

Professional and organizational commitment of university research professors

Ronel Erwee

Graduate School of Management, University of Pretoria

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Professional commitment of university research professors is initially fostered by an internalized code of ethics, inculcated during an extensive training process, and further maintained by colleague authority. Professional commitment may however be eroded by current internal problems in the professions. Furthermore, the research professor functions within the constraints of the larger university system. The unique university research system, as well as the role of research administrators, may influence the development of the professor's organizational commitment. The relationship between the professor's professional organizational commitment is discussed. Blau and Scott's⁴ model of this particular relationship is criticized and alternate viewpoints are given.

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Die professionele verbintenis van professore wat navorsing doen aan universiteite word in die eerste plek bevorder deur 'n geïnternaliseerde etiese kode wat ingeprent is gedurende 'n intensiewe opleidingsproses en onderhou word deur kollegiale gesag. Professionele verbintenis mag egter ondermyn word deur huidige interne probleme wat deur die professies ondervind word. Verder funksioneer die navorsende professor ook binne die beperkinge van die groter universiteitstelsel. Hierdie unieke universiteitsnavorsingstelsel, sowel as die rol van die navorsingsadministrateurs, mag die ontwikkeling van die professor se verbintenis ten opsigte van die instansie beïnvloed. Die verwantskap tussen die professor se professionele verbintenis en dié van die instansie word bespreek. Blau en Scott⁴ se model van hierdie besondere verwantskap word gekritiseer en ander sienings gegee.

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In order to explore the professional and organizational commitment of university research professors, the attributes of a profession will be described with special reference to the concept of colleague authority. University research professors were chosen as subjects for discussion in this paper as the author regards them as 'professionals'. It can be stated that most research professors are appointed to their positions because they, as members of recognized professions, have made significant contributions to their science. Because of such specialization most research scientists are members of professional societies which provide guidelines for scientific endeavour. Furthermore, the majority of these professors have a dual role as they have to teach in addition to their research activities. Nosow and Form¹ point out that college teaching is a universally recognized profession. In this paper attention will also be given to elements in the university system that have a bearing on the commitment of its professional members. A distinction will be made between the professional and organizational commitment of professionals, and the implications of possible conflict between the two orientations will be discussed.

Attributes of a profession

In order to contrast professional and organizational commitment, clarity must be gained as to the characteristics of each type of commitment. The focus will be on the attributes of professional commitment, as well as the nature of the pressures, arising from their various professions, research professors are subjected to. It can be argued that notwithstanding the differences between various professions, they share a common core of attributes by virtue of being 'professions'. These specific attributes can be understood if the historical development of professions is taken into account.

Nosow² declares that the universally recognized professions such as medicine, law, the clergy and teaching arose from the needs of the community and were seen as critical to the survival of the community. The early practitioners of these professions had the most knowledge in these areas. New incumbents were trained extensively, were initiated into the profession and their positions were given high sanction by the community. Therefore, the select few who practised the profession were bound to ethical principles governing their service to the community. The historical development of the professions had a signifi-

cant influence on what is currently regarded as the hallmarks of a profession.

According to Kornhauser³, Blau and Scott⁴, and Shepard⁵ one of the key elements of professionalism is the body of specialized knowledge which forms the base of each profession. To master this body of knowledge and the concomitant skills requires a period of intensive training. The professional thus has a specialized competency to deal with problems in a specific area and is usually committed to a career in this competence. Because of this expertise the professional not only has considerable autonomy, but also bears the responsibility not to abuse his authority. The actions of the professional are governed by 'universalistic standards' (Blau & Scott⁴) which are derived from the profession's specialized data base. During the period of socialization which accompanies the specialized training process, these universalistic standards are internalized by the individual. An example of these norms is the norm of 'affective neutrality' (Blau & Scott⁴) which assumes that the professional will not be governed by self-interest but will strive to render a service to others.

