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Andrew Borchers
Lawrence Technological University

Julia Teahen
Baker College

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Andrew S. Borchers
Lawrence Technological University
borchers@ltu.edu

Julia Teahen
Baker College

Abstract

In recent years many educational institutions have increased their use of part-time adjuncts, especially with the introduction of distance learning courses. With this growing use questions about the efficacy of part-time and distance faculty have arisen. This paper tests whether organizational commitment, as described by Mowday (1979), differs between four groups of faculty: full-time, on-ground; full-time, on-line; part-time, on-ground and part-time on-line. The authors used a 15 item, seven-point scale instrument to measure commitment of a sample of 479 full and part-time faculties at two Midwestern universities. No significant difference in commitment was observed between the four groups.

Introduction and Literature

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

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

Educational institutions are among the most active employers of part-time workers. On average, part-time instructors account for nearly half of all instruction at colleges and universities (Cox 2000). With the advent of distance education technology, this number is bound to grow. Twenty years ago, this figure was about 30% (Magner 1999). Between 1975 and 1993, adjunct faculty grew four times faster than full-time faculty (Kavanagh 2000). Today at Yale University, adjunct instructors and graduate students handle 70% of classroom instruction (Wilson 1999). This ratio is even higher at the University of Phoenix. "Ninety percent of Phoenix's faculty members are employed elsewhere" (Leatherman 1998).

This employment has not come about without controversy. Much of the discussion has focused on the fairness and social justice of using lowly paid adjuncts in place of more highly paid full time faculty members (Leatherman 1998, Fulton 2000 and Kavanagh 2000). A subtle tone in these sources, however, points to the underlying belief by many traditional academics that part-time faculty are in some ways inferior to full-time faculty.

Research on the commitment of part-time workers in general shows mixed results. Some researchers have found that part-time workers are less committed to and satisfied with their jobs than full-time workers (Lee & Johnson 1991; Miller & Terborg 1979; and Morrow, McElroy, & Elliott 1994). Other researchers have determined that part-time employees are more committed than full-time employees (Eberhardt & Shani 1984; Jackofsky & Peters 1987; and Schaubroeck, Judge, & Taylor III 1998). Eberhardt and Shani (1984) found that part-time healthcare employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction than did full-time employees.

These part-time workers also reported more favorable attitudes toward the organizational structure, reward systems, and organizational policies as well as the level of trust among organizational members.

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

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

Behavioral or continuance commitment is the second area and is based on the work of Becker (1960). Becker states that commitment is based on a combination of "side bets" and the individual's system of values. Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) also based their definition of organizational commitment on the theory of side bets. "Commitment is primarily a structural phenomenon which occurs as a result of individual-organizational transactions and alterations in side bets or investments over time" (p. 556).

Other researchers have focused their definitions on employee involvement within the organization (Buchanan 1974; Kanter 1968; and Mowday, Steers, & Porter 1979). Kanter defines organizational commitment as "the willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations which are seen as self-expressive" (Kanter 1968, p. 499).

Research Question and Hypothesis

This paper addresses the following question: What differences in the level of organizational commitment exist between part-time, full-time, distance and on-ground faculty? This is operationalized as the following hypothesis:

> H1: There is a significant difference between the organizational commitment of full-time on-ground, full-time on-line, part-time on-ground and part-time on-line faculty.

Methodology

To answer this research question, the authors used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (15 items using a 7 point scale) and organizational commitment model developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979), modified by adding demographic questions. This instrument's reliability and validity has been well established by prior researchers (Mowday, et al., 1979, Lee and Johnson (1991), Eberhardt and Moser, (1995) and Martin & Hafer, (1995). Cronbach alpha (α) values in these studies, for example, have ranged from .85 to .93. Test-retest reliability over two and three month periods range from R-values of .62 to .72. The instrument was distributed via U.S. Mail to 1,098 instructors at two private, Midwestern institutions. These 1,098 instructors were 100% of the faculty at the two institutions. 479 surveys were returned and used in this study for a response rate of 44.43%. Based on respondent's answers to demographic questions, faculty were divided into four groups based on their status:

> Group 1 - Full-time faculty that do not teach distance courses. N=78.
> Group 2 - Full-time faculty that do teach distance courses N=18.
> Group 3 - Part-time faculty that do not teach distance courses N=314
> Group 4 - Part-time faculty that do teach distance courses N=63

Findings

The research hypothesis was tested using a one-way ANOVA with a Bonferroni post hoc test. Table 1 below shows the descriptive results from the test.

Table 1. Organizational Commitment by Faculty Type

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Fulltime-onground	78	5.2482	1.2897	.1460
Fulltime-on-line	18	5.4365	1.1676	.2752
Parttime-on-ground	314	5.0300	1.0651	6.011E-02
Parttime-on-line	63	5.2354	1.0093	.1272
Total	473	5.1089	1.1046	5.079E-02

From this table, it is clear that any difference in organizational commitment is slight, at best. The results of an ANOVA, shown in Table 2 below confirm this.

Table 2. ANOVA Results on Organizational Commitment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.407	3	2.136	1.759	.154
Within Groups	569.478	469	1.214		
Total	575.885	472			

Finally, the Bonerrfoni results (Table 3) show that none of the four groups varied significantly from the others. Hence, the research hypothesis was not supported.

Table 3. Multiple Comparisons on Organizational Commitment

Dependent Variable: COMMIT2
Bonferroni

(I) Status	(J) Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Fulltime-onground	Fulltime-on-line	-.1883	.2881	1.000
	Parttime-on-ground	.2182	.1394	.709
	Parttime-on-line	1.278E-02	.1867	1.000
Fulltime-on-line	Fulltime-onground	.1883	.2881	1.000
	Parttime-on-ground	.4065	.2671	.772
	Parttime-on-line	.2011	.2945	1.000
Parttime-on-ground	Fulltime-onground	-.2182	.1394	.709
	Fulltime-on-line	-.4065	.2671	.772
	Parttime-on-line	-.2054	.1521	1.000
Parttime-on-line	Fulltime-onground	-1.2780E-02	.1867	1.000
	Fulltime-on-line	-.2011	.2945	1.000
	Parttime-on-ground	.2054	.1521	1.000

Conclusion

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

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

As for part-timers that have full-time work elsewhere, their higher commitment may well be based on the "enjoyment" aspect of teaching compared to part-timers without full-time employment that may be struggling financially.

The debate about the efficacy of part-time and distance faculty will likely continue for some time. There are many aspects for faculty and administrative participants in this discussion to consider. This study suggests, however, that organizational commitment is not different between part-time, distance and full-time faculty.

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