

Research Paper

Work Commitment among Abidjan's Industrial Private Sector Employees: What is the Implication of Work Representation?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the influence of work representation on the work commitment of employees in the private industrial sector of Abidjan. Using a quantitative approach, a sample of 80 employees was drawn up. The subjects that compose it are equivalent with regard to age, sex and professional category. This sample was submitted to a questionnaire relating to work representation and work commitment. The data collected and analyzed using the Student's T technique show that employees with a favorable work representation record a higher level of commitment than their colleagues with an unfavorable work representation. Such a conclusion suggests that the content and working conditions should be further improved in order to give work a positive value that is a source of involvement.

Keywords: *Work Representation, Work Commitment, Private Sector, Employees*

With the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which offer new work perspectives, the meaning of work has evolved considerably. Thus, the question of work, its meaning and attitudes in the professional environment, in particular the involvement of employees, arises.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the industrial private sector constitutes the bulk of the country's formal private sector (IMF Report, 2009). For several years, trade unions and staff representatives have been protesting against working conditions, which they consider to be inhuman in industrial zones. In March 2021, the Ivorian textile and loincloth manufacturing giant, Uniwax, which is an entity of the Dutch Vlisco Group, faced an employee strike (Financial Afrik, 2021). Similarly, another strike movement took place in October 2022. These repeated strikes reveal the unhappiness and lack of involvement of employees at work.

In the literature consulted, several studies highlight the determining factors of work involvement. Some work fits five categories of background, namely personal (level of education, age, marital status, family situation, seniority in the position, gender), related to the position (variety of skills, extent of the position, autonomy, positive professional experiences, usefulness required for the career), to the states of roles (ambiguity, overload, conflict), to the group/leader relations (cohesion of the group, interdependence of the tasks),

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and to the organization (size, degree of centralization) (Peyrat-Guillard, quoted by Neveu and Thévenet, 2002). In addition to these antecedents, Fotso (2022), for his part, highlights three types of determinants (individual, cultural and organizational).

Individual determinants; they relate to the subject's personality, self-esteem and history. These determinants revolve around two notions: the need for achievement (or success). This need is strongly correlated with the need to be efficient and competent. The need to be an "actor", to be at the source of the events that we experience. People identify themselves as 'active' or 'passive'. Thus, the former tell themselves that they have real control over events and are very involved; the others preferred to do nothing because they referred to themselves as objects instrumentalized by the organization. Cultural determinants concern the value systems encountered in companies. With regard to the organizational determinants, he points out that they relate to the relationship of man to his work (the challenges offered, the means made available, the reward system, the autonomy, the experiences lived, the role of the organization, its structure) in an organization which can be a brake or a driver of involvement. These are all factors related to work involvement (Dorra, 2007). Also, economic factors such as remuneration and other incentives are a means of retaining staff. These elements allow the reinforcement of the degree of involvement and commitment of employees (Elouaer, 2008).

Despite the relevance of the studies and the preventive measures put in place, the problem of employee involvement in the work is struggling to fade. Faced with the magnitude of this problem in Côte d'Ivoire, especially with the recurrence of strikes in the private industrial sector of Abidjan, we propose to explore another perspective. Indeed, few studies to our knowledge have focused on socio-cognitive factors such as representations of work, related to employee involvement behavior in the private industrial sector of Abidjan. There is therefore food for thought because a line of research opens up through the determinant thus identified.

To highlight the influence of the representation of work on the work involvement of employees in the private industrial sector of Abidjan, we relied on the theory of professional representations of Piaser (1999).

The notion of professional representations was proposed by Piaser (1993, 1999) as a “more effective conceptual tool” (Ibid., p.96) to study the representations circulating in professional groups and contexts (Piaser, 1999). They are defined as a category of social representations that are constructed in a specific professional environment and are exercised through the activity of professional groups (Netto, 2010).

The theory of professional representations seeks to explain human behavior at work, in particular how the representation of professional objects (working conditions, interpersonal relations, organizational climate, management style, remuneration, self-efficacy, career) guides the attitudes, conduct and behavior of individuals in the professional sphere. Defined and explained in this way, professional representations have the same structures and functions as social representations. According to the structural approach, any social representation consists of an organized and structured set of information, beliefs, opinions and attitudes about an object (Abric, 1994). Also, they are also made up of two interacting subsystems: a central system (or central core) and a peripheral system, each of which has specific roles.

