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# An Investigation on the Relationship Between Work Locus of Control and Union Commitment

## İşte Denetim Odağı İle Sendikaya Bağlılık Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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**Abstract:** *The present study intended to analyze how union commitment attitudes, namely belief in unionism, responsibility to the union, union loyalty and willingness to work for the union change with work locus of control. Analyses of 127 survey responses indicate that changes in responsibility to the union are directly proportional with work locus of control. There found to be low but positive relationships between work locus of control (higher scores indicated internality) and the other three union commitment attitudes (belief in unionism, union loyalty and willingness to work for the union). (Higher scores in locus of control indicated internality.)*

**Key words:** *Work locus of control, internals, externals, union commitment, union loyalty, responsibility to the union, willingness to work for the union, belief in unionism.*

**Öz:** *Bu çalışmada sendikaya bağlılığı gösteren tutumların (sendikacılığın önemine inanma, sendikaya karşı sorumluluk, sendikaya sadakat ve sendika için çalışmaya isteklilik) işte denetim odağına göre nasıl değiştiğinin araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. İncelenen 127 anketin sonuçları, sendikaya karşı sorumluluğun denetim odağı ile doğru orantılı olarak değiştiğini ortaya koymaktadır. İşte denetim odağı ile, sendikaya bağlılığa ilişkin diğer üç tutum (sendikacılığın önemine inanma, sendikaya sadakat ve sendika için çalışmaya isteklilik) arasında ise düşük ancak olumlu ilişkiler olduğu saptanmıştır. (Denetim odağına ilişkin yüksek puanlar içten denetimlilik göstergesidir.)*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *İşte denetim odağı, içten denetimliler, dıştan denetimliler, sendikaya bağlılık, sendikaya sadakat, sendikaya karşı sorumluluk, sendika için çalışmaya isteklilik, sendikacılığın önemine inanma.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Work locus of control is a personality construct and has been regarded as an important organizational variable since general locus of control was first conceptualized in Rotter's Social Learning Theory (Rotter, 1966). As defined by Spector (1988, p.335), work locus of control is an expectancy that rewards, reinforcements or outcomes related to work life are controlled either by one's own actions (internality) or by other forces (externality). People with a high internal locus of control (internals) believe that the promotions or penalties they get at work are due to their own actions and performance. On the other hand, people with a high external locus of control (externals) believe that those events at work are beyond their control and are the result of fate, chance, luck or decisions made by the authority. Besides being related to a lot of organizational variables, work locus of control was especially found to be associated with organizational commitment in such a way that internals tended to be affectively committed to their employing organization whereas externals were more possible to be in continuance commitment (Coleman et al., 1999, p.995). As a concept which is derived from and which seems to be sometimes in parallel (Godon et al.,1980, p.481) and sometimes in opposite directions (Fullagar and Barling, 1989, p.215) with organizational commitment depending on the industrial relations climate, union commitment also, like organizational commitment, may be analyzed with its different facets being differently related to certain predictor variables and those variables may relate differently to union commitment than they do to organizational commitment.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Employees' attitudes toward their job, employing organization and union have been examined by researchers for several years. In some studies, organizational commitment which can be defined as the employee's emotional, calculative or normative attachment to the employing organization (Allen and Meyer,1990, p.849) and union commitment which is the member's loyalty and responsibility to, belief in, and willingness to work for the union (Gordon et al.,1980) are related. In most of these studies union commitment has been found to be in positive correlation with organizational commitment (Iverson and Kuruvilla,1995, p.577; Bamberger et al.,1999, p.311) especially when the industrial relations climate is positive (Angle and Perry,1986, p.31) or when the employee benefits from both (Magenau et al.,1988, p.373) whereas in some studies negative correlations were obtained between organizational and union commitment (Fuller and Hester,1998, p.183; Reed et al,1994, p.1269). Therefore it may be useful to examine how particular predictor variables related to organizational commitment are related to union commitment.

Gordon et al. (1980, p.485-487) found evidence for four correlated dimensions of union commitment. Among them, union loyalty was defined as a sense of pride in associating with the union as a member and a perceived instrumentality of the union for satisfying its members. Responsibility to the union reflected the degree of readiness to fulfil the day-to-day obligations and duties of a member in order to protect the interests of the union. Willingness to work for the union indicated the degree of eagerness of a member to spend extra energy in the service of the union. And belief in unionism was defined as faith in the concept of unionism.

