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An HRM perspective on workplace commitment: Reconnecting in concept, measurement and methodology

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ABSTRACT

Workplace commitment is viewed as an important mechanism connecting HRM practices with organizational outcomes, including performance. For this reason, commitment has emerged as one of the most significant and voluminous areas in HRM studies. Yet some of the key advances in the wider field of commitment have not been incorporate in studies of commitment in the HRM field. This is problematic as the body of work on commitment may develop separately from HRM research, wherein which the construct is so central. We seek to rectify this disconnected development through a systematic literature review which is targeted on three key threads, i.e., (1) definition and conceptual meaning, (2) multiple targets of commitment, and (3) the dynamics of commitment. These three threads are then connected to *measurement* and *methodology*, together providing the basis for a 'toolkit' for future research on commitment in HRM studies. Our review advances the field of commitment research in HRM by providing much needed conceptual, theoretical and methodological clarification, and by providing ways of bridging the gap and stimulating further research in this area.

1. Introduction

Workplace commitment is a central theory and stalwart in the canon of research in Human Resource Management. In the HRM literature commitment is viewed as an employees' response to HR practices (Kuvaas, 2008). Particularly, the employee receives HR practices and develops commitment to the organization in an reciprocal exchange relationship (Gaertner, 1999), resulting in organizationally relevant behaviors (Mayer & Schoorman, 1992) and intention to stay (Clugston, 2000). Increased commitment is positively related to job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Flinchbaugh, Zare, Chadwick, Li, & Essman, 2019; Stanley & Meyer, 2016; Vandenberghe, 2009), alongside a host of other consequences (Meyer, 2016). Therefore, workplace commitment is placed center stage in the development of wider HRM theory (Markoulli, Lee, Byington, & Felps, 2017). Indeed, our initial systematic literature search[1] confirms the scale and centrality of research on workplace commitment, consisting of 5000+ top quality publications in a variety of management related disciplines (all years, 6% of the total publications). In HRM journals an average of 10.8% of the total published articles include commitment (278 out of the 2585 total publications). Commitment has long been a key topic for Human

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[1] This section is based on a series of systemic searches conducted for study. All details are provided in the Appendix which may be part of an online supplement.

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Resource Management Review, with some key contributions published on these pages (Meyer & Allen, 1991; and see 2001 and 2013 special issues).

However, there have been substantial developments in the past decade regarding the theory and methods surrounding workplace commitment. This can be traced back to the fundamental critique of Solinger, Van Olffen, and Roe (2008) who indicated the weaknesses and limitations of the Three Component Model. This was followed by the reconceptualization of workplace commitment (Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012), and an accompanying new survey measurement instrument (Klein, Cooper, Molloy, & Swanson, 2014). Concurrently, the three-component model has been developing conceptually and methodologically towards a commitment mindset, taking a person-centered approach representing the three dimensions of commitment as commitment profiles (Meyer & Morin, 2016). In addition, social exchange theory has received substantial critique as an underlying theoretical framework for commitment studies (Van Rossenberg et al., 2018), and other underlying explanations not being represented in extant social exchange models (Klein, Solinger, & Duflot, 2020). More recently commitment system theory provides a promising direction for the development of workplace commitment (Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020).

In HRM studies, commitment is frequently used as a construct to explain several HRM related phenomena, e.g., retention and performance. For example, the current critiques, debates and limitations of the TCM are particularly relevant for studying commitment as a mediating variable, which is common practice in HR studies when HRM practices are connected with organizational outcomes through mediation of commitment. Yet, at this point we regard that HRM studies are not fully aware of the many recent advances in the commitment field and, consequently, HRM research has not been able to benefit from the opportunities that these conceptual, theoretical and methodological advancements provide. We see this lacuna as problematic; it hampers theoretical development, rigor and relevance. There is a danger that the study of commitment in HRM becomes staid and irrelevant, which is concerning because the concept of commitment is so central and a key connector in previous HRM work.

This paper seeks to bring together key developments in commitment and HRM research. We use a systematic literature review of the research on commitment within HRM to (i) identify the gap and bridge between the developments in the workplace commitment field and commitment included in HRM studies, (ii) outline developments with regards to measurement and methodology, and (iii) provide suggestions for future research. Through our review we find evidence of how commitment is conceptualized, theorized and measured.

This paper is structured around three key threads: (1) definition and conceptual meaning, (2) multiple targets of commitment, and (3) the dynamics of commitment. We use these to show the confusing, disconnected and, in some cases, dearth of research. Throughout, we underline why it is vital that these threads are addressed and incorporated in future HRM research and theory. We then go on to discuss these threads with regards to measurement options and methodological approaches that seek to address the disconnect. These approaches are, we see, ways to further develop HRM research on commitment and address the relatively narrow focus that we find. In each section, we discuss relevant research developments in relation to the current practices in the HRM field. Together these are developed into six recommendations and directions for future research providing a clear guide for commitment related HRM research (Table 6). We finish with a detailed outline of the relevance of these to HRM research and a research agenda for commitment in HRM.

Our review of how workplace commitment is studied in the HRM field is timely and important. The field of commitment has made substantial advancements theoretically, conceptually and methodologically since the seminal piece by Solinger et al. (2008). We see key steps in this process in the commitment field that provide a broader variety of ways and novel opportunities to study commitment in the field of HRM, particularly in contemporary work settings (Van Rossenberg et al., 2018). As such this paper highlights opportunities for HR scholars to capitalize on these changes, and to further develop the concept of workplace commitment for HRM. Importantly, by combining the theoretical threads and methodological advances we provide a useful tool for future research, and provide ideas for pushing the boundaries of research of commitment in the HRM field in a coherent manner.

Throughout our review, we refer to both ‘commitment’ and ‘workplace commitment’ interchangeably as the literature makes no distinction. Furthermore, we prefer the use of ‘workplace’ over that of ‘employee’ (Meyer, 2016) as not all of those whose commitment is affected by HRM are necessarily employees (Kinnie & Swart, 2020; Van Rossenberg et al., 2018). Finally, it is important to note that, going into our review as experienced researchers in the areas of HRM and commitment, and based on previous work in the area, we had clear expectations regarding the systematic literature review. During our review, some of these were emphatically confirmed yet others were surprisingly overturned. Whilst our results and discussion may not be surprising to some, we are confident that all readers will find some eyebrow raising outcomes. Moreover, we believe that our review offers useful insights and vital directions to maintain the health of the fields of commitment and HRM.

2. Systematic literature review

2.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To understand how commitment is represented in the field of HRM we conducted a systematic search and review of the literature. We initially searched a number of academic databases (including Web of Science, Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, Emerald, PsycInfo, Science Direct and ProQuest) using the search string ‘commit*’ in the title, abstract or keywords. We limited the timespan of this review to 2009–2020 to incorporate commitment studies in the HRM field since the publication of the seminal piece by Solinger et al. (2008). Publications were selected on the basis of HRM journals rated ‘3’ and above in the Chartered ABS Academic Journal Guide (2018). A total of 457 articles were found that were published in Human Resource Management (HRM), the Human Resource Management Journal (HRMJ), the International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM), and Human Resource Management

Review (HRMR).

Recognizant of commitment being studied in the broader fields of work and organizational psychology and general management fields, we also included the top journals from these fields (ABS 4 and 4*), and included "human resource*" as keywords to ensure these studies were central to the HRM field. This yielded 43 articles from psychology journals and 29 articles from management journals[2] hence our initial sample was 529 articles.

We applied exclusion and inclusion criteria to further refine. We excluded 51 papers that we labelled as 'macro' commitment studies which have focused only on high-commitment HRM practices, commitment HR systems (Arthur, 1994), commitment-based HRM (CHRM) (Chuang, Jackson, & Jiang, 2016; Klaas, Semadeni, Klimchak, & Ward, 2012; Zhu, Chew, & Spangler, 2005), or commitment-based versus control-based HR practices (Ma, Silva, Callan, & Trigo, 2016). High-performance work systems (HPWS) (Boxall & Macky, 2008) have also been addressed as high-commitment HR systems as they are developed with the intention to facilitate commitment of employees to the organization. Whilst recognizing this position in the literature, we focus this review on commitment as an individual-level workplace phenomena rather than factors that may be studied as antecedents of this construct. Inclusion of these papers would therefore not enable deeper insight into the conceptual development of commitment in and of itself.

The next step in the selection process was the rating of the 478 articles based on the centrality of workplace commitment to the contribution of the paper. These ratings were; (1) commitment is a keyword but there is no single mention of commitment in the paper, (2) commitment is mentioned but no definition nor measurement of commitment is included, (3) commitment is one variable in the study, a definition and/or measurement of commitment is provided, (4) commitment is the main topic of the study and the paper makes a clear contribution to the workplace commitment literature. We excluded 175 articles that were rated a 1 or a 2 from our sample, resulting in a final sample of 303 articles, Table 1 provides an overview of this selection process.