The internalization of the code of ethics thus forms one source of control over the professional's actions. Blau and Scott⁴ and Kornhauser³ point out that the distinctive control structure of the professions provide a supplement to the individual's self-control in the form of surveillance of the individual's conduct by peers. Only fellow professionals are assumed to be qualified to judge a colleague's actions and 'since they have a personal stake in the reputation of their profession, are motivated to exercise the necessary sanctions' (Blau & Scott⁴, p⁶³). Voluntary associations are established which formulate laws delineating the field of jurisdiction of a group of professionals, licensing the members to practice and laying down preferred codes of conduct. While advice from equals is accepted, a high value is placed on the autonomy of the individual professional. In the university setting the notions of 'academic freedom' and 'colleague authority' (Marcson⁶) are especially ingrained and defended. The insistence that the source of discipline should be the colleague group and not the hierarchy of authority can be a source of conflict between research professors and university administrators.

Professional commitment therefore has two sources — it is fostered by an internalized code of ethics as well as colleague authority. Both these sources can exert powerful psychological pressure on the individual to be committed to his profession. It is questionable whether an organization has equally powerful techniques to exert psychological pressure on the individual to be committed to its objectives.

Current developments in the professions

It can be postulated that the abovementioned lofty attributes of professions can generate considerable commitment to a profession. However, pressures in contemporary society are creating internal turbulence in the professions which may have an impact on member commitment. These pressures may contribute to the erosion of professional commitment and even strengthen organizational commitment. Therefore current developments should be evaluated to ascertain whether such factors can

affect professional commitment. In describing the internal turbulence both Nosow and Form¹ and Schein⁷ state that increasing specialization within each profession creates conflict between sub-specialities which then tend to be detrimental to co-operation between colleagues. As an illustration of this tendency it is interesting to note that South African counselling psychologists recently established their own professional association to protect their interests in reaction to a similar society that was formed by clinical psychologists. Although the constitution of each society makes provision for co-operation with the other group, the very existence of two societies creates a gulf between members of the same basic profession. The statement by Goldner and Ritti⁸ that 'the proliferation of specialities has resulted in a pluralistic system of contending groups' can be applied to current conditions in the social, biological and physical sciences. Furthermore, the authority and control that professional associations exert over members is eroded by disagreements between members and the association over a variety of issues. Boshoff and Hamblin⁹ point out that one of these contentious issues is the variations in adherence to ethical standards and application of knowledge among industrial psychologists.

In addition to internal controversies in a profession, conflict also exists between closely related professions. An example of this is the fact that South African clinical and counselling psychologists feel that the authority and prestige of their profession is threatened by the demand for accreditation as professionals by personnel managers and administrators. Few guidelines exist in the literature as to how the internal turbulence in the professions or the conflict between professional groups affect members' commitment to their profession. If Coser's model (Coser, LIR 823¹⁰) is followed, it is hypothesized that commitment to the *specialist subgroup* is enhanced by the abovementioned conflicts as 'conflict with other groups contributes to the establishment and reaffirmation of the identity of the group and maintains its boundaries against the surrounding world'.

Another development that has to be taken into account is that more professionals are being employed in a wide variety of organizations and are not working as 'free' or autonomous agents (Schein⁷, Blau & Scott⁴). A controversy exists as to whether employment conditions affect professional ethics. One viewpoint is that a free professional, who is economically dependent on his clients, has a greater financial orientation than a humanistic service orientation. Another viewpoint is that salaried professionals employed in business are so affected by the profit motive of these organizations that they do not adhere strictly to their code of ethics. Blau and Scott⁴ contend that the salaried professional in a service organization is relatively free from pressures to be unfaithful to professional codes of conduct. As the writer agrees with Blau's statement and it is not within the scope of this paper to deal with the abovementioned controversy, university research professors were taken as subjects for discussion. The assumption is that a research professor could pursue knowledge for its own sake without it creating conflict with the demands of earning a living. However, by being a member of an established organization, the issue of professional versus organizational com-

mitment becomes relevant.

Relevant characteristics of the university research system

Having dealt with the way in which professional commitment is fostered and influenced, the issue of organizational commitment can be discussed. As a point of departure, it is postulated that the characteristics of a particular organization have a significant impact on the development of organizational commitment. The particular organization that accommodates professionals therefore has to establish how the professional perceives the organization as well as his role within the organization. These factors in turn will influence the professional's interaction with the organization and the extent to which he develops a commitment to organizational objectives. As the focus is the organizational commitment of university research professors, the unique characteristics of the university research system that may influence the development of organizational commitment must be considered.

