

# Ethical Climate, Organizational Trust and Organizational Commitment

Deniz Boru, Guler Islamoglu, Melek Birsell, Serra Yurtkoru  
Marmara University Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Turkey  
e-mail: [denizboru@marmara.edu.tr](mailto:denizboru@marmara.edu.tr)

## Abstract

Organizational commitment has been a subject of many studies and received great attention. Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian [1] have stated that organizational commitment has been a rather stable construct and negatively related with attitudes such as turnover, absenteeism and performance. It is also found to be positively related with job satisfaction, job involvement, coping with tension, employee's job, role and task identity as well as demographic characteristics. Organizational trust has also been among the antecedents of organizational commitment. Organizational trust has been found to contribute to positive workplace attitudes and behaviors in the organizations such as cooperative behavior, communication, information sharing and productivity [2, 3]. Ethical climate, on the other hand, is a very important contributor for affecting the ethical decision-making behavior of managers in the organizations [4]. Victor and Cullen [5, 6] claim that ethical climate is one of the many organizational work climate types. Ethical climate is a macro level organizational characteristic that consists of shared set of norms, values, and practices of organizational members in relation with appropriate behavior in the workplace.

The aim of this study is to analyze the distinction of the contribution of ethical climate and organizational trust on organizational commitment. Discriminant analyses are conducted to discriminate varying levels of organizational commitment by different dimensions of organizational trust and ethical climate. It is found out that affective, continuance, and normative commitment can be differentiated based on different dimensions of organizational trust and ethical climate.

## Introduction

Organizational commitment is a common and important construct in behavioral studies. Researchers analyze the antecedents of commitment to provide awareness into employee's commitment. Many studies try to explore essential elements that affect organizational commitment both at individual and organizational levels, such as characteristics of employees, culture, and human resource policy in practice [7, 8]. Meyer & Allen [9] have categorized the factors affecting organizational commitment into three classes; personal characteristics, work experiences, and organizational characteristics

The interest of an employee in an organization is called organizational commitment. Studies have defined organizational commitment as the combination of attitude and behavior. When an employee identifies with a particular firm and sees that his own goals are similar to that of the organization, he tries to continue his employment in that organization in order to achieve that goal. This type of organizational commitment is as an attitude [10]. When there is such a state, in which the employee does without any other alternate action and select himself to link with the organization. This type of organizational commitment is a behavior.

Mowday, Porter, & Steers [11] defined organizational commitment as “relative strength of an individual’s identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization”. It has been further conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of three components: affective, continuance, and normative commitment [9]. Affective commitment refers to “the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization”, whereas continuance commitment refers “to an awareness of the cost associated with leaving the organization”. Finally, normative commitment reflects “a feeling of obligation to continue employment”. The Three-Component Model (TCM) propose that employees remain with an organization because of their (1) desire to remain (affective commitment), (2) recognition that the perceived costs associated with leaving would be high (continuance commitment), and/or (3) feelings of obligation to remain (normative commitment). Although an employee could experience all three components to varying degrees, each component was considered to develop independently and to exert different effects on work behavior [12].

Cook and Wall [13] claimed that trust is an important factor leading to organizational commitment. Many studies confirmed that trust contributes to organizational commitment, job satisfaction and employee turnover [14, 15]. Cangemi, Rice and Kowalski [16] claim that although trust is strongly related with organizational commitment, commitment refers to identification with and evaluation of corporate goals whereas organizational trust refers to employee faith in corporate goal attainment and organizational leaders, and to the belief that ultimately, organizational action will prove beneficial for employees.

Organizational trust is a feeling of confidence and support in an employer; that is, it is the belief that an employer will be honest, open and will follow through on commitments [17]. It is suggested that trust "is the core of all relationships" and will hold people together and give them a feeling of security. Trust is thought to be fragile and it is generally earned and grows at a painfully slow pace but can be destroyed in an instant. It is stated that trust is an important predictor of satisfaction with supervision and performance appraisal [17].

Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman [18] describe trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party". Hosmer [19] views individual trust as one party's optimistic expectations of the behavior of another when the party must make a decision about how to act under conditions of vulnerability and dependence.

