Full Length Research Paper

A research on the relation between organizational commitment and learning organization

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This study basically aims to determine the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment, and to determine whether "emotional commitment", "normative commitment" and "continuation commitment" which are subordinate elements of organizational commitment have effects on learning organization and subordinate elements of learning organization. Secondary aim is to contribute to the literature by determining which dimension of organizational commitment is more effective on organization. The research was conducted on businesses registered to Aegean Region Chamber of Industry (Izmir/Turkey). The results of the research indicate that organizational commitment is an element which affects learning organization. Moreover, the findings of the research suggest that the information age organizations need to obtain employees with high organizational commitment and take measures in order to increase commitments of employees in order to become learning organizations.

Key words: Organizational learning, organizational commitment, learning organization.

INTRODUCTION

Information created through learning is a strategic input which can help organizations to pacify their competitors and achieve their goal to become one step ahead of them. Organizations in the information age understand that learning means competitive advantage; therefore they determine their primary purpose as becoming effecttive learning organizations. Organizational commitment which means employees adopting aims, goals and values of the organization and having high faith in these, having a strong will to remain in the organization is a serious issue with respect to effective usage of human element which has become the basic value for organizations. While organizations attempt to become learning organizations on one hand, on the other hand their requirement to create employee commitment appropriate to this makes these two matters attractive. However, number of studies which indicate the relationship between the concepts of becoming learning organization and organizational commitment which have vital importance for information age organizations is quite few.

This study is focused on determining the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment which is rather missing in the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the studies performed about learning organization until today, the process of formation of learning organization has been observed and a roadmap for organization leaders was tried to be drawn. Moreover, interaction of learning organization with various variables such as organizational culture, motivation, job satisfaction, performance, personality, employee turnover, individual learning, team learning has been research subjects. Today, leaders have difficulties in transforming their organizations into learning organizations despite all its attraction.

Senge also argues that five disciplines for the prototype learning organization he put forward may not be adequate, in this framework organization leaders have some questions and problems, and these have to be learned and developed in order to establish learning organizations (Senge, 1990). Kofman and Senge, suggest in their studies that without commitment learning cannot be achieved in organizations and transformation towards learning organization cannot be resulted (Kofman and Senge, 1993). Competitive requirements of

information age organizations are more global, more customer-oriented, more flexible, more learning-oriented and more dependent on teamwork. These demands with a tendency to become learning organization require people who combine their emotional, intellectual and physical energy for the success of the organization and have high commitment (Ulrich, 1998). Organizational loyalty which is a concept related to psychological unification and identification of an employee with the organization is the driving power behind organizational success.

Organizational loyalty increases the feeling and interest of the individual to stay within the organization. Information-centered organizations of today when the relations became virtualized have to give importance to organizational loyalty (İscan and Naktiyok, 2005). Researches indicate that employees with high commitment strive more to fulfill what is expected from them and achieve organizational objectives (Oberholster and Taylor, 1999).

Another consequence of organizational commitment is the fact that it allows diffusion of individual learning into the organization (Lewitt and March, 1998). In a study that was conducted on employee turnover which is a result of organizational commitment, it was concluded that organizations with high employee turnover have slow learning (Carley, 1992; Wasti, 2000).

Therefore, organizational commitment has a function to decrease absenteeism and employee turnover, and this function prevents interruption of the period required for continuous learning.

Information sharing and information sharing culture are musts of learning organizations. Conger and Kanungo find communication important for information sharing since information sharing on organizational mission helps to create a meaning and feeling of purpose, therefore associate it with organizational commitment (Robbins et al., 2002). While Alvenson also argues that organizations will be successful in obtaining and producing information to the extent that they maintain high organizational commitment (Alvenson, 2001), Robertsen and O'Malley argue that when more commitment is felt towards the organization, the employees will share their information more with the organization and other employees (Thompson and Heron, 2005).

To sum up; individuals with no commitment or low commitment to organization are more likely to skip work, come to work late or leave work (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Organizational commitment is the primary factor that is critical in achieving organizational objectives (Dick and Metcalfe, 2001) and makes employees problem-solving individuals rather than problem-making (Savery and Syme, 1996). Organizational commitment does not only increase quality and quantity of the level of success of a certain role and contribute to decreasing absenteeism and employee turnover; but also directs the employee to many volunteer behaviors which are required for high

level success in organizational processes (Katz and Kahn, 1977).

METHODOLOGY

Aim of the research

Basic aim of this research is to determine the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment and differences of organizations with different organizational commitment levels in becoming learning organizations. Subordinate objectives of the research in this respect are; to determine the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment and to analyze the effect of organizational commitment in general on becoming learning organization.

Hypotheses of the research

H_1: Level of organizational commitment is effective on the level of becoming learning organization.
H_{1a}: Emotional commitment has a positive effect on the level of becoming learning organization.
H_{1b}: Normative commitment has a positive effect on the level of becoming learning organization.
H_{1c}: Continuation commitment has a negative effect on the level of becoming learning organization.

