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Change and Stability in Work Commitment in Norway: from Adolescence to Adulthood

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Abstract

The individual's commitment to work has occupied a central place in much welfare state research. This centrality relates to beliefs that welfare system design influences the ways in which people come to value employment. If, as believed, generous benefit systems diminish citizens' willingness to work, then these systems undermine both the legitimacy and the performance of the welfare state. This article explores change and stability in work commitment in a Norwegian cohort born between 1965 and 1968. We investigate whether and if so how individuals' experience with the welfare system and their personal, family or work experiences influenced their level of work commitment between 1993 and 2003, from adolescence to adulthood. Findings show work commitment as relatively stable across the ten years, with some individual-level change relative to changes in family life (such as becoming a parent) and in work experience (such as long-term unemployment). Results indicate that the fear of disincentive effects on individuals' work commitment is exaggerated.

Introduction

Research into the welfare state has often focused on how generous social benefits can undermine the welfare state by weakening the individual's motivation to work (Halvorsen, 1999). In the UK, this research has considered the possible emergence of a new underclass essentially different from the working class, comprising unemployed persons with a much lower commitment (Buckingham, 1999). In the US research, the focal point has been welfare dependency, independent of the concept of class (Murray, 1990), while continental European research has been mainly concerned with the fear of social exclusion (Halvorsen, 1999).

A wide range of conceptualisations and applications of concepts portraying work values exists. In 1983, a review of literature covering work values revealed at least 25 different definitions and applications in the field (Morrow, 1983). Previous research has applied concepts of work centrality, work involvement, work commitment and employment commitment in the various studies. There has been some confusion about the distinction between the concepts (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005). This article examines work values as commitment to work and employment in general, as opposed to commitment to a specific

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job or occupation. To portray and analyse change in work commitment among a Norwegian cohort throughout a ten-year period, we apply the concept of work commitment as operationalised by Warr *et al.* (1979): the extent to which a person wants to be engaged in paid employment. To further distinguish this concept from job involvement, we add that work commitment is a belief in the centrality of work and the psychological identification with employment in general (Kanungo, 1982b).

To measure 'work commitment', Warr *et al.* (1979) developed the Work Involvement Scale (WIS), now widely used in the social sciences. In his study of work commitment, Nordenmark showed that this scale may be related to questions describing general functions, not just the financial aspects, of employment (Nordenmark, 1999b). Thus, work commitment is theoretically and substantially different from job involvement and organisational commitment (Morrow, 1986; Underlid and Thuen, 1991).

Much of the literature on work involvement has focused on the question of whether unemployment experience affects employment commitment. A number of opposing views exist. First, theories of the underclass and the culture of dependency often posit that prolonged unemployment in combination with benefit receipt erodes commitment to paid work, especially among adolescents (Murray, 1990). Several studies have suggested that young people tend to form their own social networks. These groups may develop their own subculture, one that rejects social norms and values. Prolonged unemployment may therefore create an anti-work culture, thereby explaining why the risk of re-emerging unemployment is so high among the previously unemployed.

The relationship between unemployment and employment commitment is thought to operate on both the societal and the individual level. For example, some predict a general decline in the work ethic in areas or societies with high unemployment (Lindbeck, 2006; Lindbeck *et al.*, 1999; Marsh and Alvaro, 1990). Jahoda (1982), on the other hand, has argued that a spell of unemployment will highlight the importance and centrality of employment in the individual's life, and therefore lead to increased employment commitment. A third possibility is that the unemployed may re-evaluate the importance of employment in their lives as a method of coping with job loss (Jackson *et al.*, 1983).

Hagstrøm (1988) found that men with lower work commitment could more easily adjust to unemployment than men with higher levels of work commitment. As to the receipt of social welfare benefits, Marklund (1993a) found that both social assistance claimants in the most marginal positions in the labour market and claimants who had never been employed were considerably less work-oriented than others. He suggests a linear relationship between the stability of labour market position and work commitment. He found that people with the longest work experience seem to increase their work commitment when unemployed or

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receiving social assistance. Some studies indicate that unemployed adolescents have lower work commitment than adults. However, these studies have difficulty determining whether the lower commitment is a cohort effect or a life-course effect. Other studies have found that work commitment is still very high among young people (Jackson *et al.*, 1983). Banks and Ullah (1988) found an even higher work commitment among unemployed adolescents than among adolescents in employment.

