

THE EFFECT OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT: DO MEN AND WOMEN DIFFER?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to determine the influence of procedural justice on organizational commitment and whether gender differences play a role in moderating the above-mentioned relationship among Malaysian employees. Based on the social exchange framework (Blau, 1964), the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), and the "group-value" model (Lind & Tyler, 1988), a study was conducted among hotel workers in Malaysia. Analyses of 161 responses reveal that procedural justice does have a significant effect on organizational commitment. While gender does not moderate the effect of procedural justice on employees' commitment, the findings may suggest a trend toward similarity in beliefs, values, and attitudes towards work among males and females in the Malaysian workforce. Implications for managerial practice and future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of globalization has given rise to the need for organizations in Malaysia and elsewhere to perform in ways that gives them a competitive edge over their competitors. To survive and thrive under such challenging environments, organizations need loyal and committed employees who are able to enhance the organization's efficiency and add value to the firm's output. Employees who are committed to the employing organization are more likely to exert extra effort on behalf of the organization, all of which are likely to enhance customers' satisfaction. This is especially true in the service sectors whereby the competitive edge lies in the provision of quality service above and beyond the call of duty (Bowen et al., 1999). Although there have been several studies on organizational commitment within the Malaysian context (Ismail, 1990; Mat-Zin, 1996; Lian, 1998), none have focused on the role of procedural justice as its determinant. Given this lack of information, the objective of the present study is to examine whether procedural justice has an effect on employees' commitment to the organization and whether this relationship varies according to gender.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Procedural Justice and Organizational Commitment

Procedural justice reflects a person's judgements about the fairness of the process of making outcome allocations decisions (Greenberg, 1990). Specifically, procedural justice reflects the extent to which an individual perceives that outcome allocation decisions have been fairly made according to the formal procedures of the organization and from the treatment given by its authorities in enacting those procedures (Moorman, 1991). Explanations by earlier researchers seem to indicate that procedural justice judgements play a major role in affecting employee attitudes. For instance, according to Lind and Tyler's (1988) "group-value" model, perceptions of procedural fairness which entails fair treatment and use of fair procedures communicates to members two symbolic messages about group membership. Firstly, fair treatment received from decision makers indicates that the individual is a respected and valued member of the group. Secondly, the use of fair decision-making procedures in groups also indicates whether members can take pride in their group membership because fair procedures will reassure members that their interests will be protected and advanced through group membership. Feelings of respect, worth, and pride formed as a result of procedural justice may motivate members to adopt a favorable attitude toward the group that is responsible in mandating the decision-making procedures. Tyler (1989) added that when people obtain evidence that they have attained a favorable social standing within the group, and that over time, they will receive fair benefits from group membership, these may enhance group harmony and activate group concerns by stimulating members to adopt positive feelings toward the group.

At the workplace, Konovsky and Pugh (1994) noted that the use of procedurally fair practices would affect employees' higher-order motives such as commitment to the organization because the use of fair procedures indicates that the authority within the organization respects the rights and dignity of each employee. In discussing the concepts of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) in organizational settings, Settoon et al. (1996) suggested that an organization and/or its representatives that chose to undertake positive, beneficial actions directed at their employees will create a sense of indebtedness within each worker to reciprocate in the same fashion. Thus, managerial actions of acting in a procedurally fair manner, which represents beneficial actions targeted at employees, may induce them to reciprocate by being more committed to their employing organization.

Several earlier studies provided empirical evidence for the positive relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993; Martin & Bennett, 1996; Tang & Sarsfield-Baldwin, 1996). Folger and Konovsky (1989) provided support for the role played by procedural justice in influencing employees' attitudes about the organization namely organizational commitment as opposed to

distributive justice. In their study, the authors discovered that only perceptions of procedural justice made a unique contribution to organizational commitment whereas perceptions of distributive justice is significantly associated with pay satisfaction. Findings by Folger and Konovsky (1989) imply that procedures may not simply be regarded by employees as means to an end but rather as ends in themselves. This implication is consistent with the suggestion made by Tyler and Caine (1981) that procedures can be ends in themselves when they provide intangible and symbolic outcomes such as respect. Fair procedures indicate to the employees that the organization have high regards for employees' self-respect, dignity and rights (Rawls, 1971). According to Folger and Konovsky (1989), fair procedural actions imply that the organization has done something to distinguish itself from other organizations in the sense that reflects the level of concern that the organization has for its employees, thereby, providing a basis for employees to feel committed toward their organization.

