

Investigating The Role Of Workplace Friendship On Organizational Commitment

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ABSTRACT

Various factors that affect organizational commitment (OC) have been examined by many researchers. However, among these antecedents, workplace friendship has not gained significant attention yet. Only a few have tested the indirect role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment. This present study was designed to investigate the direct role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment. The research was carried out on a sample of 221 white collar employees in Istanbul, Turkey. Regression analysis was used to analyze the data collected. It will be noted that workplace friendship has a positive effect on the organizational commitment. By emphasizing the role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment this paper provides valuable insights on how organizations can increase organizational commitment by fostering workplace friendship.

Keywords: workplace friendship, organizational commitment, human resources

1. INTRODUCTION

Surrounded by the increasingly turbulent environment of the 21st century, success of organizations depends very much on the performance of their human resources, thus employees. The employees of 21st century organizations are considered as "knowledge workers" as defined by Peter F. Drucker many years ago and have different needs and expectations than traditional employees (Drucker P.F., 1999). Companies are constantly in search for ways to attract as well as retain their human resources and increase organizational commitment. The prerequisite for committed employees is increasing their organizational commitment. Companies are implementing various strategies to make this happen. For decades, organizational commitment has dominated the research agenda and caught the attention of practitioners too. Mitchell, Holtom, and Lee (2001) consider organizational commitment as a huge problem that organizations today are facing. On the other side, academicians are investigating the factors that affect organizational commitment. This study has emerged from this need and aims to investigate the role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment and provide insights from Turkey. The interpersonal job dimensions presented by Hackman and Lawler (1971) and especially friendship opportunities have not yet received considerable attention although there is research evidence that these may have a role on attitudinal and performance outcomes of employees (Hackman & Morris, 1974; Mueller & Price, 1989, 1990). Only a limited number of studies that have investigated the effect of workplace friendship on organizational commitment (Riordan &

Griffeth, 1995; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000) in western countries. They have contributed to the literature considerably but there still is the need to expand these studies to emerging economies. The present paper explores the role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment based on a sample of white collar employees from Istanbul, Turkey.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Workplace Friendship

Workplace friendship is a multidimensional and therefore complex phenomenon. In the literature, there are different definitions for workplace friendship (Dobel 1990, 1999; Berman, West & Richter, 2002; Lin, 2010; Fehr 1999, 2004). Liu, Kwan, Fu, and Mao (2013) define workplace friendship as "the unique interpersonal relationships that employees have". According to Berman, West and Richter (2002) workplace friendship is "nonexclusive workplace relations that involve mutual trust, reciprocal liking and shared interests or values". Although workplace friendship varies from person to person, there are some common characteristics. One important characteristic of workplace friendship is that it is created and maintained with each other beyond the formal assigned organizational roles and forces. It represents a certain degree of voluntary interdependence as well

as mutual interest and concerns (Winstead, Derlega, Montgomery & Pilkington, 1995). Employees develop these unique relationships between their peers and/or supervisors. This is stated by Sias as,

(2005) "Workplace friendships involve people from different gender, age and cultures" .

Several individual and organizational benefits can be derived from workplace friendship. Workplace friendship increases organizational outcomes such as support from others, reduced stress, increased job satisfaction and is linked to work effectiveness (Berman et al.,2002; Hwang, Seo & Kim, 2012; Song, 2007). Since job satisfaction is considered as a factor that decreases employee organizational commitment (Leisanyane and Khaola, 2013), it is expected that workplace friendship also has a positive role on organizational commitment (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995). The reserach findings of Riordan and Griffeth (1995) show friendship opportunities has indirect effects on organizational commitment.

2.2. Oganizational Commitment

There are a significant number of scholars who have provided definitions for organizational commitment. Mowday, Porter, & Steers (1982) definition of organizational commitment is "relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization". Tett & Meyer state (1993) that organizational commitment indicates a huge amount of involvement, and feeling as a part of the organizations.

The studies of Meyer and Allen's (1990) and Meyer and Allen's (1993) have categorized three components for organizational commitment.

Affective Commitment (AC): Indicates the presence of a positive relationship between the employee and the organization attributable to shared and common values (Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

Continuance Commitment (CC): This dimension is explained by Meyer et al. (1991) as "...It is related to one's experience that has been given to an organization difficulty in giving it up and the cost of things in case he leaves the organization or having

few or no alternatives when he leaves the organization".

Normative Commitment (NC): The third dimension of organizational commitment is again claimed by Meyer et al., (1993:539) as "...It reflects the feelings of an individual's obligations about staying within an organization. These kinds of obligations are not for one's own good but an individual reflect ". Employees that have a high level of normative commitment towards their organizations feel that they ought to keep working at the organization (Allen & Meyer, 2000).

