

The Influence of Organizational Politics on the Organizational Commitment of Employees in Emergency Organizations in Israel

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Abstract

The paper discusses the influence of organizational politics on the organizational commitment of employees from two major emergency organizations (Magen David Adom-MDA, and the National Fire Authority) from Israel. The main hypothesis is that there is a negative influence of organizational politics and the organizational commitment and its three components: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Based on a quantitative research, calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient, all the four hypothesis formulated were validated. In the article are discussed the results and made several recommendations for managers of emergency organizations in Israel.

Keywords: Organizational politics, organizational commitment, emergency organizations, Israel.

JEL classification: M10, M12, M14

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1. Organizational politics

Organizational politics “refers to employees / individuals who are directed towards a targeted goal of promoting their self-interests regardless of the well-being of others within the organization” (Zivnuska et al., 2004, apud Abitbul et al., 2020).

Several studies such as “Drory and Romm, 1990; Ferris, Frink, Beehr and Gilmore, 1995; Ferris and Kacmar, 1992; Ferris and Judge, 1991; Ferris, Russ and Fandt, 1989; Kacmar and Ferris, 1993, Ferris, Fedor, Chachere and Pondy, 1989; Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar and Howard, 1996; Ferris and Judge, 1991”, quoted by Randall et al. (1999) have defined in a narrow manner the concept of organizational politics as “unsanctioned influence attempts that seek to promote self-interest at the expense of organizational goals”. Randall et al. (1999) underlined that “this seems to be the understanding of politics possessed by working people within organizations. When individuals are asked to describe political behaviors, they tend to list actions that are manipulative and self-serving (Ferris and Kacmar, 1992)”. It includes those organizational activities executed by individuals and groups of

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individuals in the context of their organizations with the aim of appropriating and using power, and other resources, to achieve their own individual or group interests and desired results. Consequently, organizational politics includes “concealed means, manipulative behaviors, theft of ideas, finding scapegoats, and all these are designed to serve one’s own goals” (Abitbul et al., 2020).

The study of organizational politics and its various aspects has received much attention for many years. The main focus of the literature has been the negative impact it may have on employees (Miller et al., 2008). Researchers are interested in understanding, for example, how employees feel about the political climate that exists in their organization and whether this feeling is reflected in their performance in the workplace (Bodla & Danish, 2009). Bukhari & Kamal (2015) emphasized that in managers of organizations where employees perceive a higher level of organizational politics need to create and develop a complex system of providing employees with organizational support aimed to keep the emotional commitment of employees at an high positive level. The research of Chang et al., (2012) associated to high levels of organizational politics an intense lack of transparency in organizations for employees influencing negatively their work performance, the quality of their work, their organizational commitment and their work motivation.

High levels of organizational politics relate to lack of transparency and therefore has negative implications on employees’ commitment to their own organization, on their work motivation and subsequently on their performance (Chang et al, 2012). High levels of organizational politics can include a wide range of processes that impair creativity, productivity, fairness, motivation and teamwork (Agrawal, 2013). Such perspectives of the studies mentioned are often linked to terms such as manipulation, illegitimacy, narrow interests, subversion and more. Using improper channels to get special treatment and favors, bypassing the official line of top-down authority to obtain needed resources for their own project, lobbying top-level managers just before they decide about a promotion decision represent the most frequently found types of self-serving behaviors. Such types of actions are contributing greatly to undermine fairness in that organization. Employees who follow proper official rules and procedures usually become unhappy and disgruntled because they perceive unfair distributions of the organization’s resources, including unfair rewards and recognition (Parker et al., 1995). The negative side of organizational politics is more intense during periods of intense organizational change. It is also highly intense in moments of having to make difficult decisions and fewer resources than needed leading to more intense competition among various formal or informal groups within organizations.