In another study, McFarlin and Sweeney's (1992) findings are consistent with that of Folger and Konovsky's (1989). According to McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) the reason why procedural justice and not distributive justice may have a greater impact on organizational outcomes in the form of organizational commitment may be because procedures define the organization's capacity to treat employees fairly. When employees perceive procedures as fair, they may view the organization positively, which in turn, may lead them to become committed to the organization. Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) in examining four models of distributive and procedural justice in predicting four employees' reactions to organizational life (namely job satisfaction, pay satisfaction, organizational commitment, and subordinate's evaluation of supervisor) discovered that the two-factor model as tested by Folger and Konovsky (1989) is the best parsimonious model in explaining the data. Sweeney and McFarlin (1993) found that procedural justice is an important predictor of organizational-level evaluations such as commitment as opposed to distributive justice which is a better predictor of personal-level evaluations such as pay satisfaction. According to Sweeney and McFarlin (1993), perceptions of procedural fairness is a reflection of the positive character of the organization, which in turn, allow workers to have faith in the organization as reflected by their high levels of commitment.

The findings by Martin and Bennett (1996) are also consistent with that of earlier researchers (for example, Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993). Martin and Bennett (1996) investigated the role of distributive and procedural justice in explaining the nature of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They discovered that even though neither job satisfaction nor organizational commitment determine one another, organizational commitment is determined by procedural justice, and not distributive justice. Nevertheless, the findings by Tang and Sarsfield-Baldwin (1996) are not as clear-cut as those of previous researchers (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993; Martin & Bennett, 1996).

Tang and Sarsfield-Baldwin (1996) concluded that both distributive justice and procedural justice are related to employees' satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Tang and Sarsfield-Baldwin (1996), however, measured organizational commitment using two different scales namely the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) and the Index of Organizational Commitment (IOC). In their study, different aspects of procedural justice were discovered to be positively related to the two different measures of organizational commitment. In addition, distributive justice was also found to have an impact on organizational commitment as measured by the two scales. Tang and Sarsfield-Baldwin (1996) attributed the variations in their findings to the use of different measures of satisfaction and commitment and the longitudinal method of data gathering.

Since studies on the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment have been carried out chiefly in the United States, little information is available about the generalizability of these findings to non-Western countries, for instance, Malaysia. Thus, the objective of this research is to fill the void in the literature with regards to the above-mentioned relationship in a Malaysian setting. Thus, the first hypothesis of this research is that procedural justice will have a positive effect on organizational commitment.

Gender as a Moderator between Procedural Justice and Organizational Commitment

Although a number of studies have investigated the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship between procedural justice and workers' attitudes, their findings have been somewhat inconsistent. For instance, Brockner and Adsit (1986) found that gender differences moderate perceptions of fairness and satisfaction relationship. Specifically, the equity-satisfaction relationship was considerably stronger among men than women. This finding implies that judgements about fairness of an exchange relationship may be more salient in the development of job satisfaction for men than women. On the other hand, Witt and Nye (1992) found no gender differences with regard to the relationship between fairness of pay and promotion with job satisfaction. Witt and Nye (1992) explained that the differences in their results with those of Brockner and Adsit's (1986) may be attributed to the different conceptualizations that has been used for both fairness and satisfaction. Brockner and Adsit (1986) focused on satisfaction with an exchange relationship whereas Witt and Nye (1992) studied job satisfaction. Furthermore, Brockner and Adsit (1986) operationalized fairness as: (a) the difference between the referent other's perceived outcome and inputs, and (b) the difference between one's own outcome and inputs. Witt and Nye (1992), on the other hand, viewed fairness in terms of the employee's ratings of pay and promotions whereas the referent others on which fairness formulations were to be based were not clearly specified. Thus, these people with whom the respondents in Witt and Nye's (1992) study were comparing their situations with, may have varied significantly, as may their internal standards.

Sweeney and McFarlin (1997) in their study discovered that the relationship between procedural justice and organizational outcome variables including employees' intentions to stay, job satisfaction, supervisory evaluation, and organizational commitment were moderated by gender. In other words, the relationships between employees' procedural justice judgements and their reactions were generally stronger for women than men. Lee and Farh (1999) subsequently replicated Sweeney and McFarlin's (1997) study using two different samples. Initially, based on a sample of 354 participants, Lee and Farh (1999) found that gender did not moderate the relationship between procedural justice and pay satisfaction. In their second study using 217 respondents, gender again failed to moderate the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment.