Although there have been debates about its dimensionality (Kelloway et al.,1992, p.197; Thacker et al.,1989, p.228), union commitment is mostly measured by Gordon et al.(1980) scales or items derived from them (Snape et al.,2000, p.447). As Thacker et al. (1989, p.228) have suggested, the construct should be expressed in terms of four correlated factors; namely union loyalty, responsibility to the union, willingness to work for the union and belief in unionism or as a single factor called total union commitment, instead of categorizing the four factors under two subgroups like union loyalty and belief in unionism vs responsibility to the union and willingness to work for the union, according to their attitudinal vs behavioral character which Friedman and Harvey (1986, p.376) have done. They should be regarded as four separate factors which contribute to overall union commitment.

The factor named 'belief in unionism' was found to be the most stable one and stated to influence the factor 'responsibility to the union' whereas 'union loyalty' and 'willingness to work for the union' were less stable across time and less resistant to changes in conditions (Tetrick, 1995, p.586). In a recent study on the relationship between employee involvement and union commitment (Hoell, 2004, p.272), total union commitment and all the factors of union commitment except 'belief in unionism' showed statistically significant relationships with the predictor variables (participativeness in Employee Involvement Programs, previous exposure to EIP and organizational commitment). Besides that, in a study conducted on Turkish union members (Bilgin,2003), no interunion differences were found in the factors 'responsibility to the union' and 'belief in unionism' whereas there were significant interunion differences in the factors 'union loyalty' and 'willingness to work for the union'.Therefore it seemed as if 'responsibility to the union'and 'belief in unionism' were more enduring, persistent member attitudes like personality traits while 'union loyalty' and 'willingness to work for the union' could easily change in response to situations.

The relationship between work locus of control and employee attitudes about job and employing organization has been examined since the Work Locus of Control Scale was developed by Spector (1988). Work locus of control (higher scores indicating internality) has been found to correlate positively with job satisfaction (Spector,1988, p.338) and affective organizational commitment (Coleman et al.,1999, p.995). In paralel with these findings, results of a recent study showed that people with a high internal locus of control develop better quality relations with their manager and this, in turn, leads to more favorable work related reactions like organizational commitment, job-related contentment, etc. (Martin et al., 2005, p.145). Then as internals and externals are different in respect to organizational commitment, they may also probably be different in respect to union commitment. A recent study concerning the impact of personality on psychological contracts (Raja et al.,2004) indicated that externals are more likely to perceive "psychological contract breach"<sup>1</sup> than internals. Besides that, findings of another research (Turnley et al., 2004, p.425) showed a positive relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Psychological contract is an unwritten and unspoken agreement perceived to have been made between two parties in an exchange relationship. Each party believes that the other has silently promised to offer certain benefits in exchange for what he himself is ready to give. Terms of the psychological contract may not be similar for each party as they are not pronounced. The contract may be between an employee and his employer, a member and his union, a counsellor and his client...Psychological contract breach is the perception of the person that the other party is not acting in respect to the terms of the psychological contract between them. (Rousseau,1998)

psychological contract breach and union loyalty which was found to be mediated by union instrumentality. Then, externals may be more sensitive to union instrumentality, a fall in which would also signal a psychological contract breach (between the union and the member), so internals' commitment to the union may be expected to be more temporary than that of externals. Moreover, results of a study (Iverson and Kuruvilla,1995) which aimed at exploring the impact of individual dispositions (positive and negative affectivity) and contextual variables on union loyalty, controlling for the effects of other determinants like demographics, job related and union related variables consistently found in previous research, indicated general support for the inclusion of dispositional and contextual variables in models of union commitment for they had significant causal effects on union loyalty. Iverson and Kuruvilla (1995, p.579) suggested that in future research on union commitment, other dispositional factors, especially personality traits such as internal and external locus of control which have shown to be important in studies of job satisfaction must also be investigated. The present study seeks to understand the relationship between work locus of control and union commitment.

### **3. HYPOTHESES AND MEASURES**

An internal (person with a high locus of control) is the one who believes that the primary determinant of what happens to him is himself while an external (person with a low locus of control) believes that it is the authority, powerful others or luck (Spector,1988, p.335). The reason why an "internal" employee has joined a union may be that he believes in unionism, that in this way he believes employees can acquire control over the employment relationship, etc. As belief in unionism was found to be the most enduring aspect of union commitment (Tetrick,1995, p.586) and internals were found to be less sensitive to changes than externals (Raja et al,2004, p.358), it is expected that employees who are internals will have a higher belief in unionism than externals will. (i.e. belief in unionism will increase as work locus of control increases, indicating internality.)

Hypothesis 1: Belief in unionism will be positively related to work locus of control .

