The Relationship between Perceived Organizational Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: A review of the literature

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Abstract

Perceived organizational justice and organizational citizenship behaviors have frequently been studied separately (e.g., Sheppard, Lewick, & Minton, 1992; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Allen & Rush, 1998; and Chen, Hui, & Sego 1998), as well as in conjunction with each other (e.g., Ball, Trevino, & Sims 1994; and Moorman 1991). The current review of the literature condenses the findings of these and other studies, working first with perceived justice, then with citizenship behaviors, and ending on the connection between the two areas.

Perceived Organizational Justice

By definition, Perceived Organizational Justice (POJ) is subjective; we tend to compare our state with the state of those around us (e.g., input to output ratio, pay increases, and punishment severity). Ortiz (1999) traces justice theory back to Adams' 1965 equity theory. The equity theory states that people assign values to their inputs on a job and the outputs they receive from their job. These values are used to calculate a ratio (input to output). This ratio is then compared with the input to output ratio of a referent (someone the employee sees having similar skills, tenure, and so forth). If the ratios are equitable, there is no reason for grievances; however, this is not the case if the referents ratio is smaller (their inputs are outweighed by their outputs). For example, if an employee's ratio was 10:10 and the referent's ratio was 15:15, the ratios are equitable; if, however, the employee's ratio was 10:10 and the referent's ratio was 10:15, the employee would feel under-rewarded (underpaid) for their inputs and would eventually adjust their inputs accordingly (reduce their inputs). If the employee's ratio was smaller than the referent's ratio (e.g., 10:15 vs. 10:10), the employee may engage in additional inputs to settle the dissonance.

Muchinsky (2000) makes the case that POJ can be differentiated into two types of justices (procedural and distributive) as well as two means, or focuses of actions (structural and social), which will be discussed later.

Types of Justice

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice involves the receiver's views on how their outcome compares to a referent's outcome, the outcome of another employees. Organ (1988) asserts, "Debates about the criteria—such as status, seniority, productivity, effort, and need—that should determine salary … have to do with distributive justice" (p. 64, emphasis added). In this illustrative example, Organ alluded to the three rules of distribution, a further division of distributive justice: Equity, Equality, and Need.

Equity rule of distribution. This rule is based on the idea that rewards should be contingent upon the level of contribution. If one person works full-time, they deserve greater compensation than someone who only works part-time, if all other aspects are equal. The full-time employee would likely feel that the employer violated the equity rule if they found out that a part-time employee earned more money than they did.

Equality rule of distribution. The Equality rule states that all people, regardless of individual characteristics (such as, sex, ability, and race), should have an equal opportunity for attaining rewards. Even the briefest glance at this rule should cause alarm: people would get rewarded regardless of whether or not they do the job, let alone do it satisfactorily. Since it is ineffective to blindly reward people for random behaviors, this rule is rarely used in practice; instead, a modified version is used: rewards are based first on some important measure (e.g., ability, knowledge, production), then equally distributed . For example, if there were two supervisor openings, the CEO may choose to promote (or hire) one male and an equally qualified female. If there are several equally qualified applicants for the position, half male and half female, and the CEO chooses two women to fill the job, the rejected males would feel that the equality rule was broken.

Need rule of distribution. The final rule is rooted in the notion that less well to do people deserve (i.e., need) the rewards more than other, more fortunate people. For example, if all other things were equal, a single mother of two would deserve a pay increase more than someone with no children in a double income home. Should the single mother of two not get the increase, she is likely to feel that the company has broken the need rule of distribution.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice deals with the procedures that the organization uses to come to a decision. Organ (1988) refers to this type of justice as the way in which an organization applies the relevant criteria to arrive at a decision. Muchinsky (2000) argued that a decision is procedurally just if it is consistent, "without personal bias, with as much accurate information as possible, and with an outcome that could be modified" (p. 277). Consider two individuals, identical in every job-relevant aspect. Suppose they were both up for their performance review, which is the company's basis for pay increase. If one received a greater increase than the other, the recipient of the lesser would view the procedure as unjust. The recipient of the higher increase may also view the procedures as unjust, but would probably be less apt to raise any grievances.

