DOES A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT ENHANCE ORGANISATIONAL ATTACHMENT IN UNIVERSITY ACADEMICS?

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ABSTRACT:
Global competition for students and talented academics has made it essential for human resource practitioners in Higher Education to understand the antecedents of organisational attachment in academics. This study of 663 academics from 36 Australian universities found that a positive work environment was an important element in developing organisational attachment and Perceived Organisational Support was found to be the most significant predictor of both affective commitment and intention to quit the organisation. Job Characteristics were important for both attachment elements however job involvement was only significant for affective commitment. We conclude that academic attachment is fostered in a work environment in which there is support for academics so that they feel the university is committed to them and recognises their contribution.

Keywords: academic, affective commitment, intention to quit, perceived organisational support, job characteristics, job involvement

Globalisation has increased the competition faced by Higher Education institutions in Australia. This competition is not only for students but for the academic talent whose outputs contribute to the rankings of universities and to students' quality perceptions of their academic experiences. Higher Education is an important part of the Australian economy as it is the third biggest export earner behind coal and iron ore (Universities Australia 2009) Continuing success in the provision of academic services by Higher Education institutions in Australia is under threat as globalisation has not only increased the competitiveness between existing higher education institutions but also means that new institutions are entering existing markets. Within the global higher education environment there has also been the emergence of global higher education institutions that not only provide educational courses in multiple countries but also have developed fully serviced campuses to support these courses. Most Australian universities have a degree of internationalisation which brings international students to Australia and sends local students abroad. With this internationalisation there is a corresponding movement of academic staff. Globalisation not only sets international standards for quality of performance and higher standards of efficiency (Niland 2008) but also increases the need to maintain these standards in order to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace (Nayyar 2008). This is recognised and marketed through the global university ranking, that give status to and prestige for leading universities (Marginson 2007). The commitment and attachment of academics to a University is therefore becoming increasingly important to Universities as there is not only a global

competition for students but also for engaged and talented academics to create and renew an institutions performance. (Newman, Couturier & Scurry 2004).

The academic role seems to be changing as academics are now working longer and harder than ever before (Harman 2003), they have higher qualifications and are reported as being, less satisfied, less committed and less involved with their institutions (Bellamy, Morley & Watty 2003; Harman 2003; Lacy & Sheehan 1997; Winter & Sarros 2002; Winter, Taylor & Sarros 2000). Academics are under greater pressure to produce quantifiable outcomes for research and teaching (Taylor 1999). There is less time for academic freedom and autonomy with increased administrative duties (Taylor 2008). Academics are also spending more time on non-core activities and these tasks seem to be bringing little or no enjoyment (McInnes 1998), this includes administrative tasks. In the current climate of increased competitiveness between higher education institutions in it is essential for human resource practitioners in Higher Education to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents to organisational attachment of academics. The aim of this paper is to identify the potential antecedents to emotional organisational attachment in academics and to evaluate their relative importance of these antecedents to academic attachment to the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational attachment can be seen as a measure of commitment and intention to stay with the organisation (Bar-Haim 2007; Gaiduk, Gaiduk & Fields 2009; Riketta & Dick 2005). It is noted by Riketta and Dick (2005) that the attachment to the organisation is a predictor of retention. Conversely, if an individual is not attached to the organisation then that person is more likely to have a high intention to quit. It is proposed that there is a continuum of attachment. At the positive end employees are likely to have high levels of emotional attachment to their organisations (affective commitment) which indicates a low quit intention (Iverson & Buttigied 1999; Ko, Price & Mueller 1997; Tett & Meyer 1993). And at the other end of the continuum, there would be minimal emotional attachment to the organisation and a correspondingly high intention to quit the organisation.