If an open systems approach is followed, the research professor may be seen as an 'open system' practicing a profession while being subjected to the restraints of the larger university system. He is not a passive agent but provides his own inputs into the larger system. In most universities professors maintain considerable power in influencing academic and administrative decisions such as the recruitment of new members, curriculum content, what would be regarded as acceptable research and appropriate research methodologies. However, a professor who is contracted mainly to do research may tend to limit himself to exerting power in the area of his research duties and as such the university's policy regarding research, which defines his power base, becomes relevant in influencing his actions. The writer hypothesizes that prevailing controversies regarding the role of research in universities influence the professional and organizational commitment of researchers.

As can be seen from Fig. 1 (adaptation of Langenhoven,^{11 & 12}) research in South African universities is only one component of the total university system. One problem confronting the researcher is that in the allocation of resources, the components are ranked mostly in the following order: training, management and administration, services and lastly research. Another problem can be that no clear guidelines have been formulated as to the role of research in a particular department or subsystem within the university. This leads to uncertainty as to how research results will be evaluated and what recognition and rewards will be given to outstanding research work. This in itself may not foster organizational commitment.

Coltrin and Glueck¹³ found that in United States universities the perceived ability of administrators to reward researcher's efforts played a key role in the researcher's satisfaction with the administrators. Other findings indicated that there are differences among researchers of various academic disciplines as to the leadership role they expect from administrators. The general conclusion of Coltrin and Glueck¹³ about the role of the administrator is that most researchers do not wish to be controlled or have their work controlled by the administrator. Rather, they expect him to 'play a *positive role* in the research environment . . . the role seems to be either that of a resource person or co-ordinator' (Coltrin & Glueck¹³, p 111). Lorsch and Morse¹⁴, p 93 reported a similar finding in an earlier study regarding the difference in formal control between high performance and low performance research laboratories. The administrators of high performance laboratories relied on the research scientists' self-discipline and self-control to regulate their work flow. In the low performance laboratories the administrators assumed that more pervasive rules and other formal devices were essential to regulate performance. However, if the administrator does play the expected role, it still does not guarantee that the research scientists will be committed to organizational goals just because they are satisfied with the administrator's role behaviour.

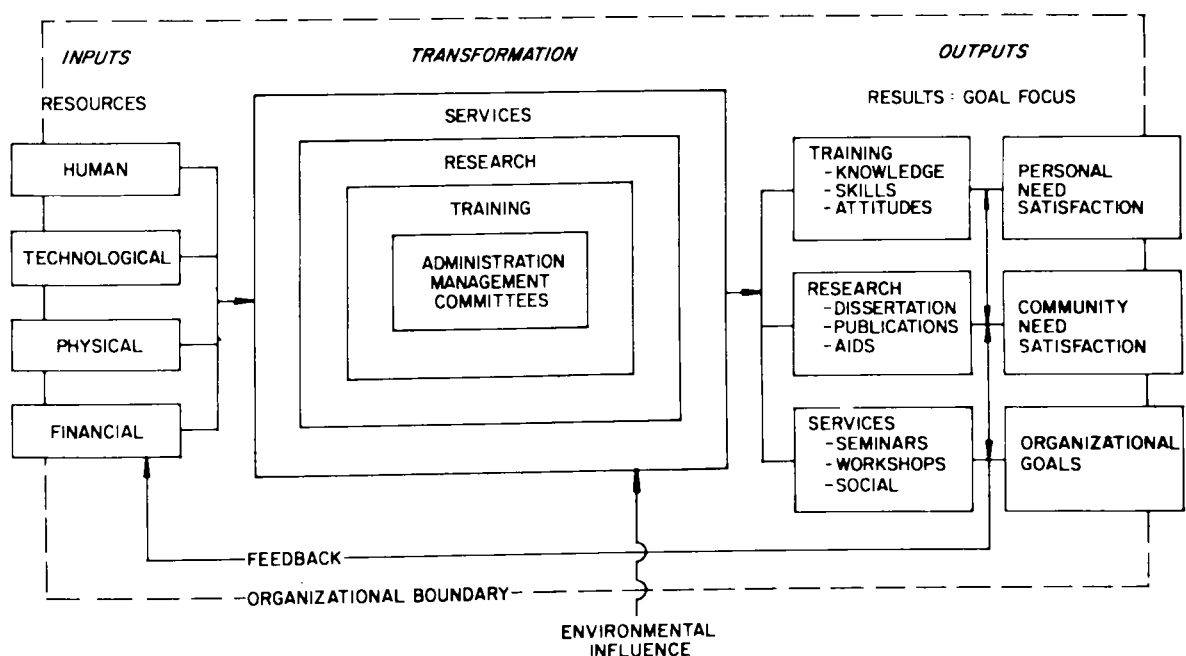


Fig. 1 Role of research in a university system (Langenhoven, 1975 & 1977)

