

Perceived Organizational Justice as a Predictor of Organizational Trust in Medical Education Organizations

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Motivated employees are probably the most valuable resource of the contemporary organizations. Evidence shows the significant impact of perceived organizational justice on the attitudes of employees, including their trust. To further investigate the issue in the context of health organizations, this study aimed to explore the relationship between perceived organizational justice and employees' trust among the staff of Kerman University of Medical Sciences (KUMS), Iran.

Methods: Overall, 285 employees were selected to participate in the study based on stratified sampling and Cochran formula. Organizational justice was measured by Niehoff and Moorman questionnaire in three dimensions of distributive, interactional, procedural justice. The trust in managers was measured in the dimensions of competence, benevolence and reliability, and institutional trust was quantified based on situational normality, vision, strategy, communication, and structural assurance using the corresponding inventories developed by Ellonen et al. The reliability of the study tools was confirmed by Cronbach alpha of 89% for organizational justice and 86% for trust in managers and institution. Data were summarized using descriptive methods and analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient, t test and multiple regressions analysis.

Findings: A significant positive relationship was identified between the perceived organizational justice and trust in managers and institution. Among the three dimensions of organizational justice, procedural justice showed the strongest relationship with trust in managers and institution compared with distributive and interactional justice. Perceived organizational justice and trust were not significantly different between the sex, age, job tenure, employment status, and educational level groups.

Conclusions: The research results provide evidence that organizational justice is a predictor of employees' trust in their managers and institution. Given the importance of employees' trust in their organizational commitment, this study recommends improvement of organizational justice as a pathway towards enhanced human resources productivity in the medical education organizations.

Keywords: Organizational justice, Organizational trust, Organizational commitment, Human resources productivity

Background and Objectives

Studies have established that the way human resources are treated in an organization will affect their beliefs, behaviors and attitudes.¹ Employees' productivity and performance are largely influenced by their attitudes toward their organization,² and organizational justice (OJ) is a crucial factor shaping these attitudes.³ Justice has been an issue of immense importance in

human social life throughout the history. In the context of organization science, justice is discussed in terms of how employees' perceptions towards the fairness of organizational outcome distributions, procedures, and relationship with superiors impact their job satisfaction, quality of work life and commitment.^{4,5} According to Shockley-Zalabak,⁶ OJ is defined as "the organization's willingness, based upon its culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable based on the belief that another individual, group, or organization is compe-

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tent, open and honest, concerned, reliable, and identified with common goals, norms, and values.”⁶ OJ has three distinct dimensions, including distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. These aspects, while related, affect the employees’ work-related attitudes and behaviors, differentially.⁶

Employees’ perceptions towards OJ significantly impact their job performance, job satisfaction, evaluation of supervisor, citizenship behavior, commitment, conflict solving, disharmony, counterproductive behaviors, tension-stress, turn over intention and burnout.⁸⁻¹⁰ Studies have shown that lack of OJ, as perceived by the employees, leads to negative organizational outcomes. These include tendency to leave the jobs, low level of commitment, dissatisfaction with job, low performance, and low cooperation with the coworkers among the employees.⁹ Without a positive perception of employees towards justice, organizations will have great problems in motivating and leading their employees. These facts render the perceived OJ a fundamental issue to the organization performance.¹⁻⁴

Yet another construct affecting employees’ attitude towards their organization is trust. Trust has become a crucial issue of investigation in various disciplines such as ethics, sociology, psychology, economics, and management.¹¹ Emerged as a central research issue in 1980s,¹² the concept has gained renewed interest in recent years.¹³

Trust is the essence of leadership, playing an important role in organizational effectiveness.^{14,15} Researches have documented the crucial impact of trust on various organizational processes, its influence on employees’ behaviors and work performance as well as organizational-level outcomes such as organizational commitment, confidence in decisions made by the managers, organizational citizenship behaviors, innovation, problem solving, long term stability, organizational health and productivity.^{11,14-19} There are evidence showing that trust has been decreasing in some private and public organizations in recent decades.^{15,19} Given the negative impact of such phenomenon on the organizations’ performance, the leaders have to explore its causative factors, and find solutions to maintain a high level of trust in their organization.

As medical universities are human-dense organizations, the attitudes of their employees have large impact on the goals of these universities, most important of which being quality medical education. It could be urged that promotion of organizational trust (OT) in medical education organizations is crucial to develop efficient health human resources. The aim of the present study is thus

to investigate the extent to which OJ can predict OT in a medical university.

Methods

Setting and Sample

Among the total staff of KUMS, 285 employees were selected to participate in the study based on stratified sampling and Cochran formula.

Study Instruments and Data Collection

OJ was measured by Niehoff and Moorman’s questionnaire in three dimensions of distributive, interactional, procedural justice. The trust in managers was measured in the dimensions of competence, benevolence and reliability, and institutional trust was quantified based on situational normality, vision, strategy, communication, and structural assurance using the corresponding inventories developed by Ellonen et al.²⁰⁻²² The reliability of the study tools was confirmed by Cronbach alpha of 89% for OJ and 86% for trust in managers and institution.

Ethical Issues

The approval for conducting this study was obtained from the Ethical Committee of KUMS. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Data Analysis

Data were summarized using descriptive statistical methods. Pearson coefficient and multiple regressions analysis were used to quantify the relationship between variables. Student’s *t* test was employed to compare the mean values. $P < .05$ was defined as the statistical significance. All analyses were carried out using the SPSS version 19 software package.

