The Effect Of Loneliness In The Workplace On Organizational Commitment

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Abstract

The direct effects of loneliness in the workplace on employees’ organizational commitment were investigated in the study. Within this scope, the three-dimensional concept of organizational commitment and the two-dimensional concept of workplace loneliness were evaluated in the five-star hotel establishments in Didim district. In this sense, some 156 questionnaires were obtained. As a result of correlation and regression analyses, it was determined that loneliness in the workplace negatively affected organizational commitment. When both concepts were considered in terms of dimensions, it was established that only social companionship negatively affected affective and continuance commitment. On the other hand, the effects of employees with emotional deprivation in the workplace on organizational commitment and affective and continuance commitment were insignificant.

Keywords: loneliness in the workplace, organizational commitment, hotels.

1. Introduction

The accommodation sector is defined together with high employee turnover. The basic reasons for this include the scarce job security, opportunities of promotion, and career development; low pay policies; and the low skill levels of employees (Iverson and Deery, 2007). Nevertheless, the reasons why employees quit the organization do not always have to depend on rational, ordered, or alternative job opportunities (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). When considered from this perspective, organizational commitment, which has attracted the attention of both managers
and researchers since the 1960s (Suliman and Iles, 2000), has been quite widely explored in order to examine the relationships between employees and their organization. Likewise, with the change in, and development of, employment relationships in time, it is important to examine the characteristics of this change so as to further understand the concept of organizational commitment (Mowday, 1998).

The study aims to determine the commitment of employees with a feeling of loneliness in the workplace to the organization. Research was made on whether the unavailability of both opportunities of social relationships and the emotional quality of relationships in the organization (Wright et al., 2006) directly affected organizational commitment, particularly the affective dimension of commitment, and, if it did so, at what level it affected. At this point, on the basis of the existing research, hypotheses were developed so as to reveal the relationships between loneliness in the workplace and organizational commitment.

1.1. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment, which is seen to widely overlap concepts such as job involvement, job attachment, and career satisfaction (Reichers, 1985), is a concept with a multiple structure (Mowday, 1998). Organizational commitment is defined as the psychological bond between employees and the organization that reduces the voluntary quitting of the organization by the employee (Allen and Meyer, 1996). Meyer and Allen (1991) define organizational commitment as “a psychological expression (a) that defines the relationships of an employee with the organization and (b) that is about the decision to continue or discontinue membership to the organization” (p.61). In other words, the concept of commitment is “consistent behavior”. In this sense, it must take place within a specific time. Nevertheless, the failure to clearly define the concept of consistency in human behaviors has been identified as one of the serious obstacles to the concept of commitment (Becker, 1960).

Meyer and Allen (1991) referred to the dimensions of organizational commitment that were defined differently by different researchers as affective, continuance, and normative, and they defined them as the dimensions rather than types of commitment. Affective commitment refers to the emotional commitment of an employee to the organization, his/her identification with it, and his/her participation in it. Continuance commitment refers to the consciousness of costs that might occur upon quitting the organization, while normative commitment refers to the obligation felt in order to go on employment. These dimensions might take place at different levels in employees, and the employee may feel all of these three dimensions towards the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). The fact that the concept of organizational commitment has a structure which varies by person and the knowledge of the sources which form commitment or of the types of commitment are useful to predict the possible changes in the commitment levels of individuals (Reichers, 1985).

1.2. Loneliness in the workplace

For a human being, loneliness is a concept which is against his nature since a human being is always in need of social communication and social integration (Cacioppo and Patrick, 2008). When it is considered that the amount of social relationship is frequently influenced by the structure of the work or of the organization, it might be stated that the process of socialization expected in the workplace might frequently be hindered. This causes the occurrence of a difference in the quality of the desired social relationship and in the development of work-based relationships. In this way, loneliness in the workplace manifests itself as sorrow resulting from the lack of interpersonal communication of good quality among the employees in the working environment (Wright, 2005). From another perspective, loneliness is defined as complex emotional reflections resulting from the failure to meet the close relationship and social needs (Ernst and Cacioppo, 1999), some unpleasant experience of the lack of an individual’s social relationships (Shaver and Brennan, 1991) or some subjective experience influenced by situational variables and personality traits (Rokach and Neto, 2005). Özçelik and Barsade (2011) state that employees’ loneliness in the workplace triggers their emotional divergence from the establishment as a reflection of their decreasing affective commitment, thereby affecting their performance.

