

## Occupational Commitment and the Role of Leisure and Money Among Recreation and Park Professionals

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### Abstract

While the park and recreation profession has grown steadily in recent decades it is generally understood that many current baby boomer professionals will be retiring soon and with it the prospect there may not be enough people entering the profession to meet the current demand for services. With a growing number of the general public recognizing that active lifestyles facilitate a greater quality of life these trends highlight the need to retain workers currently in the profession. As reflected by reviews of commitment research in other service industries (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000; Meyer & Allen, 1997), occupational commitment can be influenced by tenure with an organization, career field, the specific job performed, and the organization in which employed (Frauman, Cunningham, and Ivy, 2009; Morrow, 1983; Wahn, 1998). Two additional factors that may influence occupational commitment, particularly among park and recreation professionals, are monetary compensation and an individual's ethic towards leisure. As such, the primary purpose of this research was to examine how park and recreation professional's perceptions of leisure and money relate to and influence occupational commitment.

Questionnaires were mailed to a sample of 700 members of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) representing branches of the organization most likely linked to recreation provision (e.g., National Society for Park Resources). The Occupational Commitment Scale (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) was used as were leisure and money ethic measures (Crandall & Slivken, 1978; Tang, 1995). The sample valued leisure and thought of money as good but did not consider money a sign of achievement. Leisure and money ethic were not meaningfully related to or good predictors of occupational commitment. Given the findings and impending changes in the profession more research is needed to further examine the roles of money and leisure as well as other factors that may influence occupational commitment among recreation and park professionals.

**Key Words:** Money ethic, leisure ethic, occupational commitment, recreation professionals

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## Introduction and Review of Literature

The parks, recreation, and leisure services field experienced significant expansion in the decades between World War II and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is widely believed that during the next two decades many park and recreation professionals will choose to retire at the same time, and the number of persons entering the field with professional training has not been adequate to meet the demand. It is feared that this impending wave of retirements will only add to the shortage of trained professionals (Witt, 2003). Understanding the factors influencing the recruitment and retention of professional personnel seems evermore important as agencies and organizations respond to retirements in a challenging economy.

An understanding of occupational commitment is important because of its potential link to retention. Whether the focus is on the broad concern of retention of persons in the field or the more specific concern of keeping employees within a specific organization, the concept of occupational commitment and its association to retention has enormous human resource management implications (Gambino, 2010; Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000).

It should also be noted that occupational commitment, as discussed here, is different than organizational commitment or work commitment, although each contribute independently to the prediction of professional activity and work behavior (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Lee, Carswell, and Allen (2000), as cited in Gambino (2010), conceptualized occupational commitment as the psychological link, based on affective reaction, between the individual and his or her occupation, while organizational commitment is linked to the specific organization and work commitment is linked to the nature of the work actually performed. Blau (1985) referred to commitment to career as attitude towards one's profession or voca-

tion and noted its distinction from commitment to the organization. Occupational commitment has also been described as "a person's belief in and acceptance of the values of his or her chosen occupation or line of work, and a willingness to maintain membership in that occupation" (Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1994, p. 537). These definitions are consistent with the notion of affective commitment incorporated into the occupational commitment scale of Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). Regardless of the definition, it is reasonable to conclude that the connection the individual has with an occupation will be related to the person's desire to remain in the occupation.

Researchers have identified several factors which influence individuals' levels of commitment to their occupation including tenure with the organization, the work itself, the career field, the specific job performed, the organization in which they are employed, and their possible relationships with a representative union (Frauman, Ivy, and Cunningham, 2009; Giffords, 2003; Morrow, 1983; Wahn, 1998). Each of these factors has, to some degree, been investigated including commitment to unions (Fullager & Barling, 1989), to employment (Jackson, Stafford, Banks, & Warr, 1983), and to careers (Blau, 1985, 1988, 1989). Lee, Carswell, and Allen (2000) in a meta-analysis of commitment studies observed gender, number of dependents, and marital status not related to occupational commitment although age and tenure with an organization were moderately correlated. On the other hand, Frauman, Ivy, and Cunningham (2009) found men were slightly more committed to the parks and recreation occupation than women, while professionals with children or those who were married also exhibited greater overall and continuance commitment versus those without children or who were single. Additionally, numerous investigators have identified commitment as an important predictor of employee retention and as a moderator of employee turnover

(Buchanan, 1974; Commeiras & Fournier, 2001; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

Two additional factors that may particularly influence occupational commitment among park and recreation personnel given the nature of the profession are the role of monetary compensation and the value placed on leisure. Recognizing parks and recreation professionals are generally not as highly paid per capita in comparison to other similar occupation sectors (e.g., mean annual wage of \$25,040 for recreation workers versus \$32,840 for community and social services workers) (US Department of Labor, 2009), individuals with a high money ethic orientation may not want to stay in the profession. This may cause voluntary and/or involuntary turnover and thus, their normative commitment or feeling one ought to stay in the profession will be negatively related to money ethic. Furthermore, they may have low pay satisfaction (Tang & Kim, 1999) and thus have low affective occupational commitment or emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the occupation. Conversely, given occupation-specific skills and training may not be transferable to other professions and thus career alternatives could be limited, one's money ethic may be strongly related to continuance commitment or the perceived costs associated with leaving an occupation.

