

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE: A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION**

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### **Abstract**

In this study, the affective commitment that is one of the components of organizational commitment put forth by Allen and Meyer (Allen, Meyer 1996) will be differentiated from the other commitment components. The importance of creating an emotional commitment to organizations will be examined and the organizational factors needed to form organizational commitment will be investigated. Also, organizational silence is a situation that the company avoided. In the study, the reasons and the drawbacks of silence are focused on and the factors that cause employees to remain silent are discussed.

The aim of this study is intended to manifest the relationship of 'organizational silence' with affective commitment' which is one of the components of 'organizational commitment' on the basis of literature. In this study, a negative correlation between affective commitment and organizational silence is suggested.

**Key Words:** Organizational Commitment, Affective Commitment, Organizational Silence

**JEL Classification:** M1, M12.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 1960, Becker in his researches claimed that the employees never commit to the organization emotionally, but they just do is to continue working because they do not want to lose its status and salary.

Meyer and Allen identify three components of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. The common point of organizational commitment components is that the employees continue to remain in the organization whatever they feel positive or negative. On the other hand, the employees who have strong affective commitment continue to work in the organization because they want to. When employees perceive that "their" organization acts as a "true organization", they form positive images about it.

They feel proud to identify with such an organization, develop their self-esteem, form affective bonds with the organization and make efforts to perform better. The managers tend to avoid any information that may suggest the weakness of them. The fear of receiving negative feedback from the subordinate forces them to create a climate of silence. The employees feel compelled to remain silent. In this study the relationship between organizational silence and affective commitment is researched.

## **2. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

Organizational commitment is a psychological concept reflecting the relationship between the employees and the organization (Becker, 1960; qtd. Wei, Tai, 2010: 904). It is the way of employees to perceive the organization and response to it (Mowday, 1979; qtd. Uyguç, Çımrın 2004: 92). “The employees who are strongly committed to the organization are those who are least likely to leave the organization” (Allen, Meyer, 1990: 1). As Balcı mentioned in his studies, the individuals who are committed to the organization, work as more compatible, productive, and loyal (Bayram, 2005: 126).

In 1960, Becker in his researches claimed that the employees never commit to the organization emotionally, but they just do is to continue working because they don't want to lose its status and salary (Gül, 2002: 39). According to side-bet theory, he pointed out that employees don't leave working in the organization in order to protect their hidden benefits. For instance, a person thinks to give up his job which he took two months before because of a better job offer. But the ones giving up his job before the end of a year are called as untrustworthy in his work circumstances. So the person refuses the new job offer to be afraid of to be called such a way (Becker, 1960: 35-36).

## **3. MEYER AND ALLEN'S THREE COMPONENT MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

Meyer and Allen identify three components of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is defined as individuals feeling closer to the organization emotionally and to have involvement with the organization and its goals. The employees who have strong affective commitment continue to work in the organization because they want to. When employees feel that the organization is responsible toward them such as offering salaries higher than industry average, they tend to reciprocate with positive attitudes toward the organization, including affective bonds and feelings of loyalty. Continuance commitment is also a

willingness to remain within the organization because of high cost of quitting and the advantages of staying. The other job alternatives aren't desirable as it is now, but if they have a better job offer in future, they don't hesitate to give up their jobs. Normative commitment is the commitment that a person believes that ethically they have to work within the organization. A feeling of obligation to their workplace and high loyalty is seen in employees. In their opinion, such an idea as to leave their organization is not concurred. They stay with the organization because they ought to (Allen, Meyer, 1996: 253). The multiplicity and quality of investments which are conducted on employees and also the lack of perceived better alternatives are the factors affecting the continuance commitment. Besides, the cultural circumstances can lead to continuance commitment. For instance if an employee was grown up in a family whose members were loyal to their organization in their working life, the person would probably feel an obligation to stay in that organization.

