

The effects of academic mentoring perceptions of research assistants on their organizational commitment

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Abstract. Mentoring can be expressed as a supportive relationship in which an experienced person transfers his or her expertise and knowledge to someone else. Universities are one of the most appropriate environments that this process, the samples of which can be seen in many sectors, is experienced. Academician is one of the professions in which the mentoring process is the most intense and most-needed. This study was aimed to investigate how research assistants perceive the academic mentor and mentee relationship, how these perceptions are related to the desired working behaviour, performance, and organizational effectiveness, and how these relationships affect "organizational commitment," which has an increasing importance. Thus, both a sample based on the academic mentoring process was obtained and the academic mentoring process, as a factor affecting the organizational commitment, was studied. As a result of the research, it was found that there was a positive relationship between perceived mentoring and organizational commitment, affective commitment from subcategories of commitment. The relationship between normative commitment and organizational commitment were also found to be positive and meaningful. However, no relationship between perceived mentoring and continuance was found, and the established regression model did not make sense either.

1 Introduction

In today's world, it is seen that experienced and intelligent individuals in business life and private life direct younger and inexperienced individuals by positively contributing to their development. Academia is the most appropriate field in which the process is best experienced and considered to be the best example of the mentoring process [1] which is defined as "a process in which an experienced person guides or helps an inexperienced member of the profession to reach a desired level" [2]. The support that experienced faculty members provides to new research assistants and those at post-graduate level is highly significant. This orientation, which is called academic mentoring, provides significant contributions to the teaching faculty candidates both in learning academic research methods and internalizing professional ethics and academic culture.

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In addition, it is thought that academic mentoring along with its positive aspects such as research assistants' behaviors, attitudes and positive effects in their relationship that lead to career advancement and motivation [3] would increase organizational commitment. Applying mentoring in an institution indicates that the organization values its employees and attributes its success on its employees' commitment and abilities. The fact that mentoring is practiced in an institution shows that the institution values its employees and indicates that the success of the organization is based on the loyalty and abilities of the employees [2]. The more the individual identifies himself or herself with the organization, the more valuable he feels in the institution he works for; the more he believes and contributes to the organizational goals, the more the individual's sense of belonging increases and the easier it will be for the individual and the organization to achieve their goals.

2 Literature

2.1 Academic mentoring

According In literature, mentoring, which is also conceptualized as counseling and advising, is defined as "the process of helping and assisting a less experienced and knowledgeable individual by an expert with advanced knowledge and experience in order to support professional development [4]", and it was first developed in academic field.

Training of the future faculty members is a product of planned and attentive effort. Within the master-apprentice relationship, the importance of being guided and educated by academic mentors, research assistant's efforts to become a scientist cannot be denied. Mentoring, in an academic sense, is an upbringing process in which a senior lecturer supports the younger faculty member to gain scientific ability, to understand the institution he is working for and to solve the problems he or she faces at work place. This process is precious regarding the quality of the relationship between the consultant and the research assistant, the effectiveness of information exchange, research assistants' personal and academic development and job satisfaction. The academic mentor will enhance the efficiency of the activity by sharing his / her experience with the research assistant, providing moral education, evaluating performance, and being a good source of information, a guide and an academic model for the assistants [5].

In literature, the studies on academic mentoring are as follows. "Training Roles of Faculty Members," [5] found that the thesis advisors of the research assistants at Gazi University utilized the role of 'thesis advisor' more than their roles of 'facilitator' and the role of 'being a model.' The thesis advisors with the title of associate professor performed the role of upbringing at a higher level than the thesis advisors with other titles.

In their study with research assistants working at Graduate School of Social, Science and Health sciences at Anadolu University, Özkalp, et al. [1] have concluded that advisors are a source of information and guidance, shared their experience and knowledge, and maintained the master-apprenticeship relationship to improve personal performance. To establish a mentoring program at nursing college, in their study, Nick, et al. [6] grouped the best practices in academic mentoring under six main themes by analyzing the data obtained from face-to-face interviews: (1) a good mentor and mentee match, (2) the creation of clear goals for the mentoring process, (3) the strengthening of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, (4) to defend the mentee and guide him or her, (5) to integrate the mentee with academic culture and (6) to mobilize of the academic sources.

2.2 Organizational commitment

In Turkish Language Association dictionary, 'commitment' is defined as individuals' considering themselves as a member of a community, a social group or congregation [7].

