

Master Thesis

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Training and affective commitment at MECAL

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is my graduation assignment for Master program in Business Administration, at the University of Twente. I carried out my research project at MECAL, a Dutch engineering company. The primary goal of the study was to learn if MECAL can increase affective commitment of its employees through offering more training opportunities. This assignment was very interesting to work on and I was looking forward to gaining the results of analyses.

Completion of this project would not be possible without support of several people. First of all, I would like to thank my academic supervisors Dr. Anna Bos-Nehles and Dr. Maarten van Riemsdijk. Their advice and feedback were very valuable during the whole process of working on my thesis. Secondly, I would like to thank Dick van Haare and Richard Jungman for allowing me to do this research at MECAL. Dick van Haare was my supervisor at the company, and he helped me a lot by providing a different perspective on the project.

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Olga Semeyko

1. Introduction

Training is considered to be a critical human resource management practice since it increases intellectual capital of the company (Bulut & Culha, 2010) and contributes to gaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Schuler & MacMillan, 1984). Jex and Britt (2008) argued that training creates a resource which is more valuable for the company than any other – a committed workforce. Meyer and Allen suggested that a “committed employee is one who will stay with the organization through thick and thin, attends work regularly, puts in a full day, protects company assets, and who shares company goals” (1997, p. 3). Thus, the company providing training benefits not only from development of skills of its employees (and as a consequence from increased productivity and performance of employees): training can also result in a more strong emotional attachment of employees toward the organization and desire to remain with the company (Bulut and Culha, 2010).

Our study will research the strength of the relationship between training and organizational commitment at MECAL.

This introduction chapter will elaborate on MECAL and objectives of the study. A brief summary about MECAL will be given in paragraph 1.1. After that the background of the study will be discussed in paragraph 1.2. The purpose of the study will be stated in paragraph 1.3. The central question will be given in paragraph 1.4. The relevance of the study will be discussed in paragraph 1.5. Finally, the structure of the study will be presented in paragraph 1.6.

1.1 MECAL

MECAL is a medium-sized engineering company specialized in designing advanced solutions within the Wind Energy and Semiconductor industries. The company conducts business globally and is headquartered in Enschede, the Netherlands.

MECAL was founded in 1989 as a one-person engineering office and has grown significantly in the last 20 years. Currently, it employs over 100 professionals. The main offices are in Enschede (with around 70 employees) and Eindhoven (with around 35 employees).

The company’s mission is “to convert technology and knowledge into advantage with excellent feasibility, on a substantial scale”¹.

Even though MECAL is not large, it operates in several businesses and has a number of corporate entities:

— MECAL Wind Turbine Design BV

¹ MECAL (2011). Raising Bars, Setting Standards. A policy plan for 2011 through 2015. Enschede, the Netherlands (p. 5).

- MECAL Wind Farm Services BV
- MECAL Semiconductor Product Development BV
- MECAL Pantheon BV
- MECAL Facilities BV
- MECAL Asia Co. Ltd. (Japan)
- MECAL LLC (Virginia)

MECAL conducts business internationally and a large part of its revenues is generated by sales outside the Netherlands. The company has a diverse workforce with almost 20 nationalities. English is used as the company language.

The research will focus on training and commitment of MECAL's employees, who are mostly professionals with engineering and technical education. The workforce is relatively young: the average age is around 35 years. The employees are well-educated: most of them have a higher education. At the same time, continuous upgrading of skills is important in engineering industry. That is why MECAL aims to systematically train and develop its employees.

1.2 Background of the study

One of the latest human resource management initiatives at MECAL is a new development program for employees, called "the MECAL Academy".

The two main goals of the MECAL Academy are:

- 1) Improving skills of employees, personal development, and sharing expertise through training, workshops, etc.
- 2) Increasing employee commitment to the organization and achieving long-term employment with MECAL as a result of providing employees with challenging tasks and extensive opportunities for growth and empowerment.

Thus, the company aims not only to update and develop employees' skills, but also, in the long term, achieve higher organizational commitment and, potentially, decrease turnover. This seems to be a good strategy, as several researchers found training indeed is positively related to organizational commitment (Ahmad & Bakar, 2003; Al-Emadi & Marquardt, 2007; Bartlett, 2001; Bartlett & Kang, 2001; Bulut & Culha, 2010; Newman, Thanacoody & Hui, 2011), which in turn is negatively associated with turnover (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

Therefore, it is relevant for the company to examine to what extent training and development opportunities at MECAL indeed influence the organizational commitment.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The main objective of this study is to research the relationship between training and commitment at MECAL. This will provide MECAL with valuable information on employee perceptions of training and development practices and can be used for the decision-making processes in the future. In addition to that, the study will give insights into the current level of organizational commitment at MECAL.

1.4 Central question

The following central question should be answered in order to achieve the purpose of the study:

To what extent do perceptions of training among MECAL's employees influence their commitment to the company?

While performing analysis to answer the central research question, we will also be able to answer the following two questions relevant for MECAL:

- What are the perceptions of training among MECAL's employees?
- What is the current level of organizational commitment among MECAL's employees?

1.5 Relevance of the study

This research should both have managerial relevance for MECAL and add to the debate on the relationship between training and employee commitment.

