

The term 'commitment' appears quite often in the popular discourse, as it does in psychological texts. Lay persons hold forth freely about commitments to a cause, to a relationship, to an organization, or to a course of action, and listeners seemingly have no trouble deciphering the meaning of such expressions. In contrast to past theories of commitment in the current project we propose that our understanding of this concept will benefit from distinguishing two dimensions of commitment, initiation of commitment and maintenance of commitment. The first aspect, initiation, is marked by a decision to adopt and strive for a goal. The second aspect, maintenance, indicates the continued striving for a goal despite possible adversity. We propose that initiation and maintenance are two separate factors with different antecedents and consequences. Thus, some individuals may be prone to making commitments but not necessarily to keeping them; others may stick to their commitments but not be particularly keen to make new ones; yet others may be averse to both initiating and maintaining commitments; and still others may be prone to both making and keeping commitments. In this project we will investigate in greater depth the consequences of various combinations of initiation and maintenance of commitment for a set of motivational outcomes. For example, we will explore how individual differences in the willingness to initiate and maintain commitment affect a number of goals individuals pursue and relations between them, that is whether a person experiences a high degree of internal goal conflict and stress or whether they are free of them due to a balanced goal structure. We will also investigate how the strength of motivation changes with progress toward goals as dependent on one's level of initiation and maintenance level. After establishing a validity of the distinction between initiation and maintenance, the next step will be to verify the psychological mechanisms that underlie these processes. An important question is whether the psychology of commitment is constant across the different objects of commitment: are factors that determine commitment to a relationship, for example, the same as those that determine commitment to an ideological cause, to a course of action, to one's profession or to one's country. We suggest a positive answer to that question. We assume that there are indeed factors that transcend specific content of the goal one is committed. Specifically, we propose that people initiate commitments because making any new commitment satisfies two needs: the need for novelty and the need for agency and control. When people decide to pursue a goal they may experience an excitement and autonomy, which is not granted by mere maintenance of old commitments. In contrast, we propose that people maintain commitments because existing commitments satisfy two different needs: the need for consistency and the need for belonging. In other words, when people remain committed to their goals it is in part due to their value of stability and because this is what other people expect from them. We will test all our hypotheses in two lines of studies (26 total) using a variety of methods and designs.