

**Organisational commitment among public and private sector
professionals**

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Abstract

Public sector workers are partly portrayed as highly motivated and with relatively altruistic values, and partly as lazy and opportunistic. This paper compares the level of organisational commitment in professional groups mainly employed in the private sector on the one hand (e.g., journalists, business administration graduates) with public sector professions (e.g., social workers and teachers) on the other. Data come from a sample of people who graduated from Norwegian university colleges in 2001 and who responded to a survey in 2003. It turns out to be considerable variation among the public sector professions, with the highest commitment among teachers and the lowest among nurses, but no systematic difference between the sectors. I also examine to what extent differences among groups can be explained as a function of the rewards people feel they receive in their jobs and of the importance (value) they attach to the various rewards. Special attention is given to the hypothesis of an interaction effect between values and rewards, implying that the more important an individual considers a given reward to be, the stronger the impact of that reward on organisational commitment. The analyses indicate that some of the group differences in commitment are due to corresponding differences in job rewards, but this holds only to a very limited extent. The hypothesis of values-rewards interactions is rejected. It is noteworthy that although the effects of some job rewards differ among the groups, these variations are not captured by the value measures. This may indicate that the processes involved in the formation of commitment attitudes are more complex and less rational than assumed in much of the literature.

Organisational commitment among public and private sector professionals

Both in the public debate and in scholarly literature, strikingly different views of the attitudes and motivation of public employees are found. According to Perry (1997) important elements of a *public service motivation* are an attraction to policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self sacrifice. In a similar vein, Pratchett and Wingfield (1996) consider the absence of a profit motive and loyalty (to employer, profession, etc.) as defining characteristics of what they call a *public service ethos*. In the New Public Management movement, on the other hand, public employees are regarded as basically self-interested (Aberbach and Christensen, 2003) – not necessarily more so than private sector employees, but certainly not less. Although not explicitly referring to public employees, a similar negative view is found in Collins' (1978) discussion of *sinecures* – sheltered bureaucratic jobs with many privileges but requiring little effort.

Despite the attention given to the issue of differences in motivation between employees in the public and private sectors, few comparative studies have been carried out. With regard to “organisational commitment” in particular, a search of the literature cited in the ISI Social Sciences Citation Index database since 1990 shows 1350 articles with this term in title, keywords or abstract, but only 15 studies combining “organisational commitment” with the terms “public” and “private”.

This paper compares the organisational commitment among employees in typical public sector service professions with professional groups who are mainly employed in the private sector. I focus on attitudinal (or affective) organisational commitment which may be defined as “employees’ emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization” (Meyer, Irving, and Allen, 1998, p. 32). As noted above, discussions of the motivational characteristics of public sector employees have also considered several other attitudes and dimensions. The focus on organisational commitment here is based on the centrality of that concept in the more general literature on employee motivation (Ricketta, 2002). Also, organisational commitment seems more suited for a comparative study than concepts defined in sector specific ways like public service motivation.

The public sector professional groups considered in this study have bachelor level degrees in education, nursing, social work, public administration or library science. The private sector professional groups have degrees in engineering, journalism, or business administration. More specifically, the sample consists of people who graduated in these fields in 2001 and who responded to a survey three years after graduation (spring 2004). One might argue that comparisons between public and private sector employees should ideally be made within and not between occupational or professional groups. Such a within group approach has obvious advantages in satisfying *ceteris paribus* requirements, but also important limitations. The public and private sectors are very different in terms of the occupational and educational compositions of their employees, so within group comparisons are possible only for very selected groups. I therefore compare groups with different *types* of education. They all have the same amount of education, and they are also very similar in terms of age and amount of work experience. This approach also allows us to examine whether differences between public and private sector groups are larger than the differences found among groups in each sector.

The empirical analyses below start out with a simple description of the between-group variation in organisational commitment. I then explore to what extent this variation can be explained as a result of differences in the *job rewards* employees receive or in their *work values* or preferences. The discussion of public sector motivation mentioned above clearly implies that work values are important. Are employees who claim to be strongly concerned with such values as being useful to society and helpful to others more committed than those who report a high concern with pay and career opportunities? Or is commitment determined by the *match* between job rewards and work values, so that high pay and career opportunities are the primary determinants of commitment in some groups and opportunities to help and to be useful in other groups? In particular, do we find that different types of rewards are important in determining the level of commitment of public and private employees?

Perspectives on sector differences in employee motivation

In the ideal typical Weberian bureaucracy the bureaucrat enjoyed high status, job security, and regular salary increases. In return, he performed his duties and acted in accordance with organisational objectives. The relationship between bureaucrat and bureaucracy was not, however, based on market like transactions but is better described as relying on a relationship of long term reciprocity (cf. Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986; Settoon, Bennett, and Liden, 1996). Bureaucratic employees enjoyed important privileges and reciprocated by developing a long term sense of loyalty and commitment.