In comparative studies, Norwegian young adults in general report high levels of work commitment (Hammer and Russel, 2004; Hyggen, 2005a) and the Norwegian labour market is a favourable one in an international context. Following a peak of 6 per cent unemployment among the working population in 1993, unemployment rates levelled out at about 3 per cent up to 2003. Unemployment has been more widespread among the younger age groups in this period, nearly twice as high as among the general population. Unemployment among the young is, however, characterised by shorter periods outside work, reflecting young people's less stable position in the labour market (Hyggen, 2005b). The period we study, from 1993 to 2003, is marked by a shift from private to public provision for young people without work, in the case of both young mothers and unemployed people. People who previously would be supported by their families are now to a greater extent provided for by social security measures. Labour force participation is high in Norway, among both young people in general and among women (Hyggen, 2003). The most important explanations for the growth in female labour market participation during this period are higher levels of education, a desire for independence, gender equity and self-fulfilment, a high demand for labour within the public sector and the development of childcare opportunities (Halvorsen, 2000).

Hypotheses

Previous theories have argued both for stability and change regarding work commitment, even if the general belief is that work commitment is a stable dispositional characteristic and an effect of socialisation (Banks and Henry, 1993; Kanungo, 1982a; ter Bogt *et al.*, 2005; Winefield, 1995). The evidence, however, is scarce, as few studies have been able to explore changes in work commitment within the same group of people over time, and certainly not using a nationally representative sample (Isaksson *et al.*, 2004).

Popular everyday notions of work commitment as they occur in public debate and within politics deviate from such an understanding. There are strong beliefs that the way in which we design our welfare systems in general and benefit systems in particular influences the way people value employment.[1] Dependency theory and theories concerning growth of an underclass have primarily been

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concerned with how individuals may lower their work commitment in response to adversities in the labour market in combination with generous systems of welfare provision. In addition, scholars have argued that a poor work ethic may be a major cause of poverty and unemployment (Murray, 1984). A poor work ethic poses a considerable threat to the foundation of a welfare state built on contributions from all able-bodied individuals in society. However, in their studies of 'dependency cultures' in Britain, Dean and Taylor Gooby (1992) find no support for the idea that claiming welfare undermines the work ethic of individuals.

Previous research on work commitment has mainly focused on measuring levels of commitment within different groups. In contrast, this article explores changes in work commitment within different groups of people in society. Results from previous research are scarce and conflicting both regarding stability and change. As a working hypothesis, we nevertheless assume that: work commitment is influenced by important experiences within individual's lives both in the labour market and in family life.

Formulating new social policies related to social welfare benefits necessitates seeing whether changes in work commitment are related to unemployment and benefit schemes or whether they are related to individual experiences throughout the life course.

We offer four explanations for changes in work commitment, each provided by different strands of theory and previous research:

(a) *The coping hypothesis*: successfully coping with unemployment will lead to a reduction of work commitment; coping poorly will lead to an increase in work commitment. Successfully coping with unemployment will include both financial problems related to the unemployment period and a positive experience of the unemployment period. Coping poorly will increase work commitment, as the unemployed will embrace both the social and financial benefits of employment to a greater extent.
(b) *The financial incentives hypothesis*: receipt of generous benefits such as unemployment benefit will reduce work commitment, whereas less generous benefits such as social assistance – a benefit designed as the last public safety net – will not.
(c) *Unemployment and mental health*: unemployment will lead to mental health problems, which in turn lead to a reduction in work commitment.
(d) *The welfare dependency hypothesis*: the receipt of public benefits such as unemployment benefits and social assistance will lead to a reduction in work commitment, as individuals will lose the ability and motivation to work.

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We will relate these four main theoretical approaches in varying degrees to experiences in individuals' lives within the labour market, as well as personal, family and institutional spheres.

Members of our cohort of Norwegian adolescents were in their late 20s at the time of the first interview and in their late 30s at the time of the second interview. This period is one not only in which important changes occur in the life course but also one in which individuals strive to gain a foothold in society as adults: working and taking care of children.

To investigate factors that influence change in work commitment among individuals in this part of the life cycle, we consider four important categories: personal factors, family factors, labour market factors and factors concerning contact with the welfare system.

Personal factors

Changes in physical health may be related to changes in work commitment. Health problems such as chronic disease may have an impact on the individual's capacity and ability for work. Individuals tend to adjust their expectations to what is realistic in the labour market (Halvorsen, 1996; Marklund, 1993b). We thus assume that deteriorating health is related to a negative change in work commitment. Mental health may also be related to work commitment in several ways. We know that mental health is largely related to unemployment and adversities in the labour market. Mental health problems may result from a discrepancy between possibilities in the labour market and how individuals value work. If an individual places great value on employment but is unable to participate in the labour market, this may cause psychological distress and consequently mental health problems.

