn from across the corporate support section and with a minimum tenure of 3 years and a maximum tenure of 30 years with the mean age estimated at 39 years.

A research assistant was employed to assist the researcher during the focus group sessions, taking detailed notes to ensure accurate recording of the respondent's comments. These sessions were held in meeting rooms in the department itself during normal working hours and over a period of 2 months. A number of themes were explored during the focus group sessions to determine the form that continuance commitment took in the department. These themes formed the basis of questions that the researcher put to the respondents.

RESULTS

In completing Chen and Francesco's (2001) organizational commitment questionnaire respondents indicated their level of agreement with the statements about their attitudes towards their commitment to the department on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1= strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with .859

for affective commitment, .669 for normative commitment and .606 for continuance commitment, lower than previously found by Chen and Francesco (2001) (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Alpha Coefficients

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Affective commitment	.859	7
Normative commitment	.669	7
Continuance commitment	.606	5

The reliability scales for normative and continuance commitment are slightly low being under .7 possibly because the scales within these components consisted of fewer than 10 items, with 7 items in the normative commitment scales and only 5 items in the continuance commitment scale (Pallant 2001, p.850). The low coefficients might also be explained by the fact that all statements in the questionnaire were positively worded as this was specifically requested by the department's management. Inter-item correlations were run to explore these low coefficients further (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Item-Total Statistics

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Rest of career	.625	.839
Desire to stay	.493	.856
Org's problems are my own	.582	.845
Belong to org	.704	.827
Emotionally attached to org	.682	.831

Feel part of the family	.692	.829
Org has personal meaning to me	.601	.842
Owe my org	.135	.702
Obligated to people	.638	.546
Org deserves loyalty	.438	.616
Feel guilty if leave	.398	.628
Not right to leave org now	.590	.571
Would leave but too much invested	.058	.711
Obligated to remain	.429	.619
Necessary to stay	.266	.607
Hard to leave if wanted to	.530	.460
Leaving disrupt life	.284	.588

Table 2 shows that 5 of the 19 items are low when the corrected item-total correlation is determined (lower than .3) and that when these items are removed the alpha coefficients increase slightly; items '*I owe a great deal to my organization*'.135; '*If I had not put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere*' .058; '*Right now staying with my organization is a matter of necessity*'.266; '*Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organization right now*' .284; '*I feel that I have few options to consider leaving this organization*' .262. This raises some questions as to the reliability of these scales in this research. The qualitative stage of this research allowed in depth exploration of the form of commitment found in this government department and so the researcher chose to limit the quantitative analysis to descriptive statistics showing the mean, standard deviations and skewness of the data (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Means, Standard Deviations and Skewness

(N = 44)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Error
Total affective commitment	38	13	46	28.76	7.964	.183	.383
Total Normative Commitment	44	12	38	24.95	5.961	-.290	.357
Total Continuance Commitment	41	9	27	17.76	4.779	-.104	.369
Valid (listwise)	N 37						

The total affective commitment scores are skewed to the left (.183) at the low values showing a higher number of respondents tending to disagree with organizational commitment questionnaire statements relating to affective commitment. The normative commitment scores are skewed to the right (-.290) as are the continuance commitment scores (-.104) showing that respondents tended to agree with the statements relating to normative and continuance commitment with the greatest responses tending to agree with the statements relating to normative commitment.

This is slightly different to previous findings (Abbott et al., 2005) and slightly different to what the researchers expected. Interestingly the slightly lower levels of continuance commitment found in this stage of the research are not found in the second stage of the research, where the basis of commitment appears to be continuance commitment more than normative. In both stages of research the levels of affective commitment were very low.