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First, the central core considered as the brain of any social representation, provides three essential functions defined as follows: a generative function which allows the core to attribute meaning to each of the representations produced; an organizing function that highlights its responsibility in the internal organization of representations; its last function gives it stabilizing properties.

The peripheral system is perceived as being the less constraining zone, more flexible and flexible. It represents the most accessible and lively part of the performance. The peripheral system has psychological schemas comprising two components (prescriptive and descriptive) which make it possible to read reality without preferring itself to the central core. Peripheral elements orient behaviors, lead to professional communication and allow a posteriori justification of opinions expressed and/or behaviors adopted (Piasek, 2000). It is these different functions of professional representations that interact and characterize the behavior of individuals at work.

The practical interest of the theory of professional representations in the elucidation of the phenomenon of involvement at work is to explain how the perception of an object can lead a subject to a modification of his attitudes, behaviors, opinions, beliefs and feelings. (Yao, Yeo & Silue, 2018). In this context, the work carried out by Morin (2003) has shown that if an individual perceives his work positively, the conditions in which he performs it (health and safety conditions, physical environment, labor relations, etc.) and the relationships that his work gives rise to (with his superior, his colleagues, the clientele, etc.), then he will tend to find meaning in his work, and consequently, to feel good physically and mentally. He will therefore be inclined to show up on time, to engage in his activities, to be vigilant in the performance of his duties, to cooperate with others to achieve the objectives set and to give the expected performance (Morin, 2008). From the elements concerned, we hypothesize that employees with a positive representation of work will record a higher level of involvement than that of their colleagues with a negative representation of it. This study aims to determine the effect of labor representation on the level of work involvement of employees in the private industrial sector. Achieving such an objective requires the implementation of a well-adapted methodological approach.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Description of variables

Work representation

As a socio-cognitive system, representations are a set of organized cognitions, resulting from the reconstruction of the subject's reality in his quest for meaning and orientation of behaviors. As a result, they are similar to the process of assimilation-accommodation, which makes it possible to adapt to a situation on the basis of pre-existing information. The representation of work would therefore be a category of social representation specific to the professional group and the use of which would allow the subject to make his choices. More specifically, the representation of the work of employees in the industrial sector of Abidjan is the structured set of information, opinions, beliefs and attitudes they have about work. In the context of our research, the representation of work is assessed from two angles: favorable representation of work and unfavorable representation of work.

Favorable representation of work refers to the positive judgment of a person who values work, seeing more advantages in it. On the other hand, *unfavorable representation of work*

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refers to the negative judgment of a person who devalues work, seeing more disadvantages in it.

Work commitment

The dependent variable in this research is work commitment. It describes the relationships that an individual maintains with the various objects of the professional field (work itself, organization, group, etc.) which condition his weak/strong involvement behavior. In this study, the level of commitment at work will be apprehended through three dimensions: affective, calculated and normative (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

1.2. Sample

Abidjan constitutes our field of investigation and the employees of the industrial private sector our population of study. For the construction of our sample, we use the purposive sampling technique. The main selection criteria are age, socio-professional category and gender.

Table 1: Distribution of subjects in the sample

Categories	Middle manager		Executing agent		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
21-30	5	5	5	5	20
31-40	5	5	5	5	20
41-50	5	5	5	5	20
51-60	5	5	5	5	20
Total	20	20	20	20	80

We are interested in the different professional categories (middle managers and enforcement agents). The subjects questioned are between 21 and 60 years old. The choice of these intervals is justified by the fact that age can influence perception. In terms of gender, we retained as many men as women.

1.3. Data collection tool: the questionnaire

This research is based on a questionnaire comprising three sections: the survey profile, work representation, and work involvement.

- **Survey Profile**

This section, made up of 14 items (9 closed and 5 open), concerns the biography of the survey and general information about it. More specifically, the elements contained in this part allow the collection of four (4) main pieces of information, namely: marital status, dependents, level of education, place of residence and work.

- **Scale of evaluation of the representation of work**

The scale of representation of work in this research is inspired by that of the representation of unemployment by Dje (1996). It includes 15 items (8 negatives and 7 positives).

- **Scale for measuring work involvement**

The work involvement of employees in the private industrial sector in Abidjan is measured using the scale of Allen & Meyer (1991), more precisely the French translation of Fabre (1997).

