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Who is worthy of my commitment now? The dynamic nature of interns' workplace commitment

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Who is worthy of my commitment now? The dynamic nature of interns' workplace commitment

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3 **Who is worthy of my commitment now? The dynamic nature of interns' workplace**
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5 **commitment**
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9 **Abstract**

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11 **Purpose-** The paper aims to investigate the dynamics of individuals' multiple commitments in
12 the internship context by answering two questions: how do interns' commitment to different
13 stakeholders change over time? And what are the reasons behind these changes?
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17 **Design/methodology/approach-** a qualitative longitudinal study was conducted of a hundred
18 and three interviews with twenty interns in three professional service firms in the UK. The data
19 was gathered via semi-structured interviews that took place on five occasions during the whole
20 internship.
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24 **Findings-** Individuals' decision to maintain or change their commitment depended on their
25 motive to gain long-term benefits (future employment) or short-term benefits (completing an
26 assignment). Therefore, they experienced different types of commitment dynamics, which
27 were influenced by their intention to commit to the organization in the future.
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31 **Practical implications-** This offers significant implications for attracting and employing
32 interns, which directly affects talent employment. It also contributes to the contemporary work
33 context, as the rise of temporary and cross-boundary settings would increase the complexity
34 and dynamics of commitment.
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38 **Originality-** Despite the predominant assumption that considers commitment as a stable bond,
39 this research is one of the first to investigate the dynamics of multiple commitments. This
40 contributes to the commitment theory by identifying the different types of commitment
41 dynamics, and the impact of individuals' intention to commit on the (in)stability of their
42 commitment, which is absent from the existing literature.
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46 **Keywords:** dynamics of commitment, targets of commitment, intention to commit, internship
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Introduction

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Internship participation has become the best career entry point for graduates and employers (Kapareliotis *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the UK's top employers rely on internship programmes to attract and employ potential workforce (High Fliers Research, 2022). An internship represents a valuable source that generates future talent for the organization (Dixon *et al.*, 2005; Zhao and Liden, 2011). To maintain that talent, it is necessary to develop their commitment during the internship (Gault *et al.*, 2000). Thus, we are examining the dynamics of interns' commitment to various stakeholders (also known as commitment targets).

Workplace commitment is a significant bond that connects HRM practices with organizational outcomes, such as performance and retention. Therefore, commitment has developed as one of the most important areas of impact in HRM studies (Van Rossenberg, Cross, and Swart, 2022). Commitment has been defined as an investment outcome (Becker, 1960), an attachment (Meyer and Allen, 1997), and volitional psychological bonds (Klein, Molloy, and Brinsfield, 2012). Commitment is important in the internship because it influences the intention to take up employment in the future. In the internship context, different combinations of commitment targets may exist, which comes into sharp focus given the short-term nature of the relationship. Similarly, the rise of temporary and cross-boundary settings (Kinnie and Swart, 2019) is likely to increase the complexity of individuals' multiple commitments. The inadequacy of time in these temporary settings (internship) can influence individuals to shift their commitments to manage their multiple bonds. Hence, individuals could experience volatile bonds that are changing according to the work conditions. Previous studies have considered organizational commitment as a stable relationship within traditional employment (Swales, 2002; Vandenberg and Stanley, 2009). This means we know little about the dynamics of commitment, which is absent from HRM studies (Van Rossenberg *et al.*, 2022). This is also crucial for HR managers who are seeking to develop their employees'

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2
3 commitment in both temporary and flexible work settings and retain future talent through
4 internships. Therefore, this paper examines the dynamics of multiple commitments in the
5 internship context, by answering two questions: ‘how do interns’ multiple commitments
6 change over time? And what are the reasons behind these changes?’.

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12 This paper identifies the pace of commitment changes (dynamics of commitment) and
13 the reasons behind that. A qualitative longitudinal study was conducted to offer a deeper
14 understanding of the journey of individuals’ commitment during their internship. The data was
15 gathered via semi-structured interviews that took place on five occasions during the internship.
16 A total of a hundred and three interviews were conducted with twenty interns, in three
17 professional service firms (PSFs) in the UK.

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22 We found that the intern’s decision to maintain or change their commitment depends
23 on their motive to gain long-term benefits (e.g. future employment) or short-term benefits (e.g.
24 completing an assignment). Thus, when interns have the intention to commit to the organization
25 in the future, they experience steady workplace bonds. Otherwise, their focus will be on the
26 immediate benefits of targets, which means their commitment bonds constantly change,
27 influenced by present work circumstances. In answer to the second research question, we
28 address the factors that influence commitment stability and changes.

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33 We contribute to the commitment theory by developing the conceptualization of
34 commitment as a dynamic bond, where individuals can experience different types of dynamics
35 (unstable, stable). We identify the influence of individuals’ future commitment on the
36 dynamics of their current commitment. This has significant implications related to most
37 organizations that rely on internships for talent employment. Similarly, understanding the
38 factors that affect commitment changes allow HR managers to influence the (in)stability of
39 employees’ commitments to achieve the desired outcomes. This offers an opportunity to reform

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3 the study of commitment in HRM to meet the challenges of this evolving world of work and
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5 for commitment to have a valuable impact.
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8 The paper is structured as follows: we begin by discussing the relevant previous
9
10 research on commitment and internship context. We then present our research methodology.
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12 Finally, we discuss our findings, before we present the implications of our work for future
13
14 research.
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17 18 **Literature review**