It was also of interest to the researchers that a high proportion of respondents who responded to statements in the questionnaire as ‘neither agree nor disagree’ (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Percentage of Respondents Undecided

Items	Valid Percent
Rest of career	14.0
Desire to stay	18.6
Org’s problems are my own	21.4
Belong to org	11.4
Emotionally attached to org	18.6
Feel part of the family	22.0
Org has personal meaning to me	31.8
Owe my org	29.5
Obligated to people	22.7
Org deserves loyalty	20.5
Feel guilty if leave	20.5
Not right to leave org now	6.8
Would leave but too much invested	25.0
Obligated to remain	25.0
Necessary to stay	15.9
Hard to leave if wanted to	15.9
Leaving disrupt life	16.3
Few options to leave	20.9
Few alternatives	13.6

This caused consideration as to whether respondents were truly unsure as to the grounds of their commitment to the department or whether they were reluctant to record the basis of their commitment in the questionnaire or both. This was further explored in the focus group sessions.

The results of the questionnaire showed that the levels of continuance commitment were higher than the levels of affective commitment and this was neither surprising to the researchers nor inconsistent with previous research (Abbot et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2006). The focus group sessions allowed exploration of the basis of this commitment. The outcomes of the focus groups will now be considered in terms of the different forms of commitment and the employee performance.

Affective commitment

A number of themes were identified in the focus group sessions that suggested low levels of the affective commitment dimension with the only clear emotional connection being felt towards respondents' team mates and work colleagues. The statement "[I feel an emotional connection] *definitely to the people...but big emotion to the department as well*" was the only statement made that indicated an emotional connection to the department. The emotional connection to the people with whom the respondents worked were more along the lines of: "*Definitely* [an emotional connection] *to my team; not emotional to the department, but to the people in my team*"; "*Definitely* [an emotional connection] *to my team; not emotional to the department, but to the people in my team.*" Other comments were: "*Not passionate about the work, but interested in it*"; "*I feel passion and commitment to the work these guys [in the department do] and I can assist them to do their job*".

However, previous research shows that where individuals' feel comfortable in the working environment and competent in their jobs they display higher levels of affective commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990). In this research respondents showed very positive feelings towards their employer with regard to experiencing high levels of comfort and competence; so much so that several respondents described themselves as 'complacent' about their jobs.

Respondents made comments such as "*I don't like changing jobs too often because I don't like being a fish out of water*"; "*If you have to work, this is where you'd choose*"; "*I hate going to new jobs, anxiety, and getting to know new people. I am comfortable. Could become*

complacent”; “*I get a bit complacent and think I will apply for the job and then I don’t. I would have to spend hours typing up an application. I have done many selection criteria over the years and it’s very tiring. I would have to find the dream job and I would make the effort*”; “*There are definitely times when you feel more committed and other times when I think I could be more interested (than I am) but I (just) stay*”; “*It’s a comfort thing. Why leave?*”; “*I don’t want to move until I retire (in 15 years)*”; “*Why leave? It’s good here...*”; “*I think I would probably put off looking for other work because I am comfortable here, and I would need to start over*”; “*I’m comfortable here. Things would have to change dramatically (for me to leave)*”.

Respondents also spoke about their perception of the department’s reputation in Canberra, that is, how well it is perceived by people who do not work for the department and showed clearly that this was a significant contributor to their decision to stay with the department and influenced their commitment levels. Previous research has found a positive relationship between perceived external prestige and affective commitment (Herrbach, Olivier, Mignonac and Karim, 2004) and the results of this research confirm the existence of perceived external prestige and a strong commitment to remain with the organization forming a level of affective commitment.

Normative commitment

There was a clear sense of obligation showing that the tendency for normative commitment was high, as shown in the questionnaire. However, whereas the questionnaire data suggests normative commitment directed to the organization, the focus group research shows clearly that the normative commitment is directed not at the department itself but at the respondents’ work colleagues. The themes identified were that people enjoyed working with their colleagues, they felt a sense of loyalty to their team mates and managers, felt like part of the team and felt appreciated by others in the department. There was not a sense of loyalty to the department itself. Comments that reflected this were “*The loyalty is there but it has decreased over the years. There is so much extra work and it is hard to feel loyal when you are over worked. I stay because I would feel disloyal to my manager, but if she left I don’t think I would worry. That might decrease the loyalty*”; “*Because they have given me the opportunity, good conditions, good pay not that I owe the department but I should come to the party.*”; “*I feel a sense of obligation to the department; (it) gave me a job and paid me good money so I feel obligated – to the group*

of people I think". There were further comments that showed a low level of normative commitment to the department such as *"I could walk out tomorrow and wouldn't feel disloyal"*; *"I would only leave if I was disgruntled"*.

