

Investigating the Relationship between Professional Ethics and Managers' Organizational Commitment

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ABSTRACT

Adherence to ethical principles and standards among teachers and administrators can lead to positive outcomes. Undoubtedly, moving toward achieving organizational goals and ultimately comprehensive progress depends on increasing professional ethics within organizations. Having professional ethics is considered a competitive advantage and one of the most important factors for success in any organization. This study aimed to examine the correlation between organizational ethics and professional ethics with organizational commitment among managers of knowledge-based companies. The research method was descriptive correlational, and the statistical population comprised all managers of knowledge-based companies in Isfahan province. A total of 70 participants were randomly selected based on Morgan's table. An online questionnaire was used to collect data, which included demographic information, the Petty Professional Ethics Questionnaire, and the Allen and Meyer Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient test with SPSS-27 statistical software. The research findings indicated a significant relationship between professional ethics and organizational commitment among managers.

Introduction

The word "ethics" is a plural form of the word "character," meaning traits or dispositions. Ethics is a branch of philosophy referred to as moral philosophy or ethics. It encompasses a set of internal and spiritual qualities of humans, and according to some scholars, it can also refer to actions and behaviors that stem from these inner dispositions. Simply put, ethics includes the correct understanding of what is right, followed by correct actions and the avoidance of incorrect ones. Ethics is essential for a healthy society. Educators and administrators in organizations always pay attention to ethics due to its effectiveness and positive individual, organizational, and social outcomes. Stable values and ethics in the organizations of society serve as essential tools for addressing social issues and represent the core of organizational practices and moral education, which is crucial for managing distinct organizations (Neyzazari et al., 2013). In the past, financial outcomes were significant reasons for establishing a good company. However, in recent years, ethics, work quality, and job satisfaction have increasingly been recognized as standards of development related to the performance and sustainability of business organizations.

One of the most important variables for the success of any organization is adherence to ethics. Professional ethics refers to the general ethical norms established within a specific professional community to address ambiguous ethical situations, ultimately preventing and avoiding ethical harm. In fact, professional ethics is a rational thinking process aimed at determining organizational values. Professional ethics is considered a fundamental pillar across all professions, including management. The increasing complexity of business competition and the strict application of effective social norms position ethics as a key element in international learning and development. Good behavior elicits appreciation, admiration, affection, and interest, which in turn act as reinforcing forces to ensure continuity (Ahmadi, 2010). Employees in ethical organizations prefer this environment, as an ethical workplace reduces unpleasant interactions among colleagues, increases job satisfaction, and improves psychological relationships between coworkers (Kazemi et al., 2011). Additionally, many people become concerned about ethical issues when deciding on important matters such as hiring candidates or making orders. Organizations' neglect of work ethics and weak adherence to ethical principles in dealings with workers and external stakeholders can create problems for organizations and raise questions about their legitimacy and actions. Employees prefer to work in professional organizations because an ethical environment stemming from professionalism diminishes unpleasant factors in teamwork and enhances job satisfaction and appropriate relationships among colleagues (Arasteh and Jahed, 2010).

One of the fundamental ethical foundations in society is organizational commitment. For this reason, this concept is fundamentally flawed in all ethical theories. A significant factor in persuading employees of any organization to continue working in highly stressful and tense conditions is organizational commitment (CARLOS et al., 2014). Organizational commitment reflects the degree of alignment and belonging of an individual to the organization and is determined by three factors: a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, and a willingness to exert high effort for the organization (Leach, 2005). As an assessment indicator of employees, organizational commitment influences nurses' intention to change jobs, leave their jobs, absenteeism, conflicts, job stress, and clinical performance (Naghneh et al., 2017). Employees with organizational commitment demonstrate greater effectiveness in their work compared to non-committed employees. According to researchers' studies, factors such as job security and managerial decision-making have been recognized as influences on organizational commitment (Taravian, 2006).

Given the importance of the subject, this research was conducted to examine the relationship between professional ethics and organizational commitment among managers, highlighting the significance of this relationship for these two important organizational variables. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: Is there a significant relationship between the dimensions of professional ethics among managers and the dimensions of organizational commitment?

1. Theoretical Foundations

- **Professional Ethics**

Initially, professional ethics was used to refer to work ethics and occupational ethics, and today some authors use the term in its original sense. There are various definitions of professional ethics: Ethics is the behavioral norms commonly observed among the members of a profession. Management ethics refers to the conduct of individuals during professional activities. Ethics is one of the moral disciplines that studies occupational

relationships.