Weber's conception of the employment relationship in public bureaucracies appears quite close to what has been termed a "commitment" or "corporatist" approach in more recent organisational literature (Arthur, 1994; Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990). In this literature commitment oriented employment practices are distinguished from "control" practices (Arthur, 1994; Wood and de Menezes, 1998). The latter are based on direct control of employee behaviour by means of close supervision, sanctions and rewards. The commitment approach, on the other hand, is more indirect. By building commitment one presumably secures workers that identify with the goals of the organisation and act in accordance with its interests.

Bureaucracies are not limited to the public sector. Taking into account the prevalence of bureaucratic structures in this sector, the above argument nevertheless suggests that a high level of commitment should be expected among public employees. Other authors have more explicitly suggested quite fundamental differences in the motivation and attitudes of public and private sector employees. As noted above, Perry (1997) associates *public service motivation* with an attraction to policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self sacrifice. Pratchett and Wingfield (1996) define a *public service ethos* in terms of the following dimensions: accountability (including a commitment to implementing policies irrespective of personal views), bureaucratic behaviour (including honesty, integrity, etc.), and concern with the public interest, non-pecuniary motivation, and loyalty.

The above arguments notwithstanding, public sector and bureaucratic employment structures may also have negative effects on employees' motivation. For instance, a central characteristic of Weber's ideal typical bureaucracy is its rigidity and lack of flexibility. A recent review article focussing on employees in managerial jobs found fourteen studies addressing sector differences in employee motivations or values (Boyne, 2002). It was concluded that public managers are indeed less

materialistic, and also express a greater desire to serve the public interest. Their level of organisational commitment, however, tended to be *lower* than what was found in the private sector. Boyne suggests that the lower commitment in the public sector may be due to more inflexible personnel practices in that sector.

Thus, it is not clear whether ideal typical bureaucracies should be expected to have on balance positive or negative effects on commitment. Any empirical assessment of these issues must of course also take into account that ideal types are theoretical constructs that never exist in their pure form. Moreover, there seems to be broad consensus that the organisation of public administration has in recent decades removed itself clearly from the bureaucratic ideal type, with, e.g. less job security and less secure career opportunities (cf. Brown, 1995). In the New Public Management, the desired behaviour of public employees is believed to follow from application of economic incentives rather than from loyalty and commitment. Thus, a change in the direction of more control oriented rather than commitment oriented employment relations has taken place.

The changes in the size and composition of the public sector are likely to be one important factor behind the changes in managerial practices. Traditional bureaucratic privileges may not easily be extended from a small elite to a sizeable part of the work force. Nevertheless, it is slightly paradoxical that the influx of incentive systems and “quasi markets” in the public sector has taken place at the same time as an almost opposite trend in private sector management, i.e. a move from control to commitment. Various known as “Innovative human resource management practices” (Ichniowski and Shaw, 2003), “high commitment employment practices” (Whitener, 2001), “best practice human resource management” (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000), and the like, these management practices do include incentive pay but only as part of a package including features such as problem-solving teams, job rotation, careful screening and selection of workers, job security, information sharing between management and employees, and training (Ichniowski and Shaw, 2003).

Of course, public bureaucracies have changed in numerous ways over and above the change in managerial philosophies and practices. Not the least important is an enormous growth in size. In Norway, public sector employment rose from xxx in xxx to xxx in xxx. A very large part of this growth occurred within the provision of health, educational and social services – what may with a general term be called welfare state services. Thus, the composition of the public sector has also changed strongly, from a dominance of administrative officials to one of service providers – what Michael Lipsky (1980) has called street level bureaucrats. A further characteristic of these service providers is that they tend to have fairly high and specialized education, typically bachelor degrees in fields like education, nursing or social work. Thus, they can also be considered as knowledge workers or even professionals.

Several authors have suggested that professional groups may exhibit relatively low levels of organisational commitment (Blau and Scott, 1962; Scott, 1966; Hall, 1967; Freidson, 2001). One reason for this is that they have another possibly competing focus of commitment, viz. the profession. Secondly, conflicts may arise between bureaucratic demands on the one hand and professional autonomy on the other. Thirdly, professional knowledge is of a fairly general as opposed to firm-specific kind. This contributes to low costs associated with between-employer mobility, both for the employee (whose knowledge will be equally valuable with another employer) and for the employer (who may replace the employee without

extensive investments in firm internal training). The further implication of this is that both the employer and the employee will have fewer incentives to invest in the relationship (cf. Althauser and Kalleberg, 1981).

