The Impact of Organizational Growth on Employees' Personal Initiative and Commitment

Jill Walters Glombik (j.walters_glombik@gmx.de)

University of Applied Sciences Kempten, Germany

Summary

Research questions:	The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between organizational growth and employees' level of personal initiative and commitment considering perceived organizational support as a mediator. The main research question is: How does rapid organizational growth affect employees' personal initiative and commitment?
Methods:	Empirical study at one German organization using four external surveys from 2012-2018 as well as two internal department specific surveys implemented within a year to assess the level of personal initiative and commitment among leaders and non-leaders over time.
Results:	The analysis showed that there was no significant difference in levels of commitment between employees in a leadership or non-leadership role. There was no evidence to prove there is a decrease in perceived organizational support and consequently commitment due to strong organizational growth. The examination of commitment with respect to job tenure revealed that commitment seems to decrease during a tenure of 5-10 years with an upward slope between 11-15 years. Regarding personal initiative, leader behaviors and attitudes influence non-leader behaviors and attitudes.
Structure of the article:	Introduction; Literature Review; Research questions & methods; Empirical results; Conclusions; About the author; Bibliography

Introduction

The importance of employees' personal initiative and commitment has become increasingly important for organizations due to advancing globalization and technological developments. The demands on employees are changing as the workplace becomes increasingly dynamic and unpredictable (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013). The internal factors of change which are associated with organizational growth, affect all employees as stakeholders. Employees react differently to change; depending on personal experiences, motivation, socio-demographic factors, knowledge, values and behavior types (Furxhi, Stillo & Teneqexhi, 2016).

Organizational support theory suggests that in order to meet socioemotional needs and assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form a generalized perception regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Studies indicate there is a relationship between perceived organizational support and affective organizational commitment and the level of personal initiative (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008). Employee commitment can be negatively affected by a sense of vulnerability in the wake of change (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008). When employees anticipate direct benefits from an organizational change, perceived organizational support is higher (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Organizational growth is associated with organizational change; both of which affect employees' perception of organization support (Furxhi, Stillo & Teneqexhi, 2016). In turn, there is a relationship between perceived organizational support and employees' personal initiative and commitment (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008).

For the sake of completeness, organizational cynicism, a negative attitude toward the organization, should also be taken into consideration as an influencing factor which affects the interpretation of perceived organizational support. This feeling of dissatisfaction comprises three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization (Dean et al., 1998).

There has been no direct research on the impact of strong organizational growth on personal initiative and commitment. However, as previously mentioned, organizational growth has been associated with organizational change (Furxhi, Stillo & Teneqexhi, (2016). Results from a study done by Iverson (1996) indicate that employee acceptance of organizational change is increased by organizational commitment, job motivation and job satisfaction, among other influencing factors. On the other hand, factors such as role conflict and tenure decrease employee acceptance. Internal demands for organizational change include the internationalization of companies as well as increases in the size and complexity of organizations (Iverson, 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between organizational growth and employees' level of personal initiative and commitment considering perceived organizational support as a mediator. Employees' perceptions of personal initiative and commitment are examined in relation to position (leadership role vs. non-leadership role), job tenure, and intervening human resource management practices.

Literature Review

Organizational Growth

Although there are a variety of approaches used to measure organizational growth, it is essentially a dynamic measure of change over time. The majority of studies identified by Weinzimmer et al. (1998) in a literature review regarding organizational growth used sales revenue as a concept of growth with most of the studies using it as their only measure. Further common concepts for growth measurement include employees and assets (Weinzimmer, Nystrom & Freeman, 1998).

Starbuck (in March, 1967, p. 451) defines organizational growth as "change in an organization's size when size is measured by the organization's membership or employment". For the purpose of this paper, organizational growth is primarily conceptualized as employee growth.

Changes in an organization can affect the balance between inducements (e.g., salary, status, personnel and goals) and contributions such that if employees anticipate negative consequences from changes, they in

turn reduce their contributions to the organization or even leave the organization. However, withdrawals from the organization are not necessarily perceived as undesirable as the organization has the opportunity to hire more compatible employees (Starbuck, 1967).

Personal Initiative

Advancing globalization and technological developments are changing the demands on employees in the workplace as they become increasingly dynamic and unpredictable (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013).

Modern organizations require employees to be flexible and go beyond their role description taking a proactive approach to work by showing personal initiative. They need to actively participate in the workplace rather than passively fulfill assigned tasks (Frese & Fay, 2001).

Career researchers postulate that in contemporary careers, employees will take charge of their personal and career development, relying less on their organizations (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007).

In contrast to most traditional performance concepts which presuppose that outside tasks or goals are assigned and simply taken over by the employee, the concept of personal initiative takes the perspective that individuals can work beyond assigned tasks, develop their own goals, and self-start them (Frese & Fay, 2001). Fay and Frese (2001) show in studies that personal initiative is significantly related to a nomological net of variables based on the related

constructs of environmental supports; knowledge, skills, and cognitive abilities; personality variables and orientations; and behavior and performance. An overview of these variables and their measurements are provided in Figure 1.
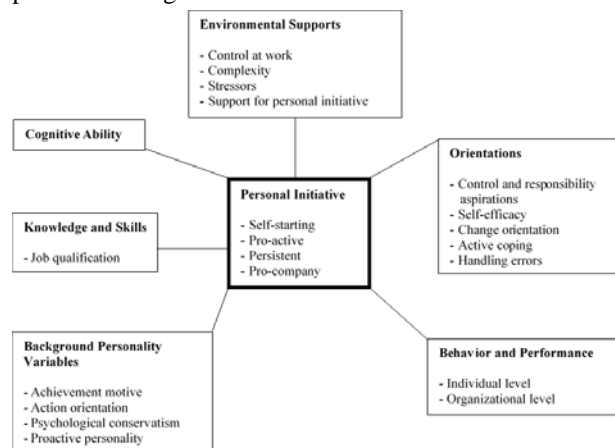

Figure 1. Nomological Net of Personal Initiative. Adapted from "The Concept of Personal Initiative: An Overview of Validity Studies", by D. Fay & M. Frese, 2001, *Human Performance*, 14(1), p. 103.

Personal initiative is a behavior that is characterized by an individual taking an active and self-starting approach to work goals and tasks. There are three aspects of personal initiative; self-starting, proactive, and overcoming barriers, which are related and can co-occur (Fay & Frese, 2000). These are described in detail in Table 1.

Action sequence	Self-starting	Proactive	Overcome barriers
Goals/redefinition of tasks	- Active goal, redefinition	- Anticipate future problems and opportunities and convert into a goal	- Protect goals when frustrated or taxed by complexity
Information collection and prognosis	- Active search, i.e. exploration, active scanning	- Consider potential problem areas and opportunities before they occur	- Maintain search in spite of complexity and negative emotions
Plan and execution	- Active plan	- Back-up plans - Have action plans for opportunities ready	- Overcome barriers - Return to plan quickly when disturbed
Monitoring and feedback	- Self-developed feedback and active search for feedback	- Develop pre-signals for potential problems and opportunities	- Protect feedback search

Table 1. Facets of Personal Initiative. Adapted from "Personal initiative: An active performance concept for work in the 21st century", by M. Frese & D. Fay, 2001, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 23, p. 144.

Studies show that personal initiative is related to a number of desirable outcomes for organizations, such as employee organizational commitment and performance at the individual level and at the collective level, improved organizational performance during times of innovation and change (Hong et al., 2016).

Self-starting involves a person recognizing tasks and independently developing his or her own goals. These goals can be based on an idea developed by the individual or created by taking charge of an existing idea. This proactive action includes anticipating future demands, i.e. new demands, new or recurring problems, and emerging opportunities; and considering how to handle them as well as prevent difficulties (Fay & Frese, 2000). Individuals displaying proactive behavior persevere at overcoming constraints and obstacles, i.e. they tackle them actively and persistently, and as a result are able to change the environment to some extent. In contrast, a passive approach can be described as following orders, quitting in the face of difficulties, and reacting to environmental challenges (Fay & Frese, 2001).

