



Linking career mobility with corporate loyalty: How does job change relate to organizational commitment?[☆]

Tammy B. Kondratuk,^a Peter A. Hausdorf,^{a,*} Karen Korabik,^a
and Hazel M. Rosin^b

^a *Department of Psychology, College of Social Sciences, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ont., Canada*

^b *York University, Toronto, Ont., Canada*

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Abstract

Today's organizations are undergoing constant and substantial change due to many internal and external forces. These changes are impacting on the inter- and intra-organizational career mobility of managers and employees. This research assessed the relationship between career mobility history and a recent internal or external job change on organizational commitment using (Allen & Meyer, 1990) three-dimensional model. Professional-level employees participated in three survey administrations over an 18-month timeframe. External career mobility history (i.e., number of external job moves over one's career) was negatively related to normative commitment, but not to affective and continuance commitment. Affective and continuance commitment were significantly lower for external movers prior to a move when compared to nonmovers over the same period. In contrast, only continuance commitment was significantly lower for internal movers prior to a move when compared to nonmovers over the same period. Affective commitment increased significantly after the move for both internal and external movers. Implications for research with respect to career mobility and organizational commitment are discussed.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: phausdor@uoguelph.ca (P.A. Hausdorf).

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1. Introduction

Historically, workers and organizations expected stable and long term employment relationships, reflecting a “cradle-to-grave” attitude toward organizational careers (Mirvis, 1992). However, in response to dramatic economic change in recent years (Dufficy, 2001), organizations are now often sending mixed signals to their managers and employees with respect to career opportunities (Conlon, Coy, Palmer, & Saveri, 1999; Coy, Conlin, & Thornton, 2002; Jamrog, 2002). For example, organizations are laying off some employees at the same time as they invest considerably to retain those identified as having potential (Jamrog, 2002; Miller, 2001). Such trends have prompted a number of researchers to suggest that traditional career models, wherein individuals become employed by and promoted within a single organization over the course of their careers, are being replaced with new career models that are typified by increased job (internal) and company (external) mobility (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996).

There is growing speculation about how such changes will impact work attitudes such as employee commitment to organizations, which has often been referred to as loyalty in both the popular media (e.g., Moskal, 1993), and academic literature (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Interestingly, despite such commentary, very little empirical evidence has been accrued with respect to the impact of career mobility patterns on organizational commitment (Kalleberg & Mastekaasa, 2001; Murrell, Frieze, & Olson, 1996). This paucity of research is particularly surprising given the well-established relationships between organizational commitment and a variety of key organizational and individual outcomes, including withdrawal cognitions (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002), voluntary employee turnover (for reviews see Allen & Meyer, 1996; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer et al., 2002), absenteeism (e.g., Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Meyer et al., 2002), job performance (e.g., Bashaw & Grant, 1994; Meyer et al., 2002), organizational citizenship behaviour (Meyer et al., 1993; Meyer et al., 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995), stress (Begley & Czajka, 1993; Meyer et al., 2002), and work–family conflict (Meyer et al., 2002). As such, the purpose of the present research is to further explicate the relationship between career mobility and organizational commitment through both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. The present investigation also extends previous research, which has focused on mobility and affective commitment, to the three-dimensional model of organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991). As labour shortages create more career instability, understanding the relationship between commitment and career mobility will become extremely important for both organizations and workers.

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