Philips and Stone (2002) suggested that effective training should not only increase employee's knowledge and skills (and as a result raise productivity and employee performance), but also have some intangible benefits. The authors considered organizational commitment as one of the intangible benefits of training. In turn, high levels of affective commitment are associated with such valuable outcomes as lower withdrawal cognition and turnover, lower absenteeism, higher organizational citizenship behavior and job performance (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Jaros et al., 1993; Bartlett, 2001).

Since the MECAL Academy will be implemented soon and one of its goals is to influence commitment, it is relevant for the company to learn about the association between training and organizational commitment among its employees. The company will be able to use acquired insight to improve the MECAL Academy and make management decisions that will help to increase employee commitment in the future.

The reviewed articles on the relationships between training and commitment reported contradictory results for some of the training variable (these results will be discussed in detail in paragraph 2.4). Moreover, we can expect that some contextual differences (in culture, company size, industry or occupational groups) may limit generalizability of the results of the

previous research for MECAL. That is why it is beneficial for MECAL that the research will be conducted specifically for the company.

This study will also add to research on the link between training and commitment because it will test the proposed relationships in a new context. As yet, few studies were devoted to researching these relationships.

Employee commitment will be conceptualized in this research using the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment from Meyer & Allen (1991). As will be discussed later, the developers of the model were concerned with applicability of this model outside North America. The model has been used in a number of international studies, and this research will be an example of applying the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment in the Netherlands.

Moreover, we intend to apply existing scales from previous studies to measure training and commitment constructs. Thus, this research will allow us to test reliability of these measurements tools in a new context.

1.6 Organization of the study

Chapter 2 contains the theoretical framework of the study and elaborates on the relevant constructs and theories. The methodology of the research is addresses in Chapter 3. The results of data analysis are presented in Chapter 4. Finally, conclusions and recommendations based on the research are given in Chapter 5.²

² Chapter 3–5 of the thesis are confidential

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter a theoretical background of the study will be presented. In paragraph 2.1 the construct of commitment will be discussed, followed by discussion of components (bases) of commitment in paragraph 2.2. Paragraph 2.3 will elaborate on the construct of training. In paragraph 2.4 training dimensions will be defined and hypotheses on their relationship with affective commitment will be formulated. The international aspects related to this research will be discussed in paragraph 2.5. In paragraph 2.6 the control and demographic variables will be chosen. Finally, in paragraph 2.7 the conceptual model of the study will be drawn.

2.1 Commitment

Organizational commitment has become a popular topic of research in organizational and behavioral sciences since the work of Becker (1960) was published (Al-Emadi & Marquardt, 2007). Becker suggested that commitment comes into play when a person makes side-bets and links his or her interests with some consistent line of action. For instance, employees are bonded to their organizations by salary and other benefits.

However more recent research, such as Meyer & Allen (1997), has suggested that employee commitment is based not on financial rewards, but on opportunities to interact with people, have challenging work, and constantly develop skills.

Thus, views on the nature of organizational commitment vary across the literature. Attitudinal and behavioral approaches to organizational commitment can be distinguished. According to the attitudinal approach, organizational commitment is based on emotional or psychological attachment employees develop to their organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Becker (1960) supported the behavioral approach according to which commitment is based on cost benefits of leaving or remaining with the organization.

This study will use the definition of Allen and Meyer who defined commitment as “a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization” (1990, p. 14). Allen and Meyer (1996) elaborated on this definition stating that organizational commitment generally is a psychological link between the employee and his or her organization that makes it less probable that the employee will leave the organization.

Overall, Meyer and Allen (1997) argued that strongly committed employees will be more valuable for the company than employees with weak organizational commitment. Jaros et al. (1993) stated that among many work-related attitudes, organizational commitment has become increasingly important because of its influence on employees' behaviour. Indeed, commitment has become widely discussed in the literature because it was found to have a number of positive outcomes related to employees' attitudes and behavior. In the study of

employee turnover in Singaporean companies, Khatri, Fern, & Budhwar (2001) came to the conclusion that organizational commitment is one of the three main factors associated with turnover intention. Interestingly, Bartlett and Kang (2001) discussed that high affective commitment was also related with lower levels of stress and work-family conflict. Thus, being affectively committed to the employing company may be considered beneficial for the employee. Meta-analysis of Meyer et al. (2002) has identified a number of outcomes of commitment. The outcomes were classified into three groups: (1) turnover and turnover intention; (2) on-the-job behavior (including attendance, organizational citizenship behavior and performance), and (3) employee health and well-being. Meyer et al. (2002) concluded that the strongest correlations were found between commitment and turnover (turnover intention). According to the findings, affective commitment correlated negatively with absenteeism and positively with organizational citizenship behavior and job performance. The relationship of commitment with stress and work-family conflict was negative.

However, the relationship between commitment and performance is debated. High commitment levels are sometimes expected to result in higher job and firm performance. But in the meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organizational commitment Mathieu & Zajac (1990) argued that commitment, as an attitudinal construct, has little influence on organizational performance. Klein (2001) suggested that commitment is more strongly related to turnover and extra-role behavior than to firm performance. In line with that, Randall (1990) argued that commitment has stronger relations with continuing employment, effort, and attendance than with job performance. Thus, even though the relationship between commitment and performance is not clear, high levels of commitment have several important organizational outcomes. HR practices influence employees' attitudes and behavior which in turn influence performance (Becker, Huselid, Pickus & Spratt, 1997; Guest, 1987).

