



The Commitments of Academic Staff and Career in Malaysian Universities

Fauziah Noordin

Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-3-55442710 E-mail: fauziah716@salam.uitm.edu.my

Kamaruzaman Jusoff (Corresponding author)

Yale's Center for Earth Observation

School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, 370 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511 USA

Tel: (203) 432-3772 (voice) E-mail: jusoff.kamaruzaman@yale.edu

Jamil Hj Hamali

Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-082677777

Mior Harris Mior Harun

Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-3-55444694

Abstract

This article reports the study on career commitment of the academic staff of a local public university in Malaysia. The findings indicate that the academic staff of this university has higher level of career identity, low level of career resilient, and slightly high level of career planning. In addition, the results indicate that the respondents' organizational tenure and annual salary have significant impact on their career resilience commitment. Other demographic variables showed no significant differences on career identity, career resilience, and career planning of the respondents. Implications for management and recommendations for future studies are highlighted.

Keywords: Career commitment, Career identity, Career resilience, Career planning

1. Introduction

The commitment of employees to careers is of prime importance to all organizations. Persons committed to their careers will, presumably, perform better and this will lead to better overall performance of the organization. Many studies have examined and established the importance of career commitment (for example, Blau, 1985, 1988; Colarelli and Bishop, 1990; Carson and Bedeian, 1994; Aryee, Yue, and Chew, 1994; Arnold, 1990). However, many of these studies were conducted in Western countries, namely America (a individualist culture). As such it is not clear how commitment to career relates to individual's differences in terms of cultural background in this case Malaysia (a collectivist culture).

Most earlier works on the area of career commitment were characterized by unidimensional views of the construct. Career commitment is now widely recognized as multidimensional work attitudes (see Carson and Bedeian, 1994). Career commitment as multidimensional construct would give more specific rather than generalized information on the different components of that construct. This would in turn help researchers to have an even better understanding of the

variances in career commitment of employees in different cultural environments. Hence, the purposes of the present study are to examine the career commitment of the academic staff of the university and to assess the relative importance of demographic factors on components of career commitment of the academic staff of the university.

2. Culture and career commitment

Carson and Bedeian (1994) developed and validated a three-dimensional measure of affective career commitment. Following Blau (1985), they define "career" as having the same meaning as vocation, occupation, or profession, while "commitment" was defined as one's motivation to work in a particular vocation (Hall, 1971). The measure which they labeled Career Commitment Measure (CCM) was developed with three underlying dimensions. First, career identity which deals with an emotional attachment to the vocation (Blau, 1985). Second, career planning which considers the energizing component of career commitment (London, 1985). Finally, career resilience which taps steadfastness in the face of adversity (Lydon and Zanna, 1990). Carson and Bedeian (1994) stress that one of the benefits of their three-dimensional definition of career commitment is that it makes it possible to examine theoretically relevant relations that might otherwise be masked and, therefore, makes it a more useful tool in conducting research on career commitment. For the past several years significant attention has been devoted to career commitment. This is not only due to the importance of careers to individuals, organizations, and society (Carson and Bedeian, 1994), but also due to changing employee loyalties (Castro, 1989), higher education levels (Burris, 1983), and increases in mergers, acquisitions, and layoffs (Bremner, Rebello, Schiller, and Weber, 1991) which resulted in individuals not being able to depend on a single organization to sustain an entire career (Nussbaum, 1991). To cope with such uncertainty, better educated employees have become increasingly committed to their own careers. As Colarelli and Bishop (1990, p.159) explain, "commitment to an internally defined career has become an important source of occupational meaning as organizations become more fluid and less able to guarantee employment security". In addition, Mueller, Wallace, and Price (1992) consider that career commitment is becoming increasingly recognized as integral to the study of all aspects of employment relationship, which they broadly define to include everything that happens between initial entry and exit.