Family factors

Changes in an individual's family situation may influence his or her value system. Becoming a parent may reduce a person's work commitment, as greater value is placed on the family. Even if Norway is not a particularly gender-traditionalist society, we may assume gender differences (Gallie and Alm, 2000). For men, becoming a father may cause a positive change in work commitment, as he may feel more obliged to support his family financially. For women, becoming a mother may cause a negative change in work commitment as she may be expected to, and feel obliged to, take care of her children, to comply with traditional social norms and possibly her working husband's expectations. She will also gain an alternative identity as mother, as opposed to employee (Hammer and Russel, 2004). In Norway, with its well-developed childcare system and generous childcare benefits on the one hand and a high rate of labour market participation of women on the other, becoming a housewife, a career woman or a combination

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of both are all valid choices. Lifestyle preferences for women, including a possible adjustment of work values, may help explain how women choose home-centred, work-centred or adaptive lifestyles (Hakim, 2000, 2002, 2003). Changes in marital status may influence work commitment. We assume that getting married or cohabiting will have a negative effect on work commitment. We may also assume gender differences regarding marital status and its effect on work commitment. Women may lower their work commitment when entering a stable relationship such as marriage or cohabitation as they will take on an alternative role to being an employee. Men may increase their commitment to work, as they may be increasingly expected to support their spouse through employment. Divorce or break-up of a relationship may influence the work commitment positively.

Labour market factors

In line with dependency theory and theories linking unemployment and mental health, we may assume that unemployment experience has a negative effect on work commitment for individuals. Different types of unemployment may, however, have a different impact on the work commitment that individuals report. Previous research has found that the unemployed report higher levels of work commitment than those in employment. Some argue that this finding may result from an increased appreciation of employment among those losing their job. This thinking is in line with Jahoda's (1982) argument about the latent functions of work: work, being a source of time structure, social contact, collective effort or purpose, social identity or status, and regular activity thus offers personal rewards other than mere wages. In line with theories of dependency, we assume that longer-term unemployment influences work commitment negatively. Individuals who are unemployed for long periods may lower the value they place on employment to protect themselves from the feeling of inadequacy in not finding work. People who have poor work adjustment or who experience a negative work environment may likewise report a negative change in work commitment in response to 'unpleasant' experiences within the labour market.

Institutional factors

Much labour market research and economic theory assumes that the level of benefits given to those out of work influences their willingness to work. We may therefore assume that receiving welfare benefits causes a decrease in reported work commitment. The greater the replacement rates, the greater the decline in work commitment. On the other hand, people have to be willing, or at least report willingness, to work to be eligible for unemployment benefits. To receive unemployment benefits, individuals are obliged to apply for jobs and attend meetings and consultations at labour agencies. This obligation may cause an

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inverse effect on work commitment, as recipients have to display a high degree of willingness to work.

Social assistance benefits are not directly related to previous employment, as they are not part of the social security system in Norway. It may be argued that this part of the welfare system is equipped with poorer means of getting people back to work (Brofoss *et al.*, 2003). We will thus assume that receipt of social assistance may cause a further decrease in work commitment. Unemployed social assistance recipients may be a particularly vulnerable group. We assume that individuals experiencing both unemployment and poverty are particularly motivated by their need for more money to survive financially and consequently may report an increase in work commitment. On the other hand, this group alone may be closest to experiencing what we have labelled dependency and have given up on getting real employment – thus reporting decreasing levels of work commitment. Labour market training for the unemployed is supposed to supply individuals with the motivation and ability to get jobs. Evaluation of training schemes typically shows the most motivated and able unemployed being selected into such schemes (Hardoy, 2003; Lorentzen and Dahl, 2005). Given both selection and goals of schemes, we assume that participation has either no effect or a positive effect on work commitment.

Overall, we might assume that an accumulation of different experiences and incidents in individuals' lives, particularly experiences in the labour market, may be related to the way people value employment. We assume that not necessarily single events within one area of life but rather several adverse events in relation to family life or the labour market make a joint impact. Individuals' lives are not isolated into specific areas but consist of an interplay between different factors and areas.

Data and methods

We investigate the hypotheses by using a combination of register data and survey data from the 'Arbeid, livsstil og Helse' ('Work, Lifestyle and Health') survey. This is a longitudinal panel survey tracking a sample of nearly 2000 individuals representative of the Norwegian cohorts born between 1965 and 1968. It was first conducted in 1985 with follow-ups in 1987, 1989, 1993 and 2003. The span from 1985 to 2003 allows us to examine individual life trajectories from age 17–20 to 36–39. The panel was stratified, based on the individual's primary occupation in 1985: young persons who were still completing their education had the lowest probability of being included in the sample (0.25, $N = 801$), whereas those in employment had a higher probability (0.70, $N = 800$), and those who were neither working nor completing their education had the highest probability of inclusion (1.00, $N = 394$). This variable is treated as the stratification variable in the analyses. The response rates throughout the study have been good: 85 per cent

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of the sample participated in the survey in 1985, 80 per cent in 1987, 74 per cent in 1989, 73 per cent in 1993 and 70 per cent in 2003.

