

**GOVERNMENT CAREER COMMITMENT
AND THE SHAPING OF WORK ENVIRONMENT PERCEPTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines government career commitment and its relation to perceptions of the work environment, as well as reports of career decisions and behaviors. The results of a field survey of 385 government employees from 11 state agencies suggested that stronger government career commitment was linked to reports of greater job involvement, more organizational commitment, and lower turnover intention. Results also suggested that government career commitment has positive relations with perceptions of situational characteristics such as human resource development, performance feedback, variety, challenge, and mission importance. Occupational differences were reviewed to examine whether they influenced the extent to which government career commitment had shaped employees' perceptions of their jobs, office, and agencies, as well as their reports of job involvement, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Findings indicated that the government career commitment of professional/technical employees was related to their perceptions of jobs, offices, and agencies, but minimal effects were found in occupational categories of secretarial/clerical or managerial/executive.

Key words: Career commitment, occupations

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Interest in a better explanation of work-related commitment has increased as workers more frequently are deciding to quit or continue their jobs based on long-term career plans. Although the need to investigate various forms of work-related commitment has been suggested (see, for example, Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Morrow, 1993; Randall & Cote, 1991; Reichers, 1985), many public organization studies have focused mainly on the variable of *organizational* commitment, its antecedents and outcomes (e.g., Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2003; Goulet & Frank, 2002; Liou & Nyhan, 1994; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2006; Moon, 2000; Nyhan, 1999). An alternative area of study is the investigation of *career* commitment (Blau, 1985, 1988, 1989). By examining career commitment and its relation to employees' perception of the work environment in the context of public sector agencies, this paper expands on the current understanding of the motivational bases of government employees.

According to Morrow (1993), career commitment is a composite of individual attitudes toward career roles reflected in various career decisions and behavior such as career identification, job involvement and career planning. For instance, individuals seek positions in the military, in health care or in universities in accordance with their own career plans and personal values, and their career commitment strengthens or weakens over time to the extent that their employment situation fulfills their career needs (e.g., for a military career, a health care career or an academic career).

Career commitment and organizational commitment differ in that the two constructs have distinct foci. While organizational commitment reflects an individual's dedication to a particular collectivity (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), career commitment, instead, is indicative of an individual's dedication to maintaining a series of related jobs in a particular occupational or professional domain (Morrow, 1983, 1993). Career commitment, however, also can be distinguished from professional commitment and occupational commitment, although previous studies sometimes have used these three distinct constructs interchangeably (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000). The concept of career addresses the totality of work activities over one's lifetime, while occupations and professions refer to particular areas of work that require specific sets of acquired knowledge and specialized skills (Hall, 1968). In that regard, career commitment develops over time as the consequence of a dynamic interplay between job-related experiences and one's identity, especially those aspects that include personal values and attitudes about a meaningful career.

Previous empirical studies also have found that career commitment is related to a variety of key work-related variables such as job involvement (Aryee & Chay, 1994; Cohen, 1999; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Freund & Carmeli, 2003; Morrow, 1993), organizational commitment (Cohen, 1999; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Freund & Carmeli, 2003; Lee et al., 2000; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), and turnover intention (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Bedeian, Kemery, & Pizzolatto, 1991; Blau, 1988; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Lee et al., 2000; Meyer et al., 1993). Such studies clearly indicate that career commitment is an important construct to consider in any organizational effort to improve human resource management.

LONDON'S CAREER MOTIVATION MODEL

London's (1983) career motivation model was one of the first theoretical frameworks proposed that could undergird a systematic study of employees' career motivation. London suggested that career motivation is strengthened or weakened through the interaction of i) individual characteristics such as an employee's values and attitudes, ii) situational characteristics that describe the specific job context, and iii) specific behaviors and decisions at and about work (see Figure 1). More importantly, London's model elaborated these interdependencies as a complex and dynamic process.

To be more specific, London (1983) viewed the development of career motivation as simultaneously involving two ongoing processes of rationality: prospective rationality and retrospective rationality. Prospective rationality explains how an individual identifies desired career outcomes and forms expectations for attaining them. In this process, situational characteristics (such as job, office and organization variables) and individual characteristics (such as career identity, insight, and resilience) influence ongoing decision making about one's career (arrows 1, 2 and 3 in Figure 1). Alternatively, retrospective rationality focuses on the extent to which individual characteristics pertinent to career commitment are affected by employees' prior career decisions and behavior (arrow 4) and the situational characteristics of their previous work-related experiences (arrow 5). Of particular relevance to the present study, London also explicitly recognized in his career motivation model that individuals in the same employment situation can report widely varying perceptions of their job, office, and organization and offer divergent assessments (arrow 6). Individual differences clearly affect the manner in which the work situation is interpreted.

Most studies based on London's (1983) career motivation model have focused on the process of prospective rationality (see, for example, Aryee & Chay, 1994; Bedeian et al., 1991; Chang, 1999; Ellemers, de Gilder, & van den Heuvel, 1998; Meyer et al., 1993). Relatively few studies have examined the process of retrospective rationality, especially the connection between individual characteristics and assessments of the situational characteristics of the work environment (arrow 6 in Figure 1). Given that career commitment is a product of one's career decisions, behaviors, and experiences over time, the question remains whether the level of career commitment can be linked to more or less favorable evaluations of one's immediate job, office, or organization at any particular point in time. In the context of the public sector, for example, do employees with higher government career commitment tend to view their work environments more positively? Which assessments of the situational characteristics of the work environment are more sharply framed by the government career commitment of public sector employees?

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The research framework of this study as presented in Figure 2 was adapted from London's (1983) career motivation model. The specific focus of investigation, however, was *government* career commitment (parallel to other career domains such as military career commitment, health care career commitment, or academic career commitment). The construct of government career commitment was selected as overarching specific occupations or professions. For example, the occupational commitment of truck drivers or the professional commitment of accountants may find expression throughout a career that spans employment within one or more government agencies. Thus, employees in a variety of occupations and professions can share a common commitment to a career in government.