Although personal initiative must be in accordance with overall organizational goals, it suggests a critical aspect towards management as employees' self-starting behavior goes beyond the assigned work role and beyond the boundary of their authority (Fay & Frese, 2000). Individuals with a high level of personal initiative are often perceived as rebellious as they tend to question suggestions and orders by their supervisor as well as the way things are done (Frese & Fay, 2001). Research by Morrison (2006) implies that although employees are breaking the rules, in many cases they have good intentions with regard to the organization, supervisor, work group or customer. Moreover, employees who are motivated not only by increasing their status and influence within the organization, but also by getting along with colleagues, will be able to take initiative with less disturbance in the workplace (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013).

Fay and Frese (2001) postulate that three environmental conditions influence the development of personal initiative. Control at work, complexity of work, and company/supervisor support for personal initiative are proposed to trigger self-started behavior and the ability to overcome barriers.

Preconditions for the ability of an individual to take initiative are job-relevant knowledge, skills, and cognitive abilities. If these factors are wanting, the individual will not be able to identify areas in need of action, analyze problems or develop ideas and solutions. However, personal initiative can result in job-related knowledge and skills as employees who have a long-term perspective on work can anticipate future demands better and take action to prepare for them. Studies show that personal initiative is positively related to job qualifications (Fay & Frese, 2001).

Individual differences in personality indicate cross-situational action tendencies that have a comprehensive influence on behavior. Personality traits such as achievement motivation, action orientation, and level of psychological conservatism drive individuals and thus contribute to personal initiative. Furthermore, the concept of proactive personality can be considered as an influencing factor on work behavior (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

Bateman & Crant (1993, p. 103) define proactive personality as a "relatively stable tendency to effect environmental change". A high score on the proactive personality scale implies that individuals are assumed to grasp opportunities to influence and change their environment. Hence, personal initiative suggests that an individual initiates change which inevitably creates an increase of uncertainty.

Consequently, if individuals are unable to embrace change and uncertainty, they should show a lower level of personal initiative (Fay & Frese, 2001).

In contrast to individual differences in personality, Kanfer (1992) postulates that individual differences in orientations reflect more specific factors that more directly affect personal initiative and work behavior. Fay & Frese (2001) found in studies that personal initiative is related to control aspirations. Taking initiative can be described as one pursuing a self-set, non-assigned goal, which infers personal responsibility for it. Hence, an individual who facilitates organizational change will be held responsible for the outcome in case of failure or negative effects. Furthermore, studies found that self-efficacy is positively related to personal initiative (Fay & Frese, 2001). According to Bandura (1997), a person's belief in their ability to do a certain action directly influences whether or not they will attempt to do it.

With reference to error handling, personal initiative

frequently involves attempting new activities which is associated with the uncertainty of outcomes. Thus, taking initiative is related to the possibility of making errors (Fay & Frese, 2001).

Fay & Frese (2001) used the Error Orientation Questionnaire to determine the attitudes toward errors. Confidence in error handling, risking errors, and low levels of strain due to errors were all significantly related to subjective personal initiative.

Den Hartog & Belschak (2007) examined the relationship between personal initiative and affective commitment at work to determine whether more committed employees are also more likely to show more personal initiative. Meyer et al. (2002, p. 21) define affective organizational commitment as "an emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization". Den Hartog & Belschak (2007) argue that employees are more inclined to show initiative when they feel affectively committed to workplace targets at four different focus levels: organization, supervisor, work-group and career. Moreover, they posit that personal initiative may support employees' goal achievement in all four areas and thus all four are positively related to personal initiative.

According to Hong et al. (2016), organizational climate is associated with the development of employee personal initiative. Organizational climate can be defined as "the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected" (Ostroff et al. 2003, Schneider & Reichers 1983, Schneider et al.2011; as cited in Schneider, Erhart & Macey, 2012, p. 362). As key antecedents of initiative climate, Hong et al. (2016) identified initiative-enhancing HRM systems at the organizational-level and empowering leadership at the departmental-level. The relationships and influencing factors are depicted in the theoretical model in Figure 2.
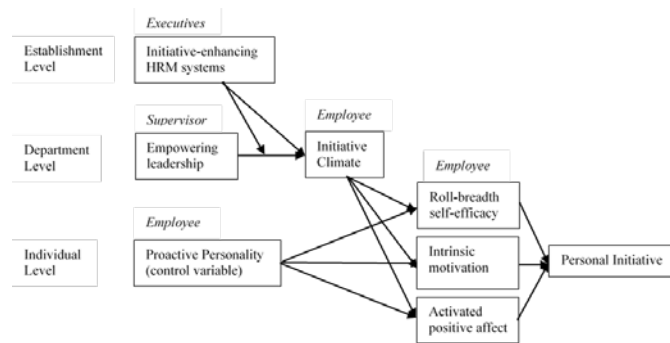

Figure 2. Proposed theoretical model of personal initiative. Adapted from "What it takes to get proactive: An integrative multilevel model of the antecedents of personal initiative", by Y. Hong, H. Liao, S. Raub, & J. H. Han, 2016, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(5), p. 48.

Moreover, they examined the role of these antecedents in fostering initiative climate and employee initiative (Hong et al., 2016). Raub & Liao (2012, p. 653) define initiative climate as "employee shared perceptions of the extent to which self-starting, change-oriented, long-term oriented, and persistent behavior is encouraged and rewarded by management".

Initiative-enhancing HRM systems refer to practices such as selection, training, performance appraisal, and compensation which can be designed to the objective of fostering personal initiative. Selection practices can serve as an initial means to recruit employees with a proactive personality and/or high capacity for taking initiative. Employees' self-efficacy can be strengthened by training practices, which reinforce cross-situational proactive behavior. Furthermore, such proactive behavior can be triggered by rewarding personal initiative through performance appraisal and compensation practices (Hong et al., 2016).

Organizational climate theories imply that employees' proactive behavior is influenced by observing and interacting with their immediate leaders, thus receiving signals as to what is expected and rewarded by the organization (Hong et al., 2016; Martin, Liao, & Campbell, 2013).

Therefore, empowering leadership is essential in fostering initiative taking. Such leaders encourage employees to take responsibility, defy difficulties, and solve problems in a team (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010).

On the individual level, employee personal initiative is

determined by initiative-enhancing HRM systems and empowering leadership including their interactive effects on initiative climate at the departmental level. These organizational variables influence personal initiative through the generation of three proximal individual proactive motivational states, which are described as "can do", "reason to", and "energized to" motivation (Hong et al., 2016).

According to Parker et al. (2010), an individual's strong conviction that they "can do" something is often a prerequisite for taking initiative to either change a situation, self-set higher goals, actively seek feedback, and overcome obstacles. However, a firm belief in one's ability to take initiative is not a sufficient motivational factor and thus must be supported by a compelling "reason to" do so. Hong et al. (2016) suggest that employees' intrinsic motivation or an interest in their work tasks is a valid compelling reason and that initiative climate forms individuals' intrinsic motivation. Finally, in order to achieve the "energized to" motivational state, individuals require activated positive affect (Parker et al., 2010). Activated positive affect refers to emotions such as being excited, active, and enthusiastic which can all be triggered in an initiative climate (Hong et al. 2016).

In a study on individuals' perceptions of work characteristics (job control, complexity, task completeness, inflexibility in task performance), Fay and Kamps (2006) found that individuals with jobs characterized by high complexity, task completeness, and control demonstrated a higher level of personal initiative. Similarly, jobs with motivating characteristics such as high skill variety and high job autonomy are more likely to induce personal initiative (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009).

Chiaburu and Carpenter (2013) examined how intra-individual cognitive-motivational orientations representing getting along (communion striving), getting ahead (status striving), and getting things done (accomplishment striving) predict personal initiative. They found that accomplishment and status striving were positively related to personal initiative; whereas, communion striving was negatively related. Furthermore, status and communion striving were found to interact as predictors of personal initiative whereby personal initiative was highest at high levels of both status and communion striving. The study results indicate that employees motivated to get ahead and achieve greater status and influence are more likely to take initiative than employees who are only more motivated to get along with others.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is important due to the strong motivational implications of commitment. Based on dictionary definitions, commitment in an organizational setting can best be defined as a pledge or promise and the state of being obligated or bound in the sense of intellectual conviction or emotional ties – in other words, the state one arrives at having made a pledge or promise (Brown, 1996).