To understand each end of the attachment continuum it is necessary to look at both variables (affective commitment and intention to quit). Organisational commitment is most commonly defined as an employee's involvement and identification with their organisation (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian 1974). Porter et al. (1974) identified three components of commitment: employees' acceptance of the organisation's values and goals; their desire to exert extra effort for the benefit of the organisation; and their desire to remain with the organisation. Commitment has been described as encompassing 'an active relationship with the organisation such that individuals are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the organisation's well being' (Mowday, Steers & Porter 1979, p. 226). Refining prior definitions, Allen and Meyer (1990) conceptualize commitment as including the constructs of affective commitment, continuance and normative commitments. Most closely related to the idea of organisational attachment is affective commitment (Casper & Harris 2008) which can be described as 'an affective or emotional attachment to the organisation such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organisation' (Allen & Meyer 1990, p.2). Affective commitment is seen as going beyond the call of duty, putting in the extra effort on behalf of the organisation. On the other hand, intention to quit is the prospect of the continuance of the job into the future (Saks 2006), or in this case the intention of detachment from the organisation. This leads to the first hypothesis;

Hypothesis 1 – Affective commitment and intention to quit will be negatively correlated.

For academics in this era of change it has become increasingly important to develop an understanding of the organisational factors that enhance attachment to the organisation. Research by Gaiduk et al (2009) found that elements such as the characteristics of the job have a positive impact on the degree of organisational attachment. The job characteristics model as developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1980) identifies the various aspects of the job (autonomy, task identity, task significance, skill variety and feedback from the job) which significantly impact the positive psychological states. The psychological states have been found to mediate the relationship between the core job characteristics and various outcomes (Fried & Ferris 1987; Nogradi & Anthony 1988). The job characteristics model

has been identified as a key antecedent to organisational commitment (Knudsen, Johnson & Roman 2003; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky 2002; Winter & Sarros 2002; Yoon & Thye 2002).

Casper and Harris (2008) found that perceptions of support from the organisation positively impacted attachment. Perceived organisational support (POS) as developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa (1986) has been identified as a strong predictor of affective commitment (Eisenberger et al. 1990; Hutchison 1997; McFarlane Shore & Wayne 1993; O'Driscoll & Randell 1999). POS is based on organisational support theory (OST) where 'employees develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being' (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski & Rhoades 2002, p. 565), in essence the commitment of the organisation to the employee (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The links of both POS and job characteristics suggests that a positive work environment will provide the elements which nurture and develop a greater attachment. The positive work environment will have the job characteristics conductive to a positive association and high levels of support from the organisation.

This paper contends that positive work environment encompasses the degree of involvement in the job. Although within the organisational attachment literature job involvement has not been identified as an antecedent, the wider research domain on the other hand identifies job involvement as explicitly linked with organisational commitment (Brown 1996; Reid, Riemanschneider, Allen & Armstrong 2008). Job involvement is defined as 'the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with their work, or the importance of the work on total self image' (Lodahl & Kejner 1965, p. 24). In contrast Kanungo (1982) defines job involvement in terms of the cognitive psychological attachment that is motivationally based and directed at meeting the needs and expectations of the individual. A meta-analysis on job involvement by Brown (1996) concluded that a person that is involved in their job if three elements are present, firstly they find the job motivating and sufficiently challenging. Secondly there is a clear commitment to the job, the work and the organisation. And finally, the job involved employee is developing key relationships on a professional level with supervisors. Having each of these elements would assist in creating a positive work environment, in addition to job

characteristics and the perception of organisational support (POS). This leads to the third and fourth hypothesis;

Hypothesis 2 – Perceptions of a positive work environment (POS, Job Characteristics and Job involvement) will explain unique variation in affective commitment in university academics.

Hypothesis 3– Perceptions of a positive work environment (POS, Job Characteristic and Job involvement) will explain unique variation in intention to quit in university academics.

Australian Universities fall broadly into five major groups (Table 1) and of these groups the Group of Eight (Go8) is regarded as the most elite brand. Universities in this group are represented by higher level classifications on the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU 2008) compared to the other University groups. The Go8 university group consists of older institutions within Australia, this group competes for students based on their elite status and produces three times as many research publications when compared to the other groups (Harman 2003). It is likely that this group may vary from the other university groups in terms of perceptions of support and design of the academic jobs. The Go8 universities may have a greater capacity for research with subsequent less time allocation for teaching. There is a possibility that due to the large research focus, this academic group has greater individual control over their time which would alter their levels of job involvement.