On the other hand parks and recreation professionals' leisure attitude is one of the most important work-related attitudes because their work is within the realm of leisure. Research in the intrinsic motivation literature (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that when intrinsic interests (e.g., it feels good) are high and extrinsic rewards (e.g., money) are low people are more likely to reason that they do it for intrinsic reasons. If people enter the parks and recreation profession primarily for intrinsic interests in leisure activities and service, they should therefore be committed to the profession in general, and particularly from an affective commitment

or identification with standpoint. With much of what park and recreation professionals do premised on designing and facilitating satisfying leisure experiences be they of an instrumental nature or more a state of mind, professionals should value leisure strongly.

No studies from the authors' perspective have examined how perceptions of money and leisure relate to and influence occupational commitment in any profession. Cunningham, Frauman, Ivy and Perry (2004) examined leisure and money ethic of park and recreation college students and Iso-Ahola and Buttner (1982) studied the same concepts using 8<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> graders, but neither study examined occupational commitment. Tang and Kim (1999) examined money ethic and its relationship to occupational commitment among health care workers but did not include a leisure ethic component. As such, the primary purpose of this research was to examine leisure and money ethic and their respective relationship to and influence on occupational commitment among park and recreation professionals.

## **Methods**

Data were collected via a questionnaire mailed to a stratified random sample of professional members of the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). The sampling strategy selected was conducted to ensure that members of the American Park & Recreation Society (APRS), National Society for Park Resources (NSPR), National Therapeutic Recreation Society (NTRS), and Armed Forces Recreation Society (AFRS) were selected in numbers proportional to their branch membership within NRPA at that time. The questionnaire was composed of the 30-item Money Ethic Scale (Tang, 1992, 1995), 10-item Leisure Ethic Scale (Crandall & Slivken, 1978), 18-item Occupational Commitment Scale (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), and select demographic questions. Seven hundred questionnaires were dis-

tributed in an initial mailing with follow-up post cards and a second questionnaire mailed to non-respondents at two-week intervals. A list of member mailing addresses was provided by the National Recreation and Park Association. Nearly four hundred ( $n = 397$ ) usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 56.7%.

Tang (1992, 1995) developed the Money Ethic Scale (MES) to determine the value people place on money which is described as their "money ethic." The MES has been utilized in a variety of settings and with a variety of occupational groups (Tang, 1995; Tang & Gilbert, 1995; Tang & Kim, 1999). The money ethic scale is a multi-dimensional scale with six subscales measuring different attitudinal dimensions toward money. The subscales are money is good (representing positive attitudes toward money); money is evil (which reveals negative attitudes towards money); money means achievement (how money allows persons to measure their success); money means respect/self esteem (helps people express competence and gain respect from others); money should be budgeted (revealing how people budget their money which is related to the notion of retention and effort/ability); and money provides freedom/power (reflecting the belief that with money one is able to have autonomy, freedom, and be what one wants to be). The response format was a 5-point Likert-type scale using *disagree strongly* (1), *neutral* (3), and *agree strongly* (5) as anchor points. Cronbach's alpha for each of the six subscales of the MES were as follows: .81 (good), .69 (evil), .70 (respect), .69 (freedom), .72 (budgeted), and .71 (achievement), respectively, with test-retest reliability for each of the six subscales of .67 (good), .56 (evil), .61 (respect), .63 (freedom), 0.65 (budgeted), and 0.83 (achievement) respectively (Tang, 1992).

In much the same way as the Money Ethic Scale shows the extent to which people value money, the Leisure Ethic Scale (LES) (Crandall & Slivken, 1978, 1980), measures individuals'

"leisure ethic." Test-retest reliability for the 10-item LES has been determined to be on average .80 when tested for intervals from one to five weeks (Crandall & Slivken, 1980). The response format for the LES is a 4-point Likert scale composed of *completely disagree*, *moderately disagree*, *moderately agree*, and *completely agree*. Examples of items on the LES include: "I would like to lead a life of complete leisure", "It is good for adults to be playful", "I admire a person who knows to relax", and "Leisure is great."