The definitions of commitment in research are numerous, yet they seem to refer to three comprehensive ideas which are 1) affective attachment to the organization, 2) perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and 3) obligation to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Brown (1996, p. 249) summarizes that organizational commitment "represents dedication to and support of the organization (or referent unit) beyond that associated with job expectations and rewards". Support can be characterized differently depending on the organization and thus must be defined by the specification of terms. For example, terms could be support of goals, ongoing membership, and support of the efforts of other members of the organization or a combination thereof (Brown, 1996).

There are various reasons why organizations want to foster commitment among its employees. Employee commitment can be viewed as a decisive factor in achieving competitive performance. Highly committed employees remain with the organization thus contributing to a low rate of employee turnover and high return on investment in selection, training, and development of employees. On the other hand, a low rate of employee turnover can be viewed as negative if it would be beneficial to bring in new employees with new, innovative ideas (Nehmeh, 2009).

Consequently, organizations may be interested in developing goal commitment but not membership commitment (Brown, 1996).

There are differences in how organizational commitment can be described, whereby two prevalent distinctions have been made between an "attitudinal" and a "behavioral" approach to commitment, and that between an "affective" and a "continuance" commitment concept (Brown, 1996). However, the

dominant approach to organizational commitment has been Meyer and Allen's three-component concept (Cohen, 2007). Meyer and Allen (1991, p. 61) argue that "commitment, as a psychological state, has at least three separable components reflecting (a) a desire (affective commitment), (b) a need (continuance commitment), and (c) an obligation (normative commitment) to maintain employment in an organization".

The attitudinal approach pertains to the development of commitment through some combination of work experiences, organizational perceptions (congruency of values and goals with those of the organization), and personal characteristics that result in positive feelings about the organization; and ultimately commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). According to the behavioral approach, employees' feeling of commitment is a result of engaging in committing behaviors such as a company-specific retirement program, accrual of leave time, and tenure; (Brown, 1996). In other words, it refers to the process by which employees become "stuck" in a certain organization and how they handle their situation (Mowday et al., 1982). Figure 3 illustrates the structure of organizational commitment typology.
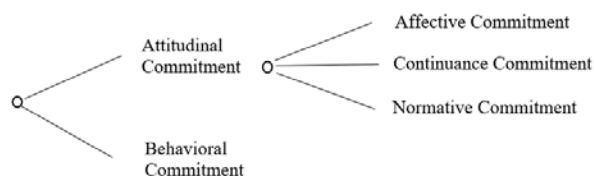

Figure 3. Organizational Commitment Typology. Adapted from "Organizational commitment: Clarifying the concept and simplifying the existing construct typology", by R. B. Brown, 1996, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 49(3), p. 232.

Affective commitment has been defined within the attitudinal framework as "a set of strong, positive attitudes toward the organization manifested by dedication to goals and a shared sense of values" (Brown, 1996 p. 231). It has also been described as the extent to which an individual identifies with or is involved with a certain organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Meyer and Allen (1991, p. 67) suggest that affective commitment is related to an individual's "emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization", hence employees

want to continue employment with the organization.

In contrast, continuance commitment refers to an individual's loyalty to an organization and its continued existence as a result of required investments and/or sacrifices in the organization, thus hindering the individual in leaving. In other words, continuance commitment is the tendency of an individual to stay with the organization because of the perceived costs of leaving (Brown, 1996).

This psychological state reflects an employee's need to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

A third type of attitudinal commitment is normative commitment. It pertains to an individual's felt sense of obligation that forces them to act a certain way – they feel they ought to remain with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This type of commitment can be described as the entirety of inherent normative pressures to take a certain course of action in line with organizational goals and interests (Wiener, 1982).

All types considered, attitudinal commitment can be described as a combination of a state of positive obligation to an organization and a state of obligation as a consequence of past actions. Conversely, this state of commitment implies an individual's obligation to act in a certain way to fulfill the terms of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Wiener, 1982).

Mowday et al. (1979) argue that the terms of commitment in an organizational setting comprise a willingness to stay with the organization, dedication to organizational goals and interests, and willingness to invest effort in achievement of those goals through job-related behaviors.

Brown (1996) argues that the aforementioned concepts form a typology of organizational commitment that can be eliminated and replaced by a singular concept of commitment. Specifically, he argues that commitment to an organization is a distinct phenomenon that may vary depending on an individual's perception and evaluation of certain factors regardless of type of commitment. All commitments have in common that they have an entity such as a person or group of people to which the commitment is made. Furthermore, all commitments involve some notion of terms that define what is required to uphold the commitment.

Rather than there being different types of organizational commitment, Brown (1996) takes the approach that there are specific influencing factors that define organizational commitment. These factors are an

underlying commitment to an entity including some understanding of terms, the strength of the commitment associated with an individual's continuous evaluation of the commitment and the subsequent effects of past events, experiences or reasons behind the commitment, as well as current perceptions and attitudes about the commitment. In summary, commitments can change and there can be more than one commitment to an organization that also can be evaluated differently.

In line with this approach, Meyer and Allen (1991) consider affective, continuance, and normative commitment to be components of commitment rather than types as they can occur simultaneously to varying degrees and interact to influence behavior.

There are differences in the antecedents of the three components of commitment. In general, the antecedents of affective commitment can be categorized as personal characteristics, structural characteristics, job-related characteristics, and work experiences (Mowday et al., 1982).

With regard to personal characteristics, demographic characteristics such as age, tenure, gender, and educational background have been associated with commitment, yet they are inconclusive and the interpretation of observed correlations is questionable. In contrast, moderate correlations have been shown between commitment and personality traits such as need for achievement, affiliation and autonomy; work ethic, locus of control, and a fundamental interest in work (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

There is limited research on the links between organizational characteristics and commitment. However, some studies have indicated that affective commitment is associated with the distribution of decision-making competencies and defined policy and procedure (Brooke, Russel, & Price, 1988; Morris & Steers, 1980; as cited in Meyer & Allen, 1991). Other studies have shown that characteristics such as organizational dependability and leadership to be significant predictors of organizational commitment (Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak, 1974; Steers, 1977; as cited in Glisson & Durick, 1988). In a study done by Glisson & Durick (1988), findings show further support that organization age, due to its implications for organizational dependability, and leadership have the strongest impact on organizational commitment.

Meyer & Allen (1991) assume that commitment is a consequence of employee satisfaction and value congruency. These work experience variables can be categorized as those that satisfy the need to feel comfortable in the organization and those that contribute to the perception of job competency. Relevant work experience variables which have been found to correlate to affective commitment include confirmation of pre-entry expectations (Blau 1988; Meyer & Allen, 1988), equity in reward distribution (Lee 1971; Ogilvie 1986; Rhodes & Steers, 1981) organizational dependability (Buchanan, 1974; Meyer & Allen, 1987, 1988; Steers, 1977), organizational support (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutschinson, & Sowa, 1986), role clarity and freedom from conflict (Blau 1988; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Jamal 1984; Morris & Koch 1979; Podsakoff et al., 1986), and supervisor consideration (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Glisson & Durick 1988; Morris & Sherman 1981; Stone & Porter, 1975). The competence-related experiences included accomplishment (Angle & Perry, 1983), autonomy (Colarelli, Dean, & Konstans, 1987; DeCotiis & Summers, 1987), fairness of performance-based rewards (Brooke et al., 1988; Curry, Wakefield, Price & Mueller, 1986), job challenge (Buchanan, 1974; Meyer & Allen, 1987, 1988), job scope (Blau 1987; Buchanan, 1974; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Pierce & Dunham, 1987; Steers & Spencer, 1977), opportunity for self-expression (Meyer & Allen, 1988), participation in decision making (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Rhodes & Steers, 1981), and personal importance to the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977).

All variables that increase the perceived costs related with leaving the organization can be considered antecedents of continuance commitment. The most significant variables based on theoretical arguments rather than empirical evidence are investments and the availability of alternatives. Most research findings are inconsistent due to the individual nature of perceived costs. The procedure of correlating proxy variables, such as age and tenure, are based on the assumptions that the number of investments increases over time. This assumption may be counteracted by the acquisition of transferable skills during longer tenure which employees can leverage. Therefore, there is no general consensus whether age and tenure should be considered antecedents of continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

With regard to normative commitment, there is a lack of

empirical evidence to explain its development. Some researchers postulate that employees may feel obligated to "repay" the organization for advance rewards or costs incurred in providing employment and do so by committing themselves to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Scholl, 1981).