Theoretical framework

As noted by Kalleberg and Mastekaasa (2001), most theories and research on work attitudes and behaviour can be categorised according to whether they emphasise the causal effects of job rewards or other aspects of the work situation or of work values or personality characteristics (i.e., “situational” or “dispositional” perspectives) (Gruenberg, 1980; Morris and Villemez, 1992). The dispositional perspective assumes that job attitudes reflect relatively stable individual differences in needs, values, or personality characteristics (see Staw and Ross, 1985). By contrast, situational theories assume that work attitudes are shaped by the context of work or by job characteristics. One situational perspective is represented by Salancik and Pfeffer’s (1978) information processing approach, which suggests that work attitudes are mainly determined by social influences and contextual cues, and are only weakly related to people’s actual job characteristics. A second type of situational approach assumes that work attitudes are shaped primarily by the benefits and utilities that people obtain from their jobs and organisations (see Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959). This second type of situational theory may also to a greater or lesser extent allow for dispositional factors and thus be consistent with the view that people’s overall feelings about their jobs are a function of both job characteristics and the needs or values that workers attach to their jobs and organizations (see Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt, 1968; Locke, 1976; Kalleberg, 1977; Morris and Villemez, 1992). Thus, it may also be considered as a combination of the situational and the dispositional perspective.

One such combined approach is to consider work attitudes like commitment and job satisfaction as multiplicative functions of work values and job characteristics. The basic idea is that job characteristics impact work attitudes, but the strength of this effect depends on how much the individual employee values the particular job characteristic in question. Thus, for instance, the impact of job security is expected to vary between employees with different views of the importance of this characteristic. This model, which may be called a *values-rewards model*, has its roots in the expectancy theory of attitudes (Vroom, 1964). It has been widely used in research on job satisfaction (Locke, 1976; Mastekaasa, 1984; Hesketh and Gardner, 1993), but has been influential even in the commitment literature (Meyer, Irving, and Allen, 1998).

In the values-rewards model, the impact of rewards is assumed to vary as a function of the importance attached to these rewards. In technical terms, values are assumed to act as moderator variables. It follows that the actual variation in impact in a given population will depend on the amount of variation in values. The higher the degree of consensus about a type of reward, the lower the variation. In line with this, Hesketh and Gardner (1993) suggest that values (or other dispositional characteristics) will have moderator effects only for job characteristics that are of moderate normative desirability.

With its roots in expectancy theory, the values-rewards model assumes that the attitude formation process is highly cognitive and rational (Mastekaasa, 1984). Employees are assumed to know exactly how much they value different job characteristics and to use these values as weights when forming their opinions. This may make relatively good sense with regard to phenomena like satisfaction, which are

generally regarded as having a strong cognitive component (McKenna, 1978). Such assumptions may be more problematic with regard to less clearly cognitive attitudes like commitment – not the least to the affective commitment dimension (which is the one considered in the empirical analyses below). Meyer, Irving, and Allen (1998) assume, however, that the model is equally applicable to all three dimensions (affective, normative, and continuance).

What happens if we relax the assumption that people have relatively precise ideas about the importance of each job characteristic, and that they use these importance scores as weights when making up their minds about how committed they are? One implication is that (conscious) work values will be less efficient in accounting for variations in the impact of various job rewards. This is true at the individual level, but even with regard to differences between occupational or professional groups. Job security, for instance, may have stronger effects on commitment in one group than in another, without this necessarily being reflected in a similar difference in their stated values.

If it turns out that people's professed work values do not reflect how important various job characteristics are for their attitudes toward the organisation, this may have important implications for our interpretation of responses to direct questions about work values, and, in particular, for comparisons of the motivation of public and private employees.

Hypotheses and research strategy

As noted above, very different views on the motivation and commitment of public and private employees are found in the literature. The review of the literature by Boyne (2002) nevertheless suggests a lower level of organisational commitment among public employees:

Hypothesis 1. The level of organisational commitment is lower in the public than in the private sector professions

To the extent that differences among the professional groups are found, the next step is how to account for these differences. In terms of the values-rewards model a substantial part of these differences can be hypothesised to be due to differences in the job characteristics experienced in the various groups:

Hypothesis 2. Between group differences in organisational commitment are partly explained by differences in job rewards

Job rewards are assumed to be only a partial explanation for two reasons. First, the list of job rewards employed here is clearly not exhaustive, and potentially important job characteristics may have been omitted. Second, to the extent that the groups also differ in their work values, this variation may also be taken into account.

Hypothesis 3. Between group differences in organisational commitment are partly explained by differences in work values

This hypothesis is based on the ideas found in the public service motivation literature. Public employees are assumed to be more altruistic and committed than private sector employees.

Hypothesis 4. Between groups differences in organizational commitment are partly explained by taking into account the multiplicative effects of job rewards and work values (or, in other words, the moderator effects of work values).

