PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: EVİDENCE FROM THE TOURİSM INDUSTRY IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Purpose: This study intends to explore the link between psychological empowerment (PE) and organizational commitment (OC) with the data obtained from tourism sector employees in Turkey. Accordingly, the goals of the study are: i) To measure the level of OC (affective, normative and continuance commitment) among employees in the tourism sector in Turkey ii) To measure the level of PE (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) iii) To examine the relationship between PE and OC. To test the proposed relationship, three hypotheses are developed;

H1: PE will have a positive impact on affective commitment.

H2: PE will have a positive impact on normative commitment.

H3: PE will have a positive impact on continuance commitment.

Research Methods: Each variable was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). PE was measured by 12 items developed from the study of Spreitzer (1995). OC was measured by 9 items developed from the study of Meyer & Allen (1997). The data of the study were obtained both through the questionnaire technique via Google form and face to face interviews. Of the 118 respondents 80(68%) were men, and 38 (32%) were women. The majority of the participants (45%) are ranged in age from 17 to 25 years. Of the participants, %31 have üniversity educations and %46 have been working between 3 and 5 years in the company. The majority of the participants have an income ranging from 4001-6000 ₺ (Turkish Liras) where the net minimum wage is wage for single people is 2,826 ₺ ($377) a month. Data from 118 employees have been evaualted by using of the SPSS 20.0 program

Results and Discussion: The findings of the study reveal that the level of AC (mean = 3,81), NC (mean = 3,53), and CC (mean = 3,82) is moderate among tourism sector employees. Continuance commitment appears to be the highest of the three components of the OC which is not surprising as the respondents of the survey are from Turkey which has high unemployment rate (13,4 percent in February of 2021). In high unemployment work environments employees are likely to exhibit higher levels of CC because of the higher penalty of job loss. In such environments feelings of job insecurity among employees creates an incentive to embrace their current employment and thus they remain loyal and committed to their organization(Shapiro-Stiglitz, 1984). In terms of the correlations between the variables, the results reveal that all of the variables show significant positive correlations. On the other

hand the findings indicate employees in tourism sector felt that they are not empowered enough by their organization (mean = 2,65). that the level. This result suggests that although employee empowerment is proved to be a useful tool, managers are resistant to share their power. Overall, consistent with other studies (Joo et al., 2010; Choong et al., 2011; Rawat, 2011; İbrahim, 2020), findings of the study indicate that PE has positive and significant impacts on AC (β = .31, p< .01), NC (β = .26, p< .05), CC (β = .21, p< .05). Therefore it is evident that there is a need to improve the current situation at tourism companies with respect to all the components of the PE which in turn would enhance OC levels of employees.

Implications: This research suggests that employees' empowerment experiences directly affect their commitment level and thus in order generate high degree of OC, the tourism companies should develop training programs to foster managers in understanding appropriate practices and behavior sets that will enhance employee empowerment. However, it is useful to evaluate the results of the research in consideration of some constraints. First of all, the present study is carried out in Turkish companies in the tourism sector and the sample size is quite small. Therefore, one may debate that generalization of the results is questionable. Future research should observe a broader set of in order to identify if any the differences exist in relation to the characteristics of its industry. Researchers should also look to impact of leadership styles, ethical climate, corporate reputation on OC.

Keywords: psychological empowerment, affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment

INTRODUCTION

Human resources are the most essential and critical assets of any organization, including hospitality and tourism sector. But unfortunately, the hospitality sector has a reputation of having high turnover rates which indicates the sector is loosing its precious asset. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the hospitality sector has an annual turnover rate of 73,8%, with around 6% of staff leaving every month. This rate is alarmingly high compared to the annual average of 10-15% and thus have both direct costs (e.g., recruitment, hiring, and training) and indirect costs (e.g., reduced customer satisfaction and employee motivation , loss of productivity) which in turn decreases the performance of the companies in this sector. Satisfactory empirical evidence exists in the literature about the decreasing power of organizational commitment (OC) on turnover (Sinem & 2011; Sani, 2013). Actually a lot of research have been conducted on OC topic and proved it has many advantages for businesses like customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yuanqiong et al.,2011), increased job performance (Jaramilloa et al., 2005), increased service quality (Dhar, 2015) but the question how OC is achieved still remains unclear.