Mishra [3], defines trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is: (a) competent, (b) open, (c) concerned, and (d) reliable". The perception of trust is created with the existence of these factors collectively.

### **Trust and Commitment**

In some research it was found that organizational trust was a significant predictor of organizational commitment. In fact, organizational trust, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are all thought to be part of affective organizational attachment and employee attitudes [20]. On the other hand, job satisfaction was assumed to be improved by changing jobs within the same organization and to be context specific, while organizational commitment and organizational trust were thought to be better indicators of subsequent withdrawal behavior. Moreover, job satisfaction was indicated as one of the many components comprising organizational commitment [21].

Tan and Tan [22] reveal that trust in organization is a significant and positive predictor of organizational commitment and a significant and negative predictor of employee turnover intentions. Both Chiaburu and Byrne [23] and Tan and Tan [22] demonstrate trust in organization to be an antecedent to organizational commitment.

Recent research has also revealed not only that a subordinate's trust in a supervisor affects the subordinate's intentions and behaviors but also that a manager's trust in his/her subordinates is positively and significantly associated with subordinate task performance and negatively associated with subordinates' intentions to quit. Trust in management has been demonstrated to have an effect on subordinates' intentions and behaviors with regard to many job-related outcomes. In both high and low individual-job congruence situations, trust in management is a positive and significant predictor of a subordinate's satisfaction with work, supervision, promotion, co-workers, overall job satisfaction, and subordinate performance [24]. High trust in management also results in high affective and continuance commitment among subordinates.

McAllister, [25] has found that trust leads to higher levels of organizational commitment. For example, negative feedback from a trusted manager will be probably considered as accurate by an employee, and it will lead to improvement in their performance. On the other hand, accuracy of negative feedback from a manager who is not trusted will be questioned and may not lead to improvement in their performance.

Research has suggested that a lack of predictability and safety in organizational relationships results in low organizational commitment decreased human relations and organizational performance [26], low employee morale and product quality [16] and increased absenteeism and turnover. If employees perceive that they are betrayed by management, they may engage in even more destructive organizational behaviors, such as neglect, or in extreme cases, sabotage.

Organizational characteristics as stated by Meyer and Allen [9] also lead to commitment. One of these characteristics is ethical climate. Victor and Cullen [5] first introduced the construct of ethical work climate in 1987. They noted that it is one of many work climate dimensions, and they defined it as a 'shared perception of what deems ethically correct behavior and the way ethical issues should be handled' within an organization. However, they did not intend to develop a measure of organizational morality, but rather to describe different types of ethical climates that may emerge. The Victor and Cullen framework refers to egoism, benevolence (utilitarianism) and principle (deontology) dimensions. The second dimension is the 'locus of analysis'. This concept originates in sociological theory and later applied to organizational context. The emerging referent sources from these two theoretical contributions helped to conceptualize the specific levels at which decision making is determined and behavior is operationalized.

These levels, or loci, were categorized as local and cosmopolitan. The local locus refers to the organization itself. External to the organization is the cosmopolitan locus, which refers to the community or society at large. Additionally, Victor and Cullen [5] describe another referent known as the individual locus. Without organizational norms, the individual makes decisions alone at this locus. Decision criteria and the bases of moral reasoning emerge from personal beliefs and values at the individual locus. Combining the dimensions of 'ethical criterion' and 'locus of analysis' results in nine theoretical climate types. From this conceptual framework, the Ethical Climate Questionnaire was developed to measure various perceptions of ethical climate types. This instrument is, on the whole, the most fully developed, widely used, and accepted measure of ethical climate available to date. Over the course of numerous studies, perceptions of a wide range of climate types have been observed in ethical climate research, however, only five have been found empirically.