Means

Structural Means

Methods that deal with the context of the interaction are said to be structural in nature. An action is structurally just if the methods used adhere to some prevailing rule of justice, for example, the three rules of distribution (Muchinsky, 2000).

Social Means

Social methods, on the other hand, deal with how the individuals (the recipients) are treated during the action. Muchinsky (2000) states that treating people in an "open and honest fashion" exemplifies a socially just methodology (p. 279).

Classification of Justice

With these two methods of describing justice (types and means), we can create four categories or classes of justice: Systematic, Configural, Informational, and Interpersonal. Table 1 shows a typology of the classification of these four "flavors" of justice.

Table 1
Typology of Justice Classification

	Means	
Justification Type	Structural	Social
Procedural	Systematic	Informational
Distributive	Configural	Interpersonal

Systematic Justice

Systematic (systemic) justice is comprised of procedural justice using structural means. Muchinsky (2000) explains this concept:

> Structural means include making sure the decisions made (1) are consistent over people and time, (2) are based on accurate information, (3) represent the concerns of all parties, and (4) are compatible with prevailing moral and ethical standards (p. 279).

Configural Justice

Configural Justice is comprised of distributive justice using structural means. Outcomes vary with different circumstances; this is where the three rules of distribution come into play. Does the employee with the highest production get the promotion and pay increase? Or do these rewards go to the single mother of two? What about the Asian employee, who would be the only non-Caucasian to hold a position of authority?

Informational Justice

Informational justice is the social method of achieving procedural justice. As the name suggests, there is a free flow of information. This class of justice requires that the people involved (frequently the recipients of the outcome) be given the rationale behind the decision.

Interpersonal Justice

Interpersonal justice is the social method of achieving distributive justice. Overt concern for the outcomes of individuals typifies this class of justice.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) are discretionary behaviors on the part of the worker, which are neither expected nor required, and therefore cannot be formally rewarded or punished for the presence of lack of, by the organization. Schnake (1991) gives three reasons why OCB are not affected by organizational influences: (1) OCB are subtle and therefore hard to objectively rate, which makes for difficult inclusion in appraisals; (2) Some forms of OCB may pull people away from their own work to assist another; and (3) Because OCB cannot be contractually required (if they were required behaviors, they would be contractual behaviors, not OCB), the organization cannot punish employees for not performing them. For this reason, OCB is commonly defined in terms of social exchange (Moorman, 1991). Moorman describes the difference between economical and social exchange: "Because social exchange exists outside of strict contracts, the exchange tends toward ambiguity, allowing for discretionary, prosocial acts by the employee" (p. 846).

Researchers have identified many different "types" of OCB, but these are currently consolidated into five dimensions: Altruism, Courtesy, Conscientiousness, Sportsmanship, and Civic Virtue.

Dimensions of OCB

Altruism

The first dimension is Altruism (also referred to as helpful behaviors, pro-social behaviors, and neighborliness). This dimension is associated with behaviors that either directly or indirectly help another worker with a present work-related problem. It is easy to see the benefits for this dimension of OCB: workers helping each other instead of distracting supervisors from their jobs. Also, the workers may benefit by not showing their supervisor how often they need help, which may come up on their performance appraisal.

Courtesy

The second OCB dimension, which is closely related to altruism, but distinctly different, is Courtesy. It refers to helpful behaviors that prevent a work related problem from occurring or help to lessen the severity of a foreseen problem. Behaviors such as advance notices, reminders, and consultation fall under this dimension.

Conscientiousness

The third dimension is Conscientiousness, which includes such behaviors as being punctual; maintaining a better-than-average attendance record (i.e., coming to work when you're sick or during sever weather conditions); and following an organization's rules, regulations, and procedures.

Sportsmanship

The fourth dimension is Sportsmanship; this is the only dimension that identifies a lack of behaviors. Organ (1988) described it as tolerating less-than-desirable situations without complaining or "making federal cases out of small potatoes" (p. 11). This dimension might just be a supervisor's most favorite: a lack of petty grievances.

Civic Virtue

In the same work, Organ defined the fifth dimension, Civic Virtue, as the "responsible participation in the political life of the organization" (p. 12). An example of such behaviors is staying up-to-date with important issues of the organization.

