



## EXAMINING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS

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### Abstract

Organizational commitment has become an issue of paramount concern as the organizations realize that their long-term survival depends on the commitment of their members. Yet, most schools seem to fail to pay adequate attention to this important issue given their relatively recent experience in the competitive battlefield as compared to the business sector. This study aims to investigate the level of organizational commitment of private school teachers in one of the Turkey's largest K-12 school chains. In order to determine the level of teachers' organizational commitment and to understand whether it differs with respect to some variables, a case study was carried out by the use of a survey method. Teachers working in the different schools of the selected school chain participated in the study. In the study, TCM (Three-Component Model) Employee Commitment Survey which was developed and validated by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) was translated into Turkish by the researcher and employed as the data collection instrument. The results of the study are expected to give insights to private school administrators and academics regarding the commitment levels of teachers working in private schools.

**Keywords:** organizational commitment, private school teachers, case study

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational commitment reflects the strength of the bond which employees feel towards their organizations (Dogan & Kilic, 2008), and considered as fundamental to hold the school organization intact (Nartgun & Menep, 2010). Organizations often strive to foster employee commitment in order to achieve stability and reduce costly turnover (Meyer & Allen, 2004). Research into organizational commitment demonstrated that maintaining a high level of organizational commitment is one of the most important predictors of many desirable organizational outcomes. It is also widely accepted that committed employees work harder and they are more likely to exert an extra effort to achieve organizational objectives (Meyer & Allen, 2004).

The last decade, with its unprecedented changes in schooling, left many school teachers, primarily the ones working for the private sector, emotionally detached from their schools. Mistrust, accelerating change, growing cynicism, escalating financial pressures, and increasing challenges negatively affected the most employees' commitment to their organization (Manion, 2004), and the private school teachers were no exceptions. Growing competition put private schools under constant pressure to perform better with fewer teachers and lesser payments, and during the process, teachers' commitment to their schools has gradually diminished. When the schools failed to pay adequate attention to this problem, the problem grew even bigger. Despite the general tendency among private school owners and administrators to neglect the problem, teachers' commitment to their organizations has never been more essential to the well-being of the private schools in order to stand out from the fierce competition. As put forward by Laabs (1996), the old employment contract of lifetime employment in exchange for loyalty is long gone. So is the employee commitment. Recently, the loss of the so called 'psychological contract' between the employees and employers, led by the increasing competition, has generated mounting problems in the private school sector such as low job satisfaction among teachers, high teacher turnover, and poor school achievement.

Admittedly, competition in the private school sector is as real as the competition in all the other sectors of the business. Competitiveness of each school mainly depends on its teachers. Teachers are the primary source of competitive advantage in schooling. Losing valuable teachers to a competitor or a high turnover rate may put



schools at risk, as it can give negative messages to the community in terms of the school's continuity and reliability. Schools need a core of teachers who are committed to the values and the goals of the school and to perform at their maximum potential (Caudron, 1996; Meyer & Allen, 1997 cited in Hawkins, 1998). In general, all schools wish to retain their teachers but it is not without a cost. Pool of talent in the education sector is limited, and just like all other employees in all different sectors, the best teachers are often faced with above average salary offers from the competitors (Mguqulwa, 2008). For many schools, only way to maintain the core group of best teachers is, therefore, to ensure their commitment to the school. Yet, the valuable teachers have considerable opportunity to move from one school to another. Under these conditions, ensuring teachers' commitment is becoming even more problematic, but also one of the most, if not the most important priority of employers in the private school sector. However, recent research regarding the organizational commitment raised a growing concern as to whether or not commitment was a reasonable expectation for organizations to hold for their employees in today's landscape (Hawkins, 1998). Today's organizations, including schools, no longer expect their employees to stay with them for a lifetime, but instead they aim to become 'employers of choice' by offering professional development (Baldry, Hyman, & Scholarios, 2005), and thereby ensuring the employability of their teachers not only within the confines of their own school but at any school. This changing nature of psychological contract can be considered as a new deal in which high commitment can only be induced through a negotiated process of reciprocity (Baldry, Hyman, & Scholarios, 2005). According to Rousseau (1989), work commitment, which is the commitment not to the organization or career, but to the work itself, replaced the organizational commitment. The new working conditions and employment arrangements seem to promote work commitment rather than the development of organizational commitment among employees. Along with those changes all around the world, new age teachers, just like all other employees, seem to demonstrate higher levels of work commitment, instead of organizational commitment. Given the current landscape in education, this might be a quite reasonable choice for teachers, yet it is also one of the biggest challenges need to dealt with care by the school managements. Therefore, whether they realize it or not, nowadays, ensuring organizational commitment has become more important than ever for private schools operating under fierce competition.