2.2. Analysis

Based on our close reading, we identified three key threads; (1) definition and conceptual meaning, (2) the multiple targets of commitment, and (3) the dynamics of workplace commitment. This was a purposeful decision based on our own involvement with and in-depth knowledge of the fields of commitment and HRM, attendance at various conferences including commitment focused ones, discussion with fellow researchers, knowledge of developments, and key texts and reviews in their field developments in the commitment literature (Becker, 2009; Klein et al., 2012; Meyer, 2016; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Mowday, 1998; Solinger, Hofmans, & Van Olffen, 2015; Van Rossenberg et al., 2018) including special issues of the Journal of Organizational Behavior and HRMR. Our review proceeded to pinpoint the development of the three threads in the HRM literature.

Thereafter we, as a team of three commitment scholars, proceeded to analyze each individual paper using a shared data extraction form. Any queries or discrepancies were discussed in the team, and we dip sampled each other's analysis, at times working in company with each other to facilitate data and sense-checking and to ensure consistency. Our data extraction form recorded the key details of each paper and then focused on data relevant to the main theories involved (in addition to commitment), the role of commitment in the study, and the definitions, type, and targets of commitment. We focused on the methodology and the measures, noting any dynamics of commitment or interactions between commitments.

3. Results – Three key threads

In the following section, we discuss our results and findings following the structure of the three threads. The themes that emerged from the analysis will be discussed and further developed in discussing methods and methodology in Section 4.

3.1. Definition and conceptual meaning

In HRM studies, commitment is most frequently defined as affective commitment to the organization, referring to the work of Meyer and Allen, (1991, p11) as "*an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization*", however we found some uncertainty regarding the source of this definition as it is also attributed to Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979, p. 226) and Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian (1974, p. 604). Table 2 shows the definitions and frequencies that authors have reported in their papers and the frequencies of these, showing that HRM studies define commitment mostly on the basis of the work of Allen and Meyer (e.g., 1991, 1993, 1997), Mowday, Steers, and Porter (e.g., 1977, 1974, 1979, 1982), and Meyer and Herscovitch (2001).

In the HRM studies included in the review commitment is not always defined, out of the 303 articles a total of 74 studies do not provide a definition (24.4%). Furthermore, we found that the definitions of commitment in HRM studies is imprecise and inconsistent. We identified definitions that are combined and changed from its original, differently worded definitions from the same source, and the same definition referenced to different sources. This is a sign of the gap between HRM studies which seem to be unaware of the current fundamental conceptual developments in the commitment field, including critique (Solinger et al., 2008), reconceptualization (Klein et al., 2012), methodological approaches (Meyer & Morin, 2016) and the introduction of a new theoretical framework (Klein,

[2] These articles where published in the following journals: Work, Employment and Society, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Personnel Psychology, Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, British Journal of Management, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, and Strategic Management Journal.

Table 1
Systematic review selection criteria and results.

Search conditions	Results
Keyword "commit"*, year 2009–2020, Categories: Management, Business, Psychology multidisciplinary sciences	31,104
Keyword "commit"*, year 2009–2020, ABS 3–4* HRM journals	457
Keyword "commit"*, keyword "Human Resource*", year 2009–2020, ABS 3–4* Psychology journals	43
Keyword "commit"*, keyword "Human Resource*", year 2009–2020, ABS 3–4* Management journals	29
Total	*529*
"Macro" studies / HRM High Commitment Practices, excluded from the review	51
Articles rated (1) or (2) excluded from the review	175
Articles rated (3) or (4) included in the review	303
Total	*529*

Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020).

Recommendation 1. Provide a definition of commitment. Choose a definition of commitment that is consistent with the way you approach, conceptualize and measure commitment in your study.

There has historically been a debate about the dimensionality of commitment and this debate is still ongoing (see Allen, 2016 versus Klein & Park, 2016). We identified five different multi-dimensional conceptualizations of commitment that have been used in HRM studies. In total 47 studies out of 303 (15%) have used a multi-dimensional conceptualization of commitment. Other studies have either selected one dimension or have drawn on a uni-dimensional conceptualization (See Table 3).

Matching to most prevalent definition of Allen & Meyer (1991), the most prevalent set of dimensions of commitment is the Three Component Model (TCM) (Allen & Meyer 1991; Meyer & Allen, 1997) wherein commitment is conceptualized as affective commitment, representing emotional attachment to, involvement, and identification with the target of commitment; normative commitment, based on a sense of duty, loyalty and a moral obligation including indebted obligation and moral imperative (Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010); and continuance commitment, grounded in Becker's (1960) notion of side-bets, the costs and high-sacrifice associated with leaving the relationship or a lack of alternatives. Out of the 216 HRM studies that did provide one definition of commitment, a total of 124 drew on the TCM (57%), of which 70 refer to the affective commitment dimension only (32%), one study the normative dimension only, and three studies purely continuance commitment.

The heavy reliance on and use of the affective commitment dimension of the TCM in HRM studies stands in contrast to the general model of Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) as well as the significant conceptual and measurement development in the wider field of workplace commitment. More widely, the viability of the TCM and organizational commitment in general has been challenged (Solinger et al., 2008) including (1) combining fundamentally different attitudinal phenomena in one model, (2) no clear distinction between affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects, and (3) normative and continuance commitment are conceptually embedded in the organization and include action readiness (e.g., turnover intention).

In line with this Klein et al. (2012) called the TCM a 'stretched' conceptualization of commitment that is unclear. This is particularly problematic for HRM studies because our review shows that commitment serves frequently as a mediator (132 studies, 44%) connecting HRM or managerial practices (36%) with different types of performance related behavioral responses (44%) and turnover intention (27%). Commitment is also often studied as a dependent variable (101 studies, 33%), studying the effects of satisfaction (23%), leadership (21%), support (17%), and justice (7%) on commitment. It is exactly these antecedents and outcomes that are both central to HRM studies and vulnerable to the conceptual limitations of the TCM, resulting in an overestimation of the found effects.

The 2012 reconceptualization of commitment aimed to address some of the issues by (1) providing a clearer and narrower definition of commitment in relation to other workplace bonds, (2) detaching commitment from its direct antecedents, and (3) detaching commitment from 'a course of action' or outcomes (Klein et al., 2012). In this reconceptualization, based on a process model, commitment is clearly distinguished from its immediate antecedents, including perceived evaluation of salience, affect, trust and perceived control. In turn, commitment is also separated from the motivation to allocate more effort and resources towards the target, which is particularly relevant in HRM studies.

For Klein et al. (2012) workplace commitment is identified as one of four types of workplace bonds on a continuum and defined (p. 137) 'as a volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target'. This sees commitment as a unidimensional construct thus negating the need for different bases or mind-sets of commitment (Allen, 2016). Commitment is therefore just one of a number of workplace bonds ranging from aquiesence to identification. These conceptual and measurement developments (Klein et al., 2014) provide much needed clarity. They are key to commitment researchers but particularly relevant to HRM scholars who have paid attention to organizational commitment because of its connection to reduced employee turnover and absenteeism, and its positive overall effect on extra-role behavior and job satisfaction (May, Korczynski, & Frenkel, 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

However, during our review it became clear only two of the 209 HRM articles used this definition, and none of the 183 empirical survey studies used the survey measure. Furthermore, Klein et al. (2012) and Klein et al. (2014) had 184 and 86 citations on Web of Science respectively (as of 2nd July 2021), of which only 14 and 3 are cited in HRM journals (IJHRM, HRMR, HRMJ and HRM). This is an indication of the gap between these developments and the adoption of this reconceptualization and measurement in HRM.

Recommendation 2. Choose between a uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional approach. Be aware of the strength, weaknesses, critique and limitations of the conceptualization of your choice. Align definition, conceptualization and measurement. When choosing

Table 2
Definitions of commitment.

