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PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. The paper aims at studying the institutional factors influencing professional commitment of teachers in self-financing colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. A sample of 100 teachers was chosen and questionnaire was used to collect data. Inter correlation matrix and Path analysis were used to analyze the data. Professional Autonomy, Feedback, Participation in Decision making, Perceived Organizational support and Collegiality were the institutional factors chosen and it was found that all of them had a strong relationship and influence on the Professional commitment of teachers. Professional Autonomy and Collegiality had a direct effect on Professional Commitment of teachers in self-financing colleges.

KEYWORDS

Professional commitment, Professional Autonomy, Perceived organizational support.

INTRODUCTION

The growth and progress of a country mainly depends upon the teachers, and teachers are the nation builders. Teaching is the noblest profession and hence, their well being and their commitment towards their profession is gaining significance recently, especially in higher educations. India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, next to the United States and China. Indian higher education system has expanded at a fast pace by adding nearly 20,000 colleges and more than 8 million students in a decade from 2000-01 to 2010-11. As of 2011, India has 42 central universities, 275 state universities, 130 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 33 Institutes of National Importance.

While there is clear and categorical recognition of the vital role that the teachers in colleges have to play in preparing future pillars of the nation, in terms of professional competencies and commitments on their part, surprisingly, in the total enterprise of teachers, the most neglected group is the teachers themselves.

PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT

Vandenberg and Scarpello (1994) defined professional commitment as "a person's belief in and acceptance of the values of his or her chosen occupation or line of work, and a willingness to maintain membership in that occupation" (p. 535).

Professional Commitment is defined as the extent to which one is committed to one's profession, identified elements including dedication and social obligation (Hall 1968).

Jeffrey j Bagraim (2003), Meyer et al (1993) defined three components of professional commitment, which are as per following:

- Affective professional commitment (APC)
- Continuance professional commitment (CPC)
- Normative professional commitment (NPC).

Affective professional commitment (APC) refers to identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the profession. Thus, employees with strong affective professional commitment remain members of their profession because they want to do so.

Continuance professional commitment (CPC) refers to commitment based on the employee's recognition of the costs associated with leaving their profession. Employees with strong continuance commitment remain with their profession because they realize that they have much to lose by not doing so.

Normative professional commitment (NPC) refers to commitment based on a sense of obligation to the profession. Employees with strong normative professional commitment remain members of their profession because they feel they ought to do so.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The body of literature in industrial/organizational psychology represents a potentially fruitful domain of theory and research that may be applied to understanding the relationship between teachers and the schools in which they are employed. But most of the researches are conducted only in schools and the research has not focused much on the teacher's professional commitment in higher education. Relatively little research; however, has addressed commitment among teachers (e.g., Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Grady, 1989). Moreover, although recently there have been attempts to trace the diverse construct of commitment (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988), most research on teachers' commitment examined it as a generic construct (e.g., Niehoff, 1997; Reames & Spencer, 1998).

The teacher commitment literature can be distilled for generalizations and assumptions about the ways that teachers define, describe and characterize commitment. The current accepted conceptualizations of teacher commitment can be directly linked back to the research done in the 1970's into organizational commitment by Kanter (1974) and Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). Teachers are thought to have commitments to the social context in which they work, or to what Kanter (1974) describe as the 'social system'. However, the overarching assumption is that teacher commitment is not one dimensional, but has many layers and dimensions (Day, 2000, 2004; Nias 1981, 1996; Tyree, 1996). Professional commitment is of importance as it is associated with greater job effort and involvement, i.e. committed employees are less likely to leave their position and display other withdrawal behaviour such as absenteeism (Singh & Billingsley, 1998).

PC AND PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Supportive leader behaviors and a generally facilitative organizational climate may be subsumed under a variable entitled "Perceived Organizational Support." Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) demonstrated that individuals tend to "form global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (p. 504). Employees are frequently sensitive to relevant environmental and organizational constraints that might limit the ability to provide them with desired rewards (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Employees who

experience a strong level of POS theoretically feel the need to reciprocate favorable organizational treatment with attitudes and behaviors that in turn benefit the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In support of this social exchange perspective, research has revealed that POS is positively related to job attendance and measures of job performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990), the tendency to help coworkers (Shore & Wayne, 1993), the tendency to offer constructive suggestions for organizational improvement, and affective organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1990).