Commitment can be expressed in both positive and negative terms depending on how the commitment is evaluated and developed by the individual. It is possible for individuals to be committed to their organization and either feel positive (feeling good or a sense of meaning) or negative (feeling of being stuck in a situation with no way out without negative consequences) about it. This can be attributed to differences in the development process, i.e. two individuals may initially develop positive senses of commitment, but come to evaluate them differently as a result of subsequent experiences or changing circumstances and attitudes (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

According to Brickman (1987), commitment inherently comprises both a positive, "want to" element and a negative, "have to" element and that the two are interrelated, whereby one or the other can dominate one's perspective. If positive elements are predominant, the resulting commitment is characterized by "enthusiasm". In contrast, the commitment is characterized by "persistence" when negative elements are dominant.

The most prevalent measure of affective commitment has been the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire developed by Mowday et al. (1979), which is a 15-item scale implemented to determine employees' acceptance of organizational values, willingness to expend effort, and intention to remain a member of the organization.

Organizational Support Theory and Perceived Organizational Support

Organizational support theory (OST) suggests that in order to meet socioemotional needs and assess the benefits of increased work effort, employees form a generalized perception regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Meta-analyses research on organizational support theory done by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and later by Riggle, Edmondson, and Hansen (2009) show evidence that perceived organizational support (POS) is related to the dominant hypothesized antecedents of POS (fairness, human resource practices, and supervisor support), attitudinal outcomes (affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction), and job performance. Moreover, POS has important implications for leadership, organizational context, positive feelings toward the organization, and employee well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Organizational support theory contends that POS is contingent upon employees' attributions with regard to the organization's intentions behind their treatment, whether it be positive or negative. The reciprocal effect is that POS activates a social exchange process characterized by employees' felt obligation to support the organization in achieving its goals and employees' anticipation of greater rewards in return for their increased efforts on behalf of the organization. Consequently, POS should increase when employees attribute favorable treatment to the organization's positive opinion of them (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli & Lynch, 1997) and when they receive individual benefits (Gouldner, 1960).

Organizational support theory effectuates social exchange theory where employment is of reciprocal nature, i.e. there is a trade-off. Specifically, employees offer effort and loyalty for tangible benefits and social resources from the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Consequently, employees with high POS should expend increased job-related efforts with subsequent increase in both in-role and extra-role job performance. The resulting felt obligation of employees toward the organization has been found to be positively associated with affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades, 2001). Employee status is regarded to be a source of both tangible benefits and intangible resources (assets) in organizations. The higher the status an employee enjoys, the more resources and power they will receive (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; as cited in Lee & Jueng, 2018). A study incorporating status theory confirmed the moderating role of employees' status in explaining the relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment; and showed that the degree of the indirect effect of POS was dependent on the level of status (Lee & Jueng, 2018). A review of international and cross-cultural studies between 2000-2010 using Eisenberger's (1986) survey of perceived organizational support showed that the relationship between POS and affective commitment was strong and positive, although the antecedents of POS may differ within different

cultures. These findings imply that the norm of reciprocity and the influence of POS on employees' organizational commitment is also valid in a global context and are thus of particular interest to multinational organizations given continuous globalization trends (Baran, Rhoades Shanock & Miller, 2012).

Social exchange theory describes one component of organizational support theory. Another important component is the self-enhancement process which is characterized by the fulfillment of socioemotional needs such as approval, esteem, affiliation, and emotional support. Self-enhancement processes invoke organizational identification which in turn may lead to affective organizational commitment through the development of shared values and stronger relationships with members of the organization (Kurtessis, 2017; Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006).

As potential antecedents of POS, Kurtessis et al. (2017) identified treatment by organization members, employee-organization relationship quality, and human resource practices, as well as job conditions. They found in their meta-analysis of variables with regard to treatment by organization members that supervisor support was most strongly related to POS, while the relationship to coworker support was somewhat weaker and team support only moderately related. These results can be attributed to the fact that supervisors and others in leadership roles have a more powerful role when it comes to providing organizational rewards and resources to employees (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). On the other hand, Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2006) research findings suggest that supervisors who feel supported by the organization will be more inclined to provide their subordinates with more supportive treatment, i.e. they play an intermediary role between the organization and employees. Thus, subordinates perceived supervisor support was found to be positively related to their POS.

Leader consideration and transformational leadership were also found to be strongly related to POS, whereas transactional leadership was found to have a less than moderate relationship. Therefore, the extent to which a leader is supportive and shows concern for subordinates' well-being as well as the extent to which a style of leadership fulfills socioemotional needs has a strong influence on POS. Finally, an equally strong relationship was found between leader-member exchange and POS, as was found with leader consideration and transformational leadership (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Employee-organization relationship quality refers to contextual factors such as value congruency, psychological contracts (obligations to employees), fairness of treatment, and perceived organizational politics. Value congruency and fairness of treatment were both found to be strongly related to POS and the relationship with fulfillment of psychological contracts was still strong, but somewhat weaker than the other factors. In contrast, breach of psychological contracts and perceived organizational politics were found to be strongly and negatively related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Human resource practices and job conditions (work role characteristics and working conditions), for example job security, flexible work practices, family supportive work practices, and developmental opportunities, involve organizational efforts to create a pleasant work environment and good work-life balance. Only developmental opportunities were found to be strongly related to POS. Job security was moderately related to POS and flexible work practices as well as perceptions of family supportive organizational practices were related, but much less so. The weakest correlations may be attributed to the difference in needs among employees and thus difference in perceived benefits of certain working conditions. Job enrichment conditions such as job autonomy and participation in decision making were both found to be strongly related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

To examine the relative importance of supervisor support, fairness, and dispositional affectivity as antecedents of POS, Kurtessis et al. (2017) determined correlations from their meta-analysis as well as from other meta-analyses and found that fairness perceptions emerged as the strongest predictor of POS with supervisor support and negative affectivity having less of effect on POS.

The outcomes of POS fall into three categories: positive orientation toward the organization and work, subjective well-being, and behavioral outcomes.

With regard to orientation toward the organization and work the following variables were considered in a meta-analysis from Kurtessis et al. (2017): economic and social exchange, trust, felt obligation and normative commitment, performance-reward expectancy, organizational identification, affective organizational

commitment, and job involvement were considered. The results showed that POS was positively related to all variables except economic exchange. The strongest relationships were found with regard to social exchange, felt obligation, affective commitment and trust in the organization and management. The least significant positive relationships were determined concerning performance-reward expectancy and job involvement (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Baran, Rhoades Shanock and Miller (2012) found there to be an increased interest in employee well-being in organizational research in the decade prior to their review. This can partially be attributed to consideration of the effects on employees of meeting the demands of global economy (Macik-Frey et al., 2007). Subjective well-being refers to factors such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, job self-efficacy, organizationally-based self-esteem, stress, and work-family balance/conflict. The meta-analytic results showed that POS was strongly related to job satisfaction and organizationally-based self-esteem; moderately related to work-family balance, and weakly related to job self-efficacy. In contrast, POS was negatively related to stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and work-family conflict (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Research on employee well-being illustrates the function of POS as buffering these negative relationships between employee-felt stressors and employee well-being (Baran, Rhoades Shanock & Miller, 2012).

Behavioral outcomes of POS include effort, in-role performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors, and withdrawal activities (absenteeism, tardiness, intention to stay, job search behavior, turnover intentions, turnover) (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Kurtessis et al. (2017) suggest that by accommodating employees' socioemotional needs, POS increases identification with the organization, which in turn leads to a higher level of affective organizational commitment. Furthermore, factors such as felt obligation and reciprocal reward expectation induce greater effort in job activities which leads to both enhanced in-role and extra-role performance and reduction of negative behaviors.

