

## Summary

# The Effects of Perceived Justice and Empowerment on Knowledge Workers' Organizational, Supervisory and Occupational Commitment

Lale Gumusluoglu  
Bilkent University

Zahide Karakitapoğlu-Aygün  
Bilkent University

Being a critical source of competitive advantage to organizations, knowledge workers, who are rather short in supply, have many alternatives in the market (Flood, Turner, Ramamorthy, & Pearson, 2001). Hence, it is of utmost importance for organizations not only to attract such talents, but also retain them as human resources committed to their organizations, leaders, and jobs. Despite their increasing importance to organizations and economies, little is known about knowledge workers' commitment and work attitudes (Benson & Brown, 2007). The present research, therefore, investigated the predictors of this group of workers' commitment to multiple foci.

Recent research differentiated between different (1) components and (2) foci of commitment. Regarding the components of commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) classified commitment into three categories, namely affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Among these three components, affective commitment was found to be the strongest predictor of work outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Regarding commitment foci, studies differentiated between various targets to which employees feel committed such as organizations, leaders, or occupations (Becker, 1992; Reichers, 1985). Studying multiple foci is important, because each focus has different implications for job-related outcomes (Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004). Unlike the Western literature, Turkish literature has investigated commitment mostly at the organizational level (Güney, Akalın, & İlsev, 2007; İşcan & Naktiyok, 2004; Wasti, 2000). Only a very limited number of research has studied commitment to multiple-foci which were mainly interested in the relationships among commitment to different targets (Özmen, & Saatçioğlu, 2005).

Based on these observations, the present study examined the predictors of knowledge workers' affective

commitment to three foci, namely, to their leaders, occupations and organizations. In doing so, we investigated the potential roles of perceived justice and empowerment. Indeed, previous research has cited organizational justice as an important antecedent of knowledge workers' commitment (Flood et al., 2001; Thompson & Heron, 2005). Two dimensions of organizational justice, specifically procedural and interactional justice, have been suggested to enhance this group's commitment. Moreover, studies on occupational commitment suggest that feelings and attitudes toward the job itself may be important in explaining one's commitment to occupation (Lee, Carswell, & Allen, 2000), which points to the importance of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). In line with these studies, perceived procedural justice, interactional justice and empowerment were expected to predict organizational, supervisory and occupational commitment, respectively.

Recent literature suggests that knowledge workers are more committed to their careers and occupations than to their organizations (Elliman & Hayman, 1999; Özer, Özmen, & Saatçioğlu, 2004). In response to the increasing competition in knowledge-intensive sectors, these workers feel the need to continuously upgrade their knowledge and professional capacity. Hence, they might attribute more importance to their professional goals than the organizational goals. As they are more interested in the market value of their knowledge and capabilities (Reed, 1996), whenever they are provided with better career opportunities they may consider changing their employers. Thus,

*H1. Knowledge workers will be more committed to their occupations than to their leaders and organizations.*

Organizational justice is an important variable that influences employee attitudes and behaviors within organizations. Justice studies differentiated between pro-

cedural and interactional justice. Procedural justice is the perceived fairness of the system, such as procedures used for outcome and resource allocation (Leventhal, 1980; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Moorman, 1991). Interactional justice, on the other hand, relates to the interpersonal treatment by and fairness of the supervisor (Bies & Moag, 1986; Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002). Social exchange theory suggests that employees respond differently when they perceive unfairness in formal procedures and interpersonal treatment (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Masterson, Lewis-McClearn, Goldman, & Tylor, 2000; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Accordingly, because formal procedures represent the way the organization allocates resources; procedural justice tends to be highly correlated with organization-related attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, as interactional justice relates to the behaviors of the person carrying out the interpersonal treatment, it tends to be correlated with supervisor-related attitudes and behaviors.

