

## COMMUNICATION CLIMATE, WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT – RESULTS FROM AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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**Abstract.** *The actual global economic competition entails considerable challenge in the organizational life. There is an increased interest in identifying the main factors that could predict organizational commitment and performance. The current study aims to examine the relationship between communication climate, work locus of control and various dimensions of organizational commitment such as affective, normative and continuance commitment. Communication climate in an organization is a key determinant of the effectiveness thereof, as it refers to the emotional level of a relationship. In other words, it describes the way people feel about each other as they carry out their daily activities. Work locus of control refers to the extent to which people believe that they are in control of their lives, or to external factors such as chance and powerful others, who are responsible for the events that influence their lives. The organizational commitment is a manifest response to the work groups and the measure of employee attachment towards the organization. It is directly related to the turnover rates, absenteeism, tardiness and individual performance level, with significant impact on the organizational efficiency. The focus of our study is of the variables which are due to the direct impact on the behavior of an employee and on the orientation thereof towards commitment being concentrated on communication climate and generalized perceived control belief within the work groups. The study comprised 91 participants from both public and private sector organizations in Romania. The attendants were invited to answer the following questionnaires: Communication Climate Inventory (Costigan & Schmiedler, 2004), Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector, 1988) and Organizational Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). The study has a cross-sectional and correlation layout, all questionnaires being self-reported. The correlation analysis revealed that locus of control showed a positive relationship with continuance commitment. The results further demonstrate that supportive climate has a significant negative correlation with affective commitment and normative commitment. The implications with regard to theoretical research and organizational practice are also discussed. If the management wishes to increase the organizational commitment, it is wise for it to pay particular attention to the individual particularities and context of the work groups.*

**Keywords:** *organizational commitment; work locus of control; communication climate; affective commitment; normative commitment; continuance commitment.*

## Introduction

The term communication climate refers to the emotional side of a relationship, which does not mean a specific activity, but rather the way people feel about each other as they carry out those activities (Adler, Rosenfeld, Proctor & Winder, 2009). In other words, it is the way in which the people involved in a relationship or in specific context feel about and treat each other.

As a component of organizational climate, communication climate, in terms of employee interaction, is a factor that influences the quality of the work environment and the effectiveness of the organizational functioning.

Gibb (1961) emphasizes the importance of employee interaction, especially the attitude and behavior of managers in their interactions within organizations. He identifies two poles in the climate of communication, defined as supportive and defensive climate. The supportive climate encourages the subordinate, whereas the defensive climate puts the individual on defend, reacting defensively to the words and tone of the speaker in their interactions.

The organizations with supportive climate are characterized by work participation, free and open exchange of information, and constructive conflict management. Within organizations with defensive climates, the employees keep things to themselves, work by taking care of their actions and have low morale (Costigan & Schmiedler, 2004).

Hence, the findings of this study reveal that the literature oriented towards the examination of communication climate can be applied in an organizational context, with effects on organizational commitment.

The term work locus of control refers, according to Spector (1988), the personal behavioral tendency represents the extent to which individuals tend to attribute what happens to them to internal factors (e.g. skills, efforts, perseverance) or to external factors (e.g. chance, other people, divine intervention). Internality is the perception of control that employees have over various outcomes in the workplace. An externality is a perception that work outcomes are controlled by luck or by powerful others.

Rotter (1966) found that personalities who tend to be external are generally more susceptible of and submissive to the direct influence of others. Personalities who tend to be more internal are not as susceptible of and submissive to the influence of others.

Employee locus of control is important because it has been linked to a number of job performance criteria. As work locus of control is thought to measure this generalized perceived control belief in the workplace, it is important to understand the variability of its impact on the dimensions of organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment can be defined as “the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). It is a manifest response to the work groups and the measure of employee attachment towards the organization. While the linkage between job perception and employee commitment among organizations has been widely studied, less attention has been paid to the effect of communication climate and work locus of

control, both directly on the organizational commitment. The low level of organizational commitment has negative effects, such as increased turnover rates; higher absenteeism and tardiness; poorer performance with a significant impact on organizational efficiency (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky, 2002). Allen and Meyer (1991) proposed three types of organizational commitment: continuance commitment (cost), normative commitment (obligation), and affective commitment (attachment).

Affective commitment (attachment) refers to a psychological attachment to the organization (i.e., individuals stay with the organization because they want to). In organizational commitment literature, the affective organizational commitment was defined as the extent to which an employee identifies himself/herself with the organization (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993).

Continuance commitment (cost) refers to costs associated with leaving the organization and the perceived lack of alternatives (i.e., individuals stay with the organization because they need to). Employees who are essentially bound to their organization on the basis of continuance commitment stay in their jobs because they feel that what they have invested in the organization (e.g., time, energy) would be "lost" if they left their current employer or, because they assess their job options outside the organization as being limited.