However, we emphasize that organizational politics is a much more complex phenomenon and one cannot ignore its positive aspects and the possibilities it presents both employees as individuals within the organization and the organization as a whole (Vigoda-Gadot, 1997). Alongside all the negative aspects organizational politics also includes positive sides as it teaches about a developing organization, a dynamic organization that may have high engagement of its members. We are highlighting that organizational politics have a great potential to get things done

within organizations (Rosen et al., 2006). Organizational politics can also be seen as a fuel that drives individuals and subsystems to participate in processes and decisions made by the organization and advance. Therefore, despite its problematic implications, organizational politics should be seen as an action that it is better to live with it than without it.

2. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment refers to an individual's loyalty or his connection with the organization. According to the most accepted definition, organizational commitment is the "relative power of individual identification with the organization". Many researchers define organizational commitment as "identifying with the organization and as an emotional response to a positive assessment of the work environment, especially when the employee believes in the goals of the organization and its values" (Catania et al., 2009). Bhuian and Menguc (2002) define organizational commitment as "an effective commitment that represents the strong desire of the employee to continue to be part of the organization when he or she face an opportunity to change the workplace".

Two key patterns of organizational commitment can be distinguished: instrumental organizational commitment and normative organizational commitment (Popper, 2004). The model proposed by Popper is derived from the principle of congruence between the individual and his or her organizational environment. The model distinguishes between two patterns of commitment, that are instrumental commitment, and normative commitment. The findings showed that common motivational concepts in academic literature such as satisfaction coincide with instrumental organizational commitment, which is particularly relevant to employees working in the organization.

Normative organizational commitment, however, which in general reflects the volunteers, is a distinct and different concept. Normative commitment uniqueness resides in its focus on the expressions of attitude and behavior of the individual, such as determination, perseverance, etc. These attitudes and behaviors are not fully explained by the key similar models of motivation in organizations. The psychological processes underlying normative commitment are based on personal beliefs and norms, which are primary sources of this kind of commitment. This commitment is strengthened or weakened as a result of the conduct itself and various dynamic organizational processes. From this perspective, the volunteer's commitment to the organization is also derived from his attitude towards the organizational politics that exists in the organization. In general, the volunteer may regard organizational politics as a given situation, which he or she must contain in order to achieve his or her personal goals that refer to values. A volunteer may try to moderate organizational politics and its influence on his or her conduct in the organization, and when a situation happens when the volunteer might conclude that his/ her value goals cannot be achieved, then he or she may stop participating in the organization.

Prior to this type of extreme situation, volunteers may act as a moderating and mediating factor that works with both employees and managers to create an organizational climate based on mutual trust to solve problems and crises. Volunteers examine the resistance factors, diminish the opposing forces by identifying and neutralizing, or by exerting pressure to neutralize the opposing forces, identify the difficulties and address their motives, identify the concealed forces and culture, participate in decision-making processes, and maintain principles of fairness in the process. "Perhaps the most important activity perceived by the volunteers is establishing trust relations between the various hierarchies and those affected by it while providing comprehensive and open information" (Podsakoff, et al, 2009).

The political conduct of managers includes a broad spectrum of instruments that are employed in the struggle for power in the organization. These struggles lead to the formation of coalitions between various parties, when each party seeks to create a conscious advantage and power position over the other, while blaming the other for failure, or taking exclusive credit for success. These struggles may raise arguments, such as the appropriate personnel was not recruited, fatal errors were made in the organization's policy or the performance of the work assignment. Creating such negative climate that has no tolerance for constructive criticism and improvement enhances politics where essence is absent. Politics led to this functional vacuum, as it should provide excuses for the dysfunction. The general approach is that of winners and losers. Such approach directs the discussion to the edges and at personal level and may inevitably lead to retirement or to a desire to quit by various people in the organization. This approach is also contrary to the general financial interest of the organization, which fails to establish a current operating horizon and enjoy activity along the "experience curve."

An example of such a transitional change is described in the study of (Byrne, 2005). The study emphasizes the culture of the managerial role (clear and rational structure with clear division of roles, stability, and rationality), the organization has transitioned to a culture of controlling power of the individual or the group that make decisions and act in a centralized way with political considerations while maintaining its influence.

