

Commitment of Ohio Vocational Agriculture Teachers To Their Profession

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The professions offering educational services to the agricultural community should offer programs of the highest possible quality. The quality of education is believed to be related to the degree of commitment of the men and women who serve as teachers in the schools. Agricultural clientele desire teachers who are committed to their roles. How committed are these educators? What factors are related to their level of commitment?

Commitment means dedication. Both commitment and dedication imply the pledging of oneself or the setting apart of oneself for a special purpose. Organizational commitment (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974) is characterized by at least three factors: (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.

Sheldon (1971) stated that organizational commitment is an attitude or an orientation toward the organization which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization. Koch and Steers (1976) indicated that job attachment is clearly related to the notion of organizational commitment. Job attachment refers to an attitudinal response to one's job that is characterized by: (a) a consequence of one's real and ideal job; (b) an identification of one's job with one's chosen occupation; and (c) a reluctance to seek alternative employment.

The topic of employee attachment to organizations has been discussed by Steers (1977). Employee attachment includes concern with why and how people select their occupations or careers, why they shift occupations, why they choose a particular organization, why the organization chooses them and why individuals decide to remain or withdraw from an organization.

Steers (1977) conceptualized three general stages in the attachment process. Organizational entry is concerned with the manner in which employees choose which organization to join. The second stage, organizational commitment, is concerned with the depth of employers' attachment to the organization. Low commitment may lead to employee turnover and absenteeism. High commitment, on the other hand, may lead to greater propensity to participate. The third stage is the propensity to participate, or to withdraw.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate whether demographic characteristics, job characteristics and work experiences could explain the degree of commitment to teaching by Ohio teachers of vocational agriculture. The objectives were to determine: (a) the level of commitment to teaching as a profession by Ohio teachers of vocational agriculture; (b) the relationship between commitment to teaching as a profession and selected demographic variables; (c) the relationship

between commitment to teaching as a profession and job characteristics variables; and (d) the relationship between commitment to teaching as a profession and work experiences.

The variables were derived from a model adapted from the works of Steers (1977) in organizational psychology and of Suandi, McCracken and Smith (1982) in extension. The demographic variables included age, sex, marital status, tenure, program responsibility and educational experiences. Higher levels of commitment were hypothesized to be associated with teachers who were older, female, married, of longer tenure, and traditionally prepared. Job characteristics variables were skill variety, job autonomy, task identity and feedback. Work experiences were role clarity, peer group cohesion, group attitude, realization of expectations, first-year job challenge, personal importance, and self-image reinforcement. All job characteristics and work experiences were hypothesized to be positively related with commitment to teaching.

Method

The population of the study was the Ohio secondary school teachers of vocational agriculture who were listed in the 1983-84 directory (n=637). Every fifth name was chosen (with a random start) from the directory (n=128). A sample of this size allowed the researchers to be 95% confident that the dependent variable mean score for the sample was within plus or minus .165 of the mean score for the population (Cochran, 1977, pp. 72-88).

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. One section was adapted from an instrument developed by Hackman and Lawler (1971) which measured job characteristics. Another was adapted from the experience scales developed by Buchanan (1974). Professional commitment was measured by a 15-item attitude scale adapted from the work of Porter et al. (1979). Demographic variables were obtained from items developed by the researchers. Minor changes were made in the previously-developed scales to make them more relevant to the vocational agriculture teaching profession.

The dependent variable measure was concerned with three aspects of the definition of commitment: a strong belief in and acceptance of the profession's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the profession, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the profession. It was adapted from the original work of Porter et al. (1979). The response format employed a 7-point Likert-type scale with the following anchors: (a) strongly disagree; (b) moderately disagree; (c) slightly disagree; (d) neutral; (e) slightly agree; (f) moderately agree; and (g) strongly agree. The internal consistency of the instrument in previous studies ranged from .82 to .93 (Suandi, 1982). For this study, the Cronbach's alpha measure of reliability was .84. The job characteristics were measured by an instrument adapted from the work of Hackman and Lawler (1971). Work experience scales were adapted from those developed by Buchanan (1974). The adaptations were only in working to make the items relevant to the work of the teacher of vocational agriculture. The reliability values of subscales measuring independent variables ranged from .63 to .87, except for self-image reinforcement (.45) and task identity (.53). The items making up these two variables were individually analyzed because of their low reliability. The low reliability was an indication the individual scale items were measuring different concepts, thus scores could not be averaged across items. Findings relating to these two variables should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Data were collected Autumn 1983. A total of 104 teachers responded, representing an 81% response rate. Eight of the 24 non-respondents were randomly sampled and interviewed by telephone to obtain their demographic characteristics and dependent variable data. Information was therefore available on 112 of the 128 teachers who were sampled.

Findings

The respondents and the telephone interviewed sample of non-respondents were compared on their dependent variable scores. Respondents were significantly more committed than non-respondents ($p < .05$). The only demographic difference that was statistically significant was that non-respondents were less likely to possess a bachelor's degree.

The respondents had a mean commitment score of 5.17 and non-respondents, representing 24 sampling units, had a mean value of 3.60. Therefore, the adjusted mean commitment score for the total sample $\frac{1104(5.17)+24(3.60)}{128}$ was 4.88 on a 7-point scale. The adjustment was based upon the difference between respondents and non-respondents. This commitment score was similar to the value of 5.13 reported by Suandi et al. (1982) for agents in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service.