As a consequence of these feelings, the employee wishes to stay an organization for longer time periods. Adeoye & Torubelli (2011) found that organizational commitment results in high motivation of employees, employee job engagement and employee happiness. Organizational commitment stipulates faithful employees who are passionate to organizational goals and values. Employees with higher levels of commitment are more loyalty to their organizations and see themselves as a part of the company. As result of this perception, they will keep on working within the company for longer times (Adeoye, Torubelli, 2011). The influence of workplace friendship on organizational commitment has been measured indirectly and found to be significant (Price and Mueller, 1981, 1986). Meyer et al. (1993) concluded that "...our data suggests that it is important for organizations to examine the policies they implement to increase commitment".

This study will be based on the role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment.

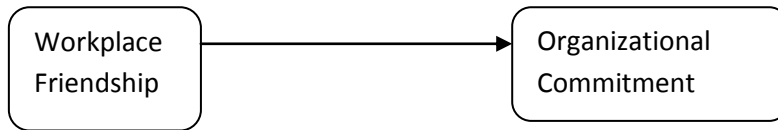
As result of the preceeding theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are devepoled to be tested:

H1: Workplace friendship has an positive influence on organizational commitment.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

FIGURE 1.

Research Model of the Study



In this study, quantitative research method is used. To identify the effect of workplace friendship on organizational commitment, hypothesis testing is applied. The sample is drawn using simple random sampling among white-collar employees of multinational as well as local companies located in Istanbul, Turkey.

Data collection period started in September 2013 and ended in January 2014. The data was collected by sending a hyperlink to the survey by e-mail to the respondents. In total, 600 employees were contacted. The number of returned questionnaires was 230 but 9 questionnaires had missing data and therefore could not be included. In the end, 221 questionnaires were used. For statistical analyses, SPSS 18.0 software program was used. The measurement instrument consists of three parts, namely demographics of the respondent, workplace friendship and organizational commitment.

Workplace friendship was measured using the Workplace Friendship Scale (WFS) developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) that has 12 items and consists of two dimensions, namely opportunity for Friendship (FOD) and prevalence of friendship (FPD) with six items each. For measurement, a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree was used. Organizational Commitment was measured by the scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) and measured using 6-point Likert-type scale. This scale was translated to Turkish by Yildirim (2002). In total there were 38 items on the questionnaire.

4. FINDINGS

4.1.Descriptive Statistics

Gender distribution of the sample was 43.4% women and 56.6% men. 59.3% of the sample holds a university diploma, 33,0% has a master's degree, 5% is high school graduate while 2.7% have a PhD. degree. As for the marital status, 50.7% are married and 49.3% are single. 72.9% had an organizational tenure of 5 years or less while the remaining 27.1% of 6 years and more.

4.2. Factor Analysis and Reliability Test for Workplace Friendship

In order to identify the factor structures of workplace friendship, factor analysis using principal components solution with varimax rotation was used for the 12 items of workplace friendship. Items that had a factor loading below 0.50 were excluded and items with higher cross loadings were kept. One item was left out of the analysis that had low crossloading and 11 items remained. Factors with Eigenvalues higher than 1.00 were included in total variance explained.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were used. Results with (KMO=0.906, Bartlett test 0.000, Chi-Square: 1278,931, df:55) were above the accepted value and showed that the variables were suitable for factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was and showed a high internal consistency and are shown below in Table 2.

The 11 items were loaded on two factors and explained 67,246 % of the total variance.

The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Results of the Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests for Workplace Friendship

Factor Name	Factor Items	Factor Loading	Variance
FOD	1. I have the opportunity to get to know my coworkers	0.849	37.162
	2. I am able to work with my coworkers	0.802	
	3. I have the opportunity to develop....	0.789	
	4. Communication among employees is encouraged by my	0.705	
	5. I have formed strong friendship at work	0.699	
	6. I can confide in people at work	0.679	
FPD	7. I can socialize with coworkers outside the workplace	0.860	30.084
	8. Being able to see my coworkers outside the workplace is one reason I look forward to	0.823	
	9. Informal talk is tolerated by my organization as long as the work is completed	0.729	
	10. I feel I can trust many coworkers a great deal	0.717	
	11. In my organization I have the opportunity to talk informally and visit with others	0.612	
		Total variance explained	
	KMO	0.906	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-square	1.278.931	
	sig.	0.000	

4.3. Factor Analysis and Reliability Test for Organizational Commitment

Factor analysis by using principal components solution with varimax rotation was applied in order to identify the factor structures of organizational commitment. There were 37 items in the beginning. During the analysis, one item that had a factor loading below 0.50 was excluded and those with higher cross loadings were kept. 36 items and 3 factors having Eigenvalues higher than 1.00 were included in total variance explained.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were used. Results with (KMO=0.904, Bartlett test 0.000, Chi-Square: 1278,931, df:55) were above the accepted value. Next, reliability analysis was conducted to test the reliability of each subscale of the OC scale. The Cronbach Alpha results indicated that the third factor of organizational commitment named as "*Normative Commitment*" was unreliable and therefore was excluded from the analysis. The remaining two factors were reliable and explained 57,389 of the total variance. The results are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Results of the Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests for Organizational Commitment