Ethical climate in an organization is observable and can provide a basis for employees' perception of acceptable and ethical behavior [27]. As such, organizational ethical climate involves prevailing attitudes about an organization's standards concerning appropriate conduct within the organization. This construct has received much attention since the development of a measure by Victor and Cullen [5, 6]. They argued that a number of different

types of ethical climates are possible to exist in organizations and classified them into several different sub-types from their empirical research [28, 29]. Since people tend to accept and internalize the climate of the organization in which they work, the perception of climate can have an important impact on their attitudes and behaviors. A good example may be the research on the influences of ethical climates on organizational commitment. Schwepker [30] investigated that salespeople's perceptions of a positive ethical climate are positively associated with their organizational commitment. Cullen, Parboteeah and Victor, [31] also demonstrated that a benevolence or principled climate is related to organizational commitment. In addition, in a study of Korean tourism industry employees, Kim and Miller [32] confirmed the findings of Cullen et al. [31] along with new founding of moral caring as a climate factor. These connections may be due to the fact that ethical climate serves as a perceptual lens through which employees diagnose and assess situations. If their perceptions of acceptable and ethical behavior are cumulated continuously over time, employees are likely to increase trust in their organization. Subsequently, this will induce a loyalty toward the organization. Therefore, the higher level of perceived ethical climates, the more likely employees will trust organizational goals and increase emotional attachment to the organization. Following this logic, it is reasonable to argue that organizational ethical climate also affects career commitment. The link between the two constructs can be explained by the fairness heuristic [33]; that is, employees' perceptions of fairness in one area can influence their perceptions of fairness in another area. Accordingly, an organizational ethical climate, which affects employees' justice judgments, plays an important role in how employees commit to their occupation and give a priority to develop their own career goals. For example, when organizations have principled climates employees are more likely to feel they are given a fair opportunity for promotion or movement. Such perceptions, in turn, will stimulate a stronger commitment and a more positive attitude toward their personal career. In this way, a Perceived External Prestige higher level of perceived ethical climates may positively influence an employee's commitment to his or her career, as well as to the organization.

Ethical climate refers to an employee's perceptions concerning their organization's rules, policies, values, and practices in an ethical context [30]. Much of the literature on ethics climate refers to the construct via a five-factor typology consisting of instrumental, caring, independence, rules, and law and code ethics climates. From this perspective, ethics climates are best viewed across organizations and their affects on employees occur through an "ethical fit" [34]. Ethics climate is linked with various positive job attitudes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction. One explanation for the effect of this perceived climate is through felt ambiguity. Official organizational policy concerning ethical situations, as well as confidence that the organization will maintain its set ethical code, likely results in less ambiguity felt by employees on handling ethical situations. Elimination of this ambiguity by an ethics climate likely results in greater job satisfaction [30]. In addition, positive work attitudes may be engendered by the perception of an ethical climate because employees may view those ethical organizations as having positive work environments characterized by honesty and trust [30]. Overall, empirical research supports the positive association between the perception of a climate for ethics and positive employee outcomes [28, 30]. Recent research has linked perceptions of an ethical climate to turnover intentions as well. Utilizing role stress theory, Mulki et al. [28] argued that the perception of an ethics climate provides employees with cues as to appropriate behavior, which reduces role conflict, role ambiguity, and subsequent emotional exhaustion and results in fewer turnover intentions. This perspective coincides with the previously presented argument that an ethics climate is associated with positive employee attitudes through a reduction of job stressors [30]. Quite a few research supports the negative relationship between ethical climate perceptions and turnover intentions [28, 34, 35].

## **Ethical climate and organizational commitment**

Hunt, Wood, Chonko [36] found that there is a significant relationship between firm's ethical values and organizational commitments measured by ethical climate and some job outcomes. Trevin'o, Butterfield and McCabe [37] suggest that, in general, organizational commitment could be lower when the ethical climate is perceived as egoistic and higher when the climate is perceived as benevolent or principled. Based on the observation that employees will feel more emotionally attached to an organization that supports values such as caring for employees and the broader community and adherence to ethical principles, they have made this suggestion. Trevin~o et al. [37] proved that organizational commitment is negatively correlated with egoistic/individual climates, whereas positively correlated with benevolent/local and benevolent/cosmopolitan climates.