19 20 21 **Commitment**

22
23 Individuals can commit to multiple workplace targets such as supervisors, co-workers (Klein,
24
25 Solinger, and Duflot, 2022), profession, and clients (Kinnie and Swart, 2012). Employees'
26
27 multiple commitments could be overlapping, and have synergies (Klein *et al.*, 2022). However,
28
29 they can often have conflicts (Kinnie and Swart, 2012). Multiple commitments can lead to a
30
31 'zero-sum' game where individuals need to choose one target at the expense of the other.
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35 Moreover, the cross-boundary work settings in organizations could increase the
36
37 complexity of the interrelationships among the various stakeholders to which individuals can
38
39 commit. For example, with the rise of modern professionals in project-based work,
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41 organizational loyalty has become less essential (Olsen *et al.*, 2016). With the complexity of
42
43 multiple commitments, it is difficult for individuals to commit fully to all targets. This increases
44
45 the pressure on them to rapidly develop or relinquish commitments, which could lead to
46
47 commitment shifts. Thus, it is important to understand how people change their commitment
48
49 to manage their multiple bonds (Klein *et al.*, 2022).
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53 Previous research measures commitment at one point in time, mostly six months to a
54
55 year, to assess its future outcomes (Jaros, 2009). This has a predominant assumption of
56
57 commitment as a stable bond that requires key events to provoke change (e.g. mergers and
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3 acquisitions) (Swales, 2002; Vandenberg and Stanley, 2009). However, Klein et al. (2012)
4
5 reconceptualized commitment as “a volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and
6
7 responsibility for a particular target” (p.137). A person's commitment to a target is a conscious
8
9 choice to dedicate to serving the purpose of that target. Identifying commitment as a
10
11 psychological bond highlights the dynamic nature of commitment, as it depends on an
12
13 individual's perception and interpretation of situations. Since situations and perceptions are
14
15 changeable, a bond may change in strength and duration. Therefore, Klein, Cooper, Molloy,
16
17 and Swanson (2014) produced a response scale of commitment levels to address the changes
18
19 in commitment.
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24 Some studies have examined the dynamics of commitment, although most of them are
25
26 organizationally focused. For instance, Bergman et al., (2013) found that the changes in
27
28 organizational commitment are influenced by personal values that are activated by
29
30 organizational events. Solinger et al. (2016) state that psychological contract breaches cause
31
32 organizational commitment changes.
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35 Furthermore, individuals' commitment can develop before and after entering the
36
37 organization. They may also remain committed to their employer, even after leaving the
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39 organization, especially, if, leave by consent (Breitsohl and Ruhle, 2013). When people have a
40
41 positive experience during their employment, and their decision to leave is not related to
42
43 dissatisfaction with the organization, they are more willing to return to the organization in the
44
45 future (Shipp *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, we aim to explore the individuals' willingness to return
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47 and commit to the organization after completing their temporary employment, which we refer
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49 to as 'future commitment'. To achieve this, we predict their behaviors through their
50
51 'intentions'. We address the individuals' future commitment by examining their intention to
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53 commit to the organization, referring to their own estimated probability of their willingness to
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55 return and commit to the organization in the future.
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3 Most commitment research has focused on the antecedents and consequences of
4 commitment, thus, we have limited insight into the dynamics of commitment. At the same time,
5
6 most commitment development studies are focused on organizational commitment in
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8 traditional employment (Curado and Vieira, 2019; Klimchak *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this
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10 research explores the dynamics of interns' multiple commitments.
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14 **The internship context**

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16 The internship is short-term employment that represents a way to create a talent pool with built-
17 in loyalty (Dixon *et al.*, 2005). Interns experience the work environment which allows them to
18 assess their fit with the organization. Likewise, firms evaluate interns' organizational and job
19 fit before offering permanent positions to them (Kapareliotis *et al.*, 2019; Kristof-Brown *et al.*,
20 2005). Thus, interns are expected to experience higher job satisfaction than non-interns (Gault
21 *et al.*, 2000). Hence, hiring individuals after completing the internship is often the ideal path to
22 full-time employment for many interns and employers. The number of internships on offer at
23 the UK's top employers has been rising sharply (High Fliers Research, 2022).
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35 However, interns' short-term work experience represents a critical time for forming an
36 impression of and commitment to the organization. Different factors can influence interns'
37 organizational commitment such as perceived support and job characteristics. Supervisor
38 support has a key role in an internship experience, by providing guidance with personal
39 development and career plans. Supervisors represent the organization and signify its
40 commitment, thus, management supportive treatment enhances individuals' organizational
41 commitment (Dixon *et al.*, 2005). Likewise, job characteristics such as quality of feedback,
42 skills variety, and autonomy improve interns' organizational commitment (Chong and Yazdani,
43 2020). Moreover, Interns' commitment enhances their intention to return to the organization
44 and accept a job offer (Breitsohl and Ruhle, 2013).
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3 Previous research on internships has focused on the organization as the leading target
4 of interns' commitment (Dixon et al., 2005). Few studies have investigated interns'
5 professional or occupational commitments (Teekens, Giardini, Zuidersma, and Wittek, 2021).
6
7 Yet, interns can commit to different work targets, such as managers, teams, clients, or projects,
8 which can affect their work experience. Thus, it is necessary to understand the development of
9
10 interns' multiple commitments, and how they may try to manage them. Hence, there is a need
11
12 to understand the nature of individuals' intricate multiple commitments. Therefore, this paper
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14 explores the dynamics of interns' multiple forms of commitment. It answers two questions (1)
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16 how do individuals' multiple commitments change over time? And (2) what are the reasons
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18 behind these changes?
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26 **Methodology**