The antecedents leading to affective commitment are separated into 4 categories: personal characteristics, job characteristics, work experiences and structural characteristics (Allen, Meyer 1990: 4-15). According to Çakır, age, gender, education level, individual values and desire to success and etc are personal characteristics. Gilbert and Ivancevich refers that management style, work stress, employee award system and the responsibility degree given to employees are job characteristics. As Çakır mentions, the size of the organization, the formalization degree, the degree of control, working hours, wage system, the career opportunities reflect the structural properties of the organization (Özdevecioğlu, 2003: 115-116). Work experiences are the most effective one to create affective commitment. Because it fulfills employees' psychological needs to feel comfortable and competent within the organization. Organizational reliability, openness to new ideas, equity, role and purpose clarity meet the needs of employees' feeling comfortable in the work place. On the other hand a challenging job, difficulty of goals, feedbacks made by the management and participation in decision lead people to feel competent. According to Allen and Meyer's survey, that was implemented by a university and two manufacturing firms, the employees commit emotionally to the organizations if they feel competent and comfortable in their work place (Allen, Meyer 1990: 4-15).

If and only if it is possible to create self confidence within the organization is by satisfying the social needs of employees. The employees feel as they are valued and form a positive perception inside (Rhoades, et al., 2001: 825-826). In literature the positive perception of employees about the organization is called

perceived organizational support. Supportive organizations have some characteristics such as being open to creative ideas, giving importance to healthy communication and equity approach to all employees (Özdevecioğlu, 2003: 117-118). The more individuals feel that they are supported by the organization; they bond more emotionally to the organization (Rhoades, et al., 2001: 825-826).

#### **4. AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AND WORK PERFORMANCE**

The common point of organizational commitment components is that the employees continue to remain in the organization whatever they feel positive or negative (Özdevecioğlu, 2003: 114). For instance, although the employees have weak affective and normative commitment, the lack of alternatives can lead them to have a strong continuance commitment (Ceylan, Bayram, 2006: 117). However the main important point here for the organization is the performance and efficiency of the employee. The attitudes and performance of employees in work place depends on what they perceive about the organization (Allen, Meyer 1990: 4-15). For instance, when employees perceive that “their” organization acts as a “true organization”, they form positive images about it. They feel proud to identify with such an organization, develop their self-esteem, form affective bonds with the organization, develop a sense of loyalty, and make efforts to perform better and to benefit the whole organization (Dutton, 1994).

The researches show that the individuals, who bond to their organization emotionally, have higher work performance. There is a negative correlation between continuance commitment and work performance (Meyer, et al., 2004). The results of Jing and Xiao-hua’s survey indicate that there is a positive relationship between affective commitment and work performance (Jing, Xiao-hua, 2009: 621). Also as the employee satisfaction increases, there will be increase in work performance. The continuance commitment has a negative relationship with work performance belonging to the survey. It is not surprising to obtain low work performance from those who have the desire to give up and unwillingness with the organizational goals and conditions. Suitable working environments which satisfy and motivate the employees, lead them to have higher works performance (Yücel, 2009: 455).

#### **5. ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE**

The employees are reluctant to talk about the issues that can be interpreted wrongly by the managers and seen as a threat (Roberts, O’Reilly, 1974; qtd. Milliken, et al., 2003: 3). However it doesn’t mean that they are blind to the problems and don’t chat about it with each other when they are alone (Morrison,

Milliken 2000: 706). They just don't dare to speak the truth to their supervisors. They feel compelled to remain silent. Organizational silence is not an individual behavior; it is spread throughout the organization. Actually it is a general attitude of employees even it has an effect on the new members of the organization. Based on past bad experiences of the employees who have worked several years for the organization, they abandon talking. The ones who join to the organization recently take the experienced employees as an example and choose to remain silent to not be damaged. This is named in literature as "learned helplessness". Employees think there is no possibility to change the undesired organizational conditions and therefore they refuse to take an action. They lose their self confident and feel inadequate and helpless. Rather than to resist, they accept and normalize the undesired organizational circumstances (Tutar, 2004; qtd. Aktan, 2006: 8-10). According to Seligman and Maier, the uncontrollable situations can cause employees to have disruptions in motivation, emotion, and learning. Motivational disruption is to lose motivation and willingness to change the undesired issues. Emotional disruption is the loss of self esteem, depression and stress. Learning disruption is to feel alienated to the job and the goals of the organization (Tutar, 2007: 145). Alienation occurs as a response to the certain situations when a person accepts societal expectations that are counter to the person's true goals, feelings or desires (Gale Encyclopedia, 2001).