Continuance Commitment

The conditions of service were a major theme in all the focus groups sessions and potentially offer reasons for the high level of comfort in the department. The themes were that part time work was available and highly regarded; family – friendly practices were very important; established networks in the department were highly valued; salary was a major issue, as was free car parking. When asked to identify the relative importance of people versus the work, respondents agreed that the conditions of service, pay and the people they worked with were considerably more important in their decision to stay with the department than the work that they, or the department did. Some of the comments made were: *"I really like the public service superannuation. Money was the driver..."*; *"Stability, holidays, sick leave, this is the first time I've had paid sick leave. Super etc, so for me (it's) like heaven. So this is wonderful. Flextime"*; *"Our conditions of leave are really good. The Certified Agreement (CA) is an enticing factor"*; *"I guess in a sense I work to have the lifestyle I want. Work is a necessity"*; *"I like the style of the public service"*; *"I work part time and I have no intention of working full time again. It takes time to build up credibility as part time"*; *"To earn an extra \$20,000 would mean working an extra hour a day, I wouldn't do it" and I don't want to have to do that again. [I have] work life balance"*; *"[The] conditions of service in the Public Service are very good, enjoying the work and the people is what it's about."*; *"The pay is good compared to the private sector"*; *"I am having a baby next year so conditions of service are very important"*; *"My dad a long term public service so he was always talking about good pay and conditions"*.

As stated earlier, respondents felt comfortable in their jobs, and identified a number of other aspects as important elements in their decision to stay with the department, such as: knowing the people and the job and that leaving would mean starting over again; feeling respected and liked by others and established as belonging to the agency; feeling an ability to add value and contribute to the team; feeling a desire to be comfortable, relaxed and enjoy the work and people

for the rest of one's career; enjoying the job and the people one works with as the most important factors; that it is important to be happy at work; feeling a sense of rapport with the people in the department and that the department offered a lot of support by way of training, part time work and variety of work. Finally, many respondents also stated that they believed that their department was superior in its salary, staff support, variety of work and conditions to almost every other government department in Canberra; this is of interest as, in fact, this is not the case and salary, qualifications and conditions of service are similar to all other agencies. This is more about perceived prestige than actual difference.

Performance

Respondents were asked to report on their perceptions of their levels of performance. They were given a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being low performance and 5 being high performance and most reported an average performance of 3 or 4. All respondents in the focus groups described their performance as limited to what they perceived was expected of them most of the time and where their performance increased this was always on a short term basis. When asked about their performance management system, and if it influenced their performance, they stated that they performed in accordance with the expectations in the performance management system and were measured accordingly. They also stated that where their performance was perceived by a manager to be more than expected at their level, they were strongly encouraged to reduce it to bring it back in line with their level and job description. They described the performance expectations as high in the department, but not as high as some had experienced in the private sector. Respondents' comments in relation to performance included "[In the private sector when had own company] *I was doing enormous amounts of work to keep up. Now (I'm) not being out on the spot as much, (the) culture of performance is different. They want you to do well but do not expect you to be a wiz kid*"; "*To earn an extra \$20,000 would mean working an extra hour a day, I wouldn't do it*".

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods offers interesting insights into the level of continuance commitment, the form it takes and the commitment profile found in one representative commonwealth government department. The questionnaire data suggested that many respondents were unsure or undecided about why they choose to stay with the department. It also indicated fairly low levels of affective commitment and higher levels of normative and continuance commitment. It was not able to show us a clear commitment profile or what the form of continuance commitment took because of the weak results and high levels of apparent uncertainty.