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28 The data was gathered from three PSFs in the UK; one financial services, and two engineering
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30 consultancies. In the UK, PSFs are one of the top graduate employers that offer internships to
31
32 attract and recruit potential talent (High Fliers Research, 2022). PSFs are defined by their
33
34 knowledge-based products and services. The nature of their work requires extensive interaction
35
36 with different parties such as teams and clients. This cross-boundary working environment
37
38 holds the potential for individuals to commit to different stakeholders besides their organization
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40 (Kinnie and Swart, 2012). Access to participating firms was through their graduate recruiters.
41
42 All participants were undergraduate students who joined paid internships. According to the
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44 university programmes, their placement was either compulsory as part of their degree, or
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46 optional to gain work experience. The sample includes twenty interns; nine were from the
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48 financial services firm, and eleven were from the engineering consultancies (See Table 1).
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54 In the financial services firm, interns had specific jobs with clearly defined
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56 responsibilities. For instance, they reviewed clients' claims and retained their contracts, which
57
58 was stable and predictable work. In the engineering consultancies, interns were involved with
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3 different project teams and worked on tasks according to their skills, such as reviewing the
4 calculations for designs. Most of the work was client-driven, which meant that tasks/projects
5 were constantly changing.
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16 A qualitative longitudinal study was conducted to examine a group of interns on five
17 occasions to address commitment dynamics (Menard, 2002). We conducted a hundred and
18 three face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.
19 Interviews were distributed over the duration of the internship. With the six months internship,
20 the interviews were planned for every forty-five days (a month and a half), but with the twelve
21 months internship, they were conducted approximately every three months. On different
22 occasions, we had an additional interview for 3 interns because of unexpected changes in job
23 positions and leaving dates.
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35 Participants were asked about their experience of work activities, their socialization
36 with different entities, and their multiple commitments. We referred to Klein et al.'s (2012)
37 definition of commitment as a conscious decision to serve the purpose of a target. They were
38 freely choosing the targets of their commitment. A response scale of commitment levels
39 (Extremely, Quite a bit, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all) (Klein *et al.*, 2014) was used as a way
40 to enable the participants to describe the level of their commitment, which addressed the change
41 of their bond over time. At the end of each interview, they needed to mention the work targets
42 that they were currently committed to and select from the scale the level of their commitment.
43 Then, they explained the reason for their selection and the occurrence of any commitment
44 change.
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3 Finally, we used the scenario-based method to predict the interns' willingness to accept
4 a permanent job offer in their organization. Scenarios are "coherent pictures of possible future,"
5 and are useful tools to differentiate from the present and create alternative futures to predict
6 accordingly the possible decisions and actions (Mietzner and Reger, 2005, p.223). In the last
7 interview, we gave the interns a scenario, where we assumed that they had received a job offer
8 from their employers and they had to respond, then explain the reasons for their decision. This
9 helped us to determine their intention to commit to the organization in the future, which could
10 influence the dynamics of their commitment. Moreover, ethical approval was given at the
11 institutional level, and the data collection process was anonymous with the consent of all the
12 participants.
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26 For the analysis, our approach was abductive to develop a theoretical understanding
27 through a recursive process of comparing existing theory and new empirical discoveries
28 (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Therefore, the data was analyzed through an iterative process
29 where empirical material, experience, and theory were interrelated and drawn together to
30 achieve a reasoned working conclusion (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The analysis involved
31 several interrelated phases. It started with reading all the interview transcripts. This took place
32 in an individual case narrative style, looking at the individual journey through all stages of the
33 data collection. Each case was read independently with more depth and then reviewed in
34 comparison with others (Saldaña, 2003). We subsequently conducted a thematic analysis
35 (Braun and Clarke, 2006), to explore any key issues across cases, and look for patterns in the
36 individuals' cases using Nvivo 11 software for coding the interviews.
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51 Our analysis included three stages, which were recursive rather than linear. First, to
52 address the pace of commitment changes, we followed the journey of individuals' multiple
53 commitments, reviewing their decision to change or maintain their commitment. This showed
54 us that some participants were experiencing more shifts in their commitment bonds than others,
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3 which then revealed the different types of commitment dynamics (unstable, stable). Second, to
4 understand the reasons behind these changes, we reviewed participants' explanations of their
5 commitment decisions and their interactions with targets in each data collection interval. This
6 generated the initial coding, which then formed the themes that identify the factors of
7 commitment changes/stability. We also identified the targets of commitment that were affected
8 by these changes. It emerged that unstable commitment changes were affected by the variations
9 of daily work incidents and targets' immediate impact on individuals. However, the stable
10 commitment was influenced by interns' fit perceptions of the organizational environment,
11 which was associated with long-term/future benefits. Finally, to address the influence of future
12 commitment on the commitment dynamics, we reviewed participants' responses to scenario-
13 based job offers, which indicated their intention to commit to the organization in the future.
14 This revealed that individuals who were willing to accept the hypothetical job offer experienced
15 steadier commitment, while the others experienced unstable commitment. Our findings were
16 presented in figure 1.
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43 Findings

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45 The interns experienced different types of commitment dynamics, which were
46 influenced by their intention to commit to the organization in the future. Interns early work
47 experiences had a major role in developing their intention to commit to the organization. For
48 example, the (un)match of the job with their interest developed their fit perception with the job
49 that impacted their readiness to accept a job offer from the organization. Likewise, interns'
50 intention to commit could change if they faced significant alterations that would make them
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3 question their perception of the organization (ethical dilemma), and reshape their dynamics of
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5 commitment.
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8 We found that individuals' intention to commit to their organization had an impact on
9
10 their long-term relationship with their employers, which made their commitment steadier
11
12 (stable commitment). Thus, they were less sensitive to daily incidents swings, their attention
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14 was on the big picture and their future benefits. However, when they were not considering
15
16 future commitment, they tended to concentrate on targets' immediate benefits and what they
17
18 can get now from them. This led them to experience unstable commitment, which was changing
19
20 constantly influenced by daily changes in work circumstances.
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23
24 In the following section, we will discuss the two types of dynamics of commitment and
25
26 the factors of commitment change/stability within each type.
27

28 *Unstable commitment*

29
30 Interns experienced unstable commitment bonds when they did not intend to commit to the
31
32 organization in the future. Thus, they were committed to targets who had an immediate impact
33
34 on their daily work (workgroup, clients). Therefore, their commitment was influenced by
35
36 changes in the **present work circumstances**. The reason was that interns had limited time in
37
38 the workplace, and they needed to use it carefully to get the most out of their internship. Hence,
39
40 they experienced dynamic commitment bonds. We found different factors that caused
41
42 commitment changes and were associated with short-term/daily perspectives.
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46
47 Interns committed to their workgroups when they were relying on them for task
48
49 performance. For example, interns' **positive/negative experiences with their workgroups**
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51 had an impact on their commitment. Positive experiences such as receiving support enhanced
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53 the potential of the advantages of working with them. In contrast, the negative experiences such
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55 as lack of support or having conflicts made them feel that focusing on themselves was more
56
57 beneficial. For example, Jennifer was uninterested to return to the organization, instead, she
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3 focused on the immediate benefit of working with her team. However, the lack of team support
4
5 made her shift her commitment to herself, as she felt committing to her learning was much
6
7
8 worthy.