As shown in Figure 2, government career commitment was expected to be associated with perceptions of several situational characteristics of job, office, and agency. In particular, 11 variables that have been identified frequently in career commitment research were selected for the present study. Five job characteristics were included: variety, autonomy, challenge, clarity, and importance (Blau, 1988; Hall, 1968; May, Korczynski, & Frenkel, 2002; Noe, Noe, & Bachhuber, 1990; Wallace, 1995). Four office characteristics were included: rewards, human resource development, performance feedback, and perceived fairness (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1991; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Noe et al., 1990). Two agency characteristics were included: mission importance and organizational goal specificity (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Pandey & Wright, 2006; Wright, 2007).

Also depicted in Figure 2 is the expected connection between government career commitment and three aspects of career decisions and behaviors: job involvement, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Prior research has supported the significant relationship between greater career commitment and higher job involvement, more organizational commitment, and lowered turnover intention (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1991; Blau, 1989; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). For purposes of the present study, this generic linkage was considered unlikely to be attenuated for government employees.

An important feature of the research framework shown in Figure 2 is the positioning of occupation as a moderating variable between government career commitment and both situational characteristics and career decisions and behaviors. This framework anticipates that occupational differences will influence the extent to which government career commitment would be found to shape employees' perception of their jobs, offices, and agencies, as well as

their reports of job involvement, organizational commitment, and turnover intention.

Furthermore, occupational groups may vary in the characteristic strength of government career commitment. Such complexities introduced by the consideration of occupational differences were addressed by identifying three distinct occupational groups for comparative study in this investigation.

London (1983: 626) proposed that, in the process of prospective rationality, “individual characteristics associated with career motivation will have a greater direct effect on career decisions and behaviors the more the individual characteristics are stable and integrated into the individual’s self-concept.” A variety of studies of teachers, nurses, librarians, and other professionals have indicated that the strength of their career commitment was correlated positively with job involvement, organization commitment, and turnover intention (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Bedeian et al., 1991; Carson & Bedeian, 1994; Cohen, 1999). An expectation that these three connections also exist in populations of government employees would seem warranted.

London (1983: 628) also proposed that, in the process of retrospective rationality, “individual characteristics associated with career motivation will affect how the situation is perceived.” Studies aimed at testing retrospective rationality in London’s model of career motivation, especially the connection between career commitment and perceptions of the situational characteristics of employees’ jobs, offices, and agencies, appear to be quite limited. Aryee and Tan (1992) described a significant association between career commitment and reported appropriateness of human resource development for populations of nurses and teachers. Park and Rainey (2007) documented significant relationships between their measure of

government career commitment¹ and federal employees' perceptions of transformation-oriented leadership, goal clarity, empowerment, objective performance appraisal systems, and procedural equity. Greater commitment was linked to more positive assessments of situational characteristics. Thus, London's propositions and the accumulation of supporting empirical evidence to date suggested the following two hypotheses for the study of government career commitment:

Hypothesis 1: Lower turnover intention and greater job involvement and organizational commitment will be reported by public sector employees with a strong commitment to government careers.

Hypothesis 2: Job, office, and agency characteristics will be reported more positively by public sector employees with a strong commitment to government careers.

The research framework for the present study (Figure 2) depicts occupation as a moderating variable between government career commitment and both situational characteristics and career decisions and behaviors. Expectancy theories have proposed that employees respond to their work environment differently if they differ in salient values and attitudes (Hackenhausen, 1991; Vroom, 1964). For example, work that provides greater opportunities for responsibility, challenge, and growth may be viewed positively by employees with more internal control, strength of self-efficacy, and a high need for achievement, while appearing more threatening to employees with more external control, less self-efficacy, and a lower achievement need. Since public employees in different occupations and professions may vary in their reasons for making a commitment to a government career (Fiske, 1993; Fiske, Kenny, & Taylor, 1982; Pryor & Kriss,

¹ Items included "Reputation of the federal government as an employer is important" and "I would recommend the government as a place to work." Park and Rainey (2007: 221) designated the measure as "affective commitment," though corresponding generally to the construct of government career commitment as discussed here.

1977; Taylor & Fiske, 1975), the treatment of occupation as a moderating variable in the research framework is critical.

London's (1983: 628) final proposition suggested that in the process of retrospective rationality individual characteristics associated with career motivation will affect how situational characteristics are perceived "the more the situation initially is ambiguous, uncertain, and/or cognitively inconsistent." The nature of work responsibilities varies considerably across occupations and professions. Physicians typically must confront more ambiguity, uncertainty, and inconsistency than librarians; in government organizations, managers typically must confront more ambiguity, uncertainty, and inconsistency than clerical employees. Thus, consistent with London's final proposition, well understood occupational and professional differences—in perceptions, needs, values, attitudes, and the nature of work—suggested the following hypotheses for the study of government career commitment:

Hypothesis 3: Agency secretarial and clerical employees will exhibit a lesser propensity to report positively about job, office, and agency characteristics, as well as lower turnover intention and greater job involvement and organizational commitment, when their government career commitment is high.

Hypothesis 4: Agency professional and technical employees will exhibit a moderate propensity to report positively about job, office, and agency characteristics, as well as lower turnover intention and greater job involvement and organizational commitment, when their government career commitment is high.

Hypothesis 5: Agency managers and executives will exhibit a greater propensity to report positively about job, office, and agency characteristics, as well as lower turnover

intention and greater job involvement and organizational commitment, when their government career commitment is high.

These five hypotheses, consistent with the research framework presented in Figure 2, provided the structure that guided the design of the present study. Details of the research method including the selection of the sample and measures are described in the following section.

METHOD OF STUDY

The present study was conducted with a field survey of 385 New York State employees drawn from a two-stage cluster sampling procedure. In the first stage, a sample of 12 organizations was randomly selected from the population of 72 state agencies in New York; probability for inclusion was determined by the number of employees in each agency. Five of the 12 agencies provided a current list of their employees. Employee lists from the seven remaining agencies were taken from the most recent New York State Office of General Services (OGS) Telephone Directory. One agency was dropped from further study because the available sampling frame was clearly restricted. In the second stage, 35 employees who worked in the state capital were selected randomly from each of the 11 agencies.