However, significant results were not obtained for the effects of principled climates. Cullen, Parboteeah and Victor [38] also hypothesized that egoistic climates will lead to decrease in organizational commitment whereas benevolent climates will lead to increased commitment. Principled climates are hypothesized to be associated with organizational commitment only in the case of professional employees, since professionals are likely to be affected by the organization's being supportive of the ethical principles of their profession. A comparison of results from non-professional employees of a telephone company and professional employees of four public accounting firms supported the hypotheses: in both samples egoistic climates were found to decrease organizational commitment whereas benevolent climates were found to lead to increased commitment, but only in the case of the accounting firms did a principled climate positively affect commitment.

Shafer [39] had found that four ethical climate variables had significant effect on affective commitment, and one climate type had a marginal significance. The benevolent/cosmopolitan and principle/cosmopolitan climates both had been found to have highly significant positive impacts on organizational commitment. The egoistic/individual climate had a highly significant negative impact on commitment. The impact of the egoistic/local climate was found to be marginally significant and negative. The results proved that organizational ethical climate has highly significant direct effects on organizational commitment

## **Research Design**

The aim of this study is to analyze the distinction of the contribution of ethical climate and organizational trust on different levels of organizational commitment.

### **Measures and research instrument**

A multi item questionnaire was used in this study to measure the "ethical climate", "organizational trust" and the dependent variable, "organizational commitment". Organizational commitment was measured by a scale developed by Allen and Meyer [9] and consisted of 24 items. Ethical climate was measured by a scale developed by Victor and Cullen [6] and consisted of 36 items. Organizational trust scale was developed by İslamoğlu, Birsel and Börü [40] and consisted of 36 items. Respondents have answered the questionnaire on a 5-point interval scale ranging from "strongly agree (5)" to "strongly disagree (1)".

### **Data collection and sampling**

Data of this study were collected from employees working in Istanbul. Participation in the study was voluntary. 1000 questionnaires were distributed and in two weeks with a 67 % return rate 672 questionnaires were obtained. 3.8 % of the sample consisted of females and

56.2 % consisted of males, and respondents were highly educated (77 % university graduates).

In this study 70 % of the data set was used for constructing a model (analysis sample) and 30 % of the data set was used for testing the model (holdout sample). For selecting analysis sample we have used random sampling technique with Bernoulli distribution. As a result our analysis sample consisted of 463 observations and holdout sample consisted of 209 observations.

## Results

The aim of this study was to analyze the distinction of the contribution of ethical climate and organizational trust on different levels of organizational commitment. Therefore three dimensions of organizational commitment – affective, continuance, and normative – were first transformed into low, moderate, and high levels of commitment according to their quartile values. Values below 1st quartile were recoded as lower levels, values between 2nd and 3rd quartile were recoded as moderate levels, and values above 3rd quartile were recoded as high levels of commitment. Later series of discriminant analyses were conducted with the purpose of profiling and differentiation of affective, continuance, and normative commitment levels with ethical climate and organizational trust dimensions. The ethical climate scale has nine dimensions and the organizational trust scale has ten dimensions. The analysis sample was used to form the models and the effectiveness of our profile descriptions were tested on the holdout sample

Table I. Results of stepwise discriminant analyses

Dependent variable: Affective commitment							
Step	Variable Entered	Min. D <sup>2</sup>	Wilks' Lambda	F value	df1	df2	p value
1	Creating commitment	0.763	0.626	61.763	1	460.000	0.000
2	Laws and Professional codes	1.141	0.526	46.061	2	459.000	0.000
3	Positive image	1.260	0.507	33.851	3	458.000	0.000
4	Team interest	1.396	0.489	28.047	4	457.000	0.000
5	Considering employees' needs	1.425	0.478	22.856	5	456.000	0.000
6	Objective performance appraisal	1.460	0.470	19.479	6	455.000	0.000
7	Honest and fair business attitudes	1.461	0.459	16.672	7	454.000	0.000
Dependent variable: Continuance commitment							
Step	Variable Entered	Min. D <sup>2</sup>	Wilks' Lambda	F value	df1	df2	p value
1	Personal morality	0.021	0.981	1.677	1	460	0.196
Dependent variable: Normative commitment							
Step	Variable Entered	Min. D <sup>2</sup>	Wilks' Lambda	F value	df1	df2	p value
1	Creating commitment	0.271	0.820	20.836	1	460.000	0.000
2	Team interest	0.290	0.796	11.132	2	459.000	0.000
3	Social responsibility	0.368	0.780	9.393	3	458.000	0.000
4	Company profit	0.409	0.763	7.800	4	457.000	0.000

