Umbrella Summary

Occupational Commitment

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is occupational commitment?

Occupational commitment refers to the extent to which employees are committed to their line of work (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Over the past 40 years, various researchers also labeled the construct as career commitment or as professional commitment, but the term *occupation* is intended to convey that the concept (a) does not apply to a more general concept of a career, which may involve different occupations over time and (b) applies to both professional and non-professional occupations (Meyer et al., 1993).

Occupational commitment is one of many forms of work-related commitment. Some of the other, more commonly studied types include job involvement, organizational commitment, and union commitment (e.g., Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Morrow, 1993). Though occupational commitment is conceptually and empirically related to these other types of commitment (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005), it is different enough to be considered distinct.

Early measures of occupational commitment (labeled career commitment at that time) treated it as a single dimension (e.g., Blau, 1985). Since then, multidimensional measures have been developed. A popular and recommended 18-item measure regards occupational commitment as having three components: affective (emotional attachment), continuance (costly to leave), and normative (obligation to remain) (Meyer et al., 1993). This three-component conceptualization is based on the three types of organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1991). Example items from each factor include, "I am proud to be in the (occupation) profession," "Changing professions now would be too difficult for me to do," and "I am in (occupation) because of a sense of loyalty to it" (Meyer et al., 1993).

Why is occupational commitment important?

Occupational commitment is important because it is associated with several job attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors. More specifically, occupational commitment is moderately associated with job satisfaction (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000) and strongly associated with organizational commitment (Wang, Jiang, Weng, & Wang, 2019). It is also moderately associated with burnout and stress; employees who express commitment to their occupation are less likely to experience burnout and stress (Lee et al., 2000). In terms of behaviors, occupational commitment also has a moderate connection to both task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Wang et al., 2019), which are discretionary extra-role

behaviors, such as volunteering, helping others, and making suggestions for improvement, that benefit the group and organization (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Though occupational commitment is very strongly connected to occupational turnover intentions, it is moderately connected to organizational turnover intentions and modestly connected to actual organizational turnover (Lee et al., 2000).

What contributes to occupational commitment?

Meta-analytic research on occupational commitment thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with it, not on what factors cause occupational commitment or what strategies can improve it. Further, among those factors that have been examined, very few seem likely to be viable contributors. Though it is possible that there are individual factors, such as personality, that may make a person more or less likely to experience occupational commitment (in general, rather than for a specific occupation), there is little research on it thus far. The one personality factor that has been sufficiently studied is locus of control, and it is moderately associated with occupational commitment; individuals who tend to feel that their success is determined more by luck than by their own abilities (i.e., have an external locus of control) are less likely to experience occupational commitment than those who feel they have more control over their future (Lee et al., 2000). Age is only modestly associated with occupational commitment; among younger employees, there is not much of a connection, but among older employees, there is a positive relationship, until about retirement age, at which point the connection is again very weak (Katz, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019). Finally, people who believe in the value of hard work are more likely to be committed to their occupation (Lee et al., 2000).

Job and organizational factors that are associated with occupational commitment include supervisor support, coworker support, autonomy, participation, low role stress, and congruence between the organization and the occupation (Lee et al., 2000). This last factor means that the work standards, procedures, goals, and values of the organization are consistent with those of the occupation (e.g., there is greater congruence for a lawyer working in a law firm than a lawyer working in a chemical company). When an employee feels that there is consistency between their occupation and the organization, they feel more committed to that occupation. In sum, job or organizational factors may figure into how people feel about their entire occupation, not just about the job or the organization.

Though the meta-analytic research thus far sheds some light on occupational commitment, there is still much to learn about how it develops and can be improved. Among others, potential areas to explore include person-vocation fit (i.e., congruence between a person's interests or personality and their occupation) and individuals' experiences related to occupational choice (e.g., amount and type of career counseling received), socialization into their occupation (e.g., mentoring, networking), and growth and advancement (e.g., professional development opportunities, promotions).

QIC-WD Takeaways

► Occupational commitment is moderately associated with job satisfaction and strongly associated with organizational commitment.

► Occupational commitment is moderately associated with burnout and stress; employees who express commitment to their occupation are less likely to experience burnout and stress.

► Occupational commitment has a moderate connection to two types of job performance—task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.

► Occupational commitment is very strongly connected to occupational turnover intentions, moderately connected to organizational turnover intentions, and modestly connected to actual organizational turnover.

► Occupational commitment is higher among those with an internal locus of control and those who believe in the value of hard work. More research is needed to understand what other individual factors may be associated with greater occupational commitment.

► Occupational commitment is stronger among those who are older, up to a point, then seems to slowly decline, but longitudinal research is needed to verify these trajectories over time.

► Occupational commitment is higher when there is role clarity in the organization, when the supervisor is supportive and helps employees set goals, when coworkers are supportive, and when employees have a higher sense of autonomy and participation.

► Occupational commitment is undermined in stressful environments and when roles are ambiguous and/or in conflict.

► When an employee feels that the work standards, procedures, goals, and values of the organization are consistent with those of the occupation, they feel more committed to that occupation.

► Studies are needed to better understand what causes occupational commitment and how to improve it. Valuable information might be gained by looking at fit indicators and individuals' experiences related to occupational choice, socialization into their occupation, and growth and advancement.

► Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess occupational commitment should consider the measure developed by Meyer et al. (1993).

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