In all the analyses, we account for the stratification of the sample, either by including the stratification variables or by undertaking separate analyses for the groups based on their main occupation in 1985.

Data from official records have been linked to the individual responses for the entire period. This information was collected from the FD-trygd[2] register at Statistics Norway and from registers on personal income and education. These official records allow us to track individual social assistance receipt in detail, as well other social security payments such as unemployment benefit, benefits for the sick and disabled, and transitional benefits for frequency, duration and the amount of benefits received. In addition, we have access to information on individual educational and employment careers.

Measurements

Work commitment, and change in work commitment, is the dependent variable in the analyses presented in this article. Work commitment is measured according to the Work Involvement Scale. The index is based on the mean score of six statements about different aspects of the importance of employment for individuals. Responses to the six statements range from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The statements are as follows: 'It is very important for me to have a job', 'Even if I won a big sum of money I would want to work', 'I hate/would hate to be unemployed', 'I feel restless when I have no work to do', 'Work is one of the most important things in my life' and 'Even if the unemployment benefits were high I would prefer to work'. The index is found to have a high internal reliability both in previous studies (Gallie and Alm, 2000; Nordenmark, 1999a) and in the material investigated here (Cronbach's alpha 1993 = 0.83, 2003 = 0.82).

The independent and control variables used for investigating changes in work commitment between 1993 and 2003 are divided into four groups based on personal, family-related, labour market-related or institutional factors. The selection variable, which is treated as a personal factor, represents the individual's main occupation in 1985. It is included because of the initial selection procedure. We contrast those who were in education with those who were either working or unemployed in 1985. Change in health situation is measured by an item from the surveys in 1993 and 2003 where the respondents were asked whether they had a chronic illness. Those who were not chronically ill in 1993 but reported chronic illness in 2003 are coded as having had a negative change in physical health. Mental health is measured by the ten items on the Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL-10) (Derogatis *et al.*, 1974) for anxiety and depression selected from a factor analysis of a health survey of the same age group (the 1985 CBS

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survey). The items used in the index are: fatigue or faintness, nervousness or uneasiness, crying easily, blaming oneself, sudden fear for no particular reason, insomnia, feeling of hopelessness regarding the future, feeling that everything is a strain and worrying a lot. A principal component analysis of the ten questions indicates a one-dimensional solution. We chose to use a mean score of the ten items. The answers are scored from 1 = not troubled (by this problem) to 4 = troubled very much (Chronbach's alpha HSCL-10, 1993 = 0.88, 2003 = 0.88).

Family-related factors include variables reflecting the family situation of the respondents. Whether the respondent lives with a partner in a stable relationship either in marriage or as a cohabitee is registered by survey questions from both 1993 and 2003. A change in relationship during the period is treated as either divorce or break-up of a stable relationship or as getting married or cohabiting. The two alternatives are contrasted to a situation of no change. Becoming a parent during the period is included as a family-related factor. Whether the respondents were parents prior to 1993 is thus not treated as a change in the family situation and is not included in the analyses. To investigate whether the effect of becoming a parent may be said to be gender-specific, we added an interaction consisting of gender and becoming a parent in the period in the multivariate statistical model.

As labour market factors we include variables portraying both the unemployment experiences of the respondents and work adjustment. Periods in unemployment are measured by a question in the 2003 survey, asking the cohort to state the total length of periods out of employment. In addition, an index of coping with unemployment is included. The index comprises ten statements on possible negative personal effects of unemployment. The possible replies range from 1 (to a great extent) to 4 (never). High scores thus indicate fewer negative experiences and better coping. Seven of the statements included in the index were negative: 'I experience a cut in spending', 'I lose contact with my colleagues', 'I am being stigmatised as unwilling to work', 'I experience insecurity regarding the future', 'I experience becoming financially dependent on others', 'I become insecure because I feel there's no need for me', 'I experience a decline in physical health'. The remaining three statements were positive and are reversed in the index construction: 'I get to spend more time with family and friends', 'I don't need childcare', 'I can spend my time as I like'. A factor analysis of the ten statements supports a one-factor solution and thus the unidimensionality of the index. Work adjustment is measured by asking 14 questions about satisfaction with the employment situation in 1993, compiled in an index ranging from 1 to 5 where high scores indicate poor work adjustment (Hammer and Hyggen, 2006; Hyggen, 2006). We added this index to control for work adjustment and integration into employment in 1993. The 14 questions cover satisfaction with wages, tasks, working hours, colleagues, ambient working conditions (such as

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TABLE 1. Change in work commitment from 1993–2003.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No change	863	43.2	77.8	77.8
	Increase	118	5.9	10.6	88.5
	Decrease	128	6.4	11.5	100.0
	Total	1,109	55.5	100.0	
Missing	System	888	44.5		
Total		1,997	100.0		

noise, temperature and so on), other working conditions (such as stress and lack of time), deadlines, closest superior, future work opportunities, training and additional educational opportunities, pace of work, opportunities for deciding and performing tasks, opportunities for choosing when to take breaks and variety of tasks.