The outcome of commitment in which MECAL is primarily interested is retention of employees. Management of the company admits that attracting employees with the required knowledge and skills is a challenge. Therefore, the managing director and HR manager of MECAL recently identified retention of talented employees as one of the major goals. Increased job effort, attendance and extra-role behavior will also be valuable for MECAL.

2.2 Components of commitment

This research is based on several previous studies on the relationship between training and organizational commitment: Ahmad & Bakar (2003), Al-Emadi & Marquardt (2007), Bartlett (2001), Bartlett & Kang (2001), Bulut & Culha (2010), Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011). However, while discussing results of these studies, we should take into account that all of them had a cross-sectional design. The research on the effect of training on organizational commitment is in need of longitudinal studies, in particular, to provide evidence on the causal relationship between training dimensions and organizational commitment.

The discussed studies have all utilized the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment developed by Meyer & Allen (1991). According to this model, commitment is a multidimensional construct comprising affective, normative and continuance components (also called “bases of commitment”). In early research on organizational commitment it was considered to be unidimensional. The contribution of the three-component model is that it integrated conceptualizations of commitment that existed separately within attitudinal and behavioral approaches and were raising debates among researchers. Nowadays commitment is widely acknowledged as a multidimensional construct (Bartlett, 2001).

Affective commitment was defined by Allen & Meyer (1990) as employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. **Continuance commitment** is based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the firm. And **normative commitment** refers to employees' feelings of obligation to stay with the company.

Allen and Meyer have stressed the following: “although common to these approaches is a link between the employee and organization that decreases the likelihood of turnover, it is clear that the nature of the link differs” (1990, p. 3). The authors stated that employees affectively committed to their organizations remain because they want to; employees with strong continuance commitment stay at the company because they need to; and employees having strong normative commitment remain because they feel they ought to stay. Employees can experience several components of commitment simultaneously, but of different degrees. Allen & Meyer (1990) also suggested that three components of commitment would have different antecedents.

As the meta-analysis of Meyer et al. (2002) showed all three components of commitment were related negatively with turnover and withdrawal cognition. It is worth mentioning that the affective commitment was found to have the strongest correlations with desired organizational outcomes (such as attendance, organizational citizenship behavior, and performance). Normative commitment was also related to positive outcomes, but less strongly. Finally, Meyer et al. (2002) found that continuance commitment had no relationships or negative associations with the desired outcomes and behaviors. Thus, the affective component of commitment should be the primary focus of organizations aiming to raise organizational commitment. A high level of affective commitment at MECAL will mean that employees will want to stay in the company because they like it and feel emotionally attached to it.

Since affective commitment is argued to have the strongest correlations with turnover and turnover intention (which are the highly anticipated outcomes of commitment at MECAL), we will focus on affective commitment in our research. And in the further discussion, by “commitment” or “organizational commitment” we will mean its affective base.

It should also be noted that employees can be committed to several different foci: not only to

the organization as a whole, but also to supervisors, work groups, colleagues, job, etc. (Drenth, 2009). Meyer, Allen & Topolnytsky (1998) have suggested that employees may have higher commitment to more proximal foci, such as supervisors and colleagues, than to the organization. Klein (2001) has expressed an idea that different foci can be appropriate for different Human Resource Development interventions. Since the MECAL Academy has been initiated to increase employee skills and commitment to the company, we will focus on the organizational-level commitment.

2.3 Training

In this study the definition of training from Al-Emadi & Marquardt (2007, p. 54) will be used: "... training as planned activities on the part of the organization targeted towards increasing the job knowledge and skills or to modify the attitudes and behaviors of employees in ways consistent with the goals of the organization and the requirements of the job". This definition has been chosen because, as in the study of Al-Emadi & Marquardt (2007), we will include into employee training not only formal but also informal and on-the-job training as well as other professional development activities. This definition suits to the MECAL Academy which is supposed to become a personal development program for MECAL's employees and include a wide range of training and development activities. Moreover, the MECAL Academy has been initiated to improve not only employees' skills but also their attitudes and behavior. Thus, the broad definition of training is the most appropriate in the context of this research.

Training is said to be associated with a number of positive outcomes. The resource-based view on the firm (Barney, 1991, 2001) suggests that training helps to gain a competitive advantage through developing a valuable and unique workforce. Human capital theory (Becker, 1976) justifies investments in training because they increase intellectual capital of organizations. In particular, training is expected to increase skills, knowledge and motivation of employees (Bulut & Culha, 2010). According to Bulut and Culha, nowadays human capital has become accepted in the academic literature as the most critical asset of firms. Linking two explanations we can conclude that human capital and its development are given so much attention because employees are considered to be a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Bulut & Culha, 2010; Schuler & MacMillan, 1984).