Loneliness is a common and global human experience with emotional, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (Galanki, 2004). In the literature, two general distinctions are mentioned regarding loneliness. The first one is social loneliness due to the lack of social relationships or satisfactory friendship relationships. The other one
is emotional loneliness due to the lack of close affective commitment or satisfactory romantic relationships (Russell et al., 1984). Likewise, Wright et al. (2006) also defined the two-dimensional concept of loneliness in the workplace. One of the dimensions is emotional deprivation to define the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Involving concepts such as feeling, being isolated, and being alienated, this dimension is of similar structure to emotional loneliness. The other dimension is defined as social companionship within the scope of the adequacy of social networks in the workplace. Involving expressions such as sharing, spending time, and part of the group, this dimension also resembles social loneliness. When considered from this perspective, loneliness in the workplace is a multi-dimensional structure. Even if those individuals who experience emotional deprivation and those individuals who are deprived of social companionship have the same experiences, the causes of both concepts (Wright et al., 2006) and their consequences may differ. Morrison (2004), who examined the informal relationships among individuals in the workplace, stated that especially the opportunities of companionship in the workplace did not directly affect organizational commitment, but job satisfaction mediated this relationship. On the other hand, Ellingwood (2001) states that employees become more committed to the organization when there are opportunities of companionship in the workplace. Accordingly,

H1: Loneliness in the workplace negatively affects organizational commitment.
H2: Social companionship in the workplace negatively affects organizational commitment.
H3: Emotional loneliness in the workplace negatively affects organizational commitment.

When considered in terms of organizational commitment, the important point in the three dimensions of organizational commitment is that the components are completely different from each other. In this sense, the affective commitment of an employee to the organization does not mean that he/she will have normative and continuance commitment (Ellis & Dick, 2003). In other words, the causes, relationships and consequences about commitment vary according to the dimensions of the concept (Meyer et al., 2002). Thus,

H2a: Social companionship in the workplace negatively affects affective commitment.
H2b: Social companionship in the workplace negatively affects continuance commitment.
H2c: Social companionship in the workplace negatively affects normative commitment.
H3a: Emotional loneliness in the workplace negatively affects affective commitment.
H3b: Emotional loneliness in the workplace negatively affects continuance commitment.
H3c: Emotional loneliness in the workplace negatively affects normative commitment.

2. Methodology

The concept of organizational commitment was measured with the scale which was developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). Although three dimensions occurred in the scale, normative commitment was not included in the study as its reliability coefficient was low. In this case, H2c and H3c were not supported. The reliability coefficients of the dimensions were provided in parentheses in the correlation table. The concept of loneliness in the workplace was measured with the scale which was structured by Wright et al. (2006) and translated into Turkish by Doğan et al. (2009). The scale contains two dimensions. These dimensions are emotional deprivation and social companionship. When considered lexically, the dimension of social companionship represents a positive meaning. Nevertheless, the reverse coding of the items of the scale regarding the dimension of social companionship in agreement with the original (Wright et al., 2006) ascribes some negative meaning to this concept. For instance, the item “I have social relationships in the workplace” represents a positive meaning, and since it was reversely coded in the data entry process, its meaning turned into “I have no social relationships in the workplace”. This is valid for 6 of 7 items within the dimension of social companionship. The other one, however, was not reversely coded because it had a negative meaning. The reliability coefficients of the variables and of the dimensions of these variables were provided in parentheses in the correlation table. The data about the study were obtained from the employees in the five-star hotel establishments in Didim. Totally 156 questionnaires were reached thanks to the data collection technique which was preferred as the questionnaire.
3. Findings

The correlation analysis was utilized to test the hypotheses in line with the data obtained in the study. As a result of the correlation analysis, statistically significant correlations occurred among some of the variables. In this sense, a negative but rather low correlation was detected between organizational commitment in general sense and feeling alone in the workplace (r = -.181; p<.05). When the concepts are evaluated in terms of dimensions, affective commitment is negatively correlated with emotional deprivation (r = -.183; p<.05) and social companionship (r = -.244; p<.01). However, continuance commitment is negatively correlated only with social companionship (r = -.282; p<.01). The data about the correlation analysis are elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1. The correlation analysis for the correlation between organizational commitment and loneliness in the workplace

| Constant | Mean | SD    | α    | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     |
|----------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1        | Affective Commitment | 3.38 | .88543 | .72 | 1     |       |       |       |
| 2        | Continuance Commitment | 3.05 | 1.05372 | .71 | .397** | 1     |       |       |
| 3        | Emotional Deprivation | 2.27 | .81144 | .82 | -.183* | -.048 | 1     |       |
| 4        | Social Companionship | 2.08 | .77953 | .72 |       |       | .244** | .282** | .504** | 1     |
| 5        | Organizational Commitment | 3.17 | .69136 | .82 | .675** | .748** | -.102 |       | .331** | 1     |
| 6        | Loneliness in the Workplace | 2.21 | .74977 | .85 |       |       | .226** | -.118 | .950** | .727** | .181* |

* The correlation is significant at the level of 0.05  ** The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01
SD = standard deviation; α = alpha coefficient

