Relationship between Organizational Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Justice: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between organizational communication satisfaction and organizational justice and to explore the impact of communication satisfaction on perceived justice in a group of university employees. Data were obtained through questionnaires among 481 academics working in public and private universities in Turkey. The research measures used in this study were the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire of Downs and Hazen and the Organizational Justice Scale of Colquitt. Correlation analysis showed that there was an explicit positive relationship between organizational communication satisfaction and organizational justice. Communication satisfaction explained 63.9% of the variability in perceived organizational justice and dimensions of justice (procedural, distributive, interpersonal, informational) were all found to be markedly related to communication satisfaction. Besides, a stronger relation was assessed for procedural justice. In conclusion, the present study supported the expected relationship between communication satisfaction and organizational justice and implied that higher level of communication satisfaction can favorably influence the perceptions of organizational justice.

Introduction

Justice is concerned with fair or unfair behaviors and attitudes directed toward an individual or a group of people (Rebore, 2001). Rawls defines justice as "the first virtue of social institutions''(Rawls, 1971, p. 3) and proposes its two principles as: 1) "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others", and 2) "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity" (Rawls, 1971, p.60). According to Barnard, justice is one of the fundamental bases of cooperative action in organizations (Konovsky, 2000). The concept of organizational justice is based on the adaptation of "social justice" phenomenon into organizations (İşbaşı, 2001) and built on Adam's equity theory (Greenberg, 1990). The term "organizational justice" was first used by Greenberg in 1987 to describe importance of fairness and equity in organizations (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter & Ng, 2001). Organizational justice is about the social norms and rules that describe how outcomes, i.e., rewards and punishment, should be distributed, the procedures used for making these distribution decisions and the way people are treated interpersonally in such procedures (Barling & Phillips, 1993; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Organizational justice explains the employees' perception of fairness (Beugre, 2002) and the quality of social interaction in workplace (Doğan, 2008).

In the literature of organizational justice, there is no clear consensus on the number of its dimensions (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Most previous studies have introduced these dimensions as distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice (Flint, Haley & Mcnally, 2012; Özer & Urtekin, 2007). Distributive justice is concerned with the fair distribution of organizational costs and benefits such as pay, promotion, opportunities, and performance appraisal among individuals (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Greenberg, 1990). Procedural justice concerns with the fairness of the processes used to make and implement such distribution decisions (Konovsky, 2000). Interpersonal justice is concerned with the fairness of interpersonal treatment received from the authorities in organizations in implementing such processes (Bies & Moag, 1986) and, informational justice is perceived when explanations of decision makers are adequate and candid (Colquitt, et al., 2001; Kutaniş & Çetinel; 2009). It is stated that, when decision makers in organizations are fair, just and candid to employees and justify their decisions on rational grounds, the employees believe that they are treated fairly (Beugre,

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2002; Jawahar, 2002). At this point, communication between decision makers and employees play an important role.

The concept of communication satisfaction was first introduced by Level in 1959 (Bakanauskiene, Bendaraviciene & Krikstolaitis, 2010) and has become an important field of research in the recent decades (Colquitt et al., 2001; Ehlers, 2003). Communication satisfaction defines the employees' satisfaction of communication within their organizations (Bakanauskiene, Bendaraviciene & Krikstolaitis, 2010; Spector, 1997). Communication satisfaction is an outcome of communication interactions with others (Andersen, Martin & Riddle, 2001), thus, it provides a theoretical approach to understanding the field of communication (Mueller & Lee, 2002).

Existence of a healthy communication process in organizations should facilitate the employee satisfaction and affect employees' job performances and organizational climate in a positive way (Bakanauskiene, Bendaraviciene & Krikstolaitis, 2010). It is also stated that employees with high communication satisfaction level tend to respond positively to organizational decisions and managerial actions (Ehlers, 2003). Besides, ethical communication in organizations should fulfill employees' expectations of organizational justice.

Several studies have analyzed the relationship between organizational justice and various work-related variables such as organizational citizenship behavior (Aslam & Sadaqat, 2011; Lv, Shen, Cao, Su & Chen, 2012; Noruzy, Shatery, Rezazadeh & Hatami-Shirkouhi, 2011); organizational commitment (Bakhshi, Kumar & Rani, 2009; Crow, Lee & Joo, 2012); job satisfaction (Al-Zu'bi, 2010; García-Izquierdo, Moscoso & Ramos-Villagrasa, 2012) and turnover intention (Ansari, Aafaqi & Sim, 2012; Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). But, only a few studies have investigated its relationship with organizational communication satisfaction (Bies & Moag, 1986; Doğan, 2002) and, our study is one of the first empirical studies to report this statistical relationship. Therefore, we aimed to investigate the relationship between organizational communication satisfaction and organizational justice and to explore the impact of communication satisfaction on perceived justice. On the basis of the above considerations, we tested the following hypotheses

H1: Organizational communication satisfaction would be positively related to organizational justice.