According to Noordin et al (2002), a country's individualism-collectivism may be associated with different levels and types of career commitment. Hofstede (1984) has categorized Malaysia as having a collectivistic culture. In collectivistic cultures, the emphasis is on belonging to an in-group. In return for their loyalty, individuals are provided with protection and security by the in-group. In individualistic cultures, everybody is supposed to take care of himself/herself. The emphasis in individualistic culture is on individual initiative and achievement. Autonomy, variety, pleasure, and individual financial security are sought in the system. Career commitment involves self-generated goals and commitment to one's own career, which may lead to employment in several organizations. Strong career commitment will be reflected by individuals deriving their sense of identity from their careers rather than from organization relationship, by their framing personal goals in terms of career development rather than advancement within particular organizations, and by their persistence in pursuing career goals in spite of obstacles and setbacks that are encountered. This is in contrast to the emphasis in collectivistic cultures on group goals and loyalty to the in-group, and suggests that employees in individualistic cultures will have higher levels of career identity, career resilience, and career planning commitment than individuals in collectivistic cultures. Noordin's (2002) study on the effect of individualism-collectivism on career commitment indicates that Australian managers (individualist culture) have a significantly higher level of career resilience than their Malaysian counterparts. In addition, for the Malaysian respondents, organizational tenure, annual salary, and types of job have significant impact on their career resilience, career planning, and career identity commitment, whereas for the Australian respondents, the results showed that country of education, organizational tenure, and positional tenure have significant impact on the respondents' levels of career identity and career planning commitment.

Evidence on the effects of demographic factors on career commitment is beginning to accumulate (Arnold, 1990). Individual characteristics (for example, age, religion, ethnic background), family characteristics (for example, marital status, number of children), and work characteristics (for example, organizational tenure, positional tenure, salary) may also contribute to the variance in the levels of career commitment of managers in different countries. Age and years of education are often cited as predictors for career commitment. Age is cited to affect career commitment because as people age, they become focused in career orientation and occupationally stable (Gottfredson, 1977), the more time and energy (and other resources) that one invested into a career, the greater the stake and the more commitment to a particular career, and as an individual ages and settles into a career, he/she tends to close off other career options because there is less time available to learn new skills and to develop the expertise that will bring commensurate financial rewards (Colarelli and Bishop, 1990). Years of education reflects socialization (Colarelli and Bishop, 1990), and therefore, are important in developing and sustaining career commitment because social experiences shape an individual's career identity, goals, and values (Frese, 1982), and also keep one anchored to a career despite opportunities to become side-tracked.

Based on the discussion above, and to accomplish the objectives of this study, four research questions have been formulate: (1) What is the level of career identity commitment of the academic staff of the university? (2) What is the level of career resilient commitment of the academic staff of the university? (3) What are the career planning commitment of the academic staff of university? (4) Do the demographic variables have any significant differences on the three components of career commitment of the academic staff of the university?

3. The study

3.1 Subjects and data collection

All faculties, academic centers, and branch campuses of the university were invited to take part in the study. A total of ten faculties, one academic center, and ten branch campuses have consented to participate in this research project. The respondents were then chosen randomly by the participating faculties, center, and branch campuses.

Twenty sets of the questionnaires were mailed to the participating faculties, academic center, and branch campuses. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed and 300 completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers. The final total sample size was 237 sets of completed and usable questionnaire. This gave a response rate to 79.06%.

The analysis of the demographic variables indicates that there are more female than male respondents. The majority of the respondents belong to the 31 – 44 years age group (53.2%) and also in the “Married” category. Seventy-four percent of the respondents have Master as their highest education level and majority of them (52.0%) were educated in western countries. The work demographic shows that the 50% of the respondents have worked for the university for more than 10 years and majority of them have worked for less than three organizations. Annual salary of the subjects is mostly in the “greater than RM54000” bracket.

The mail survey was administered in accordance with the principles and procedures advocated by Dillman (1977) and the administrative procedure recommended by Chan (1992).

3.2 Measurement

Career commitment was measured using the twelve-item scale developed by Carson and Bedeian (1994). The scale measures three components of career: career identity (three items), career resilience (four items) and career planning (three items). Carson and Bedeian report that the coefficient alpha reliabilities for the three dimensions ranged from 0.79 to 0.85. This measure used a 7-point disagree – agree scale. Pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted prior to the main study. The reliabilities (Cronbach’s Alpha) of the three components of career commitment (identity, resilience, and planning) in this study were .9177; .7008; and .8788 respectively.