Normative commitment (obligation) refers to a perceived obligation to remain with the organization (i.e., individuals stay with the organization because they feel they should) (Coleman, 1999). Employees with a high level of normative commitment believe they have the duty and responsibility to continue working for their current employer.

These findings, taken as a whole, indicate the importance of accounting the individual and the contextual factors that might influence organizational performance. Given the importance of organizational commitment as an organizational outcome variable, the investigation of the relationship between work locus of control, communication climate in the workplace and commitment creates a practical implication by a managerially actionable factor in the effectiveness of organizational functioning. Thus, the organizational commitment dimensions depend on the form of the relationship between communication climate and work locus of control. Specifically, we propose the following hypotheses:

The following hypotheses are formulated:

H1. The higher work locus of control will be positively correlated with the high level of continuance organizational commitment;

H2. The supportive organizational climate will be positively correlated with the high level of organizational commitment.

## Methods

### *Sample and data collection procedure. Measures.*

The study participants received an e-mail from the researcher with a short description of the study and with the request to cooperate. Absolute anonymity was stressed and guaranteed in the introduction. Via a link at the bottom of the e-mail, the employees accessed the online questionnaire. The respondents had 14 days to reply. To increase the response, a reminder was sent out a week later.

All variables used in this study were assessed through online surveys using self-report measures. In order to measure the participants' Communication Climate parameters, Work locus of Control Scale and Organizational Commitment, we adapted three existing scales that have been well established and have consistently demonstrated good psychometric properties in a number of studies.

Communication climate inventory (CCI) developed by Costigan and Schmiedler, (2004) was used in the present study. This instrument operationalized the notions of defensive and supportive communication climates. The 36 questions of the CCI are presented in a Likert response format, with three factors corresponding to each of the 12 factors.

The design of the CCI is such that the lower the score, the higher the degree to which either climate (defensiveness or supportiveness) exists. The lowest possible score on either dimension is 18, while the highest possible score is 90. Tests of CCI's internal reliability show coefficients ranging from .80 to .97, which are generally considered to be very satisfactory (Costigan & Schmiedler, 2004).

Spector (1988) operationalized the concept of locus of control in a work environment by developing the work locus of control scale (WLCS) for job-related work settings such as promotions, salary increases, and disciplinary measures. Items are rated on a six-point Likert response scale. A higher global score represents a more external locus of control.

According to the international norms (Spector, 2006), the estimate of the Romanian WLCS is 46.5. The scores higher than this level show an external locus of control, whereas the scores lower than 46.5 indicate an internal locus of control. An internal control orientation refers to the belief that the outcomes are a result of the purposive action, whereas an external control orientation reflects the belief that chance, luck, fate, or powerful others are responsible for the outcomes.

Findings indicate that differences exist between those reporting internal control orientations and those reporting external control orientations. Results indicated that people who report an internal control orientation also reported higher levels of relational satisfaction with coworkers, top management, and perceived influence. Externals report significantly lower levels of relational satisfaction with supervisors than internals. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the overall locus of control scale shows coefficients ranging from .71 to .89 (Chen & Wang, 2006).

The three dimensions of organizational commitment (affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment) were assessed using Meyer et al. questionnaire (1993). A six-item scale measures affective commitment (e.g. I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization). The normative commitment scale includes six items (e.g. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now). The measure of continuance commitment contains six items (e.g. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization).

Each item was linked to a six-point Likert response scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (6). The scores for two of the items measuring affective commitment should be reversed.

The three-component model of commitment is important because, although all three forms of commitment decrease the likelihood of individuals leaving an organization, there are different antecedents and consequences associated with each form of commitment. Consequently, managers should be aware of the manner in which their employees are committed to the organization and should attempt to foster affective commitment in their employees (Coleman, Irving & Cooper, 1999). Coefficient alpha values ranged from .77 to .88 for affective commitment (ACS), from .65 to .86 for normative commitment (NCS) and from .69 to .84 for continuance commitment (CCS) (Fields, 2002).

### ***Demographic information and recoding***

Thus, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the relations between work locus of control, communication climate and organizational commitment, the present study assesses this moderating effect by considering the three forms of organizational commitment (affective, normative and continuance commitment), and by using a measure of locus of control adapted to a work setting. The present study has a cross-sectional and correlation layout, all questionnaires being self-reported.

The study comprised 91 participants: 30 males and 61 females aged between 24 and 61 years old, coming from both public (33 participants) and private sector (58 participants) organizations in Romania, with ages of work structured in three clusters (below 6 years – 34 participants, between 7 and 15 years – 38 participants, above 15 years – 19 participants).

