

The Existing Problems and Development Trend of Professional Commitment

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Abstract: Professional commitment, defined as “degree of identification and involvement of a certain profession”, has been becoming a new focus of psychology and organizational behaviour and the studies are limited within highly specialized professions. The author outlines the studies on professional commitment home and abroad and analyzes its existing problems and development trend.

Keywords: commitment; professional commitment; career commitment

1 The studies on professional commitment

In English, several words can be used to mean “专业”, such as profession, major and so on, but their implications are different. Van Maanen, J. and S. Barley (1984) regard profession as “a sub-category of an occupational community”. Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim (1977) point out that profession is a special occupational group whose individual member can demonstrate some high-level features, such as specialization, automation, simple and efficient management and services^[1].

Long Lirong (2002) argues that a profession often refers to a highly specialized occupation and has close relationship with it. An occupation may contain different professions. One instance of many is teaching, which consists of various professions, such as mathematics, physics, politics and so on. Similarly, one professional may engage in different occupations, such as the Chinese professionals who may engage in many and quite different occupations. The concept of “professional commitment” comes from the studies on organizational commitment and career commitment^[2]. Since Becker advanced the concept of organizational commitment, many people have been studying it for several decades. In 1990, after having carried out a comprehensive integration on various theoretical models and confirmatory factor analysis, Meyer and Allen put forward the widely accepted the theory: three-factor model of professional

commitment, that is, affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment^[3]. Studies on commitment has been an important part of psychology and organizational behaviour in China. Scholars like Ling Wenshuan, Wang Chongming and Long Lirong have put forward some assumptions and theories. Recent studies have not only increased attention to the development mode and affecting factors of commitment, but also taken commitment as a mediator to study the influence of commitment on other mediators. With the expansion of research on and application of commitment, nowadays, growing concern has been turned to professional commitments while previous research focused mainly on organizational commitment and professional commitment. As the social division of labor has been diversifying and deepening, the present study on professional commitment is limited to highly specialized occupations and it is defined as “degree of identification and involvement towards a certain profession”^[4].

Most scholars in the mainland have taken college students as their subjects. In her study on professional commitment of college students, Wu Lanhua (2004) addresses the identification of college students on their major and their attitude of willingness to learn their major wholeheartedly as professional commitment, and combines “Undergraduate Professional Commitment Scale”. (Wu Lanhua, “Study on Professional Commitment and Learning Style of the Contemporary College Students”[D] Fujian Normal University, 2004 Master

thesis, 19). Yan Yu and Long Lirong (2008) focus their attention on psychological structure and affecting factors of undergraduate professional commitment, believing that the psychological structure of undergraduate professional commitment comprises affective commitment, economic commitment, normative commitment and choice commitment, that the demographic factors which influence undergraduate professional commitment are mainly major, gender, age and so on, and the psychological factors are mainly self-efficacy and interest in learning of college students. (Higher Education Research, 2008, 02)

There are also other studies: Luo Yali's "Survey of Undergraduate Professional Commitment" (Higher Education Exploration, 2008, 02), "Survey of professional commitment of free-pay students in normal universities" done by Yao Qingfu and Chen Shi (Contemporary Teacher Education, 2009, 01), "A study on the features of professional commitment of college students majoring on physical education" made by Wang Shihe and Xue Feng (Gansu Science and Technology, 2009, 05), Su Jing's "A study on the relationship between the current condition of learning turnout and professional commitment of college students majoring on physical education in Shanghai" (East China Normal University, 2007 Master thesis).

Schools in Taiwan have mostly taken teachers as their subjects. Guo Huilong points out that educational profession commitment means teachers' acceptance and beliefs of the goal and value of the teaching they are engaged in, willingness to work hard for their teaching tasks and attitude of willingness to keep doing the task. Li Xinxiang believes that professional commitment refers to their identification of the professional norms, beliefs, morals and value of the professional work that they are doing and the psychological impact of willingness to invest in it. Huang Guolong thinks that the commitment of a staff member to a profession is just his acceptance and willingness to dedicate to the profession he is engaged in, and that professional commitment contains three elements: the positive evaluation on the profession, the willingness to dedicate to the profession and the re-

taining trend.

2 The current situation and the existing problems

2.1 The current situation

While the previous studies in the west were mainly on organizational commitment and career commitment, the current studies are mostly about professional commitment and now the scope of research and application of commitment has been increasingly expanding. The subjects of these studies on professional commitment are mostly teachers, nurses, college students and so on^[5]. For recent years, the study on professional commitment has been becoming a new focus of psychology and organizational behaviour and attracting the attention of many scholars. However, the correspondingly systematic empirical study is still rare and the studies on professional commitment of the staff in some industries and special fields is at early stage.

2.2 The existing problems

The definition and structure of professional commitment are still at issue. There are two major controversial points for the existing theories: the first one is that whether professional commitment and professional attitude are the same thing, and the second is that the nature of professional commitment is single-factor or multi-factor. Foreign scholars have mainly two different viewpoints on the nature of professional commitment: the first is that professional commitment is a relatively simple concept which is mainly attached to emotion; the second is that professional commitment is multi-factor theory, including affection, economy and social norms. At present, most scholars in the mainland tend to believe multi-factor theory, but they have different views about how many factors involved, three, four or five.

The questionnaire about professional commitment is yet to be perfected. Now the questionnaires used by Chinese scholars are mainly the revised version of the questionnaire made by Blau and Meyer, such as the questionnaire on career commitment (2002) made by Long Lirong and the questionnaire (2005) by Lian Rong. The questionnaire

should be further revised when it aims at a special field. Therefore, When a questionnaire aiming at some specific industry and some special field is designed, the cultural background should be taken into consideration.

3 The development trend of studies on professional commitment

Now the studies on commitment deal mostly with the professional commitment. With the expansion of the research and application of professional commitment, more and more experts and scholars will be attracted to carry out application research and empirical study on some special field. Li Guangchun applied and obtained a Soft Science Project of Henan Province Department of Education "Study on the Professional Commitment of Teachers in Colleges and Universities in Henan Province" in 2009, which focuses on a special field, the teachers in colleges and universities. The project intends

to compile a suitable professional commitment questionnaire to be the tool of scientifically empirical study, and carry out thorough research and discussion on affecting factors of professional commitment and its affecting efficacy on work.

References

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