The focus group sessions gave greater clarity regarding the levels of continuance commitment, its form and the commitment profile of this department's corporate support section. We found the suggestion of high levels of uncertainty regarding why people stay with the department was not so much uncertainty, but more a reflection of the inability of the organizational commitment questionnaire elements to tap into the commitment elements experienced by the respondents. Allen and Meyer in their earlier research refer to the need to identify more variance in continuance commitment by allowing respondents to generate and weigh the importance of specific investments they have made to the organization and to determine the form of continuance commitment that they experience and this variance was reflected in the focus group sessions (1990, p. 13). We speculate that the specific elements of continuance commitment are higher than the organizational commitment questionnaire suggested and, in fact, form a basis for the development of the other dimensions of normative and affective commitment. We agree with Allen and Meyer's suggestion that it is the combination of all three dimensions of commitment that are most interesting and reflective of the employee-organization link. As such, continuance commitment in this environment forms the core of commitment but is enhanced considerably by the development of both normative and affective dimensions of commitment.

We agree with Abott et al.'s (2005) findings that continuance commitment is high in the public sector. Lyons et al. (2006) found the overall level of organizational commitment was low in the Canadian public service, however, they did not measure each of the three states of commitment

and their findings identified a difference in employee identification with the goals and values of the organization (2006, p. 616). Our findings suggest agreement with this if we assume that Lyons et al. (2006) refer to affective commitment in their reference to identification with organizational goals and values. However, we suggest that the reduced levels of (affective) commitment are less concerning than suggested by Lyons et al. (2006) and that the increased levels of continuance commitment are also less concerning than perhaps previously suggested; this is because of the overall benefits identified if a commitment profile is considered rather than affective commitment alone or the commitment states separately.

This commitment profile identified through the combined research methods showed clear levels of normative commitment and through both the organizational commitment questionnaire and focus groups session the foci of commitment was clearly the people with whom respondents worked, often the manager and if not only the manager, the work group or team itself. There was nothing substantial to suggest that there was a strong sense of obligation or loyalty to the department itself.

Having identified a commitment profile we then considered the respondents' perception of their performance. As found in previous research, there is a clear link between performance and commitment dimensions (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001) and we were interested in exploring this relationship in the representative department. Self-reported performance levels indicated that respondents saw their performance as effective, sometimes higher than expected or required, but usually contained to their job level and description. There was no evidence that respondents performed above and beyond their role expectations; in fact, there were suggestions that where this did occur managers encourage respondents to reduce performance so that it stays in line with job level and description. There was no evidence of altruistic behaviours or of high levels of organizational citizenship behaviours. Rather, there was a clear agreement from respondents that they did what was needed to do a good job and that performance rarely went beyond that. There was a consistent message from respondents that doing one's job during normal working hours was sufficient and departmental requirements seeking higher levels of performance might require 'others'

(managers, policy officers, specialists) to work longer hours and with greater stress and pressures, but that they were not interested or inclined to work in that manner and nor were they expected to.

If we conclude that in this department we have a commitment profile consisting of a particular combination of affective, normative and continuance commitment, where the underlying and strongest commitment is continuance, with normative commitment existing where relationships with colleagues and managers are strong and a level of affective commitment exists that relates mainly to a sense of comfort and job-competence, we could conclude that the self-reported performance ratings and descriptions are to be expected. In previous research Chen and Francesco (2001) found high levels of affective commitment reflected in higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviour and in-role performance. The level of performance self reported in our focus groups did not reflect this. Rather, the level of performance we found was more in line with the moderating affect of normative commitment on the affective commitment-performance relationship also identified in Chen and Francesco's (2001) research.

