

Full Length Research Paper

Exploring organizational indifference: Creating and validating a measure

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The aim of this research is to explore and identify dimensions of organizational indifference and to provide a measure for measuring indifference levels in organizations for the first time in management community. Organizational indifference is a state of organizational employees in which success of an organization is not a matter for its employees and they work just for salary. To explore this state, we interviewed 32 employees of the research organizations, advertising companies, schools, public organizations and universities. By analyzing qualitative data, we found five themes for organizational indifference as follows: indifference towards manager, indifference towards organization, indifference towards clients, indifference towards colleagues and indifference towards job. We translated themes to variables and prepare a conceptual and operational framework (5 dimensions, 14 element, and 33 indicators) for organizational indifference, and for determining content validity, it was sent to 30 management consultants and experts (Appendix A). At the second stage, for determining construct validity of our measure, we established a correlation between this measure and three organizational standard measures, including "organizational commitment", "organizational turn over" and "organizational identity". The results confirm the construct of our measure.

Key words: Apathy, organizational indifference, qualitative research, text analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Identifying the employee's problems and providing mechanisms for overcoming them is one of the critical functions of a manager because this practice is directly related to promotion of productivity. In other words, recognition of employee's motivation problem is of the great importance for improving performance and productivity in organizations. Individuals play an essential role in development of organization in today's variable and challenging environment. Many authorities believe that applying human resources in a strategic way is of potential power for meeting the organizations needs. It also provides the organization with competition advantage from the viewpoint of intellectual, social and human capitals (Nahpiet and Ghoshal, 1988). Organizations are tools to coordinate group efforts for realizing certain

objectives, which is outside individual capacity, power and authority. An organization can be considered to have two main parts:

1. Human side of the organization, which includes people who are running different activities of the organization in the different capacities, such as employee's experts, managers, etc.
2. Material side of the organization, which is divided into different parts and elements such as the equipment and machinery, raw material, financial potentials and information.

The ratio of these parts is dependent upon major and basic variables such as the "organization's operation", "organization objectives" and "organization environment". Despite the importance of the organization's material body and its role in realization of organizational goals; if the human resources lack enough motivation for the job,

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activity and engagement in line with achieving the goals, organization will lose its dynamicity and base (Zavareh, 1994). Silence and despondency of the workers or employees towards the fate and organization's plans, and lack of effective understanding between employees and management must be assumed as an alarm for decline of organization's performance which in turn will hurt the whole society. One of consequences of ignorance to human resources (HR) is a phenomenon called "indifference in organization". Although there are scattered studies in this regard, no measure had yet been compiled to measure it. Therefore, considering indifference and its dimensions among employees is a very crucial problem for the managers and authorities of an organization. There is no standard questionnaire for measuring organizational indifference in the contemporary literature. In this paper, we will conceptualize and operationalize organizational indifference, and then, we will construct a measure (a questionnaire) for it which can be used as a measurement instrument.

Research problem

We hear the phrases every day: "That is not my job". I cannot help you; talk to my boss". These are signs of organizational indifference (Keefe, 2003). Employee's indifference toward the organization's problems and difficulties is the problem of many organizations. Managers react to this problem in various ways; some believe in employees training; and others finding no way remain ignorant, and inexperienced managers do not notice it at all. Indifferent employees will gain a negative approach toward work and life; they will face declining of job satisfaction and increase of absence rate (Robbins, 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In some cases, isolation and escaping the risky situation are the most logic way of encountering life failures. Isolation takes an unwise aspect and leads to separation of isolated person from realities and reappearance of wishes, hopes and willing. Also, indifference abolishes the interests; individual tries to escape disappointed factor or factors; s,o facing the exciting reaction, he or she remains indifferent to his or her fate or the obstacle outwardly (Ahmadvand, 1982).