Organizational commitment, on the other hand, is the relative strength of the individual's identification with and participation in the organization [8]. Mowday, et al. [9] in their study, defined organizational commitment as “employees’ high level belief in organization's aims and values, the desire to make intensive efforts for the purposes of the organization, and a strong desire to stay in the organization and maintain organizational membership”[10]. Organizational commitment begins with acceptance of the employee and his employment with a psychological contract. It improves by acquiring knowledge about goals, objectives and what the job requires. From this point of view, organizational commitment is the unity of power that a person has formed by entering into union identity with an individual organization [11]. Allen and Meyer [12] in their model on organizational commitment mention about three types of commitment. The dimensions of the commitment are "affective," "normative," and "continuance”. Employees with strong affective commitment stay in the organization because they want this and remain in the organization with their wish; those with strong normative commitment feel they have to stay. They see it as a moral responsibility and obligation towards the organization, and those with a strong continuing commitment continue to work in the organization because they need it both socially and economically. This commitment, also called rational attachment, triggers the maintenance of the membership of the organization believing that the cost of separation from the organization will be high [10, 13].

In literature, the studies related to organizational commitment are as follows: In her 2007 thesis, “Organizational Commitment in Working Life,” which aimed to determine the level of organizational commitment of municipal employees, Sürgevil [8] found that among organizational commitment dimensions affective commitment had the highest score which was followed by continuance commitment, and the normative commitment had the lowest score. In their study they conducted in Balıkesir in private enterprise, Örucü and Sezen Kışlalıoğlu [11] found that there was no difference between the levels of affective, continuance and normative commitment according to the age of the employees; there was a difference between levels of affective commitment according to the study period and educational status. There was a difference between levels of affective and normative commitment according to the positions of the employees, but there was no difference between levels of continuing commitment. In their study to determine organizational commitment among the academicians working at Gazi University, according to the results of the correlation analysis of the academicians in general and one's level of commitment to their work, Boylu, et al. [10] found that academicians had a high level of positive and meaningful relationship in all three commitment levels about their university and unit they are working for.

“Mentoring, Organizational Commitment and Intentions to Leave Public Accounting,” conducted with the largest accountancy firms registered with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Stallworth [14]found that mentoring relationships have a positive impact on each of the dimensions of organizational commitment and concluded that among these commitments affective was the most influenced one, [5].

3 Method

3.1 The purpose and importance of the study

The aim of this study was to examine how mentoring process, considered as a career development technique, is perceived by research assistants involved in both master’s and doctoral stages and to examine its impact on organizational commitment. The research was empirical study and to collect data face to face survey technique was used. Our questionnaire was prepared by using Noe's Mentoring Scale and Mayer and Allen's Organizational Commitment Scale. SPSS 22.0 packet program was used to evaluate the

data. The study population of the research is composed of research assistants working at Selçuk University, Konya. 112 questionnaires distributed using face to face survey method have returned. This research was designed to measure the effect of research assistants' perceptions of the academic mentoring process on organizational commitment. Model and hypotheses were prepared considering the related studies.

3.2 Research model and hypotheses

This research was designed to measure the effect of research assistants' perceptions of the academic mentoring process on organizational commitment. Model and hypotheses were prepared considering the related studies.

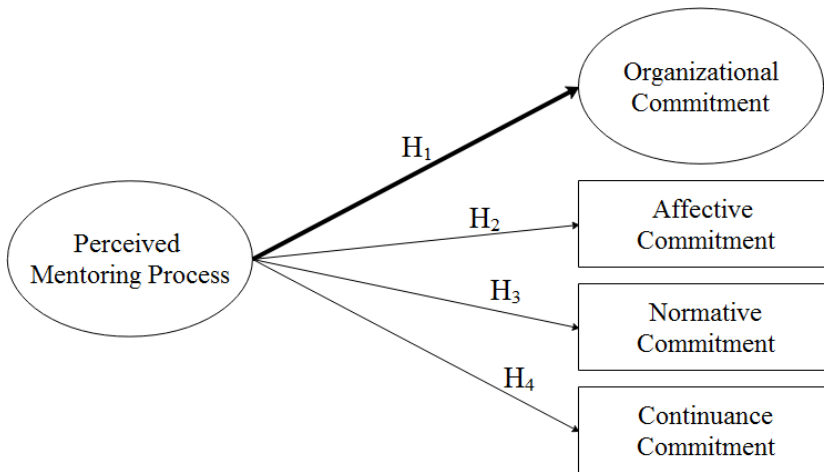


Fig. 1. Theoretical model

H₁: There is a positive and meaningful relationship between research assistants' mentor perceptions on mentor and organizational commitment.