Factor Name	Factor Item	Factor Loading	Variance	Reliability
AC	I feel emotionally attached to this organization	0,875	42.279	.928
	Working at this organization is a great deal of personal interest to me	0,872		
	My organization deserves my loyalty	0,844		
	I would be happy to work at this organization until I retire	0,835		
	I do not feel that many problems faced by my organization are also my problems	0,826		
	I owe a great deal of my organization	0,776		
	I would feel guilty if I left this organization	0,662		
	It would be wrong to leave this organization right now because of my obligation to the people in it	0,63		
	One of the reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable sacrifices	-0,607		
	I really feel that many problems faced by the organization are also my problems	0,6		
I do not feel any obligation to remain with this organization	-0,554			
CC	One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here	0,833	15.110	.743
	Right now, staying with this organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire	0,759		
	One of the serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives	-0,682		
	Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided/ I wanted to leave	0,529		
		Total variance explained	57,389%	
		KMO	0.904	
		Bartlett	Chi-square	2015,463
		Sig.	0.000	

4.4. Hypotheses Testing

In order to test the hypothesis of the study, regression analysis is used. The results of the regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between workplace friendship and organizational commitment.

Table 5: Regression Analysis Result

Dependent Variable:
Organizational Commitment AC

Independent Variable: *Workplace Friendship*

	Beta	t	P
FOD	0,472	5,514	0,000
FPD	0,38	0,439	0,662

R= 0,498; R²=0,248; F=29,109; sig.=0.000

Dependent Variable:
Organizational Commitment CC

Independent Variable: *Workplace Friendship*

	Beta	t	p
FOD	0,24	2,601	0,010
FPD	0,044	0,476	0,634

R= 0,215; R²=0,046; F=4,528; sig.=0.012

The regression results indicate a positive and strong relationship between workplace friendship and organizational commitment and that workplace friendship influences positively an employees organizational commitment. According to these results, the hypothesis of the study is supported.

5. DISCUSSION

This empirical research has been carried out to examine the role of workplace friendship on organizational commitment of employees at managerial positions in different organizations in Istanbul. Although there is a vast amount of academic research carried on in the field of organizational commitment, including workplace friendship as a direct influencing factor is what makes this study unique and valuable.

This study is an addition to earlier efforts of academicians in understanding the causes of organizational commitment as well as the results of workplace friendship. By providing new directions to the research agenda of management, it opens a new debate on the importance of workplace friendship. Statistically significant regression results are indicatives of the positive impact of workplace friendship on organizational commitment. Workplace friendship added positively to the prediction of organizational commitment. Employees that have

more workplace friendship are more comitted than those who have not.

The research results however failed to support Meyer’s and Allan’s scales as a measure of the three subdimensions of organizational commitment. Items of the OC questionnaire did not load on three factors appropriately, and one factor was found not to be reliable and therefore could not be included intor the research. The research findings of the study by Maslic and Sersic (1999) carried out in Croatia also had similiar results with regard to the loadicgs of the factors. Thus, it can be concluded that different environmental setting and culture can influence the dimensions of organizational commitment.

With regard to the significant two diemnsions of organizational commitment, workplace friendship has a positive role on the affective commitment dimension. This dimension reflects emotional ties that employees develop with their organizations primarily through positive work experiences. Our findings preveal that friendship at work is such an experience. Organizations and more specifically human resource

departments that are searching for strategies to foster positive work experiences should consider fostering friendship at work.

The second dimension workplace friendship is influencing is the continuance commitment dimension. This dimension reflects both economic and social costs of leaving their organization. From our findings for this dimension it can be concluded that organizational commitment is also explained by friendship at work. Organizations and human resource departments should therefore incorporate workplace friendship when considering the social costs for employees. The role of friendship at work should not be undermined if committed employees are targeted.

Yet another contribution this study has made is that it is carried out and provides insights from Turkey. The majority of studies on workplace friendship and organizational commitment are carried out in west european countries or North America. Only few have tested the situation in emerging countries. Since friendship and commitment are personal emotions, the differences among cultures should be investigated more.

In conclusion, the importance and positive effects of workplace friendship have been revealed with the results of this study. Managers attempting to increase organizational commitment levels of their employees should not forget the important role of workplace friendship. Organizational structures and cultures that support workplace friendship will benefit from by having more committed employees.

As for the limitations, this study includes only white collar employees from Istanbul. Diversifying the sample by adding other cities in Turkey, blue collar employees or focusing on certain sectors would add valuable comparative information. Furthermore, studies in other countries on the same variables would provide culture based understanding of the dynamics of workplace friendship and organizational commitment.

Dr. Özlem Kunday (Ph.D., Yeditepe University) is Assistant Professor of Management and Organization at Yeditepe University, Istanbul. Her areas of research include entrepreneurship, SME management, human capital, and social capital. She has published several book chapters as well as articles in academic journals.

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