In other words, the levels of affective commitment identified in the focus group sessions did not appear to have a strong effect on the performance that respondents themselves described. It appeared more the case that respondents' saw their performance as 'moderate' and maintained control of their performance, keeping it at the moderate level, meeting perceived expectations but not exceeding them. Given the fact that performance was self reported in this study and only in the qualitative part of the research, further research into this relationship in the public sector would be required to identify clearly the influence of commitment levels of public sector performance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS, LEADERS AND THE APS

This research could influence the way management and leadership training should be conducted, the way managers and leaders behave in the APS and, more generally, the human resource management practices adopted in the APS. The employee-organizational link is complex and closely related to performance and we encourage managers, leaders, trainers and HRM specialists to explore this relationship further, particularly in the APS. The commitment profile

identified in the corporate support area of one representative commonwealth government agency cannot be extrapolated and it should not be assumed that the same profile would be found elsewhere. It is important to consider why people join their employing department and why they stay there, in fact this is every bit as important as exploring why people leave their department, and so perhaps recruitment and retention strategies should add a type of employing interview similar to the exit interviews that are often held. This interview would allow HR specialists to develop a greater understanding of why people join their departments and, when combined with data collected from internal performance management systems, HR processes and practices could be developed to accurately measure performance and to develop effective strategies to boost performance.

In line with this recruitment and retention practices and other general HR practices could boost performance and retention and reduce separations and performance problems where the unique role that continuance commitment plays in public service recruitment is clearly understood and used appropriately. That is, recruitment and retention practices should not focus entirely on the conditions of pay and employment that are inclined to strengthen continuance commitment, but should maintain these because of their importance in recruiting and retaining employees, but practices should then be designed to build strong relationships within and across teams, to enhance a sense of passion in the work of the team and department and to encourage sufficient levels of stability to build a sense of competence in the job and comfort in the department.

Further, where high levels of continuance commitment are found, strategies could be put into place to enhance affective commitment. These strategies could include supporting managers and leaders to work closely with their teams to build a sense of job competence and comfort in the department and to go further and build a passion for the work of the department wherever possible. Managers and leaders would also benefit from reflecting on their own levels of commitment, where managers and leaders are committed mostly at continuance commitment levels their leadership development may be inhibited by their lack of passion for their work and perhaps also a lack of loyalty to the department. In the APS at the moment a great deal of work is being done on leadership training and the Public Service Commissioner has recently encouraged departmental heads to invest more in effective leadership training (State of the Service Report P.6). Training managers and leaders to reflect on their commitment levels and to build higher levels of affective commitment in themselves and their teams would enhance

leadership and invariably, performance. It would also ensure higher levels of retention and lower levels of separation.

Finally, the APS has a long reputation for encouraging employment on the grounds of stability, life employment and excellent pay and conditions of service. Many people join the APS on these grounds alone and devote a lifetime of work to maintaining a regular pay packet and high levels of superannuation. They also risk devoting a lifetime to mediocre performance and a stifled career. This tendency and reputation has reduced to some degree in recent years, yet remains strong enough to perpetuate expectations and practices that risk facilitating continuance commitment and reducing affective commitment levels. In an era where the Government is demanding higher levels of performance than many public servants have experienced before, understanding the relationship between commitment and performance is fundamental and developing practices to enhance affective commitment is paramount to building performance whilst maintaining retention levels and minimizing separation levels. We would encourage managers, leaders and HR professionals who work in the public sector to manage these tendencies and to recruit and manage in ways that keep continuance commitment levels low and build affective commitment levels higher. We would also encourage government departments to manage graduate recruitment campaigns with care, so as not to facilitate high levels of affective commitment by inducing high levels of passion and inspiration that bring about great expectations that cannot be met, which will invariably bring recruits who may have been attracted at an affective commitment level into a department where their commitment shifts from the affective to the continuance levels. Strategies and practices that align with a commitment profile that accurately reflects the public service, whilst boosting performance, reducing separation and maintaining retention would be ideal and arguably should be underpinned by the high levels of pay and the good employment conditions, should build strong and loyal relationships across teams and should inspire a sense of passion and interest in the departments' role in the Australian community. These strategies would align with the findings of this research that one effective and accurate commitment profile found in the APS consists of strong continuance commitment that is contained through normative commitment focused at colleagues and managers rather than the department, with affective commitment built on job competence and comfort in employment.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative research offered the most valuable insight into the employee-organizational link in a commonwealth government department. It showed that the measures of continuance commitment are quite broad and probably specific to the department's culture and even to the commonwealth public sector's culture. It also suggested that, in line with Allen and Meyer's (1990) research, all three organizational commitment dimensions should be considered simultaneously as the relationship between them is quite unique. We speculate that, in this representative department, the measures of continuance commitment are unique and reflect a 'draw card' to join the department that forms a strong basis for commitment. We also speculate that this strong basis of commitment contributes to the development of affective commitment in the form of comfort in the department and that people then stay for considerable lengths of time in a reasonably stable environment that brings a high level of competence in the job. We propose that a level of obligation or loyalty then develops, suggesting possible normative commitment, as a further consequence of the specific elements of continuance commitment, but is focused not to the department as a whole but towards colleagues or the hiring manager who is perceived to have made employment in the department possible. Furthermore, the respondents' general perception that there is no other government department that could offer the benefits that they gain from working in this department strengthens our belief that continuance commitment exists as a strong and underlying dimension of commitment in the department.