### Literature Review

Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) stated that organizational commitment consists of three important factors: (1) a strong identification with the organizational goals and values; (2) willingness to 'go an extra mile' on behalf of the organization; (3) and lastly a strong desire to remain with the organization. Meyer and Allen (1991), on the other hand, defined organizational commitment from three different perspectives: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. According to Meyer and Allen (2004), employees with a strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to do so (desire); those with strong normative commitment stay because they feel they ought to (moral obligation); and those with strong continuance commitment stay because they have to do so (recognition of the costs), otherwise they have to deal with the consequences associated with leaving the organization.

Recently, organizational commitment has been one of the most studied workplace constructs that received a considerable attention from the educational researchers as well as the organizational researchers. There are growing number of studies devoted to identify both the antecedents and the outcomes of organizational commitment. A great deal of research has been conducted that attempts to link organizational commitment with desirable work outcomes such as increased employee satisfaction, improved attendance, improved job performance, and a reduction in employee turnover (Shore & Martin, 1989). For instance, organizational commitment has been conceptualized as "a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization" by Allen and Meyer (1990, p.14), which in turn decreases the likelihood of employee turnover (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Likewise, Baruch (1998) stated that high organizational commitment lead to organizations gain workforce stability in terms of fewer turnovers, and more attendance. Other studies also found a negative relationship between the some dimensions of organizational commitment and employee burnout (see Chuo, 2003; Çetin, Basım, & Aydoğan, 2011; Güneş, Bayraktaroğlu, & Kutanis, 2009; Tan & Akthar, 1998). However, Meyer and Allen (2004) assert that the impact of organizational commitment on performance is still unclear and needs to be studied further. On the other hand, great number of research has been conducted attempting to identify the antecedents of organizational commitment. For example, Hawkins (1998) identified perceived autonomy, perceived organizational support,

and perceived support as the primary predictors of organizational commitment in his study done with the high school principals. Nevertheless, most importantly, up-to date review of the literature demonstrate that organizations with committed employees have a significant competitive advantage and a higher rate of survival compared to organizations with less committed employees (Aityan & Gupta, 2012). Therefore, it is widely accepted that committed employees are valuable assets that must be retained within the organization. However, as pointed out by Aityan and Gupta (2012), commitment cannot be expected without reciprocity. To expect a high level of commitment from employees, an organization is expected to show a similar or even higher level of commitment to its employees (Aityan & Gupta, 2012). Most of the time, however, this is not the case in most of the organizations, and Turkish schools are no exceptions. The present study, therefore, aims to understand the level of Turkish private school teachers' commitment to their schools with a case study conducted in one of the biggest K-12 chain schools in Turkey.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, cross-sectional type of research design was used in the study. In order to collect the quantitative data, a case study was carried out by the use of a survey method in one of the largest K-12 school chains in Turkey. The data was analyzed in SPSS 19 by the use of descriptive statistics, t-tests and ANOVA test.