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10 *Why should I be putting loads of my commitment to it [group tasks] if they [group] are*
11
12 *not going to give me anything back?... Not at all committed. (Interview-2)*

13
14
15 Instead,

16
17 *[I'm] committed to myself... it means my self-development... like the learning things.*
18
19 *(Interview-3)*

20
21 **Working independently** reduced interns' reliance on others, and that decreased the
22
23 amount of attention and effort they were willing to offer their groups. When interns had
24
25 independent responsibilities, they tended to shift their commitment to their own tasks. Since
26
27 Ronald was not interested in the future employment, he committed to his supervisor who was
28
29 assigning him tasks, thus, he needed his support.

30
31
32
33 *The subconscious part of me feels, the better I do and more hard work for him, he sort of*
34
35 *would like me more as a person and give me more responsibilities. (Interview-3)*

36
37 However, his commitment changed when he began working independently, as he changed his
38
39 commitment to his own project.

40
41
42 *I've become a bit more independent, I don't need him [supervisor] as much...*
43
44 *[Committed to] the projects I work on. (Interview-4)*

45
46
47 **The stage of employment** also influenced the interns' commitment. The interns'
48
49 priorities were changing, depending on the demands of each stage of their internship (early,
50
51 middle, and late), which was reflected in their commitment. For instance, in the beginning, the
52
53 interns' main concern was to make a good impression and develop relationships, which made
54
55 them committed to that. In the middle stage and towards the end, they tended to commit more
56
57 to themselves. For example, Walter was not willing to commit to the organization in the future.
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3 Therefore, he experienced multiple commitments that were dynamically changing during the
4
5 different stages of his internship.
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7
8 *I can't say it's my manager or my team I'm committed to, I think I'm committed to myself*
9
10 *now, because I want to do well when I leave... It's been like this throughout, but at the*
11
12 *beginning and the middle it was more of establishing a relationship with everyone, and*
13
14 *making a good impression with your manager, whereas right now, I am a bit more selfish*
15
16 *because I want to take the most of it while I'm still here, I want to do my learnings and*
17
18 *meet more people and have a big network. (Interview-4)*
19
20

21
22 **Development opportunities** could be manifested as a meaningful and challenging
23
24 assignment that enabled them to learn and develop their skills. When interns did not have the
25
26 intention to rejoin the organization, they tended to focus on their learning and development to
27
28 get the best out of their limited time in the workplace. Thus, they prioritized and shifted their
29
30 commitment toward present learning occasions, which increased the variations of their
31
32 commitment. For instance, Rema was committed to her project team, until she got involved in
33
34 an international engineering competition. This made her shift her commitment to her
35
36 development by focusing on the competition.
37
38

39
40 *I'm committed to like the extra stuff, not project stuff... I'm trying to just improve myself*
41
42 *as an engineer... like the competition I am doing, getting involved with. (Interview-3)*
43
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45
46 Additionally, challenging assignments represented development opportunities, which
47
48 influenced their commitment to their workgroup and their job. For example, Max was
49
50 committed to his work. Later, he felt that his team members were un-committed to him because
51
52 they assigned him a worthless job with basic skills. This affected his current and future
53
54 commitment negatively.
55

56 *Not committed to anyone... No one is committed to me here. (Interview-2)*
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3 *I'm very disappointed... 95% of my work is useless... If I would be committed to any*
4 *work, it should be something that will be useful in the future. (Interview-3)*
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8 Furthermore, when interns' jobs were unchallenging and not developing their skills,
9 they tended to focus on other targets that were more beneficial to them, such as trying other
10 external activities. Mark was uninterested in the organization for future employment. Instead,
11 he dedicated himself and committed to his work to get the best out of his internship.
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16
17 *I'm more committed to my work and doing the tasks that I'm given to the best of my*
18 *standard (Interview-2)*
19
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21 Later, he was unsatisfied with his current projects because of the lack of skill variety, which
22 eliminated the learning factor. Therefore, his commitment shifted towards himself through
23 learning and building a professional network that could be useful in the future.
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28 *I'm committed to myself and getting as much knowledge as possible and connections with*
29 *people. (Interview-3)*
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33 Additionally, the interns' jobs were not static; their work was always changing, and that
34 influenced the variations of their commitment. Hence, **changes in work circumstances**, such
35 as completing a task, or joining a new project could reshape their commitment bonds. The job
36 determined the interns' interactions with their groups, which then influenced their decision to
37 commit. This included the amount of time and attention that they were willing to offer their
38 groups. For example, Andrea's commitment shifted to her manager because she became more
39 involved with the manager's work.
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45 *She [Manager] is the one that always asks me to do things... it's an obvious commitment*
46 *to her, an extreme one, to them [team] I'm committed but not as much. (Interview-3)*
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53 Interns might experience variations in their work commitment, which caused instability
54 in their commitment. Martin explained the variation in the level of his work commitment, and
55 how it could sometimes be hard to maintain it.
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3 *If it's a task that I'm enjoying I'll be quite committed to it...and then there will be other*
4 *times where it will be something that really I'm not enjoying at all... it depends what I'm*
5 *doing as to how committed I am to what I am doing. (Interview-3)*
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10 Overall, the absence of organizational future commitment affected the motive of
11 interns' current commitment to focus on the targets' immediate impact on their work, learning,
12 and development. As a result, the change in their commitment was associated with the change
13 in current work circumstances.
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19 *Stable commitment*

20
21 The interns' organizational commitment was associated with their future commitment. This
22 affected the motive of their commitment, which was influenced by long-term benefits.
23 Therefore, interns were willing to invest more in their work and relationships. One of the
24 significant factors that influenced the interns' organizational commitment was their job. The
25 interns' perception of the match between their needs/desires and what was provided by their
26 jobs (**Person-Job fit**) (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005), was the main influencer of their intention
27 to commit to the organization in the future. For example, Martin was a Mechanical Engineering
28 intern, but he joined the Building Services department. The job did not match his professional
29 field, thus, he decided not to return as a graduate. The reason was his job, which affected his
30 organizational commitment.
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44 *I don't like the job I was doing, [it] is a good company to work for... my team is good. I*
45 *don't like building services. (Final Interview)*
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48

