

## **Predictors of vocational high school principals' affective organisational commitment in Taiwan**

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**ABSTRACT:** Prior study has indicated that affective organisational commitment (AOC) is equivalent to service motivation. This study is aimed at determining the factors, which can predict vocational high school (VHS) principals' AOC. A questionnaire was sent to all 157 VHS principals in Taiwan and 112 valid responses were received. Data were analysed using stepwise multiple regression analysis (SMRA) to examine the relationships between independent variables (personal background characteristics, organisational management, leadership style and school setting characteristics) and dependent variable (AOC). The results of the study indicate that VHS principals' AOC can be explained with a linear combination of the following variables: perceived fairness, school status, school location, pay satisfaction, previous position and education level. The largest percentage (17.5%) of the variance of AOC can be explained by the variable perceived fairness. Thus, the main implication of this study is that culture of fairness at VHS should be valued by VHS stakeholders.

### INTRODUCTION

The students in vocational high schools (VHSs) not only learn how to live but also learn to earn a living. VHS principals should have highly affective organisational commitment (AOC) to lead the schools they are responsible for and provide a serene climate within which the students can successfully learn and develop their careers. However, what can predict VHS principals' AOC?

Previous studies found that there was an important link between employee's organisational commitment and identification, involvement and loyalty to the organisation. Most of the researchers reported that personal characteristics such as gender, age, education, job position and satisfaction, organisational tenure and organisational characteristics are antecedents to organisational commitment. It was also found that organisational management and leadership variables, including satisfaction with the pay and rewards system, organisational support, fairness, autonomy and leadership style can predict an employee's organisational commitment.

Unfortunately, some of the literature related to the correlation between school status, location and organisational commitment do not cover VHSs. Additionally, although there are many studies related to employee's organisational commitment, most of them focus mainly on organisational commitment in Western countries. Few relate to Asian countries, where national and social culture may produce different results compared with studies in Western countries. In the Asian context, studies produced evidence that demographic variables such as experience in organisation, education level and the leadership duration can have a significant impact on organisational commitment. In Taiwan, there is no literature about VHS principals' organisational commitment, in spite of their important position in school effectiveness.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the independent variables, such as personal background characteristics, organisational management, leadership style and school setting characteristics, can predict the dependant variable, VHS principals' AOC, in Taiwan. The results of this study could be useful in selecting and training VHS principals.

### METHOD AND PROCEDURE

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was used. The population for this study was all 157 public and private VHSs listed in the data bank of the Ministry of Education. The independent and dependent variables were measured by a set of items developed by previous researchers. The Principals' Background Characteristics Questionnaire was used for measuring personal background characteristics [1]. The Organisational Management Questionnaire contains pay satisfaction, perceived organisational support, perceived fairness and perceived autonomy questions. Pay satisfaction was measured by the Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire [2]. Perceived organisational support, perceived fairness and

perceived autonomy were measured by the questionnaire Predictors of Affective Organisational Commitment among High School Principals [3]. Leadership style was measured by the Leadership Style Questionnaire [4]. And, finally, school setting characteristics, including school status, location and size were measured by the School Setting Characteristics Questionnaire [1].

The questionnaire was mailed to all 157 VHS principals in May 2006. A covering letter was sent with the questionnaire, inviting the principals to participate in this study and complete the questionnaire within three days. A pre-addressed and postage paid envelop was provided for return convenience [5]. By one month later, 112 valid questionnaires had been returned.

The stepwise multiple regression analysis (SMRA) was used to test the relationship between the set of independent variables (predictors) and the dependent variable, VHS principals' AOC [5]. The relationships between variables were also measured using ANOVA, *t*-test or the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (*r*); the regression of the dependent variable on independent variables was tested using the squared multiple correlation procedure ( $R^2$ ). An alpha level of 0.05 was set for inferential analyses.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research results show that VHS principals' AOC is explained with a linear combination of the following variables: perceived fairness, school status, school location, pay satisfaction, previous position and education level. Those predictors account, respectively, for 17.5%, 9%, 4.9%, 4.2%, 2.9% and 3% of the variance of AOC. The largest percentage (17.5%) of the variance of AOC can be explained by the variable perceived fairness ( $R^2 = 0.175$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the prediction equation is as follows: VHS principals' AOC = 3.451 + 0.299 (Perceived Fairness) – 0.318 (School Status) + 0.327 (School Location) + 0.142 (Pay Satisfaction) – 0.264 (Previous Position) + 0.248 (Education Level).

