

**The Effect of Workplace Exposure on Professional
Commitment: A Longitudinal Study of Nursing Professionals.**

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Philosophy**

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Abstract

The behaviour of employees is increasingly being recognised as the critical factor in achievement of organisational effectiveness. Therefore, the need to address inefficiencies that are derived from the organisation-employee relationship is being recognised as important to organisational success. For many years the concept of organisational commitment provided the means to develop theory in relation to organisation-employee relationships. More recently, however, other types of work-related commitments have been identified as having importance to the organisation-employee relationship.

In the contemporary political-economic context, professionals are increasingly becoming employees of organisations which operate according to market or quasi-market principles. There are some fundamental differences between professional occupations and non-professional occupations. These differences may have consequences for the relationship between professional employees and their employing organisation. The differences may also have consequences for other work-related outcomes for professional employees in ways that are different from the work-related outcomes of non-professional employees. Importantly, for professional employees commitment to the profession is developed during the pre-workplace entry educational experiences and may have consequences for the retention of professional employees within organisations, as well as retention within the profession. Therefore, the commitment of professional employees to their occupation may be both an antecedent to and a consequence of other work-related outcomes. However, to date, professional commitment has not been studied from a developmental perspective and the effect of workplace exposure on professional commitment is not understood.

This thesis reports the findings of a study in which a theoretical model of the relationship between professional commitment prior to workplace entry and professional turnover intention was evaluated using path analysis. The relationships included in the model were between commitment to the profession as both an antecedent to, and a consequence of organisational-professional conflict, job satisfaction and organisational commitment, as well as the relationship that each of

these variables may have to organisational turnover intention and professional turnover intention. A repeated measures design was used with a sample of nursing professionals. Professional commitment before entry to the workplace was measured, and after a period of workplace exposure, professional commitment was again measured, as well as the other work-related outcomes identified in the model. The Blau (2003) occupational commitment measure was used to measure the pre-and-post workplace entry levels of professional commitment. The thesis also examined the factor structure of the Blau (2003) occupational commitment measure.

The results of the model evaluation indicated that it is a plausible model of the identified relationships. Examination of the factor structure of the Blau (2003) occupational commitment measure indicated that it is best represented by five rather than four components. This research found that professional commitment was quite stable in the initial period of workplace exposure. The research findings also indicated that the relationship between professional commitment and organisational commitment was mediated by job satisfaction and that organisational-professional conflict and job satisfaction were directly related to organisational commitment. The research found that job satisfaction and professional commitment after a period of workplace exposure were related to organisational turnover intention, but that organisational commitment was not. The final major research finding was that organisational turnover intention was the only workplace variable in the model that was directly related to professional turnover intention.

This research has contributed to the organisational behaviour literature through the development and initial evaluation of a model of the relationship between professional commitment prior to workplace entry and professional turnover intention. The results of the model suggested that when organisations provide professional employees with workplace experiences that are professionally, as well as personally satisfying, they promote retention of professional employees with their own organisation, as well as retention of professionals within the profession.

This research recommends that for organisations that employ professionals, the model of the organisation-professional employee relationship that is likely to promote the retention of professional employees both within the organisation and within the profession, is a partnership model. Conflict resolution principles are recommended to inform the partnership model of the organisation-professional employee relationship. In addition, the empowering leadership style is recommended

for organisations that employ professionals, because it is better matched to the employment mode and characteristics of professional employees.

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