49 In this case, his current commitment to his colleagues was affected by the temporality of the
50 internship context, as captured in this quote:
51
52

53 *I've not got loads of time to be thinking, 'I want to spend it with these people and get to*
54 *know them,' especially when it's such a short-term, I'm not here for that long. It would*
55 *be a bit different if I was going to be working next to them every day for the next five*
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1
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3 *years, but I'm only going to see them for another six months... If it was permanent, there*
4 *would be more incentive to get to know the people you're with, if you're here*
5
6 *permanently. (Interview-3)*
7
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9

10 Furthermore, the perception of **person-group fit**, which is the conceptualization of the
11 individuals' match with the workgroup (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005) affected their
12 organizational commitment. Fitting with both the job and the workgroup indicated the match
13 with the work environment. Accordingly, they committed to the organization and tended to
14 return as graduates. For example, Erica was satisfied with her job and her relationship with the
15 team, which made her willing to accept a graduate job offer. Hence, she experienced stable
16 commitment bonds to her job, team, and the organization.
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26 *If they ask me to come back for the graduate scheme then I would definitely consider it...*
27
28 *I like the team and I have liked the work... I would definitely consider coming back here.*
29
30
31 *(Final Interview)*
32

33 In contrast, Jennifer believed that her job did not match her skills, plus she did not fit
34 with her team. Therefore, she was committed to her development and focused on the short-
35 term advantages that she could gain from the workplace. In the end, she was not committed to
36 the organization or had the intention of applying for a graduate position.
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42 *I would reject [job offer]... because it doesn't suit my skill set, I don't think I've*
43 *potentiality to grow within that team and within that job, so I would reject that one. (Final*
44 *Interview)*
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49 From the beginning, some interns were already committed to the organization because
50 of its good market reputation or their earlier experiences in the workplace (summer internship).
51 Then, when their jobs matched their interests, they viewed the organization as a desirable place
52 to work. Interns who perceived strong **person-organization fit and person-job fit** were more
53 willing to commit to investing in the workplace. Here, the interns' commitment to the
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3 workgroup was based on their long-term impact on them as potential job candidates. Thus, it
4
5 was a more stable bond that developed with time and could continue after the internship.
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8 For example, James believed that he fits with his organization and job; thus, he was
9
10 highly committed to be involved in the workplace. He tried to socialize and develop
11
12 relationships with his team that could assist him later in getting a job offer.
13

14
15 *[committed to] meeting people, and kind of developing good relationships... because if I*
16
17 *wanted to come back... it would be a lot easier to get a job, because they'd know who I*
18
19 *am. (James, Interview-4)*
20

21 He was willing to accept a job offer from his organization.

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23
24 *I'd accept it [job offer] because I like the company, the people, the scope of work that*
25
26 *I've had... I'd reject the offer from a different company, just because of all the good*
27
28 *things that I've had at this company. (James, Final Interview)*
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31 Furthermore, shocking events that could make them question their perception of the
32
33 organization, could cause a change in their organizational commitment. However, it would
34
35 need to be a significant change to affect their perception of and commitment to their job,
36
37 workgroup, or organization. For example, Rose was enjoying working in the 'FU' campaign,
38
39 and was highly satisfied with her job and team, until the organization decided to shut down the
40
41 campaign and lay off most of the team as part of a restructuring process. This was very
42
43 disappointing for her. This damaged her perception of and commitment to the organization.
44
45

46
47 *This is a real shame, this team is really nice, friendly, hardworking, talented team, and I*
48
49 *think for that to go, it just madness. (Interview-3)*
50

51
52 *It was very disappointing and demotivating... wouldn't say I am very committed to*
53
54 *anything in the [company]... I think just want to leave. (Interview-4)*
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56 This reshaped the dynamics of her commitment, as she started to focus on the short-
57
58 term benefits of targets, which made her experience unstable commitment.
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3 In conclusion, interns experienced two types of dynamics of commitment.
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5 Unstable commitment, which was influenced by the immediate targets' impact on their
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7 work, and stable commitment, which was associated with their intention to commit to
8
9 the organization in the future.
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13 **Discussion**

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15 Our aim was to explore the dynamics of interns' commitment to various targets. The
16
17 data analysis reveals that when interns had the intention to commit to the organization, their
18
19 workplace commitment was stable, as they were aiming for a long-term relationship with their
20
21 employer. In contrast, when they were uninterested in the organization for future employment,
22
23 they focused on immediate benefits. This meant that commitment bonds were more unstable
24
25 and more responsive to daily work incidents. This contributes to HRM research on commitment
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27 by expanding its relatively narrow focus on the stability of organizational commitment in a
28
29 traditional work context (Van Rossenberg et al., 2022).
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33
34 Commitment has been viewed mostly as a stable bond that evolves with time (Beck and
35
36 Wilson, 2000; Meyer and Allen, 1997). This is due to different reasons. Firstly, the
37
38 conceptualization of commitment has somehow supported this view. For instance, identifying
39
40 commitment as an attachment (Meyer and Allen, 1997), a result of investment reward (Becker,
41
42 1960), perhaps indicates that time is required for commitment to develop. However, Klein et
43
44 al.'s (2012) concept of commitment shows that it can change anytime according to the
45
46 individuals' choices.
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50 This view is supported by our findings reveal that unstable commitment bonds were
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52 frequently changing depending on the interns' decisions. Interns were assessing the targets'
53
54 impact on them depending on their current priorities (e.g. current project), and asking
55
56 themselves 'who is worthy of my commitment now?' Accordingly, interns decided on the
57
58 amount of dedication, attention, and time they were willing to offer each target. As a result,
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3 they experienced volatile multiple commitments, which could easily shift and end (unstable
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5 commitment).

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8 Secondly, most of the commitment research has been focused on organizational
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10 commitment, particularly, in a traditional employment arrangement (Curado and Vieira, 2019;
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12 Klimchak *et al.*, 2020). In this context, commitment is expected to be a long-term bond with
13
14 the organization, where the exchange relationship between individuals and the organization
15
16 takes more time, making it a relatively stable bond.