Chen et al. (2009) found that POS was positively related to temporal change in extra-role performance. The results of their studies support the notion that POS leads to extra-role performance, and not the other way around. The results from the meta-analysis for

behavioral outcomes show that POS is positively related to effort on behalf of the organization, in-role performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors directed toward the organizational. Moreover, POS is negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors based on the negative reciprocity norm (i.e. adverse treatment evokes vindictive behavior). With regard to withdrawal activities, POS was found to be positively related to intention to stay, negatively related to turnover intentions, absenteeism, job search behavior, and turnover; and unrelated to tardiness (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Caesens et al. (2016) examined the causal relationship between POS and proactive behavior directed toward the organization and suggest that POS is an antecedent of proactive behavior toward the organization. They contend that the relationship is based on social exchange and the norm of reciprocity in that a high level of perceived organizational support results from felt obligation to compensate positive treatment by the organization with proactive treatment toward the organization. Caesens et al. (2016) argue that felt obligation is a fundamental mechanism in the relationship between POS and employees' proactive behaviors. In a three-wave longitudinal survey they were able to show that POS is positively and significantly correlated with proactive behavior directed towards the organization and that felt obligation and work engagement are positively associated with proactive behavior.

Organizational Cynicism

By virtue of its implications for organizational support theory, it is paramount to acknowledge the concept of organizational cynicism. Moreover, research on cynicism implies that it is a potentially valuable construct in organizational behavior in that relationships between cynicism and work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, interpersonal relations, and job motivation have been found (Andersson, 1996).

Research suggests that organizational cynicism results from breach of the psychological contract between employer and employee. Anderson (1996) categorizes such contract breaches in those that refer to characteristics of the business environment (unfair compensation policies, unethical behavior) or organization (poor change management, lack of communication); or to the nature of the job (role

ambiguity, work overload).

Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998, p. 345) define organizational cynicism as follows: "Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect". This multidimensional conception of cynicism is characterized by the three components – beliefs, affect, and behavioral tendencies – and is thus consistent with attitude theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hilgard, 1980; Smith, 1947: as cited in Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998). For the purpose of this paper, cynicism will not be examined as a personality trait, but rather as a dynamic aspect of people that is directed toward their organization. However, it is significant to note that empirically, personality cynicism is the strongest predictor of organizational cynicism (Abraham, 2000).

With regard to the belief that the organization lacks integrity, organizational cynics believe that the actions of their organization lack such principles as fairness, honesty, and sincerity. They may see hidden motives behind certain actions, believe that organizational decisions are based on self-interest and expect deception rather than honesty from the organization. The affective dimension of organizational cynicism comprises emotional reactions to the attitude object – i.e., the organization (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: as cited in Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998). Specifically, these negative emotions can be a feeling of contempt for or anger toward the organization; and feelings of distress, disgust, and shame when thinking about the organization. Finally, organizational cynics tend to display negative or even disparaging behavior. This can be expressed through strong criticism of the organization in the form of explicit statements or more subtly through sarcastic humor or general pessimism directed at organizational actions (Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998).

Earlier research on organizational cynicism shows that the expression of cynical attitudes is usually directed toward supervisors or senior management as representatives or agents of the organization (Reichers & Wanous, 1997), which is consistent with further research findings indicating that organizational cynicism anticipates hopelessness, frustration, disillusionment, and distrust directed toward those who have the power to distribute rewards and punishment – i.e., supervisors and senior management (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). Other studies identified role overload, unfulfilled promises (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993), high levels of role conflict, and limited autonomy to be predictors of organizational cynicism (Naus, van Iterson & Roe, 2007).

Byrne and Hochwarter (2007) examined the linear and non-linear implications of organizational cynicism on the POS-performance relationship and considered the circumstance that employees may simultaneously show a high level of both organizational cynicism and perceived support. The norm of reciprocity explains the relationship that organizations expect high levels of performance in return for its attention to employees' socioemotional needs through support. Yet organizational support is not always considered positive in that employees with high organizational cynicism can develop negative affect resulting in distrust, i.e. they question the organization's motives (Dean et al., 1998; Abraham, 2000).

Their studies confirmed that the relationship between POS and performance was consistently non-linear for employees reporting high levels of organizational cynicism across source of performance ratings (supervisor), dimension of performance (in-role, extra-role, effort), and sample characteristic (mixed group or specific occupation group). The results indicate that increased POS does not necessarily facilitate performance improvement, but is rather dependent on moderators. The presumption that the development of POS and organizational cynicism is associated with the interaction between these constructs can only be confirmed to a certain extent due to the inability to establish the progressive nature of constructs or explain the development of perceptions. However, the results imply that those reporting high organizational cynicism may negatively interpret levels of POS (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2007).

Employee commitment can be negatively affected by a sense of vulnerability in the wake of change (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008). Organizational growth is associated with organizational change; both of which affect employees' perception of organization support. Studies suggest that organizational change efforts tend to be more successful when employees receive support during change initiatives (Mintzberg & Westley, 1992; Mohrman et al., 1989; Schalk et al., 1998; as cited in

Weber & Weber, 2001). Organizational cynicism expressed as a sense of betrayal and pessimism experienced by employees can be attributed to the observation of failed change initiatives. Moreover, employees who are more cynical toward organizational change display negative attitudes such as low perception of valuable intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, low motivation to exert change initiatives, and low personal success expectations (Wanous et al., 1994; as cited in Andersson, 1996).

Research Questions & Methods

From the extensive literature review the author has identified several influencing factors and aspects of personal initiative and commitment that may be measured by the surveys described in the following. Some exemplary factors and aspects are increased work effort, integrity of the organization, proactive behavior, control (e.g. decision making, autonomy), error handling, initiative enhancing HRM systems, positive attitudes toward the organization, and work experience variables (e.g. feeling comfortable in the organization, perception of job competency). The organizational growth process as a form of change can affect the balance between inducements (e.g., salary, status, personnel and goals) and contributions. The effects of growth on employees' attitudes and behaviors can be measured by comparing surveys conducted over a period of eight years.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses have been developed.:

Hypothesis 1: The level of employee commitment to the organization is role-dependent. Employees in leadership roles have a higher level of POS and consequently are more committed to the organization.

Hypothesis 2: Strong organizational growth reduces the level of POS and consequently the level of employees' commitment regardless of their role.

Hypothesis 3: Employees with longer job tenure show higher levels of commitment regardless of their role.

Hypothesis 4: The negative effects of strong organizational growth on employees' personal initiative can be mitigated by increased POS.

Methodology

The objective of the empirical part is to validate the theoretical assumptions about the different levels of perceived organizational support (POS) with regard to

employees in leadership and non-leadership roles considering POS as a mediator of personal initiative and commitment. Furthermore, the author will examine the impact of organizational growth on levels of personal initiative and commitment over a time period of eight years during which the company has experienced strong growth and within one specific department whose size has increased by almost 30% within two years.

The data from four company-wide quantitative surveys as well as two department specific quantitative surveys will serve as the basis for this empirical research.

The surveys were performed at a midsize German company in the chemical industry with about 800 employees. The company has experienced strong growth over the past eight years, but particularly over the past five years during which staff has doubled.

The author analyzed data from four quantitative surveys which have been collected for the company between 2012 and 2018 by an external organization.

The surveys offer a comprehensive assessment of organizational development by measuring employee perceptions, e.g. with regard to workplace culture and assessing management practices.

The target group for this research were all employees at every company location. The size of the target group differs from 289 to 666 depending on the survey year due to organizational growth.

Employees rated the company as a whole or all managers that are relevant to their work (i.e., team leader to top manager) on a bipolar 5-item Likert-type scale with scale point anchors labeled (1) almost always untrue, (2) often untrue, (3) sometimes untrue/sometimes true, (4) often true, and (5) almost always true.

Data regarding gender, ethnicity, type of employment and education were excluded from the analysis to ensure the anonymity of the participants in the survey. However, the demographic structure of the samples from each survey does not differ substantially over time.

In 2012, 80 % of all employees completed the questionnaire. The sample comprised 67% non-management staff (without vocational trainees) and 29% management staff (manager/supervisor, executive/senior manager).

Survey participation dropped by 8% in 2014 to 72%. The ratio of staff/non-management to management was 73% to 26%.

The participation quota for the 2016 survey increased

slightly to 76%. Seventy-two percent of all respondents belonged to the job category staff/non-management and 24% were employees in a management position.

In the most recent survey performed in 2018, participation dropped again to 71%. The percentages for each job category remained largely the same as the previous year with just a small shift of 1-2% - in summary: non-management staff 71%, employees in management positions 25%.

Organizational commitment was operationalized by a 23-item questionnaire comprising a selection of items from the external survey based on the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) and the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS). The SPOS was developed to better understand organizational commitment processes and certain facets of commitment. The OCQ, which was created by Mowday, Steers & Porter in 1979, provides a general measure of commitment.

