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The Relationship between Organisational Communication and Organisational Climate in Universities

Baris Uslu
Hasan Arslan

Introduction

Recent changes such as mass education, globalization, commercialization, managerialism and internationalization in higher education area have resulted in universities becoming entrepreneurial organisations. In modern universities, the major human resource is academics who contribute to entrepreneurial structures by different activities within teaching, research and service in their institutions. Therefore, academics are expected to fulfil many duties and responsibilities such as generating innovative teaching methods, bringing external grants and funds, joining international scholarly networks, leading collaboration with industrial and governmental institutions, contributing to the social well-being by using their expertise, etc (Welch, 2005). For actualization of these duties and responsibilities which affect the success of universities directly, the most critical determinant is the work environment of academics within their universities (Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure & Meek, 2013).

The prior factor influencing academics' opinions related to the efficacy of their working environment is their general perceptions about their organisations, which is called 'organisational climate' (Özdede, 2010). The organisational climate in universities is composed of factors related to autonomy, cohesion, trust, pressure, support, recognition, fairness, innovation and collegiality (McMurray & Scott, 2013; Schulz, 2013). The perceptions of academics about these variables are influenced by the quality of organisational communication in terms of the opportunities to share ideas, emotions, requests and desires among people in universities throughout open and sincere communication channels in multiway (Arabacı, 2011). Therefore, the effective communication systems in universities can motivate academics to accomplish their duties and responsibilities with a higher performance by contributing the formation of more collegial and positive climate in universities.

Although these associations between organisational communication and organisational climate have been emphasized in many studies (Martin & Uddin, 2006), there are limited studies about the relations between communication and

Abant İzzet Baysal University, Turkey, there was no significant difference in organisational climate in terms of superior-subordinate relationship according to academics' gender (t=-.09; p=.93) and administrative status (t=.43, p=.67). After these findings, Balcı-Bucak (2002) stated that insufficient relationship between academics and administrators in the faculty can cause negative climate perception among academics, which affects their scholarly productivity and contribution to the institution.

Gizir & Gizir (2005) developed Inventory of Communication Analysis in Academic Context, and carried out validity and reliability analyses. The purpose of this inventory is to explore factors which negatively influence communication in universities. Firstly, they composed 53 items for the inventory in 10 sub-dimensions: *Poor Communication*, *Individualism*, *Inadequate Exchange of Scientific Knowledge*, *Lack of Motivation*, *Alliances*, *Administrative Issues*, *Lack of Common Goals*, *Criticism*, *Introvert Characteristics of the Department*, *Departmental Atmosphere*. Secondly, the inventory was presented to some academics from Educational Administration & Planning, Curriculum & Instruction and Statistics for expert opinions, and then some corrections were made to the inventory in the form of 5 Points Likert-Type. Finally, the inventory was applied to 1000 faculty from 7 universities in Turkey, and 480 valid questionnaires were received for statistical analysis. After obtaining quantitative data, they used LISREL for Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the inventory, and they found good fit indices (x^2/df=1.39) for 10 factors structure with 36 items; reliability coefficients varied between .67 and .88. Finally, Gizir & Gizir (2005) measured the lowest mean in ($\bar{X}$=1.16=[9.31/8]) in Alliances and the highest mean ($\bar{X}$=3.22=[9.67/3]) in Criticism. Taking into account that this inventory contains only factors which affect communication processes in academic mediums negatively, they found that interactions with criticism, problems based on administration, the general atmosphere in the department and negative motivator speeches are the most powerful factors in communication at universities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Supportive climate comprises multi-directional communication channels for open and sincere interactions among administrators and employees; healthy climate emphasizes the existence of effective communication networks in organisations. Especially in organisations with intensive human relations like educational institution, organisational climate reflects the internal and external relationship processes, work methods and physical structure, the web of communication channels, staff's identities and authority usage styles (Balci-Bucak, 2002; Karadağ et al., 2008). In universities as the most complex educational organisations, effective communication initiatives can provide sharing organisational vision and common

goals among units, informing stakeholders about ongoing processes and different operations, exchanging opinions between senior and junior members, establishing collegial discussion platforms and forming interdisciplinary cooperation.

Therefore, well-functioning organisational communication networks in universities contribute to the creation of a positive climate as more open, sincere, collegial, supportive, participative, democratic, reassuring and transparent (McMurray & Scott, 2013). Moreover, alternative communication channels not only facilitate collegial sharing but also expedite the interactions between academics and students, so that academics can assist the development of their students more efficiently as well as the advancement of their colleagues' academic careers. As a result, a positive climate with effectual communication in universities favorably influences academics' intention to stay, commitment to their institutions, participation in decision-making processes, taking responsibility for organisational practices, collaborative and interdisciplinary studies, and work performance and job satisfaction (Arabacı, 2011; Schulz, 2013).

Additionally, the authors, in reviewing literature, accessed a limited number of empirical research which evaluates the relationship between organisational communication and climate in universities (Alipour, 2011; Arabacı, 2011; Balcı-Bucak, 2002; Gizir & Gizir, 2005) whereas many studies emphasize the association of communication and climate in organisations. Therefore, the authors readily admit that it requires further empirical study, using various research methods in different sample groups, to examine the level of the relationship between organisational communication and organisational climate in higher education institutions. It is also possible to ask how communication and climate affects each other mutually. It is the authors' next task to address these questions.

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