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**Professional Ideology and the Psychological Contract: an
Analysis of the Psychological Contracts of Registered Nurses,
Research Scientists and Primary School Teachers Employed in
Public Sector Organisations.**

By Wayne O'Donohue, B.A. (UQ), M.Sc. (GU)

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania
(May, 2007)**

Declaration

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution nor, so far as I am aware, any material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Wayne O'Donohue

Date / /

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Abstract

The increasingly complex world of work has prompted many individuals to search for new meaning and purpose in their work. For many employed professionals, meaning and purpose are also realised through identification with their profession and commitment to its distinctive ideology of values and beliefs about work and organizations. Published research into the psychological contract between the employee and the organization has given limited consideration to the role that occupational ideologies play in psychological contracts. This study addresses that gap in the literature.

The study has two broad themes: the relationship between the occupational ideologies of employed professionals and their psychological contracts, and the importance of that relationship for conceptualisation of the psychological contract. Using a qualitative research design, the study explores the perceptions of a sample of registered nurses, research scientists and primary teachers with regard to their occupational ideologies and the terms of their psychological contracts.

The research findings show that study participants in each sample group perceived their contributions to the organization to include professional competence, a client focus, and a service orientation, that is, delivery on core elements in their occupational ideologies. Study participants also perceived the provision of credible commitments of support as being part of the contribution by their organizations under the psychological contract. In regard to perceived

Abstract (continued)

failure by the organization to provide this support, the research findings show clear impacts on the individual in terms of commitment and job performance. In addition, the findings reveal nuances and a level of complexity in attitudinal and behavioural responses by the individual that have not hitherto been revealed in psychological contract research.

The study discusses the relevance of the research findings for the bidimensional (transactional/economic and relational/socio-emotional) interpretative framework that currently underpins the concept of the psychological contract. It supports calls in the literature for a broadening of this framework to include an ideological dimension. The study also discusses the multiplicity and interdependency of exchange that professional employees can engage in as a consequence of enacting their occupational ideologies through their psychological contract. It calls into question the emphasis on a single dyadic relationship with the organization that underpins the predominant conceptual approach used in much of the work to date on the psychological contract.

Finally, a number of possible future research directions are outlined. The study highlights the need for managers to understand the nature of the occupational ideologies operating within their organization, and how, in the case of professional employees, these ideologies can drive perceptions about what they contribute to the organization and what the organization is expected to contribute in return.

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“In research, as in conversation, we meet ourselves.”
(Morgan, 1983)

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