If administrators do not formulate clear guidelines regarding research, the research professor has no other recourse but to rely on his own expertise and to consult with his fellow professionals. This again strengthens the ties of colleague authority which tend to nurture professional commitment but can erode hierarchical authority. The writer hypothesizes that another phenomenon which negatively affects hierarchical authority, but can enhance colleague authority, is what Goldner, Ritti, and Ference¹⁵, p. 346 describe as 'cynical knowledge'. This refers to the knowledge that presumably altruistic actions or procedures of the organization actually serve the purpose of 'maintaining the legitimacy of existing authority or preserving the institutional structure'. The advancement of knowledge is described as 'altruism' within a university setting. The implication of this concept is that research professors may perceive a discrepancy between administrators advocating advancement of knowledge and their failure to allocate adequate resources to research or to reward research effort. Coltrin and Glueck¹³, p. 107 demonstrated that research professors of various disciplines expect administrators to be men of 'highest ethical standards and integrity'. If this expectation is not fulfilled and the abovementioned discrepancy is perceived, then cynicism will be created among researchers about the organization and its motives. This could have the effect of alienating organization members to the extent that they are less committed to organizational goals.

However, the negative reaction against the organization could also have a positive outcome in the sense that a cluster can be formed consisting of researchers in a scientific specialty. These researchers can then formulate their own high standards against which research results will be evaluated. Mullins, Hargens, Hecht and Kick¹⁶ postulate that such scientific specialty clusters have a subset of members who are accepted as experts in the discipline and have made significant contributions to their field. The clusters that Mullins *et al.*¹⁶ refer to may exist within a university system, but usually transcend organizational boundaries to include members of various universities. The norms that the scientific specialty cluster develop can serve to reinforce the functional autonomy of that part of the organization (Gouldner¹⁷). The formation of such specialist clusters again serve to strengthen the member's commitment to his professional group as 'conflict with out-groups increases internal cohesion' (Cosser, LIR 823¹⁰).

The relationship between professional and organizational commitment

In the previous sections several references were made to professional and organizational commitment of professionals. Traditional analyses of professional and organizational commitment have assumed that the individual had to choose one over the other (see Marcson⁶ and Shepard⁵). Another proponent of this viewpoint was Gouldner¹⁷ who studied the conflict between professional and organizational commitment in a liberal arts college. He described individuals who have low loyalty to their employing organizations, are highly committed to a set of specialized professional skills and are oriented toward an outer reference group as 'cosmopolitans'. On the other hand, individuals who have a high loyalty to their

employing organizations, a low commitment to specialized skills and an orientation toward reference groups in the organization were described as 'locals'. It was hypothesized that most professionals tend to have a cosmopolitan orientation. Such professionals will tend not to develop a loyalty to any particular organization, but will exhibit a readiness to move to other organizations so that they may practice their profession.

In order to test this hypothesis that an inverse relationship does exist between professional commitment and organizational loyalty, Blau and Scott⁴, pp. 67-69 conducted a study in a social work agency. They concluded that the inverse relationship does indeed exist and that 'professionals tend to be cosmopolitans and not locals'. It is the writer's contention that the study can be criticized on several points. One of these is that 'some graduate courses in social work' was used as an estimate of the individual's professional commitment. Physical attendance of some graduate courses and the minimal socialization that takes place during that time cannot adequately reflect the individual's belief system. It is hypothesized that measuring the individual's belief system will yield more reliable and valid estimates of the level of his professional commitment. The choice of outside professionals, journals, and books to indicate use of outside reference groups was taken as another measurement of professional commitment in the Blau and Scott⁴ study. The question arises whether social desirability played a role in prompting some subjects to state that they did use 'outside' reference groups. More valid measurements used by other researchers (Friedkin¹⁸; Mullins *et al.*¹⁶) to study the influence of external reference groups were cocitation analysis and investigation of social network patterns among scientists of a particular specialty.