The final component of the instrument, the Occupational Commitment Scale (OCS) (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993) is designed to solicit responses that allow for determination of commitment to one's occupation using a 5-point Likert-type scale with *disagree strongly* (1), *neutral* (3), and *agree strongly* (5) as anchor points. The OCS is composed of three subscales of six items each, representing the affective, continuance and normative dimensions of commitment and is based upon Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model of organizational commitment. Affective commitment is described as psychological attachment to the occupation (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997). Continuance commitment refers to the perceived costs associated with leaving an occupation (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997). Normative commitment is the perceived obligation to remain with the organization (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997). Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) have explained the psychological state of these forms of commitment to an organization as, "Employees with strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to, those with a strong continuance commitment remain because they need to, and those with a strong normative commitment remain because they feel they ought to do so" (p. 539).

## Results

Just over half of the sample were male (55.3%,  $n = 219$ ). The overall average age of respondents was 42.8 and ranged from 21 to 71. Approximately, two-thirds were married (69.0%) and nearly the same had children (63.4%). The mean number of years working in the profession was 17.6 and ranged from 1 to 42, while the mean number of years with the same organization was 11.5 and ranged from .5 to 40. Reliability analysis was performed for the Money Ethic Scale (MES) and its six dimensions with Cronbach alpha values ranging from .60 to .75. The Cronbach alpha value for the Leisure Ethic Scale (LES) was .71. Cronbach alpha values were greater than .80 for the Occupational Commitment Scale (OCS), overall and each of the subscales.

The sample had an average item score just above “moderately agree” ( $m = 3.35$  on the 4-

point scale) for the 10-item Leisure Ethic scale with the item “I would like to lead a life of complete leisure” evaluated the lowest ( $m = 2.59$ ), and “It is good for adults to be playful” evaluated the highest ( $m = 3.82$ ) (Table 1). The sample also had an average item score just below “agree” for the “money is good” ( $m = 3.92$ ) and “money should be budgeted” ( $m = 3.73$ ) money ethic measures (1 = “disagree strongly” and 5 = “agree strongly”). Respondents did not observe “money as evil” with a reverse-scored mean equivalent of 3.73. On the other hand, the “money means respect” ( $m = 2.47$ ) and “money means achievement” ( $m = 2.23$ ) measures revealed average item scores close to the “disagree” response choice.

Regarding the OCS, the “affective commitment” measure had an average item score above the “agree” response ( $m = 4.30$ ) with

**Table 1: Leisure Ethic, Money Ethic, Occupational Commitment Scale Responses**

| Measure                                    | Average Item Score | Overall Mean |
|--|--------------------|--------------|
| Leisure Ethic (10 items)                   | 3.35               | 33.5         |
| Overall Money Ethic (30 items)             | 3.34               | 100.2        |
| Money is Good (9 items)                    | 3.92               | 35.3         |
| Money is Evil (6 items)                    | 3.73 <sup>1</sup>  | 22.4         |
| Money Means Respect (4 items)              | 2.47               | 9.9          |
| Money Provides Freedom (4 items)           | 3.13               | 12.5         |
| Money Achievement (4 items)                | 2.23               | 8.9          |
| Money Budgeted (3 items)                   | 3.73               | 11.2         |
| Overall Occupational Commitment (18 items) | 3.35               | 60.4         |
| Affective Commitment (6 items)             | 4.30               | 25.8         |
| Continuance Commitment (6 items)           | 3.13               | 18.8         |
| Normative Commitment (6 items)             | 2.63               | 15.8         |

*Note:* The Leisure Ethic Scale used a 4-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 4 = completely agree). The Money Ethic Scale used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly), Occupational Commitment used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly).

<sup>1</sup>Reverse-scored.

Leisure ethic was not meaningfully related to occupational commitment with correlation values ranging between -.050 and .084 (Table 2). Overall money ethic was not meaningfully related to occupational commitment (OC) with values ranging from -.097 to .116. Of the six money ethic dimensions, only “money is evil” had values greater than -.200 or .200, correlat-

ing at -.216 with OC and -.297 with normative commitment (NC), while “money means respect” and “money means achievement” were negatively correlated with affective commitment (AC) at -.140 and -.130 respectively. In addition, “money means respect” was positively correlated with continuance commitment (CC) at .138.