The fairness of the system and procedures (i.e. procedural justice) can be a great concern for knowledge workers (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). One reason for this is that knowledge workers need a great deal of autonomy in their work environment and are likely to challenge decisions affecting them, such as those related to their professional achievement and recognition (Kinneer & Sutherland, 2000). Accordingly, they expect their employers to provide them with opportunities to appeal or challenge the decisions, collect accurate information necessary for making decisions, and hear the concerns of all those affected by the decisions. Furthermore, knowledge workers create and share knowledge; this only happens when they cooperate voluntarily which depends on organizational support and trust (Flood et al., 2001; Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). When they perceive that the process is fair, they will trust the system, believe that the organization values their contribution and cares about their welfare, and, consequently, reciprocate by being more committed to their organizations.

**H2.** *Perceived procedural justice will have positive associations with knowledge workers' organizational commitment.*

Research on knowledge workers illustrates that professional standards, knowledge creation and innovation require supportive managerial styles. These studies show that for this group of workers, the supervisor-employee relationship should be based on reciprocal trust, not on command and control (Zaim, 2006). Hence, the intensity of interaction (Pelz, 1963) and the quality of the relationship (Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999) between the leader and the knowledge workers have been positively associated with knowledge creation and innovative behavior among this highly qualified group. Lack of a high quality treatment by their leaders might have

detrimental effects on their motivation and job performance. Such negative effects are critical for knowledge workers and might result in lower levels of supervisory commitment on their part, since these workers have significant drives for achievement and personal growth. Therefore,

**H3.** *Perceived interactional justice will have positive associations with knowledge workers' supervisory commitment.*

Psychological empowerment is a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his/her work role: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). Accordingly, meaning is the value of a work goal judged by an individual's own standards. Competence is an individual's belief that he/she is capable of successfully performing a task. Self-determination refers to feelings of autonomy in making work-related decisions. Impact refers to the extent to which an individual believes he/she can influence organizational outcomes.

Knowledge workers are attracted to occupations in which they can actualize their potential, develop their personal and intellectual capacity, and achieve their career goals. What energize them most are intrinsic sources of motivation, which can be symbols of personal and professional excellence for this intellectual group (Despres & Hiltrop, 1995). As a matter of fact, they will be motivated when there is a fit between the requirements of their work and their beliefs and values, they believe in their capability to perform job-related activities, they have autonomy and take initiatives, and they can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work. Hence, knowledge workers who have high levels of perceived empowerment are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, to enjoy their jobs, and in return show more commitment to their occupations. Thus,

**H4.** *Perceived empowerment will have positive associations with knowledge workers' occupational commitment.*

## Method

### Sample

The total sample consisted of 445 (124 female, 319 male, 2 unidentified) knowledge workers. Participants were the employees from companies located in the technoparks of two universities in Ankara (Bilkent and METU). They mainly operate in research and development (R&D) such as information and communication technologies, electronics, and biotechnology. About half of the participants were from defense sector. The mean age of the participants was 27.56 ( $SD = 4.86$ ). In terms of education, 73.1 % of the participants held at least a university degree. The average job and company tenures

were 4.14 ( $SD = 4.37$ ) and 2.16 ( $SD = 2.26$ ), respectively. The average year spent with the leader was 1.83 ( $SD = 1.87$ ).

### Measures

The Turkish and English versions of the scales were checked through back translations. Native speakers of English and Turkish also checked the scales for wording, accuracy, and clarity of items in both languages. All items in the study were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree").

**Commitment.** *Affective commitment to the organization* was measured with an 8-item scale, which has been tested in the Turkish context in previous studies (Wasti, 2000, 2002). Wasti reported acceptable reliabilities for this 8-item measure, which includes both emic and etic items (Meyer et al., 1993). *Affective commitment to the supervisor* was measured with Vandenberghe et al.'s (2004) 6-item scale. Finally, *affective commitment to the occupation* was measured by a 6-item scale from Blau (2003). In the confirmatory factor analysis of the three commitment foci, we omitted two problematic items from the organizational commitment subscale. The resulting three-factor solution yielded an acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(166, N = 445) = 842.73$ ,  $RMSR = .05$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $NNFI = .95$ .

