



# Engagement within occupational trainees: Individual difference predictors and commitment outcome

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examines occupational entrants' experiences of their vocational training, its relation with relevant internal characteristics, and its proposed impact on commitment to the profession. Particular focus is paid to trainees' engagement, hypothesizing motivation and self-efficacy as predictors, and occupational commitment as a distal outcome. Data were from 247 recent entrants into professional degree programs (architecture, engineering). All hypothesized predictive relations were supported, such that motivation (as both a composite and as solely intrinsic) and self-efficacy are predictive of engagement, and engagement is predictive of occupational commitment among early-stage trainees. Further, engagement partially mediated the relation between self-efficacy and commitment, and fully mediated the relation between motivation and commitment. Squared multiple correlations for endogenous variables indicated substantial variance in engagement and commitment accounted for by their respective predictors. Moreover, two structural equation models were examined and compared, proposing more holistic nomological nets for how these constructs fit together. A respecified model accounting for a sole focus on intrinsic motivation and a direct path between motivation and commitment was an excellent fit, superseding a competing model conceptualizing motivation as a composite and only an indirect motivation–commitment path. Finally, need for achievement moderated the relation between motivation and engagement such that the relation is stronger for individuals high in need for achievement than it is for those low in the desire to grow in their profession. The study contributes to our understanding of how early occupational trainees' experiences of work and individual characteristics impact their commitment to their intended profession.

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## 1. Introduction

The rise of positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002) has led to a greater focus on related constructs such as work engagement, and this is true in both the realms of the workplace, as well as the educational classrooms and experiences preparing people for those workplaces (e.g., Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). However, despite evidence that engagement has a positive effect on learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), little attention has been paid to engagement and its correlates at the intersection of those two realms: the education and training of those entering professional occupations. Likewise, researchers (e.g., Rothman,

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