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1.4. Statistical data processing techniques

The statistical technique used to verify our hypothesis is the student's "T". The choice of this test is due to the fact that operational efforts are required in terms of comparing the mean of independent groups. This test is based on the null hypothesis (Ho). In the context of our research, it is formulated as follows:

- Ho: There is no significant difference between the averages reflecting the involvement of the different groups.
- H: There is a significant difference between the means reflecting the involvement of the different groups.

The presentation of the various results, their analysis and their interpretation are the subject of the following section.

RESULTS

Work representation et commitment at work

Two tables are presented: table 2 (Group statistics) and table 3 (Test of independent samples).

Table 2: Group statistics _Representation of work

	Representation of work	N	Average	Ecart type	Average standard error
Work commitment	Unfavorable representation of work	80	30,25	18,60	1,86
	Favorable representation of work	80	53,20	16,48	1,64

We can observe that employees with an unfavorable representation of work have an average involvement (30.25) lower than that (53.20) of their colleagues with a favorable representation of work.

Table 3: Test of independent samples _ Representation of work

	Levene's test on the equality of Variances				T-test for equality of means				
	F	Sig	T	dof	Sig (bilateral)	Difference average	Difference standard error	95% Confidence interval around the deference	
								Inferior	Superior
Work commitment	2,892	,091	-	198	,0001	-29,09	2,48	-33,99	24,18
Assumption of equal variances			-	195,18	,0001	-29,09	2,48	-33,99	24,18
Assumption of unequal variances			11,70						

At 198 Degrees of Freedom (dof), bilateral significance gives 0.0001. The working hypothesis (H1) is therefore accepted and the null hypothesis (Ho) rejected. As proof, the

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average (53.20) obtained by employees who have a favorable representation of work is higher than that (30.25) of their colleagues who have an unfavorable representation of work. The operational hypothesis according to which employees who have a favorable representation of work are more involved than their counterparts with an unfavorable representation of it is therefore confirmed. Indeed, upon entering an organization, employees who have a negative mental disposition towards work are predisposed to be less interested in the work entrusted to them. Such behaviors are supported by the theory of professional representations developed by Piasek (1999). According to the author, the mental dispositions developed by the subjects determine and guide their behavior. Concretely, the orientation function of the representation is the proof that individuals, like automatons, obey the orders prescribed by the central core, the seat of the meaning of the representation.

By offering ourselves on this paradigm, one could affirm that, when the essence and the goal of the work boils down only to the satisfaction of the physiological needs, the individuals are unconsciously or deliberately present at the service only in a figurative capacity. Thus, those concerned are invited to show up for work late, content with the daily routine consisting of filling in the attendance list. In the daily professional exercise, they show themselves nonchalant, not very passionate about work despite its playful aspects. This context does not favor availability and dynamism. For example, an employee who has a negative representation of work becomes less rigorous, less organized and reactive on a daily basis. He is probably not concerned with the smooth running and the actual organization of the activity. Conversely, a favorable representation of work, a source of involvement, would be the result of a positive evaluation of the components or characteristics of meaningful work. To account for the influence of representations, Morin & Cherré (1999) highlight several elements: the usefulness of work, the social contribution, the rationality of work, the workload, cooperation, salary, exercise of skills, learning opportunities, autonomy, responsibility, correctness of practices, spirit of service, health and safety, and recognition.

Usefulness and social contribution highlight respectively the symbolic then the utilitarian dimension of the working man who is constantly in search of meaning. Consequently, employees who perceive the real usefulness of their activity both for themselves and for others, organize themselves daily to perfect their work and guarantee their work.

Rationality and workload make it possible to understand the objectivity and subjectivity that condition the behavior of man at work through reality (what is factual and tangible) and the interpretation he gives of it (judgment, thoughts, feelings). In fact, when an employee feels that his work encroaches on his private life (work overload), the (negative) thoughts and emotions he has aroused have led to disinvestment or even dis-involvement at work. According to Vroom's concept of instrumentality (1964), the subject capitulates because he does not consider himself capable of making the necessary efforts to achieve the objectives set by the organization.

Cooperation, moral rectitude and the spirit of service engage the human and social dimension of the man at work and the values advocated by the organization likely to guide his involvement at work. Indeed, within a given organization there is a certain level of cooperation and solidarity between its members which would encourage or discourage work involvement. For example, when an employee is struck by a misfortune (mourning or work

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accident), and his colleagues or even the management cares little (no social support), he is likely to re-evaluate his efforts downwards.