Organ (1988) makes the note that the five dimensions of OCB may not all be present when one is found. "The people whom we think of as most conscientious are not always the most altruistic, and vice versa; and the conditions that evoke altruism from us are not always the conditions that inspire us to conscientiousness" (p. 10).

Anti-Citizenship Behaviors

Opposite of OCB is the realm of Anti-Citizenship Behaviors (ACB). These behaviors, according to Ball et al. (1994), "detract from the work-related output of an individual" (p. 302). Behaviors included in ACB are defiance, resistance to authority, avoidance or escape from assigned work, aggression, and revenge. Burrhus F. Skinner, the behaviorist, showed that punishment on rodents would produce comparable results. Ball and associates (1994) site this reason for superiors often being "advised that punishment only be used as a last resort" (p. 316).

Benefits of OCB

Individually, OCB are frivolous, but in aggregate, they benefit both the organization and its employees in numerous ways. To the organization go the benefits of having a group of employees who are dedicated to the company. According to Chen et al. (1998), the mere presence of OCB (specifically altruism, conscientiousness, and sportsmanship) indicated a lower turnover rate. These dedicated workers will stay with the company longer, produce more products of higher quality, and help the company succeed in many other ways. Logically we can assume that prevalent OCB will foster a better work environment within the organization. This environment, in turn, should elicit greater employee dedication, which yields greater productivity, and lowers turnover (as Chen et al. [1998] have shown).

Allen and Rush's work (1998) pointed out a benefit to the employee: performance of OCB "may produce an affective response and hence enhance a managers' liking for a subordinate" (p. 248). However, it is not known whether an employee's persistent performance of OCB causes a greater affective response by management or whether an employee who is already liked by management is noticed engaging in OCB more often than other employees (i.e., schema theory).

Interaction of POJ and OCB

Ball et al. (1994) studied the effects of perceived unjust punishment on OCB. They used 89 supervisor-subordinate dyads, with only one supervisor to a subordinate. There was a requirement that the pair had experienced at least one instance of undesired behavior with punishment, preferably within the previous six months. If there was more than one instance of punishment, they were both asked to consider only one. Ball et al. found that when the subordinate had high POJ (i.e., control over punishment procedures and imposed punishment), they tended to engage in OCB. What's more, Ball and associates found that the subjects avoided ACB.

Skarlicki and Folger (1997) researched the revenge area of ACB, which they coined as Organizational Retaliation Behaviors (ORB). They found significant negative correlations between ORB and organizational justice (distributive [r=-0.44] and procedural [r=-0.53] types). They also found a significant positive correlation (r = 0.69) between procedural justice and what they call interactional justice (referred to as the class of interpersonal justice in the current review). This significant positive correlation suggests that procedural and interactional justices can, and do, compensate for each other. When a situation is lacking in one, a higher degree of the other may make the situation more tolerable to the employee. Therefore, they concluded that "when supervisors show adequate sensitivity and concern toward employees, treating them with dignity and respect, those employees seem somewhat willing to tolerate the combination of an unfair pay distribution and unfair procedures that would otherwise maximally contribute to retaliatory tendencies" (p. 438).

Moorman's 1991 research on POJ and OCB initially found a causal relationship between the two. But upon further analysis, the causal relationship was limited to interactional justice and OCB. This finding is supported by Skarlicki and Folgers' 1997 findings.

Discussion

The areas of organizational justice and organizational citizenship behavior have different roots, but it is easy to see that they are not completely separate and unrelated ideas. Organizational justice is able to elicit citizenship behaviors in many cases and citizenship behaviors are the mainstay in many organizations with high organizational justice. Future research will likely clarify their common roots, but as of now, more empirical research is required.

Obviously this research is not the epitome of all there is to organizational justice and citizenship behaviors, but it is a start. With the volumes of justice theory research and the proliferation of OCB research in the 1990's, it would take years to compile a bona fide summary of the theories involved. Also with the rapid changes in the way organizations do business and the way they view their employees (for example, twenty years ago, an employee with a long list of previous jobs was looked at suspiciously, but now they are said to be experienced and may even be desirable), the theories will need to be refined.

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