H₂: There is a positive and meaningful positive relationship between research assistants' mentor perceptions and their affective commitment.

H₃: There is a positive and meaningful relationship between research assistants' mentor perceptions and normative commitment.

H₄: There is a positive and meaningful relationship between research assistants' mentor perceptions and continuance commitment.

3.3 Research method and scales

A four-part questionnaire was prepared to obtain the findings of the research. In the first part of the questionnaire, there were demographic questions such as age, gender, marital status, academic career status, affiliated institution, etc. In the second part, organizational commitment, and in the third part, the perceptions about the perceived mentoring process were questioned. In the fourth part, the question "How do you describe your relationship with your advisor?" was asked and the participants were asked to reply to the question using similes such as teacher-apprentice, parent-child, etc.

Organizational Commitment Scale: An authentic 18-item "Organizational Commitment Scale," the reliability of which is tested and very often used in literature, developed by Meyer, et al. [15] and adapted to Turkish by Al [16] used. The scale consists of three sub-dimensions, affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment.

The perceived mentoring scale items are the expressions of Noe [17]'s Mentoring Scale. The scale items in Turkish were taken from Özkalp, et al. [1]. It consists of total 30 items.

Questionnaires were prepared by using a 5-point Likert scale. In Likert scale "1", means "never agree"; "5" corresponds to the phrase "I fully agree". The data obtained from questionnaire forms were analyzed by SPSS 22.0 program. Correlation and regression analysis tests were used to determine the relationship and effect between variables. Also, descriptive statistical methods such as frequency, percentage, etc., t-test and ANOVA tests were also used.

4 Findings

The demographic characteristics of the survey participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic Values	Sub-characteristics	Frequency	
		N	%
Gender	Female	50	44.6
	Male	62	55.4
Marital Status	Married	62	55.4
	Single	50	44.6
Age	Between 22-26	33	29.5
	Between 27-31	39	34.9
	Between 32-36	29	25.9
	Between 37-41	8	7.2
	Over 41	3	2.7
Academic Career	Master's Graduate Course	13	11.6
	Master's Thesis Stage	11	9.8
	Intro to PhD	3	2.7
	PhD Graduate Course	21	18.8
	PhD Proficiency	9	8.0
	PhD Dissertation Stage	30	26.8
Institute	Doctor	25	22.3
	Graduate School of Social Sciences	63	56.3
	Graduate School of Sciences	39	34.8
Work Experience	Graduate School of Sciences	10	8.9
	Less than a year	6	5.4
	1-5 years	65	57.9
	6-10 years	23	27.8
	11-15 years	16	14.4
Advisor's gender	16 years and over	2	1.8
	Male	96	85.7
Advisor's age	Female	16	14.3
	Between 30-40	11	9.9
	Between 41-50	51	45.6
	Between 51-60	38	34.1
Academic Position of Mentor	Between 61-70	12	10.8
	Asst. Professor	8	7.1
	Assoc. Professor	24	21.4
	Professor	80	71.4

According to the Table 1, 55.4% of the respondents were male, while 44.6% were female. 62 of the participants were married, while 50 were single. When the age average of the participants was analyzed, it was found that participants aged 22-26 years accounted for 29.5% of the respondents, 34.9% of the participants aged 27-31 and 25.9% of the participants aged 32-36 accounted 25.9%. The vast majority of respondents was in their doctoral dissertation stage (26.8%) and affiliated with the Graduate School of Social Sciences (56.3%). When the characteristics of the advisors of participants were examined; it was seen that 85.7% of the advisors were male and 14.3% were female. The ages of

advisors were mainly in the range of 41-50 years (45.6%). Academic positions of the advisors were as follows: 7.1% were assistant professors, 21.4% were associate professors and 71.4% were full professors.

According to **Hata! Başvuru kaynağı bulunamadı.**, 34.8% of surveyed research assistants identified their relationship with their counselors as a professional relationship based on mutual respect. And 17% likened the relationship with the advisor to the master-apprentice relationship.