3.3 Data analysis procedure

In seeking answers to the research questions, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, of the constructs were computed. Internal consistency of the scales were tested by using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). To test the effect of demographic variables on the constructs used in the study, a series of two-tailed independent group t-tests and one-way between groups ANOVA with post-hoc comparison analyses were conducted.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Cronbach’s Alpha (Internal Consistency Reliabilities)

Research shows that data reliability varies from country to country. This reduces the precision of estimation, which reduces the power of statistical test (Davis, Douglas, and Silk, 1981; Parameswaran and Yaprak, 1987; and Sekaran, 1983). Since the instruments were developed in the western countries, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study to assess the internal consistency of all constructs used in this study.

All the measures showed acceptable levels of reliability (career identity = .92; career resilience = .70; and career planning = .89). Nunnally (1967) has argued that reliability estimates of .50 to .60 are sufficient for basic research.

4.2 Levels of career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment

A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure the career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment of the respondents. It appears that the respondents have higher level of career identity commitment (6.211) compared to both career resilient (3.773), and career planning commitment (5.426). In order to identify which of the statements in the career commitment instrument have the lowest means and individual means for each of the statements in the career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment were conducted. Table 1 indicates that all the statements in the career identity commitment showed higher means ranging from 6.18 to 6.24

For the career resilient commitment measure, the respondents do not perceive that the costs associated with my line of work/career field sometimes seem too low (3.31). This is perhaps due to the high workload assigned and high expectations from the management of the university to the academic staff. The means for each of the statement in the

career resilient commitment measure range from 3.31 to 4.20 indicating that the respondents perception with regard to the statements are rather moderate.

(See Table 1. Means of Individual statements of the Measures)

The means for the career planning commitment measure range from 5.37 to 5.46 . This indicates that the academic staff of the university perceive quite highly of the career planning commitment in the university. It appears that they have quite a good idea in terms of their career path in the university. Analysis of individual means on each of the statements in the three components of the career commitment measure will aid management in identifying the factors that may be of concern to them. This in turn can aid them in formulating new procedures, policies, etc. with regard to their employees' career commitment.

4.3 Analysis on the impact of demographic variables on career identity, career resilience, and career planning commitment

The impact of demographic variables on career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment were analysed using Independent Groups T-test and One-Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison. To determine whether the perceived differences between means in relations to career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment based on gender and country of education of the respondents were significant or not, two sets of t-test were conducted. There are no significant differences between career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment in relation to gender and country of education. The findings also indicate that respondents' designations have no significant differences on all the three components of career commitment. It also appears that marital status has no significant differences on the career identity, career resilient, and career planning of the academic staff of the university. In addition, age, number of children, and level of education too, do not seem have any significant differences on the three component of career commitment of the respondents.

(See Table 2. One Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison^a (Organizational Tenure))

Blau (1985) reported that nurses who have been working as nurses longer and are not married are more career committed. Mannheim, Baruch, and Tal (1997) argue that gender is directly and negatively related to career planning, due to suggestions in the literature that women are somewhat less focused on advancement than men (Baruch, 1991; Mannheim, 1993), and therefore are less likely to plan their career. The results of their study confirmed that women in the sample planned their career less. They also argue that older people tend to plan their careers less. Cherniss (1991) reported that age was strongly correlated with career commitment, with older samples more committed than younger ones; marital status was significantly correlated with career commitment, with married professionals scoring higher career commitment than single and divorced professionals; and number of children was not correlated with career commitment. The present study does not appear to support any of these findings.