Exemplary items for the organizational commitment measure include statements such as 'I want to work here for a long time', 'I would recommend the company as an employer to good acquaintances' and 'We have special and unique benefits here'.

The author used the statistic software IBM SPSS Statistics for data analysis. The statistical techniques of an Independent Samples t Test, descriptive statistics and frequencies were utilized in the analysis.

Descriptive statistics for all relevant variables in each of the surveys were calculated to describe the basic features of the data. Specifically, the mean was calculated to measure central tendency and standard deviation to measure dispersion.

An Independent Samples t Test was conducted for all four surveys to compare means for the groups Staff/Non-Management and Management/Supervisor; and to determine the statistical significance of the survey results. A significance level of $\alpha <.05$ is assumed in all analyses.

Hypothesis 1: The level of employee commitment to the organization is role-dependent. Employees in leadership roles have a higher level of POS and consequently are more committed to the organization.

Empirical results

The evaluation of the mean results in Table 2 shows that there is no noteworthy difference between the two groups Staff/Non-Management and Management/Super-

visor on any of the four surveys.

The data from the Independent Samples t Test for survey 2012 show that the survey results for the 23 variables are largely statistically nonsignificant with three exceptions. Regarding the variables 'Promotions go to those who best deserve them' and 'People look forward to coming to work here' the test shows that the results are highly significant with $p = .001$ and $p = .009$ respectively. For the third variable 'I am able to make the best use of my abilities here' the test indicates statistical significance at $p = .041$.

Survey 2014 shows similar results from the t test with largely statistically nonsignificant results. As in 2012, there are a few exceptions with the results for some variables showing statistical significance: 'My work has special meaning: this is not "just a job"', $p = .024$; 'People here are given a lot of responsibility', $p = .045$; and 'I feel I make a difference here', $p = .015$. The results for the following variables show high statistical significance: 'People look forward to coming to work here', $p = .009$ and 'We have special and unique benefits here' $p = .002$.

The t Test for survey 2016 also reveals partial statistical significance of the data. Three variables show high significance with the following values: 'My work has special meaning: this is not "just a job"', $p = .003$; 'I feel I make a difference here', $p = .002$; and 'I am able to make the best use of my abilities here', $p = .008$. An additional three variables indicate statistical significance at a somewhat lower level: 'Management shows appreciation for good work and extra effort', $p = .043$; 'Management recognizes honest mistakes as part of doing business', $p = .047$; and 'People look forward to coming to work here', $p = .035$.

Finally, the 2018 survey contains the most statistically significant data showing p-values $<.05$ for 12 of 23 variables. The p-values for nine variables can be considered to be highly significant. In summary these are: 'My work has special meaning: this is not "just a job"', $p < .001$; 'Management recognizes honest mistakes as part of doing business', $p = .006$; 'Management genuinely seeks and responds to suggestions and ideas', $p = .003$; 'Promotions go to those who best deserve them', $p < .001$; 'People look forward to coming to work here', $p = .002$; 'We have special and unique benefits here', $p = .004$; 'Management is honest and ethical in its business practices', $p = .004$; 'I feel I make a difference here', $p < .001$; and 'I am able to make the best use of my

abilities here', $p < .001$. Furthermore, the remaining three variables 'People here are willing to give extra to get the job done', 'Management involves people in decisions that affect their jobs or work environment' and 'I can highly recommend our products and services' are statistically significant at p-values of .045, .019, and .039 respectively.

Only the data from the variable 'People look forward to coming to work here' consistently showed statistically

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Relevant Variables 2012-2018

Variable		2012			2014			2016			2018		
		n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
I am given the resources and equipment to do my job.	staff/non-management	147	4.27	0.822	203	4.38	0.724	254	4.42	0.738	316	4.46	0.696
	manager/ supervisor	56	4.21	0.731	65	4.32	0.752	79	4.49	0.766	103	4.54	0.638
People here are willing to give extra to get the job done.	staff/non-management	147	4.17	0.753	203	4.19	0.688	253	4.04	0.741	314	4.08*	0.767
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.18	0.710	65	4.12	0.761	79	4.14	0.812	104	4.25*	0.747
Management makes its expectations clear.	staff/non-management	147	3.98	0.798	203	3.97	0.875	253	3.85	0.903	316	3.82*	0.969
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.86	0.854	65	3.95	0.909	79	3.85	0.921	104	3.87	0.801
I am offered training or development to further myself professionally.	staff/non-management	146	3.75	1.160	195	3.73	1.109	246	3.85	1.163	312	3.90	1.170
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.91	1.023	65	3.86	1.102	79	4.06	1.147	104	4.02	1.123
Management shows appreciation for good work and extra effort.	staff/non-management	148	3.94	0.942	204	3.91	0.937	252	3.71*	1.078	315	3.84	1.057
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.98	0.954	65	3.97	1.015	79	3.99*	0.913	104	4.01	0.876
People here are paid fairly for the work they do.	staff/non-management	147	3.16	1.086	201	3.25	1.086	252	3.13	0.926	313	3.48	0.937
	manager/ supervisor	56	3.23	1.044	65	3.08	1.065	78	3.10	1.088	104	3.60	0.909
My work has special meaning: this is not "just a job".	staff/non-management	149	3.98	0.962	203	4.02*	0.895	251	3.68**	1.071	312	3.63**	0.973
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.32	0.929	65	4.31*	0.883	78	4.08**	0.908	104	4.05**	0.949
Management recognizes honest mistakes as part of doing business.	staff/non-management	148	4.05	0.855	205	4.09	0.838	253	3.97*	1.003	314	3.96**	0.875
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.18	0.710	65	4.20	0.795	77	4.22*	0.868	104	4.23**	0.791
Management genuinely seeks and responds to suggestions and ideas.	staff/non-management	148	3.98	0.907	202	4.03	0.889	251	3.87	1.020	312	3.85**	0.981
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.95	0.915	64	4.11	0.893	75	4.12	0.885	104	4.17**	0.864
When I look at what we accomplish, I feel a sense of pride.	staff/non-management	148	4.22	0.804	199	4.32	0.714	253	4.29	0.887	314	4.25	0.842
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.33	0.787	65	4.38	0.764	76	4.46	0.756	103	4.41	0.785

Management trusts people to do a good job without watching over their shoulders.	staff/non-management	148	4.23	0.817	204	4.07	0.957	254	4.10	0.960	316	4.22	0.928
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.12	0.888	65	4.05	1.082	78	4.31	0.795	104	4.26	0.812
Management involves people in decisions that affect their jobs or work environment.	staff/non-management	146	3.76	0.971	204	3.69	0.941	253	3.60	1.048	316	3.51*	1.085
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.72	0.940	65	3.77	1.057	78	3.69	0.887	104	3.79*	0.972
People here are given a lot of responsibility.	staff/non-management	148	3.87	0.971	202	3.96*	0.945	251	3.97	0.983	316	4.07	0.887
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.12	0.983	65	4.23*	0.932	78	4.15	0.854	104	4.24	0.818
Promotions go to those who best deserve them.	staff/non-management	130	3.62**	0.893	171	3.60	0.997	221	3.39	1.093	279	3.34**	0.995
	manager/ supervisor	53	4.08**	0.805	60	3.78	0.958	76	3.64	1.016	97	3.78**	0.927
People look forward to coming to work here.	staff/non-management	147	3.97	0.785	200	4.02*	0.709	251	4.04*	0.801	312	4.07**	0.725
	manager/ supervisor	56	4.29	0.653	63	4.29*	0.682	77	4.26*	0.715	104	4.32**	0.579
I'm proud to tell others I work here.	staff/non-management	148	4.22	0.856	203	4.27	0.918	253	4.27	0.939	313	4.25	0.930
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.23	0.926	64	4.41	0.886	78	4.46	0.833	104	4.44	0.761
We have special and unique benefits here.	staff/non-management	146	3.49	0.970	201	3.75*	1.044	248	3.58	1.088	311	3.63**	1.073
	manager/ supervisor	57	3.21	1.161	65	3.26*	1.149	79	3.41	1.171	104	3.26**	1.199
Management is honest and ethical in its business practices.	staff/non-management	144	4.19	0.813	196	4.24	0.816	243	4.21	0.857	305	4.19**	0.865
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.35	0.790	64	4.42	0.708	78	4.28	0.851	103	4.47**	0.654
I want to work here for a long time.	staff/non-management	147	4.01	0.940	204	4.12	0.888	253	4.14	0.965	312	4.17	0.924
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.23	0.866	64	4.31	0.794	77	4.36	0.776	103	4.34	0.774
I feel I make a difference here.	staff/non-management	149	4.04	0.845	201	4.07*	0.822	251	4.09**	0.901	315	4.12**	0.815
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.19	0.934	64	4.36*	0.824	78	4.44**	0.766	102	4.45**	0.766
I would recommend the company as an employer to good acquaintances.	staff/non-management	148	4.06	0.875	203	4.12	1.029	253	4.08	0.999	313	4.14	1.006
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.21	0.995	65	4.23	0.965	78	4.18	1.029	103	4.20	1.004
I am able to make the best	staff/non-management	147	3.97*	0.929	202	4.00	0.855	252	3.92**	1.004	314	3.93**	0.957