Table 1 Australian University Classification

Go8	ATN	IRU	NGU	Regional
*Australian National University *Monash University *The University of Queensland *The University of Sydney *University of Adelaide *University of Melbourne *University of New South Wales *University of Western Australia	*Curtin University of Technology *Queensland *University of Technology *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology *University of South Australia *University of Technology, Sydney	*Flinders University *Griffith University *Latrobe University *Macquarie University *Murdoch University *University of Newcastle	* Australian Catholic University * Central Queensland University * Edith Cowan University * Southern Cross University * University of Sunshine Coast * University of Ballarat *University of Canberra * University of Southern Queensland * University of Western Sydney * Victoria University	*Charles Darwin University *Charles Sturt University *Deakin University *James Cook University *Swinburne University of Technology * University of New England * University of Tasmania * University of Wollongong

The Australia Higher Education sector is characterised as one of the oldest workforces operating in the country and staff in universities are heavily concentrated in the older age groups (Hugo 2005).

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There are many older academics that refer to times past within the Higher Education as the 'golden era' (Taylor 2008); a time when there was a true collegial environment. It is likely that because of their greater experience of change in the sector, older academics will have a different view of Higher Education than younger academics. Therefore the age of academics may be an important factor when thinking about organisational attachment.

If age might indicate different academic experiences that shape level of attachment within academics gender might also indicate different academic experiences. Women are significantly underrepresented in the academic workforce (Hugo 2005). Winter and Sarros (2002) and Lacy and Sheehan (1997) found gender differences in perceptions of support, degree of satisfaction, elements of job characteristics. This indicates that gender may cause considerable differences on perceptions of organisational attachment. Furthermore, academic classification levels may also cause variation on the results. The classification levels are dependent upon qualifications and work rate output from assistant lecturer (level A) to Professor (Level E) and there are differing conditions associated with employment at each of the levels. Academics in the positions of Professor and Associate Professor would be expected to have different responsibilities, including leadership and greater research output than those in lower ranked positions (Barkhuizen & Rothmann 2006; Winter & Sarros 2002; Winter et al. 2000). To control for the variation on each of these contextual elements the following hypothesis are presented;

> *Hypothesis 4 – Unique variation explained by positive work environment (POS, Job characteristics, Job Involvement) on affective commitment will remain even when academics gender, age, university type and lecturer classification are controlled for.*

> *Hypothesis 5 – Unique variation explained by positive work environment (POS, Job characteristics, Job Involvement) on intention to quit will remain even when academics gender, age, university type and lecturer classification are controlled for.*

Overall, this research investigates the impact of a positive work environment as measured by POS, job characteristics and job involvement on organisational attachment (affective commitment and intention to quit).

METHOD

As part of a larger study, questionnaires were sent to the entire population of Faculty of Business academics in the 37 public Australian universities in November 2007, with the exception of one University that was used as a pre-test. A total of 4434 questionnaires were mailed out and there was a return rate of 708 (16%), of which 663 were usable responses (representing a 15% response rate). The demographics of the sample are presented in Table 2. This table demonstrates that there is a representative sample from the population as there is an adequate representation from within all the groups' analysed.

Table 2 Sample Demographics

Sex of Participant	University Grouping	Academic Lecturer Level	Age Group
Male= 386, 58.1%	Go8= 181, 27.6%	A=77, 11.6%	24-35years = 86 (13.1%)
Female= 278, 41.9%	NewGen= 143, 21.8%	B=262, 39.5%	35-44years = 148 (22.5%)
	ATN= 107, 16.3%	C=161, 24.2%	45-54 years = 255 (38.7%)
	IRUA= 97, 14.8%	D=87, 11.6%	55-64 years = 156 (23.7%)
	Regional/Unclassified= 127 , 19.4%	E=77, 11.6%	65+ years = 14 (2.1%)

The measures used in this study are reflected in Table 3, each was measured on a 7 point likert scale (Strongly agree – Strongly disagree). For questions within these scales that in the original used the word 'organisation' were modified by substituting the word 'university', and 'employee' was substituted with the word 'academic'. This enabled each of the measures to be directly related to the respondent group. All scales were pre-established questionnaires, reliability and subsequent validity was already established (as presented in Table 3). An example of the Allen and Meyer (1990) affective commitment scale questions is 'I do not feel emotionally attached to my University (negative scored)', an example of Colarelli's (1984) intention to quit scale is 'I frequently thinking about quitting my job'. The Eisenberger et al. (1986) POS scale contains items similar to 'My University is willing to help me if I need a special favour'. The Job Involvement scale developed by Frone, Russel and Cooper (1995) based on an adaptation of the scale developed by Kanungo (1982) contains items like 'I am very much personally involved in my job'. Finally the measure of the Job

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Characteristics model contains items such as 'How much variety is there in your job' (Hackman &

Oldham 1975, 1980; Saks 2006). Table 3 presents a summary of scales used.

