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Perceived support, affective commitments and subjective career success: a person-centred approach

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to test a model that combines the source of perceived support, be it organisational or union-based, the profile of affective commitment and the subjective career success of 1100 employees who are also members of a trade union. The results obtained from an iterative classification process identified four distinct profiles: those with very little commitment, those committed to the organisation, those committed to the trade union, and those committed to both. Two key findings emerge from this: firstly, each source of perceived support has a predictive impact on the affiliation to a specific affective commitment profile. Only in cases where individuals are poorly supported by both the organisation and the trade union do we struggle to anticipate the employee's attitude. Secondly, the commitment profile is related to subjective career success. For instance, a lack of organisational commitment appears to be far more detrimental than a lack of trade union commitment. These findings indicate that the internalisation of organisational norms resulting from the perceived support and revealed by the commitment profile can be added to the list of antecedents of subjective career success.

Key words: Commitment, organisation, trade union, perceived support, subjective career success

INTRODUCTION

The meta-analysis conducted by Ng et al. (2005) indicates that the known antecedents of career success account for a small percentage of variance. Along with personal dispositions, the correlations observed between social and human capital are insufficient to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon in full. This also applies to employees' satisfaction with regard to their own careers. The subjective dimension of career success nonetheless appears to have gained in importance. Protean careers (Hall, 1996), whether chance or deliberate, budgetary restrictions and a simplified chain of command have indeed reduced opportunities for tangible rewards as measured by objective career success (Judge, et al., 1999).

These observations led Arthur et al. (2005) to suggest that new research avenues should be explored, taking into account the impact of peer groups in the study of careers. Subjective career success could indeed result from the comparison employees make with regard to a social norm relayed by the group or groups to which they belong (Heslin, 2003). In this sense, the commitment profiles found in one or several groups, as well as the perceived support which is their main antecedent, could help to inform comprehensive models of career success (Ng, et al., 2005). According to its definition, perceived organisational support includes 'the general beliefs of employees concerning how much the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being' (Rhoades, et al., 2001: 825). Subsequent research has demonstrated that it is not only the organisation that has an impact in this regard. Other groups such as trade unions can also provide support (Bamberger, et al., 1999). A commitment profile constitutes a homogeneous subset of the population with respect to 'feelings such as attachment, identification and loyalty toward a variety of groups' (Cohen, 2003: Xi).

If employees feel supported by certain groups to which they are emotionally attached, then it is likely that they will be sensitive to those groups' values (Heslin, 2005) and thus judge their career success in a way which is conditioned by their group membership (Van Maanen, 1980). To quote Heslin's (2005: 130) pithy statement, 'Context matters!'

We put this general hypothesis to the test using an empirical approach with a sample of unionised employees. This population is particularly interesting as trade unions convey certain ideals and strong values in France (Lipset, 1983). They are therefore liable to have a strong impact on the type of expectations used to measure career success. Moreover, trade unions comprise diverse profiles, from those who are barely committed to any entity to those who are dually committed to both the organisation and the union, as well as those with unilateral commitments to one of the two groups (Magenau, et al., 1988).

The findings obtained using a person-centred approach indicated that only poor support from both the organisation and the union cannot be linked to any specific commitment profile. When an employee feels supported, identifying whether the source of the support is organisational and/or union-based enables us to predict an affiliation with an affective commitment profile. Should the employee feel supported by both entities, there is very often a dual commitment profile. With regard to subjective career success, a lack of organisational commitment appears to be far more detrimental than a lack of trade union commitment. Profiles characterised by a unilateral or a dual

trade union commitment respectively report the same level of satisfaction with regard to their careers as that observed in the profile of the poorly committed and that of employees who are unilaterally committed to the organisation. Thus, a person-centred approach enables us to demonstrate that organisational commitment can be included on the list of antecedents of subjective career success.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Subjective career success

Career success comprises the 'the real or perceived achievements that individuals have accumulated as a result of their work experiences' (Judge, et al., 1995: 486). The difference between these objective and subjective components is valid since the correlation between these two aspects is no more than 0.30 (Ng, et al., 2005). This observation can be explained intuitively: a hierarchical promotion may be deemed insufficient, for example, consequently resulting in dissatisfaction (Korman, et al., 1981). It might even have a detrimental psychological impact (Hall and Chandler, 2005) if the employee believes that they have made personal sacrifices in order to achieve it. Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews (2005) refer to people affected by this as 'unhappy winners'; this stands in opposition to the concept of the 'happy loser', in other words, an individuals who is satisfied despite their apparent career failure.