H2: Organizational communication satisfaction would have a positive impact on (a) distributive justice, (b) procedural justice, (c) interpersonal justice, (d) informational justice.

Method

Participants

A questionnaire was sent out via e-mail to the academic personnel (n=3.740) working in the faculty of economics and administrative sciences of public and private universities in Turkey. A total of 481 were returned, a response rate of 13%. Participants who were under 35 outnumbered the other age groups (66%) and majority of them (85%) reported their institution as public university. 64% of them were male and 53,4% identified their academic title as research assistant and the remaining as assistant professor, associate professor and professor.

Instruments

Organizational communication satisfaction was measured by using the 40-item "Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire" of Downs and Hazen (1977). Our study didn't include the items about communication satisfaction with subordinates, thus, the 35-item version was used. The reliability coefficient of the scale computed using Cronbach's alpha, was .97 for our sample. Our data were also subjected to factor analysis using the principal component method, therefore KMO value was .97 and the Bartlett's test was significant at the $p < .01$ level ($\chi^2_{(595)}$ =14611,981).

Perception of organizational justice was measured by Colquitt's 20-item Organizational Justice Questionnaire (2001). The scale measures four dimensions: (1) procedural justice, (2) distributive justice, (3) interpersonal justice, and, (4) informational justice. In our reliability and validity analysis the Cronbach's alpha was .96, the value for KMO test was .96 and the Bartlett's test was significant at the $p < .01$ level ($\chi^2_{(190)}$ =8442,541). Factor analysis results for each dimension of organizational justice scale are reported in Table 1.

Statistics

All statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS software, version 19. Independent sample t test and one-way ANOVA test were used to assess the differences in communication satisfaction and organizational justice related to independent variables like sex, age, type of organization and academic title. A Pearson correlation matrix was calculated to determine the strength of relationship between organizational justice and communication satisfaction. Simple linear regression analysis was performed to estimate the impact of communication satisfaction level on the perceptions of organizational justice. A *P*-value < .05 was regarded as statistical significant and 95% confidence intervals were calculated.

Results

No significant difference was detected in the perception of organizational communication satisfaction with regard to the socio-demographics of the participants. As for the mean scores of organizational justice, we found significant differences between the participants working in public and private universities, thus, the perception of organizational justice was found to be more positive for the academic personnel working in private universities ($t_{(479)}$ = -2.657, *p* < .01). This significant difference was also observed with the procedural justice ($t_{(479)}$ = -2.325, *p* < .05), interpersonal justice ($t_{(479)}$ = -2.424, *p* < .05) and informational justice ($t_{(479)}$ = -3.262, *p* < .05), but not for distributive justice (p > .05).

A positive and strong correlation was seen between organizational justice and organizational communication satisfaction (*r* = .79, *p* < .001), confirming hypothesis 1. The strongest correlation was with procedural justice (*r* = .765, *p* < .001), followed by informational (*r* = .744, *p* < .001), interpersonal (*r* = .651, *p* < .001), and distributive justice (*r* = .57, *p* < .001). Besides, significant correlation was observed within the sub-groups of organizational justice. For instance, informational justice was determined to be highly related to procedural and interpersonal justice. Correlation results of our analysis are presented in Table 2.

We also aimed to analyze whether the level of communication satisfaction can predict changes in the perception of organizational justice and its dimensions, as well. Thus, we performed regression analysis in which we used the sum of organizational justice score as dependent variable and communication satisfaction scores as independent variable. As can be seen, communication satisfaction explained about 63,9% of the variance (r^2 = .639, *p* < .001) confirming Hypothesis 2. Of the sub-dimensions of organizational justice, procedural justice had the highest predictive capacity. Regression analysis summary for predicting organizational justice and its sub-dimensions are reported in Table 3.