### Participants and Procedure

A total of 146 teachers from one of the largest school chains in Turkey participated in the study. Table 1 summarizes the respondent characteristics in terms of gender, age, marital status, education, grade level taught, work experience at the current school, and total work experience.

Table 1: *Respondent characteristics (n=146)*

		f	%			f	%
gender	Female	111	76	Education	Bachelor's degree	100	68.5
	Male	35	24		Master/Phd degree	46	31.5
Age	<25	24	16.4	Current work experience	1-5 years	67	45.9
	25-30	57	39		6-10 years	48	32.9
	36-45	43	29.5		11-15 years	31	21.2
	>45	22	15.1		>15 years	0	0
Grade level taught	Kindergarten	41	28.1	Total work experience	1-5 years	28	19.2
	Primary (K1-K4)	32	21.9		6-10 years	46	31.5
	Secondary(K5-K8)	43	29.5		11-15 years	46	31.5
	High school (K9-K12)	30	20.5		>15 years	26	17.8
				Marital status	Single	67	45.9
					Married	79	54.1

No incentives were provided for the participants and the participation was completely voluntary. Participants were first required to complete the questions asking for demographic information, and then were asked to indicate how much they agree with the statements measuring their commitment level to their organizations.

### Measure

The present study employed the TCM Employee Commitment Survey which was developed and validated by Meyer, Allen, & Smith (1993). 18-item, 7-point Likert type scale measures three forms of employee commitment to an organization: desire-based (affective commitment), obligation-based (normative commitment) and cost-based (continuance commitment) (Meyer & Allen, 2004). The survey includes three 6-item sub-scales: (1) the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), (2) the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS) and (3) the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS). Each sub-scale can be scored separately in order to identify the "commitment profile" of employees within an organization (Meyer & Allen, 2004). The scale was translated into Turkish by the researcher by the combination of back and parallel translation.

## FINDINGS

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics, and the Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the constructs used in present study. The mean score of 4.47 obtained from the 7-point likert type TCM Employee Commitment scale indicates that our sample had an average level of commitment towards their school. Internal consistencies of the scales used in the study are found to be high enough (above .70) to continue with further analyses.

Table 2: *Descriptive statistic of the TCM Employee Commitment scale with Cronbach's alpha reliabilities (n=146)*

Scale	N of items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
TCM Employee Commitment scale	18	4.47	1.07	.922
Affective Commitment Scale (ACS)	6	4.83	1.49	.913
Normative Commitment Scale (NCS)	6	3.72	0.93	.799
Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS)	6	4.87	1.40	.884

Table 2 shows the analysis of the TCM Employee Commitment scale with respect to gender, age, marital status, education, grade level taught, work experience at the current school, and total work experience.

Table 3: *Analysis of the scales with respect to demographic data (n=146)*

		N	X	Sd.	t/F
Gender	Female	111	4.53	1.03	1.047
	Male	35	4.31	1.22	
Marital status	Single	67	4.24	1.06	-2.449*
	Married	79	4.67	1.05	
Education	Bachelor	100	4.63	0.82	2.148*
	Master/PhD.	46	4.14	1.44	
Age	<25	24	4.38	1.23	0.390
	25-30	57	4.43	1.13	
	36-45	43	4.62	0.95	
	>45	22	4.39	1.07	
Grade level taught	Kindergarten	41	4.10	1.09	4.317*
	Primary (K1-K4)	32	4.80	1.02	
	Secondary(K5-K8)	43	4.33	1.01	
	High school (K9-K12)	30	4.83	1.04	
Current work experience	1-5 years	67	4.28	1.08	3.668*
	6-10 years	48	4.47	1.08	
	>10 years	31	4.90	1.07	
Total work experience	1-5 years	28	4.19	0.22	2.223
	6-10 years	46	4.29	1.15	
	11-15 years	46	4.70	1.01	
	>15 years	26	4.71	0.83	