Reliability analysis and frequency analysis for the scales of the variables under investigation are shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability and frequency analysis

Scales	Number of Item	Cronbach Alpha	Average	Standard Deviation
Perceived Mentoring Scale	30	0.970	3.53	0.788
Organizational Commitment	18	0.829	3.06	0.562
-Affective Commitment	6	0.840	3.19	0.857
-Normative Commitment	6	0.753	3.02	0.565
-Continuance Commitment	6	0.686	2.92	0.677

According to Table 2, the Cronbach Alpha values of the scales used in the study were high (since $\alpha > 0.70$). It is understood here that the scales are reliable and sufficient for the study. When we look at the average, the participation score on the perceived mentoring scale was 3.53 and on the organizational commitment scale it was 3.06. Participants had higher scores on expressions of organizational commitment subscale and affective commitment dimension.

For the study, t-tests and ANOVA tests were used to determine whether the perceived mentoring and organizational commitment differed on the demographic variables. According to the results of the study, there were meaningful differences between the organizational commitment and the affiliated institute in ANOVA test conducted to define only the difference between the institution and variables ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). According to the averages, the academicians at Graduate School of Health Sciences (N: 3.60), responded more to items on organizational commitment than those at Graduate School of Social Sciences (N: 2.89) and Graduate School of Sciences (N: 3.09).

Correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between perceived mentoring scale and organizational commitment and its sub-dimensions. The results of correlation analysis were shown Table 3. According to this, there is a positive relationship between perceived mentoring and organizational commitment ($r = 0.473$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, there was a positive and significant relationships between perceived mentoring and affective commitment dimension ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$) and normative commitment dimension ($r = 0.430$, $p < 0.01$). There was no relationship between continuance commitment and mentoring.

Table 3. Correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived Mentoring	1				
2. Organizational Commitment	.473**	1			
3. Affective Commitment	.460**	.813**	1		
4. Normative Commitment	.430**	.766**	.511**	1	
5. Continuance Commitment	.092	.505**	.006	.332**	1

**Correlation is meaning at 0.01 level.

In the Table 4, simple linear regression models of variables were included. According to the table, it is seen that the rate of explanation of the change in mentality perceived by our independent variable over our dependent variable on organizational commitment was 0.217. It means that 21.7% of organizational commitment dimension can be explained by perceived mentoring. As it is seen in the table, the established regression model was found significant (F: 31.774, $p < 0.001 < 0.05$).

Table 4. Regression analysis

Independent Variable : Perceived Mentoring	Model Summary					
	R	R Square	Corrected R Square	SE of Result	F	p
Organizational Commitment	.473	.224	.217	.49758	31.774	.000
Affective Commitment	.460	.211	.204	.76507	29.447	.000
Normative Commitment	.430	.185	.178	.51261	25.004	.000
Continuance Commitment	.092	.009	.000	.67722	.946	.333

According to the table, it is seen that the perceived rate of explanation on the mentor's affective commitment sub-factor was 0.204. That is, 20.4% of the affective commitment sub-dimension can be explained by perceived mentoring. The rate of change of the perceived mentoring on the normative sub-factor was 0.178. According to this result, 17.8% of the normative commitment subscale can be explained by perceived mentoring. It is also seen that the established regression models were significant (F: 29.447, F: 25.004 $p < 0.001 < 0.05$). The regression model established between perceived mentoring and continuing commitment was not found meaningful. According to the results of the study, the rate of perceived change in mentor perception on the subscale of affective commitment was the highest when compared to the other commitments (Figure 3), which is similar to the results of Stallworth [14]'s study. As the result of the Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analysis, established **H₁**, **H₂**, **H₃** hypotheses were accepted, while **H₄** was rejected.

5 Results

Academic mentors are the greatest supporters and helpers of research assistants during graduate education, who have assumed the role of a lecturer at the beginning of their academic life. During this process, sometimes there was a master-apprentice, sometimes a parent-child, sometimes a brother – sister-sibling, sometimes a superior-officer, and sometimes a teacher-student relationship. Research assistants' perceptions on this process also affect their organizational commitment. In our study it was studied how research assistants' academic perception of mentoring affected their organizational commitment. The results achieved in this context show that there was a positive relationship between perceived mentoring and organizational commitment. The affective commitment from the sub-dimensions of commitment and the relationship between normative commitment and organizational commitment were also positive and significant. However, no relation was found between perceived mentoring and continuance, and the established regression model was not significant. It is not possible to generalize these results for all universities because our research consists of research assistants only at Selcuk University. However, further research may contribute to the literature by conducting a comparative analysis including

more than one university and adding a new dimension of how academic mentors perceive the process as well as the research assistant dimension.

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