Subjective career success is an interpretation made by the employee. It is based on a comparison between work experience and established standards, influenced by both psychological (e.g. Seibert et al., 1999) and sociological (Heslin, 2003) factors. When an employee joins a group of peers, they will internalise their social norms in order to give meaning to their work experience (Van Maanen, 1980). These will then form a cognitive structure, that is to say, a frame of reference for career success (Fournier and Payne, 1994). Such social norms also play a significant role in terms of personal expectations. Internalising the norms in question is particularly important for individuals who are strongly group-oriented (Leede, et al., 2004), such as unionised workers. Overall, these normative standards will be more important if the employee is more emotionally attached to such groups in other words, the emotionally attached individual will subscribe to the group's values. According to Heslin (2005), affective commitment galvanises the individual to adopt norms of career success that are consistent with those of the group. The commitment profile is therefore likely to exercise a strong influence, particularly when driven by perceived support.

Organisational and union commitments

Two common traits emerge from the many different definitions of the concept of commitment, according to Meyer and Herscovitch (2001: 299): 'a) a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target b) and that may be associated with a mind-set that shapes their behaviour'. There are numerous potential targets here (Cohen, 2003), with the

first of which is the organisation itself. Affective commitment can then serve to determine the degree of attachment, identification and implication toward the organisation (Meyer, et al., 2002: 21). With regard to trade union commitment, this will be synonymous with a desire to remain a member, to make an effort to help it, and to identify with its goals (Gordon, et al., 1980). These two targets are clearly separate in the employees' minds (Redman and Snape, 2005). Very early on, Reichers (1985) alerted the academic community to the need to understand the impact of commitment on several groups at the same time as behaviour is influenced by the importance that members give to their different groups (Cohen, 2003). Among the many possible group configurations, a dual commitment toward both the organisation and the union has elicited recurring interest. This interest is due to the impact such commitment is likely to have on the success of social dialogue strategies and, consequently, on the organisation's ability to deal with hostile environments (Gordon and Ladd, 1990). In effect, a dual commitment would have a unique predictive power regarding delegates' appeasement behaviours, as well as their tendency to adopt informal methods to ease tension (Bemmels, 1995). Moreover, research also suggests that perceived support is an antecedent of commitment.

Organisational and union support

Meyer et al. (2002) conclude from their meta-analysis that perceived organisational support constitutes the strongest antecedent of organisational commitment. It creates a relationship of proximity that fosters identification with the organisation. Perceived organisational support appears to account for over 50% of variance in affective organisational commitment (Riggle, et al., 2009). It results from fair procedures, consideration, approval and respect conveyed by the direct line manager, as well as organisational rewards such as training and good-quality work conditions (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Together, these factors constitute a mark of esteem bestowed upon the employee. Perceived support also includes an informational component insofar as it reflects the standards that should be respected in order to receive recognition (Tesser, et al., 1988). As such, it is representative of how the employee's environment impacts on the self-evaluation process (Wood, 1989). The predictive power of such perceived support with regard to commitment has been observed at both the organisational (Ashforth and Saks, 1996) and the trade union levels (e.g. Tetrick, et al., 2007). While this observation stems more from intuition than from empirical evidence, dual commitment may also ensue in the event of dual support (Magenau, et al., 1988). The many insights that might be gleaned from such a scenario could result in a specific definition of the employee's standards, and could eventually lead to specific and subjective career success. This line of reasoning leads to the adoption of a person-centred approach (Meyer, et al., 2013) and the development of a research model.