The managers tend to avoid any information that may suggest the weakness of them. The fear of receiving negative feedback from the subordinates who they call as untrustworthy and self interested, force them to create a climate of silence (Morrison, Milliken 2000). The employees, who are against to the climate, are seen as problem makers by the management. These individuals have to face the results of not remaining silent such as to be fired. The turnover rate of talking people is more than the silent ones. In order to protect the status in work life and to avoid from negative repercussions for speaking up, the employees continue to remain silent (Graham, 1986; qtd. Donaghey, et al., 2011: 53).

The organizational structures causing to organizational silence can be distinguished into three categories: The employees are self interested. The management knows the best about the organizational issues. It is better to avoid from disagreement and dissent and to support agreement and consensus for organizational health (Morrison, Milliken 2000).

## **6. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE**

Affective commitment is defined as individuals feeling closer to the organization emotionally and to have involvement with the organization and its goals. According to Allen and Meyer's survey, the employees commit emotionally to the organizations if they feel competent and comfortable in their work place. This is the only way to commit the employees emotionally to the organization. The organization's success depends on employees' performance. However if the employees feel alienated to their job, they will only do the minimum amount required. This isn't a desired situation for the profit oriented organizations. The researches show that the individuals, who bond to their organization emotionally, have higher work performance. Suitable working environments which satisfy and motivate the employees, lead them to have higher works performance. The working conditions shouldn't create a climate of silence that makes people feel helpless and inadequate. Otherwise, the employees continue to work in the organization because they ought to or they have to. They lose their self confident, motivation and willingness to change the undesired issues, and their beliefs on organizational goals. The employees are reluctant to talk about the issues that can be interpreted wrongly by the managers and seen as a threat. In their opinion there is no possibility to change the undesired organizational conditions and therefore they refuse to take an action. This is named as 'learned helplessness'. The climate of silence doesn't let the employees to commit the organization emotionally. The multiplicity and cruciality of investments which were conducted on them, the lack of perceived better alternatives, and high cost of quitting the job or the feeling of obligation are the factors affecting the employees to stay within the organization. It is possible to see continuance or normative commitment in the organizations having organizational silence. But in order to create affective commitment, the psychological needs of the employees such as feeling comfortable and competent have to be fulfilled. According to Allen and Meyer, organizational reliability, openness to new ideas, equity, role and purpose clarity meet the needs of employees' feeling comfortable in the work place. On the other hand a challenging job, difficulty of goals, feedbacks made by the management and participation in decision lead people to feel competent. These working conditions don't exist in the organizations which have a climate of silence so it is not erroneous to refer that there is a negative relationship between affective commitment and organizational silence.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this study organizational silence and affective commitment is discussed. In order to create affective commitment, the psychological needs of the employees such as feeling comfortable and competent have to be fulfilled. When employees perceive that “their” organization acts as a “true organization”, they generate positive images about it. Organizational silence is a general attitude of employees who choose to remain silent to not have negative repercussions from the managers. The employees don’t dare to speak about certain issues to their supervisors. Employees consider that there is no possibility to change the undesired organizational conditions and therefore they refuse to take an action. Organizational silence makes them lose their self esteem. The climate of silence doesn’t let the employees to commit the organization in an emotional way. Consequently, it is claimed that in these kind of organizations there exists continuance and normative commitment and a negative relationship is observed between silence and affective commitment.

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