We treat contact with the public support system for the unemployed, either as training or financial support, as institutional factors. We measure labour market training by asking respondents to state whether they took part in any such training for the unemployed in the period 1993–2003. Receipt of social assistance is included in the register data from Statistics Norway and given as the total number of months for which benefit was granted. A single social assistance payment is treated as receipt for one month. The variable indicating receipt of unemployment benefits is also based on information from public registers: this information is recorded by employment offices in Norway and reported to Statistics Norway. Transitional benefits comprise yet another social security arrangement available in Norway. Eligibility is granted to parents of young children for a limited period in cases where the parent is temporarily unable to provide for their children. Transitional benefits are registered as either received/not received during the period between 1993 and 2003.

Findings

A dependent t-test showed no change in work commitment between 1993 and 2003 for the cohort. The mean value of work commitment reported by individuals was 4.315 in 1993 and 4.293 in 2003, and the correlation ($r = 0.444$) between the two was highly significant ($p < 0.000$). Work commitment is measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the lowest and 5 the highest possible work commitment. The sample thus reports a high work commitment overall. No change in work commitment between 1993 and 2003 means that there

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are no effects of age on work commitment within this cohort and that the work commitment it reports as a whole is remarkably stable.

In addition to looking at the stability of work commitment within the cohort, we are interested in stability and change in work commitment for each individual or group of individuals. To explore whether we can identify any individual-level changes in work commitment, we recode the two variables describing work commitment in 1993 and 2003 respectively into a new variable with values for no change, for positive change of at least one standard deviation and for negative change of at least 1 standard deviation. A change in at least one standard deviation is thus treated as a significant change in work commitment in either direction.

When we look at the changes in this way, we find that individual changes in work commitment from 1993 to 2003 do occur. About one in ten reports an increase in the value put on work of at least 1 standard deviation, and similarly one in ten reports a decrease. Nevertheless, almost 80 per cent report no significant change in work commitment during the period.

We then look at what, if anything, may cause changes in work commitment between the two points in time. Are the changes related to personal experiences, experiences related to family life, the labour market or contact with the welfare state? And can our hypotheses, based on the different strands of theory, explain changes in work commitment?

We use two strategies to explore explanations for changes in work commitment: correlation analyses and regression analysis. First, we look at the correlation between the most important variables included in the analyses.

Using Cohen's suggestions (1988, 1992), we consider r of 0.10 to be a small effect, r of 0.30 a medium effect, and r of 0.50 to be a large effect.

The correlations reported here support the various theories presented above to varying degrees. We find some support in the simple correlation analysis for coping hypothesis (a). Coping with periods of unemployment more successfully is related to lower levels of work commitment. It is hard to say anything about the financial incentives hypothesis (b) from the correlation analysis. We know the time spent receiving benefits, but we did not include replacement rates or similar measures. In addition, the correlations between benefits and work commitment documented here are small and insignificant. The unemployment/mental health hypothesis (c) gains some support in the analysis. The level of mental health problems in 1993 is positively related to unemployment and receipt of benefits. A medium effect is found between mental health and coping with unemployment, and some correlation is also found between mental health and work commitment in both 1993 and 2003. The dependency hypothesis (d) receives small or no support from the correlation analysis unless we also assume indirect effects through coping and mental health.

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TABLE 2. Pearson's correlation, r

		Work commitment 1993	Work commitment 2003	Mental health problems 1993	Work adjustment 1993	Weeks in unemployment	Coping with unemployment	Months received social assistance	Days receiving unemployment benefits	Days receiving transitional benefits
Work Commitment 1993	*r*	1								
	N	1.442								
Work Commitment 2003	*r*	0.444(**)	1							
	N	1.109	1.319							
Mental Health 1993 (HSCL -10)	*r*	−0.127(**)	−0.087(**)	1						
	N	1.433	1.112	1.445						
Work adjustment 1993	*r*	−0.265(**)	−0.209(**)	0.267(**)	1					
	N	936	738	934	942					
Weeks in unemployment	*r*	−0.061(*)	−0.107(**)	0.164(**)	0.055	1				
	N	1.442	1.319	1.445	942	1.997				
Coping with unemployment	*r*	−0.113	−0.270(**)	−0.338(**)	−0.093	−0.104	1			
	N	242	303	244	121	305	305			
Months received social assistance	*r*	−0.067(*)	−0.059(*)	0.200(**)	0.032	0.300(**)	−0.242(**)	1		
	N	1.442	1.319	1.445	942	1.997	305	1.997		
Days receiving unemployment benefits	*r*	−0.081(**)	−0.061(*)	0.241(**)	0.052	0.263(**)	−0.307(**)	0.287(**)	1	
	N	1.442	1.319	1.445	942	1.997	305	1.997	1.997	
Days receiving transitional benefits	*r*	−0.049	−0.048	0.204(**)	0.039	0.106(**)	−0.250(**)	0.170(**)	0.560(**)	1
	N	1.442	1.319	1.445	942	1.997	305	1.997	1.997	1.997