The regression analysis is used to distinguish between two or more correlated variables as dependent and independent variables and to explain their correlation with mathematical equation (Köklü and Büyükoztürk, 2000). In the present study as well, the level at which loneliness in the workplace explained organizational commitment was aimed at, and a regression analysis was made. According to Ural and Kılıç (2005), a multiple linear regression analysis should be made for the linear correlation among two or more independent variables against a dependent variable. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was made since loneliness in the workplace as the independent variable contained more than one dimension and because organizational commitment as the dependent variable and its dimensions were considered different variables. The data about the regression analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The regression analysis for the relationships among the variables
The fundamental hypothesis of the study is that loneliness in the workplace will negatively affect organizational commitment. Accordingly, loneliness in the workplace explains organizational commitment at the level of 3% ($\beta = -.181; p<.001$). In this case, H1 was supported. While organizational commitment is not correlated with emotional deprivation ($r = -.102; p>.05$), it is negatively correlated with the concept of social companionship ($r = -.331; p<.01$). Likewise, only the concept of social companionship explains the concept of organizational commitment at the level of 10% ($\beta = -.374; p<.001$). In this case, H2 was supported. On the other hand, although affective commitment is correlated with the concepts of emotional deprivation and social companionship, it is the social companionship which explains affective commitment at the level of 5% ($\beta = -.204; p<.001$). Accordingly, H2a was supported. Continuance commitment is explained with the concept of social companionship at the level of 8% in the present study ($\beta = -.345; p<.001$). Therefore, H2b was also supported. Hypotheses H3, H3a and H3b apart from these hypotheses were not supported.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to reveal the effects of loneliness experienced in the workplace on organizational commitment. The study is essential in that the direct relationship among the concepts is revealed, for Wright et al. (2006) stated – regarding the importance of the matter – that the concept of loneliness in the workplace might have not only different causes but also different consequences, and they made recommendations to future studies for this matter. Nevertheless, the labor-intensive structure of hotel establishments and therefore their employment of a large number of employees and the fact that the relationships accordingly were experienced intensively were effective in selecting hotel establishments as the area of practice of the study.

When the findings obtained in the study are evaluated together with the literature, it is seen that employees’ feeling of loneliness in the organization may negatively affect their commitment to the organization, although at a low level. This obtained finding can be compared with the study by Riordan and Griffeth (1995) on the relationship between organizational commitment and companionship relationships in the workplace. Likewise, the researchers stated a direct relationship between having companionship relationships in the workplace and organizational commitment. However, Wright et al. (2006) defined the concept of loneliness in the workplace as the dissatisfaction of an individual with the quality of his/her relationships with other employees. In Riordan and Griffeth (1995), however, loneliness in the workplace was addressed within the scope of whether there was any opportunity of companionship. Accordingly, it was defined as an opportunity that the work enabled to talk to other employees about the work and that is for employees’ formation of informal relationships among each other. This conceptual
difference may produce misleading results with the comparison of the two studies even though they encompass the dimensions of social relationships. Likewise, in the present study, the concept of loneliness in the workplace was considered with the definition by Wright et al. (2006).

The feeling of loneliness in the workplace might be effective on organizational commitment not only within the general scope but also in terms of its dimensions. Likewise, when the effects of the concepts of social companionship and emotional deprivation as two dimensions of loneliness in the workplace on affective and continuance commitment are examined, it is seen that only social companionship affects commitment. At this point, an individual’s keeping his/her colleagues at arm’s length in the workplace or his/her being left alone by his/her colleagues does not affect his/her affective commitment; nevertheless, an individual’s lack of friends with whom he/she can share his/her opinions in the workplace and the fact that no social relationships have been formed negatively affect an employee’s affective commitment to the organization. Furthermore, Meyer and Allen (1991) define affective commitment as an employee’s organizational commitment, identification with the organization, and participation in the organization. At this point, because employees desire to stay in the organization, they go on working in the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991). In addition, affective commitment is quite sensitive to job experience and develops as a result of positive work experience (Powell and Meyer, 2004). Thus, it is related to the experience which enables an employee to feel “psychologically comfortable”. This may also enhance an individual’s feeling of competition (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer et al., 1998).

An unexpected finding in the study is that continuance commitment was affected by social relationships. It is quite interesting that continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991), referring to the consciousness of the cost to occur upon employees’ quitting the organization and explained with the stay of an individual in the organization since “he/she needs this”, is affected by social companionship. This is also supported by Ellingwood (2001). Likewise, those employees who have friends in the workplace are satisfied with pay and other benefits. When this finding is evaluated with the direction of the correlation in the present study, it is seen that the increase in social companionship in the workplace reduces the stay of employees in the present organization only because they need this and can also enable them to stay in the organization within other dimensions. In this sense, it is thought that the social companionship formed in the workplace may bind an employee to the organization not only with material benefits but also emotionally.

The study has some limitations. The most important limitation of the present study for the authors is that the concept of loneliness in the workplace was not measured in agreement with culture. At this point, the scale which was prepared for a different culture must first of all be adapted to the structure of Türkiye that is regarded among collectivist cultures. Allen (2003) and Meyer et al. (2012) stated that a scale which was suitable for the culture would yield more reliable results and that the problems which might result from translation into the mother tongue could therefore be overcome. Another limitation of the study is that it was carried out in hotel establishments within the scope of the tourism sector. Even though the labor-intensive structure of the service sector also brings about many correlation variations, the repetition of the study in other sectors and their sub-branches can further enhance the validity of the relationship.

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