Indifference happens when one loses hope to accomplish his/her goals and tries to pull away from source of his/her disappointment. Such phenomenon is the characteristic of those who have repetitive and monotonous jobs, often giving in to the reality that there is no hope for improvement and progress. A manager should keep in mind that wrangling, coming up with reasons, a return to childhood, becoming accustomed and indifferent, are all the result of inability and failure which can point to existence of problems (Rezaian,

1999). The indifferent forget the laugh and cry, and possess no interest at all. They find no difference between the past and present and future (Naghbiyan, 1988). Here is the typical cycle: when people begin a new job, whether they are promoted or newly hired, they usually come into the position with great enthusiasm. They are excited about all the opportunities, the people they will work with, and the goals they will accomplish. The problem is, over time, their attitudes slowly begin to change. Eventually, enthusiasm moves out, and organizational indifference moves in (Kvale, 1983). Organizational indifference occurs when your employees no longer care about the company's success. They are simply working for a salary package, doing only what it takes not to get fired, and not looking for opportunities that will help organizational turnover (Keefe, 2003). Goldner recognize that if regulations and laws are not institutionalized and are considered as part of internal behaviors of the employees, they encourage indifference. In other words, employee's performance will be at minimum satisfactory level (Naghbiyan, 1988). Characteristics of an indifferent individual are as follows:

1. Indifferent person misses personality and takes negative position, when reacts to others.
2. Indifferent person does not believe that the works done are indicators of the characters.
3. Indifferent individual feels null physically, bodily, mentally and sentimentally (Robbins, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on exploratory mixed methods, that is, a kind of research strategy for collecting, analyzing and combing qualitative and quantitative data. It is used to understand the research problems while being conducted. Qualitative research is conducted first; then a quantitative method is applied based on qualitative data. Qualitative research is applied extensively in social sciences, applied sciences, management and planning. In these methods, the individual's viewpoints under study are in valued and the researcher attempts to know them and interact with the research subjects. In qualitative method, the talks and observable conducts of the people are used to collect main data (Arabi and Parsian, 1997). Guba and Lincoln (1994) introduce four paradigms for the qualitative research: positivism, realism, critical theory, and constructivism. Interpretive paradigm is our paradigm in this research.

Interpretive paradigm

Interpretative social sciences may be searched in the works of German sociologist, Weber; and the German philosopher, Dilthey (Mirzayi, 2006). This paradigm approaches the research in an inductive approach and begins the research in real world, where the phenomenon under-study happens not in laboratory world in order to present one's opinions about that special phenomenon. This paradigm is contrary to positivism which possesses a deductive approach; it starts the study with a theory and tests it in experimental world (Danaeefard, 2004). The relation between researcher and the phenomenon under-study is more different to that of positivism paradigm. The researcher enters the social

Table 1. Interviewee's categories based on their gender, education level and profession.

| Women | Men |
|---|---|
| Diploma- Administrative affairs | Diploma- employee |
| Diploma- Service clerk | Diploma- employee |
| Diploma- Secretariat clerk | Diploma- Financial expert |
| Diploma- Chief of secretariat clerk | Graduated- employee |
| Diploma- Chief of supervision group | Graduated- Financial professional |
| College diploma- secretary | Graduated- Financial expert |
| College diploma- teacher | Graduated- employee |
| Graduated- Financial expert | Graduated- Chief of administrative affairs |
| Graduated- Vice president of the school | Post graduated- Chief of research affairs |
| Graduated- School principal | Post graduated- Financial professional |
| Graduated- teacher | Post graduated- Financial professional |
| Graduated- Clerk of issuing invoice section | Post graduated- Chief of currency supervision group |
| Graduated- Supervisor of planning unit | Post graduated- Manager of resources supply office |
| Graduated- advertizing clerk | PhD- Physician |
| Graduated- advertizing clerk | |
| Graduated- advertizing clerk | |
| Graduated- Support clerk | |
| PhD- Professor | |

environment and changes into a social cast in order to realize internal viewpoints (Glaser and Strauss, 2002). Data collection methods are different in interpretive and positivism paradigms. In premier, the researcher uses a qualitative methodology to collect knowledge from real experimental world (not from laboratory).