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We are not, however, primarily occupied with how the *levels* of work commitment correlate with different experiences inside and outside of the labour market but rather how these experiences may be related to *change* in work commitment.

To explore change within individuals' work commitment we perform a multivariate regression analysis. Work commitment in 2003 is used as a dependent variable, whereas reported work commitment in 1993 is used as a control variable for tracing any change in attitude towards employment between the two points in time. A model in four steps is applied to personal, family, labour market and institutional factors, respectively.

The multivariate regression confirms our findings from the previous analysis. Work commitment stands out as a stable attitude. We find systematic, statistically significant correlations between some of the variables introduced by previous research and theory.

When looking at personal factors in Model 1, however, we find no explanation for change in work commitment in either direction. The set of selection variables displays no significant effect on change in work commitment. Interestingly, we find that individuals who became chronically ill during the period did not alter their work commitment, as we might have expected.

Model 2 included factors portraying changes in family-related factors. Compared to model 1, the increase in model fit was significant. Compared to those who did not experience change in their marital status, persons who experienced divorce or the break-up of a stable relationship during the decade increased their work commitment. Furthermore, we find that becoming a mother has a negative effect on the reported level of work commitment. Women who become mothers lower their work commitment, whereas men who become fathers do not adjust how they value work.

When looking at labour market factors and asking whether these influence the level of work commitment, we find that weeks in unemployment display a significant negative effect on work commitment. Having been unemployed during the period is associated with a decrease in work commitment. In addition, an index measuring coping with unemployment was added to the model. In the analysis, individuals who had never been unemployed were compared with individuals with unemployment experience. Individuals scoring below average on the coping index are treated as coping poorly, and scores above average are treated as coping well. Coping poorly with unemployment is related to a positive change in work commitment, whereas coping well is related to a negative change for the unemployed. Work adjustment has a negative effect on work commitment, but the effects are not statistically significant in the model presented here.

The fourth model includes factors associated with public welfare institutions and benefits. In this model, we introduced dummy variables indicating receipt

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TABLE 3. Change in WORK COMMITMENT from 1993 to 2003, effect of personal, family, labour market and instiutional factors (OLS linear regression $N = 1{,}106$).

	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3				Model 4			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	2.56	0.14			2.53	0.14			2.90	0.18			2.91	0.18		
Work Commitment 1993	0.42	0.03	0.43	***	0.43	0.03	0.44	***	0.40	0.03	0.41	***	0.40	0.03	0.41	***
Personal factors																
Occupation 1985: In employment (ref.)																
Working 1985	−0.02	0.04	−0.01		−0.04	0.04	−0.02		−0.04	0.04	−0.03		−0.04	0.04	−0.03	
Unemployed 1985	0.04	0.05	0.02		0.02	0.05	0.01		0.02	0.05	0.01		0.02	0.05	0.01	
Gender	−0.04	0.04	−0.03		0.02	0.05	0.01		0.01	0.05	0.01		0.01	0.05	0.01	
Chronic illness	−0.05	0.05	−0.03		−0.05	0.05	−0.03		−0.06	0.05	−0.03		−0.07	0.05	−0.03	
Mental Health problems (HSCL-10) 1993	−0.05	0.05	−0.03		−0.06	0.05	−0.04		−0.05	0.05	−0.03		−0.06	0.05	−0.04	
Family Factors																
Marriage status (no change - ref.)																
Change: Married/ Cohabiting					−0.03	0.05	−0.02		−0.04	0.05	−0.02		−0.04	0.05	−0.02	
Change: Divorce/Break-up					0.14	0.07	0.06	*	0.15	0.07	0.06	*	0.15	0.07	0.06	*
Children in the period					0.03	0.06	0.02		0.02	0.05	0.01		0.02	0.05	0.01	
Gender * Children					−0.18	0.08	−0.10	*	−0.17	0.08	−0.09	*	−0.16	0.08	−0.09	*
Labour market factors																
Work adjustment problems (a)									−0.10	0.05	−0.06	*	−0.10	0.05	−0.06	
Weeks in unemployment									0.00	0.00	−0.07	*	0.00	0.00	−0.07	*
Coping with unempl (ref. Not unemployed)																
Unemployed - good coping									−0.29	0.06	−0.13	***	−0.28	0.07	−0.13	***
Unemployed - poor coping									0.17	0.07	0.07	*	0.16	0.08	0.07	*
Institutional factors																
Labour market training in the period (1=yes)													0.03	0.09	0.01	
Social assistance recipient in period (1=yes)													0.07	0.06	0.03	
Reception of unemployment benefits (1=yes)													−0.05	0.04	−0.03	
Reception of transitional benefits (1=yes)													0.02	0.07	0.01	

Note: (a) For individuals not reporting work adjustment the mean value of 2.16 is assigned.