According to the literature, training can have some more benefits to organizations (in addition to developing skills). Benkhoff (1997) suggested that training can be important in explaining work-related behavior of employees and impact on performance: committed employees are expected to perform better and have less intention to leave the organization. Moreover, training is expected to provide such positive outcomes for the organizations as increased productivity and improved performance of employees (Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; Gultek et al., 2006; Watson, 2008 as cited in Bulut & Culha, 2010, p. 312). As Bartlett (2001) stated increasing productivity and organizational performance are the dominant arguments to justify

training investment. However, the author admitted that evidence on the link between Human Resource Development and organizational performance is lacking. Referring to Bates (1999), he explains it by challenges in performance measurement. Bartlett (2001) suggested that it would be more productive to research the relationship between training and more proximal outcomes than organizational performance. The author suggests, for instance, examining the link between training and desired employee attitudes (such as organizational commitment) which are in turn considered to impact organizational performance. We decided to focus on training as an antecedent of commitment because this relationship is of the highest interest for MECAL while implementing the new training program. Future studies may research other proximal outcomes of training, such as in-role behavior or job performance.

On the relationship between training and employee attitudes, Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli (1997) argued that investment in employees (including among other practices training) would be positively related to higher levels of affective commitment, citizenship behavior and intention to stay. Pajo, Coetzer, & Guenole (2010) did research on the link between formal development opportunities and withdrawal behaviors in SMEs. The authors have found that employees participating in more formal training and development activities are less likely to consider leaving the organization.

However, the exploration of the relationship between training and organizational commitment is still in an early stage (Ahmad & Bakar, 2003; Bartlett, 2001). The major studies on the topic found some empirical support for a positive link between training and affective organizational commitment, but quantitative findings are incomplete. I will discuss the results of previous research in the next paragraph after the four training dimensions are introduced.

In the reviewed articles the relationship between training and employee commitment was usually explained using social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1990).

In his book, Blau (1964) argued that people enter into social interactions with the same logic and reasoning as into economic exchange: because they need something from other parties and expect to gain it through interaction. However, the ratio of contributions and rewards for parties interacting in a social exchange is often more complicated and less obvious than in economic relationships. For instance, a person may behave altruistic at some point anticipating that it will bring social rewards in the future (Blau, 1964). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argued that stability of social interactions (i.e. remaining of all parties in the exchange) depends not only on the rewarding value of these interactions, but also on the rewarding value of alternative social relationships.

The term "psychological contract" was introduced by Argyris (1960) in order to refer to employee and employer expectations (for instance, about mutual obligations in the employment relationship) that are not written in the formal contract. Rousseau (1990)

distinguished transaction (temporary) contracts and relational contracts. The latter are built on trust and are expected to last for a long time. We can also point out that in psychological contract literature, the employee's perspective was discussed more widely, than the employer's side. In particular, consequences of unsatisfied expectations or contract violation on employee attitudes and behavior were paid much attention in the research.

Bartlett (2001) argued that psychological contracts are important predictors of organizational behavior and that human resource practices are playing a significant role in forming and managing of psychological contracts with employees. The author also suggested that training is one of the practices that can foster favourable psychological contracts. In line with that Bulut and Culha (2010) considered that vocational training and development opportunities are inevitable expectations of employees entering into a psychological contract. Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011) have argued that when an organization shows willingness to care about its employees (by offering training opportunities, for instance), they will pay back with positive behavioral and attitudinal responses favorable to the organization. In particular, providing training gives a signal to employees that their firm wants to establish a social exchange relationship with them and it helps to create a psychological bond between an employer and its employees. Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro (1990) stressed that employees are more likely to display high levels of organizational commitment if they perceive that the organization is committed to them. Ahmad & Bakar (2003) suggested that organizations may demonstrate such commitment through providing support to employees and that the impact of training on affective commitment will be greater when employees believe that training initiatives are motivated by care about their development.

2.4 Training dimensions

In research on the relationship between training and organizational commitment, training is usually conceptualized as having several dimensions: motivation for training, access to training, benefits of training and support for training. In the study of Bartlett and Kang (2001) the four discussed training dimensions together with training frequency explained approximately 30.6% of variance in affective commitment (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$). In the research of Bulut and Culha (2010) the four training constructs explained around 27% of variance in affective organizational commitment ($R^2 = 0.273$, $p < 0.001$). Each training dimension will be addressed in a respective sub-paragraph. After defining training dimensions we will discuss results of the previous quantitative studies on the relationship between training and affective commitment.

2.4.1 Motivation for training

Motivation for training can be defined as "the degree to which employees are willing to make an effort to improve themselves and their task and job performances by training" (Robinson, 1985 cited in Bulut & Culha, 2010, p. 311).

In the reviewed articles on the relationship between training and commitment, motivation for training is considered to be one of the antecedents of affective commitment. The researchers suggested that employees with higher levels of training motivation will display higher levels of organizational commitment when they receive relevant training. Newman, Thanacoody and Hui (2011) proposed the following explanation for this relationship: motivated employees tend to learn and apply acquired skills more effectively while associated benefits increase positive feelings toward an organization and, therefore, enhance affective commitment. The authors did not explain what they meant by associated benefits, but we can suppose that it can be, for instance, improved skills and increased effectiveness as well as personal satisfaction from performing tasks in a more efficient way.

