

Career Commitment: A Reexamination and an Extension

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Compared to the other forms of work commitment, there is a paucity of research on career commitment. In this article, the authors seek to address this relative gap in the literature by building on previous research on the correlates and antecedents of career commitment and adding “new” variables to the framework. More specifically, they investigate the effects of a few previously studied factors such as job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, and they add two more individual factors (need for achievement and work ethic) as well as some situational variables (organizational uncertainty/fear of job loss and job fit) that, to the best of their knowledge, have not been investigated in previous research. Furthermore, they examine the effects of extra-work variables (family involvement and number of dependents) on career commitment. Finally, they control for a number of key demographic variables. The authors find considerable support for the hypotheses that job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction are positively related to career commitment and find some support for a similar effect for need for achievement and work ethic. Furthermore, as predicted, fear of losing one’s job was negatively related to career commitment, whereas “job fit” was positively related. The extra-work variables did not have any significant effects on career commitment. The implications for theory and practice are discussed. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA)

Work commitment has attracted considerable attention from academics and practitioners for decades. Many observers note that commitment to work may be an explanatory variable in several organizational outcomes, including turnover, effort expenditure, and job satisfaction (Blau, 1985, 1989; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990; Somers & Birbaum, 1998). During recent years, there has been an increased focus on some of the “negative” outcomes as employers report less “employee loyalty” and “involvement.” Although many factors for the perceived decrease in work commitment have been offered, there is some vagueness, especially in the practitioner press, on exactly what constitutes and determines work commitment.

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In the academic literature, there seems to be some understanding of this concept. Morrow (1983) identified five forms of work commitment: work ethic endorsement, career commitment/professional commitment, job involvement, organizational commitment, and union commitment. She has since reformulated this "constellation" to comprise the following: job involvement, affective organizational commitment, continuance organizational commitment, work ethic endorsement, and career commitment (Morrow, 1993). However, as Aryee and Tan (1992) noted, following from an earlier observation by Morrow (1983), career commitment "lags developmentally," and "although aspects of careers, for example career choice and career development, have been extensively studied . . . , there is a paucity of work on career commitment" (Aryee & Tan, 1992, p. 288). In this article, we seek to address this relative gap in the literature by building on previous research on the correlates and antecedents of career commitment and adding "new" variables to the framework.

In an early examination of "career motivation," London (1983) posited that a number of personal, environmental, and career decisions and behavioral factors may influence and/or reflect career commitment. The list of possible antecedents and correlates identified by London is fairly exhaustive and it is practically impossible to include all into a single study; thus, all previous researchers using this model have limited themselves to a few of these "traditional" factors. In fact, most of the research has focused on a few individual/personal factors, such as job involvement and organizational commitment (see, e.g., Blau, 1985, 1989; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990). As Aryee and Tan (1992) noted, "Since no one can possibly include all the variables identified in London's . . . theory, there should be continuous efforts to isolate situational variables suggested by the theory as a basis for building and empirically verifying a parsimonious model" (p. 302).

In this study, we add two more individual factors (need for achievement and work ethic) as well as some of the situational variables (organizational uncertainty/fear of job loss and job fit) that, to the best of our knowledge, have not been investigated in previous research. The job security/organizational uncertainty variable (fear of job loss) is added because there is a growing feeling that economic and organizational forces unleashed in the past, including downsizing and restructuring, may be having an impact on career commitment (Hall & Associates, 1996; Morrow, 1993). This phenomenon continues to be relevant as labor markets become even more competitive and organizations continually to seek to restructure their operations and "rightsize" their workforces. Furthermore, there are additional extra-work variables that may be having an influence on career commitment. Aryee and Tan (1992) suggested "family situations" (spouse support and household coping mechanism); however, they found that these variables did not have any significant statistical effect on career commitment. In this study, we use "family involvement" and "number of dependents" as the extra-work variables. Finally, we control for a number of key demographic variables; this allows for a better examination of the unique effects of the key independent variables. Overall, this study adds theoretically to the literature by reexamining a previously underresearched construct, adding new variables, and controlling for others.

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