The high level of significance shown in Table 2 indicate that the respondents with more than 10 years of organisational tenure have a higher level of career resilience than those in the more than 2 -10 years group. This can perhaps be explained in terms of a career stage perspective. Most studies have used a three-stage model as being appropriate for managerial careers (for example, Morrow and McElroy, 1987; Hall and Nougaim, 1968). Morrow and McElroy (1987) categories organizational tenure and positional tenure of less than 2 years as the "establishment stage", 2-10 years as the "advancement stage", and more than 10 years as the "maintenance stage". The academic staff of the university appears to have a high level of career resilience commitment at the maintenance stage of their career. London (1985) refers to career resilience as the extent to which people resist career barriers or disruptions affecting their work. People who are high in career resilience see themselves as competent individuals able to control what happens to them. They get a sense of accomplishment from what they do. They are able to take risks and know when and how to co-operate with others and act independently. They are persistent in pursuing career goals. The dimensions of career resilience commitment - belief in oneself, need for achievement and willingness to take risks - appear to be consistent with an individualistic culture. Therefore, it comes as surprise that the respondents (since Malaysia is categorized by Hofstede (1980) as a collectivist culture) to have a higher level of career resilience commitment. But a study on individualism-collectivism conducted by Fauziah (1999) discovered that Malaysian managers (collectivist culture) appear to be significantly higher in vertical individualism than their counterparts in Australia (an individualist culture). Therefore, that would explain why the respondents in this study who are in the >10 years of organizational tenure appear to be significantly higher in their career resilient.

(See Table 3. One Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison^a (Salary))

There are no significant differences detected in positional tenure, number of organization worked, and place of work in relation to career identity, career resilient, and career planning commitment of the academic staff of the university. Post-Hoc comparison (Table 3) shows that the academic staff of the university with annual salary of more than \$53,000 perceived a higher level of career resilient commitment than those in the other categories of annual salary. The respondents may be committed to their career resilience due to met expectancy between their careers and remuneration.

They may experience a felt positive equity between remuneration and their inputs (time, ability, energy and expertise) in their careers and believe that they do not have to depend on the organization for their job security.

Several limitations exist in the present study which warrants review. First, the results of this study must be qualified in terms of the samples that were used. Extensive sampling was beyond the resources of this researcher. However, studies such as the present one may be valuable in establishing both the theory and the measures that may be useful for extensive testing with probability samples in survey research. Second, since only the academic staff of the university was used as samples in this study, this raises the issue of generalisability of findings. Therefore, more research is needed before firm generalisable implications for academic staff of institutions of higher learning can be drawn. Generalisability of the results of these analyses for employees in the non-academic position remains an open empirical question. Additional replication using a more careful comparison by types of employees and types of occupation would be useful. Finally, a possible limitation of the study is some method bias resulting from the use of a common instrument (questionnaire). However, this is unlikely to be a serious problem because Spector (1987) has shown that method bias is generally not a problem with well-developed instruments. The high alpha levels are evidence of the soundness of the instruments in the present study. Future research should combine the use of questionnaire method with observation and field experimentation. In addition, longitudinal investigation could be conducted to determine whether variable effects change over time and, if they do, whether they change differentially across organizations / countries. Since little research has been done in this area, the results of this study should be interpreted cautiously. The overall findings of this study are encouraging. However, by no means are the present results conclusive. Rather, interpretation and specification of the influence of demographic variables on career identity, resilience, and planning commitment that are empirically examined in the present study must be regarded as tentative. Although the present research examined the influence of demographic variables on career identity, resilience, and planning commitment from an Malaysian culture approach, the measures that were used in order to assess the constructs were developed by investigators from North America. It is possible that aspects of career identity, resilience, and planning commitment that are unique to the collectivistic culture (like Malaysia) were not included. Future research needs to employ measures that are developed in each of the cultures of concern. Then the measures will assess the constructs in the way that each particular culture conceptualizes them.