Questionnaire design and sample

Studies of Ford et al. (2000); Goh and Richards (1997); Senge et al. (1998); Armstrong and Foley (2003) were used in developing the learning organization variable consisting of seven dimensions which is the scale of the research conducted on businesses which are members of Aegean Region Chamber of Industry (EBSO). There are many scales used in the literature on organizational commitment. The one developed by Meyer and Allen (1990) is the most widely used and accepted scale. This scale measures organizational commitment in 3 different dimensions as emotional commitment, continuation commitment and normative commitment. This scale by Meyer and Allen was adapted in line with the purpose of the research and was used in measuring the organizational commitment variable of the research.

RESULTS

Validity and reliability analyses of the research were performed. In the factor analyses performed for validity, it has been found that 7-factor structure towards learning organization is appropriate, and in the result of factor analyses towards organizational commitment scale, 3-factor structure is appropriate. When the reliability concerning learning organization scale is examined, Alpha coefficient of the 31-article scale is 0.912, while alpha coefficient of 16-article organizational commitment scale is 0.689. On the other hand, it is observed that organizational commitment scale whose relationship with

Table 1. Relationship of organizational commitment factors with learning organization.

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Emotional commitment									
2. Normative commitment	0.610**								
3. Continuation commitment	-0.297**	-0.288**							
4. Flex. Org. structure	0.359**	0.122*	0.021*						
5. Empowerment	0.457**	0.222**	0.338*	0.595**					
6. Individual learning	0.534**	0.205**	0.332**	0.421**	0.525*				
7. Team learning	0.564**	0.115**	0.316**	0.377**	0.563*	0.544**			
8. Organizational learning	0.372**	0.165*	0.361**	0.452**	0.604**	0.364**	0.516**		
9. Shared vision	0.433**	0.131*	0.394*	0.435**	0.573**	0.498**	0.422**	0.632**	
10. System understanding	0.393**	0.178*	0.329**	0.272**	0.476**	0.343**	0.457**	0.599**	0.518**

** $p < 0.01$ and * $p < 0.05$, n=199

Table 2. Influence of organizational commitment factors on learning organization.

Independent variable	Learning organization		
	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Emotional commitment	0.685	90.703	0.000
Normative commitment	0.041	- 0.582	0.561
Continuation commitment	0.269	4.601	0.000

R^2=0.406; D.R^2=0.397; F=44.367.

the learning organization is tested for the first time is higher than 0.60 alpha coefficients which are accepted for exploratory researches (Hair et al., 1998). Leech et al. (2005) also expressed that low alpha coefficients in scales with few articles are acceptable between 0.60 and 0.69 (Leech et al., 2005). This indicates that scales have internal coherence.

While there is a positive and meaningful relationship between emotional commitment and normative commitment of 99% in the correlation analysis given in Table 1, there is a negative and meaningful relationship between continuity commitment and both emotional and normative commitment in 99%. Learning organization factors have 99% positive and meaningful high level relationship among each other and this relationship is high, therefore, this supports divergence and convergence validities of scales. As it can be observed from Table 1, there is a 1% level of positive and medium level of meaningful relationship between emotional commitment and all learning organization factors. There is a positive but low meaningful relationship between normative commitment and all learning organization factors in the rate of 1 and 5% respectively. It is also observed that continuity commitment has a 5% positive and low meaningful relationship with flexible organizational structure, strengthening and shared vision, while it is only 1%, positive and medium-meaningful for other organizational factors.

Results of regression analysis indicating the influence of organizational commitment factors on learning organization are given in Table 2. Organizational commitment factors explain approximately 41% of total variance of learning organization (R^2=0.406). 41% value of R^2 and F value in regression analysis show that the model has explanatory power. 41% value of R^2 indicates that organizational commitment influences learning organization in a good level. When the value β which expresses the power of independent variable to regress dependent variable is being look at, emotional commitment (β =0.685) has more influence than continuation commitment (β =0.269) on learning organization. It is observed that normative commitment has not effect on learning organization (t= -0.582).

Therefore, the hypotheses "H_{1a}: Emotional commitment has a positive effect on the level of becoming learning organization" is accepted. Hypothesis "H_{1b}: Normative commitment has a positive effect on the level of becoming learning organization" was rejected since no effect of normative commitment on learning organization has been found and hypothesis "H_{1c}: Continuation commitment has a negative effect on the level of becoming learning organization" is rejected because continuation commitment has a positive effect on learning organization. Therefore, while organizational commitment factors of emotional commitment and continuation commitment

have positive effects on learning organization, normative commitment has no effect.

DISCUSSION

According to definitive statistics, it has been found that organization levels of the organizations which are in the research sampling are high with 3.75 average. It has also been found that their organizational commitment for emotional commitment is higher than high level with 4.13; very close to high level with 3.84 for normative commitment, and in the medium level with 2.86 for continuation commitment. This indicates that these commitment levels are parallel to the conditions desired for an organization. It is found with the businesses in the research that emotional commitment and continuation commitment dimensions of organizational commitment influence learning organization and normative commitment has no influence, differing from the previous various studies on its influence on organizational dynamics. In the previous studies on different organizational elements of organizational commitment, it is generally found that emotional commitment and normative commitment have effects on several organizational elements while continuation commitment has no effect or has the least effect. The findings obtained in this research differ from those in the literature with this aspect.