According to Lee and Farh (1999), such findings may indicate a trend toward value similarity among respondents of both genders consistent with the results obtained by Chusmir and Parker (1991). Lee and Farh (1999) agreed that there is a narrowing of gender differences at work in recent years as asserted by Beutell and Brenner (1986). These findings may be attributed to the influence of feminism in the United States which has provided the opportunity for women to understand and redefine the relationship between their economic and domestic roles, thereby, affecting their orientations and attitudes towards work (Gray, 1989). Since findings of studies in the West on the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment have been inconclusive, this study hopes to explore the role of gender in a more collectivistic culture as in Malaysia as espoused by Hofstede (1991).

In order to explain why the effects of procedural justice on organizational commitment will be stronger among women than men, Sweeney and McFarlin (1997) suggested that one need to observe how women behave in group situations. For example, women are more likely than men to define success and achievement in terms of the achievement process itself (Veroff et al., 1975). Women have higher affiliative needs and that achievement behavior is motivated by a desire to please (Hoffman, 1975). Women tend to be more aware of others and be able to accept other people's point of view (Gough, 1960). Women are also likely to solicit participation from group members because they possess certain characteristics that are considered feminine such as nurturing and supporting (Rosener, 1990). Women tend to be more sensitive toward their colleagues and are more interested in forming relationships with their co-workers than men (Rosener, 1990).

One explanation for these findings may be linked with their early childhood experiences. Hoffman (1975) noted that women through socialization may have learnt that effectiveness and even safety lie in their affectional relationships. Another plausible explanation may be due to the fact that women tend to be victims of various forms of discrimination (Northcraft & Gutek, 1993) and sex-role stereotyping (Ngo & Tsang, 1998), all of which may have restricted women's involvement in major outcome allocation decision-making. Therefore, women may

have to rely on formal procedures and processes in order to obtain organizational outcomes. This suggestion hold true in societies traditionally dominated by patriarchy. According to Farh et al. (1997), in the Chinese society based on the hierarchical pattern of relationships, men are accorded a wider range of privileges, opportunities, and authority as opposed to women. Thus, women's involvement in major outcome allocation decision-making becomes limited. Such information seem to suggest that women focus more on process-oriented issues than men.

In work settings, since women tend to be more process-oriented, perceptions of procedural justice may be stronger in affecting organizational commitment for women than men. Therefore, by exploring the role of gender in moderating the effects of procedural justice on commitment, this study offers a new perspective on the role played by gender within the Malaysian context. Thus, the second hypothesis of this research is that the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment would be stronger for women than men among Malaysian employees.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

Participants in the study consisted of non-supervisory employees attached to five-star hotels located in the state of Penang, Malaysia. The survey was undertaken in 1999 between the month of June to September. A total of 236 questionnaires were distributed. The "drop-off" and "pick-up" method was employed whereby respondents were given two weeks to answer the questionnaires. Since it was not possible to have direct access to the employees, the respective managers of the hotels' human resource departments were asked to distribute the survey instruments at random to respondents. A total of 161 responses were obtained representing a response rate of about 68.2%. In terms of gender, 57.1% of the sample are males with the remaining 42.9% being females. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the sample were married. In terms of ethnicity, the sample consisted of Malays (59.6%), Indians (23.3%), and Chinese (17.4%). The mean age, organizational tenure, and job tenure of the sample were 32.74 years, 7.51 years, and 5.67 years respectively.

Measurement

The predictor variable used in this study is procedural justice. An index of procedural justice was developed. This index included 15 items (for example, "Job decisions are made by the manager in an unbiased manner") adopted from several scales (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993; Tyler et al., 1996; Lind et al., 1997). Responses to the items were made on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). All items were summed and divided by 15 to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's perceptions of procedural justice. Higher mean scores were indicative of greater procedural justice. The reliability coefficient (α) for this

measurement scale was high (0.902), which exceeded Nunnally's (1978) minimum level of 0.70.

The criterion variable used is organizational commitment as measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979). Responses to the 15 items (for example, "I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful") were made on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Several items were negatively phrased and had to be reverse-coded. Results are then summed and divided by 15 to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's commitment. Higher mean scores were indicative of greater organizational commitment. The reliability coefficient (α) for this measurement scale was 0.887. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned instruments were content translated into the Malay language with the help of an expert to ensure that respondents understand them clearly.