The results revealed that employees with dissimilar levels of commitment differ in terms of their perceived ethical climate and organizational trust. Furthermore the ethical

climate and organizational trust dimensions that explains these differentiations are distinct for affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Table II. Canonical discriminant functions

Dependent variable: Affective commitment								
Function	Eigen Value	% of variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' lambda	Chi-square	df	p value
1	1.156	99.185	99.185	0.732	0.459	355.414	14	0.000
2	0.009	0.815	100.000	0.097	0.991	4.319	6	0.634
Dependent variable: Continuance commitment								
Function	Eigen Value	% of variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' lambda	Chi-square	df	p value
1	0.019	100.000	100.000	0.137	0.981	8.666	2	0.013
Dependent variable: Normative commitment								
Function	Eigen Value	% of variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' lambda	Chi-square	df	p value
1	0.305	98.759	98.759	0.484	0.763	123.873	8	0.000
2	0.004	1.241	100.000	0.062	0.996	1.755	3	0.625

Table 1 provides the overall stepwise discriminant analyses results after all the significant variables have been included in the estimation of the discriminant functions. This summary table describes that creating commitment, laws and professional codes, positive image, considering employees' needs, objective performance appraisal, honest and fair business attitudes were significant discriminators of affective commitment, and creating commitment team interest, social responsibility and company profit were significant discriminators of normative commitment. However personal morality, the only discriminating variable of continuance commitment was not significant although the overall model and the canonical correlation function were significant. All of the canonical correlation function results can be seen in Table 2.

Table III. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients

Dependent variable:	Affective commitment	Continuance commitment	Normative commitment
Team interest	0.331		0.563
Laws and Professional codes	0.210		
Honest and fair business attitudes	0.272		
Positive image	0.194		
Creating commitment	0.375		0.755
Objective performance appraisal	-0.231		
Considering employees' needs	0.258		
Personal morality		1.000	
Company profit			0.336
Social responsibility			-0.521

As can be seen from the Table 2 first functions, which were highly significant, explained the 99 % of variance in affective and normative commitment. Moreover discriminant function of affective commitment has a high canonical correlation value of 0.732 and 54 % of variance in affective commitment can be accounted by this model. Likewise discriminant function of normative commitment has a moderate canonical correlation value of

0.484 and the model explains the 23 % of variance in affective commitment. However, the discriminant function for continuance commitment was significant but a very weak canonical correlation.

Table IV. Stepwise discriminant analyses of affective commitment for females vs males

Female Respondents							
Step	Variable Entered	Min. D <sup>2</sup>	Wilks' Lambda	F value	df1	df2	p value
1	Honest and fair business attitudes	1.071	0.575	33.422	1	197.000	0.000
2	Team interest	1.761	0.467	31.977	2	196.000	0.000
3	Considering employees' needs	2.039	0.435	21.008	3	195.000	0.000
4	Self interest	2.095	0.414	18.826	4	194.000	0.000
Male Respondents							
Step	Variable Entered	Min. D <sup>2</sup>	Wilks' Lambda	F value	df1	df2	p value
1	Creating commitment	0.624	0.671	30.966	1	260.000	0.000
2	Positive image	0.995	0.607	24.594	2	259.000	0.000
3	Team interest	1.164	0.564	19.105	3	258.000	0.000
4	Laws and Professional codes	1.234	0.537	15.133	4	257.000	0.000
5	Honest and fair business attitudes	1.244	0.512	12.157	5	256.000	0.000

Table V. Canonical discriminant functions of affective commitment for females vs males

Female Respondents								
Function	Eigen Value	% of variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' lambda	Chi-square	df	p value
1	1.377	98.766	98.766	0.761	0.414	172.577	8	0.000
2	0.017	1.234	100.000	0.130	0.983	3.333	3	0.343
Male Respondents								
Function	Eigen Value	% of variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' lambda	Chi-square	df	p value
1	0.886	96.067	96.067	0.685	0.512	172.947	10	0.000
2	0.036	3.933	100.000	0.187	0.965	9.197	4	0.056

