



THE RELATIONSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONAL CORRUPTION WITH ORGANIZATIONAL DISSENT AND WHISTLEBLOWING IN TURKISH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to analyze the relationship between organizational corruption, organizational dissent and whistle-blowing in schools. 193 teachers, who worked at primary and secondary schools in Turkey, participated in the study. Measures of organizational corruption, organizational dissent, and whistle-blowing were used. Data were analyzed with correlation and regression analysis. Findings revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between organizational corruption, organizational dissent and whistle-blowing and that organizational corruption predicted organizational dissent and whistle-blowing. The results suggest that organizational dissent and whistle-blowing are two main techniques that teachers use to resist organizational corruption in schools.

Keywords: *Organizational corruption, organizational dissent, whistle-blowing.*

INTRODUCTION

Studies on organizational corruption have expanded at an astonishing rate in recent years due to the growing number of scandals both in public and private sector organizations (Kayes 2006). In fact, there are over 22 million web-pages related to organizational corruption on the Internet and this number increases daily. Likewise the 2010 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) published by Transparency International (TI), which rates companies from highly clean (10) to highly corrupt (0), shows that nearly three quarters of the 178 countries in the index score below five. The results clearly reflect the seriousness of the problem. But, the debate on corruption is not new. Indeed, corruption has been pervasive in almost all states throughout history. For example Kautilya, a famous Indian political philosopher, discussed the principles of governing the state and included the problems of corruption in a manifesto entitled *Arthashastra* (Science of Polity) in the fourth century B.C. (Aguilera & Vadera 2008). The problem of corruptive behaviors of public servants forced administrators to take various actions to prevent corruption in Athens and Susa city-states (Hanbury 2004). Apparently, corruptive behaviors were common among public administrators and public servants in ancient Rome and Babylon (Palmier 1983). Others have argued that giving and taking bribes in public administration and in adjudication was one of the determinant causes of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Mumcu 1969), where it was illegal to offer a bribes to public officials and for public officials to accept bribes (Çadırcı 1997, p. 123).

Based on historical precedent, one can assume that corruption continues to be pervasive in contemporary organizations including public schools. But, with a few exceptions (e.g. Waite & Allen 2003; Heyneman 2004; Rodal & Mendoza 2004) corruption has received very little focused attention in the education literature despite the increasing interest afforded to corruption in other disciplines. For example, sociological and political works on corruption have increased in recent years (Wilson 1966; Peters & Welch 1980; Johnston 1986; Fackler & Tin 1995; Welch & Hibbing 1997; Seligson 2002; Alt & Lassen 2003; Anderson & Tverdova 2003; Warren 2004; Redlawsk & McCann 2005). Corruption has also

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received considerable attention from researchers who study management and organizational practices (e.g., Caiden & Caiden 1977; Berkman 1983, 1992; Werner 1983; Stapenhurst & Langseth 1997; Davis 2004; Johnson & Sharma 2004) as well as psychologists (e.g., Darley 2005). This does not mean that corruption has received no attention in education. It is possible to locate several studies dealing with the corruption in educational organizations. But in these cases it seems to be a by-product rather than a focus of the study (e.g. McCluskey 2005; Hallak & Poisson 2007).

Hence, there is a greater need to focus on how corruption in educational settings relates to other workplace behaviors. Two such behaviors are organizational dissent and whistle blowing. Indeed, studies on the functions of organizational dissent and whistle-blowing indicated that both variables play a crucial role in the fight against corruption in organizations (e.g. Keenan 2000; De Maria 2008; Uys 2008; Mansbach & Bachner 2010). In addition, other studies have revealed that whistle blowing reduced the rates of unethical behaviors in organizations, including fraud and misconduct (Eaton & Akers 2007; Pascoe & Welsh 2011). There also is empirical evidence demonstrating a clear relationship between whistle blowing and corruption in public sector organizations in South Africa (Mbatha 2005). Miethe and Rothschild (1994) suggested that whistle blowing might help detect and control organizational misconduct. Similar findings can also be seen in organizational dissent literature, with several researchers claiming that organizations can benefit from the type of corrective feedback that dissenting employees provide (Hegstrom 1995; Kassing 2006; Redding 1985). So, previous literature indicates that organizational corruption ought to relate to organizational dissent and whistle blowing. In particular, whistle blowing and organizational dissent may be potential factors that reduce the rate of organizational corruption within organizations. However, the relationship between these variables has yet to be examined in detail in the educational context. There are few studies dealing with teachers' dissent (Zoraloğlu *et al.*, 2004) and whistle blowing in educational institutions (Vinten 1999). Yet, these studies do not directly focus on the relationships between organizational corruption, organizational dissent and whistle blowing in schools. Therefore, currently we do not know how organizational corruption relates to organizational dissent and whistle-blowing in the educational context.