Method of Analyses

Organizational commitment can be influenced by personal factors (Mowday et al., 1982). Following previous researchers (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Steinhaus & Perry, 1996; Balfour & Weschler, 1996; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997), six personal variables were controlled in the statistical analyses to reduce the possibility of spurious relationships based on unmeasured variables: age, marital status, race, educational level, job tenure, and organizational tenure. Since gender, marital status, race, educational level were categorical in nature, these variables were initially dummy coded. Gender has been hypothesized as having an effect on organizational commitment based on previous literature (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Angle & Perry, 1983). In addition, the results of the meta-analysis conducted by Mathieu and Zajac (1990) indicated that women tend to be more committed than men.

The first and second hypotheses of the study were tested using hierarchical regression analysis (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). A three-step procedure was used. Control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the main effects of procedural justice and gender in the second step. In the final step, the interaction term (procedural justice \times gender) was entered into the regression equation. The change in F was assessed and the significance of the individual parameter (standardized beta) using the t-values will be interpreted. The moderating effect was tested by examining the interaction term. If the interaction term was significant, then gender was said to moderate the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and reliability coefficients of the study variables. In brief, the mean value for procedural justice

was found to be 5.01 with a standard deviation of 0.81. Organizational commitment, on the other hand, had a slightly higher mean value of 5.39 with a standard deviation of 0.66.

Table 1 : Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities of Variables

Variables	Age	Org. Tenure	Job Tenure	Marital Status	Race1	Race2	Qual1	Qual2	Gender	Proc. Justice	Org. Commitment
Age (years) Mean (32.74) S.D. (9.63)	NA										
Organizational Tenure (years) Mean (7.51) S.D. (7.38)	.622**	NA									
Job Tenure (years) Mean (5.67) S.D. (5.89)	.538**	.818**	NA								
Marital Status Mean (0.64) S.D. (0.48)	.605**	.409**	.346**	NA							
Race 1 Mean (0.60) S.D. (0.49)	.125	.086	.051	.226**	NA						
Race 2 Mean (0.17) S.D. (0.38)	-.105	.050	.014	-.236**	-.558**	NA					
Qualification 1 Mean (0.50) S.D. (0.50)	.439**	.209**	.166*	.238**	.043	-.101	NA				
Qualification 2 Mean (0.46) S.D. (0.50)	.399**	.186*	-.149*	-.217**	-.029	.037	-.928**	NA			
Gender Mean (0.57) S.D. (0.50)	.170*	.090	-.005	.030	-.022	-.066	.068	-.007	NA		
Procedural Justice Mean (5.01) S.D. (0.81)	-.110	.073	.020	-.055	.067	.049	-.081	.087	.031	-.902	
Organizational Commitment Mean (5.39) S.D. (0.66)	.268**	.387**	.290**	.183*	.060	-.074	.047	-.001	.112	.447**	(0.887)

**p<0.01, * p<0.05; Cronbach alphas for selected scales are shown in parentheses.
NA= not applicable

Table 2 depicts the results of the hierarchical regression analysis for the dependent variable. It was discovered that each of the control variables (age, organizational tenure, job tenure, marital status, race, and qualification) did not have any influence on organizational commitment. Meanwhile, procedural justice was found to have a significant and positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.300$, $p < 0.01$). This result provided support for the first hypothesis.

Gender, on the other hand, did not have any impact on organizational commitment. When the interaction term was finally entered, the incremental variance did not add significantly to the variance in organizational commitment. In other words, gender did not moderate the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment. This result did not provide support for the second hypothesis of the study.

Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Variables	Organizational			Commitment	
	Beta	R ² Total	Change in R ²	F change	Sig.F Change
Step 1					
Control Variables		.179	.179	4.14**	.000*
Age	.160				
Organizational Tenure	.226				
Job Tenure	-.004				
Marital Status	.045				
Race 1	.037				
Race 2	.107				
Qualification 1	.225				
Qualification 2	.275				
Step 2					
Main Variables		.359	.180	21.07**	.000*
Procedural Justice	.300**				
Gender	-.634				
Interaction		.370	.011	2.66	.105
Gender × P. Justice	.704				

**p < 0.01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained in this study showed that procedural justice is an important determinant of Malaysian employees' commitment to the organization. This result is consistent with those of previous researchers (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993; Martin & Bennett, 1996; Tang & Sarsfield-Baldwin, 1996). The use of fair formal procedures and fair treatment by the authorities in enacting those procedures indicates that the authority within the organization respect the rights and dignity of each employee. In social exchange relationships (Blau, 1964), the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) would induce employees who judged the organization as procedurally fair to reciprocate by being more committed to the organization.