A total of 385 selected participants initially were notified about the study in a personally addressed and signed letter sent to their office address. Five days after this introductory letter, an eight-page questionnaire with a similar cover letter was mailed to each selected employee. All questionnaires were coded for tracking purposes. After the first mailing, non-respondents received two additional mailings: a postcard follow-up after 10 days and a personally addressed and signed letter and replacement questionnaire after 21 days. These measures were taken to maximize the survey response rate (Dillman, 1978, 1991).

Of the 385 questionnaires that initially were mailed, 30 were returned uncompleted because those selected participants were no longer employed in the state agencies. From the reduced sample of 355 employees, 267 usable questionnaires were returned for an overall response rate of 75.2 percent; response rates by agency ranged from a low of 64.5 percent to a high of 83.9 percent. For the purpose of this study focusing on the government career commitment of three different occupational groups, returned questionnaires were usable only if respondents had replied to questions about their occupational roles and salary grades; a total of 250 respondents (62 secretarial/clerical; 132 professional/technical; 56 managerial/executive) provided all essential information and were included in the database for the present study.

A brief demographic overview of the respondents is provided in Table 1; further demographic details are provided by Wright (2004). As shown in Table 1, a large majority (89%) of respondents was white, 52 percent were female and 48 percent were male, and over 60 percent reported having earned a college degree. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of the respondents reported their job was best described as clerical or support, over half (53%) as professional or technical, and nearly one-quarter (22%) as managerial. Salary grade level provided an additional measure of the respondents' nature of job responsibility. One-third (35%) were in salary grade level 17 or below, and two-thirds (65%) were in salary grade level 18 or above. Mean age (47 years) and years in current position, years in agency, and years in state agency (7.9 years, 15.6 years, and 20.6 years, respectively) did not differ significantly from demographic parameters of the state workforce (Wright, 2004).

Respondents completed a 114-item questionnaire designed to examine employee perceptions of their work situation, as well as reports of personal career decisions and behaviors including job involvement, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Four items on

the questionnaire were devoted specifically to the assessment of employees' government career commitment. In addition to the variables relevant here, data were collected to measure several other variables, as well, the analysis of which is beyond the scope of the current study. Items for all of the variables were measured on either a six-point (coded 1–6) strength of agreement (strongly disagree, generally disagree, disagree a little, agree a little, generally agree, and strongly agree) or a five-point (coded 0–4) frequency of occurrence (almost never/never, rarely, sometimes, often, and almost always/always) scale. A complete list of the items included in each measure is provided in the appendix.

Each of the key variables was assessed using multiple items borrowed, wherever possible, from previously validated measures. To assess job characteristics, Locke and Latham's (1990) Goal Setting Questionnaire and Steers' (Steers, 1975, 1976) Task-Goal Attribute Scales provided the basis for a five-item measure of autonomy, a four-item measure of job importance, and three-item measures of job clarity and job challenge. A three-item measure of job variety (or job routineness) originated in the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Checks of reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for these measures have been reported from .73 to .85 (Wright, 2004; Wright & Davis, 2003).

To assess office characteristics, Locke and Latham's (1990) Goal Setting Questionnaire again provided the basis for a three-item measure of rewards and a three-item measure of human resource development, as well as a four-item measure of performance feedback. The three-item measure of perceived fairness was constructed from relatively generic statements concerning fairness, equal opportunity, and perceived discrimination and should not be confused with more systematic assessments of procedural justice (see, for example, Colquitt, 2001; Mossholder, Bennett, & Martin, 1998). Variables pertaining to agency characteristics were measured using

items adapted by Wright and his colleagues (Wright, 2004, 2007; Wright & Davis, 2003) for mission importance and organizational goal specificity (Cronbach's alphas of .77 and .73, respectively).

Three variables considered relevant aspects of career decisions and behaviors were organizational commitment, job involvement, and turnover intention. Organizational commitment was constructed using four items adapted from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979). This study used only the dimension of affective commitment; space constraints in questionnaire design precluded inclusion of additional organizational commitment items. Turnover intention (often considered a salient aspect of continuance commitment) and job involvement were measured using items adapted by Wright and his colleagues (Wright, 2004, 2007; Wright & Davis, 2003).

As detailed in the appendix, four items were devoted to the measurement of government career commitment. Unpublished project reports have suggested reasonable coherence in subsets of these items in prior use, but no formal validation had been undertaken to the point of the present study. This measure should not be confused with the scaling of public service motivation (Perry, 1996; Wright, 2008), as these commitment items pertain directly to an individual's cumulative strength of connectedness to a government career. Specific wording of the four government career commitment items was shaped largely by reviewing scales validated in prior studies of work commitment and, in particular, career commitment (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005).

RESULTS

Table 2 presents univariate and bivariate statistics for the 15 measures included in the present study. Because all constituent items for each measure were placed in standard form before summation, all arithmetic means were scaled identically at 0.0. Standard deviations were as low as .65 for job autonomy (least variability among government employees) and as high as .90 for turnover intention (greatest variability). The reliabilities for all 15 measures as indicated by Cronbach's alphas were acceptably high for the purposes of the present study; the lowest alpha (.62) occurred for the job involvement measure.

Pairwise bivariate correlations between the 15 measures suggested reasonable levels of discriminant validity. The median correlation was 0.30, indicating that typically less than 10% of the variance in pairs of measures was shared. About one in ten of the correlations were above .50, however, and might raise some concern about collinearity. Five of these larger correlations, however, appeared in pairs including organizational commitment, a variable known to be central in the nomological network of organization theory. Job variety and job challenge were highly correlated ($r = .59$), as well, but well below the magnitudes of their reliabilities (.78 and .79, respectively).

Hypotheses 1 and 2 proposed that public sector employees with a strong commitment to government careers will perceive the characteristics of their jobs, offices, and agencies more positively and also exhibit greater job involvement and organizational commitment with a lower turnover intention. These hypotheses were consistent with London's (1983) contention that retrospective rationality influences the connection between individual characteristics such as government career commitment and perceptions of situational characteristics in the workplace,

as well career decisions and behaviors. The correlations—displayed in bold in the third column of Table 2—were used to test these hypotheses.