		n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
use of my abilities here.	manager/ supervisor	57	4.26*	0.835	65	4.22	0.927	79	4.25**	0.869	104	4.33**	0.794
I can highly recommend our products and services.	staff/non-management	142	4.52	0.568	201	4.60	0.585	248	4.56	0.633	309	4.57	0.649
	manager/ supervisor	57	4.67	0.546	64	4.73	0.445	78	4.62	0.629	103	4.72	0.513

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

significant results over all four surveys.

There is insufficient evidence from the survey data to prove the hypothesis and the null cannot be rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Strong organizational growth reduces the level of POS and consequently the level of employees' commitment regardless of their role.

In order to compare results for the two groups over time, the descriptive statistics tool was used to calculate the overall mean for each group and each survey year from the sum. The results provide no evidence in support of this hypothesis. There is not only nearly no difference between the groups for each year, but also only a negligible difference over time. Table 3 illustrates these results.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Overall Means for Groups 2012-2018

	2012		2014		2016		2018	
	n	M	n	M	n	M	n	M
staff/non-management	149	3.98	204	4.00	254	3.95	316	3.98
manager/ supervisor	57	4.08	65	4.08	79	4.11	104	4.16

Hypothesis 3: Employees with longer job tenure show higher levels of commitment regardless of their role.

To further examine the impact of growth on commitment, overall means were calculated for the two groups Staff/Non-management and Management/ Supervisor in relation to job tenure. The results show consistent decreases in mean scores for Staff/Non-management with an employment period between 2-5 years with a further drop at 6-10 years for all four surveys. The mean scores consistently increase again for Staff/Non-management who have been with the company for 11-15 years; however, the increase in 2018 is not quite as prevalent.

The results for the Management/Supervisor are not as consistent. However, the mean scores follow a similar pattern for 2014 and 2018. The results for 2012 and 2016 do show fluctuations depending on tenure, yet

they do not follow the same consistent pattern as can be observed for the Staff/Non-management group. The results are visualized in Figures 4 and 5.
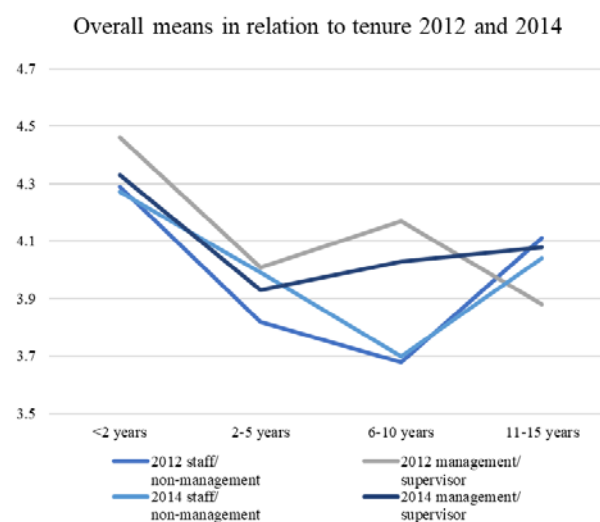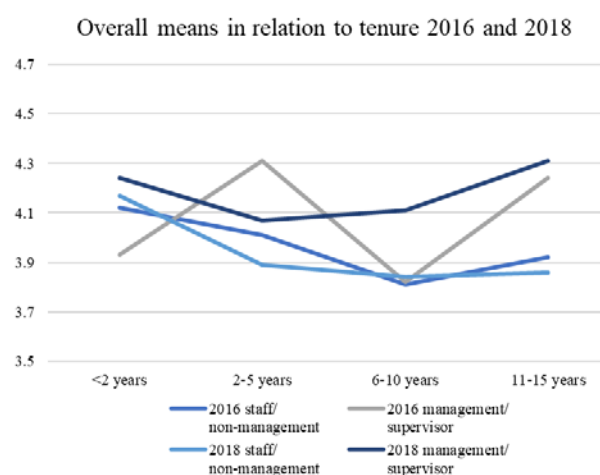
Figure 4

Overall means in relation to tenure 2012 and 2014

Figure 5

Overall means in relation to tenure 2016 and 2018

The results provide insufficient evidence to support the hypothesis. For the most part, there are higher scores for the group with a tenure of 11-15 years when comparing to the groups with 2-5 years and 6-10 years' tenure.

However, in 2012 and 2014 the mean values for the group with a tenure of less than 2 years were consistently higher for both Staff/Non-management and Management/Supervisor. Perhaps this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the first one to two years can be considered the honeymoon phase in a new job. According to Brooks (2019), job satisfaction and employees interest levels drop in the second year of employment. Employees may at this point come to the realization that their job expectations have not been met.

A further quantitative survey was performed in July 2019 and repeated in March 2020. The aim of the survey was to inquire about employees' opinion and behavior concerning personal initiative. After implementing certain measures within the department, the aim of the second survey was to determine whether the measures had any effect on employees' opinion and behavior.

The target group was a selection of employees within a specific department. The selection was made to form a homogenous group based on role descriptions.

The survey questionnaire comprises 24 questions directed at the topics responsibility, feedback/error culture, competency, openness, trust and motivation. In addition, one open question referring to rules and processes was included.

No socio-demographic variables were included in the survey to ensure the anonymity of the participants since the sample size was relatively small.

The first survey was sent to 55 employees, of which 47 respondents completed the full questionnaire. In other words, 85% of the recipients responded to the survey. Due to employee turnover, the second survey was only sent to 52 employees. Employees hired during the time period between July 2019 and March 2020 were excluded from the survey for meaningful comparability. Of the 52 recipients, 44 completed the survey. Therefore, participation on both surveys remained equal at 85%.

During the nine-month period between the two surveys four culture workshops were held on personal initiative and responsibility in order to determine which workplace aspects influence the level of personal initiative and the willingness to take on responsibility. The workshop groups were formed from a representative cross-section of 5-10 employees. Conclusions from the workshops indicate that the level of personal initiative is dependent on trust, positive error culture, role clarity, task distribution, and goals.

Two follow-up events provided a platform for a dialogue between supervisors and employees during which measures for improvement could be defined together. These measures include increased transparency of work procedures, revision of role definitions to clarify responsibilities/competencies, optimization of the flow of information, improvement of situational leadership skills, and the development of a future strategy/vision. Of course, not all measures could be implemented within such a short period; however, first steps have been taken regarding information flow and the employment of situational leadership skills.

Personal initiative was operationalized by a 24-item questionnaire comprising a selection of items from the external survey as well as questions developed by the human resources department.

Hypothesis 4: The negative effects of strong organizational growth on employees' personal initiative can be mitigated by increased POS.

The descriptive statistics confirm that there is no significant difference in means and only minimal differences in standard deviation between survey I and survey II. Although the frequency results show no marked differences with regard to the items worst (aggregated ratings for almost always untrue/often untrue) and best rated (aggregated ratings for often true/almost always true), there have been significant improvements on some items with regard to positive ratings. There was a 10% increase in positive ratings (often true/almost always true) for the statements 'Management recognizes honest mistakes as part of doing business and as a chance to learn' and 'Managers avoid favoritism'. Furthermore, a 9% increase in positive answers could be observed for the statements 'Management involves people in decisions that affect their jobs or work environment' and 'I am aware of the competencies of my role'.