Nowadays, it is common for tourism companies to deal with important concepts influencing employee behavior and attitude which includes commitment and loyalty since high turnover rate in the sector is likely to lead a loss for the industry in general and for the companies in particular. Therefore, in order to provide a regular supply of manpower and resolve some management issues such as low performance and high turnover rate tourism companies should examine the commitment levels of employees. Since the human resources are of great importance for the productiveness and development of tourism sector, the practices

that can increase their level of attachment or commitment to the organization should be searched. Therefore, this study considers psychological empowerment (PE) as an antecedent of OC and proposes that empowered employees are more committed to the organization.

Past empirical researches suggest that empowering conditions such as meaning, competence, self-determination and impact enhance employees feelings of commitment to the organization. All of these four aspects of PE were found to be significantly related to organizational commitment (Lashinger et al., 2000; Liden et al. 2000; Joo et al., 2010) but there has been little research that has examined the relationship in tourism sector. Therefore, this study intends to fill this research gap, focusing on the role of PE as a determinant of OC. Accordingly, the goals of the study are: i) to measure the level of OC among employees in the tourism sector ii) to measure the level of PE among employees in the tourism sector iii) to examine the relationship between PE and OC (affective, normative and continuance commitment).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies frequently examined OC and associated it with positive outcomes including increased employee job performance (Negin et al.,2013; Qaisar et al.,2012) and job satisfaction (Shibeika, 2016; Adekola, 2012), customer satisfaction (Güllüoğlu, 2011) as well as decreased turnover and absenteeism (Wasti, 2003; Chang et al.,2007), burnout, cynicism and bullying (Wright and Hobfoll, 2004; Işık, 2015). These studies underline the importance of OC and thus to explore its antecedents stands out as a necessary orientation for managers and leaders. The current study is an attempt in this direction and examines the impact of PE on OC.

Although there have been several conceptualizations of OC, Allen and Meyer's (1990) conceptualization pointing three forms of organizational commitment including affective commitment (AC), continuance commitment (CC), and normative commitment (NC), is highly accepted in the literature. AC is an emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization because of employees' strong beliefs in the values and goals of the organization. CC indicates the perceived costs and losses that employees have to bear with departing the organization. Employees with a strong AC stay with the organization willingly, whereas those with strong CC stay because they estimate the costs of ending membership. The cost assessment is affected by the position of the employee and tenure because s/he might feel that s/he have invested too much to consider leaving from the organization (Sing and Gupta, 2015). Finally, NC reflects perceived obligation of employees to remain within the organization.

On the other hand, Conger & Kanungo (1988) suggest that empowerment is a motivational construct that means "to enable" rather than simply "to delegate" and thus PE happens when employees have a heightened sense of self and motivation at work (Lee and Koh, 2001). In other words, it is the employees' psychological reaction to presence or absence of empowering contextual conditions in the workplace (Laschinger et al., 2004). It is defined more broadly as increased intrinsic work motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions including meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The meaning was described as the value of a task judge in relation to the individual's value system. The second cognition, competence described as an individual's belief in his/her capability to perform activities with

skill. Third, self-determination was described as an individual's sense of having an option in starting and regulating procedures and exists when employees have a sense of freedom, autonomy or power to make a decision about their work. Finally, impact is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes in the organization and is seen as control over one's environment or the belief that his/her actions are making a significant difference in the organization (Spritzer, 1997; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

