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AUTHORS: Nigar DEMIRCAN ÇAKAR

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Gender-Based Perceptions of Organizational Justice: The Role of Ethical Climate

Nigar Demircan Çakar¹

Abstract

Gender is an important issue which effects both social and organizational behavior. From an organizational perspective, another important issue which creates performance-oriented results and increases employee motivation is organizational justice. A gender-based view of organizational justice implies that women and men differ from each other regarding their perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The codes and strategies of ethical climates need to be established accordingly. The results of this study, which was conducted on 562 academicians, indicates that women's perceptions of justice are less effected by the codes of ethical climate. This study serves as a guide for managers from any sector who aim to increase employee performance concerning gender-based differences.

Keywords

Distributive justice • Procedural justice • Interactional justice • Gender • Organizational ethical climate

¹ Prof., Rector of Duzce University, Konuralp Yerleşkesi Merkez, Düzce 81620 Turkey.
Email: nigarcakar@duzce.edu.tr

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Basically, the concept of justice in reference to science of law is one of the elements that people give the greatest value in social life. The concept of justice is related to the dimensions of individual perception and organizational behavior (Tuna, 2013). One of the most important and unchanging factors of the business environment is the concept of *organizational justice*, which represents fairness towards the decision-making process that determines the equitable allocation of gains obtained on the basis of relationships in the workplace (Özen, 2002). Organizational justice covers employee perception on the correctness of organizational practices and decisions, and the impact of these perceptions on employees (Çolak & Erdost, 2004).

Men and women have different perceptions when assessing the level of fairness of the events they encounter as well as when developing responses to injustice (Lee, Pillutla, & Law, 2000). The main reason for these differences can be explained through the *societal concept of gender* which exists socially between men and women and has gained usage through reference to the differences that are also socially expected from them (Toker, 2009). It draws attention to the social dimension of differences between men and women on the basis of the societal concept of gender (Ersoy, 2009). This concept draws attention to the artificial, unnatural value of the mold that society deems appropriate for women and men. While *gender* describes the biological distinction of male and female, *societal gender* refers to the distinctions between masculinity and femininity in social life (Gürhan, 2010). Societal gender is not just the individual identity and personality of women and men; it also includes the positioning of gender in institutions and organizations through the cultural structure of masculinity and femininity (Marshall, 1999).

Societal gender should not be thought as being separate from religion. In regards to this, religion is known to be one of the most effective driving factors for society.

According to some authors and researchers, the concept of societal gender with modernization has been evolved into a state known as ‘equity’ or ‘complementariness’. With this, the justice-based view has been slightly neglected.

Due to the differing perception of women and men, responses will be different regarding issues of how fair are the wages that have been earned at work, whether or not administrators have treated them fairly, whether or not rewards given at work have been distributed equitably (Irak, 2004), and whether or not an ethical climate has been created at work.

Whether or not a judgment or behavior has been fair is related to whether or not a female or male employee has found them fair. Justice from this perspective is a perceptual condition based on societal gender. Female and male employees’ perceptions of an identical event under identical conditions will differ when related to justice, the perception of justice also varies according to gender (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998).

Literature Review and Research Model

The Concept of Organizational Justice and its Dimensions

The concept of justice which was developed by those interested in philosophy such as Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Nozick, and Rawls has been observed in international management literature (Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005; Greenberg & Bies, 1992). According to Rawls (1971), who first put forth the concept, justice is the primary virtue of social institutions (Fırat, 2003). The concept of *organizational justice* had been developed, representing the benefits that result in connection to relationships within an organization with the adaptation of *social justice* to organizations and the process of distributing these benefits (İşbaşı, 2001).

In recent years, researchers have focused their attention on the important role of organizational justice in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of employees (Clay-Warner, Raynolds, & Roman, 2005). In everyday language, the concept of justice is used to express the appropriateness and correctness of a behavior or action towards justice, and to express people's integrity. In organizational settings, the concept of organizational justice is used to describe the situation of managers as equitable or just with regards to the organization (Colquitt et al., 2005; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999).

Organizational justice is the process of evaluating the administrative decisions towards variables such as employee work distribution, overtime compliance, handing out authority, wage level, and award distribution. Considering from this point, organizational justice can be expressed as a concept related to how the decisions and practices of organizational management are perceived workers (İnce & Gül, 2005).