Notes:\* p<0.05

In order to investigate whether gender makes a difference in terms of employee commitment, independent sample t-test was conducted. As can be seen on Table 3, no significant difference has been found between male and female participants in terms of their commitment towards their current school [t (144) = 1.05, p>0.05]. With respect to marital status, results of the independent sample t-test indicated a significant difference between single and married participants on TCM Employee Commitment scale [t (144) = -2.45, p<0.05]. Married participants (m=4.67, sd=1.05) scored significantly higher than single participants (m=4.24, sd=1.06) on TCM Employee Commitment scale. As far as education is concerned, participants with a bachelor degree (m=4.63, sd=0.82) scored significantly higher [t (144) = 2.15, p<0.05] than the participants with a master or doctorate degree (m=4.14, sd=1.44) on TCM Employee Commitment scale. Furthermore, one way ANOVA tests indicated no significant difference between the commitment levels of participants in terms of age [F (3,



142) = 3.90,  $p > 0.05$ ] and total work experience [ $F(3, 142) = 2.22, p > 0.05$ ]. On the other hand, one way ANOVA test results indicated a significant difference between participants' level of commitment in terms of grade level taught [ $F(3, 142) = 4.32, p < 0.05$ ] and current work experience [ $F(2, 143) = 3.67, p < 0.05$ ]. Kindergarten teachers ( $m = 4.10, sd = 1.09$ ) scored significantly lower than both primary school teachers ( $m = 4.80, sd = 1.02$ ) and high school teachers ( $m = 4.83, sd = 1.04$ ) on TCM Employee Commitment scale. Furthermore, participants working for their current school for more than 10 years ( $m = 4.90, sd = 0.96$ ) scored significantly higher than the participants working for their current school for less than 5 years ( $m = 4.28, sd = 1.08$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study demonstrated that teachers' commitment towards their school was only at average. Teachers scored lowest on the normative commitment sub-scale while they scored highest on the continuance commitment sub-scale, indicating that teachers' commitment towards their school mostly derives from the costs associated with leaving the organization. This finding is especially important as it signals that given the chance, teachers may easily accept the more competitive offer from a competitor and quit their current job. Research regarding employee commitment state that the most desirable types of employee commitment can be listed as affective, normative, and the continuance commitment respectively (Brown, 2003). Therefore, school administrators must especially think of ways to improve the affective commitment of their teachers. Otherwise, in the current climate of fierce competition, they might risk to lose their most valuable teachers to their competitors. The study also investigated whether employee commitment differed with respect to some demographic variables.

According to the results of the study, teachers' commitment to their organizations did not differ by gender, age or total work experience. On the other hand, research findings indicated that teachers' commitment significantly differed by the participants' marital status, education level, grade level taught by the participants, and years of current work experience. First, married participants were significantly more committed than the single participants. This can be explained by the fact that married people tend to be more conservative and settled down with respect to single people who tend to be in a state of constant quest. Second, participants with a bachelor degree seemed to be significantly more committed to their organization compared to the participants with a master or doctorate degree. This finding seems to confirm the study of Demir and Buğdaycı (2011) who stated that high school graduates are more committed to their organizations than graduates having master degrees. The reason behind this might be that as the level of education increases employees tend to feel that they might have more or better opportunities outside. Conversely, since they are already less committed to their current organization, the employees strive to increase their education level to increase their chances of employability elsewhere.

Another finding indicated that kindergarten teachers scored significantly lower than both primary school teachers and high school teachers. This situation can be explained by the fact that kindergarten teachers have wider work opportunities with respect to other teachers. Finally, research findings also indicated that participants working for their current school for more than 10 years seemed to be more committed than the participants working for their current school for less than 5 years. This is quite an acceptable finding, because, as the people spend more time with their organization, they tend to develop stronger bonds with their organization, and hence, they become more committed. The findings of the study demonstrate that school administrators must exert more effort to increase their teachers' commitment to their school; they should especially focus on the development of affective commitment.

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