Source of perceived support and commitment profile

Contrary to an approach based on variables, a person-centred approach takes into account the possibility that sub-sets exist within a sample (Morin, et al., 2011). The homogeneous members of these sub-sets display specific

personal characteristics and combine different commitments within the groups to develop distinct profiles. To help us gain new insights, these profiles must differ in terms of the total scores obtained from the variables and also in terms of the way these scores are constructed (Meyer, et al. 2013: 194). Each of them impacts behaviour and attitudes (Meyer, et al., 2013). Through this lens, a person-centred approach throws light on the way a system of variables operates for an individual. This means that the sample cannot be considered as a whole. When applied to our reasoning, it allows us to determine whether the commitment profiles can be identified on the basis of the source of perceived support.

According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), perceived organisational support should incite an employee to make sure that the organisation is in good health. The employee will then be committed to ensuring that the organisation meets its targets (Eisenberger, et al., 2001). By acting in this way, the employee complies with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and thus avoids any negative outcomes linked to ungratefulness. Trade union support appears to have a similar impact on the relationship with the trade union (Tetrick, et al., 2007). Like the organisation, the union will shape commitment through its actions and, in this way, should foster the assimilation of social norms. In theory, nothing prevents these unilateral forms of support from taking place simultaneously. In such a scenario, we should observe a favourable impact on dual commitment if we follow the theoretical intuition of Magenau et al. (1988: 373). This leads us to put forward the following hypotheses:

> **H1:** *The source of perceived support is linked to a specific commitment profile*
> *H1a: Employees who perceive weak organisational and union support (S1) display little commitment to the organisation and the union (Profile 1)*
> *H1b: Employees who perceive strong organisational support and weak union support (S2) are mainly committed to the organisation (Profile 2)*
> *H1c: Employees who perceive strong union support and weak organisational support (S3) are mainly committed to the union (Profile 3)*
> *H1d: Employees who perceive strong support by both the organisation and the union (S4) are committed to both the organisation and the union (Profile 4)*

A person-centred approach also allows us to test the relationship between these commitment profiles and subjective career success.

Commitment profiles and subjective career success

Uncommitted individuals are detached from the organisation and the trade union's values and so tend to be relatively indifferent to their prescriptive standards. They refer instead to personal standards without including the necessarily restricted nature of the company's resources in their reasoning. Such individuals are therefore likely to express a very low level of subjective career success.

Subscribing to trade union values is also likely to be detrimental. More specifically, the level of career satisfaction is likely to be lower here than among individuals who are mainly committed to the organisation. In effect, the French tradition of claiming rights (Lipset, 1983) can raise the level of employees' expectations and fuel a sense of frustration among them (Barling, et al., 1992). Conversely, a virtuous circle might be initiated by the organisation when it supports its employees by looking after their well-being, thus encouraging them to become emotionally committed. Adhering to the established organisational values in return simplifies the process of learning career norms by facilitating communication (Chatman and Barsade, 1995). This congruity forms one of the chief antecedents of subjective career success (Erdogan, et al., 2004). Should the reciprocity norm be violated by one of the parties, that party will incur a penalty. The signal sent by the organisation is then disturbed and the employee is unable to appropriate it. Overall, the subjective career success of dually committed individuals is likely to be lower than that of people who are committed mainly to the organisation. Together, these arguments lead us to put forward the following hypotheses:

> **H2:** *The commitment profile is linked to subjective career success.*
> *H2a: The profile of employees who are least committed to both the organisation and the union (Profile 1) has the lowest level of subjective career success*
> *H2b: The profile of employees who are committed mainly to the union (Profile 3) has a lower level of subjective career success than that of employees committed mainly to the organisation (Profile 2)*
> *H2c: The profile of employees who are committed mainly to the organisation (Profile 2) has a higher level of subjective career success than that of employees with a dual commitment (Profile 4)*

METHOD

Sample

Our questionnaire was sent to unionised employees via the heads of affiliated professional union federations and local unions. Confidentiality was guaranteed for all participants: 1100 unionised employees from private-sector firms finally provided us with workable answers. 68.9% of the respondents were male, 41.9% were aged between 46 and 55 years old, 39.7% were executives, 77.5% had over ten years of experience in their company, 30.3% held a degree requiring at least four years of university studies, 82.4% belonged to a reformist trade union (CFE-CGC, CFDT, CFTC, UNSA) and 62.7% were elected trade union representatives within the company. It is now well recognized that reformist trade unions give preference to collective bargaining rather than to strike in order to be heard.