However, the causal order in the relationship between training motivation and commitment is debated. For instance, Klein (2001) stressed that conceptual arguments can be given also for the reverse ordering: that high motivation for training is an outcome of high organizational commitment. Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers (1991), in a study of US Navy recruits, found that organizational commitment increased participation in training programs in the future. Thus, organizational commitment can influence motivation to take part in training. The study was based on pre-training and post-training questionnaires measuring recruits' training perceptions, reactions, commitment and self-efficacy.

2.4.2 Access to training

Access to training means "employees' perceptions of the probability of their attendance at organizational training, whether or not participation is based on objective and fair selective criteria, whether or not the application procedure is explicitly formalized and whether or not applicants are supported by their managers" (Bulut & Culha, 2010, p. 312). Researchers have also called this training variable as "perceived access to training" or "perceived availability of training" (Bartlett, 2001; Newman, Thanacoody & Hui, 2011) and defined it as the extent to which employees feel they have access to training opportunities (Newman, Thanacoody & Hui, 2011). As Bulut & Culha (2010) suggested employees would value fair access to training programs and perceive it as an indication that an organization values them and is willing to make investments in their development. Thus, employees will enter into a psychological contract with the company and pay back to the organization through good work and work-related behavior. In this social exchange, both parties can gain valuable rewards.

2.4.3 Benefits of training

Nordhaug (1989) identified three types of training benefits (or reward functions that employees gain from training): personal-related, career-related and job-related benefits. Al-Emadi & Marquardt (2007) gave the following explanation of these three types of training benefits:

Personal benefits represent the extent to which employees believe that participation in training activities help them network, improve their job performance and make progress towards their personal development. Career benefits result from participation in training activities that lead to identifying career objectives, reaching career objectives and creating opportunity to pursue new career paths. Job-related benefits lead to better relationships between peers and managers, and provide a necessary break from the job. (p. 55)

The researchers on training and commitment suggested that employees who reflect positively on benefits of training would be more affectively commitment to the organization that provided training (Ahmad & Bakar, 2003; Bartlett, 2001). It is interesting that not only the organization benefits from developing skills of employees, but also employees can benefit from training (for instance, they might gain a promotion or use training as an opportunity to network with their colleagues, etc.) This can be considered as social exchange between the employer and employee regulated by the psychological contract.

2.4.4 Support for training

Support for training means support to develop skills and pursue training. Bulut & Culha (2010) explained the relationship between support for training and commitment the following way: a high degree of support for training encourages employees to undertake psychological obligations to develop in performing the job; thus, employees perceiving support from the company feel obliged to it. In contrast, when organizational support is lacking, employees feel betrayed and their commitment toward the organization decreases.

2.4.5 Reviewed quantitative studies and their findings

The reviewed articles did not provide robust findings on the strength of the relationship between training variables and affective commitment. It should also be noted that we could not find enough quantitative results (preferably, Adjusted R^2) because the articles did not report all the relevant measures. For instance, Ahmad and Bakar (2003) and Bartlett (2001) fully reported results of the correlation analysis, but the results of the regression analysis for some training variables were missing. Bulut and Culha (2010) included all four training variables into the regression model in one step, therefore additive explanatory power of each training dimension is unknown. Bartlett and Kang (2001) performed a stepwise regression analysis and reported ΔR^2 , Adjusted ΔR^2 and β coefficients for each training variable. This study therefore is the most comprehensive and provided us a good example on how to perform the analyses and present results.

Bartlett and Kang (2001) identified access to training to be the strongest contributor to affective commitment, followed by support for training from supervisors. The effects of motivation for training and benefits of training were negligibly small. However, one quantitative study is not enough to draw conclusions about the relationship between training

dimensions and affective commitment. Therefore, we will retain all four training variables in our conceptual model of training-related antecedents of affective commitment.

Based on the literature review the following four hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a positive relationship between motivation for training and affective commitment at MECAL.*

Hypothesis 2: *There is a positive relationship between access to training and affective commitment at MECAL.*

Hypothesis 3: *There is a positive relationship between benefits of training (personal-related, career-related and job-related) and affective commitment at MECAL.*

Hypothesis 4: *There is a positive relationship between supervisory support for training and affective commitment at MECAL.*

2.5 International research

As it was discussed before, this study will be conducted in a multi-cultural company located in the Netherlands. However, the Three-Component model of organizational commitment and relevant measurement tools were developed in other cultural context. That is why we should consider the applicability of the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment to the specific context of this study. Moreover, a number of researchers argued that culture might influence organizational commitment (Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; Eisinga, Teelken, & Doorewaard, 2010; Wasti, 2003, 2008). The debate will be discussed in this paragraph.

As the literature review showed, cultural differences do not seem to influence the applicability of the training dimensions and measurement tools. The training dimensions and scales showed satisfactory construct validity and reliability results in the reviewed studies conducted in the United States, New Zealand, Malaysia, China, Turkey, Qatar, and some other countries. Thus, we can be less concerned about the international generalizability of the training components and focus on the debated effect of culture on organizational commitment.