Table 2: Leisure Ethic, Money Ethic, and their Relationship to Occupational Commitment

| Measure                | Overall Occupational Commitment | Affective Commitment | Continuance Commitment | Normative Commitment |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Leisure Ethic          | -.012                           | .084                 | -.050                  | -.029                |
| Overall Money Ethic    | .014                            | -.097                | .116                   | -.030                |
| Money is Good          | .034                            | -.027                | .121                   | -.045                |
| Money is Evil          | -.216*                          | .012                 | -.123                  | -.297*               |
| Money Means Respect    | .083                            | -.140*               | .138*                  | .113                 |
| Money Provides Freedom | .001                            | -.093                | .089                   | -.028                |
| Money Budgeted         | .093                            | .014                 | .081                   | .084                 |
| Money Achievement      | .068                            | -.130*               | .102                   | .115                 |

Note: The Leisure Ethic Scale used a 4-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree, 4=completely agree). The Money Ethic Scale used a 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree strongly, 5=agree strongly), with Money is Good having nine items; Money is Evil six items; Money Means Respect, Provides Freedom, and Means Achievement four items each; Money Should be Budgeted three items. Occupational Commitment used a 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree strongly, 5=agree strongly) with each dimension having six items.

\* $p < .01$ .

To examine predictors of occupational commitment based on money and leisure ethic scores four regression analyses were performed. The analyses performed included OC, AC, CC, and NC, each treated as a single dependent variable, with leisure ethic, and each of the six dimensions of money ethic treated as predictor variables.

“Money is evil” was the best predictor of overall OC and the only statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) predictor (Table 3). The adjusted  $R^2 = 4.7\%$ . “Money is evil” was also the best predic-

tor of CC and one of two significant predictors, the other was the “money is good” dimension. Together, with the other variables, 5.1% of the variance was explained (Table 4). Closer examination revealed the money is evil dimension had a negative relationship while the money is good dimension was positively related to CC. The remaining two equations had adjusted  $R$ -squares’ of 9.0 for NC and 3.2 for AC (Tables 5 & 6). “Money is evil” (negative relationship) was the only significant predictor of NC, while there were no statistically significant predictors of AC.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results on Overall Occupational Commitment

| Variables in Equation      | $\beta$ | t      | p-value |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Intercept                  |         | 10.338 | .000    |
| Leisure ethic              | -.007   | -.139  | .889    |
| Money is good              | .105    | 1.658  | .098    |
| Money is evil              | -.234   | -4.275 | <.001*  |
| Money means achievement    | .022    | .384   | .701    |
| Money provides freedom     | -.057   | -.906  | .365    |
| Money means respect        | .026    | .399   | .690    |
| Money needs to be budgeted | .060    | 1.187  | .236    |

Note:  $R^2 = .063$  \* $p < .05$ .

Table 4: Multiple Regression Results on Continuance Occupational Commitment

| Variables in Equation      | $\beta$ | t      | p-value |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Intercept                  |         | 5.092  | .000    |
| Leisure ethic              | -.055   | -1.095 | .274    |
| Money is good              | .142    | 2.227  | .027*   |
| Money is evil              | -.151   | -2.749 | .006*   |
| Money means achievement    | .013    | .221   | .825    |
| Money provides freedom     | .000    | -.004  | .966    |
| Money means respect        | .052    | .815   | .416    |
| Money needs to be budgeted | .044    | .863   | .388    |

Note:  $R^2 = .034$  \* $p < .05$ .

Table 5: Multiple Regression Results on Normative Occupational Commitment

| Variables in Equation      | $\beta$ | t      | p-value |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Intercept                  |         | 7.268  | .000    |
| Leisure ethic              | -.005   | -.103  | .918    |
| Money is good              | .019    | .303   | .762    |
| Money is evil              | -.276   | -5.165 | <.001*  |
| Money means achievement    | .089    | 1.558  | .120    |
| Money provides freedom     | -.089   | -1.453 | .147    |
| Money means respect        | .064    | 1.021  | .308    |
| Money needs to be budgeted | .060    | 1.201  | .230    |

Note:  $R^2 = .090$  \* $p < .05$ .

Table 6: Multiple Regression Results on Affective Occupational Commitment

| Variables in Equation      | $\beta$ | t      | p-value |
|----------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| Intercept                  |         | 10.595 | .000    |
| Leisure ethic              | .072    | 1.423  | .156    |
| Money is good              | .047    | .738   | .461    |
| Money is evil              | -.025   | -.455  | .649    |
| Money means achievement    | -.084   | -1.414 | .158    |
| Money provides freedom     | -.031   | -.484  | .628    |
| Money means respect        | -.100   | -1.539 | .125    |
| Money needs to be budgeted | .015    | .291   | .771    |

Note:  $R^2 = .090$  \* $p < .05$ .