5. Conclusion

This study seeks to determine the levels of career identity, career resilience, and career planning of the academic staff of the university. The results reveal that the academic staff of the university appear to have highest level of career identity (6.211), high level of career planning (5.426), and moderate level of career resilience (3.773). London (1985) describes career identity as the extent to which people define themselves by their work. People who are high in career identity are involved in their jobs, their careers and their profession, and are likely to feel loyal to their employers. Career identity reflects the direction of career goals, whether a person wants to advance in the company, to be in position of leadership, to have high status, to make money, and to accomplish these goals as soon as possible. Career planning is closely related to career identity in that it describes one's developmental needs and setting career goals (London, 1985). It is possible that the academic staff of the university view both career identity and career planning commitment as being psychologically involved with an organisation and committed to maintaining membership so as to realize their own goals. In other words, career commitment is not as independent as the career identity and career planning dimensions, for this sample as the theory suggests. London (1985) refers to career resilience as the extent to which people resist career barriers or disruptions affecting their work. People who are high in career resilience see themselves as competent individuals able to control what happens to them. They get a sense of accomplishment from what they do. They are able to take risks and know when and how to co-operate with others and act independently. They are persistent in pursuing career goals. The dimensions of career resilience commitment - belief in oneself, need for achievement and willingness to take risks - appear to be consistent with an individualistic culture. Based on London's (1985) description of high career resilience, it may be deduced that the academic staff of the university are apparently risk-adverse, externals in nature, and do not fit in the dimension of career resilience commitment.

There were some significant findings on the influence of demographic variables on the study variables. These demographic variables appear to represent antecedent conditions of the components of career commitment. It should be noted that only two of the demographic variables appear to have different influences on the study variables for the academic staff of the university. These are organisational tenure and salary. It appears that those respondents with more than 10 years of organisational tenure have a significantly higher level of career resilience commitment than those in the 2 – 10 years group. In addition, those academic staff of the university who are in the greater than RM54,000 salary group seem to have a significantly higher level of career resilience than those in the lower salary groups.

The importance of demographic variables, as relating directly to the other study variables, indicate that such variables do serve, as Landy et al. (1984) maintain, as effective "surrogate" variables whose inclusion in explanatory models of work attitudes is advisable. This is especially useful in exploratory studies, where they suggest avenues for further research on the more basic psychological processes which they apparently represent. It is interesting to note that most of

the demographic variables have different influences on the study variables. Therefore, by including demographic variables in a study, more information can be gained on their influence on the components of career commitment.

Management needs to be aware that the commitment of employees to careers is of prime importance to all organizations. Persons committed to their careers will, presumably, perform better and this will lead to better overall performance of the organisation. Many studies have examined and established the importance of career commitment (for example, Michael, Dubinsky, Kotabe, and Chae, 1996; Aryee Yue, and Chew, 1994; Arnold, 1990). However, it is not clear how commitment to career relates to individual's differences in terms of cultural background. As such, the results of this study may be of some importance to management for a number of reasons. First, they may be of interest and assistance to management of multinational and international organizations who need to manage in global contexts and, therefore, need to understand cultural-driven differences in personal and interpersonal work-related conditions between and across nations. Understanding the components of career commitment can aid management in improving their employees career commitment which would lead to better employer-employee relationships. Second, the results suggest some different ways in which management may approach career identity, career resilience, and career planning commitment methods in different organizations / nations. Malaysians are categorized as having a collectivist culture, therefore the findings in this study may differ from those research findings in an individualist culture. Knowledge of this study's findings would provide valuable information for management in terms of enhancing their understanding in human behaviour in relation to career commitment.

Research examining patterns of academic staff's career commitment in the Asian countries is lacking. Further research examining potential similarities and differences in this regard would be quite fruitful. The significant amount of empirical research evidence and data on such studies in various Asian countries could warrant suitable systematic (meta-analytic) comparisons. If performed, these comparisons would provide valuable grounds for assessing similarities and differences in aspects of career commitment in different institutions of higher learning across different nations. These comparisons would also help in highlighting some methodological issues surrounding the multidimensional character of academic staff's career commitment in different contexts.

The results of this study raise several key issues that should be pursued in future research. First, it may be that employees' expectations of their career differ between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. These expectations may shape employees' affect toward their career. Future research that empirically demonstrates employee expectations of career and the relationship between these expectations and work attitudes in the two cultures is needed. In addition, awareness of similarities and differences should help management better understand and appreciate their international counterparts and, ideally, should lead to improved cross-national working relationships. Second, the results suggest some different ways in which managers may approach career identity, resilience, and planning commitment methods in different nations. Third, future research should look into the relationship of career commitment with other work behaviour such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intention, etc. The findings of this future research would help us to better understand people at work and prepare management to face the challenges in the working world.