### VHS Principals' Personal Background Characteristics and AOC

VHS principals' education level and AOC: Education level, including the major subject of highest educational attainment and highest level of training institution attended, is positively related to affective organisational commitment ( $R^2 = 0.415$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies [2][3][6]. Nevertheless, no significant difference was found between the groups. Results of data analysis using ANOVA and presented in Table 1, show a relatively equal commitment level among and between the different groups of principals. It means that whether or not education level is a predictor of AOC, there is no specific group more or less committed to their organisation in regard to the education level, the training institution attended or the major subject of highest educational attainment. This prediction includes present and previous positions occupied, as well as whether have had part time teaching jobs.

VHS principals' organisational tenure and AOC: The most predictable variable in this analysis was the principals' experience as presented in Table 2. Consistent with other research findings, organisational tenure is positively related to AOC with  $R^2 = 0.385$ ,  $p < 0.05$  [3][7-9]. Some researchers found that employees with longer service tended to demonstrate more commitment to their organisation [2].

The authors conclude, therefore, that VHS principals with longer service have more experience in teaching and administration, and are more confident in leading their schools. The authors also conclude that principals with longer service have more professional investment in their school and may be less willing to leave this school. As presented in Table 2, the ANOVA and independent *t*-test used to determine the correlation found no significant difference between and among groups in regard to the commitment level.

Table 1: VHS principals' education level and AOC (N = 112).

Education Level	Category	<i>n</i>	M	SD	AOC <i>F/t</i> Scheffe
Highest Degree	(1) Doctorate	12	5.81	0.72	0.15
	(2) Master	74	5.83	0.60	
	(3) Bachelor	26	5.73	0.67	
Training Institution Attended	(1) Teacher college in Taiwan	49	6.04	0.64	0.103
	(2) Other college in Taiwan	53	6.06	0.64	
	(3) Teacher college in other country	01	6.33	0.00	
	(4) Other college in other country	10	5.98	0.80	
Major Subject of Highest Degree	(1) Education	74	6.10	0.62	0.69
	(2) Social Sciences	18	5.99	0.69	
	(3) Humanities	07	6.08	0.91	
	(4) Natural Sciences	07	5.94	1.05	
	(5) Applied Sciences	10	5.74	0.22	

## Organisational Management and VHS Principals' AOC

VHS principals' pay satisfaction and AOC: There is a positive relationship between pay satisfaction and AOC ( $R^2 = 0.356$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It is found that pay satisfaction is a predictor of VHS principals' commitment to their organisation. The more satisfied the principals are with the organisational pay structure, the higher their willingness to stay with the organisation.

Table 2: VHS principal's organisational tenure and AOC (N = 112).

Organisational Tenure	Category	n	M	SD	AOC F/t Scheffe
Present Position	(1) 1 to 3 years	44	6.01	0.75	0.171
	(2) 4 to 6 years	36	6.04	0.57	
	(3) more than 6 years	32	6.10	0.59	
Training Institution Attended	(1) Principalship at any USS	32	5.92	0.71	1.40
	(2) Principalship at any LSS	22	6.19	0.70	
	(3) Division Directorship	11	6.43	0.65	
	(4) University Faculty	13	6.11	0.66	
	(5) Teacher	71	6.10	0.59	
	(6) Any other position	14	6.31	0.54	
Having a part-time teaching job	(1) have had	14	5.70	0.63	0.70
	(2) have not had	98	5.83	0.63	

Note: USS -upper-secondary school; LSS = lower-secondary school

These findings support those of previous researchers, who reported a positive correlation between salary and organisational commitment, giving the reason that higher salary levels increase self-esteem [9]. These findings are also consistent with those of Kuo and Jen, who reported in their study based on 365 engineers of 57 private electronics companies in Taiwan that pay satisfaction is positively related to organisational commitment and perceived unfairness in pay will result in negative perceptions of the organisation and a lower or negative commitment [2]. Pay satisfaction is one of the most important values among Taiwanese employees according to a study on multinational organisations [10]. Employees with higher income may have more to lose in leaving the organisation, so they are less likely to leave and tend to demonstrate higher commitment.

VHS principals' perceived organisational support and AOC: A significant correlation is found through the *Pearson* correlation analysis, between perceived organisational support and AOC ( $r = 0.456$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies [3][9][12-14]. Employees are more willing to stay with an organisation that supports them and cares about their wellbeing. On the contrary, their commitment to an organisation that does not give them enough support is negative.