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18
19 However, in the internship context, we found that interns' commitment was more stable
20
21 when the future employment opportunity was the expected benefit from the organization. The
22
23 development of their commitment was influenced by their fit perceptions with the
24
25 organizational environment. Studies show that person fit perceptions are associated with
26
27 organizational commitment and intention to quit (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005). The stability of
28
29 their commitment was influenced by their intention to commit to the organization, which can
30
31 change if they face a significant event that makes them question their perception of the
32
33 organization. Interns can be classified as 'boomerang employees' who have left the
34
35 organization but are rehired for a second employment period (Shipp *et al.*, 2014). Employees
36
37 with a gradually increasing personal satisfaction with the job or the company are more likely
38
39 to leave the organization with a desire to return. Yet, employees who had negative experiences,
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41 such as unexpected demotion or ethical conflicts, made them assess their organizational image
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43 and whether they should return. This means employers can retain their human capital, by
44
45 investing in their future long-term commitment.

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48 Nevertheless, when interns were uninterested in future employment with the
49
50 organization, their attention was on the short-term advantages, thus, their commitment was
51
52 more responsive to their current work circumstances. Thus, the factors of commitment change
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54 were associated with short-term/daily perspectives. Because of the short-term nature of the
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3 internship, individuals had limited time to explore the workplace and develop professionally
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5 (Kapareliotis *et al.*, 2019), which raised the pace of their work experiences. This has
6
7 implications for our understanding of the dynamics of commitment within the work
8
9 environment that embraces various employment relationships - such as flexible and short-term
10
11 work arrangements, of which internships are an example. Commitment within this environment
12
13 can be viewed as fluid and complex bonds, where individuals' commitment can be affected by
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15 numerous stakeholders (Klein *et al.*, 2022).
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19
20 Finally, we acknowledge both notions that say commitment is a relatively stable bond,
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22 or it is a dynamic bond that is consistently changing. However, we contribute to the
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24 commitment literature by developing the conceptualization of commitment as a dynamic bond,
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26 where individuals can experience different types of dynamics (unstable, stable). This paper
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28 shows that the pace of commitment changes could vary depending on the motive behind their
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30 commitment and the duration of commitment can vary by target. Examining the dynamics of
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32 commitment changes is crucial for HRM studies to understand the factors that impact
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34 commitment development, which have significant consequences on employees' attitudes and
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36 behaviors.
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40 **Contributions and directions for future research**

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42 This research is one of the first to examine the dynamics of multiple commitments in an
43
44 internship context. We assert that commitment is a dynamic bond, where individuals' motives
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46 to gain long-term or immediate benefits influence their decision to shift or retain their
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48 commitment. Different factors caused both commitment change and stability. This has several
49
50 theoretical and practical contributions to HRM research and practices.
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55 First, we contribute to the commitment theory by developing the conceptualization of
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57 commitment as a dynamic bond that can change gradually or abruptly. We also identify the
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59 different types of dynamics (unstable, stable) and the reasons behind them. In contrast to
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3 previous studies which have focused on organizational commitment, we examined multiple
4 commitments in various time intervals, which allowed us to recognize the variations of
5 individuals' commitment bonds. We address the impact of individuals' motive of commitment
6 on their decision to change or maintain their bonds, which influences commitment dynamics.
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8 This offers a new understanding of workplace commitment away from the predominant
9 assumption of commitment stability.
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17 Second, we address the critical impact of intention to commit on the (in)stability of
18 commitment, which is absent from the existing literature. This highlights the influence of
19 individuals' future commitment on their current commitment changes and evolution. This
20 adds a new perspective on the reasons behind the dynamics of commitment. This offers new
21 insight into the theory of commitment and our understanding of the dynamic changes of
22 commitment. It means even with work settings that tend to be more cross-boundary, temporary,
23 and dynamic (such as internships), employers can improve individuals' commitment stability
24 by developing potential future relationships.
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35 Importantly, we challenge the predominant assumptions in the literature on
36 commitment beyond the traditional work context, by addressing the role of temporary settings
37 in shaping the nature of individuals' commitment. Our findings indicate that interns make a
38 conscious choice to manage their multiple commitments (Klein *et al.*, 2012). Interns work
39 temporarily in the organization; thus, they have less time to create valuable investments or
40 develop emotional bonds. However, other conceptualizations of commitment which define it
41 as an investment outcome (Becker, 1960), or an attachment (Meyer and Allen, 1997) could be
42 more relevant within a longer employment context (full-time employees). Therefore, with the
43 development of work context, which becoming more short-term and flexible, we need to re-
44 question the existing conceptualization of commitment in the literature.
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Practical implications

The findings have significant implications for HRM practices. For instance, job design can influence the dynamics of individuals' workplace commitment. Jobs form the nature of employees' relationships with co-workers and clients by shaping the pattern of interactions. This paper indicates that work interactions influence the nature of the intern's commitment. Hence, the most frequently cited reason for a shift in commitment is a 'change in work circumstances'. This means that the stability or changing aspects of job conditions can be reflected in the (in)stability of commitment.

Additionally, identifying the dynamics of commitment changes creates an agenda for HR practitioners to consider a frequent approach to employee surveys to truly understand employees' behaviors. It can be conducted through quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess commitment. This also could be influenced by workforce diversity. For instance, younger workers who are establishing their careers may experience dynamic changes (unstable commitment), compared to other workers demographics, who may experience more stable commitment. This offers valuable implications for HR practitioners to effectively manage the interconnections between commitment and work outcomes.

Furthermore, individuals could experience multiple commitments with incompatible demands or overcommit to certain targets, which could create biased judgments and conflicts (Kinnie and Swart, 2012). Thus, commitment dynamics would be beneficial, as employees need to free their resources (time, attention, effort) to support favored commitment targets. This assists HR practitioners to support the desired commitment shifts to achieve the preferred results.