Regardless of the benefits his union provides, an internal may feel responsibility to it just for that he is a member and the union needs effective members to achieve its goals. For example, he may help another employee file a grievance through the union (Gordon et al.,1980, p.486) so that the procedure will work, for he believes that an employee is powerful enough to struggle with and solve the problems he has confronted in the workplace. Responsibility to the union was found to be influenced by belief in unionism and was stated to be a more enduring aspect of union commitment than willingness to work for the union and union loyalty (Tetrick,1995, p.586) and internals are found to be less sensitive to changes than externals are (Raja et al.,2004, p.358). Therefore it is likely that internals will have a higher responsibility to the union than externals will. (i.e. responsibility to the union will increase as work locus of control increases indicating internality.)

Hypothesis 2: Responsibility to the union will be positively related to work locus of control.

Union loyalty is being aware of the benefits recieved through union membership and feeling pride about one's union (Gordon et al.,1980, p.485). From the definition, it is more

likely that an employee who is an external will endure his union membership in order to protect himself against unjust practices coming from management in the employing relationship. He may feel loyalty to his union as long as it provides the necessary benefits, and feel pride for it as if it were his own success against powerful others. Externals are more likely to perceive 'psychological contract breach'\* than internals are (Raja et al.,2004, p.358), and union loyalty is found to be high in the case of psychological contract breach (between the employee and the employing organization) especially when union instrumentality is high (Turnley, 2004, p.425). Thus an internal is more likely to be low in this dimension of union commitment. (i.e. union loyalty will decrease as work locus of control increases indicating internality.)

Hypothesis 3: Union loyalty will be negatively related to work locus of control.

Willingness to work for the union means the member is eager to put extra effort, take part in the union office, or serve on a committee for the union (Gordon et al.,1980, p.485). It is different from responsibility to the union in that the member's effort is more likely to be noticed and appreciated by the union management. The member employee seems to be in need of getting the support of powerful others and to intend obtaining it through working for the union. Besides that, it is a less enduring aspect of union commitment than belief in unionism and responsibility to the union, and willingness depends upon affect (not belief) toward the union and one's recent experiences with the union (like the case in union loyalty) (Tetrick,1995, p.586). Willingness seem more sensitive to changes so an external who is found to be more sensitive to changes in exchange relations with the employer (Raja et al.,2004) is more likely to show willingness to work for the union than an internal is. (i.e. willingness to work for the union will decrease as locus of control increases indicating internality.)

Hypothesis 4: Willingness to work for the union will be negatively related to work locus of control.

## **4. METHOD**

### **4.1. Sample and Procedure**

Data were gathered from 127 (blue-collar) employees who work in Eskişehir and were the members of two different unions (Harb-İş and Kristal-İş) belonging to the same confederation ( Türk-İş). "Türk-İş is the major and the only effective, integrative and strong labor organization in Turkey which pursue the material interests of their members as well as a broader and more generalized social and political agenda" (Büyüksulu, 1998-1999, p.72), so member commitment was expected to be higher in the unions of this confederation. Besides that, since unions belonging to Türk-İş are known to act uniformly, as a whole against employing organizations and government (Büyüksulu, 1998-1999, p.74), unions were not expected to differ much in member commitment related to union performance. So the two unions which have local organizations and members in Eskişehir; Harb-İş which comprises mostly members working at public organizations and Kristal-İş which involves members working at private organizations are chosen randomly. The questionnaires used did not involve personal characteristics of the respondents such

as tenure, sex, etc., since in a previous study conducted on a similar sample (members of four other unions of the same confederation who work in Eskişehir) no significant differences were found among union commitment levels (at factorial base as well) of the subjects with respect to sex or tenure. Self-report questionnaires were distributed to the members who had arrived their unions' offices to attend a periodical meeting and were taken back before they left the offices. The overall union commitment of the subjects was expected to be high since the questionnaires were given to those who attended the meetings and there are no closed shop agreements in Turkey to have enforced the employees to join the unions.

As expected, results of the paired samples t-test (Table 6) revealed no significant differences between overall union commitments of the two groups ( $t_{(57)}=1.116, p>.05$ ). Furthermore, test results indicated no significant differences between the two groups with respect to union loyalty ( $t_{(57)}=.267, p>.05$ ), responsibility to the union ( $t_{(57)}=.628, p>.05$ ), willingness to work for the union ( $t_{(57)}=.711, p>.05$ ) and belief in unionism ( $t_{(57)}=1.033, p>.05$ ). Hence, context (subjects' being members of two distinct union organizations) is expected not to have influenced the findings.