Salary highlights the instrumental dimension of human work which contributes to the satisfaction of physiological needs. In terms of the valence of work, ie what it brings to the employee; Vroom's theory makes it possible to explain that an employee dissatisfied with his salary could adjust his efforts in proportion to the "small salary" he receives.

The exercise of skills and learning opportunities present the theoretical and practical nature of the professional activity. Indeed, at the same time as the employees who own an organization need theoretical knowledge concerning the industrial activity, the latter must also possess themselves at the machines to be more functional. Thus, organizations that accept training and retraining continue to encourage their employees to plan for the long term in the workplace. Conversely, employees who do not benefit from it are less quick to mobilize all their resources (mental, physical and emotional) since they do not have a clear vision of the evolution of their job. In addition, they have no opportunity to enjoy and explore the wide range of skills of a given job.

Responsibility and autonomy are key concepts that bring out the quest for freedom in the workplace and must lead to inclusive participation in the most important decisions. Unfortunately, the less employees involved in the work do not manage to enjoy a stimulating job, that is to say, which allows them to exercise their judgment to solve problems, take initiatives to improve their results, have influence in his environment. Based on Vroom's concept of valence, it is clear that the representation of work (no autonomy or delegation of power) does not offer any advantage valued by the employee that would lead him to make considerable efforts to work.

Health and safety concerns the impact of work and working conditions on human integrity. Thus, work perceived as alienating would impinge on the quality of work; and would lead the subject to support in intensity in the professional exercise. This is totally in line with Vroom's theory, which suggests the probability of achieving expectations (potential gains) before considering the efforts to be made.

Recognition implies a permanent search by the worker for validation of his own professional objects (his person and his work) by hierarchical superiors. For example, when a worker agrees to reveal himself by doing more than usual (more than the prescribed or assigned minimum), he expects to be recognized as a model and then valued for his performance. In accordance with Vroom's theory, a worker who is recognized as a role model and whose skills management recognizes (his results are positively assessed) is likely to always raise his level of concentration and effort at work. The explanatory variable called work representation is therefore a determining factor in behavior at work, particularly with regard to the involvement of employees at work.

DISCUSSION

In this research, we analyze the impact of labor representation on the work involvement of employees in the private industrial sector of Abidjan. The results obtained following our surveys confirm the fact that employees who have a favorable representation of work are more involved at work than their counterparts who have a representation of work.

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A parallel could be established between our conclusions and those of the work carried out by Marquez and Léon (2012), who, beyond professional status, emphasized the qualitative composition of the central core of the representation of work. Indeed, depending on the value placed on work, people decide to invest or not. It seems that employees who are less involved in work are those who judge it negatively, associating it with the following words: "disinterestedness", "boring tasks", "repetitive", "injustice", "no change in career ". These employees have an instrumental definition, see exclusively socio-economic work and attaching more value to wages than to labor relations. According to these authors, employees who are less involved at work remain within the organization by constraint or obligation. Thus, the latter preferentially activate attribution relations in terms of judgments made on the work generating a representation of a normative nature. However, the representation of employees who have a positive judgment of work, revolves around the elements concerned "fulfilment, autonomy and accomplishment". As a result, they take more interest in work, and associate it with words such as: "yield", "objectives", "production", "quality", "method", "reliability" and "priority".

Similarly, our results underline the importance of the meaning of work as a determining factor of work involvement. Indeed, when an employee has a positive perception of the elements that are: work, working conditions (health and safety conditions, physical environment, labor relations, etc.) and professional relations at work (with his superior, colleagues, customers, etc.), then he will be inclined to show up on time for work, to engage in his activities, to be vigilant in the performance of his duties, to cooperate with others to achieve the objectives defined and to give the expected performance. Conversely, if he perceives them negatively, then he will tend to find that his work has no meaning, nor the environment in which he works, and will have difficulties in terms of presence and involvement in work (Morin, 2008).

Yao et al. (2018), for their part, tested the impact of the perception of work on the involvement of medical personnel, in particular midwives from the University Hospital Center (UHC) of Cocody (Abidjan). Although it was carried out on a study site different from ours, the results observed are exactly the same. It therefore turns out that midwives with a favorable perception of work are more preoccupied than their counterparts with a revealing perception of work.

CONCLUSION

Further to this study, we can conclude that the representations built about work and in a work environment have an impact on the involvement of employees. Such a result requires managers to reflect on the content and working conditions in order to give work a meaning and a value that brings motivation, commitment and satisfaction to encourage involvement of employees.

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Conflict of Interest

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