Organizational Corruption

Corruption has been evaluated as “a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, occurring as it takes on various forms and functions in differing contexts” (Luo 2004, p. 121). Doig and Theobald (2000, p. 6) define corruption as “the public official, appointed or elected, who uses his/her authority illegitimately or illegally to advance his/her own interests”. There are two different types of corruption in social life. The first type consists of giving bribes or gifts to public servants for specific purposes by some individuals or organizations. The second type includes civil servants demanding bribes from individuals or organizations (Klitgaard 1998). Johnston (1994) mentions that both forms of corruption are dangerous, illegal, unethical and illegitimate for developing and developed societies and economies. Additional corruption definitions exist outside the public arena. For example, Argondona (2003, p. 255) suggests that corruption occurs “when a manager or employee exercises a certain power or influence over the performance of a function, task or responsibility within a private organization or corporation.”

In terms of the scope of the present study, the definitions of corruption mentioned above are too broad, as a more precise definition of organizational corruption is warranted. Sayed and Bruce (1998) define organizational corruption as “any illegal conduct or misconduct involving the use occupational power for personal, group or organizational gain”. However, Waite and Allen (2003) claim that organizational corruption is related to culture. Hence, Waite and Allen think that it is more than financial benefit. Therefore other benefits can come into play, like social acceptance and maintaining positive relationships with corrupt managers. Waite and Allen (2003) also argue that organizational corruption consists of abusing of position or public power for individual, collective or organizational benefit. This form of

culture is defined as the “culture of corruption” by Schein (1985). For example, a teacher who thinks that ‘going to class on time’ is an ethical principle and responsibility may adopt a ‘going to class late’ orientation if the principle of ‘going to class on time’ is not being embraced in his or her school (Balci et. al., 2009).

Schools could be the place for corruptive behaviors enacted by school administrators and teachers. Because of their position, school administrators and teachers hold and use public power (Balci et. al., 2009). Hence, it is possible that that organizational corruption may be common among school administrators and teachers (Tanaka 2001). Some common corrupt behaviors in school settings include getting presents from students in exchange for good grades, giving grades based on students’ race, culture, or social class, forcing students to adopt the teacher’s values, disclosing private information about students, abusing students sexually or discriminating against them in some way, making students buy certain publisher’s books or the teacher’s own materials, using the school’s materials for one’s personal gain, and ignoring colleagues’ troubling behaviors (Heyneman 2004).

In sum, based on the literature, organizational corruption in educational arena could be defined as the school administrators and teachers working in public or private educational institutions use of their occupational power to gain financial or social benefits, as well as their efforts to treat their co-workers or students in a despotic, unfair, and unjust manner.

Organizational Dissent

Organizational dissent has been studied comprehensively in recent years (e.g. Kassing 1997, 1998). It has two parts; one of which is to feel distanced from one’s organization and the other is to determine how best to communicate disagreement about organizational policies and practices (Kassing & DiCioccio 2004; Redding 1985). Organizational dissent results from dissatisfaction with current practices and entails advocating practices that differ from the organizational status quo. Graham (1986) considers dissent as a principled action and argues that some employees in the workplace protest and attempt to change the organizational status quo because of their conscientious objection to current policy or practice. Therefore, dissent requires open protest and voicing objection, becomes inherently adversarial, and predominantly involves issues of principle (Kassing 1997). Hence, dissent can be defined as a “particular form of employee voice that involves the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices and policies” (Kassing 2002, p. 189). There are several organizational events that trigger the organizational dissent. The most common ones are employee treatment, organizational change, decision making, inefficiency, role-responsibility, resources, ethics, performance evaluation and preventing harm (Kassing & Armstrong 2002). Nevertheless these events alone are not enough for workers to express their contradictory opinions to management. Graham (1986, p. 34, *cited in* Kassing 2002) argues that once the worker becomes aware of the contradictory opinions, “he or she weighs the perceived seriousness of the issue, the degree of personal responsibility tied to the issue, and his or her possession of the necessary skills and resources to act.”