Our method in the first stage is explorative interview. Interview is among data collection instruments which provide the user with possibility of direct contact with interviewees. So, researcher can evaluate understandings, interests and testable wishes more profoundly. On the other hand, interview makes it possible to consider complex subjects, to pursue responses, to find reasons and to ensure the understanding the question from the interviewee side (Sarmad et al., 1998). Kvale (1983) defines interview in qualitative research as a method for gathering description of interviewees from real world and interpretation of the phenomenon under-study. We constructed a protocol for interview. The process of compiling and applying qualitative research interviews contains four steps as follows:

- i. Defining research problem
- ii. Compiling the interview protocol
- iii. Selecting the interviewees
- iv. Conducting interview (Danaeefard, 2004).

In the second stage of our research, we measured of our measure (questionnaire of organizational indifference) based on statistical procedures.

Compiling the interview protocol

In this process, a protocol is compiled in which subjects to be asked questions about are prepared. In this protocol, we decided to introduce ourselves, explain the necessity of conducting interview and provide a general definition for indifference. Then, the interviewee is asked whether he or she had observed this phenomenon (among the colleagues) or in a more cautiously about himself or herself. In fact, we start the interview with an appropriate background. We also attempt during the interview to lead the

interviewee along with explaining the indifference dimensions.

Selecting the interviewees

We invited the members of various organizations from diverse levels to participate in this study in order to assure the appropriateness of evaluation of organizational indifference dimensions. Regardless of industrial and organizational level, 18 women and 14 men participated in the interview as representative of organization members and various age groups. Participants were people with 7 months to 29 years job experience in research institutes, advertising agencies, schools, public organizations and university staffs.

Conducting interview

At the beginning of the interview, the goals of the research were explained for the interviewees. Then the importance and necessity of the research were described and then a general definition of indifference was given them. The interviewees were asked to express any experiences or observations in this regard. Often extra questions were asked following the main questions in order to make interviewees provide more detailed explanations. Each interview was conducted in 15 to 40 min. At the end, the interviewee was asked to explain his or her opinion about the interview produce. Table 1 shows the list of interviewees based on gender, education level and profession.

DATA ANALYSIS

There are various approaches to analysis qualitative data. Miller and Crabtree (1992) suggested four main approaches for classifying analytical techniques; our approach in data analysis is editing approach. Editing approach rooted in phenomenology philosophy tradition

Table 2. Open coding.

| Statement | Implication |
|---|--|
| I was fresh and happy at the beginning of my job | High motivation and eagerness in new comers |
| I was cautious about environment | Attention to environment |
| I understand gradually that my attempts are not considered by the manager | The importance of attention to employees Pessimistic toward manager Appearance of indifference |
| I became sequestered | Loosing motivation |
| I lost my eagerness | Attention to order and discipline in workplace |
| Now it is not important how the works are done | Missing motivation |
| I response the clients reluctantly | None prioritizing clients |
| Someday this reluctance changes into violence | Assuming no value for clients |
| I may don't answered the phone | Assuming no value for employee |
| My work is not valued | Work depreciation |
| Works are done with and without me | Indifference toward organizational costs |
| In compensation I call my friends and talk for a long time | None responsibility against the organization |
| Organization conducts training courses without any relation to my job | None relevance training courses |
| I participate to be absent from the organization | Attempt to leave the organization |

which attempts to understand individual's world life experience. In phenomenology, the main essence of a phenomenon is extracted from experiences of various people and concentrated on exploring the essence itself (Boon et al., 2007). Interpreter in this method plays the role of an editor who enters the text searching meaningful sections, adding or removing some words or sentences, deleting unnecessary words from the text (Miller and Crabtree, 1992). The best example of editing approach is the method used by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They provide guidelines for theory making based on qualitative data.

They key characteristic of editing techniques is their critic nature; the resulted interpretations of a simple subject analysis or a specific category are compared continuously to those of main context data. The aim is achieving a point of theoretical saturation where extra analysis has no room in exploring new knowledge about a specific category or class (Boon et al., 2007). In fact, interview continues until saturation theoretically (Lindlof, 1995).