Past empirical researches proved that PE creates advantageous organizational outcomes such as increased employee performance (Ahearne, et. al., 2005; Chiang and Hsieh, 2012), increased psychological well being (McClain, 2001), life and job satisfaction (Oyeleye et al.,2013), increased customer satisfaction (Namasivayam et al., 2014) as well as lower stress, anxiety, depression (Seibert et al., 2011), and intention to quit (Zhang & Liu, 2013). Despite the significant academic interest in PE there is a lack of research investigating the impact of PE in Turkish tourism sector context. Building on past evidence, the present research argues that PE will improve commitment of employees. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: PE will have a positive impact on AC.
Hypothesis 2: PE will have a positive impact on NC.
Hypothesis 3: PE will have a positive impact on CC.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Scales
To test the above-mentioned hypotheses, multi-item scales are adopted from prior studies for the measurement of variables. Each variable was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). PE was measured by a 12-items adapted from Çekmecelioglu & Özbağ (2014) which is originally developed by Spreitzer (1995). The scale contains three items for each of the four components of PE known as meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. "The work I do is very important to me" (meaning), "I am confident about my ability to do my job" (competence), "I have the autonomy about doing my work" (self-determination), "My impact on what happens in my department is large" (impact) are some examples of the items in the scale. OC was measured by 9 items developed from the study of Meyer & Allen (1997). The scale contains three items for each of the three components of OC, namely, affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization" (AC), "I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization" (CC), ". I owe a great deal to my organization" (NC) are some examples of the items in the scale.

Sampling
The aim of this paper is to describe and analyze the relationships between PE and OC. In order to empirically investigate the hypotheses, firms performing in tourism sector in Kocaeli were surveyed. The data of the study were obtained both through the questionnaire technique via Google form and face to face interviews. Of the 118 respondents 80(68%) were men, and 38 (32%) were women. The majority of the participants (45%) are ranged in age from 17 to 25 years. Of the participants, %31 have üniversity educations and %46 have been working

between 3 and 5 years in the company. The majority of the participants have an income ranging from 4001-6000 ₺ (Turkish Liras) where the net minimum wage is wage for single people is 2,826 ₺ ($377) a month.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

To test the reliability of the scales used in the study, Cronbach Alpha scores were calculated for each scale. The Cronbach Alpha scores for each scale were good with overall Alpha reported of 0.91-0.96. Furthermore, in order to identify the underlying structure of various measures exploratory factor analysis using principle components of factor extraction and varimax rotation techniques was performed. As a cut-off loading was used 0.40. Most factor loadings were above 0.50 which can be assumed a high level of significance. The results from our factor analysis of the measurement items for each of the subscales (Table 1) imply that measures used in this study have construct validity (Nunnally, 1978). The factor loadings are seen Table 1.

Table 1. Factor Loading of Scale Items

Psychological Empowerment	Affective commitment	Normative Commitment	Continuance Commitment
,899	,909	,944	,978
,887	,905	,850	,747
,878	,868		
,865	,816		
,862	,594		
,846			
,842			
,837			
,837			
,813			
,790			
,747			

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for all of the variables in this study. As predicted, the results indicate that there is a positive correlation between PE and OC.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic and correlations

Variables		Mean	Std D.	PG	AC	NC	CC
Psychological Empowerment	PG	2,65	1,27	-	314**	,263**	,218*
Affective commitment	AC	3,81	1,04		-	,836**	,757**
Normative Commitment	NC	3,53	1,13			-	,779**
Continuance Commitment	CC	3,82	1,14				-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Hypotheses Testing Results

We conducted regression analysis to examine the hypothesized relationships between PE and OC dimensions. The results revealed that PE have a significant positive effect on affective commitment (β=) supporting H1, on normative commitment supporting H2, on continuance commitment supporting H3. Consequently, PE is found to be an important driver of organizational commitment.

Table 3.The Impact of Psychological Empowerment on Organizational Commitment Dimensions

VARIABLES					
Independent	Dependent	R²	β	t	p
Psychological Empowerment	Affective commitment	,099	,314	14,725	0,000
Psychological Empowerment	Normative Commitment	,069	,263	12,405	0,000
Psychological Empowerment	Continuance Commitment	,047	,218	13,768	0,000

DISCUSSION

Since the tourism is a labour-intensive service industry, its competitive advantage and survival is very related to the availability of committed employees who take ownership of their work and exercise control over workplace decisions. Stated differently, succeeding service quality and excellence, and thus making customers satisfied and loyal, depends on the behaviour, attitudes, and performance of the employees. Therefore, the interest of researchers and practitioners to the development of high commitment is not likely to decrease since low employee commitment is one of the most frequently mentioned issues in the literature that decreases the performance of tourism companies. Correspondingly, the present study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of how different forms of commitment is affected by PE.