Measures

All Likert scales were translated twice so that they would conform to the recommendations of Brislin (1986).

Perceived support

We used the six items suggested by Eisenberger et al. (2001) to assess the level of perceived organisational support. This was for two reasons: firstly, the scale is unidimensional, and secondly, it has shown elevated metric characteristics to date. Following the example of Aryee and Chay (2001), we replaced the term 'organisation' with 'union' to measure the level of perceived union support. 'The company I currently work for really cares about my well-being' and 'the union values my contribution to its well-being' are examples of the items used. Cronbach's alpha was 0.89 and 0.92.

Commitment

Affective organisational commitment was measured using eight items proposed by Meyer et al. (1993). An example of these items is 'I feel emotionally attached to this company'. The Cronbach's alpha obtained was 0.92. Similarly, we retained the union commitment scale developed by Gordon et al. (1980): thus, a sample item is: 'I am proud to be a member of this union'. This time, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.87.

Career success

We measured the degree of subjective career success using two ad hoc items. The wording was deliberately neutral so as to allow the respondent the freedom to choose from among the standards they wished to refer to (Arthur, et al., 2005). The two items were: 'Are you satisfied with your career progress?' and 'Are you satisfied with your salary progress?' Both questions are Likert scales. Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 in this instance.

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to test the sample data structure using AMOS 18 software. Three models were used concurrently: a two-dimensional model (M0) in which the first CFA included both support and commitment while the second corresponded to subjective career success; a three-dimensional model (M1) including support, commitment and subjective career success; and lastly, our five-dimensional model (M2) employing organisational and union support, organisational and union commitment and subjective career success. The goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

	Chi²	Ddl	RMSEA	TLI	CFI
M0	8745	402	0,537	0,567	0,600
M1	6488	401	0,118	0,683	0,708
M2	1950	397	0,059	0,921	0,928

The M2 fit indices are substantially higher. The difference in Chi² values between the models is significant at a $p<0.01$ threshold: Chi²M1-Chi²M2=4538 with Δddl=4 and Chi²M0-Chi²M2=6795 with Δddl=5. All of the M2 indices are satisfactory (Roussel, et al., 2002), allowing us to test our hypothesis.

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

To identify the commitment profiles in a large sample, we opted for an iterative classification process. This approach significantly increases the number of highly ranked individuals at each stage. The K-means clustering method was initially performed by arbitrarily setting a number of profiles to 1/10 from the sample size. The profile information obtained was later used to create an ascending hierarchical classification. The dendrogram generated allowed us to determine the final number of profiles. A second K-means cluster analysis was performed with the available information, using this number of profiles. Finally, the new information obtained helped us to perform one last K-means analysis using the original data set.

We thus tested the association between the source of the support and the affiliation to a commitment profile using a contingency coefficient: $C = \sqrt{[x^2/(x^2+N)]}$. This coefficient provides an alternative to the simple Chi² test, which is too sensitive to sample size and the number of profiles. Finally, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to test the impact of affiliation on subjective career success.

FINDINGS

The correlation matrix (Table 2) shows that organisational support is strongly and significantly correlated to organisational commitment. However, it maintains a weak relation with union commitment, unlike union support. Moreover, union support is weakly correlated to organisational commitment. The two unilateral commitment profiles are significantly but nonetheless weakly correlated with one another. Lastly, career success is weakly but nonetheless significantly associated with organisational support.