No.	Definition	Reference	Frequency
	No definition is provided		74
	Multiple definitions are provided		13
1	*A psychological state that characterizes the employee's relation with the organization and decision to (dis-) continue with the organization*		*124*
1a	A psychological state that characterizes the employee's relationship with their employer and has implications for the employee's decision to continue or discontinue working within the company.	Meyer & Allen, 1991	11
1b	A state in which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in the organization.	Meyer et al., 1993	4
1c	A psychological link between the employee and his or her organization that makes it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization	Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 252	4
1d	The desire on the part of an employee to remain a member of an organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	1
1e	Attachment to one's employer.	Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 2002	1
1f	A psychological state that binds employees to an organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	
	The Three Component Model		
1g	Commitment as consisting of affective, continuance and normative components.	Meyer & Allen, 1991	28
	Affective commitment only		
1h	Employees' emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67	51
1i	An employee's positive emotional attachment to the organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1997	5
1j	An emotional attachment to the organization.	Meyer & Allen 1990, 1996	3
1k	The desire to belong to an organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	2
1l	Organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment, is understood as a "psychological bond" an employee has with his or her employer.	Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 14	2
1m	An employee's desire to continue working because of an emotional attachment to the organization.	Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002	1
1n	An affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in the organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1990, p. 2	1
1o	One's level of emotional attachment towards the job or the organization as a whole.	Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1992	1
1p	An individual's strong emotional attachment towards the organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	1
1q	Affective attachment to one's employer.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	1
1r	An individual's emotional attachment to an organization, based on the enjoyment derived through involvement and identification with the organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1997	1
1s	Affective commitment is a reflection of an employee's identification with and loyalty to the employing organization.	Meyer & Allen, 1991; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974	1
	Normative commitment		
1 t	A mindset of obligation to remain with an organization and work towards its goals.	Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001	1
	Continuance commitment		
1u	The perceived costs associated with leaving the organization.	Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002, p. 21	1
1v	The tendency to stay in a firm on the basis of the potential loss or costs associated with leaving the firm.	Meyer & Allen, 1990	1
1w	A bond based on perceived necessity.	Meyer & Allen, 1991	1
2	*Belief in goals and values, identification with and involvement in an organization*		*51*
2a	The strength of the identification with and involvement in a particular organization.	Mowday et al., 1979	22
2b	Believing in and accepting the goals and value of an organization, being willing to exert extra effort on behalf of the organization and desiring to maintain membership of the organization.	Mowday et al., 1979	3
2c	A psychological state whereby the employee shares the values of the organization and adheres to its objectives.	Mowday et al., 1979	2
2d	The relative strength of an individual's identification with, involvement in and loyalty to a particular organization.	Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226	1
2e	Affective commitment refers to a positive emotional attachment between an employee and an employer.	Mowday et al., 1979	1
2f	Affective organizational commitment is the strength of an employee's identification with and contribution to a particular organization.	Mowday et al., 1979	1
2g	The strength of an individual's identification with, and involvement in, the goals and values of a particular organization.	Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974.	13

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

No.	Definition	Reference	Frequency
2h	Organizational commitment is a psychological state that drives employee–organization. Bonding by governing an employee's decision whether to continue their membership of the employing organization and to exert their efforts to achieve organizational goals.	Mowday et al., 1982	6
2i	Commitment refers to identification with organizational goals, willingness to exert effort on behalf of an organization, and interest in remaining with an organization.	Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Pripoli, 1997	1
2j	Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment to the organization characterised by acceptance of the organization's culture and values and by a desire to remain part of that organization.	Mowday et al., 1982	1
2k	Commitment refers to a sense of being emotionally bound to the target.	Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Pripoli, 1997	1
3	*A force that binds the individual to a course of action*		*18*
3a	A force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets.	Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301	16
3b	Organizational commitment is defined as a force that binds the individual to a target – for example an organization – and consequently to a course of action of relevance to that target.	Meyer, Becker & Van Dick, 2006	1
3c	Commitment is a force, such as attachment, identification or loyalty, which ties that individual into a particular course of action.	Cohen, 2003	1
	Other definitions		*20*
4	A volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target.	Klein et al., 2012, p. 137.	5
5	An employee's psychological attachment to an organization.	O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986	3
6	An employee's identification, involvement in, and attachment to their organization.	Reichers, 1985	2
8	Employees' overall feelings and levels of attachment towards their organization.	Bartlett, 2001	1
9	This concept is made up of the feelings an individual bears for the organization he is working for.	Swailes, 2002	1
10	A psychological situation that determines the relationship of the employee with the organization, and as a commitment towards the whole organization.	Thaneswor et al., 2005	1
11	A global psychological state that defines the correlation between employees and the organization.	Landry & Vandenberghe 2009	1
12	Feelings of loyalty and a desire to invest mental and physical energy in helping organizations achieve its goals.	Gardner, Wright, & Moynihan, 2011, p. 318	1
13	Employee commitment demonstrates that employees are proud to work for a company and go above their regular responsibilities.	Jaworski & Kohli, 1993	1
14	Binding of an individual to an organization.	Gordon et al., 1980, p. 480	1
15	The act of joining an organization and the conditions surrounding that act (e.g. whether a person joined when other employment opportunities were available) determines an individuals' attitudinal commitment to the organization.	Vandenberg & Lance, 1992, p. 154	1
16	A psychological state that characterizes the relationship between an employee and the organization and reduces the likelihood that he/she will leave it.	Rego & Cunha, 2008, p. 59	1
17	Employees integrate "organizational membership…into their social identity, thereby creating a strong emotional attachment to the organization".	Eisenberger et al., 2004, p. 212	1
	Target specific definitions		*7*
18	Career commitment refers to "a person's belief in an acceptance of the value of his or her occupation or line of work and willingness to maintain membership in a particular occupation.	Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1994, p. 535	1
19	Career commitment is defined as individuals' attachment to their profession or occupation.	Blau, 1968	1
20	Career commitment (one's attitude towards a chosen profession or vocation.	Blau, 1968	1
21	The strength of one's motivation to work in a chosen career role as career commitment.	Blau, 1968	1
22	Affective team commitment or teachers' emotional bond to the team as the attitudinal response to team-oriented HR practices.	Van der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005	1
23	Occupational role commitment is defined as an individual's willingness to spend time and energy for work.	Amatea, Cross, Clark & Bobby 1986	1
24	Emotional attachment to and identification with both the employing organization and the client organization.	Benson, 1998, Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006, Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2006, George & Chattopadhyay, 2005, Liden et al., 2003	1
25	Employee willingness to invest more time and effort continuously to help their firm innovate and gain a competitive advantage.	No reference	1

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

No.	Definition	Reference	Frequency
26	Management commitment to safety, which involves the nurses' perceptions of management determination to carry out safety programs and methods to avoid occupational injuries and encourage accident prevention in their hospitals.	Beus, McCord, & Zohar, 2016; Christian et al., 2009; Shea, Cieri, Donohue, Cooper, & Sheehan, 2016; Sinelnikov, Inouye, & Kerper, 2015	1
27	Role commitment, which is defined as 'the cost' of giving up other meaningful role behaviors for a particular role in which an individual identifies.	Stryker, 1980	1

Table 3
Multidimensional conceptualizations of commitment.

No	Multi-dimensional conceptualizations	Reference	Frequency
1	The three-component model: affective, normative, and continuance commitment.	Meyer et al., 1993	39
2	Affiliation, identification and moral involvement.	Cohen, 2003	1
3	Compliance, identification and internalization.	Becker, 1992	2
4	Affective organizational commitment (AOC), continuance organizational commitment (COC), work ethic endorsement, career commitment and job involvement.	Morrow, 1993	2
5	Identification, involvement, and loyalty.	Cook & Wall, 1980	3

one of the multi-dimensional conceptualizations include all dimensions of the model and, consistently, measure all dimensions avoiding cherry picking.

3.2. *Multiple targets of commitment – The importance of context*

Following early work by Gouldner (1958) and Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982), it is Reichers (1985) who can be credited for the reintroduction of multiple foci of commitment, reconceptualizing organizational commitment, and including commitment to co-

Table 4
Commitment targets.

Target	Frequency
Commitment to the organization	242
Commitment to the team	4
Commitment to profession/occupation	3
Commitment to the career	2
Commitment to the union	1
Commitment to managers	1
Commitment to the supervisor	1
Goals/practices	
Commitment to change	4
Commitment to innovation	2
Manager commitment to safety	2
Commitment to the goals of the organization	1
Organization commitment to knowledge sharing	1
Commitment to organization-sponsored causes	1
Commitment to the merger	1
Leadership commitment to diversity	1
Multiple targets / foci of commitment	
Organization and profession / occupation	4
Organization, team, client, and profession	4
Organization, client, profession	3
Organization and union	2
Organization, job, and co-worker	1
Organization, supervisor, and work group	1
Organization and job involvement	1
Parent company and local operation	1
Commitment to leader union and commitment to immediate supervisor	1
Occupational role commitment and marital role commitment	1
Organization and career	1
Organization, coworker, occupation, and organizational goal	1
Organization and client	1

workers and supervisors. The idea of multiple foci of commitment was further developed by Becker (1992) and is now prominent in the commitment canon (for an overview see Becker, 2009, 2016; Becker, Kernan, Clark, & Klein, 2018). 'Foci' are the focal points of an individual's commitment although it can also refer to singular elements; 'the organization' as a foci of commitment for example. This language is grounded in the Meyer and Allen (1997) TCM although 'target' has been offered as an alternative (Klein et al., 2012). We use both interchangeably here.

Despite this recognition of multiple foci, 'the organization' as an employer is by far the most frequently studied foci of commitment in HRM studies with a total of 254 out of the 289 studies (88%) including commitment to the organization, of which 242 studies (84%) focus exclusively on commitment to the organization. In contrast to the wide recognition of multiple foci of commitment, in HRM only 22 studies (8%) include, discuss, or measure two or more foci of commitment. Table 4 provides an overview.

