Organizational Commitment of Part-Time and Full-Time Employees

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Abstract

In recent years many educational institutions have increased their use of part-time adjuncts, especially with the introduction of distance learning courses. With this growing use questions about the efficacy of part-time and distance faculty have arisen. This paper tests whether organizational commitment, as described by Mowday (1979), differs between three groups of faculty: full-time, part-time, and part-time who work full-time for another organization. The authors used a 15 item, seven-point scale instrument to measure commitment of a sample of 479 full and part-time faculty at two midwestern universities. Those that worked full-time for another organization are more committed to organizations for whom they work part-time than are those working only part-time. No significant difference in commitment was observed between full-time and part-time employees.
Organizational Commitment of Part-Time and Full-Time Employees

With the rapid growth of non-traditional educational institutions and enrollment, many educational institutions have added significant numbers of part-time adjuncts to teach courses. With this growth a number of questions and rhetoric have arisen about the quality of instruction from part-timers (Fulton, 2000; Leatherman, 1998; Rewick, 2001), "overuse and exploitation of part-time, non-tenure-track" faculty (Kavanagh, 2000, p. 26) and accusations about academic "sweatshops" (Cox, 2000, A-12). As institutions consider the proper use of part-time faculty, one underlying concern is whether part-time instructors, given their generally low pay and respect, are as committed to their work as full-time counterparts. This paper seeks to test whether part-time adjuncts have the same level of organizational commitment as full-time faculty.

Recent research shows that the United States Government defines part-time employees as those workers who work between one and 35 hours per week (Feldman & Doerpinghaus, 1992). Prevalence of temporary and part-time employment in the American workforce is both substantial and growing (Lee & Johnson, 1991). The number of these workers has increased 70% from 1974 to 1994. In contrast, the total workforce increased only 42% (Risher, 1997). In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000) reports that 17% of the workforce, which equates to over 22 million workers, are part-time. The later account for over 50% of the total workers in health care, retail, and service organizations (Feldman & Doerpinghaus, 1992). Additionally about 10.2% of U.S. male workers work part-time, while 25% of U.S. female workers work part-time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). Another 4.5 million U.S. workers work at a secondary part-time job in addition to a primary full-time job; and approximately 1.7 million work at a secondary part-time job in addition to a primary part-time job (Lettau, 1995).

Organizational commitment of workers is not a new concept in the study of organizational behavior. This topic was examined as early as 1938 (Barnard). Kanter (1968) views
organizational commitment as the willingness of workers to devote energy and loyalty to an organization. In general terms, organizational commitment is “a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974, p. 604).

Educational institutions are among the most active employers of part-time workers. On average, part-time instructors account for nearly half of all instruction at colleges and universities (Cox, 2000). With the growth of distance education technology, this number is bound to grow. Twenty years ago, this figure was about 30% (Magner, 1999). Between 1975 and 1993, adjunct faculty grew four times faster than full-time faculty (Kavanagh, 2000). Today at Yale University, adjunct instructors (60%) and graduate students (10%) handle 70% of classroom instruction (Wilson, 1999). This ratio of adjunct instructors to full-time instructors is even higher at schools such as the University of Phoenix and Capella University (Leatherman, 1998; Rewick, 2001). In addition, several of these part-time instructors hold full-time jobs at other organizations. As an example, “Ninety percent of Phoenix’s faculty members are fully employed elsewhere” (Leatherman, 1998, p. A15).

This employment has not come about without controversy. Much of the discussion has focused on the fairness and social justice of using lowly paid adjuncts in place of more highly paid full-time faculty members (Fulton, 2000; Kavanagh, 2000; Leatherman, 1998). A subtle tone in these sources, however, points to the underlying belief by many traditional academics that part-time faculty are in some ways inferior to full-time faculty. Research on the commitment of part-time workers in general shows mixed results. Some researchers have found that part-time workers are less committed to and satisfied with their jobs than full-time workers (Lee & Johnson, 1991; Miller & Terborg, 1979; Morrow, McElroy, & Elliott, 1994). Other researchers have
determined that part-time employees are more committed than full-time employees (Eberhardt & Shani, 1984; Jackofsky & Peters, 1987; Schaubroeck, Judge, & Taylor III, 1998). Eberhardt and Shani (1984) found that part-time healthcare employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction than did full-time employees. These part-time workers also reported more favorable attitudes toward the organizational structure, reward systems, and organizational policies as well as the level of trust among organizational members.

Many studies have concentrated on the implications for managers in regard to organizational commitment of full-time employees. There exists a need, however, to examine the organizational commitment of part-time and distance workers as compared to full-time workers. “Committed members are viewed as stable, productive, and more likely to accomplish organizational goals than their less committed colleagues” (Larkey & Morrill, 1995, p. 193).

Researchers have developed models of organizational commitment in two different research areas. The first area focuses on attitudes; the second on behaviors (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Attitudinal commitment refers to the “attitude or an orientation toward the organization which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization” (Sheldon, 1971, p. 143). O'Reilly III and Chatman (1986) defined organizational commitment as "the psychological attachment felt by the person for the organization; it will reflect the degree to which the individual internalizes or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization” (p. 493).

Behavioral or continuance commitment is the second area and is based on the work of Becker (1960). Becker states that commitment is based on a combination of “side bets” and the individual’s system of values. Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) also based their definition of organizational commitment on the theory of side bets. “Commitment is primarily a structural phenomenon which occurs as a result of individual-organizational transactions and alterations in side bets or investments over time” (p. 556).
Other researchers have focused their definitions on employee involvement within the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Kanter, 1968; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Kanter defines organizational commitment as “the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations which are seen as self-expressive” (Kanter, 1968, p. 499).