Measure	Definition	Cronbach Alpha
Affective Commitment	The degree of an employee's emotional attachment to, identification and involvement with the organisation. (Allen & Meyer 1990)	0.88 (Chang & Chelladurai 2003) 0.79 (Iverson & Buttigied 1999) 0.87(Allen & Meyer 1990) 0.79-0.91 (Luthans et al. 2008)
Intention to Quit	Prospects of the continuance of the job into the future (Colarelli 1984)	0.75 (Colarelli 1984) 0.86 (Saks 2006)
Job Characteristics	Job Diagnostic Survey. The characteristic of the job; autonomy, task identity, task significance, skill variety and feedback from the job. (Hackman & Oldham 1975, 1980)	0.79 (Saks 2006)
Job Involvement	The degree to which a person identifies psychologically with their work, or the importance of the work on total self image (Lodahl & Kejner 1965, p. 24)	0.87 (Frone, Russell & Cooper 1995)
Perceived Organisational Support	Perception of support from the organisation to the employee. (Eisenberger et al. 1986)	0.97 (Eisenberger et al. 1990) 0.89 (Saks 2006)

RESULTS

The data was first analysed as correlations and then the hypothesized relationships were tested in a

hierarchical regression. Table 4 presents the correlational analysis and Cronbach alpha of each of the

variables. It can be seen that the correlational relationships between each the hypothesised variables

are significant, each of the positive work environment variables are significantly related to both

affective commitment and intention to quit the organisation. Additionally, the Cronbach alpha for

each of the measures are above the required limits (above 0.70) as specified by Cronbach (1951), each

of the measures has adequate to good inter-item consistency.

Table 4 Correlation Table with Cronbach Alpha

		Mean	SD	Alpha	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1.	Gender				1.00								
2.	55years +				-.23**	1.00							
3.	HighLect				-.20**	.208**	1.00						
4.	Go8				-.033	.005	.11**	1.00					
5.	POS	3.68	1.31	0.909	-0.03	-.018	.070	.113**	1.00				
6.	JobInv	4.46	1.28	0.893	-.002	.031	.156**	.124**	.210**	1.00			
7.	JobCh	5.10	0.95	0.725	.050	.037	.199**	.153**	.500**	.347**	1.00		
8.	AC	3.91	1.22	0.85	.002	.079	.067	.152**	.610**	.385**	.506**	1.00	
9.	Quit	3.23	1.67	0.746	-.038	-.004	-0.41	-.089*	-.48**	-.20**	-.42**	-.60**	1.00

NOTE: ** correlation is significant at $p \leq 0.01$, * correlation is significant at $p \leq 0.05$

Using the correlations presented in Table 4, there is support for organisational attachment as a continuum. The correlation between affective commitment and intention to quit the organisation was significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level, (r=-0.60). This result indicates that as scores on one of the measures go up the other goes down. Therefore as affective commitment increases intention to quit the organisation decreases, providing support for Hypothesis 1 as affective commitment and intention to quit are negatively correlated.

The results of both of the hierarchical regressions are presented in Table 5, the discussion will focus first on the predictability of affective commitment and then on intention to quit the organisation. In testing affective commitment as the dependent variable, the first step of the hierarchical regression tested the control variables of gender, 55 years and over, higher lecturer level and Group of Eight university group. These control variables had a significant multiple R (0.174), R^2= 0.03, F[4, 653] = 5.087, $p \leq 0.001$. In total, 3% (2.4% adjusted) of the variation in affective commitment is accounted for by the demographic variables. Of these demographic variables only Group of 8 was a significant predictor (β=0.15, $p \leq 0.01$). Using the squared semi-partial correlation (sr²), Group of 8 accounted for 2.13% (sr²=0.146²) of the explained variance in affective commitment.