Organizations are a major focus of an individual's work life and an anchor point for their identity, although evidence suggests that this is changing (Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019). Particularly in contemporary worksettings, in which organizational and many other boundaries are changing (Swart & Kinnie, 2014) workplace commitment is better represented as a set, or system, of multiple foci of commitment (Becker, 2016; Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020; Van Rossenberg et al., 2018). This can be some combination of any of the other targets of commitment that have been identified such as supervisors (Askew, Taing, & Johnson, 2013; Stinglhamber, Bentein, & Vandenberghe, 2002), profession (Becker et al., 2018; Jørgensen & Becker, 2015; Wallace, 1995), occupation (Meyer & Espinoza, 2016), work group (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005), union (Horsman, Gallagher, & Kelloway, 2016), customers or clients (Kinnie & Swart, 2012; Vandenberghe et al., 2007), top management (Becker, 1992; Swailes, 2004), and temporary employment agency (Connelly, Gallagher, & Gilley, 2007). Commitment targets may also include more abstract entities such as goals or practices, commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, & Topolnytsky, 2007), a form of employment (Felfe, Schmook, Schyns, & Six, 2008), knowledge sharing (Minbaeva, Mäkelä, & Rabbiosi, 2012) and safety (Johnson, Eatough, Hammer, & Truxilllo, 2019). It is key for HRM researchers to carefully consider multiple target(s) of commitment.

While the idea of multiple foci of commitment is not new, our review shows the preoccupation and dominance of 'the organization' as a measured (and often the *only*) target of commitment; the scale of this dominance in HRM research was a surprise to us. Yet central to the identification of a set of multiple foci of commitment is the idea that the targets in a given study should be relevant from the point of view of those involved or studied (Reichers, 1985; Stinglhamber et al., 2002). This means that we can no longer privilege the organization over others and treating it as the most relevant target of commitment may be erroneous (Klein et al., 2012; Redman & Snape, 2005). Indeed, an appreciation of the context may mean that other targets are more relevant.

In Professional Service Firms (PSFs) for example, clients are paramount (Jørgensen & Becker, 2015; Kinnie & Swart, 2012) as are customers in other settings (Conway & Briner, 2012; Stinglhamber et al., 2002). Similarly temporary agency workers may be employed by multiple organizations, or multiple clients (Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, & Kessler, 2006; Gallagher & McLean Parks, 2001), and develop commitments to their client, organization and contracting role or occupation (Flinchbaugh et al., 2019). This question of context can also extend to culture. Wasti et al. (2016) highlight that foci in one culture may be much less important than in another. We therefore see that a focus on the organization as the only target of commitment is detrimental to furthering the field of workplace commitment in HRM; research may be ignoring more context relevant and important targets of commitment.

Recommendation 3. Assess which targets of commitment are relevant and should be included in your study. Consider including multiple commitments (*3a),* and assessment of which target(s) are relevant to the work context (*3b*).

3.3. The dynamics of commitment

Our third and final theme is the dynamics of commitment. Despite the acceptance that commitment is dynamic (Bateman & Strasser, 1984), most of the commitment research still examines static cause–effect relationships (Van Olffen, Solinger, & Roe, 2016a). For clarification we distinguish between a. interrelations between multiple commitments, and b. temporal dynamics. We would like to acknowledge that both types of dynamics are interrelated and, therefore, should not be considered in isolation.

Regarding the interactions between commitment targets there have been various models offered; they can be competing and in conflict (Reichers, 1986), alignment (Swart, 2007), balanced forces (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2006; Jørgensen & Becker, 2015; Olsen, Sverdrup, Nesheim, & Kalleberg, 2016) or synergistic (Johnson, Groff, & Taing, 2009; McLean Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1998). Conflict, defined by Reichers (1986, p. 509) as 'the perceived incompatibility between one goal, value or need and another goal, value or need', which means workers may experience commitment to one target to come at the expense of another. Examples include commitment to unions and organizations (Meyer, 2009; Vandenberghe, 2009) or commitment to employers and clients (Donnelly, 2011; Kinnie & Swart, 2012).

In our review we found that interactions between multiple targets of commitment was a small, however, more vibrant area than the temporal dynamics. A total of 11 papers considered these dynamics, with dual commitment to union and organization (Fortin-Bergeron, Doucet, & Hennebert, 2018; Redman & Snape, 2005) and commitment in the context of professional services (Jørgensen & Becker, 2015; Kinnie & Swart, 2012; Olsen et al., 2016) both dominating. This is a relatively small set of studies (4%), undoubtedly progress has been hampered by our earlier finding with regards to the overreliance of HRM studies on organizational commitment as the only target.

Here HRM research seems to be oblique, which results in research shortcomings, in particular where HRM practices can be vital in managing the dynamics of multiple commitments (Askew et al., 2013). In addition, there is a risk that HRM practices can create further conflict and actually be harmful (Jørgensen & Becker, 2015). Kinnie and Swart (2012) outline three strategies for managing commitment relationships; the mutual gains, the high commitment management, and the line-manager approach, which enable a synergistic 'creation of value for all stakeholders involved', (Swart & Kinnie, 2014, p. 294). These dynamics between commitments to

multiple targets and management of them is therefore important to consider for future HRM theory and *practice*.

While the commitment literature has been calling for and developing temporal dynamic approaches (e.g., van Olffen, Solinger, & Roe, 2016b), this has been absent in the HRM studies. We found that two out of 282 empirical studies (less than 1%) specifically studied the dynamic nature of commitment in a longitudinal design. This lack of dynamic research is concerning; at a conceptual level, we know that commitment develops and changes over time, yet cross-sectional designs are unable to capture this and therefore have difficulty in establishing causal antecedents and outcomes of commitment. It is because of dynamic approaches we are starting to understand how the work context interacts with dynamics of commitment (Solinger, Hofmans, Bal, & Jansen, 2016). This lack of dynamic approaches hampers a detailed understanding of commitment (Mowday, 1998) and how it can be managed (Morrow, 2011), which is particularly relevant in relation to the challenges of commitment in contemporary work (Van Rossenberg et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, we note the relevance and insight gained from the few existing dynamic commitment studies for HRM, particularly on the early stages of employment and organizational membership. The adjustments required during these early stages provide ample opportunity to study early career experiences (Bentein, 2016; Vandenberghe, Panaccio, Bentein, Mignonac, & Roussel, 2011). Solinger, Van Olffen, Roe, and Hofmans (2013) develop five typical and distinct trajectories of newcomer commitment during socialization and the first six months of work. This contributes to a wider understanding of commitment and how it develops, waxes and wanes, and eventually declines (Bergman, Benzer, Kabins, Bhupatkar, & Panina, 2013; Breitsohl & Ruhle, 2013; Klein, Brinsfield, Cooper, & Molloy, 2017).

The underlying assumption here is that commitment is not stable, although the exact extent is debatable. Becker, Ullrich, and van Dick (2013) use Affective Event Theory to address intra-individual commitment and inter-individual differences in variation. They argue that using a mean score of commitment neglects possible variability and how levels fluctuate daily.In addition, Meyer (2016) argues that if such frequent measurement, as offered by Van Olffen et al. (2016a), establishes too much fluctuation, then it may raise questions about the construct as a whole.

Recommendation 4. Consider the dynamics of commitment with regards to (a) the interrelations between multiple commitments, and (b) the temporal dynamics.

Commitment system theory has further identied the multiple elements of the commitment system that may be dynamic, including (1) how the *strength* of each commitment may change over time, (2) how a *commitment system* grows, shrinks, splits or merges with other systems over time, (3) how the multiple targets of commitment interact, or the *strength of the coupling* between commitments changes over time, and (4) how the *nature* of the coupling, positive, negative or neutral, and how this may change over time (Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020). This conceptualization and theorizing framework of commitment is particularly fruitful for future HR research to examine the dynamics of commitment systems in the work context.

In summary, our review highlighted three main areas of concern and therefore development. Firstly, we found issues around defining and conceptualizing of commitment in HRM studies. Secondly, in terms of multiple foci of commitment, we found that commitment to the organization dominates the field, and it is often the only foci of commitment examined. The extent of this was a surprise to us and contrasts with the host of other foci that have been included elsewhere (Becker, 2016; Vandenberghe, 2009, 2016). We see that this focus on the organization is potentially detrimental to the development of our understanding of multiple commitments, and the interactions between commitments in the workplace. Finally, we found that commitment in HRM is often studied as a relatively static concept through static methodologies. Yet evidence suggests commitment is dynamic, in such that multiple commitments interact and commitments change over time. Importantly, we see that these dynamics are relevant for HRM scholars to explore given that HRM practices play a key role in creating and managing these dynamics, and can fundamentally change the experience and outcomes of commitments in the workplace.

To reiterate, we see that the extant literature in these three areas is disconnected from the developments in the wider commitment literature (e.g., Becker, Klein & Meyer, 2012, Meyer, 2016, Van Rossenberg et al., 2018). The remainder of this paper is devoted to developing and improving the approach to studying workplace commitment in HRM on the basis of recent methodological and measurement advances.