According to the well-known "commitment model" by Allen and Meyer (1990), Meyer and Allen (1991) there are three components to organizational commitment of employees: affective, continuance, and normative. First, the affective commitment (AC) component refers to the emotional connection, i.e., to the sense of identification and organizational engagement. Randall et al. (1999) define it as "the extent to which the individual feels an emotional tie or bond to the organization. It is expected that individuals would form such ties with firms that are nonpolitical, because in the long run such organizations are most likely to meet their needs". Therefore, organizational politics should have a negative relation with Affective Commitment.

Affective commitment, sometimes called "emotional commitment" refers to an emotional attachment an individual has with the organization as well as

identification with the organization's goals needs and involvement in the organization and is considered a main concern for organizations wishing to retain employees and their subsequent "tacit" knowledge in a knowledge economy that is increasingly based on knowledge acquisition and transfer (Singh et al., 2021). The stronger the employee's emotional commitment to the organization, the employee will remain in the organization because it is his or her will (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019).

Second, the continuance commitment (CC) is a component that refers to a continued commitment an employee feels towards the organization and he will stay with the organization because he needs to do so, as his departure entails losses on his part, such as pensions, financial benefits, etc. Continuance commitment relates to a commitment that is based on the total cost the employee associates with leaving the organization. There is always a perceived cost by an employee about him or her leaving the organization where he or she is working. Continuance commitment refers to "one's decision to remain in an organization due to the potential economic losses that might result from departing. For example, it might be difficult to find a new job with comparable pay" (Randall et al., 1999). Compared to the affective commitment, continuance commitment is based to a lesser extent on the dominating social climate at work and to a much larger extent upon the value of available alternatives, prioritizing economic goals such as salary more than socio-emotional goals, such as a sense of worth, personal dignity and social status at work.

Third, the normative commitment (NC) component refers to employees' feeling and their level of commitment to remain in the organization. Normative commitment is defined as an obligation to remain in the organization. An employee, who feels a strong sense of normative commitment, stays in the organization because he/she believes he/she must do so. This type of commitment is "influenced by the individual's life experience, such as family, culture and values, prior to entering the organization and also to the organizational socialization process he undergoes during his employment" (Meyer et al., 1993). In this process, employees are influenced by the existing organizational culture, its values, desired and not desired behaviors.

In this respect, we point out the fact that commitment is a "force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets" (Meyer et Herscovitch, 2001) and not being therefore linked to extrinsic factors of motivation. Commitment is accompanied by a set of specific mind-sets, basically "desire, perceived cost or obligation to continue a course of action" that are components of the commitment construct. The last proposition of Meyer et Herscovitch (2001) is that "workplace commitments have an explicit or implicit target" such as an entity, or the desired results of a way of acting towards that target.

Several studies such as Cropanzano et al. (1997), Nye & Witt (1993), have found that organizational politics is negatively correlated with organizational commitment.

3. The research methodology

The research question is the following: Is there a negative correlation between organizational politics and organizational commitment of employees in emergency organizations in Israel?

Consequently, based on the literature review, we have formulated the following 4 hypotheses.

H1. We will find a negative correlation between organizational politics and organizational commitment so that the higher the organizational commitment, the lower the organizational commitment.

H1a. We will find a negative correlation between organizational politics and affective commitment so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the affective commitment.

H1b. We will find a negative correlation between organizational politics and normative commitment so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the normative commitment.

H1c: We will find a strong negative correlation between organizational politics and continuance commitment so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the continuance commitment.

The tool used by the researcher to collect quantitative information was a complex questionnaire that was distributed among employees working in emergency organization in Israel. The questionnaire used by this research has five parts: Part I – General background (demographic data); Part II - Organizational Politics, Part III- Organizational Commitment; Part IV. Employees performance; Part V – Motivation of employees.