All three correlations between government career commitment and the career decisions and behaviors measures were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and in the anticipated direction. Stronger government career commitment was linked to reports of greater job involvement ($r = .20$), more organizational commitment ($r = .30$), and lower turnover intention ($r = -.29$). Of the eleven correlations between government career commitment and perceptions of situational characteristics, six were statistically significant ($p < .05$) and in the anticipated positive direction: human resource development ($r = .21$) and performance feedback ($r = .25$) as office characteristics; variety ($r = .24$), challenge ($r = .33$), and importance ($r = .30$) as job characteristics; and the agency characteristic of mission importance ($r = .26$). No linkage was found between government career commitment and perceptions of rewards, fairness, job autonomy, job clarity, or organizational goal specificity.

Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 proposed that occupation would moderate the relation between government career commitment and both perceptions of situational characteristics and reports of career decisions and behaviors. In particular, managers and executives were expected to exhibit a greater propensity toward positive perceptions and reports when their government career commitment is high; professional and technical employees were expected to exhibit a moderate propensity toward positive perceptions and reports when their government career commitment is high; and secretarial and clerical employees were expected to exhibit a lesser propensity toward positive perceptions and reports when their government career commitment is high.

To test these hypotheses, employees were distinguished by occupational category depending on whether they had described the nature of their job as “clerical/support,”

“professional/technical,” or “manager/senior manager/executive” (n = 62, 132, and 56, respectively). Employees identifying themselves as “professional/technical” were screened further on the basis of their salary grade to reduce occupational overlap with the clerical and managerial categories; this led to reducing the professional/technical pool by 17 respondents who also had reported their salary grade either below 14 or above 25 (or M1).

Each of the three occupational categories then was divided further into three levels of reported government career commitment: high, moderate, and low. A cut-point score of $-.25$ was used to distinguish between low and moderate commitment; a cut-point score of $+.25$ was used to distinguish between moderate and high commitment. This led to approximately equal groups of employees for all three occupational categories. For the secretarial/clerical category, the proportions of employees in three groups were .32 low, .30 moderate, and .38 high. For the professional/technical category, the proportions were .31 low, .30 moderate, and .38 high. For the manager/executive category, the proportions were .29 low, .36 moderate, and .36 high. Overall, a somewhat larger proportion of employees were located in the high commitment groups. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were undertaken to test for differences between these three levels of government career commitment within each occupational category, followed by *post hoc* comparisons where the resulting F-ratios were found to be statistically significant.

As shown in Table 3 for the secretarial/clerical category, few and relatively minimal differences were found between the three groups that varied in government career commitment, consistent with the third hypothesis. With respect to differences in perceptions of situational characteristics, secretarial and clerical employees with the highest government career commitment reported more positively about performance feedback ($F = 5.39$) and mission

importance ($F = 3.56$) than employees in either of the lower commitment groups. No differences were identified with respect to the other nine situational characteristics. Reports of both organizational commitment ($F = 3.86$) and turnover intention ($F = 3.28$), however, varied significantly across levels of government career commitment. Secretarial/clerical employees with the highest government career commitment reported more positively about their organizational commitment than employees in the two lower career commitment groups, while employees with the least government career commitment reported greater turnover intention than employees in the two higher career commitment groups. No difference in job involvement was indicated.

The fourth hypothesis for the present study pertained to the category of professional/technical employees. ANOVA results for testing this hypothesis are shown in Table 4 and are generally supportive; half of the 14 tests of group difference were statistically significant: performance feedback ($F = 3.95$), job variety ($F = 7.94$), job challenge ($F = 6.50$), job importance ($F = 5.50$), mission importance ($F = 4.82$), job involvement ($F = 8.35$), and organizational commitment ($F = 5.63$). No perceptual differences between groups were identified for rewards, human resource development, fairness, job autonomy, job clarity, organizational goal specificity, or for reported turnover intention.

The *post hoc* tests for professional/technical employees indicated that the pattern of group differences were not consistent, however. Employees with the highest government career commitment perceived their jobs as providing greater challenge and reported more job involvement than employees in the two lower career commitment groups, while employees with the least government career commitment perceived less variety and importance in their jobs, less importance of their agency's mission, and reported less organizational commitment than

employees in the two higher career commitment groups. The least positive perception of performance feedback also was found in the group with the least career commitment, but the highest perception of performance feedback was recorded by employees in the moderate or middle group.

The final hypothesis (i.e., managers and executives will exhibit a greater propensity to report positively about job, office, and agency characteristics, as well as lower turnover intention and greater job involvement and organizational commitment, when their government career commitment is high) was clearly unsupported in the present study, as indicated in Table 5. ANOVA results identified only two statistically significant differences, both resulting from more negative perceptions of job characteristics by agency managers and executives with the least government career commitment: job challenge ($F = 5.44$) and job clarity ($F = 3.25$). In the other ten measures of perceived situational characteristics and all three measures of career decisions and behaviors, no differences between groups were found.

Additional analyses were conducted to complement the results of the univariate F statistics. First, since the univariate F statistics do not provide an overall multivariate test, Wilks' lambda (λ) was used to examine the overall significance of the main effect of government career commitment on the dependent measures that had generated significant F statistics. This overall multivariate test provided results that controlled for an inflated alpha level with each repeated univariate test. For example, after the univariate F statistics related to performance feedback and mission importance were found to be significant for secretarial and clerical employees, the main effect of government career commitment on those two measures was tested using Wilks' lambda (λ). All the Wilks' lambdas (λ) were found significant in three occupational

groups ($\lambda = 3.47$ for secretarial/clerical; $\lambda = 2.45$ for professional/technical; $\lambda = 4.57$ for managerial/executive).

Second, because some of the dependent measures were somewhat correlated, stepwise discriminant analyses were conducted to identify which associations were primary. Different F statistics ($F = 2.40$ for secretarial/clerical; $F = 3.08$ for professional/technical; $F = 3.17$ for managerial/executive) based on the degrees of freedom in different occupational groups were adopted to determine the criteria of the entry model in the stepwise discriminant analysis. The results revealed that somewhat fewer associations were major. Performance feedback was shown to have the primary, significant association with government career commitment of secretarial and clerical employees. In the professional/technical group, levels of job variety, performance feedback and job involvement had the major, significant associations with government career commitment. In the managerial and executive group, levels of job challenge and job clarity had the primary, significant associations with government career commitment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was one of the first to investigate the influence of government career commitment on employees' perceptions of specific job, office, and agency characteristics and on their career decisions and behaviors based on London's career motivation model (1983). Significant relationships were found among career decisions, behavior measurements and government career commitment, and six out of eleven situational characteristic measurements were found to be significant. Considering that situational characteristics of government organizations cannot be improved dramatically because of budget constraints and complex work

processes, public employees' career commitment may be one of the important sources that enhances their work experience.