The studies on organizational dissent show that there are several ways of expressing dissent. Kassing (1998) conceptualized the expression of organizational dissent as articulated, latent or displaced. Articulated dissent involves “expressing dissent openly and clearly within organizations to audiences that can effectively influence organizational adjustment”. Latent dissent occurs when employees want to express their opinions but lack sufficient avenues to effectively express themselves. So, they become frustrated and resort to expressing their contradictory opinions and disagreements aggressively to ineffectual audiences across organizations. Displaced dissent “entails disagreeing without confronting or challenging and involves expressing dissent to some external audiences (e. g., non-work friends, spouses or partners, strangers, and family members) but not the media or political sources sought by whistleblowers” (Kassing & Avtgis 1999, p. 103).

Studies concentrating on organizational dissent indicate that employees choose to express articulated dissent when they possess lower levels of verbal aggressiveness, have an internal locus of control, communicate effectively with their managers, hold higher positions in the organizational hierarchy, and have comparatively higher degrees of self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Kassing 1998; Kassing & Avtgis 1999, 2001; Kassing 2000; Kassing & Armstrong 2001). Other studies have found that a high correlation exists between articulated dissent and job security and between articulated dissent and greater prospects for alternative jobs (Cannings 1992; Farrell and Rusbult 1992). Organizational identification (Kassing 2000), work experience (Kassing & DiDicuccio 2004), organizational self-respect (Payne 2007), organizational burnout syndrome (Avtgis and et al. 2007), organizational communication (Sprague & Ruud 1998) and organizational justice (Kassing & McDowel 2008; Goodboy & et al. 2008) have also been found to be correlated with the organizational dissent expression. Studies on the consequences of the dissent propose that dissenters can be punished or reinforced depending on the organizational climate (Graham 1986; Hegstrom 1990). It must be mentioned here that the possible effects of the dissent on the dissenters as an agent or on the whole organization are not known comprehensively, yet.

Whistle-Blowing

Whistle-blowing is also one of the most comprehensively examined organizational processes in past few decades (e.g. Truelson 1989). It is defined as “unauthorized disclosure of organizational wrongdoing to those who are perceived to be in a position to take action” (Uys 2008, p. 904). As an organizational process, it involves at least four elements: the whistle-blower, the complaint, the party to whom the complaint is made, and the public organization against which the complaint is lodged (Near & Miceli 1985). Whistle-blowing can take two forms which include ‘internal whistle-blowing’ and ‘external whistle-blowing’. While internal whistle-blowing consists of reporting to superiors inside organizations, external whistle-blowing includes disclosing wrongdoing outside organizations to the media, lobby groups, public authorities and regulators (Dworkin & Baucus 1998). Studies indicate that whistle-blowing involves basically the expression of dissent to external audiences (Dozier & Miceli 1985; Near & Jensen 1983). It was found that employees either blow the whistle overtly (his/her identity is known to the public) or covertly (his/her identity is not known to public). Some whistle-blowers commonly use hidden letters, telephone conversations, faxes or e-mail to express their critical opinions (Aktan 2006). Studies on whistle-blowing within administration literature usually take two different approaches. The first approach focuses on how whistle-blowing can enrich the ethical life of organizations (e.g. Brooks 1993; Miceli & Near 1994). The second approach involves examining the influence of whistle-blowing on fraud. For example, major determinants of whistle-blowing on less serious fraud were identified in several studies (e.g. Keenan 2000). In addition, other studies also revealed that whistle blowing decreased fraud in organizations (Eaton & Akers 2007; Pascoe & Welsh 2011).