Part I refers to demographic data of respondents and their organization, such as: 1) year of birth (age), 2) gender (male or female), 3. marital situation (single, married, divorced, widower, other); 4). Name of the organization (Firefighters, Magen David Adom - MDA, police); 5) seniority in the organizations (number of years); 6). Position at work (line employee, junior manager, senior executive; 7). Personal status at work (permanent employee, hourly employee, temporary employee, volunteers); 8. level of education (elementary school, junior high school, high-school, certificate (post high-school), academic degree, special course); 9). If a recent organizational change of your current organization happened (yes, no); 10). Religion (Jewish, Druze, Christian, other); 11. Level of religiosity (religious, traditional, secular), and 12). Place of living (city, kibboutz, moshav, village, other).

Part II of the questionnaire consisted of questions serving for the calculation of an empirical index for measuring perception of political activity (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), referred to as Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS). This study employs the shorter version that is composed of 9 items. The concept of perception of organizational politics was defined as the extent to which the employee assesses his or her organizational environment as political and thus as unfair and unjust (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Reliability level of part II of the questionnaire was good, with Cronbach α =0.89.

For Part III of the used questionnaire, the researcher first used the original version of the Organizational Commitment survey, according to (Allen & Meyer,

1990) having 24 questions, as it follows: for the affective commitment (AC) scale 8 questions, for the continuance commitment (CC) scale 8 questions, and for the normative commitment (NC) scale 8 questions. In the revised version of the original questionnaire, according to (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993), the letter (R) indicates a reverse-keyed item. Scores on these items should be reflected using the following correspondence: 1 = 7, 2 = 6, 3 = 5, 4 = 4, 5 = 3, 6 = 2, 7 = 1, before computing scale scores. This revised version consisting of 18 questions was used in our research.

The sample aimed to reach a minimum of 500 participants. We had received 580 questionnaires back. Unfortunately, we had to reject 109 questionnaires that were missing several answers and made the questionnaires irrelevant for our research. That reduced the number of valid questionnaires to 471, however representing a large sample.

The researcher has friendship and collegial relations with several employees from both organizations: who assisted in distributing questionnaires in their own unit of work all across the state of Israel. The questionnaires were distributed via digital means (email or WhatsApp) by the researcher at each unit of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) and Magen David Adom (MDA), from all across the state of Israel, during month of January- March, 2020, just before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted also the Israeli state.

4. Findings and discussion

First, we have addressed hypothesis H1: We will find a negative correlation between organizational politics and organizational commitment so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the organizational commitment.

In order to examine the correlation between organizational politics and organizational commitment, the Pearson test was performed, and a distinctly moderate negative correlation was found: $r_p = -0.323$, $p < 0.001$ (see Table 1, below).

The results of the Pearson correlation test hypothesis 5

Table 1

		Opol	Obel
Opol	Pearson Correlation	1	-.323**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	329
Obel	Pearson Correlation	-.323**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	329	329

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

These results are indicating that when employees perceive a high level of organizational politics, they are feeling that only a group has most of the power and rewards, and therefore their level commitment towards their emergency organization is decreasing. However, in our research this correlation is quite low, that is confirming partially the hypothesis. The research of Vigoda Gadot (1997) explains this by the fact that if some employees are supported by the organization to achieve their personal interests not being detrimental to the organization, then they do not consider that organizational politics is detrimental to them.

In our research, this is the case of many volunteers who are feeling that their personal needs to serve in emergency organizations are fully satisfied by their activity within that organization. Consequently, they do not perceive the organizational politics power play as necessarily negative, mostly because they are able to achieve their own interests for being volunteers. On the other hand, Vigoda Gadot emphasizes that the work performance is very little influenced negatively for those employees that benefit from the organizational politics within their organizations.

Those results are also in tune with the findings of Bodla and Danish (2009) that there are three major groups of workers that are affected by the same organizational politics in a different way can be identified.

In the case of our research, the first group who is made up of the employees who are part of the group that conduct itself in a political manner or those who are close to the political actors of the organization and who may benefit from this conduct is the group of top executives and some of the line managers.