4. Measurement and methodology

In the next section we connect the three threads, i.e., *definition and conceptual meaning (3.1), multiple targets of commitment (3.2), and the dynamics of commitment (3.3)* with *measurement (4.1)* and *methodology (4.2)*. First, we assess how commitment has been measured in HRM studies. The field of workplace commitment has a rich history in the development of survey measurement instruments (e.g., Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Mowday et al., 1979). Our systematic literature review shows the predominant use of survey measurement with 281 out of 290 the empirical studies (97%) using surveys, and 9 studies using interview data (3%). The section on measurement instruments forms the basis for the 'toolkit' for future research on commitment on HRM (see Table 6).

After the discussion of measurement instruments, we open up a broader methodological discussion in Section 4.2. We focus on *two methodological approaches,* (1) person-centered approaches, and (2) interpretive approaches. These approaches are discussed in relation to our *three threads*. We review past research and discuss future opportunities alongside each other in the following sections.

4.1. Measurement

An overview of the survey measures used in the past decade of HRM studies is presented in Table 5. Comparison between how commitment has been defined and conceptualized (Table 2) and which measurement was used (Table 4) indicates inconsistency between conceptualization and operationalisation. The predominant role of the TCM is even stronger in measurement, with a total of

183 out of the 290 empirical survey studies (63%) drawing on one form of the TCM survey measurement.

The majority of the 183 studies relying on the TCM survey measure include only affective commitment (142 studies, 78%), whereas only 27 studies measure all three components of the TCM (15%). Certainly, of the three bases of the TCM, affective commitment has been shown to be the most powerful in terms of predicting commitment and producing outcomes (Solinger et al., 2008; Somers, 2010). Yet this practice needs to be reconsidered. If studies explain a larger proportion of workers' behaviors by selecting affective commitment rather than the other dimensions, this practice is capitalizing on its explanatory power (Askew et al., 2013; Riketta, 2002). It has to be noted that the three dimensions of the TCM have been developed as a combinational construct of commitment as its concurrent behavior towards the target entity (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Therefore using only affective commitment severely limits construct validity because it only represents a part of the model. This, in combination with the substantial concerns with regards to conceptual overlap of the TCM (Solinger et al., 2008) previously discussed, indicates the urgency and necessity of a major shift away from using only the affective commitment dimension of the TCM. Yet with 142 out of 290 survey studies (49%) doing this, it is a significant concern (*recommendation 2)*.

Our results confirm the TCM survey measure to be the most extensively used in the commitment studies in HRM (e.g., Meyer &

Table 5
Survey measurement instruments.

	Commitment measurement	Frequency
A	Did not study commitment empirically (reviews, meta-analyses, and conceptual papers)	21
B	Studies commitment through interviews	9
C	Commitment was measured through survey items developed for the study	13
D	It was not reported how commitment was measured or a faulty reference was provided	4
1	*Three Component Model*	*183*
1a	Meyer & Allen, 1990	71
1b	Meyer et al., 1993	42
1c	Meyer & Allen, 1997	30
1d	Meyer & Allen, 1991	19
1e	Stinglhamber et al., 2002	6
1f	Meyer & Allen, 1996	5
1g	Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005	3
1h	Meyer & Allen, 1984	2
1i	Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004	1
1j	Allen & Meyer, 2001	1
1k	Gellatly et al., 2006	1
1l	Lee, Allen, Meyer, & Rhee, 2001	1
1m	Meyer & Allen, 1984	1
2	*Organization Commitment Questionnaire*	*41*
2a	Mowday et al., 1979	18
2b	Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974	10
2c	Mowday, 1982	4
2d	Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000	2
2e	WERS 1-item of OCQ I share many of the values of my organization	2
2f	Porter & Smith, 1970	2
2g	Reichel & Neumann, 1993	1
2h	Daly & Dee 2006 - originally advanced by Mowday et al., 1979.	1
2i	Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian (1974)	1
	Other measures	*32*
3	Cook & Wall, 1980	6
4	Jaworski & Kohli, 1993	3
5	Klein et al., 2014	2
6	Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001	2
7	Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1992	2
8	Blau, 1968	2
9	Ten Brink, 2004	1
10	Moideenkutty, Blau, Kumar, & Nalakath, 2001	1
11	Rothwell & Arnold, 2007	1
12	Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997	1
13	Vegt & Bunderson, 2005	1
14	Dhondt, Pot, & Kraan, 2014	1
15	Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000	1
16	Mbindyo, Blaauw, Gilson, & English, 2009	1
17	Carson & Bedeian, 1994	1
18	Oldham & Cummings, 1996	1
19	Tsai, Yen, Huang & Huang, 2007	1
20	Vinodkumar & Bhasi, 2010	1
21	Heshizer & Lund, 1997	1
22	George & Brief, 1992; Podsakoff et al., 2000.	1
23	Marsden, Kalleberg, & Cook, 1993 adopted from Saks, 2006	1

Allen 1990; 1991; 1993; 1997). To progress the three main threads we discuss this group of TCM measures as well as alternatives, i.e., the Klein Unidimensional Target (KUT) measure (Klein et al., 2014), the TCM multi-foci measure developed by Stinglhamber et al. (2002), and temporal survey measurement (Solinger et al., 2013).

4.1.1. Measurement as related to definition and conceptual meaning (thread 1)

Klein et al. (2014) develop a new survey instrument to resolve the conceptual and measurement issues related to the TCM (Klein et al., 2012). Particularly, the KUT aims to measure commitment rather than other types of workplace bonds (e.g., acquiescence, instrumental, identification). This is relevant to the conceptual meaning of commitment in two ways. First, the KUT survey measurement provides an enhanced measurement in comparison to the TCM dimension of affective commitment. Affective commitment is found to be particularly sensitive to outcomes that are tapping into affective and emotion-based types of attitudes and behavioral intent. Some of these may be particularly relevant to HRM scholars interested in linking commitment to perceptions or satisfaction with HR practices and intention to stay loyal to the organization. Yet the KUT enables HR scholars to distinguish between such constructs and commitment, and more precisely estimate their effects.

Second, the KUT is designed to reduce conceptual overlap (Klein et al., 2014) and may therefore explain outcomes particular to commitment as opposed to outcomes related to other types of workplace bonds such as identification. On the one hand, we may expect commitment measured on the basis of the KUT to be less strongly related to some outcomes than the TCM measure of affective commitment given that the conceptual overlap is reduced. On the other hand, the enhanced conceptual clarity means that the effects found of commitment can be ascribed with more certainty to commitment, and not to other types of workplace bonds. This enables future research to distinguish multiple types of workplace bonds, and to assess their antecedents and outcomes. For example, the KUT measure specifically empowers HRM scholars to empirically assess which HRM practices have a unique effect on commitment, driven by a social exchange motive, versus HR practices that have a unique effect on identification, driven by a social identity motive.

4.1.2. Measurement as related to multiple targets of commitment thread (2)

For researchers looking to measure all three dimensions of the TCM to multiple targets, two options exist. First, it is possible to use the existing TCM scale (Meyer & Allen, 1991) replacing 'organization' with another target, however be aware that some items are conceptually inapplicable depending on the target (Klein et al., 2012). Second, the TCM has been extended to cover other targets for example Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) examine commitment to the occupation, frequently combined with the shortened nine-item measure (Gellatly, Meyer, & Luchak, 2006). Another example of this option is the TCM extended to commitment to organizational change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

However, there is a difficulty in that the TCM is conceptually embedded in the organization. That is why the TCM measure has been reworded ensuring that this measure is more valid and applicable to each specific target. Stinglhamber et al. (2002), for example, extended their TCM to measure of commitment to include five foci. The advantage is that this measure accurately represents the nature of each particular commitment target, enhancing construct validity. However, this does come at the expense of the ability to compare the level of commitment across targets.

Recent work has been drawing on the TCM to measure commitment to multiple targets (Meyer, Morin, & Vandenberghe, 2015; Morin, Meyer, McInerney, Marsh, & Ganotice Jr, 2015; Swart, Kinnie, Rossenberg, & Yalabik, 2014). The limitation of these studies is that affective commitment to target X is measured with different items than affective commitment to target Y. This is relevant to HRM studies because these measurements are more likely to explain different parts of the variance of our outcome variables. For example, affective commitment to the occupation measured by "*My occupation is important to my self-image*" and affective commitment to the organization measured by "*I feel emotionally attached to my organization*" show differences both in target (occupation and organization) but also in the type of emotional bond. This basically means you are comparing apples from Mars with pears from Venus. With both aspects varying, it becomes impossible to distinguish the effect of the affective dimension (the fruit) from the effect of the target (the planet). As a result, these two variables together will likely explain more of performance related behaviors, however this can again be seen as capitalizing on explanatory power of a measurement model.

The Klein Unidimensional Target measure (KUT) has been specifically developed to capture the commitment bond as a unidimensional construct. The measure is "target-neutral", which means items are not worded specific to a target, and any target can be included in the measurement. This addresses the difficulty of comparison across multiple targets inherent to some of the other commitment measurement instruments. More importantly, the KUT enables the measurement of commitment to multiple targets making a fair comparison as well as being parsimonious drawing on only four items per target.