Hypothesis 4 is based on the values-rewards model. As suggested above, however, commitment attitudes may be formed (at least to some extent) through less cognitive and conscious processes.

Hypothesis 5. The impact of job demands on organizational commitment varies between professional groups over and above the variation accounted for by the individuals' expressed values

In order to test these hypotheses, I proceed as follows. First, I estimate a regression model which provides the gross differences between the groups in organisational commitment. The next step is to control for job rewards. The third model includes also work values and the fourth model even interactions of work values and rewards. Finally, I estimate models allowing also for interactions between rewards and occupational group.

Methods

Data

The data were collected as part of a survey programme (called StudData) of students in Bachelor-level professional educations at several Norwegian polytechnics. Individuals responded to questionnaires both while still in college and two years after graduation. In this paper, only data collected three years after graduation are utilised. The data were collected in the spring of 2004; thus, the respondents all had graduated in the spring of 2001.

The data analysed in this paper include graduates from programmes in early childhood education (pre-school teachers), education (elementary school teachers), social work, nursing, library science, public administration, journalism, business administration, and engineering. Graduates from journalism, business administration and engineering have their main labour market in the private sector, whereas the other groups are mainly employed in the public sector.

The gross sample consists of all graduates in these programmes in the included colleges. The sampled individuals received and returned the questionnaires by mail. Up to two reminders were sent to individuals who did not respond.

Data were obtained from 1111 respondents, giving a response rate of xx percent. Of these, 974 were employed at the time of the survey and were asked questions on organisational commitment and other job-related matters. In order to make a pure comparison of the public and private sectors, I also excluded people employed outside of the sector typical of their education (e.g., nurses in private companies and business graduates in public employment). This brings the sample down to 781. The distribution of these respondents across the educational programmes is shown in Table 1. In the regression analyses, the number of observations drops to 680 due to missing responses on individual items.

As can be seen in Table 1, some of the groups are very small. I therefore combined engineers and business administration graduates in the private sector, and librarians and public administration graduates in the public sector. Preliminary

analyses indicated that these groups were fairly similar in terms of organisational commitment as well work values and job rewards.

Measures

Organisational commitment is measured by means of four items taken from the Porter scale (Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian, 1974).¹ Responses were scored on four-point scales (1 to 4), and the measure used here is each person's mean across the four items.

Work values and job rewards were measured using the type of items used in a large number of previous studies and included in several large American surveys like the General Social Survey (GSS) (e.g., Kalleberg, 1977; Crewson, 1997; Frank and Lewis, 2004). Early in the questionnaire respondents were asked to report on a five-point scale to what extent a series of statements (like "provides a high income" or "provides opportunities to help other people") are true of their present job. At a later point in the questionnaire, the same list of statement is presented, but now respondents are asked to rate each statement in terms of how important it is in choosing between jobs. Nine statements are included in the analyses in this paper; see the list in Table 1.²

I also tried controlling for gender and age in the regressions, but the coefficients for these variables never reached statistical significance. They are therefore not included in the analyses presented below.

Statistical methods

Ordinary linear regression analysis (OLS) was used. In order to make the results more easily interpretable, all explanatory variables have been centred around their means.

Results

Descriptive results

The group specific means of organisational commitment and of the perceived job rewards and the work values are given in Table 1. The highest level of commitment is found for teachers, followed by journalists, and the lowest for nurses. There is no clear contrast between public and private sector professions.

The perception of job rewards varies widely among the groups. For useful to society, opportunity to help, and contact with other people there is a clear contrast between the public sector professions on the one hand and the private sector ones on the other, with the means of the former being much higher than the latter. For high income there is an equally strong contrast, but in the opposite direction. On the other dimensions, no clear public – private pattern emerges. For job security and career opportunities, for instance, nurses have very positive perceptions whereas the lowest scores are found among teachers. (Teachers' perceptions of their jobs as insecure probably reflect that very many teachers are employed in temporary jobs.)

[Table 1 about here]

The pattern of responses to the work value questions resembles to some extent what was found for rewards, but the public – private differences are less clear. In particular, for opportunity to help, useful to society and contact with other people the

responses of the librarian/public administration group now are more similar to those of the journalists and engineers/business graduates than to those of the other public sector professions. The responses to the value questions also differ from the responses to the reward questions in that there is no clear public – private contrast with regard to high income. A high income is regarded as relatively important by engineers/business graduates, but almost to the same extent by nurses. Even for the remaining work values, no clear public – private pattern seems to emerge.

Can values and rewards account for group differences in commitment?