The second group is made of the employees who do not belong to a group or close to a political actor, but still cooperate with the political activity. This group is represented by a part of employees having seniority and the group of volunteers in emergency organisations mainly in Magen David Adom.

The third group consists of the employees who are not part of the political activity and do not necessarily cooperate with the political activity, or they are affiliated with a failed political actor. This group often suffers from bias and discrimination regarding promotion, wages, etc.

In this type of context, it emerges that one of the manifestations of political behavior and political skills within an organization will be the “actions and tactics used by members of an organization intended to influence other members in order to maximize their interests within the organization” (Vigoda-Gadot & Vashdi, 2012).

Our results are also supported by Beaudoin (2004) that found that intrinsic politics in organizations “influences the performance of the work and the functioning of the employees”. He concluded that managers cannot ignore the existence of organizational politics, and that in order to manage effectively and efficiently within its limits they should learn it and recognize it. Bodla & Danish (2009) argued that organizational politics influences almost every decision made within the organization, both, on one hand, at the level of the whole organization: value creating processes, supporting processes, organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and, on the other hand, at the level of employees themselves.

H5a. We will find a negative correlation between organizational politics (Opol) and affective commitment (AC) so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the affective commitment. In order to examine the Hypothesis H1a about a negative correlation between organizational politics and affective commitment, the Pearson test was performed, and a distinctly moderate negative correlation was found: $r_p = -0.450$, $p < 0.001$, see Table 2, below.

Results of the Pearson correlation test about hypothesis 5a

Table 2

		Opol	AfectiveCommitment
Opol	Pearson Correlation	1	-.450**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	199
AfectiveCommitment	Pearson Correlation	-.450**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	199	199

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

The research results are in tune with (Bukhari and Kamal, 2015) that found that when there are high levels of organizational politics, managers have to provide important organizational support to maintain the affective commitment of their employees such as stimulating collaborative behaviors, provide a lot of feed-back about their performance and equal access to information.

Karatepe (2003) found that perceptions of organizational politics are positively influencing the affective commitment and performance of their employees. He stressed that employees of organizations that encourage them to cope with the challenges of organizational politics, are more productive, while organizational politics and unfair decisions in the workplace negatively impact employee performance.

First, the affective commitment (AC) component refers to the emotional connection, i.e., to the sense of identification and organizational engagement (Meyer and Allen (1991). Emotional commitment refers to an emotional attachment an individual has with the organization as well as identification with the organization's goals needs and and involvement in the organization and is considered a main concern for organizations wishing to retain employees and their subsequent "tacit" knowledge in a knowledge economy that is increasingly based on knowledge acquisition and transfer (Singh et al., 2021). The stronger the employee's emotional commitment to the organization, the employee will remain in the organization because it is his or her will (Al-Jabari& Ghazzawi, 2019).

It is important to point out the fact that commitment is a "force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets" (Meyer et

Herscovitch, 2001) and not being therefore linked to extrinsic factors of motivation. Commitment is accompanied by a set of specific mind-sets, basically “desired cost, perceived cost or obligation to continue a course of action”, that are components of the commitment construct.

Next, we have checked hypothesis H1b about we will find a negative correlation between organizational politics and normative commitment (NC) so that the higher the organizational politics, the lower the normative commitment.

In order to examine the correlation between organizational politics and normative commitment, the Pearson test was performed, and a distinctly strong negative correlation was found: $r_p = -0.524$, $p < 0.001$, (see Table 3, below).

Results of Pearson correlation test about hypothesis 5b

Table 3

		Organizational politics	Normative Commitment
Organizational Politics	Pearson Correlation	1	-.524**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	372	199
Normative Commitment	Pearson Correlation	-.524**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	199	199

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

Consequently, we conclude that Hypothesis 5b was validated and that the more organizational politics is higher perceived by employees of Israeli emergency organizations, the less is their normative commitment. The r^2 is 0. 275, meaning that 27,5% of the decrease in the variable Normative Commitment is explained by the increase of the variable perception of organizational politics.