The introduction of the positive work environment variables at Step 2 in the regression caused an R^2 change of 0.445. The multiple R (0.69) yielded a significant model, R^2=0.475, F(7, 650) = 84.167, $p \leq$ 0.001. With the introduction of the positive work environment variables, 47.5% (47% adjusted) of the variation in affective commitment is accounted. In total for both models the explained variation is 50.5%. As predicted all the positive work environment variables are significant predictors of affective commitment, POS (β= 0.47, $p \leq 0.01$), Job Involvement (β=0.22, $p \leq 0.01$) and job characteristics (β=0.19, $p \leq 0.01$). The squared semi partial correlations indicate that POS accounts for a greater portion, 16.3% of the explained unique variance in affective commitment (sr²=0.404²), compared to 4.2% of job involvement (sr²=0.206²) and 2.4% of job characteristics (sr²=0.155²). In the second step the demographic variables varied in their significance levels, Group of 8 which was a significant predictor in step 1, became non-significant with the introduction of the positive work environment variables. Conversely, aged over 55 years not significant in step 1 but became significant in step 2

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(β=0.09, p$\leq$ 0.01). Hypothesis 2 was supported as perceptions of a positive work environment (POS, Job Characteristics and Job involvement) explained unique variation in affective commitment in university academics. Hypothesis 4 was also supported as unique variation explained by positive work environment (POS, Job characteristics, Job Involvement) on affective commitment remained even after academics gender, age, university type and lecturer classification are controlled for.

Table 5 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

| | | Organisational Attachment Continuum | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Affective Commitment | | | | | | Intention to Quit | | | |
		B	SE	Beta β	AdjR²	ΔR²		B	SE	Beta β	AdjR²	ΔR²
Step1					0.024						0.004	
	(Constant)	3.67	0.164					3.572	0.266			
	Sex	0.07	0.10	0.03				-0.15	0.14	-0.05		
	55years +	0.21	0.11	0.07				-0.03	0.16	-0.01		
	HighLect	0.11	0.11	0.04				-0.16	0.16	-0.04		
	Go8	0.40	0.11	0.15**				-0.31	0.15	-0.08*		
Step2					0.47	0.445					0.270	0.267
	(Constant)	0.001	0.223					7.354	0.356			
	Sex	0.04	0.073	0.16				-0.12	0.12	-0.04		
	55years +	0.25	0.08	0.09**				-0.06	0.13	-0.02		
	HighLect	-0.11	0.09	-0.04				0.04	0.14	0.01		
	Go8	0.12	0.08	0.04				-0.02	0.13	-0.01		
	POS	0.44	0.03	0.47**				-0.46	0.05	-0.36**		
	JobInvolve	0.21	0.03	0.22**				-0.06	0.05	-0.05		
	JobCharac	0.24	0.04	0.19**				-0.38	0.07	-0.22**		

NOTE: Beta is significant at ** p$\leq$ 0.01* p$\leq$ 0.05,

At the other end of the organisational attachment continuum (intention to quit the organisation) the impact of a positive work environment, the results are presented in Table 5. As with affective commitment, in step 1 the demographic variables were entered, with a multiple R=0.102, the model was not statistically significant, $F(4, 654) = 1.705$, p=0.147. These variables only accounted for 1% (0.04% adjusted) of the unique variance on intention to quit. However, Group of 8 was a significant predictor (β=-0.08, p$\leq$ 0.05).

When the positive work environment variables were entered in Step 2, the model became significant with a multiple R= 0.527, $F(7, 651) = 35.746$, p$\leq$ 0.001. With the introduction of the variables for a positive work environment R^2 changed by 0.267, indicating that 27.8% (27% adjusted) of the variance in intention to quit is now accounted for by the model. Of the positive work environment variables only POS (β=-0.36, p$\leq$ 0.01) and Job Characteristics (β=-0.22, p$\leq$ 0.01) are significantly predicting intention to quit. This suggests that a lack of organisational support and low job characteristics will