The main results from the regression analyses are shown in Table 2. In Model 1, organisational commitment is regressed on professional group only, thus essentially providing information on group differences in average commitment. As was also seen in Table 1, the highest levels of commitment are found for teachers, journalists and preschool teachers. All these groups are significantly higher than social workers, which make up the reference category. There are only small and non-significant differences among the other; thus the average level of commitment is about the same for social workers, nurses, engineers/business graduates, and public administration graduates/librarians.

Overall, these results provide no support for Hypothesis 1. The three high-commitment groups include both private (journalist) and public sector (preschool teacher and teacher) professions, as do the low-commitment groups. The group differences occur *within* the private and public sectors, respectively, and not between them.

[Table 2 about here]

Model 2 shows to what extent the group differences in commitment are due to differences in perceived job rewards. Note first that adding the reward variables leads to a marked and highly significant improvement in model fit. Interesting work is by far most strongly related to organisational commitment, but even income and career opportunities seem to be important. With two exceptions, the coefficients for the other rewards also have the expected positive signs, but except for useful to society they are very small.

For journalists the coefficient drops by about a third and for teachers by about a fourth, indicating that the high commitment of these groups can to some extent be explained by a high level of rewards. The coefficients for the other professional groups are little affected by the control for job rewards. Of most interest, the high level of commitment among preschool teachers can not be attributed to a high level of perceived rewards. Overall, the results provide some support for Hypothesis 2, stating that group differences in commitment are partly due to differential rewards.

Model 3 expands Model 2 by also including work values. There is a fairly small although significant improvement in model fit. When considered individually, only one work value, viz. being useful to society, is significantly (and positively) related to commitment. This is in line with the reasoning underlying Hypothesis 3. This is not, however, enough to compensate for the lack of impact of the other work values, and taken as a whole the control for work values also has only a minute impact on the estimated coefficients for the professional groups. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Model 4 adds interactions between work values and job rewards. This does not

lead to any improvement of the fit of the model, and the hypothesis that none of the interaction term coefficients differs from zero cannot be rejected. One may still note that all the interaction term coefficients have the expected positive signs; at least there is no case of high professed importance going together with a *reduced* impact on commitment.

Since the interaction terms are so far from reaching statistical significance, it is not surprising that the estimated group differences remain largely unchanged from Model 3 to Model 4. Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

An important conclusion to be drawn from the analyses so far is that values and rewards as well as the interaction between them can explain group differences in organisational commitment only to a very limited extent. Control for these variables succeeds in accounting for the relatively high commitment of the journalists and also in some degree for the even higher commitment among teachers. The teachers, however, stand out as clearly more committed than one would expect on the basis of their work values and the extent to which these values are seen as fulfilled in their jobs. The same is true of the preschool teachers.

Other variations in the effects of rewards

The values-reward model assumes that variations in the impact of various job rewards – both among individuals and among groups – are determined by people's work values. We now turn to the question of whether there are group differences in the impact of rewards that cannot be explained within the framework of the values-reward model (Hypothesis 5). This is examined by including interactions of the reward variables with the group dummies. With six group dummies and nine job rewards, the number of potential interaction terms becomes 54. With only 680 cases, the inclusion of such a large number of interaction terms is highly problematic. I therefore tested the interactions between group and rewards with one reward at a time. With this procedure, significant interactions were found for professional group with the following three rewards: job security, interesting work, and opportunities to help. These 18 interaction terms were then added simultaneously to the model. The estimates for this model are presented in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Inclusion of the 18 interaction terms leads to a clear and significant improvement of model fit. Hypothesis 5 thus is supported. With regard to job security, Table 3 shows that for most of the professional groups the impact on organisational commitment is close to zero. The exceptions are engineers/business graduates and nurses. This is also seen in Figure 1, which shows the partial relationship between the perception of job security and commitment for each professional group. Even teachers seem to stand out somewhat from the remaining groups in Figure 1, but that is mainly in terms of their overall level of commitment (which has been found also in the previous analyses to be high), and not in the impact of job security on commitment.

The relationship between interesting work and organisational commitment also is of fairly similar magnitude in most of the groups, as evidenced by the relatively parallel lines in Figure 2. Again, there are two strong exceptions, however. For journalists in particular, the relationship between interesting work and commitment is strong. To some extent the same applies to teachers.

Perceiving the job to offer good opportunities to help other people seems to

have little impact on organisational commitment; for most groups the regression lines in Figure 3 are quite flat. Nurses deviate strongly from the other groups, however, and in this group the relationship is negative. Thus, those nurses that perceive the best opportunities to help others also tend to be the least committed to their organisations.

[Figures 1 to 3 about here]

Discussion

Most of the public sector professionals in this study claim to be more concerned about helping others, being useful to society, and having contact with other people than do the private sector professionals. There is one exception, however – the librarian/public administration category is much more similar to the private sector professions than to the other public professions. This indicates that there may not be so much a public – private contrast as a difference between typical welfare service professions on the one hand and other professions on the other.