## **4.2. Measures**

The survey instrument which measured union commitment and work locus of control was a self-report questionnaire. The first 13 items were taken from the Work Locus of Control Scale (Spector,1988). Turkish adaptation of the scale (Bilgin and Iftar,1998) internal consistency coefficient of which was found to be .77 by Cronbach alpha analysis and where eight items representing internal locus of control loaded on Factor 1, and five of the eight items representing external locus of control loaded on Factor 2 was used. ( High scores represented internality.)

The following 23 items were taken from the 28-item version (Ladd et al.,1982) of the Union Commitment Scale developed by Gordon et al. (1980). Its Turkish adaptation (Bilgin,2003) where the internal consistency coefficient of the remaining 23 items has been found to be .85 by Cronbach alpha analysis was used.

Regression analysis was used to describe the predictability of the union commitment variables "overall organizational commitment", "belief in unionism", "responsibility to the union", "union loyalty" and "belief in unionism" by changes in the variable "work locus of control". Regression analysis can not be used to find out the differences between two groups (like internals and externals) with respect to a variable (union commitment). In this study, the aim is not to measure the differences in levels of union commitment of internals and externals. It is rather to see if there is an increase or decrease in union commitment dimension and its sub-dimensions, as there is an increase in work locus of control dimension. An increase in work locus of control means approaching the internality end of the work locus of control continuum. Hence, regression analysis can be used in establishing a relationship between the changes in the two variables (work locus of control and union commitment).

## 5. RESULTS

Regression analyses examined the respondents' belief in unionism, responsibility to the union, union loyalty, willingness to work for the union and the overall union commitment in relation to their work locus of control. In Table 1 the unstandardized regression coefficient for work locus of control, .111, suggests that work locus of control is a significant predictor of belief in unionism. The results summarized in the table indicate that internals are more likely to believe in unionism than externals are, as hypothesized. Yet the level of the relationship between the two variables is positive but low ( $R=.293$ ,  $R^2=.086$ ,  $F=11.746$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Work locus of control of the respondents explained only 09 per cent of the total variance related to their belief in unionism.

*Table 1*

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t	p
Constant	7.718	.932	-	8.284	.000
Work Locus of Control	.111	.032	.293	3.427	.001
R = .293		R <sup>2</sup> = .086			
F (1,125) = 11.746		p = .001			

\*\* p<.01

In Table 2 the unstandardized regression coefficient for work locus of control, .113, suggests that work locus of control is a significant predictor of responsibility to the union. The results summarized in the table show that internals are more likely to feel responsibility to the union than externals are. Thus,- hypothesis 2 was supported. The relationship between the two variables is positive and at moderate level ( $R=.322$ ,  $R^2=.103$ ,  $F=14.415$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Work locus of control of the examined unionized workers accounted for 10 per cent of their responsibility to the union.

*Table 2*

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t	p
Constant	7.963	.854	-	9.328	.000
Work Locus of Control	.113	.030	.322	3.797	.000
R = .322		R <sup>2</sup> = .103			
F (1,125) = 14.415		p = .000			

\*\* p<.01

The unstandardized regression coefficient for work locus of control, .194, which suggests that work locus of control is a significant predictor of union loyalty is shown in Table3. The results summarized in the table indicate that internals are more likely to feel loyalty

to the union than externals are, which is opposite to that hypothesized. The relationship between the two variables is positive but low ( $R=.269$ ,  $R^2=.072$ ,  $F=9.768$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Work locus of control of the respondents accounted for only 07 per cent of their union loyalty.

Table 3

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t	p
Constant	15.300	1.799	-	8.601	.000
Work Locus of Control	.194	.030	.269	3.125	.002
R = .269		R <sup>2</sup> = .072			
F (1,125) = 9.768		p = 0.02			

\* \* p < .01

The results shown in Table 4 suggest that work locus of control is a significant predictor of willingness to work for the union. The positive, though weak, relationship between the two variables indicate that internals are more likely to be willing to work for the union than externals are, which is opposite to that hypothesized ( $R=.196$ ,  $R^2=.039$ ,  $F=5.020$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Work locus of control of the respondents explained only 04 per cent of their willingness to work for the union.

Table 4

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t	p
Constant	8.425	.974	-	8.653	.000
Work Locus of Control	7.598E - 02	.034	.196	2.241	.027
R = .196		R <sup>2</sup> = .039			
F (1,125) = 5.020		p = 0.27			

\* p < .05

As presented in Table 5 results of the regression analysis suggest that work locus of control is a significant predictor of the overall union commitment. The relationship between the two variables is positive and moderate ( $R=.307$ ,  $R^2=.095$ ,  $F=13.047$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Work locus of control of the examined workers accounted for 10 per cent of the total variance in union commitment.