In the light of these definitions, organizational justice can be described as the decisions and practices of administrators in relation to the organization and workers as positively perceived employees. In other words, organizational justice can be defined as the perception by employees of how awards, penalties, and promotions are distributed and how these types of decisions are received or how decisions that had been taken were told to employees (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2012; Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002).

Perceptions related to organizational justice are dealt with in three perspectives: distributive justice, or the fairness of allocating resources and awards; procedural justice, or the equity of the procedures that govern the distribution of resources and awards; and interactional justice, or the fairness of relationships that exist between people in an organization (Cropanzano et al., 2002; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Kernan & Hanges, 2002; Miller & Lee, 2001; Moorman, 1991; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993; Tang & Sarsfield-Baldwin, 1996).

Distributive justice: The term refers to perceived justice which relates to the outcomes that are obtained in the organization. Within literature, organizational justice generally focuses on the content of distributive justice. Distributive justice reflects on the perceptions of employees as to whether or not the compensation they receive is fair. Thus, distributive justice is related to the equitable sharing of outcomes that are formed within the workplace (Adams, 1965). According to another view, distributive justice also means justly perceiving all types of earnings by employees as fair, such as wage received, rewards, punishments, and promotions (Cropanzano et al., 2002). The concept of distributive justice suggests there are roots based on Adam's equity theory (1965, as cited in Beugré, 2002) and that balance between the input-output ratios opens the way to a feeling of equality in workers. Basically, distributive justice as based on the equity theory is defined as "the perceived equality of outcomes that an individual gains," (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Another definition of distributive justice has been stated as "assessment of the fairness of rewards given to one's input," (Mueller et al., 1999). Distributive justice means the input and output of individuals achieve equivalent outcomes when compared with other employees. For example, an employee's salary and outcomes can be compared to that of other employees and distributive justice can be found in comparing the rewards earned for their work (Adams, 1965). As understood from these definitions, distributive justice is a dimension of justice based on the opinion of equality concerning recognition of the achievements that male and female employees have earned in return for their labor and the distribution of rewards and wages in order to meet their needs in organizational life (Colquitt et al., 2005).

Procedural justice: Procedural justice refers to the perceptions of the distribution of decisions within the organization and of the decision-making process in a way that is seen as equitable by male and female employees (Colquitt et al., 2005). The basic assumption here is that distribution in the form of decision making which is found to be fair by employees opens the way for employees to adopt these decisions more easily. The elements of decisions such as consistency, being free from bias, correctness, maintainability, representation, and ethics as determined in the decision-making process increase the level of equity perceived by both women and men (Colquitt et al., 2005).

Interactional justice: Interactional justice is considered a sub-dimension of procedural justice in some sources and is defined as the humanitarian aspect of organizational practices (Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). In other sources, interactional justice is neither a form of procedural nor distributive justice; it is considered to be a type of justice that does not tie in with these (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Interactional justice includes behaviors such as valuing employees, acting respectfully, and explaining decisions to employees that are defined as a social value (Greenberg, 1990). The effects of the the decision-makers who determine the amount in terms of distribution, upon the employees. (Beugré, 2002).

The Concept of Organizational Ethics

Organizational ethics is the totality of perceptions related to current organizational procedures and is defined as “the general perceptions of organizational activities and procedures that have accurate and truthful content,” (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Ethical climate, as a type of work climate (Wang & Hsieh, 2012), is the perception of what constitutes to proper behavior. Ethical issues that affect behavior which arise in response to both decision-making and ethical dilemmas are the criteria, rationales, or standards that are used while ethical decisions are learned. Additionally, ethical climates are the ethical dimensions of organizational culture and are perceived as a kind of identity of the organization (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Ethical climate does not only affect what issues employees see as appropriate in terms of ethics; at the same time, employees also determine the moral criteria they will use for understanding, weighing, and explaining issues like these (Cullen, Victor, & Stephens, 1989).

Ethical perceptions are the psychologically meaningful perceptions related to the ethical procedures and policies that exist in the organization of which they are members (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Ethical perception is concerned with recognizing an individual's moral case and with the comprehension that it is a moral representative (Jones, 1991). Any judgment about an issue or behavior of an individual as being incorrect depends on the level of moral significance their issue or behavior finds (Reidenbach & Robin, 1990).