Correlational Analysis

Simple Pearson-product moment correlation coefficients for continuous variables and point biserial correlation coefficients for dichotomous variables were calculated between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable. Age ($r = .20$), marriage ($r = .16$), agricultural-industrial equipment mechanics teaching ($r = -.21$) and farm management teaching ($r = .18$) demonstrated low relationships with the commitment to teaching variable ($p < .05$). Other demographic variables were unrelated to commitment to teaching.

Only the job characteristic variable of feedback was significantly related with commitment to teaching ($r = .30$). All of the work experiences variables, with the exception of role clarity, were significantly related to the dependent variable: peer group cohesion ($r = .52$), group attitude toward teaching ($r = .35$), group attitude toward profession work ($r = .25$), realization of expectations ($r = .43$), first year job challenge ($r = .59$), personal importance ($r = .64$), individual actions ($r = .28$) and self-image ($r = .45$).

Regression Analyses

Semi-partial multiple regression coefficients were calculated for three sets of variables. The four demographic variables, the one job characteristics variable and the eight work experiences variables that were correlated with commitment to teaching comprised the three variable sets. This analysis gave an indication of the unique contribution of each variable set in explaining the variance in the dependent variable. Only the work experiences set explained a unique portion of the variance (Table 1). The total R^2 was .62. The semi-partial R^2 was .43 for the eight work experiences variables.

A stepwise multiple regression of commitment to teaching scores on the significant independent variables was conducted to ascertain the best predictors of the dependent variable (Table 2). Personal importance (X_1), first-year job challenge (X_2), teacher cohesion (X_3) and

Table 1

Semi-Partial Multiple Regression Coefficients for Sets of Independent Variables Found to be Significantly Correlated With Commitment to Teaching

Variable Set	k_A	k_B	sR^2	F
Demographic characteristic variables	9	4	0.0248	1.46
Job characteristic variable (Feedback)	12	1	0.0006	0.14
Work experiences	5	8	0.4344	12.78*

Note. k_A =number of variables statistically controlled; k_B =number of variables in the set; $R^2=0.6175$.

* $p<0.05$ (df=4,90).

self image (X_4) proved to be the best predictors. As a group, these four variables explained 56.7% of the variance in commitment to teaching.

Table 2

Stepwise Multiple Regression of Commitment to Teaching Scores on the Significant Independent Variables

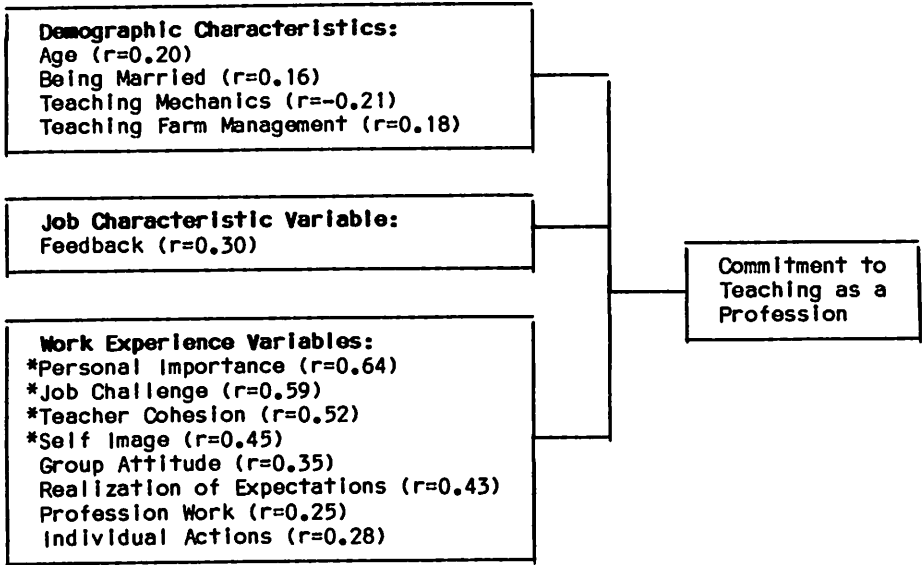
Independent Variables		R^2	R^2 Increment	F*
Personal importance	(X_1)	0.4109	0.4109	5.30
First-year job challenge	(X_2)	0.5153	0.1044	5.05
Vocational agriculture teachers cohesion	(X_3)	0.5598	0.0445	2.73
Self-image	(X_4)	0.5668	0.0070	2.38

* $p<0.05$.

Discussion

A model of commitment to teaching as a profession (Figure 1) was developed. The factors included in the model were those found to be

correlated with the dependent variable. The asterisks in the model indicate those variables having significant semi-partial correlations with commitment to teaching. These variables appear to have the greatest potential for further research on this topic.



*Variables having statistically significant semi-partial correlations with commitment to teaching.

Figure 1. A Model of Commitment to Teaching as a Profession.

Conclusions

Based upon the findings of this study, there appear to be certain significant factors contributing to being committed to teaching as a profession by Ohio teachers of vocational agriculture. Those factors are:

1. Personal importance. This variable reflects the extent to which Ohio vocational agriculture teachers feel that they are making significant and appreciated contributions to the professions. There does appear to be an overall increase in commitment to teaching as a profession scores as teachers realize that the work they do makes important contributions to the overall aims of the profession.
2. First-year job challenge. Vocational agriculture teachers tend to be committed to teaching as a profession when they perceive that their jobs are interesting and challenging.
3. Vocational agriculture teachers' cohesion. A tendency to stick together seems to effect a spirit of being committed to teaching as a profession by vocational agriculture teachers.

4. Self-image reinforcement. The extent to which Ohio teachers of vocational agriculture are encouraged to behave in ways that represent their true feelings or attitudes appears to influence to degree of commitment to teaching as a profession.

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