Coding is implemented in order to extract concepts from a large amount of information achieved through interview. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assumed coding as a microanalysis during which data are considered word by word, and finally codes removed among words or phrases. We have used primary and secondary coding in this paper or from concepts and categories; then we categorized and formed dimensions of providing organizational indifference.

Open coding

Data must be reviewed word by word and line by line for

primary coding. The first script of each interview contains a large amount of data which must be studied in order to extract categories related to the research. Titles must be mentioned as short phrases. Repetition of similar words and phrases during interview is possible and all of them have to be considered and the common phrases are put in one group. This process is called opening coding and the short phrases are codes (Allen, 2003) and Glaser (2002) states that analysis may be conducted from the very beginning of the interview. If the researcher understands the effective concept during the interview, analysis has occurred automatically. The open coding table contains two sections: primary codes extracted during interviews and extracted categories from the concepts in line with secondary codes. Table 2 shows a sample of primary coding on interviews data.

Thematic analysis

Categories are made abstract and in higher rank relative to what concept show; combining or putting some concept together forms a category or a class. Collecting key points and concepts, information are categorized and presented as a table of coding based on category, concept and secondary code. This information can be categorized in the two following tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows the category, concept and secondary code and also table 4 shows the conceptual framework of the work in the following.

The attached questionnaire was prepared based on the afore framework in order to consider organizational indifference. Responses spectrum is form 1 to 5 which represent for absolutely disagree, disagree, any opinion, agree, and absolutely agree. We also used the Cronbach's

Table 3. Category, concept and secondary code.

| Category | Concept | Secondary code |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Indifference towards manager | Escape from responding through | -Covering abilities -Resorting to expedient false -Delaying the manager's work -Pretending to work |
| | No companionship with manager | -Making excuse -Ignoring the sessions -Keeping manager in ambiguity -Avoiding to face manager |
| | Bad behavior to manager | -Talking about manager in his/her absence -Cool and formal interaction with manager |
| Indifference towards workplace | Reduction of individual responsibility feeling through | - Conducting personal affair in working hours - Conducting the work of other companies in working hours -Wasting time |
| | Unreasonable increase of organizational costs through | -Applying organizational facilities for personal benefits -Ignoring toward preserving and maintaining the public assets |
| | Attempt to leave workplace through | -Increase of hour- off -Unreasonable prolongation of mission -Increase of absence -Increase of off- days |
| Indifference towards clients | Not prioritizing the clients through | - Limitation of services to a specific time - Not responding to client's phone call - Asking unreasonable document |
| | Inappropriate contact with clients through | - Delaying the works of clients unreasonably - Responding the clients reluctantly - Violate contact with clients |
| Indifference towards colleagues | Reduction of cooperation with colleagues through | - Not participating in group works - Sensitivity over manager's interact with others - Pessimistic toward environment |
| | Inappropriate interaction with colleagues through | - Cool and official interaction with colleagues - Protruding other's weaknesses - Talking about others in their absence |
| Indifference towards job | Ignorance toward efficiency through | - Reduction of work accuracy - Reduction of work concentration |
| | Ignorance toward affectivity through | - Pretending to work - Working ignorantly |

Table 3. Contd.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Ignorance toward utility through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not perusing the works - Reduction of work speed - Avoidance from stating opinions |
| Pessimistic toward job itself through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assuming the work as not important and non- valuable - Assuming the work un useful - Assuming oneself superior then work |

Table 4. Conceptual framework.

| Category | Concept | Secondary code |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Indifference towards organization | Reduction of individual responsibility feeling through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting personal affair in working hours - Conducting the work of other companies in working hours -Wasting time |
| | Unreasonable increase of organizational costs through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Applying organizational facilities for personal benefits -Ignoring toward preserving and maintaining the public assets |
| | Attempt to leave workplace through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase of hour- off -Increase of absence |
| Indifference towards clients | Not prioritizing the clients through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limitation of services to a specific time - Not responding to client's phone call - Asking unreasonable document - Delaying the works of clients unreasonably |
| | Inappropriate contact with clients through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding the clients reluctantly - Violate contact with clients |
| Indifference towards colleagues | Reduction of cooperation with colleagues through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not participating in group works - Sensitivity over manager's interact with others |
| | Inappropriate interaction with colleagues through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pessimistic toward environment - Cool and official interaction with colleagues - Protruding other's weaknesses - Talking about others in their absence |
| Indifference towards job | Ignorance toward utility through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of work accuracy - Reduction of work concentration - Not perusing the works - Reduction of work speed - Avoidance from stating opinions |
| | Pessimistic toward job itself through | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assuming the work as not important and non-valuable - Assuming the work un useful |

Table 4. Contd.