In all these definitions, the perception of individual privilege or individuality is connected to professional ethics concerning responsibilities and morals. This is because organizational identity and participation in busy workplaces are more complex than individual jobs. Therefore, organizational ethics has a broader definition than occupational ethics. Thus, defining professional ethics requires an analytical approach to both ethics and profession.

What is the difference between a profession and a job? Is professional ethics the same as business ethics? To answer these questions, it is essential to consider the significance of ethics and the definition of a profession.

Ethics means character, nature, and temperament, relating to the inner self of an individual and being understood in comparison to "people" through insight. Ethics has also been defended as a set of inner and spiritual qualities arising from human characteristics; thus, it has been said that ethics can be defined based on its outcomes. The continuation of a particular method indicates that this method has deep-rooted inner significance in human life and spirit, which is referred to as ethics. The domain of ethics is considered individual behavior, but individual behavior, when it transforms into social behavior, becomes collaborative ethics that influences culture and society, which can be recognized based on this influence. Kant believes that moral value does not arise from profit or benefit, but rather stands in opposition to profit.

A profession, in common usage, refers to a job, occupation, or trade. The colloquial concept of a profession differs significantly from a job and salary. Paying attention to the difference between these two words can be beneficial. Now, professional ethics can be conceptually analyzed after discussing ethics and profession. The aforementioned points demonstrate that professional ethics is not merely a custom or characteristic of professional individuals. While occupational ethics is a branch of societal culture involving adherence to certain occupational norms and the values of foundational rules governing society, it often relates to the prevailing culture. Conservative policies of professional ethics represent a branch of applied ethics that addresses moral issues within professions. Thus, professional ethics is defined as the moral responsibilities of individuals and organizations in performing their professions.

- **Organizational Commitment**

Organizational commitment, particularly within the realm of organizational behavior, is an important topic in management that has gained attention recently. Not only have studies directly related to commitment and its outcomes been developed, but commitment has also been considered in most studies that are not based on commitment itself. Commitment refers to loyalty and the position an individual holds, along with a positive and absolute feeling towards something (Feldman, 2011).

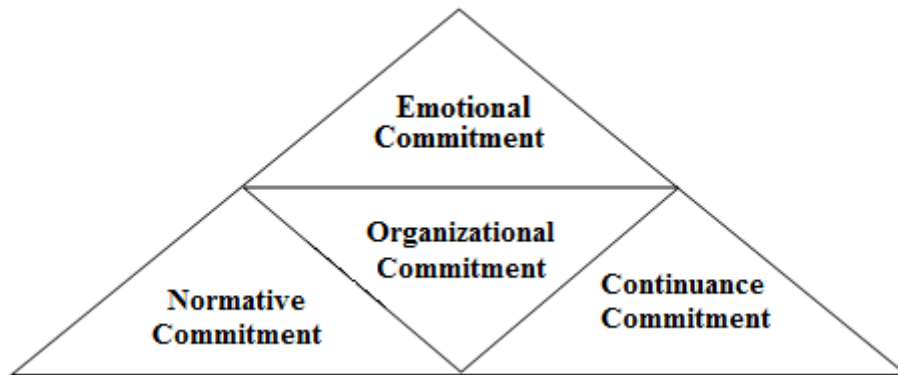
Buchanan defines commitment as "an emotional and zealous attachment to the values and goals of an organization." Commitment means the individual's attachment to their role in relation to the organization's values and goals for its own sake. Organizational commitment signifies emotional protection and attachment to the goals and values of an organization because of the organization itself, distancing itself from its instrumental aspects.

Committed employees are generally more eager to maintain significant records and keep their jobs for a long duration compared to less committed employees. Furthermore, committed employees are more inclined to exert greater effort in fulfilling their duties and achieving better performance. In summary, there is substantial evidence indicating that employees are committed (Desler, 2000).

From another perspective, a committed organization represents a type of attachment and belonging to the organization. Sheldon defines commitment as a kind of inclination and orientation towards the organization that connects the individual's identity to it. This is a state in which an individual regards their personal goals within the organization as representative of themselves and hopes to remain a member of that organization.

There is an inverse relationship between commitment, absenteeism, and employee turnover. The most comprehensive research on organizational commitment and its dimensions has been conducted by Allen and Meyer. These two researchers define organizational commitment as "the psychological state that reflects an employee's attachment (affective commitment and continuance commitment) and the necessity of engaging with the organization (normative commitment)." Meyer and colleagues are pioneers of multiple sessions on this topic. The emotional dimension, the continuance dimension, and the normative dimension are the three dimensions of organizational commitment that Meyer and colleagues have established.