increase intention to quit the organisation. Of these two significant results, POS accounts for a greater portion, 9.8% of the unique variance on intention to quit ($sr^2=-0.314^2$) compared to job characteristics unique variance of 3.2% ($sr^2=-0.179^2$). The positive work elements of POS and job characteristics both explain unique variation in intention to quit the organisation. Job involvement does not explain any unique variation after these variables were controlled for though it was significant at the zero-order level. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported with two of the three elements of positive organisations, POS and job characteristics, significantly explained unique variation. Though significant at the zero-order level Job Involvement ($r=-0.20$ $p \leq 0.01$) did not provide a significant contribution when POS and job characteristics where controlled for. Hypothesis 5 was also partially supported as the unique variation explained by positive work environment constructs of POS and Job characteristics on intention to quit remained even when academics gender, age, university type and lecturer classification are controlled for.

DISCUSSION

Organisational attachment, as the degree of emotional attachment that employees have to their organisation as measured by affective commitment and intention to quit was hypothesised to be located at two ends of a continuum (Riketta & Dick 2005). The results supported this contention where, at one end employees are emotionally attached to the organisation and at the other, they are not attached and consequently have a higher intention to quit the organisation. This result further strengthens previous research which has identified the link between these two variables (Iverson & Buttigied 1999; Luthans et al. 2008; Tett & Meyer 1993). In the context of Higher Education this highlights the importance of developing a work environment in which organisational attachment is nurtured and enhanced in an effort to retain academics within their current university.

The presence of a positive work environment was found to be an important predictor for positive and negative organisational attachment of academics. For affective commitment, all three of the positive work environment elements (POS, job characteristics and job involvement) were significant predictors of affective commitment. POS was the strongest predictor as consistent with Eisenberger

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and Colleagues (1986) who suggested that POS is a reflection of the perception of commitment from the organisation to the employee. If academics believe their University values them and their contributions they are more likely to demonstrate high levels of attachment since POS is a global belief from which the employee determines the organisation's readiness to reward and recognize effort (Eisenberger et al. 1990; Eisenberger et al. 1986). The findings of the present study are also consistent with those of Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli (2001, p. 384) who found a strong relationship between POS and affective commitment (see also Meyer et al. 2002; Reid et al. 2008; Yoon & Thye 2002) and noted that if employees believe that their organisation supports them this will lead to increased affective commitment, which they then found reduced turnover intentions.

The degree of involvement in the job and job characteristics were also found to be important predictors of affective commitment. This result is consistent with the work of Winter et al. (2000) who found the characteristics of the job very motivating to academics, and this motivation was measured as the degree of commitment and job involvement. The job characteristics variable has been a prevalent antecedent in many studies (Knudsen et al. 2003; Reid et al. 2008; Winter & Sarros 2002; Winter et al. 2000; Yoon & Thye 2002) and the significance of this result suggests that for academics the presence of the key job characteristics provides an environment in which they derive meaning from their work. Which becomes a key motivator at work (Hackman & Oldham 1975, 1980).

Research by Brown (1996) indicated that to be involved in the job results in three key elements: that the job is motivating and challenging; that there is a commitment to the job; and there are supportive relationships with supervisors. These elements give support for the significant result between involvement and commitment. These elements join all the positive environmental elements together as well as commitment. For academics, job involvement is a key motivator to perform (Winter & Sarros 2002). At the positive end of the organisational attachment continuum these results demonstrate the importance of each of these elements (POS, job characteristics and job involvement) in the development of a positive work environment which significantly impacts the affective commitment of the academic.

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At the other end of the continuum is intention to quit the organisation (the removal of emotional attachment). The results showed that only POS and job characteristics had a significant impact on intention to quit the organisation. Job involvement may not affect the results on intention to quit due to the control the individual had over the impact of this variable, whereas both POS and job characteristics are seen as being at the organisation's discretion. This might be explained by Lawler and Hall (1970) and Lodahl and Kejner (1965) who suggest that job involvement is more a function of the individual person rather than the job (Nogradi & Anthony 1988). Lawler and Hall (1970) argue that employees will have greater involvement if they have greater control and a greater ability to exhibit their skills and aptitudes, but it is an individual decision and taken from job to job. Job involvement does not specifically impact on intention to quit the organisation. Academics may not have high levels of involvement in their jobs but this does not indicate that they are ready to detach from their university. This has serious implications for the academic workforce because it may suggest that there are groups of academics who are not highly involved in their jobs but as providers of education there may be implications for the quality of teaching and research. Especially since job involvement is measured as the degree of psychologically identification with work and the impact on self image (Lodahl & Kejner 1965). Further research could explore the degrees of involvement with the varying aspects of the role of the academic (teaching, research and administration) to more fully understand job involvement in the academic context.