In addition, the findings from this research demonstrated that gender did not moderate the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, this lack of support for a stronger relationship between procedural justice and commitment for women than men is consistent with the findings in Lee and Farh (1999). This may be due to the following reasons related to the sample and research site. First, there were more men than women in this sample (57.1% men as opposed to 42.9% women). Therefore, the strength of the relationship between procedural justice and commitment among women employees may have been attenuated. Second, it is also possible that women's perceptions and attitudes toward work in Malaysia are changing. Easy access to education may have also resulted in more women having developed strong career aspirations and ready to make strong work commitment. The utilization of women talents is necessary in building a fully industrialized nation given that women comprise 50% of Malaysia's population (Wan Abdullah & Mansor, 1994). The need to maximize the capability and capacity of the untapped human resource of the country has resulted in more women obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the labor force (Mansor, 1994). Within such a context, women no longer need to rely on the existence of fair procedures in order to obtain organizational outcomes.

A study by Tuan (1998) demonstrated that the Malaysian female employees exhibit a strong desire to supplement family income and a need to improve the standard of living of the family. According to Tuan (1998), such desire to engage in employment, especially among mothers, may probably be due to the cooperation received from their spouses in household work and child rearing. It is possible that the support given by the family may have induced women to be career-minded, and possibly the role of "breadwinner" for the family is no longer the sole responsibility of the men. Such feelings may influence them to adopt work beliefs and attitudes similar to those of their male colleagues. Therefore, one could speculate that there is a trend toward homogenization of beliefs, values, and attitudes among Malaysian employees of both genders. This suggestion implies that Malaysian female workers nowadays place great importance in their jobs, i.e. they see themselves as role players by virtue of their formal positions in the organizations like their male colleagues. Such perceptions could also be extended to other countries in Asia

particularly Thailand (Komin & Smuckarn, 1979) and Hong Kong (Chiu, 1995) who found that in terms of their perceptions, values, and attitudes toward work, women employees are quite like their male counterparts.

From a practical viewpoint, the findings of this research suggests that managers responsible in managing Malaysian employees need to consider procedural aspects of justice seriously. In order to maintain or even enhance employees' commitment to the organization, managers must at least be seen to be fair from their subordinates' perspective. Managerial actions involving treating employees in a fair manner and using fair procedures in making decisions require minimal costs. Since interpersonal skills or "people" skills do not come naturally for many people, adequate training need to be provided for managers. Additionally, organizations may need to actively audit their existing policies and procedures guiding their practices in order to ensure fairness. Given that no evidence was found to support the hypothesis that gender moderates the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment, this finding further suggests that organizations in Malaysia may not need to design or revise the employment practices specifically for women for the purpose of increasing their commitment to the organization.

Although the results gathered from a few earlier studies investigating the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship between procedural justice and commitment undertaken in Western cultures has been somewhat inconsistent, the findings of this study suggest that employees of both genders in Malaysia which abide to a more Eastern-oriented culture, tend to have similar beliefs, values and attitudes towards work. Thus, it is possible to speculate that as the opportunities for education and employment among women particularly in Asia continue to increase, and given that the traditional attitude toward women are changing albeit slowly, the effects of gender on perceptions and attitudes in the workplace may no longer be robust in future.

The results of the present study are tempered with certain limitations. First, the use of cross-sectional data in the present study limits inferences with regards to causality between procedural justice and organizational commitment. The use of a longitudinal approach would improve the ability to make causal statements. Secondly, the exclusive use of self-reported data raises concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). When two or more variables are measured from the same source, any defect in that source may contaminate the measures, resulting in erroneous correlations between them. One way to alleviate this problem is by using multiple sources of data. Thirdly, given that social exchange (Blau, 1964) is one of the motivational basis for organizational commitment, reciprocal causation should be acknowledged. It is possible that the level of organizational commitment experienced by employees could affect their judgements about procedural justice, instead of the other way around. Future research may need to focus on the causal direction of the link between these variables. Finally, since this study is limited in scope, and given that there may be other individual, occupational, organizational factors that also affect employee

concerns with procedural justice, researchers interested in this area should try to explore these factors in future.

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