Table 2. Correlations matrix

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Organisational commitment	3.16	1.28	(0,92)									
Union commitment	3.96	0.94	0,16**	(0,87)								
Perceived union support	3.46	0.99	0,13**	0,70**	(0,89)							
Perceived organisational support	2.28	1.06	0,63**	0,07*	0,17**	(0,92)						
Subjective career success	2.90	1.22	0,29	0,01	0,00	0,32**	(0,81)					
Tenure	11.41	3.22	0,19**	0,09**	0,00	0,03	-0,02					
Gender	1.31	0.46	-0,05	-0,05	0,00	-0,03	-0,06*	-0,07*				
Union orientation	1.82	0.38	0,06*	-0,04	-0,06	0,09**	0,11**	-0,07*	-0,06			
Type of mandate	1.26	0.44	0,02	0,22	0,13**	-0,03	-0,03	0,15**	-0,10**	-0,01		
Level of studies	1.6	0.49	-0,02	-0,06*	-0,05	-0,04	0,06**	-0,08**	-0,01	0,11**	-0,05	
Status	1.58	0.49	0,04	-0,04	-0,08**	0,01	0,25**	0,02	-0,05	0,17	0,01	0,30**

*p<0.05   ** p<0.01 Cronbach's alpha on the diagonal*
Gender: male=1; female=2. Union orientation: reformist=1; radical=2. Type of mandate: no mandate=0; within the company=1; within and outside the company=2. Level of studies: no qualifications=1; above undergraduate level=2. Status: non-manager=1; manager=2

Sources of support and commitment profiles (H1)

The classifications reveal four distinct profiles of commitment as suggested in the academic literature (Table 3).

Table 3. Commitment profile breakdown

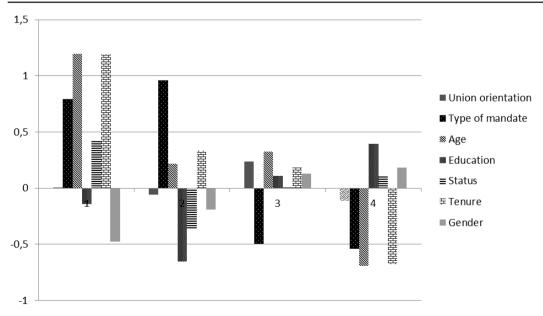|	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	N
Union commitment	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong	
Organisational commitment	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	
Number of employees	124	278	270	428	1100

The resulting dendrogram is available from the authors. Profiles two and three, involving unilateral commitment, have roughly the same comparable sample sizes, that is to say about half of the sample. The other half shows a highly skewed distribution in favour of the dual commitment profile. The individual traits of the members of each commitment profile are set out in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 4. Results using Wald's Chi² (test)

	P1vsP2	P1vsP3	P1vsP4	P2vsP3	P2vsP4	P3vsP4
Union orientation	0,01	0,48	0,66	0,69	1,24	4,49*
Type of mandate	1,33	9,41*	7,53*	30,57**	28,66**	0,49
Age	3,26	0,56	9,53*	1,69	2,41	8,95*
Education	1,41	0,32	1,19	4,80*	9,29*	0,44
Status	2,08	1,24	0,33	0,15	1,42	0,59
Tenure	2,87	2,69	18,36**	0,01	9,66*	9,79*
Gender	0,17	1,25	0,97	0,76	0,51	0,05

* (statistically) significant at 0.05   ** (statistically) significant at 0.01

Figure 1. Commitment profile characteristics

The data were standardised in Diagram 1 to simplify interpretation. Values over 0 indicate affiliation with a reformist union tendency, no mandate or a mandate for individuals exclusively elected within the company, less than 45 years of age, a diploma below secondary school leaver level, non-managerial status, less than ten years with the company and male.