In particular, the present study indicated that the government career commitment of employees in the professional/technical category significantly affected perceptions of their jobs, offices, and agencies, as well as their career decisions and behaviors. Job involvement and organizational commitment were higher for professional/technical employees with a high level of government career commitment, and government career commitment also was found to have an effect on their descriptions of situational characteristics such as performance feedback, job variety, challenge, job importance and mission importance. Even when stepwise discriminant analysis was conducted, government career commitment showed consistent significant associations with performance feedback, job variety and job involvement.

This result provides some implications for previous studies that have compared the work experiences of government professionals with those of other occupations in government organizations. Cherniss and Kane (1987) compared perceived job characteristics of public sector professionals with those of clerical workers in state agencies and found that professionals perceived a lower level of task identity, skill variety, and task significance. Emmert and Taher (1992) replicated Cherniss and Kane's study and reported that professional employees have perceptions of job characteristics that are similar to those of clerical workers but with a lower level of job involvement. Later, deLeon and Taher (1996) noted more negative job perceptions among local government professionals than among clerical employees. Since the current study suggests that professional/technical employees' perceptions of their work environment and attitudes differ according to their level of government career commitment, future research should

compare the perceptions and work attitudes of the three occupational groups by matching samples or disaggregating on the basis of government career commitment.

The lack of connection between government career commitment and any of the three measures of career decisions and behaviors for managers and executives is of particular note. Job involvement, turnover intention, and organizational commitment were no lower (and no higher) for these managers and executives than for employees in lower salary grades, and the strength of their commitment to government careers was not an influencing factor. Furthermore, except for perceptions of job challenge and clarity, government career commitment did not affect their descriptions of situational characteristics. Clearly, little evidence exists here that employment situations with “more ambiguous, uncertain, and/or cognitively inconsistent aspects” (London 1983: 628) were perceived differently as a consequence of variability in the government career commitment of agency managers and executives. One possible explanation for this finding is that, since most public managers and executives may suffer from excessive agency formalization, continuous external investigations and competing requirements from various constituents (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; Whorton & Worthley, 1981), their work experiences might not be as differentiated by their level of government career commitment. Further studies are needed to explain the lack of relationships between government career commitment and these other factors in managerial and executive groups.

A series of ANOVA tests and discriminant analyses for the clerical/secretarial group were in line with the hypothesis that their perceptions of situational characteristics and career decisions and behaviors are not significantly influenced by government career commitment. However, some of the univariate F statistics of office characteristics (performance feedback), agency characteristics (mission importance) and career decision and behavior (organizational

commitment) were significantly related to career commitment, while the measurements of job characteristics did not show any significant relationship. Since secretarial/clerical employees tend to have little chance to satisfy higher-order needs through their jobs, their evaluations of their job characteristics might not differ based on their commitment level, resulting in the secretarial/clerical groups' showing more variability in their evaluations of some of the office characteristics and agency characteristics than in their job characteristics. In future studies, more detailed models should be developed to examine more closely the influence of government career commitment on perceptions of situational characteristics for secretarial/clerical employees.

The current study also compares different work commitment constructs in the context of state agencies. Morrow (1993) conceptualized five work commitment constructs: 1) work ethic endorsement, 2) career commitment, 3) continuance commitment, 4) affective commitment and 5) job involvement. Connections between career commitment and other work commitment constructs have been documented widely. In the meta-analytical work of Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005), the mean observed correlation of career commitment with both job involvement and organizational commitment was .35—higher than reported here ($r = .20$ and $.30$, respectively). At least a portion of these differences may be attributable to less sample variability in the present study in the measure of job involvement (s.d. = .68) and more sample variability in the measure of turnover intention (s.d. = .90), as shown in Table 2. This finding is also in line with the Randall and Cote's study (1991), which reported positive relationships between job involvement, organizational commitment and career commitment. Future studies should more thoroughly investigate the relationships among government career commitment and other commitment variables in the context of government organizations.

In addition, the construct of government career commitment should be distinguished from that of public service motivation (Perry, 1996; 2000), that is, individual predispositions to respond to a select set of motives. Constraints on the length of the questionnaire upon which the present study was based precluded the additional use of the original PSM scale or even more recent condensations, nor was public service motivation an integral part of the initial research design. In contrast, the construct of government career commitment did not originate in the psychological literature on motives but in the literature on vocations, occupations, and professions, in particular, in theories pertaining to a variety of domains of work and career commitment (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Blau, 1985; Cohen, 1999; Morrow, 1983; Randall & Cote, 1991). Although the two constructs of government career commitment and public service motivation are undoubtedly connected within a nomological network, future research is required to establish the degree of their convergent and discriminant validity.

Multiple dimensions of government career commitment also could be examined in future study. Several studies have developed the multi-dimensioned concept of career/occupational commitments. Carson and Bedian (1994) developed three components of career commitment: identity, resilience and career planning. Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) developed scales of affective, continuance and normative occupational commitment based on their three components of organizational commitment. Blau and Holladay (2006) proposed four components of occupational commitment by dividing continuance occupational commitment into two dimensions: accumulated costs and limited alternatives.

London's (1983) model was based on dynamic and reciprocal relationships in both retrospective and prospective rationality. Although the emphasis in this study was on the extent to which government career commitment might influence the perception of situational

characteristics and career decisions and behaviors, these variables also influence the strength of government career commitment over time. Antecedents of government career commitment should be investigated further. Multi-level analysis using a longitudinal research design could provide useful evidence about the influence of situational characteristics on government career commitment. Other variables that have been identified as the major antecedents of organizational commitment—including supervisory support, psychological contract and perceived justice perception—should also be examined in an effort to understand the process of building government career commitment.