VHS principals' perceived fairness and AOC: Perceived fairness in this study is one of the most important predictors of affective organisational commitment. The results of SMRA show a positive relationship between perceived fairness and affective organisational commitment ( $R^2 = 0.175$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings are consistent with those found through the *Pearson* correlation analysis ( $r = 0.528$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Principals' levels of commitment were related to the way they perceived fairness within the organisation. Researchers also discovered a moderate to strong correlation between perceived fairness and affective organisational commitment [3][15][16]. Hawkins found in his study that principals highly value fairness in their functions [3]. This can be explained by the functions themselves: administrators, educators and leaders.

VHS principals' perceived autonomy and AOC: A significant correlation was found through the *Pearson* correlation analysis, between perceived autonomy and affective organisational commitment ( $r = 0.417$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies [3][9][11-14]. With regard to Taiwanese workers, researchers also discovered that most faculty members in higher education institutions prefer having academic self-determination and autonomy in their positions [17].

### VHS Principals' Leadership Style and AOC

A significant correlation was found through the *Pearson* correlation analysis, between principals' leadership style and their commitment to the organisation ( $r = 0.396$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). VHS principals who lead their schools in a participative (or democratic) way are more successful and are more willing to stay with their organisation. Although the leadership styles used in this study are different from the three leadership styles used by the previous researchers, the findings are consistent [4].

In fact, some researchers found that in the Taiwanese context, transformational leadership, such as charisma and intellectual stimulation reveal a strong positive correlation with employee commitment, whereas transactional

leadership that includes contingent reward leadership shows a degree of influence on personal commitment, depending on the situation [18-20]. A great majority of VHS principals (87.5%) are participative (democratic) leaders (M = 39.78). Some of them (11.61%) use the delegative leadership style (M = 36.72). Only 0.89% use the authoritarian leadership style (M = 31.26).

In addition, items 21 (M = 4.48), 5 (M = 4.38), 11 (M = 4.23), 8 (M = 4.20) and 20 (M = 4.13) were found to have the highest means. Item 21 stated that *Each individual is responsible for defining their job*. The high mean demonstrated that VHS principals value and promote employees' accountability in defining their job. For Item 5, *I ask for the employees' ideas and input them into upcoming plans and projects*, it was found that principals value the participation of their employees in their schools' programme planning. Item 11 was *I want to create an environment where the employees take ownership of the project. I allow them to participate in the decision making process*.

The high mean for this item means that principals, as for Item 5, value employees' participation and involvement in decision making with regard to school management. The 4th highest item was *When things go wrong and I need to create a strategy to keep a project running on schedule, I hold a meeting to get my employees' advice*. The high agreement of principals means that they do appreciate the importance in delegating power to their employees to participate in setting strategies for the school. Finally, the 5th highest scored item stated that *When there are differences in role expectations, I work with them to resolve the differences*. VHS principals' higher agreement indicates that they do not neglect conflict management within their school and prefer conflicts to be resolved in a way that everyone is involved.

As for the highest means discussed above, there are five lowest means that indicate which actions principals value less in their leadership. Items 4 (M = 1.53), 25 (M = 2.17), 9 (M = 2.29), 13 (M = 2.38) and 19 (M = 2.97) were concerned. Item 4 stipulated that *I do not consider suggestions made by my employees because I do not have the time for them*. The disagreement with this item proves that principals really do appreciate the participation of their employees in school decision-making and they assign much attention to their suggestions.

Item 25, *Employees must be instructed or threatened with punishment in order to get them to achieve the organisational objectives*, also indicates that principals do not appreciate positively punishment as a good approach to bring employees to achieve the organisational goals. Item 9, *I send information out by e-mail or voice mail, and meetings are seldom held. My employees are expected to act upon the information*. The low agreement with this item signifies that principals value most meetings over e-mail and voice mail for delivering information related to school affairs. Item 13 is: *Newly hired employees are not allowed to make any decisions unless it is approved by me first*. Principals' low agreement with this item denotes their disapprobation of discrimination between employees when it is about decision making. Equality in participating in decision making is given to both new and longer-serving employees in the school.

Item 19 is: *I closely monitor my employees to ensure they are performing correctly*. Principals have low agreement with this item, indicating that they do not closely monitor their employees to make sure they perform well. Each employee is accountable and this is a way for principals to express the level of confidence they have on their employees.

#### School Setting Characteristics and VHS Principals' AOC

School status and VHS principals' AOC: According to the SMRA, there is a positive correlation between school status (public or private) and VHS principals' AOC ( $R^2 = 0.265$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This study revealed that principals in public schools are less committed to their organisation. The reason may be the fact that principals working in public schools are subject to possible posting elsewhere. Nevertheless, no significant difference was found through the independent *t-test* analysis, with regard to the value commitment between the principals of the two statuses.