2.5.1 Generalizability of the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment

Allen and Meyer (1996) raised the issue of generalizability of the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment outside North America, and later Meyer et al. (2002) researched this problem in their meta-analysis on organizational commitment. The meta-analysis tried to determine whether the geographic location was a moderator in the relations between three components of organizational commitment and their antecedents, correlates, and consequences. The authors stated that the number of studies from a particular country was

small, therefore they classified studies into two groups: conducted in and outside North America. The results on the relationship between commitment and its antecedents, correlates, and consequences were compared between two groups. Meyer et al. (2002) found some differences, but to a large extent the results were similar. The only notable difference was that correlations between affective and normative commitment were greater in studies done outside North America. The authors suggested that the difference could be culture-based (i.e. that desire and obligation are less distinct in countries outside North America) or translation-based.

A number of studies supported the applicability of the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment in a particular country. For instance, Cheng & Stockdale (2003), tested the Model on a sample of 226 Chinese employees in six different foreign-invested companies and concluded that the Model had a relatively good fit, even though China is culturally distant from North America. Vandenberghe (1996) conducted a study among nurses in Belgium and found empirical support for the validity of the model in the studied context. Similar results were found in samples of university alumni (N = 478) and hospital nurses (N = 186) in Belgium (Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002). Snape and Redman (2003) gained evidence for distinguishing the three components of organizational commitment in the United Kingdom.

However, some studies failed to provide support to the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment. For instance, Ko, Price, and Mueller (1997) assessed the construct validity of the commitment scales in two South Korean samples and concluded that the results were satisfactory only for the affective commitment scale, while construct validity of normative and continuance commitment scales were questionable. In line with that, Wasti (2003) found that in their sample of 914 employees across 46 Turkish organizations four-factor model of commitment (including also a lack of alternatives as one of the commitment bases) had a better fit than the three-factor model. Vandenberghe (2003) suggested that such results from Eastern Asian studies might be partly related to difficulties in translation. Meyer et al. (2002) also stressed the importance of distinguishing culture-based and translation-based differences the future studies. It is relevant to say that translation of English-language scales is not necessary in this research because all MECAL's employees are proficient in English.

The major limitation of the above-mentioned studies is that they were conducted in one country and did not provide cross-cultural comparisons. Vandenberghe, Stinglhamber, Bentein, and Delhaise (2001) aimed to validate the multidimensional framework of organizational commitment across European cultures. The authors conducted a study among employees of the translation department of the European Commission in Brussels: 580 usable responses were gained from 12 European nationalities. Vandenberghe et al. (2001) measured affective, normative, and continuance commitment to different foci (the organization, occupation, and work group) and concluded that the commitment model was culturally invariant. However, the

authors admitted that the research methodology of the study might effect the results. On the one hand, the research was conducted in a single organization in one location, and it allowed to control for the influence of corporate culture and work environment (which is advantageous). On the other hand, translation employees of the European commission are very open to cross-cultural differences and might be not a random sample of their cultural populations. However, by present time this study was the biggest cross-cultural research on commitment in Europe.

Concluding, the majority of studies supported the generalizability of the three-Component Model of organizational commitment outside North America. Some issues were raised about usage of the normative and continuance commitment scales in Asian studies. Since our research will be conducted in the Netherlands and we decided to focus on affective component of organizational commitment, these concerns are irrelevant for the current study. Thus, we can expect that the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment and the relevant scale for measuring affective commitment should have a good fit in the context of this study.

2.5.2 Cultural hypotheses: Hofstede's cultural dimensions and organizational commitment

While the generalizability of the Three-Component Model of organizational commitment was overall supported, the effect of culture on commitment levels, antecedents and outcomes is highly debated.

The cross-national studies on organizational commitment apply the Hofstede's four-dimension model of culture, that is why we should first introduce this model. It was developed by Geert Hofstede and presented first time at his book *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values*, published in 1980. As Minkov and Hofstede (2011) discussed in the review of the doctrine's evolution, before the Hofstede's seminal work, culture was treated as a single variable. Hofstede showed how culture can be described by several dimensions. Originally Hofstede identified four cultural dimensions which can be defined in the following way (Hofstede, 1991):

- 1) Power distance (the extend to which authority and social inequality are accepted).
- 2) Individualism versus collectivism (the relationship between individuals and groups).
- 3) Masculinity versus femininity (the distrubution of the roles between men and women).
- 4) Uncertainty avoidance (tolerance and ways of dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty).

The fifth dimension (long-term versus short term orientation) was added by Hofstede (1991) as the result of collaboration with Michael Bond who conducted a number of cultural studies in the Asian-Pacific region. This dimension referred to the people's orientation: on the future, the present or the past. In the recent third edition of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, the sixth dimension (indulgence versus restraint) was introduced (Hofstede, Hofstede,

Minkov, 2010). However, most of the cross-national studies on organizational commitment applied the initial four-dimension model of culture.

The dimension of individualism versus collectivism is the best investigated among cultural dimensions and has been considered as the most relevant to commitment (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Wasti, 2003). It is argued that obligations in the psychological contract are of higher importance for people with collectivistic values and that employees in collectivistic cultures tend to behave according to expectations and psychological obligations in order to maintain harmony in the group (Cheng and Stockdale, 2003; Wasti & Can, 2008).