Our intention was not to identify the causal elements of the dimensions of commitment but to identify the level of continuance commitment and determine if it is higher than expected, as previous research suggested (Abbot et al. 2005), or if in fact the actual level of commitment in the public sector is low (Lyons et al. 2006). Having identified a commitment profile in this department, which is predominantly continuous commitment with normative commitment focused on colleagues and very weak affective commitment focused on the comfort in the department and competence in the job, further research may explore the idea that the causal elements of organizational commitment could be specific to the public sector context.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The first limitation is that the reliability of the statistics is low. We have posited that this may be because of the actual survey instrument, the data it can reliably collect and whether it is context bound. More testing of the instrument with mixed method studies may help to clarify the apparent differences between the quantitative and qualitative results and identify if it a weakness in this data set or the instrument itself. Second, this research has been conducted in one government agency and the commitment profile identified cannot be assumed to reflect other government departments. Third, although we have speculated on causal elements of a commitment profile, our research was not designed to quantitatively test causal elements and so further research should be undertaken in order to test the qualitative findings and better understand the way a commitment profile develops,. We also encourage further qualitative research in this field as the results of our quantitative and qualitative research differ slightly, which suggests that when respondents are invited to describe their levels of commitment from their perspective, interesting and new information is discovered that may not be identified through quantitative tools such as the questionnaire in use. Finally, although we received a 43% respondent return on our questionnaire and held in-depth focus group sessions, we worked with a relatively small group of public servants and because we drew from the corporate support area we had a greater number of women than men in the focus group sessions. Undertaking similar research on another government department with different role profiles and a more even gender mix would offer further information regarding the unique role of continuance commitment in the Australian Public Service and the overall commitment profile it tends to attract.

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APPENDIX F

Abstract accepted for inclusion in a Symposium entitled: 'Evolving Commitment Foci: how do they enlighten organizational effectiveness' at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, USA, 2011

Commitment in a Public Sector Organization in Australia: New Perspectives

In 2010 the Australian Public Service (APS) reported that 76% of surveyed staff were committed to the APS and 60% were committed to their department (APSC, 2010). Despite this, a few months earlier the most significant performance reform process the APS has seen in over 2 decades commenced.

Why is it that the APS has high levels of commitment and yet is lagging in organizational effectiveness and performance? Can it achieve performance improvement without understanding a key contributor to performance such as commitment? What is the impact of this lack of understanding on organizational effectiveness?

Research into commitment dates back over 40 years, however since the 1970s few scholars have looked at the complex, multidimensional construct of commitment in the public sector context; this has led to a call for more research into commitment in the public sector (Nyhan, 1999; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005). This paper addresses this gap by exploring commitment in an Australian government department.

Research suggests public sector organizations experience a dominance of continuance organizational commitment (Nyhan, 1999; Abbott, White and Charles, 2005) and this study sought to determine if this was the case in the Australian context and what this would mean for HRM effectiveness and organizational effectiveness.