**Justice.** *Procedural justice* was measured with 6 items (Lamertz, 2002) and *interactional justice* with 6 items from Moorman (1991). In the confirmatory factor analysis of the two justice scales, we omitted 2 problematic items from the interactional justice scale, resulting in an adequate fit:  $\chi^2(33, N = 445) = 190.90$ ,  $RMSR = .04$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $NNFI = .95$ .

**Psychological Empowerment.** Psychological empowerment was measured by the 12-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995). Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the items of the impact dimension had low factor loadings. Besides, the loading of the impact factor on the latent construct of empowerment was relatively low. Hence, this factor was omitted from the analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the resulting three-factor solution yielded an acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(24, N = 445) = 112.01$ ,  $SRMR = .046$ ,  $CFI = .98$ ,  $NNFI = .97$ .

### Procedure

First, we get the lists of the firms from the general managers of the technoparks. Then, the managers of the R&D departments of these firms were contacted by telephone. R&D personnel in each firm were asked to fill out the survey which was presented in envelopes to assure confidentiality. All respondents filled out the survey in their offices.

## Results

Our results regarding H1 showed that participants reported more supervisory commitment than occupational ( $t = 5.86, p < .001$ ) and organizational commitment ( $t = 8.78, p < .001$ ). The difference between occupational and organizational commitment was not significant ( $t = 1.27, p > .05$ ). We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test remaining H2-H4. We first estimated a measurement model to test the properties of our latent variables. Fit indices for the measurement model were acceptable: [ $\chi^2(50, N = 445) = 124.84, \chi^2/df = 2.49, SRMR = .04, CFI = .99, NNFI = .98$ ]. Then, we estimated a structural model to test our hypothesized model. Fit indices for this model were satisfactory:  $\chi^2(56, N = 433) = 203.39, \chi^2/df = 3.63, SRMR = .078, CFI = .99, NNFI = .98$ . To illustrate the superiority of this model, we tested three alternative models. In addition to the hypothesized relationships in our conceptual model, we added direct paths from procedural justice (Alternative Model 1), direct paths from interactional justice (Alternative Model 2) and direct paths from empowerment (Alternative Model 3) to all commitment foci. Results indicated that Alternative Model 3 yielded the best fit [ $\chi^2(54, N = 433) = 127.68, \chi^2/df = 2.36, SRMR = .04, NNFI = .98$ ] among all models. As hypothesized, procedural justice had associations with organizational commitment, interactional justice with supervisory commitment and empowerment with occupational commitment. Moreover, empowerment had also been related to organizational and supervisory commitment. It had the strongest association with occupational commitment (0.89), followed by organizational (0.46) and supervisory commitment (0.16).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to identify the predictors of knowledge workers' commitment to multiple foci. As hypothesized, we found that procedural justice associated with organizational commitment, interactional justice with supervisory commitment and perceived empowerment with occupational commitment. Moreover, alternative model tests revealed that in addition to occupational commitment, empowerment was an important predictor of organizational and supervisory commitment.

The first important finding of the study was that procedural justice predicted knowledge workers' commitment to their organization (H2). These workers want to be involved in decisions that affect them, to be informed about the consequences of those decisions and to be sure that objective criteria are used in the implementation of decisions. When they perceive that the policies and procedures are fair at the systemic level, they recip-

rocate with higher levels of organizational commitment. Enhancing this group's organizational commitment is critical for two reasons. First, knowledge workers need to trust the system in order to create and share knowledge (Flood et al., 2001; Kim & Mauborgne, 1997). Secondly, they can leave their companies, to start up their own companies or work for another employer unless they are committed to their organizations.

Secondly, lending support to H3, interactional justice was found to have positive associations with supervisory commitment. Knowledge workers for whom autonomy, task discretion, and voice are highly crucial, want to work with leaders who explain the decisions to their followers, provide them with opportunities to challenge those decisions and address their concerns about job-related issues and careers. Hence, in order to enhance this group's supervisory commitment, managers of knowledge workers as stated by Zaim (2006), should trust their employees, respect their expertise and build a two-way interaction.