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) suggested that in collectivistic cultures employees would commit to their organizations because of their relationships with supervisors and colleagues while in individualistic cultures satisfaction with job content or promotion might be more important for employee commitment. Wasti (2003) tested the proposed effects of individualism and collectivism on antecedents of organizational commitment in the sample of 914 Turkish employees. In general, the hypothesized relationships were supported. The findings of the regression analysis suggested that satisfaction with the supervisor was highly important for commitment of employees with collectivistic values, while satisfaction with work and promotion were the more salient antecedents of commitment among employees with high scores on individualism. Thus, the strength of antecedents of organizational commitment may vary across employees with different cultural values.

Moreover, collectivist values were hypothesized to moderate the relationship between commitment and organizational-level outcomes. For instance, Wasti and Can (2008) tested if collectivism moderated the relationship between affective and normative commitment to supervisors and co-workers and global outcomes (such as turnover intentions and job stress). However, the cultural hypothesis was not supported by the regression analysis. Moreover, Vandenberghe et al. (2001) in his study at the European Commission concluded that the relationships between commitment bases and intention to quit were culturally invariant. However, Wasti and Can (2008) suggested that it is too early to state that cultural values have no influence: this influence may be of a more complicated nature than it was hypothesized in the studies.

Several studies researched the influence of culture on absolute levels of commitment across countries. In the study of 226 employees in six companies in China, Cheng and Stockdale (2003) found that the levels of affective and normative commitment in this sample were significantly higher compared to the finding from previously published research in South Korea and Canada. The authors suggested that the difference can be explained by the idea that high commitment and loyalty to group and organization are a part of collectivistic societies, such as China. At the same time, the authors admitted that the Chinese, Canadian and Korean samples were not

large enough for making generalizations across these nations. Moreover, the samples differed in terms of age, gender, occupation, which makes the finding less reliable.

On opposite to the findings of Cheng and Stockdale (2003), some researchers did not find significant differences in commitment levels across cultures. Hattrup, Mueller, & Aguirre (2008) studies organizational commitment in two samples: among employees of ten subsidiaries of a large multinational company and among respondents of a large opinion survey conducted across 25 nations. The authors concluded that the differences in organizational commitment were small. Moreover, collectivism values were found to be empirically unrelated to the differences in commitment. Similar results were obtained in the study of affective commitment across 49 countries by Gelade, Dobson and Gilbert (2006): country-level variations in affective commitment were not significantly related to variations in collectivism and individualism. Thus, the effect of collectivistic values on commitment has been widely discussed in the literature but has not been yet empirically proved.

Some studies tested the effect of all four cultural dimensions on organizational commitment. Palich and Hom (1995) conducted one of the major studies about the moderating effect of culture on the relationship between commitment and its antecedents (in particular, role clarity, job scope, extrinsic rewards, and participative management). Their sample included 1,859 managers from 15 affiliates of a U.S. multinational company in Europe and Canada. Palich and Hom studied the effect of all four Hofstede's cultural dimensions, but they did not find any meaningful cultural moderation of commitment antecedents.

Opposite results were gained in the research of Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000). The study was conducted in the USA among employees of a public tax agency. The authors tested whether four cultural dimensions were related to three components of commitment and three foci of commitment (organization, supervisor, and workgroup). Findings of the hierarchical regression analysis suggested that cultural dimensions were significant predictors of the commitment bases and foci. Power distance was found to be positively associated with normative commitment across all foci: employees high on power distance displayed higher levels of normative commitment. Uncertainty avoidance was found to be related to continuance commitment to the organization, supervisor, and workgroup. Finally, collectivism was related to affective, normative, and continuance commitment to workgroup. Other relationships were non-significant.

The study of Eisinga, Teelken, and Doorewaard (2010) among university faculty employees in six European countries found no significant difference in the levels of affective and continuance commitment. The results on normative commitment differed significantly across the countries and the authors explained it by the differences in the national uncertainty avoidance scores as reported in Hofstede (2001). Eisinga et al. (2010) suggested that people in high uncertainty avoidance countries (for instance, Belgium) tend to display more long-term commitments, than

in low uncertainty avoidance countries (for instance, Sweden). It is not in line with the discussed above findings of the Clugston et al. (2000) who found uncertainty avoidance to be related with continuance commitment while normative commitment was influenced by power distance scores. However, when considering the findings of Clugston et al. (2000), one should take into account that the sample ($N = 156$) seems too small for making reliable conclusions about the relationship between cultural dimensions and commitment bases and foci. It should be also pointed out that the study was conducted within one nation and the cultural dimensions were measured at the individual level. While Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) argued that macro cultural dimensions have analogues at the individual level, Minkov and Hofstede (2011) emphasized that the Hofstede's dimensions were constructed at the national level and do not make sense at the individual level.

This literature review has showed that the research results on the effect of culture on commitment and its antecedents and outcomes have been inconclusive. The future research across large samples and a variety of cultures should provide more insight into the debate.

In this study because of the small population (around 100 employees) and a small number of people from a particular country, it is not possible to make a comprehensive comparison of cultural differences. Moreover, the population size limits the number of constructs that can be added into the regression model. However, we will include nationality as a control variable.

2.6 Control and demographic variables

The previous academic research on training and commitment was used to identify which control and demographic variables should be included in this study. Now the logic and evidence for including each variable will be discussed.