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses*

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of the variables.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics Work locus of control, Communication climate, Organizational commitment (N = 91)**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
WLCS_total_score	63.84	9.50
Defensive climate	57.68	11.41
Supportive climate	44.06	10.70
Affective commitment	27.19	7.05
Normative commitment	24.41	8.67
Continuance commitment	27.19	7.32
Aggregate commitment	78.81	19.02

These findings reflect inter-correlations among work locus of control and the three dimensions of organizational commitment. The correlation between work locus of control and continuance commitment was  $r=0.293$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $N=91$ . People reporting a higher external locus of control orientation reported significantly higher levels of continuance commitment.

The aim of this study was also to examine the relationship between organizational commitment and the two components of communication climate calculated by Pearson's correlations. The supportive climate was negatively correlated with organizational commitment ( $r=-.442$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $N=91$ ). The results indicate that an organizational supportive climate reported significantly higher levels of organizational commitment. On the other hand, there were no statistically significant relationships between defensive communication climate and organizational commitment.

Table 2 presents the comparison between gender demographic values and organizational commitment (affective, normative), and also between gender and communication climate (defensive). Non-significant relationships have been found between gender and work locus of control, continuance commitment, and supportive climate.

The mean of affective commitment was significantly higher for males ( $M=30.933$ ,  $SD=6.684$ ) than for females ( $M=25.36$ ,  $SD=6.52$ ). The mean of normative commitment was significantly higher for males ( $M=27.96$ ,  $SD=8.64$ ) than for females ( $M=22.67$ ,  $SD=8.21$ ). The mean of defensive climate was significantly higher for females ( $M=59.40$ ,  $SD=11.23$ ) than for males ( $M=54.16$ ,  $SD=11.13$ ).

**Table 2. Group statistics: demographic comparative analysis Gender vs. Organizational Commitment and Communication climate (N = 91)**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Affective commitment	Male	30	30.93	6.68
	Female	61	25.36	6.52
Normative commitment	Male	30	27.96	8.64
	Female	61	22.67	8.21
Defensive climate	Male	30	54.16	11.13
	Female	61	59.40	11.23

This study considers that the secondary educational stage covers middle school, high school, vocational studies, whilst the tertiary educational stage includes college and postgraduate education.

Table 3 presents the comparison between educational background as demographic values and work locus of control, organizational commitment (affective, normative and continuance) and communication climate (defensive and supportive).

The mean of work locus of control was significantly higher for the secondary stage (M=68.06, SD=5.895) than for tertiary stage (M=62.80, SD=9.96). The mean of organizational commitment was significantly higher for the secondary stage (M=100.72, SD=12.456) than for tertiary stage (M=73.41, SD=16.31). The mean of defensive climate was significantly higher for the tertiary stage (M=58.54, SD=12.41) than for secondary stage (M=54.16, SD=4.47). The mean of supportive climate was significantly higher for the tertiary stage (M=45.00, SD=11.32) than for secondary stage (M=40.27, SD=6.63).

**Table 3. Group statistics: Demographic comparative analysis Educational level vs. Work locus of control, Organizational Commitment and Communication climate (N = 91)**

	Educational stage	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
WLCS_total_score	Secondary stage	18	68.06	5.89
	Tertiary stage	73	62.80	9.96
Commitment_total_scores	Secondary stage	18	100.72	12.45
	Tertiary stage	73	73.41	16.31
Defensive climate	Secondary stage	18	54.16	4.47
	Tertiary stage	73	58.54	12.41
Supportive climate	Secondary stage	18	40.27	6.63
	Tertiary stage	73	45.00	11.32

The demographic variables are also considered. The results indicated that secondary educational level expressed external locus of control and higher commitment scores. The tertiary educational stage had higher defensive and supportive communication climate and reported believing they might be able to influence their organizational environment.

## Discussion

The present study was designed to explore the relationship between work locus of control, communication climate (supportive climate and defensive climate) and organizational commitment (affective, normative and continuance commitment). Further, the impact of different demographic variables (including gender and education) on organizational communication climate was also explored.

The significant positive correlation between work locus of control and continuance commitment shows us, in other words, that external LOC is associated with high continuance commitment. An external locus of control reveals the perception that work outcomes are controlled by luck or faith, whereas continuance commitment involves recognition of the costs associated with leaving the organization. These findings confirm the expected outcomes of hypothesis H1, which stated that work locus of control is positively correlated with continuance organizational commitment. The results drive similar conclusions to those of other studies, that the employees with more external locus of control are more likely to have high continuance commitment. These results help us to further understand the complex relationship between individual differences and psychological reactions to a specific change (Chen & Wang, 2006; Munir & Sajid, 2010).