School location and VHS principals' AOC: A correlation was found between school location and VHS principals' AOC. School location is a predictor and has a positive correlation with principals AOC ( $R^2 = 0.314$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This study finds that VHS principals in the northern district are more committed to their organisation than those in the other districts. Nevertheless, the analysis using ANOVA finds no significant difference among principals of the five districts in regard to the value affective commitment to their organisation, as presented in Table 3.

School type and VHS principals' AOC: According to the SMRA, school type is not a predictive variable of VHS principals' AOC because there is no significant correlation between the two variables. The independent *t-test* demonstrates that there is homogeneity among groups (typical vocational high schools and senior high schools offering vocational programmes) in regard to the value commitment to the organisation. Results are presented in Table 3.

School size and VHS principals' AOC: Data analysis did not find a significant correlation between school size and principals' affective organisational commitment. As for the SMRA used to determine whether there is a correlation between school size and principals' affective organisational commitment, the ANOVA also did not find a significant difference between small and big sized schools, based on the results presented in Table 3. Principals tend to have the same value commitment in both populated and less populated schools.

Table 3: School location, type and size and VHS principals' AOC (N = 112).

School Characteristics	Category	<i>n</i>	M	SD	AOC <i>F/t</i> Scheffe
School Location	(1) Eastern	10	6.08	0.73	0.675
	(2) Central district	30	5.94	0.67	
	(3) Northern district	28	6.15	0.63	
	(4) Southern district	39	6.08	0.54	
	(5) Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu	05	5.73	1.19	
School Type	(1) Typical VHS	82	6.06	0.66	0.193
	(2) SHSOVP	30	6.00	0.61	
School Size	(1) 1-1000 students	23	6.06	0.72	0.247
	(2) 1001-2000 students	43	6.01	0.65	
	(3) 2001-3000 students	23	5.99	0.63	
	(4) >3000 students	23	6.13	0.60	

Note: VHS-vocational high school; SHSOVP- senior high school offering vocational programme.

## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the predictors of VHS principals' AOC in Taiwan. Research findings reveal that the predictors are perceived fairness, school status, school location, pay satisfaction, experience and education level. A correlation was found between education, experience and principals' level of commitment to their organisation. It was found that education is a positive predictor, while experience is a negative one. A correlation was also found between pay satisfaction, perceived fairness and VHS principals' AOC. These two variables are positive predictors of VHS principals' AOC. In addition, a strong correlation was found between perceived organisational support, perceived autonomy, leadership style and VHS principals' AOC. This study also found a relationship between school status, school location and VHS principals' AOC. School status is a negative predictor of their affective commitment, while its location is a positive one.

### Implications

Having assessed these predictors, the authors hope that the findings will be useful in improving VHS principals' commitment to their organisation. Some implications based on the results and discussions presented above can be put to practical use. Education, perceived fairness, pay satisfaction and school location were found to be positive predictors of VHS principals' AOC in Taiwan. The future efficiency of VHSs in Taiwan depends on a continuous improvement of work conditions based on those predictors which, as a matter of fact, are an asset for the whole educational system in Taiwan.

It is also important that the administrative structures help facilitate creating, maintaining and consolidating an environment where these values can be nurtured. Also, experience and school status have a negative relationship with VHS principals' AOC. Principals' commitment could, then, be eroded in the future by these two factors. For example, some administrative regulations for public schools restrict principals' actions, so their level of commitment is lower than for principals in private schools. Finally, fairness was found to be the most important predictor of principals' affective organisational commitment and is linked to leadership style, pay satisfaction, organisational support and perceived autonomy.

### Recommendations

Many independent variables have been explored in order to determine whether they can be used to predict principals' commitment to their organisation. As a result, this study finds that variables, such as education, experience, pay satisfaction, perceived fairness, school status and location can predict their commitment. The recommendations for all educational partners are as follows: to educational authorities, policy makers and stakeholders, it might be useful to use the findings of this study to revise, reinforce and improve principals' work conditions. Doing so could boost their levels of commitment to their schools and improve the teachers' and students' performance, which would increase the satisfaction level of all those involved in the process and the success of the educational system.

It might also be of interest for those who participate in nominating school principals to take into account those variables in the nomination process in order to insure the principals' job efficiency. Finally, educational authorities could examine the results of this study in order to minimise the risks related to principals' administrative instability and to put more emphasis on leadership training and development based on extra curricula developed in the manner to fit with the different situations principals may encounter in their workplace.

This study did not explore the outcomes related to principals' positive commitment to their organisation. Outcomes such as principals' performance, teachers' performance and students' learning achievement might be of interest and importance. Also, the target in this study is principals. For further studies, it might be of interest to examine outcomes related to principals' positive commitment to their organisation.

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