Figure 1: Different Dimensions of Organizational Commitment from Allen and Meyer's Perspective



- **Emotional Commitment**

The first type of organizational commitment, referred to as emotional commitment, relates to the extent of employees' willingness to remain in the organization. When an employee is emotionally committed to their organization, they do not desire to leave, feel that they play a useful role within the organization, and are satisfied with their work conditions. Employees who are emotionally committed feel valued in the organization and act as ambassadors for it, making them significant assets for organizations. Indicators of emotional commitment include:

- Willingness to achieve organizational goals
- Willingness to contribute to the company's progress
- Motivation for effective performance
- Participation in team meetings and discussions (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Allen and Meyer concluded that various experiences that provide physical and psychological comfort to personnel lead to emotional commitment. These experiences include protective support from the organization. Thus, personnel who feel increasingly protected alongside the organization will have a strong sense of accountability for this organizational protection (Meyer, Allen & Larissa, 1998).

- **Normative Commitment**

This type of commitment occurs when an individual feels they should stay in the organization because they have responsibilities towards it. Employees with normative commitment feel they must remain in their organization, but not because they necessarily need to. Normative committed employees feel that leaving the organization would have disastrous consequences for them and feel guilty about exiting. The reasons for this feeling vary, but often these individuals are concerned that their departure would create a gap in knowledge or skills, increasing the workload on their colleagues. Such feelings can negatively impact the performance of employees working within the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

- **Continuance Commitment**

This type of commitment relates to the extent of employees' feelings of necessity to remain in the organization. In continuance commitment, employees are reluctant to leave the organization, but this reluctance stems from a need to stay. In other words, continuance commitment arises due to the costs associated with leaving the organization. The reasons for employees' need to remain in organizations vary, but the primary reason is often the lack of alternative job opportunities and salary.

2. Research Methodology

- **Study design and statistical population**

The current study was descriptive and correlational in nature. The target population of this research consisted of

all managers of knowledge-based companies in Isfahan province who were active in 2022. Based on the information obtained from the Planning Department of Isfahan province, the total number of managers of knowledge-based companies at the provincial level is 87.

- Sample Size and Sampling Method

Given the dispersion of companies across the province, simple random sampling was utilized, selecting 70 individuals as the sample according to Morgan's table. The criteria for inclusion in the study were a willingness to participate in the research and more than one year of experience in management. The exclusion criteria were time pressure for the company (due to heavy workload) and unwillingness to respond to the survey. Participants were asked to sign a consent form and were assured that their information would remain confidential by the research team.

- Research Tools

To assess the research variables, a demographic questionnaire and the following self-report tools were used. The demographic characteristics evaluated included: gender, marital status, educational level, age, and years of work experience. The primary data collection tool in this study was a questionnaire. For assessing professional ethics, the Petty (1993) professional ethics questionnaire was employed, and for evaluating organizational commitment and its dimensions, the Allen and Meyer (1990) questionnaire was used.

This questionnaire, created by Petty (1993) to measure professional ethics, consists of 50 questions and 4 subscales: attachment and interest in work (questions 1-16), perseverance and seriousness at work (questions 17-29), healthy and humane relationships in the workplace (questions 30-43), and collective spirit and participation at work (questions 44-50). The scoring of the questions is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" [1] to "strongly agree" [5]. Items 5, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 24, 25, 36, 40, 41, and 44 are scored in reverse. The minimum and maximum scores obtainable on this questionnaire are 50 and 250, respectively. A higher score indicates a higher level of professional ethics. In the study by Enayati and colleagues (2014), the reliability of this questionnaire was estimated at 0.81. The reliability coefficient of this questionnaire in the current research, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.946 (Petty, 1993).

- Organizational Commitment Questionnaire

To measure the variable of organizational commitment, the Meyer and Allen (1991) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire was used. This tool consists of 24 items and has 3 subscales: emotional commitment (8 items), continuance commitment (8 items), and normative commitment (8 items). The questions related to each dimension are separate from the other two dimensions, and the total score is derived from the sum of all three subscales. Responses were indicated using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Additionally, questions 20, 17, 11, 10, 6, 3, and 2 were scored in reverse. The reliability for the overall questionnaire was reported as 0.84, while for the dimensions, emotional commitment was 0.86, continuance commitment was 0.79, and normative commitment was 0.75 (Jafarzadeh, 2005).

- Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS-27 statistical software. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were described using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage. Data analysis appropriate to the research questions used descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) and inferential statistics with Pearson's correlation coefficient. A significance level of 95% was considered ($p < 0.05$).

- Descriptive Statistics

A total of 70 individuals participated in this study, with an average age of 39.67 years (± 7.74). The demographic characteristics of the participants are as follows: 78.57% of participants were male and 21.43% were female. More than half of the participants were married (70%), while the rest were single (30%). The majority of participants held a bachelor's degree (91.43%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

		Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	Female	15	21.43	21.43
	Male	55	78.57	100
Marital Status	Single	21	30	30
	Married	49	70	100
Education	Bachelor's	60	85.71	60
	Master's	6	8.57	66
	Doctorate	4	5.72	100
Total		70	100	-

Inferential Statistics

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between the dimensions of professional ethics and organizational commitment.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients Between Dimensions of Professional Ethics and Dimensions of Organizational Commitment

		Affective Commitment	Continuous Commitment	Normative Commitment
Work Commitment	r	0.621	0.614	0.543
	Sig	0.000	0.000	0.000
Diligence and Seriousness	r	0.627	0.525	0.544
	Sig	0.000	0.000	0.020
Healthy and Human Relations at Work	r	0.675	0.625	0.648
	Sig	0.000	0.027	0.000
Collective Spirit and Participation in Work	r	0.452	0.548	0.710
	Sig	0.000	0.000	0.000

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient test indicated a positive and significant relationship between the dimensions of professional ethics and organizational commitment. This result is significant at the 99% level.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the correlation coefficient test showed a positive and significant relationship between work commitment, diligence and seriousness at work, healthy and human relations in the workplace, and collective spirit with affective, continuous, and normative commitment. These findings align with the research conducted by Khajeh Hosseini et al. (2019), Azizi Nejad (2018), Mohsesi et al. (2017), Nayyati et al. (2014), Alirahimi et al. (2018), Hayati and Kanigo (2012), and Yousof (2001). However, they are not consistent with the findings of the study by Salehi and Dadgar (2017). Numerous studies have shown that an ethical work environment can be a significant factor in employees' strong commitment to an organization.

The results indicate that with an increase in work commitment among individuals, a positive aspect of work nature is created, leading to a change in individuals' mindsets, as they view colleagues and supervisors positively, resulting in job satisfaction. Furthermore, the results suggest that adherence to professional ethics by managers increases organizational commitment among them. Additionally, having a collective spirit in an organization means that managers should operate based not on individual opinions and decisions but on collective suggestions and feedback to enhance commitment. Overall, it can be concluded that more attention should be given to the ethics of managers in their private dealings since their manner of interaction and behavior is rooted in their professional ethics, which significantly impacts the satisfaction, commitment, and advancement of the organization.

Inspired by professional ethics, individuals decide to perform their professional duties correctly and ensure that they do not harm employees while paving the way for organizational improvement (Dehghani et al., 2013). If employees believe that they are treated in accordance with the organization's agreed-upon rules and experience a collaborative environment where they feel free to interact and assist each other, they will deeply trust the goals, regulations, and managers, and they will wholeheartedly feel committed to their organization (Alirahimi

et al., 2018). Creating an ethical atmosphere enhances the morale of managers and employees, improves organizational commitment, facilitates employee training, and helps retain them in the workplace. Ultimately, establishing an organizational climate contributes to the quality of patient care outcomes and the overall success of the organization (Adams et al., 2016; Shirey, 2005).

Low work ethics can affect an individual's attitude toward jobs and organizations, impacting individual, group, and organizational performance. The prevalence of professional ethics in an organization can significantly help in reducing tensions and successfully achieving goals. In health-related organizations, if managers exhibit appropriate ethics, they provide better and more comprehensive services to clients. Given the importance of professional ethics and its influence on various aspects of the organization, it is recommended that managers emphasize ethics at work and be the first to adhere to ethical principles, serving as role models for others. In-service training can be helpful in familiarizing employees with ethical principles and foundations in the workplace and in fostering professional ethics and organizational ethics.

Support from managers at various levels for employees who adhere to ethics can enhance their commitment to the organization, increasing their motivation to strive for success and reducing their desire to leave their jobs.

This study has limitations that should be noted. Firstly, the study relied on self-reported measures. Another limitation was the difficulty in recruiting managers of both genders. Finally, respondents were asked about a sensitive topic (ethics), which may have led them to respond in a socially desirable manner. Despite these potential limitations, this research has several strengths, including the use of validated questionnaires for data collection, which have been translated into Persian and validated by Iranian researchers.

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