TABLE 4. Model summary for regression.

Model	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error	ΔR^2	ΔF	df1	df2	Sig. ΔF
1	0.45	0.20	0.20	0.63	0.20	45.75	6.00	1099.00	0.00
2	0.46	0.21	0.20	0.63	0.01	3.70	4.00	1095.00	0.01
3	0.49	0.24	0.23	0.61	0.03	12.18	4.00	1091.00	0.00
4	0.50	0.25	0.23	0.61	0.00	0.57	4.00	1087.00	0.69

of different welfare benefits and participation in labour market training or a programme. Participation in labour market training is not associated with any change in work commitment. The receipt of different kinds of benefits has no significant effect on change in work commitment in this model.

Summary and discussion

One of the most important findings in this study is the remarkable stability of work commitment we find among a Norwegian cohort across a ten-year period. During this time, the cohort has moved from their late 20s to their late 30s, from efforts towards establishing themselves in the adult world by integrating into work and family life to a more established position in the adult world. The period is usually characterised by profound changes in individual situations such as having children, getting married or divorced, cohabiting or experiencing break-ups, joining the labour market, changing jobs or experiencing unemployment: moving into and out of the labour market, on and off the beaten track. The strength of this finding derives from the design of the study as a longitudinal panel study covering such a long period. The accompanying drawbacks, however, are related to difficulties in pinpointing what exactly may cause the changes in work commitment.

We made a distinction between investigating individuals' *levels* of work commitment and the *changes* in their levels of work commitment over time. We found no age effect on the level of work commitment, contrary to previous findings. The question of work commitment as a cohort effect remains unresolved, as all our respondents were born within a three-year period and may be assumed to share similar external influences.

Even though stability of work commitment is strong across all the experiences and changes in personal life, the findings show some change in the value of work for different groups and for individuals. This change appears to be related to personal experiences in family life and in the labour market. We find that experiences related to family life have particularly strong effects on women's work commitment, for both relationships and the presence of children in the household. Women seem to lower their work commitment on becoming mothers,

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whereas becoming a father does not have the corresponding effect on men. This finding may indicate that Norwegian society remains under the influence of traditional gender values for family roles. This result confirms findings from research on gender differences in work values and a vast amount of cross-sectional analyses of work values in Scandinavia and Europe (Barbieri *et al.*, 2000; Malmberg-Heimonen and Julkunen, 2000).

The main focus of this article, however, was concerned not with work commitment and family roles but rather with changes in work values associated with experiences in the labour market and in relation to institutional arrangements in the welfare state. A major question related to the political discussion of unemployment, benefits and work commitment is whether a possible negative change in the way individuals value employment is related to unemployment *per se*, or to the benefits associated with unemployment.

The analyses reveal the effects of unemployment, unemployment benefits and social assistance receipt on the level of work commitment in 2003. The relation is somewhat stronger between work commitment in 1993 and both unemployment and benefit receipt for the years following 1993. This finding indicates that the level of work commitment may predict future adversities in the labour market. This is in accordance with previous studies by Hyggen (2005a), showing that in Danish and Norwegian adolescents the levels of work commitment were related to the probability of re-entering the labour market after periods of unemployment.

In the multivariate analyses only unemployment *per se* remains a significant factor for *change* in the level of work commitment. This finding weakens the idea that receipt of social welfare benefits contributes to undermining the values of work among beneficiaries. Censoring difficulties may, however, distort these results to some degree. Experiences prior to 1993, for which this study does not account, may already have influenced the level of work commitment. In addition, we cannot know the potential long-term effects of those experiences between 1993 and 2003 that occurred outside our window of observation. Consequently, we are not able to reject entirely the notions and hypotheses predicting change in work commitment related to welfare benefits.

Conclusion

Returning to the four potential explanations and hypotheses regarding change in work commitment, we draw the cautious conclusion that none of them offers a full explanation. Results presented in the multivariate models support the coping hypothesis (a). How well the respondents cope with being unemployed appears to be related to a change in work commitment in the expected direction. Even controlling for time spent in unemployment and receipt of different types of

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benefits, we find that how individuals cope with unemployment influences change in work commitment. A person coping well with unemployment lowers his or her work commitment, whereas a person coping poorly with unemployment increases his or her work commitment.