In literature, organizational commitment is explained first as the emotional commitment, secondarily normative and lastly as continuation commitment (Brown, 2003). In the research, it is found that despite the expectancies, normative commitment was not and continuation commitment was affected by learning organization. There are different reasons for this result. The effect of continuation commitment to some organizational applications and dynamics was negative in almost all research. In a few research, though different from the literature, the effect of continuation commitment to some organizational applications and dynamics was pozitive and researchers faced difficulties to explain the reasons of this result.

In our opinion, the reason to this is explained by people's pyschological reaction. Employees show different pyschological reactions in researches which are about commitment as a pyschological concept affecting different organizational issues like performance, empowerment, organizational culture, job satisfaction etc.

If organizational commitment scales are applied together with empowerment, organizational learning, individual success, job satisfaction etc. they can show different outcomes. The reason to this is employees' perceptions, cultural differances and preconceptions. This is a question on social science on perceiving and understanding scale questions correctly. In addition, it can be said life long employment policies are considered to be effective in the employees' continuation commitment to the organization positively.

In the foregoing, normative commitment is much more related to moral values. Moral values are created by the culture that people live in. Wasti says, Turkish workers' getting permission from their families when quitting their job is an example for their tendency to be effected by community culture because of not being fond of unknown future and change. As a result of this, they show continuation commitment tendency to stay connected to the organization (Wasti, 2000). There is no doubt that the employees involved in this research were effected by that. Therefore, cultural and moral differences are also considered to be the different results of this research.

Findings obtained with field research in this study indicate that organizational commitment is an element influencing learning organization. Within this framework, it is obvious that information age organizations need to obtain employers with high organizational commitment and take measures in order to increase their commitment in order to become learning organizations.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nowadays, due to the competition and rapid disburse of knowledge, organizations need to have educated employees who have speciality and high knowledge. This issue is very important for knowledge age organizations. Because of this importance, continuous share and creation of information is becoming important for organizations which use information technology. Therefore knowledge age organizations have to be a learning organization.

But leaders have some problems to create a learning organization. They always care about which steps they need to follow. This resource is not about these steps. It's about organizational commitment's importance to create a learning organization.

On the other hand, human is the single being that access knowledge, apply information to generate new knowledge, apply information to all organizational processes to become a learning organization. Employees as human beings carry out all organizational processses. Due to employees' importance in becoming a learning organization, employees' commitment to the organization is a requirement. It is difficult to transform to the learning organizastion without higher commitment. Learning starts with the individual and spread to the whole organization. Organizations afford continuous learning and compose organizational memory with their employees' commitment. In this way organizations become a learning organization.

To employ creative people and to keep them is essential. But it's not enough to reach organizational success. At the same time commitment to the organization is necessary for these employees to show extra effort. Thus

organizations can create an environment that provide work more than the job description (Schneider, Gunnarson and Niles, 1994).

Employees with or without less commitment to the organization tend to come to work late, even not come to work or quit work (Meyer and Allen, 1997:11). Organizational commitment not only decreases employee turnover but also orientate them to voluntary behaviour at all organizational processes. (Katz and Kahn, 1977).

Competition in knowledge age is more global, more customer oriented, more flexible, more learning based and teamwork based than it used to be during the past ten years. These tendencies which aim at learning organization entails people who combine their emotional, intellectual and physical energy with commitment for organizational success. (Ulrich, 1998).

If an employee who has high organizational knowledge and does not transform his tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge quits the job, organization can not manage knowledge and also can not become a learning organization. Organizations can learn and become a learning organization owing to their employees and employees' knowledge, experience, energy for work. Employees' commitment to the organization is very important to share their knowledge with the all organization. If employees have high commitment, they share all the knowledge they have.

On the other hand, nowadays human based management's importance has increased. Because of organizational commitment's effect on learning organizations, organizations are working on developing human resources to engage and keep employees' commitment high. Emotional commitment is more postualated than other commitment levels in commitment concept. But as controlling employees' emotional behavior is difficult, to afford employees' emotional commitment is difficult, too. So, researcher's studies on affording emotional commitment is necessary and these studies will benefit the organizations.

As Human Resource applications; in order to increase organizational commitment, organizations should; i) Empower their employees ii) Take precautions which increase motivation iii) Attach importance to the their creativity and thoughts iv) Encourage group works and award prize v) Provide them with access to the organizational knowledge vi) Encourage employees' participation in decision making vii) Compose organizational equity.

It would be appropriate for today's organizations to try to employ people who have tendency to have high organizational commitment, especially emotional commitment in the initial employment. Since this study is one of the rare studies conducted towards determining the relationship between learning organization and organizational commitment on the world, it both will allow comparability with studies in the same topic in different regions and

sectors or different cultures, and contribute to the improvement of literature in the field. Moreover, a better scale can be developed where learning organization and organizational commitment scales used together are improved by using businesses from different regions or cultures and where organizational commitment and learning organization scales are used together.

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