As a conclusion, it can be said that organizational corruption might be related with organizational dissent and whistle-blowing. The basic assumption of the present study is that the more corruption that employees perceive to be occurring in their organizations the more likely they will be to express dissent and whistle-blowing within their organizations. As it was mentioned before, schools are the contemporary organizations where corruption, dissent and whistle-blowing may exist together. This research was carried out in schools. A study on teachers would provide considerable data about the prevalence of corruption, dissent and whistle-blowing. In addition, with the current study it was expected that the data would reveal the magnitude of relationships between corruption, dissent and whistle-blowing. The present research thus empirically examines the relationship between organizational dissent, whistle-blowing and organizational corruption in schools. To explore these relationships, two research questions are posed.

RQ₁: Is there a significant relation between organizational corruption, organizational dissent and whistle-blowing in schools?

RQ₂: To what extent is the variation in organizational dissent and whistle-blowing explained by organizational corruption in schools?

METHOD

Sample

A sample of one hundred and ninety-three ($N = 193$) teachers participated in this study. Respondents worked for a variety of schools in Ankara and İzmir in Turkey. Approximately 78% of the sample was female and 22% male. The ages of the teachers participating in this study were as follows: 59 participants were between 25-30, 57 between 31-35, 41 between 36-40, 18 between 41-45, and 18 were over 46. About 90% of the participants have bachelor of arts/science degrees and 10% have master degrees. Approximately 78% of the sample was married and 22% was single. Job tenure of teachers taking part in this study ranged from 1 year to 25 year (1-5 year was 31; 6-10 year was 78; 11-15 year was 52; 16-20 year was 13; and 21-25 years was 19).

Instrumentation

Three survey scales were used in the study. Organizational corruption perceptions of the participants were measured using the instrument designed by Balcı and *et al.* (2009). The Scale for Organizational Corruption consisted of 22 items. Example items include: "Administrators use their occupational power for personal gain at this school" and "administrators discriminate against teachers and students according to their ethnicity at this school". Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree). The scale has one single factor which explained 49% of the variance. Alpha value was .95 and item-total correlations ranges between .94, 1 and .94, 4. In addition, KMO value was calculated as .88 and it was seen that Bartlett value was significant ($p < .05$).

Whistle-blowing was measured using the instrument designed by Özdemir (2010), which includes 5 items. Examples of the items include: "I report organizational wrongdoing at this school to the media"; "I report organizational wrongdoing at this school to non-governmental organizations, such as teachers unions". Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree). The total variation explained by the single-factor scale was 60%, with an alpha value of .87 and item-total correlations ranges between .73, 6 and .78, 7. In process of developing the scale, KMO value was calculated as .81 and also it was seen that Bartlett value was significant ($p < .05$).

Organizational dissent was measured using the instrument designed by Özdemir (2010). The procedure followed while developing the scales is as following; firstly the researcher has prepared an item pool for the scale based on the conceptual basis and the related studies (Kassing, 1997, 1998). Then 15 experts in the field of management and organization were asked to examine the item pool for content validity. Finally, draft form was composed of 12 items. 104 high school teachers participated in the pre-application studies. Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree). One of the example items for this instrument was "I object to my superiors directly when I disagree with them". Total variance explained by the scale was 54%; item-total correlations ranged between .34 and .62; Cronbach alpha coefficient was .85. In addition, KMO value was calculated as .85 and it was seen that Bartlett value was significant ($p < .05$).

Statistical Analysis

Pearson r was used for the analysis of the first research question and simple regression was used for the analyzing the second research question.

RESULTS

Pearson correlation statistics were computed to see if significant relationships existed between the variables of interest. Descriptive statistics including the arithmetic means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the all scales as well as and the correlation coefficients between the variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations between variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Organizational corruption	50.59	18.10	1**		
2. Organizational dissent	39.41	10.18	.45**	1**	
3. Whistle blowing	9.35	4.06	.30**	.72**	1**

Note: **Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

As seen in Table 1, there is a moderate relationship (.45) between organizational corruption and organizational dissent. There is also a moderate relationship (.30) between organizational corruption and whistle blowing. Considering the results obtained, the dependent variable of organizational dissent has the highest degree of relationship with the independent variable of organizational corruption. Considering the second research question involved the use of simple regressions. The results of which appear in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis to predict organizational dissent