The most important predictor of ethical climate is the existence of a code of ethics. Research has shown that employees develop a positive attitude towards organizations that have clear codes which can allow them to distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior (Trevino & Weaver, 2001). Ethical codes are defined as a means to describe the roles and expectations within the organization based on organizational ethics (Brothers, 1991), and they are considered as an element that strengthens organizational ethics (McDonald, 1999). In the creation of organizational ethics, the existence of an ethical code is not sufficient (Soutar, McNeil, & Molster, 1994). An organization that seeks to strengthen their organizational ethics does not just have a code of ethics; they must have the desire and commitment to implement it as well. These days, some organizations try to deploy a written code of ethics to their employees (Weaver, 1993) and organizations work to ensure the code is disseminated within the organization (Robertson & Schlegelmilch, 1993). If the organizational ethical climate emphasizes the appropriateness of employees' ethical behavior, the appearance of unethical behaviors within an organization tends to decrease (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010). The absence of organizational ethics can undermine the relationships between people, shaking the trust within an organization (Zajac, 1996). Organizational ethics shows employees the way to evaluate cases and consider alternatives. It helps to determine acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors in the work environment.

The Relationship Between Justice Perceptions and Ethical Climate

Perceptions of organizational justice and organizational ethics are a product of the interactions between employees and managers. The most important theory that explains the interactions between employees and managers and the possible outcomes of these interactions is the theory of leader-member relations (Scandura & Ragins, 1999). According to this theory, the exchange between managers and employees varies according to various social factors and the quality of exchange is also affected by these social factors. In the theory on leader-member relations, the quality of exchange between managers and employees is defined by a high level of information sharing, high levels of confidence, respect, and support. Relations of poor quality include low confidence, formal relations, and a one-way exchange from the manager to employee (Bauer & Green, 1996).

Research that has been performed shows that administrators' just behaviors create a positive element of social exchange (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Experimental studies on organizational ethics as based on the leader-member relations theory have shown the relationship of justice perceptions to be close with ethical climate (Trevino & Weaver, 2001). People, in their memories of events in life that they've encountered, very systematically and orderly maintain their memories from a scattered and irregular structure. This pattern serves to interpret the received information and convert it to processed information through memory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The part that relates to ethics in memory also includes the concepts of justice and correctness. Therefore, when employees hear matters related to ethics in the context of the organization, they cognitively perceive the observed elements of justice in their employment, promotions, performance evaluations, and wage system (Weaver & Trevino, 2001). Accordingly, efforts to notice the concept of organizational ethics also increase the awareness of the fair treatment of employees in general. Furthermore, giving importance to ethics in an organization strengthens employee beliefs that they will be treated fairly (Van den Bos, Lind, & Wilke, 2001).

Procedural Justice on the Basis of Societal Gender

Individual perceptions of organizational justice are also influenced by gender, marital status, social status and so on as placed in a community, as well as group memberships. The reason for this is that socialization in different social groups also differentiates one structure from another. In society, people are separated into two different gender groups, and along with being an important determinant, gender socialization is a natural element that effects the perceptions of gender (Cross & Madison, 1997).

Some gender-based studies have shown that because women and men have different socialization processes, they also have different normative beliefs. For example, Gilligan (1977) suggested women's ethical values, unlike those of males, do not contain abstract individual assessments. According to this, women's personality structure is

developed in the process of interacting with their mothers, whom they have adopted as a role model. For males, the personality develops while ignoring existing role models like the mother and associating itself with an abstract male model. Therefore, women's personality is a result of a very conceptual and associative process of identification, rather than an abstract and individual process. Women's ethical evaluations and judgments are not uniform due to having a primary role of interactive responsibilities in the development of their ethical elements; on the contrary, it changes from topic to topic and from event to event. This situation differentiates the ethical judgments of females from males' abstract, rule-based, moral values of justice. While protection is the most important issue of existing relationships in cases involving interpersonal relations for women, men work to be isolated from interpersonal relationships in order to provide fair and impartial decisions to related events (as cited in Gilligan, 1982). When trying to change the rules in order to maintain relationships with women, men prefer to tolerate these rules and change relations (Gilligan, 1982).

For these reasons, ethical climate based on people's individual perceptions is of great importance when determining the attitudes and behaviors concerning the organization and its employees (Beugré & Baron, 2001). One study reached a finding that applications of ethics and organizational justice may lead to similar behavioral outcomes on employees (Trevino & Weaver, 2001). Few studies have been encountered in the literature to describe the relationship of justice with ethical climate. As an example, in Victor and Cullen's (1988) study based on the classification of ethical climate on 123 companies located in Hong Kong, a positive correlation was detected between distributive justice and the dimensions of egoism and morality, and a negative correlation was detected between distributive justice and charity (Lau & Wong, 2009).