It is also worth noting that these group differences in the valuation of opportunities to help, usefulness and contact with other people do not extend to other work values. Nurses, for instance, are almost as concerned with high pay as are engineers, and they also have the second highest score on the valuation of career opportunities.

Even with regard to organisational commitment, there are no clear differences between the public and the private sector professions in the present study. I do find considerable differences in commitment between different professional groups, but these differences do not follow sector lines. The professions standing out with a relatively high level of organisational commitment are teachers, journalists and preschool teachers. The level of commitment is lower among nurses, engineers/business graduates, public administration graduates/librarians, and social workers.

As far as values such being useful to society and helping others are concerned, the above findings are partly in line with previous research based mainly on American data (Crewson, 1997; Frank and Lewis, 2004; Baldwin and Farley, 2001; Wright, 2001). The results with regard to advancement opportunities, on the other hand, differ both from Crewson (1997) and from Frank and Lewis (2004), who found this to be less important to public than to private employees. For other work values, however, even the previous literature provides inconsistent findings. Crewson found no significant sector difference in the valuation of pay, but in one of two data sets public employees were less concerned about job security than private employees. Frank and Lewis, on the other hand, found high income to be more important to private employees and no sector difference in the importance of job security.

There are few previous comparative studies of organisational commitment in the private and public sectors. As noted above, the review by Boyne (2002) suggests a lower level of commitment among public employees, but that review was limited to managerial employees. However, similar findings are reported in the American literature for a more general sample of employees from sixteen businesses and agencies by Goulet and Frank (2002) and for a sample of social workers by Giffords (2003). Taking into consideration the considerable differences between the American and Norwegian societies and also the fact that the present study compares selected occupational groups, these differences are not particularly surprising. One may also add that most of the research in this field is based on small samples, so considerable

random variation may be expected. The present results nevertheless serve to underscore that the differences between public and private employees may be less general than often assumed in the literature.

The determinants of organisational commitment also do not seem to differ systematically between public and private sector professions. Perceiving the job as secure has a positive impact on commitment in one public sector profession, nursing, and in the private sector engineers/business graduates group. The perception of one's work as interesting is positively related to organisational commitment in all groups (although not always reaching statistical significance), but most strongly so among one private sector group, viz. journalists, and one public sector profession, viz. teachers.³

The main impression to emanate from these analyses is that there are few systematic differences between the sectors, and that differences between different professions within the public sector are much more striking. Teachers and to a lesser extent pre-school teachers stand out as a highly committed group. When rating their current job rewards, teachers are also the most positive group with regard to usefulness to society, opportunities to help, contact with other people, and interesting work. Moreover, the estimated interaction effects in Table 4 suggest that regarding one's work as interesting is more closely related to organisational commitment among teachers than in several other professions.

At the opposite extreme, nurses stand out as the profession with the lowest level of organisational commitment. Nurses do express a high valuation of being able to help other people, but they are more concerned with high income and leisure than all or most other groups. A puzzling result is that for nurses there is a negative relationship between perceiving good opportunities for helping other people and organisational commitment. With small and medium-sized samples, anomalous findings will turn up once in a while, and it is possible that the negative effect of opportunities to help others is essentially random. Another, quite speculative idea is that nurses may perceive a conflict between commitment to the patients and commitment to the organisation. It speaks against this interpretation, however, that there is a clear positive correlation among nurses between organisational commitment and the work value being able to help other people; thus those nurses who report to be most concerned about being able to help are also the ones with the highest levels of organisational commitment.

The analyses have shown that the values-reward model can account for group differences in organisational commitment only to a very limited extent. In particular, there are systematic group differences in the impact of the various rewards on commitment over and above what is reflected in people's reported work values. I noted above that the values-rewards model seems to make strong assumptions about the logic or rationality of people's mental processes: Employees are believed to form an overall attitude toward the organisation in which they take systematically into account the various rewards associated with the job as well as their feelings about the importance of each reward. The results reported here are not a complete refutation of this model, however. The coefficients had the expected signs, and it is possible that with a larger sample statistically significant values – rewards interactions would have been found.

A limitation of the current research is that both values and rewards were operationalised through single-item measures. It is well-known that such measures often suffer from reliability problems, and low reliability in the explanatory variables

tends to attenuate the estimated relationships. Important features of the current results suggest, however, that low reliability is not a serious problem. After all, strongly significant relationships between job rewards and organisational commitment were found, as well as systematic variation in these relationships among the professional groups.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence against the hypothesis of a general difference in organisational commitment between public and private sector employees. Even when comparing professional groups that share the same (bachelor) level of education, the differences among the public sector professions were much more striking than the differences between public sector professions on the one hand and private sector professions on the other. The highest commitment among the groups studied was found among teachers, and the lowest among nurses, with private sector engineers and business graduates in between these extremes.