Diagram 1 shows a generally homogeneous distribution in terms of union tendencies. The profile of weakly committed employees (P1) mostly comprises young women who have been with the company for a short time, are not union representatives outside the company and are non-executives. Profile 2, which comprises people who are essentially committed to the company, consists mainly of highly qualified executives who are not representatives outside the company. Employees who are essentially committed to the union (P3) primarily have positions as representatives both within and outside the company. Finally, those with a dual commitment (P4) are characterised by representative functions both within and outside the organisation, are of a more advanced age, have worked for the organisation for many years and have a low level of education. If we examine Table 4, we can see that the main differences between the profiles are the type of union representative position held, tenure and, less frequently, age and level of education.

To verify the correlation between the source of support and the commitment profile (H1), we constructed a new dendrogram using the same method based on the scores for each type of support. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Support typology breakdown

	Support 1	Support 2	Support 3	Support 4	N
Union support	Weak	Weak	Strong	Strong	
Organisational support	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	
Number of employees	292	204	280	324	1100

A contingency table was drawn up based on these two classifications. It allows us to verify that the people receiving a specific type of support are indeed those who match the expected commitment profile.

Table 6. Contingency table: origin of support/commitment profiles

		Source of support				
		Poor support (S1)	Perceived organisational support (S2)	Perceived union support (S3)	Dual support (S4)	Total
Commitment profiles	Weakly committed (P1)	**87**	7	24	6	124
	Mainly committed to the organisation (P2)	90	**116**	26	46	278
	Mainly committed to the union (P3)	77	11	**143**	39	270
	Dual committed (P4)	38	70	87	**233**	428
	Total	292	204	280	324	1100

In accordance with social exchange theory, the source of support allows us to predict affiliation to a commitment profile (C=0.572; p=0.000***) (Droesbeke, et al., 2005). A rapid examination of the contingency table shows that the distribution is consistent with Hypothesis 1: the majority of employees (116/204) who perceive strong organisational support and poor union support are indeed unilaterally committed to the organisation (P2). Perceiving essentially union-based support leads to a predominantly union-oriented commitment (P3) in 143 cases out of 280. The result is all the more conclusive for dual perceived support and dual commitment (P4): 233 cases out of 324. The totals observed on this diagonal in Table 6 are close to, if not more than, double the numbers expected. Only in the case of low perceived support are we unable to predict the commitment profile.

Consequently, Hypothesis 1 is partially supported: the source of perceived support is indeed associated with the commitment profile (h1b, h1c, h1d), except in the case of poor support (h1a). We can now attempt to determine the impact that affiliation to a commitment profile has on subjective career success.

The impact of commitment profiles on subjective career success (H2)

The four commitment profiles were compared in pairs regarding the scores for subjective career success. The ANOVA shows no homogeneity of variances with Levene's test (value obtained = 0.419). The post hoc tests were therefore conducted using the Tamhane method in order to identify significant differences between the profiles (Table 7).

Table 7. Differences in subjective career success between the four commitment profiles

Commitment profiles		Career success average X	Career success average Y	Average difference	Variation
X	Y				
	Essentially committed to the organisation (P2)		5,99	1,05**	13,10%
Weakly committed (P1)	Essentially committed to the union (P3)	4,94	5,22	0,29	-
	Dual committed (P4)		6,35	1,42**	17,70%
Essentially committed to the organisation (P2)	Essentially committed to the union (P3)	5,99	5,22	0,76**	-9,50%
	Dual committed (P4)		6,35	0,37	-
Essentially committed to the union (P3)	Dual committed (P4)	5,22	6,35	1,13**	14,10%

** p<0,01

There is no difference in subjective career success between employees who are weakly and strongly committed to their trade unions (P1/P3). However, both profiles reveal significantly lower averages than those of mainly organisation-committed employees (P1/P2 and P2/P3) and those of dually committed individuals (P1/P4 and P3/P4).

Hypothesis H2a is therefore rejected. Our findings show that the profiles of least committed employees (P1) and workers strongly committed to the union (P3) have the lowest subjective career success, with no significant difference between them.

H2b is therefore supported: employees who are committed mainly to the organisation are more satisfied with their careers than those who are essentially committed to the union.