Adopting a mixed methods approach, Allen and Meyer's three component model of commitment was deemed applicable in this context, as affective, normative and continuance commitment were

identified. However, the quantitative data was weak. Qualitative data explained this weakness by showing variances in all three forms of commitment and suggesting that a unique commitment profile was evident and unrecognized. Three theoretical discussions are presented that relate to the identification of this profile.

Commitment Profile and Bulk Recruitment

The theoretical link was identified between the development of this profile and the process of bulk recruitment supporting the idea that continuance commitment may be developed by actual HRM practices (Gong, Law, Chang and Xin, 2009). Arguably, the bulk recruitment process directly influences the development of the profile and the profile itself contributes to the success of bulk recruitment. Two conclusions are drawn. Firstly, it is theoretically possible for HRM practices to directly influence the development of continuance commitment and commitment profiles. Secondly, it appears theoretically possible for commitment to mediate the success of HRM practices and therefore the idea that commitment may be one of the most interesting areas to look at in identifying what lies within the 'black box' of HRM is supported.

Commitment Profile and Performance Management

The commitment profile was considered against self-reported levels of performance to determine if the dominance of continuance commitment resulted in lower levels of performance (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001). It appeared that the commitment profile was a comfortable fit for the performance levels required and that it was not detrimental to performance as expected.

It was concluded that the low affective commitment levels were a consequence of the performance management systems in place. The assumption that low affective commitment led to lower levels of performance was adjusted by considering whether the performance management systems themselves led to lower levels of affective commitment. It is suggested that performance management as it appeared in this context inhibited the development of affective commitment.

This offers a different perspective from the literature suggesting that public sector organizations would benefit from increased affective commitment (Nyhan,1999). Higher levels of affective commitment may be less beneficial than expected and incongruent with the performance culture of a traditional bureaucratic, public sector organization.

This argument is consistent with the literature that suggests that commitment is influenced by context (Abbott, White and Charles, 2005; Chen and Francesco, 2001; Clugston, Howell and Dorfmann, 2000; Lee, Ashford, Walsh and Mowday, 1992; Nyhan, 1999; Pierce and Dunham, 1987; Perry, 2004; Swailes, 2004; Wilson, 1995) and as such contradicts the literature that suggests that public sector organizations require higher levels of affective commitment (Nyhan, 1999). In doing so it also rejects the idea that high levels of continuance commitment are always problematic because of their relationship to lower levels of performance (Allen and Smith, 1987; Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin and Jackson, 1989; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Chen and Francesco, 2001).

Commitment Self-Awareness

A new element of commitment not explored in the literature relates to an individual's self-awareness of their state of commitment. This research showed high levels of uncertainty and confusion about the basis of one's commitment leading to theoretical consideration of the concept and importance of commitment self-awareness. To what degree is a person aware of their commitment to their organization and to what degree is this required for organizational effectiveness and HRM success? The lack of understanding of commitment by HRM practitioners (Stanley, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Bentein, 2009; Conway and Monks, 2009) may be common across practitioners and workers. Arguably, this is problematic for HRM practitioners, for managers, leaders and workers themselves and should be explored further.

Lack of Understanding of Commitment by Public Sector HRM Practitioners

It appeared that the HRM practitioners who measured and reported APS commitment levels to the Australian Parliament were measuring this as a single construct. The literature is clear on commitment being a complex, multidimensional construct with up to 5 distinguishable elements (McGee and Ford 1987; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer, Allen and Gellatly 1990; Bentein,

Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, and Stinglhamber 2005). This supports the suggestion of a lack of understanding of commitment by HRM practitioners (Stanley, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe and Bentein, 2009; Conway and Monks, 2009) and this paper joins the call for further consideration of the implications of this lack of understanding on organizational effectiveness.

The new perspectives put forward in this paper offer some insight into how unique commitment profiles may have developed in certain contexts and why it may be difficult and problematic to alter them. It is the premise of this paper that these perspectives have not been recognized by HRM practitioners and require further exploration by scholars in this field. In the public sector context in particular, these perspectives offer new insight into the influence of context on the development of commitment profiles and may offer guidance to public sector HRM scholars and practitioners in public sector organizations around the world.

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