The group differences in organisational commitment can be explained by differences in job rewards only to a very limited extent. Also, there is no clear relationship between individuals' work values and the actual impact that various job rewards seem to have on organisational commitment. This could be taken as support for further work on other models of commitment, e.g. as formulated within the psychological contract (e.g., Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998) or perceived organisational support (e.g., Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986) perspectives. However, given the limitations of the present study, further exploration of the values-rewards model is also necessary. In addition to larger sample sizes, longitudinal data will be useful in order to obtain more direct tests of the causal assumptions underlying this model.

Notes

¹ The statements are: "I am proud to work for this organisation", "I am willing to make an extra effort to help the organisation", "I would accept almost any work task to be able to continue working for this organisation", and "I feel very little attachment to this organisation" (reverse coding).

² Factor analysis was used to examine whether the set of items could be reduced to a smaller number of composite scales. The results indicate that only few items were suitable for such scaling (which is not surprising since the items generally refer to quite disparate job dimensions). The original items were therefore used in the analyses.

³ In the analyses above, group differences in the impact of the various rewards are estimated and tested net of the variation in the impact of rewards that can be explained by people's stated work values. The results are very similar, however, if the value-reward interactions are removed from the model (which is not surprising, given that none of these interactions reached statistical significance).

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Table 1. Variable means

	Preschool teacher	Teacher	Nurse	Social worker	Journalist	Engineer/ Business	Librarian/ Publ. adm.
Organisational commitment	2.91	3.03	2.64	2.72	2.94	2.76	2.72
Reward: Job security	3.90	2.88	4.14	4.07	2.83	3.49	3.49
Reward: High income	1.88	2.56	2.24	2.09	3.26	3.00	2.27
Reward: Career opportunities	2.67	2.44	3.09	2.72	3.12	3.03	2.62
Reward: Interesting work	4.03	4.20	3.93	3.96	4.07	3.57	3.81
Reward: Independent work	3.87	3.91	4.00	4.04	4.12	3.81	4.19
Reward: Possibilities to help	4.53	4.52	4.55	4.48	3.21	3.89	4.26
Reward: Useful to society	4.79	4.87	4.64	4.60	3.60	3.86	4.23
Reward: Leisure time	2.80	3.03	2.63	2.80	2.74	2.73	3.12
Reward: Contact with other people	4.69	4.73	4.59	4.60	4.09	3.97	4.25
Value: Job security	4.48	4.32	4.32	4.22	4.19	4.11	4.21
Value: High income	3.76	3.51	3.88	3.71	3.72	3.95	3.73
Value: Career opportunities	3.69	3.20	3.78	3.56	3.49	4.09	3.51
Value: Interesting work	4.66	4.68	4.69	4.66	4.74	4.62	4.60
Value: Independent work	3.79	3.76	3.80	3.95	4.02	3.95	3.78
Value: Possibilities to help	4.13	4.17	4.17	4.16	3.26	3.76	3.66
Value: Useful to society	4.09	4.30	3.94	4.07	3.70	3.86	3.69
Value: Leisure time	3.51	3.54	3.77	3.57	3.60	3.62	3.58
Value: Contact with other people	4.40	4.45	4.29	4.32	4.10	4.00	3.99
N	126	94	217	186	43	37	78

Note: To improve readability the highest score(s) in each row are given in blue, the lowest in yellow.

Table 2. Regression of organisational commitment on profession, values, rewards and interactions