Finally, hypothesis H2c is not supported since the profiles of employees who are essentially committed to the organisation and dually committed employees show strong subjective career success, with no significant difference between them.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions and further lines of research

The present paper aimed to ascertain the influence of group affiliation on subjective career success. In other words, we attempted to determine the influence of the origin of perceived support and the commitment profile. Our findings indicate that the four commitment profiles found in the literature can be found in the French context, and each profile is associated with a specific source of support apart from that of weakly committed individuals. Our first observation regarding these findings is that a lack of support does not necessarily lead to a lack of commitment. Despite its strongly predictive power, support is not an essential condition for commitment. Secondly, the intuitive insights advanced by Magenau et al. (1988) proved to be empirically sound since affiliation to a commitment profile can be predicted according to the level of support received on condition that its many possible origins are taken into account. Perceived organisational support is primarily associated with organisational commitment, while perceived union support is linked to a union commitment. Dual support leads to a dual commitment.

Our findings also indicate that the commitment profile can be added to the list of antecedents for subjective career success. A person-centred approach enables us to determine which group affiliation has the most influence, in this instance the organisation. A plausible explanation for this finding lies in the process by which norms are internalised, which combines information and learning. Employees who perceive support not only receive a message, but are also rewarded. They are informed of the normative standards used to appraise effort. The impact on subjective career success becomes apparent when the employee adopts these norms in return by adhering to its values, in other words displaying commitment. This process is more obvious for companies than for unions. A side-by-side comparison of the profiles suggests that a union commitment gives rise to neither a sense of resignation nor an increase in the expectation of subjective career success. The latter is more noticeably affected by a lack of organisational commitment than by greater union commitment. The dominant standard is thus that of the organisation.

Overall, these conclusions do not imply an outright rejection of the idea of social influence. More humbly, we suggest that not all membership affiliations necessarily have a significant influence. Determining the limits of this inactive aspect of the context is one avenue for future research. Only a profile-based approach would help us to determine which of the target(s) for potential commitment, such as work, team, line manager, etc. (Redman, and Snape, 2005), might impact on career success. A profile-based approach

could thereby provide insights into the legitimacy of inducements to multiple commitments. Each carries the risk of generating new career expectations that the organisation may not be able to satisfy.

Managerial limitations and recommendations

These conclusions should be considered with caution for several reasons. Firstly, the topic of subjective career success addressed in the present paper reflects a masculine vision of the concept of the career (Herrbach and Mignonac, 2012). Only satisfaction linked to salary and career advancement was discussed, while the work-life balance, a sense of achievement, and learning could also be included in a future study (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988). Secondly, retrospective rationalisation by employees cannot be ruled out. More or less conscious manipulation of the answers might have allowed the respondents to avoid cognitive dissonance (Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews 2005): in concealing a lack of satisfaction, the legitimacy of union commitment cannot be challenged. This risk of methodological bias is nonetheless low since our reasoning is based on a comparison of profiles. Even if individuals had artificially inflated their scores, nothing would have enabled those involved to ascertain the lack of significant differences in relation to others.

Given these limitations, discovering the lack of negative influence that unions have on subjective career success might encourage certain employees to be more willing to participate in social dialogue. This conclusion is especially significant at the managerial level at a time when the fragility of contemporary production systems requires negotiated rather than imposed decisions (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). Unionised employees have a good chance of being satisfied with their careers as long as they are strongly committed to the organization.

Given that commitment profiles are strongly associated with perceived support, both the union branch leader and the line manager play a crucial role in the matter. Thus, a union strategy that aims to distort the way organisational commitment is perceived could prove risky. When unions look for ways to promote a stereotypical vision of the employer ('them and us', Kelly and Kelly, 1994), they become isolated from the majority of employees by turning union commitment into a personal career sacrifice. Unless the aim is to develop or feed frustration and, in so doing, to develop a unilateral union commitment profile, the organisation would do well not to drop its support using the employee's affiliation to the union as a pretext. If the recommendations arising from our empirical findings are borne in mind, the different protagonists in the organisation should stand to benefit from the potential of negotiated solutions.

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