PC AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

PC is "the degree to which a person's work performance affects his self-esteem" (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965, p. 25). For a person who is professionally committed, work is a vital part of life. This means that both the work itself and the co-workers are very meaningful to the employee, in addition to the importance s/he attaches to the organization as a whole. Active participation in decision-making increases involvement and PC, which result in a higher level of acceptance and satisfaction. Evers (1990) suggested that teachers' successful participation in decision-making could be explained by the feeling of ownership that comes from initiating ideas rather than responding to others' proposals. Gaziel and Weiss (1990) claimed that teachers' participation, based on establishing a strong voice in decisions and policies, was a characteristic of "professional orientation", and fostered better working relations among staff members. With regard to self-efficacy, studies have shown that teachers with a greater sense of efficacy are more enthusiastic about teaching (Guskey, 1984), report a higher level of commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986), and are more likely to remain in teaching (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982).

PC AND FEEDBACK

An applied managerial perspective might suggest that a supervisor use as much performance feedback as possible, and indeed, the degree to which feedback enhances performance has been amply documented (Annett, 1969; Nadler, 1979). It is desirable to study professional commitment as a moderator of the feedback and performance relationship among professionals because commitment attitudes are likely to affect perceptions and reactions to different types of role related feedback. Teachers feel more responsible for their actions which in turn influences their commitment (Salancik, 1977). For such persons, task feedback is likely to be perceived as important due to expectations derived from professional training that performance standards should be defined and monitored by the individual professional. Relatedly, positive supervisory feedback would likely be welcome by the professionally committed as an indication of an absence of conflict between professional norms and organizational practices.

PC AND PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

The extent to which the profession provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to carry out the tasks is Professional Autonomy (Gegas and Schwalbe 1983; Hackman and Oldham 1980; Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990). Those high in professional commitment desire autonomy and resent organizational intervention (Sorenson & Sorenson, 1974). The autonomous flexibility to pursue these core tasks is valued part of any professional work. Mathew and Zajac found a positive correlation between Autonomy and professional commitment. (Hackman and Lawler; 1971;)

PC AND COLLEGIALITY

Professionalism is characterized by high degree of collegiality which enables them to cope up with uncertainties encountered in their work (Blau & Scott 1962;). Stronger collegial ties and support from professional coworkers enhance the professional commitment of workers; Friedson 1984; Jean E Wallace 1985; Nelson & Trubek 1992; Derber 1983).

NEED/IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a dearth of committed teachers in higher educations which is an important area to be addressed. Rate of attrition of Quality teachers is increasing and hence the institution as well as the student community suffers a lot. Lower commitment creates the dilemmas that both affect badly the effectiveness of college and cause teachers to be less successful in their professional performance or to leave the profession. The less committed teachers may both create difficulties and cause the deviations in respect of the educational aims of the institution, for example in the classroom, the teachers may struggle to direct the students to behave in accordance with different aims separated from the aims of the institution. Those types of negative attitudes may be recognized and prevented at the proper time, if there is a real understanding of their commitment towards their profession.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teachers today, leave their institutions as well as professions often due to some reasons. Teachers commitment in higher education are influenced by various institutional factors like Autonomy, Decision making, collegiality, feedback, job satisfaction, Stress etc. Serious negative consequences like turnover, turn over intentions, absenteeism can be prevented if the teachers are committed to their profession. Positive consequences like Organizational Citizenship behavior, job performance and creativity in teaching can also be enhanced in committed teachers. Based on the review of literature; six institutional variables are identified to have an impact of the professional commitment of teachers in higher educations. They are Professional Autonomy, Feedback, Participation in Decision making, Perceived Organizational support and Collegiality.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the institutional factors affecting the professional commitment of teachers.
2. To analyze the relationship between the factors and the professional commitment of teachers.
3. To suggest some measures to the institutions to enhance the commitment of the teachers.

HYPOTHESIS

Ho: There is no significant relationship between Professional Autonomy and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Professional Autonomy and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between Feedback and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Feedback and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between Participation in Decision making and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

H3: There is a significant relationship between Participation in Decision making and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between Perceived Organizational support and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

H4: There is a significant relationship between Perceived organizational support and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between Collegiality and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

H5: There is a significant relationship between Collegiality and Professional Commitment of teachers in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Arts and science colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. In this study, 100 teachers working in Self-financing colleges affiliated to Bharathiar University were chosen as samples. Selected colleges were chosen in Coimbatore district for the study and data collection was done with the help of a questionnaire. Simple random sampling was used to collect the data.

SAMPLE SIZE

It refers to the number of items to be selected from the universe to constitute as a sample. The sample size of the study was 100 and it was a descriptive study.