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Constant	2.704 ***	0.045	2.726 ***	0.042	2.720 ***	0.042	2.703 ***	0.044
Preschool teacher	0.178 *	0.070	0.174 **	0.066	0.166 *	0.065	0.170 *	0.066
Teacher	0.314 ***	0.075	0.232 **	0.076	0.225 **	0.075	0.231 **	0.076
Nurse	-0.071	0.061	-0.094	0.057	-0.059	0.057	-0.064	0.058
Journalist	0.241 *	0.098	0.158	0.105	0.140	0.108	0.093	0.114
Engineer/Business	-0.032	0.109	0.011	0.106	-0.001	0.106	-0.011	0.106
Public adm./library	0.041	0.081	0.076	0.077	0.104	0.077	0.091	0.078
Reward: Job security			-0.007	0.019	-0.002	0.019	-0.003	0.019
Reward: High income			0.067 **	0.022	0.055 *	0.023	0.055 *	0.023
Reward: Career opportunities			0.075 **	0.023	0.081 ***	0.024	0.079 ***	0.024
Reward: Interesting work			0.173 ***	0.030	0.156 ***	0.030	0.138 ***	0.031
Reward: Independent work			0.005	0.026	-0.012	0.026	-0.012	0.027
Reward: Possibilities to help			-0.015	0.033	-0.014	0.033	-0.004	0.035
Reward: Useful to society			0.071	0.037	0.031	0.037	0.033	0.040
Reward: Leisure time			0.036	0.021	0.044 *	0.022	0.034	0.022
Reward: Contact with other people			0.006	0.032	0.006	0.032	0.008	0.033
Value: Job security					0.051	0.030	0.048	0.031
Value: High income					-0.009	0.034	-0.005	0.034
Value: Career opportunities					-0.003	0.028	0.001	0.029
Value: Interesting work					-0.020	0.045	-0.009	0.046
Value: Independent work					0.058	0.031	0.053	0.031
Value: Possibilities to help					-0.061	0.040	-0.052	0.041
Value: Useful to society					0.150 ***	0.038	0.142 ***	0.038
Value: Leisure time					-0.050	0.027	-0.043	0.028
Value: Contact with other people					-0.001	0.036	0.000	0.037
Reward*Value: Job security							0.026	0.023
Reward*Value: High income							0.025	0.030
Reward*Value: Career opportunities							0.006	0.023
Reward*Value: Interesting work							0.063	0.054
Reward*Value: Independent work							0.005	0.026
Reward*Value: Possibilities to help							0.041	0.037
Reward*Value: Useful to society							0.016	0.037
Reward*Value: Leisure time							0.033	0.025
Reward*Value: Contact with other people							0.010	0.039
R ²	0.056		0.201		0.239		0.249	
R ² adjusted	0.047		0.183		0.211		0.211	
p-value for F-test of model change	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.463	
N	680		680		680		680	

Note: Significance probabilities are given as follows: *** for $p < .001$; ** for $p < .01$; * for $p < .05$.

Table 3. Regression of organisational commitment on profession, values, rewards and values-rewards and rewards-group interactions

	b	s.e.		b	s.e.
Constant	2.709 ***	0.044	Reward*Value: Interesting work	0.049	0.053
Preschool teacher	0.166 *	0.067	Reward*Value: Independent work	0.012	0.026
Teacher	0.226 **	0.086	Reward*Value: Possibilities to help	0.082 *	0.041
Nurse	-0.088	0.061	Reward*Value: Useful to society	0.008	0.037
Journalist	0.118	0.154	Reward*Value: Leisure time	0.027	0.025
Engineer/Business	0.033	0.118	Reward*Value: Contact with other people	-0.028	0.041
Public adm./library	0.091	0.078	Job security * Preschool teacher	-0.022	0.059
Reward: Job security	-0.037	0.042	Job security * Teacher	0.071	0.064
Reward: High income	0.044	0.023	Job security * Nurse	0.151 *	0.059
Reward: Career opportunities	0.092 ***	0.024	Job security * Journalist	-0.030	0.076
Reward: Interesting work	0.060	0.056	Job security * Engineer/Business	0.177 *	0.087
Reward: Independent work	-0.022	0.027	Job security * Public adm./librarian	-0.045	0.063
Reward: Possibilities to help	0.086	0.066	Interesting work * Preschool teacher	0.073	0.084
Reward: Useful to society	0.037	0.040	Interesting work * Teacher	0.206 *	0.094
Reward: Leisure time	0.042	0.022	Interesting work * Nurse	0.061	0.072
Reward: Contact with other people	0.012	0.033	Interesting work * Journalist	0.331 **	0.124
Value: Job security	0.058	0.031	Interesting work * Engineer/Business	0.017	0.121
Value: High income	0.000	0.034	Interesting work * Public adm./librarian	0.105	0.093
Value: Career opportunities	-0.006	0.028	Opportunity to help * Preschool teacher	-0.081	0.102
Value: Interesting work	-0.003	0.046	Opportunity to help * Teacher	-0.021	0.110
Value: Independent work	0.058	0.031	Opportunity to help * Nurse	-0.311 ***	0.091
Value: Possibilities to help	-0.051	0.041	Opportunity to help * Journalist	0.032	0.126
Value: Useful to society	0.145 ***	0.039	Opportunity to help * Engineer/Business	-0.076	0.135
Value: Leisure time	-0.039	0.028	Opportunity to help * Public adm./librarian	-0.029	0.102
Value: Contact with other people	-0.016	0.036	R ²	0.301	
Reward*Value: Job security	0.016	0.024	R ² adjusted	0.244	
Reward*Value: High income	0.013	0.030	p-value for F-test of model change	0.000	
Reward*Value: Career opportunities	0.006	0.023	N	680	

Note: Significance probabilities are given as follows: *** for p<.001; ** for p<.01; * for p<.05.