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TABLE 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

| | Clerical (n=62) | Professional (n=132) | Manager (n=56) | Total (n=250) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 13% | 60% | 57% | 48% |
| Female | 87% | 40% | 43% | 52% |
| Education | | | | |
| Some high school | 3% | 0% | 0% | 1% |
| High school diploma | 33% | 5% | 13% | 13% |
| Some college/technical school | 43% | 23% | 18% | 27% |
| B.A., B.S., or other college degree | 21% | 32% | 20% | 27% |
| Some graduate work | 0% | 18% | 16% | 13% |
| MA, M.S. or other graduate degree | 0% | 20% | 32% | 18% |
| Doctorate | 0% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Salary Grade | | | | |
| Grades 6-13 | 69% | 5% | 0% | 20% |
| Grades 14-17 | 31% | 11% | 9% | 15% |
| Grades 18-25/M1 | 0% | 77% | 46% | 51% |
| Grades 26-31/M2-3 | 0% | 5% | 41% | 12% |
| Grades 32-35/M4 | 0% | 2% | 4% | 2% |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Asian | 2% | 2% | 0% | 1% |
| Black | 3% | 3% | 0% | 2% |
| Hispanic | 0% | 2% | 11% | 3% |
| Native American | 2% | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| White | 93% | 90% | 82% | 89% |
| Other | 0% | 2% | 5% | 2% |

TABLE 2
Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients (n = 250)

| | Mean | s.d. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Career commitment | 0.0 | 0.70 | (0.67) | | | | | | |
| 2. Rewards | 0.0 | 0.78 | 0.12 | (0.72) | | | | | |
| 3. Human resource development | 0.0 | 0.82 | 0.21* | 0.47* | (0.75) | | | | |
| 4. Performance feedback | 0.0 | 0.79 | 0.25* | 0.30* | 0.51* | (0.81) | | | |
| 5. Fairness | 0.0 | 0.79 | 0.11 | 0.43* | 0.52* | 0.41* | (0.70) | | |
| 6. Job variety | 0.0 | 0.82 | 0.24* | 0.23* | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.18* | (0.78) | |
| 7. Job autonomy | 0.0 | 0.65 | 0.09 | 0.30* | 0.34* | 0.24* | 0.30* | 0.27* | (0.66) |
| 8. Job challenge | 0.0 | 0.88 | 0.33* | 0.17* | 0.03 | 0.17* | 0.11 | 0.59* | 0.19* |
| 9. Job clarity | 0.0 | 0.82 | 0.11 | 0.15 | 0.37* | 0.38* | 0.20* | -0.16 | 0.38* |
| 10. Job importance | 0.0 | 0.70 | 0.30* | 0.29* | 0.33* | 0.34* | 0.28* | 0.32* | 0.44* |
| 11. Mission importance | 0.0 | 0.85 | 0.26* | 0.16 | 0.24* | 0.25* | 0.26* | 0.22* | 0.30* |
| 12. Organizational goal specificity | 0.0 | 0.84 | 0.12 | 0.34* | 0.50* | 0.32* | 0.45* | 0.14 | 0.44* |
| 13. Job involvement | 0.0 | 0.68 | 0.20* | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.13 | 0.40* | 0.32* |
| 14. Turnover intention | 0.0 | 0.90 | -0.29* | -0.41* | -0.43* | -0.37* | -0.50* | -0.31* | -0.39* |
| 15. Organizational commitment | 0.0 | 0.78 | 0.30* | 0.47* | 0.58* | 0.50* | 0.60* | 0.31* | 0.49* |

| | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 8. Job challenge | (0.79) | | | | | | | |
| 9. Job clarity | -0.01 | (0.76) | | | | | | |
| 10. Job importance | 0.47* | 0.43* | (0.66) | | | | | |
| 11. Mission importance | 0.38* | 0.24* | 0.52* | (0.79) | | | | |
| 12. Organizational goal specificity | 0.14 | 0.30* | 0.54* | 0.50* | (0.79) | | | |
| 13. Job involvement | 0.45* | 0.26* | 0.51* | 0.36* | 0.22* | (0.62) | | |
| 14. Turnover intention | -0.17* | -0.31* | -0.32* | -0.23* | -0.43* | -0.26* | (0.73) | |
| 15. Organizational commitment | 0.29* | 0.35* | 0.57* | 0.48* | 0.66* | 0.24* | -0.69* | (0.78) |

Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are reported in parentheses.

* $p < .05$

TABLE 3
Perceived Situational Characteristics and Reported Career Decisions and Behaviors:
Secretarial/Clerical

| | | LGCC | MGCC | HGCC | F-ratio |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | | (n=20) | (n=18) | (n=24) | |
| Office Characteristics | Rewards | -0.19 | -0.10 | 0.23 | 1.98 |
| | Human resource development | -0.17 | -0.13 | 0.24 | 2.00 |
| | Performance feedback | -0.32 _a | -0.11 _a | 0.34 _b | 5.39* |
| | Fairness | -0.25 | 0.01 | 0.18 | 1.89 |
| Job Characteristics | Variety | -0.09 | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.21 |
| | Autonomy | 0.00 | -0.09 | 0.07 | 0.34 |
| | Challenge | -0.12 | -0.11 | 0.11 | 0.58 |
| | Clarity | -0.13 | -0.01 | 0.11 | 0.67 |
| | Importance | 0.05 | 0.15 | 0.19 | 0.28 |
| Agency Characteristics | Mission importance | -0.13 _a | -0.26 _a | 0.31 _b | 3.56* |
| | Organizational goal specificity | 0.02 | -0.07 | 0.04 | 0.13 |
| Career Decisions and Behaviors | Job involvement | 0.10 | -0.07 | -0.02 | 0.46 |
| | Turnover intention | 0.40 _b | -0.14 _a | -0.23 _a | 3.28* |
| | Organizational commitment | -0.28 _a | -0.13 _a | 0.32 _b | 3.86* |

LGCC: Low Government Career Commitment; MGCC: Moderate Government Career Commitment; HGCC: High Government Career Commitment

Differences in subscripted letters indicate statistically significant group differences in *post hoc* comparisons.