Moreover, to attract and hire potential talent through internships, which is of strategic importance given the current demand for talent, employers need to develop interns' long-term commitment by emphasizing the prospective career opportunities within the organization

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3 (graduate positions). This improves their intention to rejoin the organization in the future,
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5 which also stabilizes their current commitment. Similarly, in temporary/flexible employment
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7 where workers are expected to experience unstable commitment, managers can focus on short-
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9 term factors in daily incidences such as providing effective support to boost individuals'
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11 commitment. This enables organizations to retain skilled flexible workers by building a durable
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13 bond with them, which can also enhance their future commitment.
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17 We address the important role of individuals' fit perception with the organizational
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19 environment. This impacts the sustainability of talent employment, even within temporary
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21 work settings (internship). HRM practices such as the recruitment process should ensure the
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23 compatibility between a person and an organizational environment. Similarly, for universities
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25 to enhance students' future employment, they need to emphasize the alignment between
26
27 employers' demands and students' interests to develop long-term organizational commitment.
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31 Finally, the paper contributes significantly to the future of work. It is expected that the
32
33 dynamics of commitment will become more relevant as the transformation of the work context
34
35 is becoming more complex, diverse, and increasingly taking place outside the traditional
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37 organizational form (Cappelli and Keller, 2013). There is a rise in temporary and cross-
38
39 boundary work where organizational boundaries become more permeable or more fluid (Kinnie
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41 and Swart, 2019). There will also be a predominant reliance on alternative forms of
42
43 employment (e.g. talent sharing) and a greater engagement with temporary workers in order to
44
45 maintain workforce flexibility post-COVID-19 (Baker, 2020). Therefore, it is important to
46
47 continue the study of the dynamics of multiple commitments and its implications.
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51 This paper has some limitations that could be improved in the future. Firstly, examining
52
53 individuals' commitments five times during the internship helped us follow the changes in their
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55 multiple commitments. The longitudinal aspects can be developed by capturing the
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57 commitment change on more occasions (e.g. weekly), to examine the bonds, fluctuations, and
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3 their antecedents. Quantitative measurement could be used to assess the magnitude of
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5 commitment changes, for example, daily or weekly diary studies could be considered in future
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7 research. Furthermore, future research could study a larger number of participants in different
8
9 work settings. The context could be extended to include other contemporary work contexts
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11 such as gig or project network workers. The consequences of the dynamics of commitment
12
13 could be examined by identifying the influence of the bonds' strength and duration on
14
15 commitment outcomes. Furthermore, future research could investigate commitment dynamics
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17 in international businesses in different countries considering the differences in their culture,
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19 economic, and employment conditions.
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23 24 **Conclusion**

25
26 The growth patterns of work demand more flexibility to generate value from human capital,
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28 outside the boundaries of the firm. This includes internships as an important source of talent
29
30 recruitment and a representation of short-term and flexible employment (Zhao and Liden,
31
32 2011). Despite the increase in alternative forms of employment, most of the commitment
33
34 research has been focused on standard employment (Cappelli and Keller, 2013; Curado and
35
36 Vieira, 2019). Therefore, this paper explores the dynamics of commitment in internships.
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40 The findings indicate that interns experience both unstable and stable commitment
41
42 dynamics which are influenced by their future organizational commitment. Likewise, the short-
43
44 term nature of the employment influences individuals to consciously change their bonds, which
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46 raises the dynamics of commitment.
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50 This contributes to the understanding of commitment dynamics, whether this is
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52 temporary employment or the galvanization of talent through internships. This offers
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54 significant implications for HRM practices and their role in sustaining long-term relationships
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56 with skilled workers within temporary and flexible work environments. Ultimately,
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organizations will rely on talent outside their boundaries, such as interns. Hence, understanding how commitment enables retaining future talent in an organization is of crucial importance.

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Figure 1. Dynamics of interns' commitment