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

This paper addresses the following question: What differences in the level of organizational commitment exist between part-time, part-time who work full-time for another organization, and full-time faculty? This is operationalized as the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant difference between the organizational commitment of part-time and full-time faculty.

H2: There is a significant difference between the organizational commitment of part-time faculty and part-time faculty who work full-time for another organization.

**Methodology**

To answer this research question, the author used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (15 items using a 7 point scale) and organizational commitment model developed by Mowday et al. (1979), modified by adding demographic questions. This instrument’s reliability and validity has been well established by prior researchers (Eberhardt & Moser, 1995; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Martin & Hafer, 1995; Mowday, et al., 1979). Cronbach alpha (α) values in these studies, for example, have ranged from .85 to .93. Test-retest reliability over two and three month periods range from R values of .62 to .72. The instrument was distributed via U.S. Mail to 1,098 instructors at two private, midwestern institutions. These 1,098 instructors were 100% of the faculty at the two institutions. Four hundred and seventy nine surveys were returned and used in this study for a response rate of 44.43%. Based on respondent's answers to demographic questions,
faculty were divided into three groups based on their status:

- **Group 1** – Full-time faculty. N=97
- **Group 2** – Part-time faculty. N=269
- **Group 3** – Part-time faculty who work full-time for another organization. N=112

**Findings**

**Hypothesis 1.** Hypothesis 1 explores whether there is a significant difference in organizational commitment between part-time and full-time employees. To test the hypothesis, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. First, equal variances were not assumed based on Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances (F = 3.965, significance = .047). The result of the two-independent sample t-test was not significant, \( t \) (degrees of freedom: 132.29) = 1.424, \( p = .157 \). The null hypothesis was supported thus rejecting the research hypothesis. Even though the mean organizational commitment score was higher for full-time instructors (\( M = 5.267, SD = 1.268 \)) than part-time instructors (\( M = 5.068, SD = 1.062 \)), there is no significant difference between organizational commitment of part-time and full-time workers in this study. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 demonstrate these results.
Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 explores whether there is a significant difference in organizational commitment of part-time instructors who work for another organization and those working only part-time. As in testing Hypothesis 1, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. Equal variances were not assumed based on Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances (F = 10.342, significance = .001). The two-independent sample t-test was significant, t (degrees of freedom: 276.03) = -2.424, p = .016. Instructors who worked full-time for another organization (M = 5.283, SD = .8565) are more committed to organizations for whom they work part-time than are those working only part-time (M = 5.021, SD = 1.120). Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate these findings.
Table 2.1 Organizational Commitment
Hypothesis 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org. Commit</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>full-time elsewhere</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>5.2832</td>
<td>.8565</td>
<td>8.093E-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part-time only</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>5.0210</td>
<td>1.1192</td>
<td>7.179E-02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 Independent Samples Test
Hypothesis 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org. Commit</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>10.342</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The results of this study support the notion that for the sample group organizational commitment does not vary significantly between part-time and full-time faculty. Further exploratory analysis using other demographic variables, including age, gender, tenure, and education produced similar findings of no significant difference in commitment. The only significant relationship found in the data is that part-time instructors working full-time for another organization were significantly more committed to the educational institution than those working only part-time.

These findings are not surprising based on the extant literature. As discussed by McGinnis and Morrow (1990), there are many similarities between part-time and full-time instructors. Job responsibilities are similar, many teach because they enjoy the profession, and most work on a preferred schedule. Another reason for this finding is that regardless of employment status, instructors enjoyed working for the institution because of the organizational climate. Many commented in this study that the reason they work for their institution is because
they enjoy the people they work with, believe in the organizational mission, and love to work with
students. In contrast, there were negative reactions for both groups in regard to pay, workload,
desire to work full-time, and institutional management. As such, both groups experienced an equal
amount of dissatisfaction with their employer.

However, results of this study suggest that part-time instructors working full-time for
another organization were more committed to the educational institution than those working only
part-time. There are many reasons for this finding. First, part-time instructors choose to teach
part-time because of flexible teaching schedules, to supplement income, and for professional
development. In addition, their higher commitment may well be based on the "enjoyment" aspect
of teaching compared to part-timers without full-time employment that may be struggling
financially. Table 3 presents cited reasons for working part-time.
### Table 3
Reasons for choosing Part-Time Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work full-time for another organization</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only position available</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement income</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible schedule</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love to teach</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other commitments</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love the students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By choice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health reasons</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directions for Future Research**

There are many unanswered questions as to the reasons for the above findings. It would be useful for deans and other administrative staff to understand further why there is not a difference in organizational commitment levels between full-time and part-time instructors. Demographic variables, their affects on organizational commitment, and reasons for these affects also need to be investigated further. This information would be useful in making decisions regarding pay structures, medical and retirement benefits, and other reward systems.
The final area for future research is to further examine differences in commitment of part-time instructors who work full-time for another organization as well as compare the differences between this group and full-time employees. There seems to be a growing segment of the part-time instructor labor force (29.4% in this study) that work part-time in addition to their full-time job. Here professional commitment could be examined as well as determining if there are any differences in organizational commitment between each job the instructor holds.

**Conclusion**

The debate about the efficacy of part-time faculty will likely continue for some time. There are many aspects for faculty and administrative participants in this discussion to consider. The findings of this study indicate that there is no difference in organizational commitment levels between part-time and full-time instructors. Part-time instructors, however, who work full-time for another organization demonstrated higher levels of organizational commitment than those instructors working only part-time. Further research should be conducted to further examine organizational commitment levels of part-time and full-time workers.
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

References


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