At the center of social gender, findings reveal the importance of the effect of women and men's perceptions of justice on their attitudes and behaviors (Beugré & Baron, 2001). Therefore, while administrators disregard the concept of gender in the distribution of employee promotions or tasks, evaluations that do not address the differences in perception between male and female employees can cause damage to employee perceptions of organizational justice.

For example, Brockner and Adsit (1986) put forth that women were less satisfied with distributive justice than men. Sweeney and McFarlin (1997) showed that women are more vulnerable than men when it comes to procedural justice. According to Lee et al. (2000), despite these studies that approach the concept of justice from the view of socialized gender, the findings of these studies are neither consistent nor in the same direction.

With these thoughts, the main hypothesis of this study is that the elements of organizational ethics which affect the perceptions of distributional, procedural, and interactive justice are different for male and female faculty members.

Method

Data Collection Method and Sample Structure

The questionnaire was formed and prepared to collect data from assistant professors, associate professors, and professors working at state universities in different regions of Turkey who had been selected in accordance with the random sampling method. As a result of implementation, 562 surveys were provided for feedback and the rate of feedback was calculated at 35%. This feedback percentage was considered acceptable in terms of studies performed by e-mail (Demircan, 2003). Questions on perceptions of organizational justice (developed by Niehoff & Moorman, 1993) and organizational ethics (developed by Qualls & Puto, 1989), which were both thought to contain the proper expressions for the aim of the study, were preferred for use.

Questions relating to the scale were evaluated and given their final form by first being translated to Turkish and then back again to English by experienced and trained independent translators. The answers to the questions in the questionnaire were arranged using a five-point Likert scale, varying between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree), except for the last section on demographic information.

Of the faculty members who participated in the scale, 69.2% were male and 30.8% were female. Of the faculty members, 69.2% were married, 29.6% were single, and 1.3% were widowed; 79% of them were assistant professors; 11.8%, associate professors; and 9.2%, professors. The university experience of the faculty members who participated in the survey ranged from 1 to 24 years. Of all the faculty members, 83.1% were working at state universities and 16.9% of them were working at foundation universities.

Factor Analysis and Relations Between Variables

The questions constituting the survey were subjected to exploratory factor analysis; the most relevant factor structure was achieved using varimax rotations. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values presented information about the appropriateness of factor analysis. This value is desired to be more than .60 (Büyüköztürk, 2002). All KMO values were observed to be greater than .60 in this study. Meanwhile, the ratio of variance explained by total factor was over 55%.

Cronbach's alpha values of $\alpha > .70$ are considered to be the benchmark of a scale's accepted reliability in accordance with the results obtained from factor analysis (Nunnally, 1978). Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among variables.

Testing the Research Hypothesis and Research Findings

The effects of variables related to ethical climate on male and female perceptions of distributional, procedural, and interactional justice were analyzed from the

perspective of social gender using multiple regression analysis. Analyses were performed independently for each group in order to clarify the differences between male and female faculty members.

The organizational dimensions of *having ethical rules*, *promoting ethical rules*, *having policies on ethical behavior*, and *promoting policies on ethical behavior* were included in the regression model as a separate variable of the applied scale regarding ethical climate, since organizational ethical climate was considered to be the independent variable in this study. Thus, six different regression models were created to test this study's hypothesis.

The first model, which examined the effects on men's perceptions of distributive justice, were found to be statistically significant ($F = 8.746, p < .01$). Accordingly, the two main factors affecting male faculty members' perceptions of distributive justice were *promoting ethical rules within the institution* ($\beta = .160, p < .05$) and *promoting policies on ethical behavior* ($\beta = .143, p < .01$). The second model, which examined the effects on women's distributive justice perceptions, also appeared to be statistically significant ($F = 8.746, p < .01$). However, none of the variables in the model were statistically significant. Accordingly, no ethical factors were found to directly affect female faculty members' perceptions of distributive justice.

Results were obtained for regression analysis on the effects from factors related to organizational ethics on the perception of procedural justice. The third model, which examined the effects on men's perceptions of procedural justice appeared to be statistically significant ($F = 18.585, p < .01$). Accordingly, the two main factors affecting male faculty members' perceptions of procedural justice were *having ethical rules within the institution* ($\beta = .251, p < .05$) and *promoting policies on ethical behavior* ($\beta = .132, p < .05$).