The second hypothesis predicted that higher supportive organizational climate will report higher levels of organizational commitment. The results of the present research proved the stated hypothesis H2. Organizations with supportive environments encourage employee participation, open exchange of information, alternatives and solutions in the problem-solving process. Supportive communication climate is composed of professionalism, empathy, spontaneity, problem orientation and description (Costigan & Schmiedler, 2004).

On the other hand, based on the general model of workplace commitment, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) defined commitment to a change as “a force (mindset) that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative”. In other words, “employees can feel bound to support a change because they want to, they have to, and/or they ought to” (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002, p.475).

Therefore, a supportive organizational climate conducts to a low commitment to change. In terms of managerial implications, the findings suggest that managers should try to adjust the supportive climate work conditions by using different methods in order to obtain the desired commitment behaviors related to the work group target, to determine what the employee is committed to or what the employee is within the organization.

The impact of demographic variables (gender, educational background) and of the type of organization variable was assessed in the context of communication climate, work locus of control and organizational commitment. The results of the present research also provided further support for general predictors of organizational commitment. This was accomplished by examining the comparison of the three factors of organizational commitment with gender. The mean of affective and normative commitment was significantly higher for males than the mean of affective commitment



for females. Moreover, the defensive climate was significantly higher for females than the defensive climate for males.

The job model attributes the gender differences in work commitment to differences in the workplace constraints and opportunities of men and women. A possible reason for women's higher level of defensive work commitment and for men's higher level of affective and normative work commitment to change is the motivational job characteristics: working women often need to set work and family demands, often lack support from their organizations and have fewer opportunities on the labor market. The defensive climate, where the employees keep things to themselves and work by taking care of their actions draws more specific conditions for women to adapt. These pertinent work environment conditions affect the employees' job and organizational commitment.

Non-significant relationships have been found between gender and work locus of control, continuance commitment, and supportive climate. The present findings revealed that educational background, clustered in two stages (secondary and tertiary), can predict a relevance with work locus of control, as a specific personality variable.

Locus of control is influenced by the educational atmosphere, enjoyed a higher level of control, displayed a higher level of motivation on their jobs and grasped more opportunities for mutual learning and professional exchange. Therefore, managers should incorporate the educational levels of workers in a selection process to put quality people in leadership positions; consider selecting potential employees who are considered internals. (Tillman, Smith & Tillman, 2010).

Organizational commitment, considered as the strength of the individual's identification with and involvement in a specific organization, comprises the belief in and acceptance of organizational scope and values, and a desire to continue as a membership in the organization. The educational background results compared with organizational commitment denote a higher relationship with the secondary stage than with the tertiary stage. Gibb (1961) stated that employees are influenced by the communication climate in the organization.

Findings indicate that reports of organizational climate dimensions are indeed related to the educational background. More specifically, the individuals who reported a tertiary stage of studies identified a defensive organizational climate, whereas the respondents who reported a secondary school background identified a supportive climate. In terms of education, significant differences existed as regards communication climate: educated people were found to work in a defensive climate by displaying evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, certainty, while individuals with secondary education displayed equality, spontaneity and problem orientation to concrete (Gibb, 1961).

Currently, employees expect a fair and humane working environment and want to be treated as an individual. In order to develop a durable organizational environment and to avoid conflicts, the work groups should mainly develop their managers in terms of relevant communication and organizational commitment skills.

## Conclusion and implications

This research carries implications to objectively explore the communication climate, work locus of control and organizational commitment. It can be used as a valuable guide to identify the patterns of the dimensions implied in the commitment in the organization's environment and it guides managers as to how to adapt the assessment and development programs to create a climate of trust, spontaneity, and empathy.

Work locus of control, as the individual's tendency to believe that people control events in life or that such control resides elsewhere, and the communication climate dimensions will enhance the degree of employee participation in the organizational processes and their level of identification with the organization. The results are important because they bring to light a notable landmark of the management studies. The authors acknowledge that these dimensions couldn't simply influence the organizational commitment without taking into consideration the many different contexts of an organizational relationship.

The study has a cross-sectional and correlation layout, all questionnaires being self-reported. This could be a potential limitation because the cross-sectional data usually does not reflect any ongoing transformations that might affect the relationships between variables, and it cannot provide causal explanations.

It is also important to acknowledge that the conclusions presented in this thesis are based on a limited number of participants from the Romanian work environment, the sampling being made from different organization types and dimensions. The gender distribution of the study sample emphasizes the resultant implications. The sampling process ended in the distribution of 61 female and 30 male participants, therefore possible reasons for this uneven distribution between male and female participants should be acknowledged, along with how this uneven distribution might influence the study findings.

The results of the present study should be further confirmed in the process of finding other types of organizational change, as well as within other organizations.

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