On the flip side, a noteworthy 6-7% decrease in positive ratings is shown for the items 'I am willing to expend extra effort to get the job done', My supervisor motivates me to do my best' and 'My supervisor encourages me to use different approaches to my tasks'.

The ratings for the remaining items either show insignificant changes (+/- 5%) or have not changed at all on survey II.

For the purpose of performing a correlation analysis, the 24 statements were divided into two categories to

investigate the relationship between the variables. The categories differentiate between the respondent's opinions about management or their supervisor and their perceptions of themselves in the workplace. One category comprises 11 statements with reference to management/supervisor behaviors and attitudes. The remaining 13 statements are directed at employee behaviors and attitudes.

A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between the two variable groups. Since the Pearson correlation is sensitive to outliers in the data, these were removed prior to running the correlation.

For both survey I and survey II the correlation analyses indicate a moderate positive correlation ranging from r = .307 to r = .495 in several cases. Furthermore, a strong positive association is shown between the variables 'My supervisor motivates me to do my best' and 'I am treated as a full member here regardless of my position' (r = .540); 'Management does a good job of assigning and coordinating people' and 'I feel I make a difference here' (r = .540); as well as 'My supervisor encourages me to use different approaches to my tasks' and 'I feel I make a difference here' (r = .544) for survey I.

Similarly, the correlation analysis for survey II showed strong positive relationships between 'I can ask management any reasonable question and get a straight answer' and the two variables 'Open and honest feedback is a natural part of work' and 'My supervisor motivates me to do my best' (r = .662 and r = .537, respectively). The variable 'Everyone has the opportunity to assume responsibility and get special recognition' correlated strongly with the two variables 'Open and honest feedback is a natural part of work' (r = .522) and 'Management recognizes honest mistakes as part of doing business and as a chance to learn' (r = .563).

The correlation results regarding the previously described strong associations as well as the large number of positive moderate relationships provide substantial evidence that management/supervisor behaviors and attitudes have a considerable impact on employee behaviors and attitudes.

Although there are implications that perceived organizational support plays a role in forming employees' attitudes and behaviors, the impact of the implemented actions toward increasing personal initiative within the department cannot be conclusively

measured in such a short time period. Moreover, the positive results from the first survey limit the range in which improvements can be meaningfully interpreted. Therefore, there is no solid evidence to support the hypothesis.

Conclusions

This thesis was designed to explore the potential impact of organizational growth on employees' personal initiative and commitment; and what measures can be taken to foster employee's personal initiative and commitment. So far, there has been no research on the impact of organizational growth on these two constructs although the concepts have been investigated individually and in connection with organizational change. This research was an attempt to provide insights into the specific effects of organizational growth. The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on research concerning organizational commitment, personal initiative, organizational support theory, and organizational growth. Additionally, the concept of organizational cynicism was considered as an influencing factor.

In the literature review, the concepts of personal initiative and organizational commitment were outlined to provide definitions and an understanding of their influencing factors. Organizational support theory and the concept of perceived organizational support was described to explain its mediating role and clarify the relationships between POS, personal initiative and organizational commitment.

Research on perceived organizational support indicates that it is related to fairness, human resource practices, supervisor support, affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle, Edmondson & Hansen, 2009). Furthermore, employees with high POS should show increased extra-role performance, i.e. they are willing to expend extra effort on behalf of the organization.

With regard to personal initiative, Caesens et al. (2016) argue that felt obligation is a fundamental mechanism in the relationship between POS and employees' proactive behaviors. Their research indicates that POS is positively and significantly correlated with proactive behavior directed towards the organization and that felt obligation and work engagement are positively associated with proactive behavior.

The author recognized that previous research on the factors influencing personal initiative and organizational commitment could be extended to investigate organizational growth as a potential antecedent; and which attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are impacted the most by growth. Four hypotheses were deduced from the main research question 'How does rapid organizational growth affect employees' personal initiative and commitment?'.

Hypothesis 1: The level of employee commitment to the organization is role-dependent. Employees in leadership roles have a higher level of POS and consequently are more committed to the organization.

Hypothesis 2: Strong organizational growth reduces the level of POS and consequently the level of employees' commitment regardless of their role.

Hypothesis 3: Employees with longer job tenure show higher levels of commitment regardless of their role.

Hypothesis 4: The negative effects of strong organizational growth on employees' personal initiative can be mitigated by increased POS.

Although the selection of items from the company-wide survey was appropriate to measure organizational commitment, they failed to measure the impact of growth on employee's perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes. The department-specific survey designed to measure personal initiative does not capture some important elements of the personal initiative construct, such as proactive behavior, change orientation, and persistence.

In retrospect, it is questionable whether the implemented surveys were suitable to answer the research question. To measure employee perceptions over time, it would have been more feasible to choose a specific target group of employees who have a job tenure of at least 10 years and conduct one survey. Furthermore, the survey should have included statements regarding change management and readiness for change, as well as employees' proactive behavior and motivation in addition to a selection of items from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire and the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support. Both of these surveys are well-established and have been implemented in many studies.

The comparison of mean results for the two groups Staff/Non-management and Management/Supervisor showed no significant difference between the two groups, i.e. there is no difference in the level of

commitment. Moreover, the data proved to be largely statistically nonsignificant. The absence of differences between the two groups could be explained by lack of experience in a leadership role. Many leaders may have rather unexpectedly taken on a leadership role to accommodate rapidly changing internal structures due to growth. However, based on the current data this interpretation cannot be verified.

The comparison of total means for each group Staff/Non-management and Management/Supervisor over time showed no significant differences between the surveys 2012-2018. There was no evidence to prove there is a decrease in perceived organizational support and consequently commitment due to strong organizational growth.

The examination of commitment with respect to job tenure revealed that employees with longer job tenure are not necessarily more committed. This held true for both Staff/Non-management and Management/Supervisor. On the contrary, commitment seems to decrease during a tenure of 5-10 years with an upward slope between 11-15 years.

The consistent positive results over the eight-year period could be attributed to increased human resource management efforts that were effective in counteracting the potential negative impact of growth and change on employees' level of personal initiative and commitment to the organization. Such efforts include strengthening internal company communication, HR consultation-hour, suggestion box, revision of employee appraisal procedure, expansion of internal training/further education opportunities, and clear role definitions.

Regarding the department-specific survey, the comparison of means between survey I and survey II showed no significant differences. Certain variables exhibited shifts in positive and negative scores; however, these did not affect the overall results. A Pearson correlation analysis revealed several moderate to strong relationships between the variable categories management/supervisor and employee. These indicate that management/supervisor behaviors and attitudes do influence employee behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, the results suggest that the measures implemented by human resources management are beginning to come to fruition even though this is not statistically verifiable.

In summary, there was insufficient evidence from the data analyses to prove any of the four hypotheses.

Although the shortcomings of this research are obvious, it does provide indications and opportunities for further research. The implementation of a suitable survey design and target group would undoubtedly provide interesting findings concerning the impact of organizational growth on employees' personal initiative and commitment. Additional insights could be achieved by including socio-demographic variables such as marital and family (children) status as influencing factors. Furthermore, it would be of interest to determine at which life stage employees are particularly committed or show higher levels of personal initiative, e.g. implications for a "professional" mid-life crisis.

With regard to continuance commitment, research on returnees to the company could provide valuable insights. Although it was not included in the research question addressed in this thesis, the author interviewed two returnees to the company regarding their motivation for withdrawal. The motivation differed depending on the employee's age and job tenure. The results imply that younger employees with shorter job tenure may be motivated by lack of benefits or perceived unfair remuneration to withdraw from the company. Older employees with longer job tenure may be more motivated by inflexibility in role definition and career development opportunities than by financial factors.

Considering the aforementioned additional factors that could play a role in forming employees' behaviors and attitudes in the workplace and the inherent potential for upset caused by growth and change, further research in this area could provide valuable insights for human resource management with regard to the selection procedure for new hires, onboarding process, leadership skills, and employees' life-stage.

About the author

Jill Walters Glombik studied German Language and Literature and German as a Foreign Language at California State University, Sacramento and at the University of Heidelberg. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in German studies from California State University, Sacramento. After changing career direction, she achieved an MBA with a focus on Organizational Transformation from the University of Applied Sciences in Kempten.

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