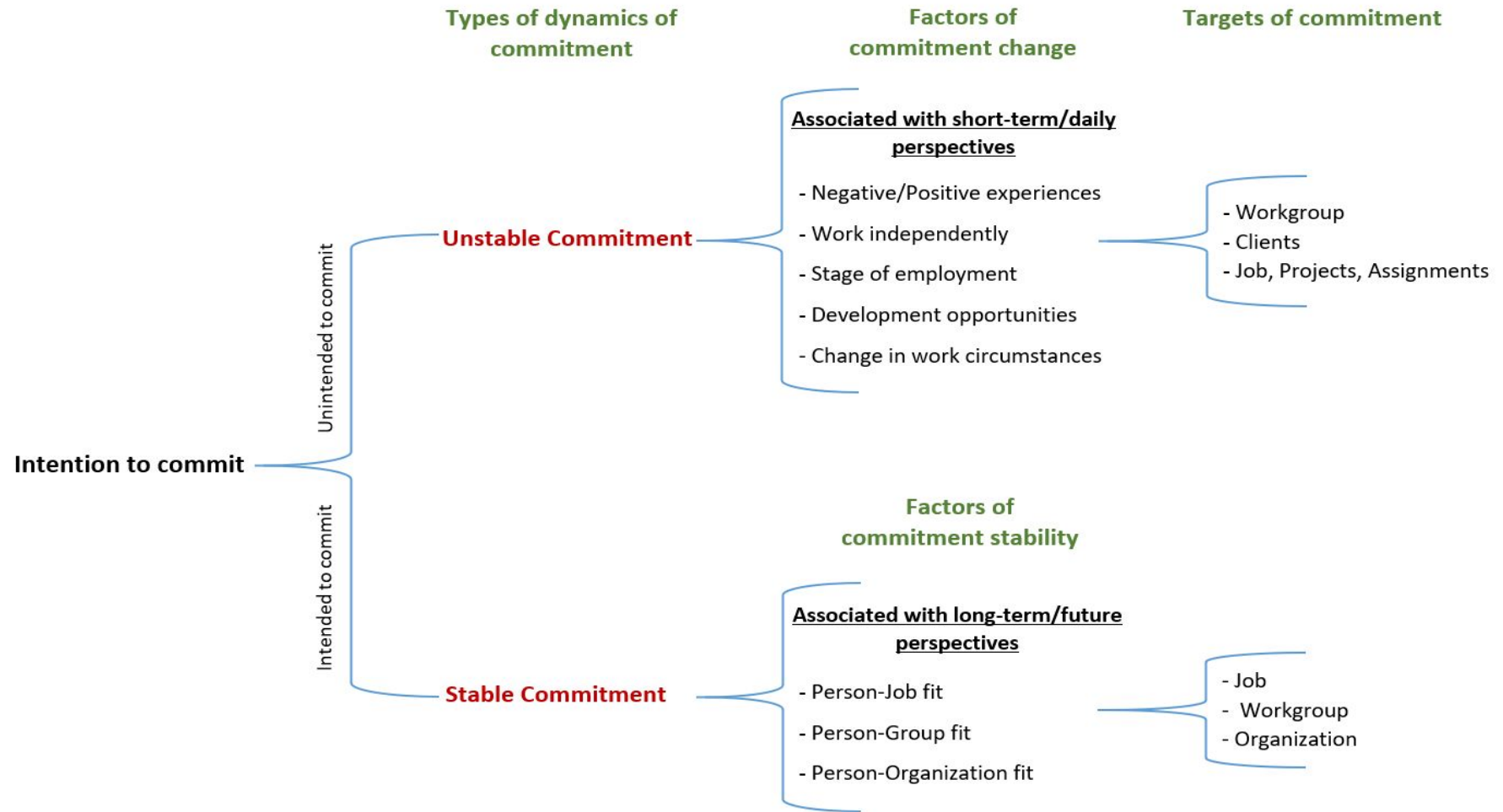


Table I. Overview of the participants

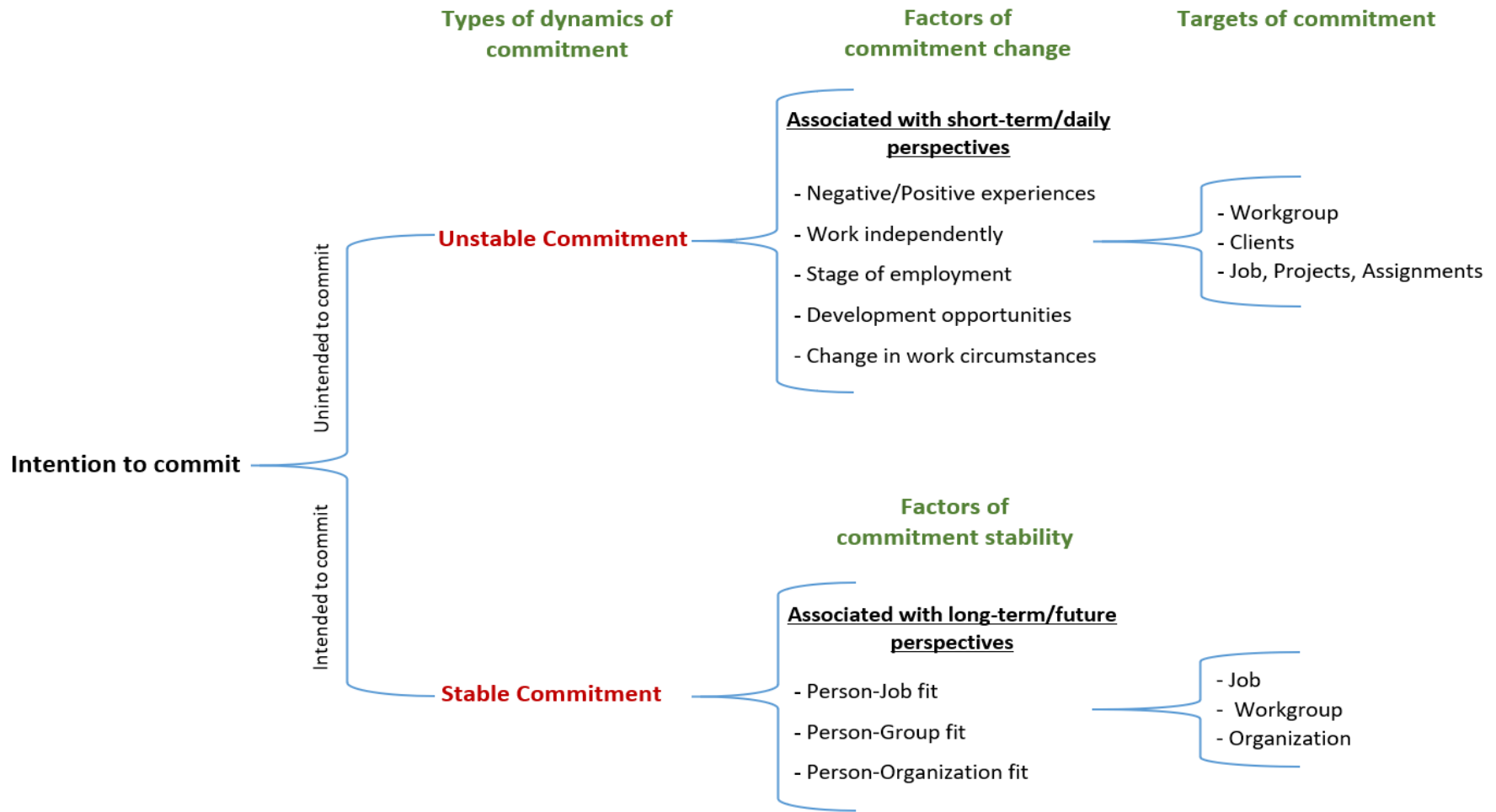
Field	Type of internship	Internship length	Department	Participants number
Financial Services	Compulsory	6 Months	Customers Relationship	2
Consultancy Firm			Retail & Governance	2
			Financial Services	1
			Retail Marketing	1
	Optional	1 year	Finance & Accounting	2
			Retail Marketing	1
Engineering	Optional	1 year	Building Services	3
Consultancy Firm			Structures Team	6
			Signaling Team	1
			Architectural Practice	1

Table I. Overview of the participants

Field	Type of internship	Internship length	Department	Participants number
Financial Services	Compulsory	6 Months	Customers Relationship	2
Consultancy			Retail & Governance	2
Firm			Financial Services	1
			Retail Marketing	1
	Optional	1 year	Finance & Accounting	2
			Retail Marketing	1
Engineering	Optional	1 year	Building Services	3
Consultancy			Structures Team	6
Firm			Signaling Team	1
			Architectural Practice	1

Personnel Review

Figure 1. Dynamics of interns' commitment



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