## Discussion and Implications

The primary purpose of this research was to examine leisure and money ethic and their respective relationship to and influence on occupational commitment. Breaking down the results for each of the scales used in the study, the sample had an average item score between “moderately and completely agree” for the 10-item Leisure Ethic Scale with the item “I would like to lead a life of complete leisure” evaluated the lowest and “It is good for adults to be playful” evaluated the highest. This finding may suggest that while leisure service professionals highly value leisure, be it instrumental (e.g., goal-oriented) in nature or more a state of mind, being entirely at leisure may not be something they seek, perhaps due to a lack of purpose. The nature of the items in the Leisure Ethic Scale makes it difficult to fully examine this possibility.

Regarding participant attitude towards money, the scores of the subscales linking money to achievement, and to respect, revealed attitudes closer to “disagree.” This would appear to reinforce the somewhat common perception that individuals in this profession “aren’t in it for the money.” Additionally, the average item score just below “agree” or above “neutral” that was found for the four remaining dimensions of money ethic lends support to the suggestion that participants do not see money as a key to respect and achievement but do recognize its worth and utility, and need to be managed.

Concerning occupational commitment, the findings seem to support the notion that commitment is based more on how one identifies with the profession (affective commitment) rather than being grounded in loyalty (normative commitment) or obligation (continuance commitment). While the dimensional scores for both continuance and normative commitment were seemingly low, similar scores were found in the Irving et al. (1997)

study across multiple occupations. As such, managers seeking to recruit or retain professional employees may be better served by focusing on identifying those individuals exhibiting characteristics of affective commitment or attachment to the profession rather than assuming that staff, once hired, will exhibit loyalty to the job. This could potentially be addressed early on in the hiring process, for example using affective commitment directed questions in a job application, and into one’s organizational tenure such as utilizing specific questions during annual review meetings.

In addressing the primary purpose of the study, leisure ethic and money ethic were not meaningfully related to occupational commitment with few statistically significant correlations. The “money is evil” dimension was although negatively associated ( $r = -.297$ ) with normative commitment or one’s feeling they ought to stay with the organization out of loyalty suggesting that the more loyal an employee is the less likely they are to see money as useless. As well, three other weak correlations were found between “money means respect” and affective commitment ( $r = -.140$ ) and continuance commitment ( $r = .138$ ), as well as between “money means achievement” and affective commitment ( $r = -.130$ ). The implication may be that an employee can identify and potentially gain a sense of achievement or respect with their occupation without believing they need money to gain the same respect or sense of achievement. On the other hand, job promotions are generally tied to pay increases. This may foster respect from one’s peers that in turn influences the decision to stay in the occupation.

In addressing whether leisure and money ethic influence occupational commitment, “money is evil” was the best and only statistically significant predictor of overall occupational commitment, and normative commitment. It was also the best predictor of continuance commitment, slightly more influential than “money

is good.” However, none of the regression equations tested were particularly good predictors of commitment. Thus, neither leisure ethic nor money ethic are good predictors of occupational commitment given the sample examined in this study. Given our results, it is suggested that future research on park and recreation professionals, be they members of an organization like NRPA or not, explore multivariate predictors of occupational commitment focusing not only on the variables examined or referenced in this study but also consider the type of job (e.g., administrative, programmer, maintenance), salary, turnover intention, locus of control, job satisfaction, et cetera.

While the findings provide new insight into the constructs of money and leisure ethic as well as the occupational commitment of park and recreation professionals, we found few truly meaningful relationships between money and leisure ethic and occupational commitment. From a practical standpoint, the fact that leisure ethic, money ethic, and occupational commitment are not strongly related suggests that the commitment construct may be more strongly associated with work related or demographic variables such as job involvement, training and development opportunities, job satisfaction, organizational tenure, gender, and age (Frauman et al, 2009; Lee et al., 2000). On the other hand, it is possible that each of the constructs examined simply need to be tested more with park and recreation professionals serving as the sample. While the work ethic and occupational commitment constructs and scales have been repeatedly used and tested in other industry and occupational studies (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000; Tang & Gilbert, 1995), the leisure ethic construct and scale has not. Indeed leisure ethic has been found to help explain the construct of leisure boredom (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1987). Despite the reliability numbers determined by the originators of the leisure ethic scale (Crandall & Slivken, 1980), the scale is seemingly dated and may not

be the best choice for examining park and recreation professional’s ethic towards leisure.

Regardless of the perceived limitations, the results of this study do provide some information about the park and recreation profession of which little is known empirically. The need for additional research within the profession as well as across different professional occupations is warranted to further understand the potential implications, for among other things, employer recruitment, retention, and training and development.

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