Another important finding of the study was the positive association between knowledge workers' perceived empowerment and occupational commitment (H4). Knowledge workers had higher levels of occupational commitment when there is a fit between their own values and work goals, and when they feel that they are competent and can take initiatives in fulfilling their tasks. Such feelings of meaning, competence and autonomy are especially critical for knowledge workers as compared to traditional workers, to enhance this group of workers' occupational commitment. Psychological empowerment was also found to predict organizational commitment. A tentative explanation for this finding may be that empowered employees are more likely to have a sense of participation and involvement in their organizations (Castro, Perinan, & Bueno, 2008). In other words, when they find their jobs meaningful, when they feel that they have the competence to do their jobs and when they have autonomy in their jobs, they will feel that they are respected and internalize organizational goals all of which enhance their organizational commitment. Finally, perceived empowerment predicted knowledge workers' supervisory commitment. Being the key representatives of the organizational processes, leaders as the "climate engineers", influence the meaning followers attribute to organizational practices (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Hence, it is likely for the employees to show commitment to their leaders who are the actual implementers of empowerment, namely provide them with meaningful jobs and discretion in their tasks.

Finally, contrary to H1, knowledge workers reported the highest level of commitment to their leaders followed by occupational and organizational commitment. This can be explained by the traditional cultural and or-

ganizational context in Turkey, which has been defined as relatively collectivistic and paternalistic (Aycan, 2001; Aycan, Kanungo, Mendonca, Kaicheng, & Deller, 2000; Berkman & Özen, 2007; Paşa, Kabasakal, & Bodur, 2001; Sargut, 2001). In such a context, employees expect frequent and close contact, care and protection. Leaders, like fathers, are interested in their employees' off-the-job lives and try to promote their personal welfare. This supporting and caring nature of the supervisor-subordinate relationship predicts employees' satisfaction with their jobs (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006). Supporting all these views, Wasti (2000) showed that satisfaction based on the relationship with the leader is an important antecedent of commitment in the Turkish culture.

### *Limitations and Implications*

Although we used a conceptual model that was tested through SEM, the relationships are associative and correlational, which does not allow for the assessment of real cause-effect relationships. The characteristics of the sample in this study might be another limitation. It included companies in research and development work in Turkey. Therefore, the findings might not be generalizable to organizations in different industries and cultures. We recommend that future research collect data from organizations operating in different sectors and cultures. Furthermore, as these workers are mostly located in teams where they are expected to share their know-how and create knowledge collectively; future research could investigate knowledge workers' commitment to their work groups.

Our findings have several implications for leaders of project teams and human resource managers. First, leaders of knowledge workers should emphasize the fairness of procedures used in the decision making and in the distribution system to promote organizational commitment. The establishment of institutional channels for employees to participate in the decision-making processes and usage of transparent criteria in the performance evaluation and feedback systems can be some important means to this end. Secondly, for knowledge workers to be committed to their leaders, it is important that the leaders interact with them in a truthful and fair manner, involve them in the decision-making process, consider their needs, and provide timely feedback. As Aycan and Kanungo (2000) stated, they should take into account the feedback they get from their employees. Thirdly, in order to improve this group's commitment to their occupations, leaders and organizations, their perceptions of empowerment should be increased. To this end, they should be provided with tasks that they find meaningful and autonomy and initiative in making work-related decisions. Furthermore, their feelings of competence should be enhanced through continuous training and

development programs, recognition for their work and supportive leadership.

In sum, the present research is among the first studies to examine the predictors of knowledge workers' commitment to multiple-foci in the Turkish context. As

stated by Drucker (1999), to increase the productivity of knowledge workers, they must be considered as capital assets of their companies. We hope the present results foster the understanding of these capital assets' commitment to their organizations, leaders and occupations.

Copyright of Turk Psikoloji Dergisi is the property of Turk Psikoloji Dergisi and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.