Wilks' lambda for the MANOVA test of significant univariate *F* statistics is 3.47 ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$

TABLE 4
Perceived Situational Characteristics and Reported Career Decisions and Behaviors:
Professional/Technical

| | | LGCC | MGCC | HGCC | F-ratio |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | | (n=36) | (n=35) | (n=44) | |
| Office Characteristics | Rewards | -0.19 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 1.32 |
| | Human resource development | -0.23 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 1.54 |
| | Performance feedback | -0.25 _a | 0.27 _b | 0.02 _{ab} | 3.95* |
| | Fairness | -0.05 | -0.00 | -0.02 | 0.03 |
| Job Characteristics | Variety | -0.44 _a | 0.04 _b | 0.24 _b | 7.94* |
| | Autonomy | -0.07 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.33 |
| | Challenge | -0.36 _a | -0.13 _a | 0.28 _b | 6.50* |
| | Clarity | -0.08 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.43 |
| | Importance | -0.40 _a | -0.05 _b | 0.14 _b | 5.50* |
| Agency Characteristics | Mission importance | -0.40 _a | 0.03 _b | 0.21 _b | 4.82* |
| | Organizational goal specificity | -0.19 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 1.08 |
| Career Decisions and Behaviors | Job involvement | -0.20 _a | -0.13 _a | 0.34 _b | 8.35* |
| | Turnover intention | 0.23 | 0.02 | -0.25 | 3.06 |
| | Organizational commitment | -0.36 _a | 0.12 _b | 0.15 _b | 5.63* |

LGCC: Low Government Career Commitment; MGCC: Moderate Government Career Commitment; HGCC: High Government Career Commitment

Differences in subscripted letters indicate statistically significant group differences in *post hoc* comparisons.

Wilks' lambda for the MANOVA test of significant univariate *F* statistics is 2.45 ($p < .05$).

* $p < .05$

TABLE 5
Perceived Situational Characteristics and Reported Career Decisions and Behaviors:
Managerial/Executive

| | | LGCC (n=16) | MGCC (n=20) | HGCC (n=20) | F-ratio |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------|
| Office Characteristics | Rewards | -0.15 | 0.12 | 0.00 | 0.47 |
| | Human resource development | -0.35 | 0.13 | 0.15 | 2.19 |
| | Performance feedback | -0.35 | 0.26 | 0.01 | 2.57 |
| | Fairness | -0.19 | 0.13 | 0.00 | 0.85 |
| Job Characteristics | Variety | 0.06 | 0.21 | -0.25 | 1.73 |
| | Autonomy | -0.02 | 0.21 | -0.19 | 1.92 |
| | Challenge | -0.43 _a | 0.28 _b | 0.33 _b | 5.44* |
| | Clarity | -0.38 _a | 0.28 _b | 0.02 _{ab} | 3.25* |
| | Importance | -0.07 | 0.10 | 0.16 | 0.71 |
| Agency Characteristics | Mission importance | -0.15 | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.40 |
| | Organizational goal specificity | -0.22 | 0.00 | 0.15 | 0.75 |
| Career Decisions and Behaviors | Job involvement | 0.01 | 0.00 | -0.02 | 0.01 |
| | Turnover intention | 0.36 | -0.25 | -0.06 | 2.33 |
| | Organizational commitment | -0.31 | 0.20 | 0.05 | 2.20 |

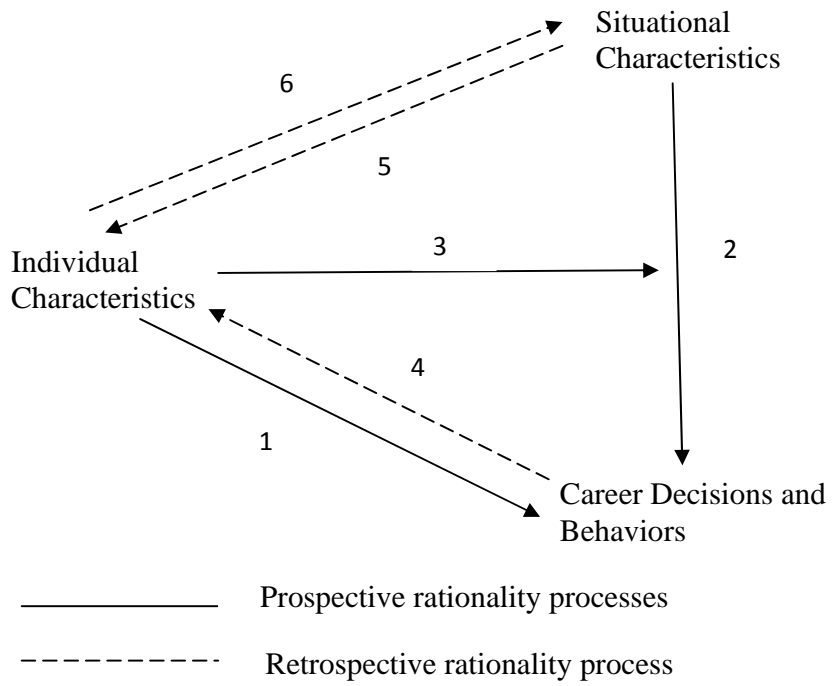
LGCC: Low Government Career Commitment MGCC: Moderate Government Career Commitment; HGCC: High Government Career Commitment

Differences in subscripted letters indicate statistically significant group differences in *post hoc* comparisons.

Wilks' lambda for the MANOVA test of significant univariate *F* statistics is 4.57 ($p < .05$).