Standardized coefficients of the discriminant function are displayed in Table 3 to present the relative contribution of each variable to the relevant models (since the second functions were not significant their standardized coefficients are not given). Team interest, laws and professional codes, honest and fair business attitudes, positive image, creating commitment, and considering employees' needs are positively and only objective performance appraisal is negatively contributing to affective commitment. Team interest, company profit and creating commitment are positively and social responsibility is negatively contributing to normative commitment.

Later in order to assess the predictive accuracy of the models classification matrices were formed. The percentage of the known cases, which are correctly classified indicates the accuracy of the procedure and indirectly confirms the degree of group separation. The hit ratios, proportion of correctly classified cases to the total number of cases, of affective, continuance, and normative commitment models were 65.2 %, 34.3 % and 50.8 % respectively. However the hit ratios obtained from analysis sample may tend to overestimate the power of classification procedure since the validation is based on the same cases used to derive classification functions. Therefore we have applied our discriminant functions to the

holdout sample. The hit ratios of the classification of holdout samples were 63.1 %, 34.3 % and 48.6 % respectively indicating a satisfactory model for explaining affective commitment and average model for normative commitment, yet the model for continuance commitment is not as reliable as the others.

Table VI. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients of affective commitment for females vs males

Dependent variable:	Female Respondents	Male Respondents
Self interest	0.256	
Team interest	0.433	0.375
Honest and fair business attitudes	0.636	0.325
Considering employees' needs	0.391	
Laws and Professional codes		0.262
Positive image		0.164
Creating commitment		0.313

Last, the model for affective commitment was compared for female and male respondents. Discriminant analyses for separate groups are given in Table 4-6. The results revealed while employees with different levels of affective commitment differ in terms of their perceived ethical climate and organizational trust, the ethical climate and organizational trust dimensions that explains these differentiations are distinct for females and males. Variables with highest contribution are honest and fair business attitudes, team interest, considering employees' needs and self interest for females. Creating commitment, positive image, team interest, laws and professional codes, honest and fair business attitudes have the highest contribution for males. The hit ratio of females' model was 67.5 % in analysis sample and 67.0 % in holdout sample and the hit ratio of males' model was 63.5 % in analysis sample and 62.4 % in holdout sample indicating high predictive accuracy.

### **Conclusions**

The results of the study indicate that employees differ in their level of commitment according to their perceived ethical climate and organizational trust. Moreover, affective, continuance, and normative commitment are explained by different dimensions of ethical climate and organizational trust.

Creating commitment, laws and professional codes, positive image, considering employees' needs, objective performance appraisal, honest and fair business attitudes were significant discriminators of affective commitment, and creating commitment, team interest, social responsibility and company profit were significant discriminators of normative commitment. It can be concluded that creating commitment dimension of organizational trust is common for both affective and normative commitment. Employee's feeling of being a part of the organization, feeling pleased to work in the organization, feeling that creativity is encouraged and the organization caring for him/her are discriminating factors for affective and normative commitment. On the other hand, when the employee feels that the organization has laws and professional codes, a positive image and considers his/her needs, has an objective performance appraisal, honest and fair he/she identifies with the organization and feels part of the organization namely he/she is affectively committed. In fact, all these characteristics reflect honesty, fairness, objectivity, legality, predictability and ethical climate which are the main antecedents for affective commitment [24, 37, 38].

However, the organization's being socially responsible, being concerned about the interest of the team as a whole, and making high profits might lead to a feeling of obligation to stay and not leave the organization that is normative commitment. These are the characteristics that are reflected externally whereas the affective commitment discriminating antecedents are more internal process characteristics which are more sincere and transparent for the employees.

When the females and males are compared, honest and fair business attitudes and team interest are the discriminating factors for both genders leading to affective commitment. Self interest and considering employees' needs are more discriminating for females than males, whereas laws and professional codes, positive image and creating commitment are more discriminating for males than females.

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