On the one hand, target specific wording optimizes construct validity, thus having target neutral wording may limit construct validity. This effect may be small for targets that are rather straightforward, however could be an issue with targets that are goal or value based (such as commitment to the career), targets that may not be completely volition based (such as commitment to family), or targets that may be idiosyncratic in nature (such as commitment to the current client). Furthermore, same or similar worded items may result in high cross-loadings between the targets. This may cause difficulty with model fit and multicollinearity issues in testing the effect of commitment to multiple targets on outcomes.

On the other hand, two recent studies drawing on the KUT measurement show no signs of these limitations. In these studies the KUT performed well for measuring multiple targets of commitment in predicting work outcomes, testing the effect of commitment to the organization, profession, supervisor and job of Finnish university employees on work behaviors and turnover intentions (Cooper, Stanley, Klein, & Tenhiälä, 2016) and assessing the effect of commitment to the organization and the union of UK National Health Service workers on union citizenship behaviors and intent to quit the union (Fortin-Bergeron et al., 2018).

This survey measurement instrument has shown its potential in measuring a more complete and context specific set of workplace

commitments and enhanced insight into work related attitudes and behaviors, which has clear benefits for HRM scholars studying commitment in contemporary work settings. This is why we recommend that HRM researchers adopt this measurement instrument and conceptualization of commitment. The measure is particularly fitting for studying commitment to multiple targets, for comparing commitment to multiple targets and for measuring commitment to novel targets for which a target specific measurement has not yet been developed (*recommendation 3a & 3b*).

4.1.3. Measurement as related to the dynamics of commitment thread (3)

As previously discussed, there are a limited number of studies that have taken a dynamic approach towards studying commitment. Some studies have used (parts of) the TCM for measuring commitment in a Latent Growth Modelling approach (for example, Maia, Bastos, & Solinger, 2016), yet the TCM has not been designed for measuring changes in commitment over time. Using the TCM for this purpose may be limited particularly with fluctuation likely to show different patterns between affective, normative and continuance commitment. In addition, patterns are even more likely to vary because the wording is target specific, which makes it impossible to identify fluctuations between targets. For example, for the Workplace Affective Commitment Multidimensional Questionnaire (WACMQ) (Morin, Madore, Morizot, Boudrias, & Tremblay, 2009) the items of commitment to work ('Work is a priority in my life') are much less likely to fluctuate over time than the items for commitment to the supervisor ('I feel privileged to work with someone like my immediate supervisor'). Drawing on such a measurement does not allow researchers to distinguish between differences in development due to the target (commitment to work or commitment to the supervisor) or differences in development due to the working of the item.

Like the TCM, the KUT has not been specifically designed to study the dynamic development of commitments over time. However, the KUT is a more parsimonious measure of commitment and it allows for comparison of the level of commitment between targets. Less variation may be expected between items in changes over time, however the wording of the items is generic and less likely to pick up changes if applied frequently with short time in between measurements. The dynamic properties of the KUT have not yet been tested extensively and future research may extend further in this direction.

There is a small set of studies exploring how to study the dynamics of commitment, and to develop measurement that is sensitive to changes in commitment over time. It has been suggested that measuring change of commitment requires the development of a different measurement tool and a reconsideration of reliability and validity of this type of measurement (an overview is provided by Van Olffen et al., 2016a). One possible direction is the use of a single-item measure representing each commitment construct (either a type, a target or a bond). One example of the study of commitment as a dynamic process in which one single item may represent each subprocess measured frequently over time is the study by Solinger et al. (2013). Here, commitment is measured repeatedly over time using one item for each of the three types of commitment, cognitive ("I belong"), affective ('I am proud'), and a behavioral ('I engage'). Similarly, one item potentially could represent commitment to a target, allowing for the repeated measurement of commitment to multiple targets over time. There is evidence that single-item measures of commitment are comparable to multiple-item scales (e.g., Cooper et al., 2016).

Technological innovations such as measurement apps and pulse surveys increase opportunities to track commitment frequently over time enabling HRM scholars to gain valuable insight into the processes of development and decline of commitments (see Becker et al., 2013 for what this might look like). Dynamic measures may be adopted for this purpose, however future studies should develop measures fitting to this purpose of tracking the development of commitment over time. We recommend HRM researchers to consider the dynamic nature of commitment, including the interrelations between multiple commitments as well as its temporal dynamics (*recommendation 4)*.

4.2. Methodology

Two areas which we feel are underrepresented in the HRM papers that we reviewed, and which have particularly relevant applications in HRM, are that of person-centered approaches, and interpretative approaches. Firstly, person-centered approaches allow for the identification of subgroups of workers with prototypical set of workplace commitments (Morin, Morizot, Boudrias, & Madore, 2011). There has been a recent increase in the application of person-centered research strategies in the investigation of workplace commitments (Meyer & Morin, 2016) and this has been indicated as particularly relevant to HRM studies (Morin et al., 2011) since it enables us to understand the prototypical combinations of commitments that groups of workers experience. To promote a substantive methodological synergy in HRM, a person-centered approach can identify groups, or profiles, of workers that may be targeted by HRM differentiation. Secondly, interpretive approaches towards the study of commitment would enable scholars to understand the underlying 'why' behind and experience of commitment targets and dynamics. This is clearly promising for developing HRM theory and practice as it enables a deeper understanding of the construct as well as allowing for further understanding of commitment in its complex interaction with the work context.

4.2.1. Person-centered approaches

The person-centered approach is changing the way commitment is thought of. Rather than looking at commitment as one variable, commitment in the person-centered approach is viewed as a set of multiple commitments (dimensions or targets) that a worker holds at one point of time, providing a more holistic view. This is a promising development (Meyer & Morin, 2016) with both HRM scholars and managers seeking to identify variation in workers, or human capital, to adopt configurational HRM systems (Lepak & Snell, 1999). While this encouraging outlook for HRM applications was demonstrated by Meyer, Stanley, and Vandenberg (2013), only one study in our review adopted this approach (Akoto, 2020). We found this surprising and certainly a gap for future study to explore.

Three types of profiles can be distinguished; (1) profiles of multiple targets of commitment (Morin et al., 2011, 2015), (2) profiles of multiple types of commitment such as affective, normative and continuance commitment (Kabins, Xu, Bergman, Berry, & Willson, 2016) and (3) profiles based on both types and targets. Use of the latter is limited, although this particular profiling combination does appear to further illuminate the different ways in which individuals experience types of commitment to various targets (Meyer et al., 2015; Morin et al., 2015). Furthermore, the person-centered approach can be applied using a variety of techniques, such as cluster analysis, Latent Class/Profile Analysis, and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Gabriel, Campbell, Djurdjevic, Johnson, & Rosen, 2018).

Further research is needed to understand how a person-centered approach changes the concept of commitment. For example, profiling the TCM means affective, normative and continuance commitment are treated as part of one multi-facetted construct representing interacting or co-existing elements, which contradicts with the TCM to include fundamentally different attitudinal phenomena (Solinger et al., 2008). A person-centered approach shows potential when studying commitment as a multi-dimensional concept *(recommendation 5a),* however future research should consider looking into the conceptual consequences of profiling for the TCM.

Existing studies show that combinations of commitment (as profiles) connect to particular attitudinal and behavioral patterns (*recommendation 5b)*. For example, only the combination of continuance commitment and affective commitment or normative commitment relates to employees' experience of a high level of well-being (Morin et al., 2015). In addition, profiles of commitment have an enhanced power of sensemaking and ease of communication in comparison to variable-centered multivariate types of analysis (Morin et al., 2011).

Using profiles for studying *multiple targets* is a fitting methodological approach because it captures the complex interrelations between multiple targets of commitment in profiles. An important feature of the person-centered approach is that it can be used both inductively by exploring and creating propositions, and deductively by hypothesis testing. The first profile studies argued for an inductive approach (Morin et al., 2011) due to the scarcity of theory supporting hypothesis development. This position should be considered when there is not sufficient theoretical ground for developing hypotheses. With theory being developed, eventually this may provide ground for developing hypotheses on which types of profiles can be expected, thus a confirmatory deductive approach would be appropriate (for example in Cooper et al., 2016). Extending this line, it may be particularly interesting for future HRM studies to test what (practices) may affect workers to transition from membership of one profile into membership of another profile *(recommendation 5c)*.

Profiling techniques have some interesting applications for research on the *dynamics* of commitment. While employee membership of a profile has been shown to be relatively stable (Kam, Morin, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2016), Latent Transition Analysis can be used to explore the conditions under which these shifts of individuals in membership of commitment profiles take place over time. Latent Trajectory Analysis has shown great potential for gaining insight into common patterns of development of commitment over time (Solinger et al., 2013), which is particularly interesting for HRM studies showing insight in the diversity of socialization processes and the effect of HRM practices (*recommendation 5d)*.

Recommendation 5. Consider a person-centered approach towards studying commitment.