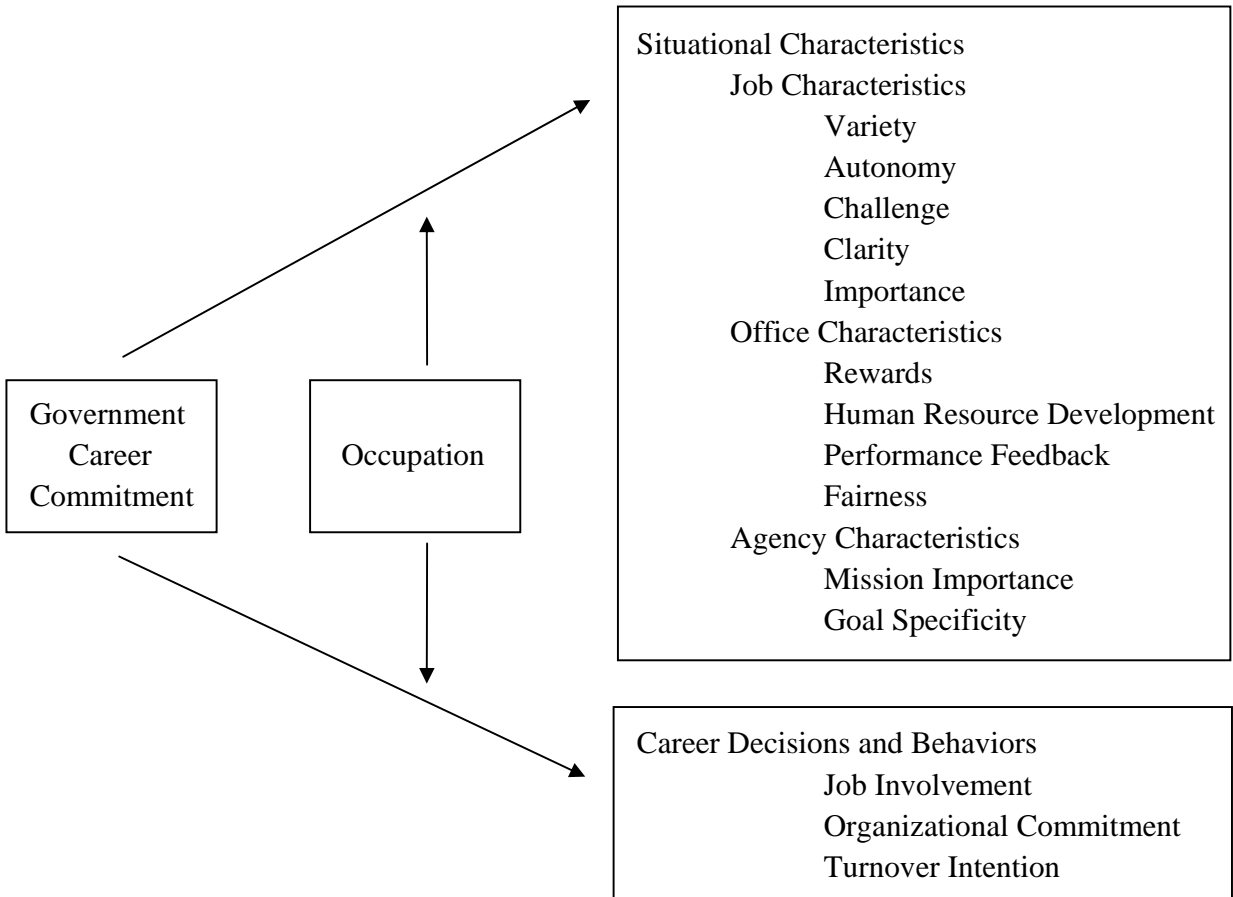
* $p < .05$

FIGURE 1
London's Career Motivation Model



Source: London (1983, 626)

FIGURE 2
Research Framework



APPENDIX

Item Components of Measures

Career Commitment

It is important to me that my career is in government.

If I ever looked for a new job, I would try to find one in government, not in business or industry.

Working for government allows me to give something back to society.

The opportunity to provide meaningful public service is an important reason why I originally took this job.

Office Characteristics

Rewards

Fulfilling my job responsibilities does little to improve my chances for a promotion. (R)

If I accomplish my work objectives, it increases my chances for a pay raise.

Doing good work in no way increases my job security here. (R)

Human Resource Development

Employees are not being kept up-to-date in important work skills. (R)

This organization provides good opportunity for job-related training.

This organization places the right emphasis on career development.

Performance Feedback

I get coaching from my supervisor to help me do a better job.

My last performance evaluation assisted me in improving my work.

I receive useful evaluations of my strengths and weaknesses at work.

My supervisor clearly expresses work expectations to me.

Fairness

Employees are treated fairly in this organization.

Personnel decisions are influenced by factors like ethnicity, age or gender of employees. (R)

This organization tries to very hard to provide equal opportunities for all employees.

Job Characteristics

Variety

Day after day my on-the-job tasks are almost same. (R)

My daily work routine is very predictable. (R)

I get an opportunity to do new and different things at work.

Autonomy

I always must check with my boss before making important decisions. (R)

I have the authority to change my work processes to get the job done.

In my job, even small matters have to be referred to someone higher up for a final answer. (R)

Rules, administrative details, and "red tape" make it difficult for new ideas to receive attention. (R)

This organization seems to much more concerned that I follow procedures than that I do a good job. (R)

Challenge

A high degree of skill and know-how is necessary to do my job well.

My work is very challenging.

Jobs like mine are quite demanding day after day.

Clarity

I know exactly what I am supposed to do on my job.

I understand fully which of my job duties are more important than others.

My responsibilities at work are very clear and specific.

Importance

A lot of people can be affected by how well I do my job.

I work on tasks that seem useless or unnecessary. (R)

I understand the importance of accomplishing my work objectives.

There is no clear link between my work and my agency's goals. (R)

Agency Characteristics

Mission Importance

Fulfilling the mission and goals of this organization is critical to the state of New York.

This organization provides valuable public services.

The work of this organization is NOT very significant in the broader scheme of things. (R)

Organizational Goal Specificity

This organization has objectives that are specific and well defined.

This organization seems to be without central purpose or apparent direction. (R)

It is hard to understand the overall goals of this organization. (R)

Career Decisions and Behaviors

Job Involvement

I put forth my best effort to get my job done regardless of the difficulties.

I probably do not work as hard as others who do the same type of work. (R)

I do extra work for my job that isn't really expected of me.

Time seems to drag while I am on the job. (R)

Turnover Intention

I think about getting a different job.

I would quit this organization tomorrow if it were possible.

Organizational Commitment

I would not recommend working here to others. (R)

This organization does not very little to deserve my loyalty. (R)

It is difficult for me to agree with policies of this organization. (R)

I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.

Note. (R) indicates the item was reverse-worded with respect to the direction indicated by the name of the measure.