For the financial incentives hypothesis (b) we find few indications that it explains change in the level of work commitment. We found no effects of receiving any type of benefits and no greater effect of receiving the more generous unemployment benefits than the more limited social assistance benefits.

Mental health is related to unemployment in the correlation analysis. In the more developed multivariate model, we find no evidence for any association between level of mental health problems and change in work commitment as assumed by the mental health hypothesis (c). As we only use the level of mental health problems reported at the beginning of the period, we are not able to rule out the possible association between deteriorating mental health and a negative change in work commitment. In addition, how one copes with unemployment will of course be related to mental health as we saw in the correlation in the cross-sectional analysis.

The results yield no support for the last hypothesis presented in this article: the welfare dependency hypothesis (d). Even if unemployment duration has a negative impact on work commitment, we find no effect from receiving welfare benefits on this commitment. According to this hypothesis, coping well with unemployment should lead to longer periods receiving welfare benefits. From the correlation analysis, we know that this is not the case. The relationship is quite the opposite: coping well is related to a shorter duration of unemployment. Thus, we do not find any indication of a culture of dependency developing among our cohort. However, we did find that unemployment duration in itself has a relatively strong and significant negative effect on work commitment. As argued in the introduction, there are different theories that seek to explain or predict the relationship between unemployment and work commitment. The concerns introduced through theories of the underclass or dependency cultures (Buckingham, 1999; Murray, 1990) are rejected in these analyses, as the benefits in themselves do not provoke negative change in work commitment. From economic theory and research, we know that long-term unemployment is associated with loss of qualifications needed for re-employment. Results from this article suggest that lengthy unemployment is associated with loss of work commitment as well. Individuals who experience long-term unemployment seem to place a lower value on employment. Jahoda (1982) suggested that individuals increase their work commitment when losing a job as the loss may highlight positive outcomes of employment that is no longer available. This may well be the case for persons experiencing only short-term unemployment, but not, as we found here, for the longer-term unemployed. Hagstrøm and Gamberale (1995)

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found that men with lower initial work commitment adjusted more easily to unemployment than men with higher levels of work commitment. Our results could be interpreted in line with this finding as it seems that unemployed people lower their work commitment as a way of coping with longer periods of unemployment: to protect themselves against feelings of failure in the labour market. In the multivariate analysis, the effect of unemployment duration persisted even when we controlled for coping and initial levels of work commitment. This finding may be related to the so-called 'discouraged worker effect', or psychological theories of learned helplessness applied to the labour market (Marklund, 1993b).

Social assistance recipients report lower levels of work commitment as we saw in the cross-sectional analysis, but receiving social assistance in itself did not lead to a deterioration of work commitment. In a study of work adjustment among Norwegian adolescents, social assistance recipients were found to end up in worse jobs than other people of their age (Hammer and Hyggen, 2006; Hyggen, 2006). They had poorer work adjustment. In the present study, poor work adjustment in 1993 has a strong effect on the level of work commitment, indicating an accumulative process of poor labour market integration.

It is also important to take note of the negative effect of unemployment duration on work commitment. This effect is significant even when controlling for individual, family, institutional and labour market factors. It is thus of great importance to keep individuals out of long-term unemployment. Special measures directed at adolescents may well be a good means of limiting unemployment duration and thus the negative effects on individuals' work commitment.

We conclude by agreeing with socialisation theorists that work commitment is a relatively stable individual trait that remains largely unaffected by changes in personal and family lives, and experiences and adversities in the labour market. If work commitment in itself is of interest to policy makers – that is, keeping the working population motivated to work – the fear of disincentive effects in the welfare benefit system seems to be exaggerated.

Notes

1 An OECD report concluded that 'Countries which currently have high unemployment and significantly reduce benefit disincentives may experience a considerable improvement in their unemployment situation within a few years' (OECD, 1994: 213). In the Norwegian presentation of the government budget in the White Paper of 1996–1997 (st. meld no. 1 1996–1997), this assumption was even more apparent: 'Public social security benefits such as unemployment benefits are supposed to take care of individuals' safety and welfare. On the other hand, the motivation of the workforce will depend on financial benefits and other benefits of being in employment. Research ... suggests that high replacement rates

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and long duration of unemployment benefits may cause a reduction in the probability of re-employment among the unemployed. This is partly because re-employment depends on efforts made by individuals and the fact that motivation may be weakened over time' (Author's translation) (St. meld. Nr1. 1996–1997).

2 Forløpsdata Trygd [Event History Data on Social Security]. For further information see: www.ssb.no.

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