Results

Of the total sample, 69.8% were female, 42.8% had 31-40 years of age, 54% held a BS degree, 24.9% had 11-15 years of job tenure, and 51.6% were officially employed (Table 1). The mean perceived score of OJ was found to be 2.79 (Table 2). The mean perceived score of OT and its two components (trust in managers and institutional trust) was found to be 2.82, 2.79, and 2.85, respectively. Competence and structural assurance gained the highest score among the other dimensions of trust-in-managers and institutional trust, respectively (Table 2). Strong positive correlations were identified between OJ and its dimensions with trust to managers and institutional trust ($P < .05$) (Table 3).

Regression analysis revealed that OJ is a significant

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	No.	Percent
Gender (n = 281)		
Female	196	69.8
Male	85	30.2
Age (n = 285)		
20-30 years	79	27.7
31-40 years	122	42.8
41-50 years	74	26.0
> 51 years	10	3.5
Education (n = 285)		
Diploma	56	19.6
Associates degree	41	14.4
Bachelor	154	54.0
Master	28	9.8
PhD	6	2.2
Job tenure (n = 285)		
< 5 years	64	22.5
6-10 years	54	18.9
11-15 years	71	24.9
16-20 years	42	14.7
21-25 years	33	11.6
26-30 years	21	7.4
Employment status (n = 285)		
Officially employed	160	56.1
Contractual employed	125	43.9

predictor of both trust-in-managers and institutional trust. OJ explained approximately 66% of the total

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of OJ and OT Constructs

Variables	Mean	SD
OJ	2.79	0.76
Distributive justice	2.6	0.78
Procedural justice	2.73	0.88
Interactional justice	3.02	0.92
OT	2.82	0.76
Trust in managers	2.79	0.8
Reliability	2.81	0.83
Competence	2.97	0.91
Benevolence	2.54	1
Institutional trust	2.85	0.75
Structural assurance	2.98	0.8
Vision, strategy, communication	2.84	0.79
Situational normality	2.85	0.84

Abbreviations: OJ, organizational justice; OT, organizational trust.

variance of trust-in-managers and institutional trust. Procedural justice was found to be the strongest predictor of both trust-in-managers and institutional trust (Table 4).

The perceived OJ and trust were not significantly different between the sex, age, job tenure, employment status, and educational level groups.

Discussion

Based on the obtained results, OJ is a significant predictor of employees' trust in managers. This finding is in line with the results from several previous studies.^{23,24} It has been shown that top managers have important role in organizational performance.²⁵ Managers' honesty can promote confidence in subordinates.²⁶ Therefore, the behaviors of top managers would be the essential basis for trust.²⁷ Through fair designing and allocating of the rewards, top managers can promote positive organizational climate, and thereby, influence the employees' trust.^{13,28}

The procedural justice showed the strongest relationship with trust-in-managers compared with distributive

Table 3. Correlations Between OJ and OT

Variables	Institutional Trust	Trust in Manager
OJ	.79 ^a	.76 ^a
Distributive justice	.62 ^a	.59 ^a
Procedural justice	.77 ^a	.79 ^a
Interactional justice	.73 ^a	.73 ^a

Abbreviations: OJ, organizational justice; OT, organizational trust.

^a $P < .05$ (2-sided).

Table 4. Multiple Regressions Analysis of the Relationship Between the Perceived OJ and OT

Variables	β		
	OJ		
	Distributive Justice	Procedural Justice	Interactional Justice
Trust in manager	.193	.486	.222
Institutional trust	.254	.404	.260

Abbreviations: OJ, organizational justice; OT, organizational trust.

* $P < .05$ (2-sided).

and interactional justice. Evidence shows that procedural justice affects the way subordinates perceive organization leadership and assess the supervisors. The procedures based on which the managers allot the organizational achievement between the subordinates influence the employees' perceived trust.^{10,17,29-32} Therefore, supervisor's commitment to fair decision-making procedures plays a crucial role in building trust in employees.³¹ Procedural justice also has strong effect employees' attitudes towards their organization. Fair procedures are an indicator of an organization's respect for the employees' rights and dignity.^{33,34} Therefore, employees' positive perceptions towards procedures that influence their benefits would deepen their trust in the organization.³⁰ The finding that employees' perception towards distributive, procedural, and interactional justice strongly influences their trust in organization is consistent with the results of previous studies.^{23,24} Organizational structure, strategy, and resource allocation influence the employees' perceived trust.³⁵ In addition, the elegant behavior of top managers can help alleviate the risk of innate opportunism, promoting the employees' perceived safety, and their confidence in both of managers and organization.³⁵

Conclusions

Our results provide evidence that OJ is a predictor of employees' trust in their managers and institution in health organizations. Given the importance of employees' trust in their organizational commitment, the present study recommends improvement of OJ as a pathway towards enhanced organizational commitment and human resources' productivity in the medical education organizations.

Abbreviations

(OJ): organizational justice; (OT): organizational trust.

Authors' Contributions

MR contributed to study design, data analysis and manuscript drafting. SS took part in data collection and analysis. LA and MM took part in interpretation of the results and drafting the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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