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Table 1. Means of Individual statements of the Measures

	Mean	Std. Deviation
CAREER IDENTITY		
1. My line of work/career field is an important part of who I am	6.24	.897
2. This line of work/career field has a great deal of personal meaning to me	6.23	.869
3. I strongly identify with my chosen line of work/career field	6.18	.898
CAREER RESILIENCE		
1. The costs associated with my line of work/career field sometimes seems too great*	3.31	1.556
2. Given the problems I encounter in this line of work/career field, I sometimes wonder if I get enough out of it*	3.54	1.572
3. Given the problems in this line of work/career field, I sometimes wonder if the personal burden is worth it*	4.20	1.701
4. The discomforts associated with my line of work/career field sometimes seems too great*	4.19	1.697
CAREER PLANNING		
1. I do not have a strategy for achieving my goals in this line of work/career field*	5.37	1.479
2. I do not identify specific goals for my development in this line of work/career field*	5.46	1.492
3. I do not often think about my personal development in this line of work/ career field*	5.42	1.560

- Reverse-scored item.

Table 2. One Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison^a (Organizational Tenure)

		Mean	Std. Dev.	F-ratio	F-probability
Career Identify	< 2 years	6.3492	.72630	.392	.676
	2 - 10 years	6.1732	.76894		
	> 10 years	6.2100	.89364		
Career Resilience	< 2 years	3.8553	1.17649	3.041	.050
	2 - 10 years	3.4974 ¹	1.04157		
	> 10 years	3.8740 ²	1.22624		
Career Planning	< 2 years	5.6984	1.08477	.533	.587
	2 - 10 years	5.3762	1.41944		
	> 10 years	5.3780	1.35847		

Note: Those with different superscripts differ significantly ($P < .05$). Those that share a superscript, or for which no superscripts appear, are not significantly different from each other ($p \geq .05$).

Table 3. One Way between Groups ANOVA with Post-Hoc Comparison^a (Salary)

		Mean	Std. Deviation	F-ratio	F-probability
Career Identity	< \$24,000	6.4167	.59111	.311	.949
	\$24,000 - \$28,000	6.2583	.73375		
	\$29,000 - \$33,000	6.1754	.70596		
	\$34,000 - \$38,000	6.1111	.75115		
	\$39,000 - \$43,000	6.1765	.84260		
	\$44,000 - \$48,000	6.2469	.70767		
	\$49,000 - \$53,000	6.2273	1.21884		
	> \$54,000	6.2404	.93716		
Career Resilience	< \$24,000	3.5000 ¹	1.04208	2.149	.040
	\$24,000 - \$28,000	3.6118 ¹	1.05539		
	\$29,000 - \$33,000	3.3750 ¹	1.24336		
	\$34,000 - \$38,000	3.6406 ¹	1.12858		
	\$39,000 - \$43,000	3.6250 ¹	1.22474		
	\$44,000 - \$48,000	3.7115 ¹	.99170		
	\$49,000 - \$53,000	3.7024 ¹	1.30293		
	> \$54,000	4.2500 ²	1.23679		
Career Planning	< \$24,000	5.6500	1.24005	.655	.710
	\$24,000 - \$28,000	5.5750	1.42423		
	\$29,000 - \$33,000	5.2807	1.22859		
	\$34,000 - \$38,000	5.4326	1.33499		
	\$39,000 - \$43,000	5.0980	1.45184		
	\$44,000 - \$48,000	5.3580	1.15443		
	\$49,000 - \$53,000	5.0435	1.83761		
	> \$54,000	5.5500	1.27680		

Note: Those with different superscripts differ significantly ($P < .05$). Those that share a superscript, or for which no superscripts appear, are not significantly different from each other ($p \geq .05$).