In the literature review on individual differences as antecedents of commitment Ahmad & Bakar (2003) stated that age and tenure tend to positively correlate with commitment. This conclusion was based on works of Allen and Meyer, 1990; Lok and Crawford, 2001; Williams and Hazer, 1986; Mowday et al., 1982; Angle and Perry, 1981; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Steers, 1977, cited in Ahmad & Bakar (2003, p. 169). However, Irving et al. (1997) and Tan and Akhrar (1998), also cited in Ahmad & Bakar (2003, p. 169) did not find significant correlations between commitment and age and tenure. The study of Ahmad and Bakar (2003) on training and commitment among white-collar workers in Malaysia reported that age and tenure were related to affective commitment: an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test showed that employees aged 40-49 years were significantly higher affected to their organizations than employees aged less than 30 years. Moreover, employees whose tenure was over 10 years had higher scores on affective commitment than those who worked for less than a year. Ahmad and Bakar reported $\Delta R^2 = 0.015$ ($p = 0.01$) for age. Al-Emadi & Marquardt (2007), in their study on organizational commitment in a Qatar petroleum company, confirmed that age has some influence on

affective commitment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.032, p < 0.05$). The authors concluded that older employees are more likely to remain with the organization and feel committed to it. Meta-analysis of Meyer et al. (2002) have found organizational and position tenure as well as age to have a weak correlation with the three components of organizational commitment.

Aven, Parker & McEvoy (1993) and Mathieu & Zajac (1990) stated that gender is unrelated to affective commitment or have just a weak relationship with it. The research of Ahmad & Bakar (2003) in Malaysia also showed that gender and race were not related with commitment. No correlation between gender and commitment was found by Meyer et al. (2002) as well.

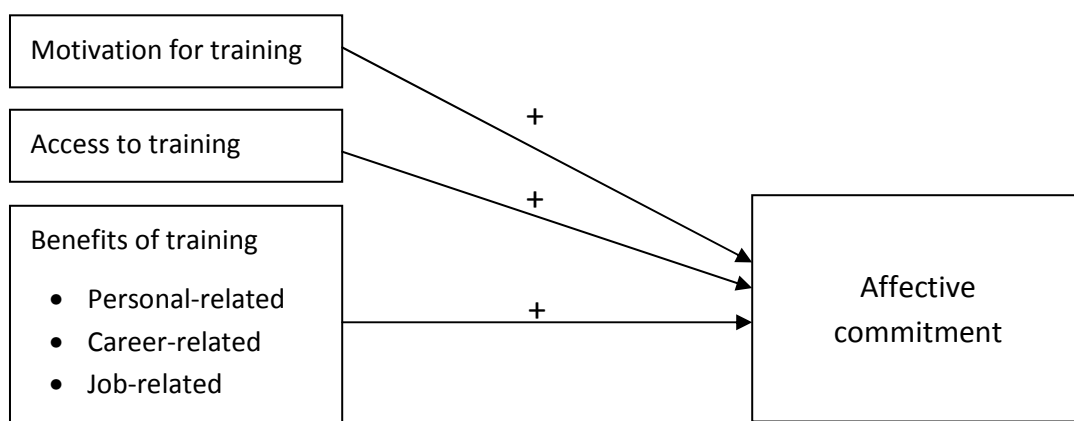
As Ahmad & Bakar (2003) stated the level of education is considered in the literature to be negatively correlated with commitment: highly educated employees have more job alternatives and higher expectations from their job; that is why they tend to be less committed to a particular organization, than less educated employees. However, meta-analysis of Meyer et al. (2002) did not find any relationship between education and commitment components.

Research on commitment of the employees at Cehave Landbouwbelang by van Delden (2008) and Drenth (2009) showed that type of employment contract and working hours can be related to affective commitment and different foci of commitment.

In conclusion, we will include age, organization tenure, educational level, contract type and working hours as possible intervening variables that can influence the research results. Organizational position will not be controlled, because MECAL has around 20 different positions and it is not viable to control them in a sample of around 100 employees. As it was stated in the previous paragraph, nationality will be included as a control variable. Gender will be included in the study for demographic statistics. And since MECAL has a number of highly independent business units in two different locations (Enschede and Eindhoven), we will also control for business unit and location.

2.7 Conceptual model

Based on the first two chapters the conceptual model of the study can be drawn. It is presented in figure 1. The model also shows the expected directions in the relationships between training dimensions and affective commitment.



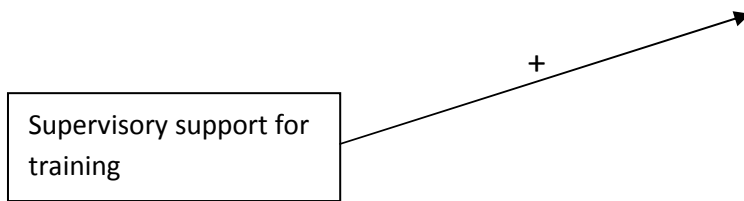


Figure 1. Conceptual model

Since it was decided to research only affective component of organizational commitment, the central research question of the study can be slightly reformulated to emphasize that we will focus on affective dimension of commitment. The following research question can be derived based on the practical and theoretical background of the study:

To what extent do perceptions of training among MECAL's employees influence their affective commitment to the company?

Chapters 3-5 of the thesis are confidential

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