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | Escape from responding through | -Covering abilities -Resorting to expedient false -Delaying the manager's work -Pretending to work |
| Indifference towards manager | No companionship with manager | -Making excuse -Ignoring the sessions -Keeping manager in ambiguity -Avoiding to face manager |
| | Bad behavior to manager | -Talking about manager in his/her absence -Cool and formal interaction with manager |

alpha to measure the questionnaire reliability. The reliability achieved by the opinions of 30 experts was 0.937, that is, the questionnaire was reliable. At the second stage, we measure the construct validity of our questionnaire by calculating correlation between our measure with three standard measures, including organizational commitment questionnaire (Meyer and Allen, 1997), leaving occupation questionnaire (Williams, 2003) and organizational identity questionnaire (Mael and Ashforth, 1992), our hypotheses were as follows:

H₁: There is negative relationship between organizational indifference and commitment.

H₂: There is positive relationship between organizational indifference and the tendency to leave job.

H₃: There is negative relationship between organizational indifference and organizational identity.

The primary sample population contains 28 employees among whom the questionnaires were distributed. Sampling method was random, that is, each member of the target population has equal chance of being selected. Excel software was applied to calculate the primary community variance which was 1.72. The following equation was used to calculate sample volume:

$$n = \frac{N Z^2_{\alpha/2} \sigma^2_x}{\epsilon^2 (N-1) + Z^2_{\alpha/2} \sigma^2_x}$$

Applying the afore data, the required sample was calculated as 196 individuals. The questionnaires were distributed among the subjects in a public and a private organization. Pearson correlation analysis was used to consider the research assumptions. Conducting the Pearson correlation test on 196 collected data, it was revealed that organization indifference and commitment

have a reverse relation. It means that the H₁ is confirmed. The correlation coefficient was -0.640. In the second hypothesis, the relation between organizational indifference and tendency to leave job was considered. The Pearson correlation test for 196 collected questionnaires showed that the relation is positive. In fact, it means that our H₂ is confirmed. The correlation coefficient equals to 0.625. In the third hypothesis, the relation between organizational indifference and identity was considered. Conducting the Pearson correlation test on 196 collected data, it was revealed that organization indifference and identity have a reverse relation. It means that the H₃ is confirmed. The correlation coefficient was -0.372.

DISCUSSION

Employees are sustainable and unexchangeable resources of an organization who apply other resources in correct direction and lead the organization toward the goals. The key to competitive, sustainable and stable advantage of the word is to develop and promote employee's abilities. As we mentioned earlier, indifferent employees provide no competitive advantage for organization, also they increase organizational expenditures. Moreover, indifferent individual feels no motivation toward realization of organizational goals (Leander, 2009). Collecting and analyzing data, we could classify organizational indifference in 5 categories: indifference towards manager, organization, clients, colleagues and job. Manager- clerk indifference may be categorized as an interactive relation, when employees feel that their work is not valuable before their manager or they do not receive appropriate reward, they will avoid accompanying the manager. When they observe that their colleagues work less and receive more salary, they avoid revealing their abilities. Indifferent employees will ignore the organization fate and future and will not have acceptable contact and interaction with clients. They just think about

salary and spending work time in a routine way and ignore the clients. Indifferent spirit takes the employee's attempt motivation and makes them unmotivated toward their colleagues or their work and finally leads to decline of organizational efficiency and utility. Statistical analysis confirmed the hypothesis. In conclusion, organizational indifference and commitment have a reverse relation, organizational indifference and the tendency to leave job have a posit relation, organizational indifference and identity have a reverse relation.

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