4.2.2. Interpretive approaches

Our review has highlighted that interpretive approaches are rare in the study of commitment in HRM, and this may be due to contextual, philosophical and managerial reasons (Deetz, 2009). This paucity comes despite repeated calls for and recognition of the insights it offers commitment research (Becker, 2009; Klein, Solinger, & Duflot, 2020; Meyer, 2016) and indeed, it is vital for the future of workplace commitment given changes, challenges, and key questions (van Rossenberg et al., 2018). Given that commitment is a socially constructed bond, a form of relationship between people and entities, and a fundamental way of shaping and understanding relations and experiences in the workplace, it seems odd that interpretive research is not more prominent. We see that the field is fertile for future interpretive research that seeks to build theory and challenge assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Lemmergaard, Furtmueller, van Dick, & Wilderom, 2011).

This is not necessarily a purely inductive approach nor do researchers have to re-invent or redefine commitment; abductive research can use theory and empirical material as a starting point (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Klein et al., 2017; Martela, 2015). Similarly, interpretive approaches can, but are not restricted to analysis of qualitative text-based data. Quantitative discovery has recently been restated as a fitting approach particularly to revealing, describing, and diagnosing interesting phenomena that are poorly understood (Bamberger, 2018; Bamberger & Ang, 2016).

Interpretive approaches can offer interesting insights into the link between commitment and outcomes (Lemmergaard et al., 2011). While deductive approaches are often limited in explaining why and how, interpretive approaches enable understanding of perceptions and experiences of commitments and how these relate to outcomes. Hence these approaches are particularly important in unpacking the specific way(s) in which HRM practices influence commitment, and, consequently, have an impact on worker's attitudes and behaviors (Jørgensen & Becker, 2015; Kinnie & Swart, 2012) *(recommendation 6a)*.

A future alternative approach could focus on how outcomes are linked to the experience of commitment and the enactment of a bond (Weick, 1988). Commitment bonds are socially constructed and individuals must make sense of, experience, react to, notice and embrace (Klein et al., 2012). It follows that they are inconsequential until acted upon, incorporated into events, situations and explanations. This requires us to move beyond organizational inputs and antecedents to see individual mechanisms and calls for a more pragmatic experientialist approach (Martela, 2015) using the enactment of the bond to understand outcomes from the perspective and description of the individual (Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008) which ultimately brings the bond to life *(recommendation 6b)*. Fruitful approaches include interpretive phenomenological analysis, discourse analysis, narratives and storytelling (Rodrigues, Gondim, &

Paim, 2017) or ethnography all of which can focus on either the construction of a bond, its experience, or both. The Critical Incident Technique (Chell, 2004) offers a more straightforward and different kind of self-report approach; that is, asking people what they have done in the past because of their commitment bond as a way of predicting possible future behavior.

The study of *multiple targets* of commitment owes much to earlier work which used interviews and focus groups (Reichers, 1985). Most of the interpretive research in commitment is the inductive precursor to deductive work where it helps to identify relevant foci

Table 6
Toolkit of six recommendations for HRM researchers studying commitment.

1. Define commitment in your study. Choose a definition of commitment that is consistent with the way you approach, conceptualize, and measure this construct.
2. Choose which conceptualization of commitment is fitting to the aim of your study:

a. *Uni-dimensional* Define commitment as a unidimensional concept: 'A volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target' (Klein et al., 2012). Consistently, measure commitment as a unidimensional concept using the Klein Unitary Target measurement scale (Klein et al., 2014).
b. *Multi-dimensional* (options in Table 3) Conceptualize and measure all dimensions of the model, avoid cherry picking one dimension. Be aware of the critique and limitations of the TCM (Solinger et al., 2008 and others), (1) commitment is conceptualized broadly, there is substantial risk of conceptual overlap with direct antecedents and other workplace bonds (such as identification), and (2) commitment is connected to 'a course of action' risk to overlap with outcomes. Avoid measuring only affective commitment, the three components are a set. Multiple dimensions of commitment are recommended to be represented as a mindset rather than as separate variables and may be represented well following a person-centered approach (Meyer & Morin, 2016). *(see recommendation 4)*
3. Assess which target(s) of commitment is/are relevant to your study.

a. Is it relevant to consider *multiple targets*?
   Commitment to the organization is the "usual suspect" and is used frequently as a mediator in HRM studies. Yet, this target may not (alone) be the most relevant target in the work setting you are studying.
   You can use the Klein Unitary Target measurement scale (Klein et al., 2014), which can be adjusted to any target. This measurement was designed specifically for measuring and comparison of bonds between multiple targets.
   Alternatively, the TCM has been extended to five foci (Stinglhamber et al., 2002); however, we would not recommend this type of measurement instrument based on the TCM since they suffer from the same critique and limitations (see 2). In addition, targets cannot be compared with each other directly as the wording of the items is target-specific.
b. Which targets are relevant to the *context*?
   The definition by Klein et al. (2012) is target-neutral. This definition and conceptualization allows you to conceptualize commitment to any target. Other definitions may be target-specific; this may restrict the target(s) you can include.
4. Consider the dynamics of commitments, (a) the interrelations between multiple commitments, and (b) the temporal dynamics.

a. *Interrelations* can be studied using interaction effects; however person-centered approaches are fitting to capture complex interactions between commitments. Also, interpretive approaches are fitting in capturing both complex systems as well as the nature of the coupling between multiple targets (synergy, conflict, neutral).
b. *Temporal dynamics* are better represented in the measurement by drawing a single-item survey measure, particularly in case you are looking to represent a large set of multiple targets of commitment, and/or to track commitment(s) over time. Using the first item of the KUT (Klein et al., 2014) is an option; see also Solinger et al. (2013) for a discussion of measuring temporal dynamics.
c. Consider dynamics in your choice of theory, target, interrelation, and methodology. Commitment System Theory shows theoretical advances with regards to dynamic systems of commitment (Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020). There are currently no existing measurement instruments for commitment systems. At this stage an interpretive approach is fitting to provide insight into commitment systems.
5. Consider a *person-centered approach* towards studying commitment, particularly:

a. When you are interested in a multi-dimensional conceptualization of commitment, then it is recommended to approach these three dimensions as a mindset. Profiles of the different prototypical combinations of the multiple dimensions may be identified using a person-centered approach. An example: Meyer, Stanley, and Parfyonova (2012).
b. When you are interested in how people in your population experience different combinations of dimensions of commitment or they may differ in their combinations of multiple targets of commitment (profiles) (Latent Profile Analysis). You may be interested in testing what predicts profile membership or what types of behaviors are associated with membership of a particular profile (Latent Mixture Model). An example: Morin et al. (2011).
c. When you are interested in how people change membership of commitment profiles because of a particular event (Latent Transition Analysis). An example: Houle, Morin, Fernet, Vandenberghe, and Tóth-Király (2020).
d. When you are interested in how people develop commitments over time, and you expect there may be different prototypical ways in which commitments develop in your population (Latent Trajectory Analysis). An example: Solinger et al. (2013).
6. Consider an *interpretive approach* towards studying commitment, particularly:

a. When you are interested in why and how HRM connects to commitment and, consequently, why, and how commitment connects to outcomes.
b. When you are interested in how workers make sense of their workplace bonds, and how they enact commitments
c. When it is unclear which target(s) of commitment are relevant to your population and/or when targets vary between respondents.
d. When you are interested in how workers experience the coupling between commitments, as synergistic, conflicting, or neutral.
e. When you are interested in developing theory on dynamic commitment systems.

and, crucially, discount others (Becker, 1992; Redman & Snape, 2005; Stinglhamber et al., 2002). This is important as what researchers may deem as relevant may not be seen as such by participants, including the organization (McCabe & Sambrook, 2013) (*recommendation 6c)*.

Future interpretive research could identify new targets, problematize existing targets, show how individuals interact with targets and how this interaction is experienced (Breitsohl, van Rossenberg, & Rodrigues, 2018; Swart, Kinnie, et al., 2014). Moreover, research shows that an abductive use of theory and empirical material leads to questions of why certain targets are not represented and the problematization of others. Despite Becker's (2016) warning against a proliferation of targets, this problematization may be balanced by the retirement or receding importance of more established targets (Felfe et al., 2008; Swailes, 2000). Interviews would be an obvious choice for this, and we posit that visual methods also offer much for theory development (Breitsohl et al., 2018; Meyer, Hoellerer, Jancsary, & Van Leeuwen, 2013). Cross and Swart (2020) show how giving participants pencils, a blank sheet of paper, and asking them to represent those things that they are committed can be useful in contexts when the targets are not known and lead to some targets being questioned.

We see that interpretive approaches have the most to offer our third thread, the *dynamics* of workplace commitment, although again the evidence is sparse. Westerberg and Tafvelin (2015) used multiple rounds of interviews to investigate how commitment to change evolves over time and focused on the perception of the change. Kinnie and Swart (2012) investigated the interaction between three foci and the HR practices to manage this. The impact of HR configurations on the synergies and conflict between targets was also investigated by Jørgensen and Becker (2015) who showed that some lead to more conflict rather than resolve it. This approach may be very useful in developing CST further (Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020) (*recommendation 6d)*.