On the other hand, the fourth model, which examined the effects on women's perceptions of procedural justice, also appeared to be statistically significant ($F = 7.941, p < .01$). However, of the variables that took place in the model, the only factor directly affecting women faculty members' perceptions of procedural justice was *having ethical rules* ($\beta = .201, p < .05$).

Results were obtained from regression analysis regarding the effects of factors related to organizational ethics on perceptions of interactional justice. The fifth model, which examined the effects on male faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice also were found to be statistically significant ($F = 24.349, p < .01$). There were three ethical factors affecting male faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice. These were *having ethical rules* ($\beta = .231, p < .01$), *promoting ethical rules* ($\beta = .160, p < .05$), and *promoting rules on ethics policies* ($\beta = .157, p < .05$).

The sixth model, which examined the effects on female faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice were also found to be statistically significant ($F = 9.667, p < .01$). However, of the variables located in this part, only *having ethical rules* ($\beta = .254, p < .01$) and *promoting policies on ethical behavior* ($\beta = .200, p < .05$) directly affected female faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Social gender is one of the factors that affect the order of work within the employees' institution. Therefore, examining the effects on perceptions of justice that increase the motivation of male and female employees in the workplace and how these perceptions of justice also differ within the center of socialized gender have led to very significant results. The most important factor that increased motivation in the work environment was supplying the demands of employees and their expectations met by the organization. The expectations of employees were that profits earned within the organization be fairly distributed among all employees and that the process of making organizational decisions be distributed equitably; these decisions can be transmitted to employees without bias.

As can be seen from the six different regression models that were performed, concerning male faculty members, the impact of organizational ethical climate was greater on three different dimensions of the perception of justice. Accordingly, it is easier to create a perception of justice by making ethical rules and policies and promoting them to male faculty members than it is to create a perception of justice in female faculty members. In other words, female faculty members' perception of justice can be made possible with the implementation of a concrete policy rather than promoting an ethical climate.

The factors and dynamics that affect the expectations, perceptions, and attitudes of male and female employees within work environment are not the same, of course. The kind of institutional policies need to be developed for male and female faculty members by bringing the concept of gender to the forefront is an important research question to answer in order to create a positive impact on employees' perceptions of justice. In this study, which was conducted on 562 faculty members answering this question, creating an ethical climate intended for women faculty members' perception of justice was generally more difficult to understand. The main finding was that female faculty member's expectations regarding any type of perception of justice were greater than that of male faculty members.

According to the results, female faculty members' perceptions of distributive justice were not bound by ethical rules and practices. In other words, no ethics or politics could be directly proposed for development to ensure that disciplinary actions in the institution

such as wages, promotions, compliance with overtime, and punishment were perceived as fair. On the other hand, female faculty members' perceptions of the processes that determine results such as wages, promotions, and equitable decisions depended on the existence of specific ethical rules. In other words, the presence or promotion of ethical rules and policies in the institution affected their perceptions of process-oriented justice directed towards the method and interactions that determine these gains rather than a results-oriented perception of justice directed towards earning rewards. Ethical policies need to be developed in order to improve female faculty members' perception of justice so that female employees can raise their voices in the process of decision-making. When evaluated from this point, creating a process that will be used to determine female faculty members' awards or to ensure their participation in the process of determining awards is important in supporting the perception of procedural justice.

According to the findings of this study, male and female faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice were also affected by the different indicators of organizational ethical climate. Managers' sincere and honest behaviors in explaining the reasons for decisions they give, as well as their positive communication with employees for this purpose, can be a positive influence on female faculty members' perceptions intended for the process of justice. Statements made to employees during the process of giving decisions that determine distributions can provide the necessary information to evaluate the structural aspects of this process. Female faculty members' perceptions of interactional justice can be positively increased when managers behave more respectfully towards employees, when they are more sensitive to them, and when they also clearly and honestly share a logical explanation of the decisions with the female faculty members who are receiving them.

As a result, the effect of organizational justice on faculty members' attitudes and behavior is a matter that should be paid attention by managers. Male and female faculty member that perceive their managers or institutions as fair may lead to the development of responsive behaviors. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the different reasons that affect male and female employees' perception of justice. Addressing the topic of justice from the perspective of socialized gender will make a major contribution in examining organizational justice from theoretical aspects.

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Değerlendirmeler

Reviews