Variable	β	T	p
Constant		13.41	.000
Corruption	.252	6.82	.000

R = .45 R² = .20 F_(1,191) = 46.54 p = .000

As seen in Table 2, the independent variable organizational corruption explains 20% of the variance in organizational dissent. Considering standard regression coefficients, this result indicates that organizational corruption is a significant predictor of organizational dissent.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis to predict whistle blowing

Variable	β	T	p
Constant		6.98	.000
Corruption	.068	4.32	.000

R = .30 R² = .09 F_(1,191) = 18.72 p = .000

As seen in Table 3, the independent variable organizational corruption explains 9% of the variance in whistle blowing. Considering standard regression coefficients, this result indicates that organizational corruption is a significant predictor of whistle blowing. Hence, these all findings clearly imply that organizational corruption predicts organizational dissent and whistle blowing to some degree in schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that (a) organizational corruption exists in Turkish schools to some degree according to the views of teachers who participated in the survey, (b) corruption in schools is correlated with dissent and whistle blowing and, (c) corrupt practices or behaviors within an organization predict organizational dissent and whistle blowing. These results are consistent with the previous literature that suggests that whistle blowing and organizational dissent are related variables with unethical

organizational practices within the organization (Eaton & Akers 2007; Kassing 2006; Miethe & Rothschild 1994; Pascoe & Welsh 2011). As it can be appreciated, corruption in organizations is a form of unethical conduct. The present study reveals that some organizational members resist unethical conduct including corruption within their organizations by expressing dissent and practicing whistle blowing. Indeed, some researchers argue that whistle blowing plays a crucial role in the fight against corruption in organizations (e.g. Keenan 2000; De Maria 2008; Uys 2008; Mansbach & Bachner 2010). So, the present research has supported this argument. In addition, Zoraloğlu *et al.* (2004) found that some teachers resisted various school policies including unethical behaviors of school administrators.

This study is also consistent with the literature indicating that whistle-blowing might enrich the ethical life of organizations (e. g. Brooks 1993; Miceli & Near 1994). In fact, the present study shows that the resistance mechanisms including whistle blowing and dissent are triggered by corruptive behaviors in organizations. Keenan (2000) showed that there is a negative relationship between whistle blowing and fraud. In other words, as the occurrence of whistle blowing increases some unethical conduct including fraud decreases. The findings of this study are consistent with earlier findings, indicating that dissent and whistle blowing can play a crucial role in fighting against corruption in schools. The reason why some teachers resist corruption can be explained with the concept of organizational citizenship which is defined as 'psychological attachment of organization members to their organizations' (O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). The workers who have high degrees of attachment to their organization might be expected to resist all kinds of unethical practices within organizations including corruption.

LIMITATION AND IMPLICATION

Although the current study carried out in Turkish schools and produced some interesting results, some of its limitations must be mentioned. First, because the focus of the study was to analyze the relationships between various variables, the sample size was restricted with a relatively small group (N=193). In further research, it is suggested that it would be useful to study larger groups in order to strengthen the possibility of generalizing the findings. Indeed, it would be interesting to examine corruption and dissent at different school levels, such as primary schools and secondary schools. It would also be interesting to see whether public or private teachers react in similar ways. In addition, more than ¾ of the respondents were women teachers in the present study. Based on this data, it could be assumed that over representation of the woman in the study could have influenced the results. Therefore, there is a need for extra studies which specifically focus on the effects of gender on perception of corruption, organizational dissent and whistle blowing. And lastly, it must be mentioned that schools are the organizations where children are educated for specific purposes. As a very specific and vulnerable group children should be protected from the damaging effects of the corruption. Because they are main target of the education, it is possible that they perceive the corrupt behaviors of school principals or teachers. So, it might be suggested that children could be the target population of future studies of organizational corruption, dissent and whistle blowing.

This study has several implications for school principals and teachers who are concerned with the ethical administration of schools. First, principals must be aware that if there is considerable dissent and whistle blowing occurring, this may signal that something is wrong at a given school. Therefore, they must attend closely to the dissent expressions of the teachers to create a healthy and effective school climate. Parallel with this suggestion, if teachers want to work under an ethical administration, they must resist unethical conduct and express dissent and whistle blowing when confronted with corruption.

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