Discussion

The present study confirms that there is a relationship between organizational communication satisfaction and organizational justice. Moreover, it states that the positive perception of organizational justice increases with the higher level of communication satisfaction. The strongest correlation was detected for the procedural justice (*r* = .76). This is in line with results from a study performed in textile sector in Turkey which reported a correlation of .68 between procedural justice and communication satisfaction (Doğan, 2002). In our study, this explicit relation should be explained with the participants' high level of education. Since, the positive perception of procedural justice increases by implementing the organizational procedures consistently, without bias, on the grounds of accurate information, and, in consideration of all parties (Colquitt, 2001); highly educated respondents' questioning these procedures should be expected. Therefore, efficient and two-sided communication plays an important role in the positive perception of procedural justice. In contrary, lack of an active and adequate communication system may lead to doubts about the reliability of the organizational procedures. Given the assumptions discussed above, relation between organizational communication satisfaction and procedural justice is quite understandable, as communication satisfaction concerns perceptions of various communication types in organizations (Ehlers 2003; Varona, 1996).

Yet, our study showed a relatively weak relation between communication satisfaction and distributive justice. This may be related with the majority of our participants being employed in public universities. In Turkish public universities, outcome distribution is strictly dependent on the rules and regulations of the government and communication is used as a way to give information about such rules and regulations to academic personnel. Yet, in private universities distribution of wage and rewards are generally dependent on the performance evaluation process where communication plays an efficient role. Communication is mostly two-sided; even 360 degree feedback has become a performance evaluation tool in some private universities.

When we analyzed the perceptions of organizational justice in general, we detected significant differences between the academic personnel in private and public universities. Accordingly, private university personnel were found to be more positive in their perception of organizational justice. This significant difference may derive from the constitutional differences between public and private universities. For instance, public universities have a more hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, and in public universities wages are set depending only on the academic position and it is difficult to find an academic position even though the academic title is achieved. Therefore, these assumptions may lead to the negative perceptions of organizational justice.

We also determined high correlations between informational and interpersonal justice. Similar results were observed in some studies (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Mayer et al., 2007; McNall & Roch, 2009). Employees' perception of informational and interpersonal justice is investigated within the questions about their superiors and these sub-dimensions of organizational justice are combined into one in some of the studies (Beugre, 2002; Colquitt, 2001; Thomas & Nagalingappa, 2012). Therefore, the high correlation in our study is understandable. Similar relation was observed for distributive and procedural justice, in line with the findings in the literature (Cole, 2008; Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Sweeney & Farlin, 1997; Welbourne, Balkin & Gomez Mejia, 1995). Distributive justice involves perceptions of the fairness of outcomes and procedural justice involves perceptions of fairness of the procedures used in making decisions regarding the distribution of outcomes (Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005; Konovsky, 2000). Both distributive and procedural justice perceptions are derived from the expectations of outcomes, and, they are defined to be functionally the same (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001). Therefore, distributive justice and procedural justice are considered to be combined into one dimension (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001).

Summing up, our study findings revealed that private university personnel tend to have a more positive perception of organizational justice when compared with public universities. It is also observed that a high level of communication satisfaction is strongly related with the positive perception of organizational justice. Yet, certain limitations in this study should be discussed. The most important limitation is that it was based on cross-sectional data, from which it is difficult to make causal inferences, thus, associations between study variables should be considered carefully before drawing some conclusions. Another limitation of our study was its low response rate of 13%, even though a second mailing was sent to non-responders four weeks after the initial mailing. In spite of the above limitations, our study contributed to the literature by clarifying the association between organizational justice and communication satisfaction and by being one of the first studies showing the impact of communication satisfaction on the perceived level of organizational justice and its sub-dimensions.

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Table 1: Results of factor analysis for organizational justice scale

Dimensions	KMO value	χ^2	P	Cumulative variance (%)	df
Procedural justice	,913	2329,636	,000	67,538	21
Distributive justice	,847	1346,090	,000	79,729	6
Interpersonal justice	,790	1411,623	,000	73,608	6
Informational justice	,889	1855,756	,000	77,573	10

Table 2: Pearson correlations between communication satisfaction and organizational justice factors

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Communication satisfaction	1				
2. Procedural justice	,765*	1			

3. Distributive justice	,570*	,608*	1		
4. Interpersonal justice	,651*	,682*	,504*	1	
5. Informational justice	,744*	,785*	,592*	,791*	1

$p < .001$.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Summary for Predicting Organizational Justice and Its Sub-dimensions

Predictor variable		r	r^2	F	P
Communication Satisfaction	Organizational Justice	,799	,639	847,189	,000
	Procedural justice	,765	,585	675,748	,000
	Distributive justice	,570	,325	231,020	,000
	Interpersonal justice	,651	,424	352,644	,000
	Informational justice	,744	,554	593,947	,000