Normative commitment (NC) component refers to employees’ feeling and their level of commitment to remain in the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1991). Normative commitment is defined as an obligation to remain in the organization. An employee, who feels a strong sense of normative commitment, stays in the organization because he/she believes he/she must do so. This commitment is influenced by the individual’s life experience, such as family, culture and values, prior to entering the organization and also to the organizational socialization process he undergoes during his employment (Meyer et al., 1993) In this process, employees are influenced by the existing organizational culture, its values, desired and not desired behaviors.

Finally, we have addressed hypothesis H5c: We will find a strong negative correlation between organizational politics and continuance commitment (CC). In order to examine the correlation between organizational politics and continuance commitment, the Pearson test was performed, and a very weak correlation

($r_p=0.035$) was found between the variables (see Table 4, below). Therefore, we conclude that Hypothesis 5c is rejected.

Results of Pearson correlation test for hypothesis 5c

Table 4

		Organizational politics	ContinuanceCo mmitment
Organizational politics	Pearson Correlation	1	.035
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.622
	N	372	199
Continuance Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.035	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.622	
	N	199	199

Continuance commitment (CC) is a component of organizational commitment that refers to a continued commitment an employee feels towards the organization, and he will stay with the organization because he needs to do so, as his departure entails losses on his part, such as pensions, financial benefits, etc. (Allen and Myer, 1991). Continuance commitment relates to a commitment that is based on the total cost the employee associates with leaving the organization. There is always a perceived cost by an employee about him or her leaving the organization where he or she is working.

Our research results show that employees in emergency organizations consider that organizational politics they perceive to exist in their organizations has no influence on their advantages such as salary, pensions, benefits. Therefore it is not influencing their commitment to stay and work in their organization. Employees consider that leaving emergency organisations and losing their benefits makes them not being affected by the .political playing in their organization

5. Conclusions and recommendations

There are several recommended actions to company’s managers to be taken in order to reduce political behavior, such as providing open and therefore equal access to all relevant information, stimulating and maintaining collaborative behaviors, and not rewarding political maneuvering. Furthermore, leaders should encourage managers throughout the organization to provide high levels of feedback to employees about their performance. When employees have greater access to information regarding behaviors that are acceptable and desired at work, perceptions of politics are reduced, and work outcomes are enhanced. “High levels of feedback reduce the perception of organizational politics and improve employee morale and work performance” (Rosen et al., 2006).

In addition, increasing worker understanding of organizational policies and procedures related to performance evaluations, rewards, and discipline can aid in reducing the psychological feelings of ambiguity that workers in uncertain environments often experience (e.g., Ferris et al. 1996b; Hochwarter et al. 2006; Vigoda-Gadot&Drory, 2016).

Consequently, our recommendations for managers of emergency organizations in Israel to plan for and implement organizational actions to explain to employees and volunteers the mission, vision, strategy and the organizational values and appropriate behaviors of their organization, the motives of the existing organizational procedures about performance standards, system of rewards and incentives, and discipline in the workplace. We also recommend to managers to apply in an objective manner these procedure in order to increase the trust of their employees and volunteers that they are applied equally and in an equitable manner.

We recommend to managers of public emergency organizations from Israel to make use of two categories of human resource best practices: the first, skills enhancing HR practices, and second, opportunity enhancing practices. They should ensure that the organization has appropriately skilled employees and volunteers by doing comprehensive recruitment, rigorous selection of candidates, and extensive training of both employees and volunteers. From the second category of best HR practices, we recommend their HR specialists and line managers should amplify employee and volunteer motivation applying practices such as developmental performance management, competitive compensation, use of appropriate incentives and rewards, extensive benefits, provide a system for promotion and career development, and increasing job security.

We also recommend managers to use HR best practices for empowering employees to make the best use of their skills and motivation to achieve organizational objectives. Such HR practices are allowing for a flexible job design, extensive use of work teams, providing opportunities for involving employees in the decision-making process regarding their work, increased organizational agility and information sharing by managers for all employees and volunteers.

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