Another problem in the Blau study is that organizational loyalty was measured by a single question, *viz.* would the subjects leave their present job if better employment opportunities were created in the community. This cannot be regarded as an objective question. Some subjects may have feared that their position in the organization will be jeopardized if they answered in the affirmative. The reaction of subjects to all the abovementioned questions were expressed by utilizing percentages. No attempt was made to apply non-parametric statistics to ascertain whether the differences in reactions between groups were statistically significant. The writer contends that because of the inadequacies of the study the validity of the findings has to be questioned.

To gain more perspective on the difference between professional and organizational commitment, the concept of organizational commitment can be explored further. Many diverse opinions exist as to the nature of organizational commitment. Near, Rice and Hunt's¹⁹ statement that job satisfaction is only a small component of life satisfaction imply that the importance of work in an individual's life is vastly overrated. On the other hand, several other studies indicate that *work* is the central life interest of many individuals (see Kidron²⁰ for a summary). It was found that individuals with a central life interest in work had a higher commitment to their employing organization compared to other individuals who had a different central life interest. Most of these studies found that organizational commitment is multi-

dimensional. For example, Kidron^{20, p 241} states that organizational commitment has two components, viz. 'moral commitment' and 'calculative involvement'. The 'moral' component reflects the individuals' willingness to exert high levels of effort and the degree to which they accept the values and goals of the organization. The 'calculative' component reflects the willingness of individuals to stay with the organization. In addition to stating that the construct itself is multidimensional, Kidron^{20, p 246} hypothesizes that 'the environment of the organization, its technology, structure and goal configuration might be relevant in combination with the Protestant ethic in predicting moral and calculative involvement'. This hypothesis implies that the nature of the organization and the individual's belief system will have a significant impact on the nature of his organizational commitment. This statement also confirms what has been stated in previous sections of the paper and is further confirmed by the research of Mortimer and Lorence²¹, Underhill²², and Kalleberg²³.

At this point some of Marcson's⁶ findings can be taken into consideration. He found that the occupational values of scientists tended to shift from basic research to applied research and from research to administration as their careers developed. Scientists in the latter group realize that they are not really subjected to colleague authority of fellow professionals, but that their position places them under jurisdiction of hierarchical authority of the organization. They then tend to develop aspirations in the direction of an administrative career if they have reached the ceiling on prestige and financial compensation from a scientific research career. These findings imply that the level and nature of a scientist's organizational commitment may change as his career is subject to changes.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the literature survey that an individual's professional and organizational commitment may be independent of each other. This statement is also supported by Jauch, Glueck and Osborn's²⁴ research on the relationship between organizational loyalty, professional commitment and research productivity. Therefore, an individual's professional and organizational commitment may both be high, or both may be low or one may be high and the other low. As was pointed out in previous sections, current developments in the professions and in university research systems have to be taken into account when predictions are made about commitment levels of university research professors. In general it can be postulated that the level of their professional and organizational commitment will be a function of the particular individual, his specific profession and factors in the particular university research system. It can also be postulated that university research professors will have a high professional commitment as highly talented individuals are usually recruited into scientific careers; they undergo intensive research training and a lengthy socialization process during which the intrinsic rewards of scientific achievement is stressed. Jauch *et al.*²⁴ found that organizational loyalty does *not* account for variability in research performance. However, professional commitment is positively associated with research productivi-

ty — the greater the professional commitment, the greater the research productivity.

Reskin²⁵ states that universities should not assume that the high level of professional commitment of research professors should alone provide adequate incentive for them to maintain a high level of output. If a university really values the production of knowledge it should reinforce research professors' performance with professional rewards that will facilitate future research. This statement can be linked to a suggestion made by Jauch *et al.*²⁴ that administrators should help pay for attendance at professional meetings or pay professional dues, provide for adequate professional libraries and even encourage professional meetings at their universities. Commitment can duly be fostered if research scientists also reap external rewards such as formal and informal recognition for their contribution to science as well as adequate resources for future research projects.

The abovementioned reward structure can create an environment where the researcher can utilize and extend his knowledge and skills, co-operate with competent colleagues and enhance his professional reputation. These factors can facilitate professional commitment which in turn may stimulate academic research productivity.

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