Future development around dynamics could use repeated interviews, visual methods to identify targets and to discuss their interactions, as well as visual metaphors to gain access to different language (Cornelissen, 2005). Diary studies could also tie in well with other approaches to multi-wave designs (Van Olffen et al., 2016a) to not only track changes over time in commitment but crucially to ask why and how *(recommendation 6e)*. Again, the Critical Incident Technique is especially relevant for this.

Recommendation 6. Consider an interpretive approach towards studying commitment.

Our review has highlighted the dearth of research using person-centered and interpretive approaches in commitment based HRM research. Here, we have outlined the important developments with regards to methods and methodologies with the aim to rectify the imbalance and limitations to, eventually, create a deeper insight into commitment. Importantly, we see that this is vital not only for theory development but also developing commitment research in HRM through methods that are more aligned to the depth of individual experience of the workplace.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The aims of this paper were to conduct a thorough systematic literature review of commitment research within HRM in order (i) to identify the gap and bridge between the developments in the workplace commitment field and commitment in HRM studies, (ii) to outline developments with regards to measurement and methodology, and (iii) to provide suggestions for future research. In so doing, we identified three threads in relation to commitment research: (1) definition and conceptual meaning, (2) multiple targets of commitment, and (3) the dynamics of commitment. The three threads have also been used as a framework to discuss measurement and methodology. Together this provides an overview of avenues and ways of studying workplace commitment and future research directions which are captures in our "toolkit", consisting of six recommendations for studying commitment in HRM (Table 6). In sum, this review urges HRM researchers to (re)consider: (1) the definition of commitment, (2) the relevance of multi-dimensionality, (3) multiple targets, (4) dynamics, (5) a person-centered approach, and (6) an interpretive approach.

The main points we have found as a result of the review are: (1) in HRM studies commitment has not always been defined, has been defined inconsistently, definitions vary and particularly the measurement of commitment does not fit very well with the conceptual meaning. The toolkit provides the recommendations for more precise and careful fitting of definition, conceptualization, measurement and methodology in HRM studies. (2) Most research on commitment in HRM includes commitment to the organization, whereas other targets are equally, or even more, relevant. We call for a more careful consideration of the set of multiple targets of commitment relevant to the work setting. The toolkit provides directions for future research, including when a person-centered approach is particularly fitting and provides relevant directions for future research in HRM studies. (3) Despite calls, the dynamic nature of commitment has not been represented in the research design of most studies. Both dynamics in terms of changes in commitment over time and dynamics in interactions between commitments are key to understanding how HRM practices impacts on how commitment develops. These advances are particularly relevant to consider given the recent development of Commitment System Theory (Klein, Brinsfield, & Cooper, 2020). The toolkit provides directions for future research and suggestions of methodologies that show good potential for assessing the dynamics of commitment in HRM studies.

We have emphasized here that commitment is of importance to HRM scholars given that it is centrally regarded as a performance enhancing outcome of an HRM system (Boxall & Macky, 2009, Becker et al., 1996; Jiang, 2016). We argue that given the methodological and theoretical issues and complexity, HRM scholars and practitioners would benefit from a greater awareness of the developments in the commitment field. It is for this reason we aim to provide HRM scholars the means for adopting the most recent and appropriate *definition and conceptual meaning*, measurement and methodologies when researching this construct.

The increased choice and complexity in measurement and methodology means a responsibility to critically assess the options and adopt a wider scope of approaches to further the research into commitment based HRM research. Measuring affective organizational commitment for example, which is the most common in HRM studies as our review shows, is limited in gaining adequate and meaningful insights. As such, the threads and methodological advancement that we have identified here serve as a clear guideline for

HRM scholars which we distil into our toolkit for researchers.

The threads that we have identified hold implications for HRM strategy and practice. The first strategic implication of our review is related to that of *definition and conceptual meaning*. Both HRM scholars and practitioners alike invest time and other resources in the measurement of commitment to inform strategic action. This is often reflected in employee surveys which then direct managerial action. That is to say, the results of employee surveys, reflecting levels of commitment, specifically inform where strategic efforts and investments will be focused. The central role that commitment plays in connecting HRM practices with discretionary outcome behaviors, which in turn impact on organizational performance (Purcell et al., 2008), therefore calls for conceptual clarity to guide strategic action.

Human Resource Management textbooks provide our academic foundation and shape our conceptual understanding; they are when most students and future HR practitioners first encounter commitment. On the one hand, commitment is used in high frequency in these textbooks and the relationship between commitment and HRM is seen as central to performance (Gilmore, 2013; Stredwick, 2013). On the other hand, issues around definition – and its regular absence - seen in our review of articles, were mirrored here. Commitment was often described in textbooks under the umbrella of employee engagement (Stredwick, 2013). Furthermore commitment at the individual level was largely ignored, rather commitment was often only defined in contrast to control type of HR practices (Malik, 2018). Hence, providing a toolkit for studying commitment at the worker level is pertinent as well as timely.

Second, it is important to recognize that the recent developments in the commitment field enable us to study commitment in contemporary work settings (van Rossenberg et al., 2018). Furthermore, the world of work is going through significant change in terms of employment relationships, organizational boundaries, and workforce demographics to name a few (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Kinnie & Swart, 2020; Swart & Kinnie, 2014). Contemporary work organization increasingly include loosely coupled networks. These three points enable the HRM researcher to critically assess and choose a set of *multiple targets of commitment* relevant and fitting to the aim of the study and the work setting. Hence, we call for work that addresses not only more targets than just the organization in the same study but also considering examples where the organization is not a relevant construct in the workplace (see van Rossenberg et al., 2018 for a discussion of this). Given these changes in work organization, in this review we have illustrated that commitment serves as a bond or an anchor, however, we need to consider that the anchors may be increasingly outwardly directed (to clients) and inwardly directed (to the self and the career).

These shifts in the targets of commitment have a direct impact not just on how we study this construct but also on how we understand HRM systems. HRM studies of the past decade have mainly focused on 'the organization'. It requires a change in perspective for researchers to (re-)consider what are the most relevant targets of commitment for workers, to be (more) appreciative of context and to delineate targets more deliberately. Targets such as professions and occupations, teams and other targets nested within the organization, as well as those outside of it, may be much more relevant for outcomes such as turnover or performance than 'the organization' (see reviews in Becker, 2009 and Meyer, 2016). This may require more inductive types of research methodology to more fully understand the targets of relevance. Recent changes in professions (Cross & Swart, 2020) or the multiple clients involved in such work (Broschak, 2015), as examples, may mean that measurement of these is not tapping what we think it is (Breitsohl et al., 2018). HRM as a field needs theory that is equipped to deal with this changing world of work. Our review therefore presents an opportunity to reconfigure the study of commitment in HRM to meet the challenges of this changing world of work and for commitment to make a greater contribution.

Third, we have discussed the emergence and importance of *the dynamics of commitment* as opposed to viewing the construct as more stable over time. Emerging research points to the notion that commitment can shift almost on a weekly or even daily basis (Solinger et al., 2013). This can be through sudden changes and affective events theory (Becker et al., 2013; Bergman et al., 2013). If such regular change is the case, then surely HRM practitioners need to reconsider the use of annual employee surveys which gauge commitment and move to a much more frequent (pulse point) approach in order to more accurately understand the attitudes and behaviors of their workforce. This can be done by both quantitative high-density trajectory analysis as well as qualitative and narrative-based approaches to the study and management of commitment, especially if the organization is to retain its valuable talent. There are clear implications here for the management of diverse workforces. For example, younger workers newly entering the workforce may experience frequent and dynamic changes to their set of multiple commitment, whilst there may be more stable commitment bonds across other worker demographics. It is important for future research to understand these fine-grained differences to manage the interconnections between commitment and work-based outcomes effectively.

Fourth, in terms of measurement and methodology, we have highlighted the importance of aligning measures and methodologies with context. In particular, our methodological deliberation points to the increasing need to understand variability in the experience of commitment. One interesting direction in this respect is the use of a person-centered approach, which provides insight into the fact that groups of individuals have different experiences of commitment(s). This relates directly to the configurational approaches to HRM (Lepak & Snell, 1999) and HR differentiation, wherein which different groups of employees and external partners are managed through a variety of employment modes. The use of person-centered approaches offers a way to extend the configurational approaches to that of commitment-based management. This is significant given that individuals commit in different ways to targets both inside and outside the organization, which in turn can inform the configuration of strategic HRM practices.

Finally, the review that we have put forward here, categorized into threads of definition and conceptual meaning, multiple targets of commitment and dynamics, which is then reflected in measures and methodologies provides not only a 'roadmap' for future research. It also extends an invitation of collaboration between HRM scholars and practitioners. It is through this further integration that the field of commitment can be strengthened through both theory and practice.

Our work provides a reconnection of the HRM field with many of the recent developments in the field of workplace commitment. These offer a clear opportunity for further relevant and interesting research. Importantly, by combining the theoretical threads and

methodological advances we create a framework and guidance for studying commitment in the context of HRM and provide ideas for pushing the boundaries of research of commitment in the HRM field in a coherent manner.

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