The implications of this research for the Higher Education sector are clear and consistent with organisational support theory which identifies that if there are favourable work experiences this will contribute to POS (Eisenberger et al. 2002; Rhoades et al. 2001). The variable of POS was the most significant predictor of both affective commitment and intention to quit the organisation. If there is a perception of support, this will lead to increased affective commitment whereas lack of support will contribute to an intention to quit the organisation and its associated behaviours. It is imperative within the current climate to provide a supportive environment to ensure that academics demonstrate emotional attachment to the organisation.

Another implication is that the characteristics of the job need to meet the standards as dictated by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1980) which are: task identity, task significance, skill variety, autonomy and feedback for the job, to support the attachment to the university. If academics do not feel they have these characteristics then they will not be motivated within their job and not emotionally attached (Winter and Sarros 2002). These characteristics have traditionally been associated with the collegial academic environment. The changing nature of the Higher Education sector may have altered the shape of the core job dimensions, especially since in the current climate academics have greater pressure for accountability and quality (Eveline 2004; Harman 2003; Taylor 2008). Academics are working harder to balance the demands of the current system and workload (teaching, research and administration). To nurture attachment through the job characteristics may require Higher Education managers developing programs to assist academics in managing their loads, resulting in the enhancement of the core job dimensions. Once enhanced the core job dimensions can assist in the development of psychological attachment to the work (job involvement) through finding greater meaning in the work. The enhancement of the core job dimensions can also assist in the perception of a supportive work environment, especially feedback from the job because this demonstrates specific support to the academic.

A further implication from the study is the contribution to theory development. The results found support for an area with little empirical support: organisational attachment as a continuum (Riketta & Dick 2005) and also added support to the overall topical area of organisational attachment (Gaiduk et al. Casper & Harris 2008; 2009). Furthermore, another implication that impacts on future research in academia is the impact of the diverse university groupings (Group of 8) and higher lecturer levels have on the overall elements. It may be deemed appropriate for researchers to build in the disparities between these groups into future research in academia especially when focusing on the elements of job involvement and job characteristics.

The cross sectional nature of the study sample is a limitation and future work would benefit from a more longitudinal approach and incorporation of non-perceptual data. This research could benefit from qualitative interviews to illustrate a positive work environment and degrees of organisational

attachment. This research has nevertheless identified useful findings which have implications for the management of academics in the changing Higher Education environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to provide a greater understanding of the attachment that academics have to their university, and it highlights the importance of a positive work environment as a key element. Higher Education in Australia is a significant contributor to the national economy, as the third largest Gross Domestic Product it makes understanding and enhancing the role of the academic especially important. Academics are bearers and providers of education to this growing population of Higher Education students (local and international). Previous research has identified the declining satisfaction (Lacy & Sheehan 1997), commitment (Winter & Sarros 2002) and acknowledged that academics are working harder and longer than ever before (Harman 2003). Deans, Heads of Schools and human resource practitioners, in universities need to develop a work environment in which there is support for academics so that they feel that the university is committed to them and recognises their contribution to the creation, maintenance and enhancement of University Rankings. One such way of doing this is through the development of programs aimed at assisting academics to manage their increasing workload.

Further qualitative and qualitative research is needed to determine if the changes to the academic role that have lead to academics now working longer and harder (Harman 2003) reflect an even more deeper change in how academic work is organised. This change from collegial models to more managerial models may be resulting in work structures that have created a lower perception of organisational support, jobs that are seen as less motivating and challenging, and work tasks structured in a way that provide less job autonomy, task identity, task significance, skill variety and feedback. This research provides only some initial insights into this larger issue of how Australian Universities can create and renew the commitment and attachment of academics to a University so that these engaged and talented academics can in turn create and renew their institutions performance.

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