The findings of the study reveal that the level of AC (mean = 3,81), NC (mean = 3,53), and CC (mean = 3,82) is moderate among tourism sector employees. Continuance commitment appears to be the highest of the three components of the OC which is not surprising as the respondents of the survey are from Turkey which has high unemployment rate (13,4 percent in February of 2021). In high unemployment work environments employees are likely to exhibit higher levels of CC because of the higher penalty of job loss. In such environments feelings of job insecurity among employees creates an incentive to embrace their current employment and thus they remain loyal and committed to their organization(Shapiro-Stiglitz, 1984). In terms of the correlations between the variables, the results reveal that all of the variables show significant positive correlations. On the other hand the findings indicate employees in tourism sector felt that they are not empowered enough by their organization (mean = 2,65). that the level. This result suggests that although employee empowerment is proved to be a useful tool, managers are resistant to share their power. However, they have to rethink ways of boosting performance and productivity at work, due to changing needs of employees (e.g. psychological support) to uphold their emotional bond with their organizations. Accordingly, it is fair to

suggest that HR practitioners should develop workplace strategies that are supporting employee empowerment which in turn positively shape OC. Overall, consistent with other studies (Joo et al., 2010; Choong et al., 2011; Rawat, 2011; İbrahim, 2020), findings of the study indicate that PE has positive and significant impacts on affective commitment (β = .31, p< .01), normative commitment (β = .26, p< .05), continuance commitment (β = .21, p< .05). Therefore it is evident that there is a need to improve the current situation at tourism companies with respect to all the components of the PE which in turn would enhance OC levels of employees.

The results imply that employees desire meaningful jobs where they have the power to shape their work and make the decisions on their own. When supervisors empower them, they become more responsible and more accountable in each task they handle and hence more fruitful at the job. Seeing how their job makes a difference to individuals and impacts the success of the organization can provide a sense of pride in individual's work. Additionally, supervisors could enhance subordinates' self-efficacy by providing positive feedback to high performing employees. These methods can encourage employees to feel that they are effective components of the organization and their efforts are valued, which in turn develop a high degree of emotional attachment (AC), obligation to stay (NC), and awareness of the costs of leaving the organization (CC).

Understanding the importance of employees' PE and OC is of great importance for managers and practitioners because knowing the levels of these constructs can help them to handle these issues appropriately in tourism sector. Depart from focusing on salaries, benefits, and career advancement structures as a means of building OC, they should overlook to possible elements to enhance the feeling commitment among employees. Accordingly, this research suggests that employees' empowerment experiences directly affect their commitment level and thus by eliminating disturbing factors which directly or indirectly influence on employees' satisfaction with all aspects of work (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) is likely to foster emotional connection between the individual and the organization. In this sense, in order generate high degree of OC, the tourism companies should develop training programs to foster managers in understanding appropriate practices and behavior sets that will enhance employee empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper contributes to the literature by showing that tourism organizations can influence the commitment level of employees by providing choice and freedom to employees in initiating and performing tasks, encouraging employees' belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation, and giving opportunity to make an impact in the organization. However, it is useful to evaluate the results of the research in consideration of some constraints. First of all, the present study is carried out in Turkish companies in the tourism sector and the sample size is quite small. Therefore, one may debate that generalization of the results is questionable. Future research should observe a broader set of industries in order to identify if any the differences exist in relation to the characteristics of its industry. Second, as Zhang & Bartol (2010) points employees with particular personal traits are more likely to experience PE and thereby respond favorably to PE but we have assumed that all employees desired the same degree of empowerment. The influence of personality traits such as altruism, openness to

experience, and extraversion could also be included into the research model in future researches. Researchers should also look to impact of leadership styles, ethical climate, corporate reputation on OC. Similarly, testing the influence of additional mediating and moderating variables such as job satisfaction, psychological resilience, work stress, and psychological contract will deepen our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between PE and OC.

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