**Table 5**

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Beta	t	p
Constant	42.135	4.200	-	10.033	.000
Work Locus of Control	.528	.146	.307	3.612	.000
R = .307      R <sup>2</sup> = .095					
F (1,125) = 13.047      p = .000					
** p < .01					

**Table 6**

Overall commitment	union	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1st Group		58	58.02	7.07	-1.116	57	.269
2nd Group		58	56.71	6.49			
Union loyalty		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1st Group		58	20.91	3.16	.267	57	.791
2nd Group		58	20.78	2.87			
Responsibility to the union		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1st Group		58	11.29	1.17	.628	57	.532
2nd Group		58	11.14	1.65			
Willingness to work for the union		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1st Group		58	10.74	1.58	.711	57	.480
2nd Group		58	10.57	1.69			
Belief in unionsm		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	P
1st Group		58	10.81	1.62	-1.003	57	.306
2nd Group		58	11.07	1.49			

p > .05

## 6. DISCUSSION

The results of the regression analyses only partially supported the hypothesized relationship between union commitment and work locus of control.

The relationships of work locus of control with both union loyalty and willingness to work for the union were found to be weak but positive, so the related hypotheses (hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4) were not supported. On the other hand, the relationship between work locus of control and belief in unionism was positive as expected, but weak, accounting for a small amount of the total variance. The results indicating weak but positive relationships between locus of control and the two factors of union commitment (union loyalty and willingness to work for the union) should not be surprising perhaps, with the logic of why two dimensions of union commitment would relate differently to work locus of control when the four facets were found to be correlated in the union commitment literature (Gordon et al.,1980; Tetrick et al.,1989; Thacker et al., 1989).

The positive relationship between work locus of control and responsibility to the union which was found to be at moderate level indicates that responsibility to the union increases as internality increases, so internals may be said to feel themselves more responsible to their unions than externals do. They may help coworkers use the grievance procedure, “keep their ears open” for information that might be useful for the union (Gordon et al.,1980, p.486) as they believe that employees are not victims of fate or authority, they have to struggle for their rights, and they may get more powerful as far as their union is powerful against unjust treatment directed by employing organizations. This result is consistent with hypothesis 2.

Finally, the overall union commitment as well was found to be positively and moderately related to work locus of control, indicating that union commitment increases as internality increases. Then results imply that internals are more committed to their unions than externals are, in all aspects. A possible explanation to this result may be that internals believe that they are the masters of their own fates and unions are the necessary tools for them to change the conditions. Therefore they may believe in the power of organized workforce, feel pride for their unions, support their activities and work willingly for their success. They may have regarded their unions as tools through which they can use the power they believe they have already got.. Besides these findings and interpretation, it should be added that Turkish workers who have already joined unions are sure to be more or less committed to their unions as “ trade union membership in Turkey has dropped sharply during the last decade from 24% to 15% due to employers’ antiunion policies like hiring sub-contracting and temporary workers, increasing the number of skilled workers and professionals which are not covered by collective bargaining and massive layoffs” (Özkaplan, 2000, p.35). Especially those who feel a deeper responsibility to their unions may be the employees who don’t give in but believe that they can change the conditions through union membership and score higher on the work locus of control scale (internals).

Results suggest that overall union commitment, and especially responsibility to the union are positively related with work locus of control (in this study high scores represented internality). It may be that members nearer to the externality end of the work locus of control continuum, expect and demand more from unions but give less in return. The reason why responsibility to the union decreases as externality increases may be that responsibility for success of the union is attributed to others. Overall union commitment decreases as externality increases when the union is perceived not to offer enough gain. Results of a recent research (Altan vd.,2005, p.176) carried out in Eskişehir on unionized workers indicate that 57.7% of the subjects believe that their union can not defend their rights. Further research in countries where unions are more active, union instrumentality

is higher, and union membership is encouraged by employing organizations may clarify the locus of control-union commitment relationship. Moreover, it would not be surprising, if in such countries, union loyalty of externals was found to be higher than that of internals. The reason is, that psychological contract breach, to which externals are more sensitive than internals as Raja et al. (2004, p.358) have stated, is less possible in those countries where union- member-management relations are positive. Then, in future research, employees' perception of the psychological contract breach between the union and the member may be a moderating variable in locus of control - union commitment relationship.

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