TOOLS USED

Professional commitment scale of Meyer and Allen (1993) was used to collect data on PC. Questions on Collegiality were framed on the basis of the instrument adapted from Professional teacher behavior: OCI by Hoy et al (2001). Questions on Feedback were adapted from Job Characteristics Inventory by Sims et al

(1976). Questions on Participation in decision making and Professional autonomy was taken from (Rosenholtz 1989), and (Eisenberger et al 1986)'s scale was used to collect data on Perceived Organizational Support.

Correlation matrix was used to find the relationship between the institutional factors and the relationship of those factors with PC. Path analysis was done to find the direct and indirect effect of the institutional variables on PC.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

INSTITUTIONAL VARIABLES AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT

In order to study the relationship between institutional variables as well as institutional variables with professional commitment among the respondents, and the consolidated inter-correlation matrix was computed and presented in the table no. 1 furnished below:

TABLE 1: INTER - CORRELATION MATRIX

	Pro Autonomy	Feedback	Decision making	Org support	Collegiality	Prof commit
Prof Autonomy-x1	1.00					
Feedback-x2	0.23	1.00				
Decision making-x3	0.24	0.47	1.00			
Perceived Org support-x4	0.53	0.19	0.48	1.00		
Collegiality-x5	0.56	0.29	0.47	0.82	1.00	
Prof commit-y	0.54**	0.11*	0.23*	0.38*	0.53**	1.00

**-Significant at 1 % level

It is seen from the above table that the inter-correlation among all the explanatory variables X1, X2, X3, X4 and X5 is highly significant and positive. Further it is also seen that all these explanatory variables are highly, significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable Y (Professional Commitment).

PATH COEFFICIENT ANALYSIS

The Path coefficient analysis is performed from the inter-correlation matrix, in order to study the direct response and indirect response of each explanatory variable through other independent variables on the dependent variable.

The direct effect of each of the explanatory variables on the dependent variable and the indirect effect of each explanatory variable on the dependent variable through other explanatory variables are furnished in the Table No. 2

TABLE 2: DIRECT & INDIRECT EFFECT OF EXPLANATORY VARIABLES ON Y-PROF COMMITMENT

	Prof Autonomy	Feedback	Decision making	Org support	Collegiality	Prof commit
Prof Autonomy-X1	0.40	-0.03	0.02	-0.15	0.31	0.54
Feedback-X2	0.09	-0.12	0.04	-0.05	0.16	0.11
Decision making-X3	0.10	-0.06	0.08	-0.14	0.26	0.23
Perceived Org supp-X4	0.21	-0.02	0.04	-0.29	0.45	0.38
Collegiality-X5	0.22	-0.04	0.04	-0.24	0.55	0.53

It is seen from the above table that among the five explanatory variables, two explanatory variables namely X1-prof autonomy and X5-collegiality have higher positive direct effect on the dependent variable Y-professional commitment. The variable X1 also has higher positive indirect effect on Y through X5. Similarly the variable X5 also has positive indirect effect on the dependent variable through X1. Hence the two explanatory variables X1-prof autonomy and X5-collegiality are substantially important contributing variables to Y-professional commitment.

FINDINGS

1. Professional Autonomy has a strong positive relationship with Professional Commitment. It has a high positive direct effect on PC.
2. Collegiality has strong positive relationship with Professional Commitment. It has a high positive direct effect on PC.
3. Feedback has strong positive relationship with Professional Commitment. It has an indirect effect on the dependent variable PC.
4. Participation in decision making has strong positive relationship with Professional Commitment. It has an indirect effect on the dependent variable PC.
5. Perceived Organizational support has strong positive relationship with Professional Commitment. It has an indirect effect on the dependent variable PC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The institutional factors in self-financing colleges have a strong impact and relationship with the professional commitment of teachers in higher education. Professional autonomy and collegiality influences professional commitment directly. Hence higher education institutions should realize the importance of professional commitment of teachers and concentrate in improving the working conditions of teachers that will enhance their commitment. The outcomes of professional commitment like turnover and absenteeism can be minimized if the institutional factors are healthy so that quality teachers can be retained in educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

From the study, it clear that the institutional factors namely Professional Autonomy, Feedback, Participation in Decision making, Perceived Organizational support and Collegiality have a positive relationship with the professional commitment. Teachers in higher education will be committed to their teaching profession if these institutional variables are good.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study focused on the institutional factors. Researches can be carried out to study the other variables that affect professional commitment and the scope of research can be extended to other universities and colleges in the state.

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