

WORK IN PROGRESS REPORT

Work Engagement and Performance: Does the (Mis)Alignment of Justice Sources Matter?

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Perceptions of and reactions to injustices are an integral component of human life. The proposed study aims to capture them, in the sense of the level of employees' work engagement and job performance, in a situation. When employees simultaneously perceive (in)justices deriving from multiple sources. Data collection will run across six countries on a convenience sample of employees in non-managerial positions in various industries (i.e., insurance companies, call centres and banks). Polynomial regression analysis combined with response surface methodology will simultaneously capture main effects and interactions of justice sources on work engagement and performance.

Keywords: multi-foci justice; misalignment; work engagement; job performance; polynomial regression; response surface methodology

Editor's Note

This work in progress report (WiP) was developed by the 2014–2015 cohort of the Junior Researcher Programme (JRP), a service supported by the European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA). During the course of the JRP calendar, the six research groups that are initiated via the European Summer School submit the WiPs of their research to the *Journal of European Psychology Students* (JEPS). The WiPs are short methodology papers that outline steps undertaken by research groups in developing and carrying out a research project in the context of low-resource, independent, student-driven, cross-cultural research. The WiPs are submitted prior to project completion to enable the authors to improve their

research according to the comments resulting from the peer-review process. WiPs also support the dissemination of methods used by student-driven, independent research projects, with the hope of informing others carrying out such work.

The 2014–2015 cohort was inducted into the JRP at the European Summer School 2014, held in Vorarlberg, Austria.

Background

Justice in an organisational context can be simply defined as the extent to which people estimate that they are treated fairly in their workplace. When it comes to organisational justice, employees usually take into account three factors: outcomes (i.e., distributive justice), procedures used to define those outcomes (i.e., procedural justice), and interpersonal treatment (i.e., interactional justice). Over time, these specific justice judgements can be merged into overall justice evaluations. Additionally, employees can differentiate between multiple sources of (in)justice (e.g., supervisors, the organisation as a whole, co-workers and customers), as long as they hold that source responsible for the treatment they are receiving (Rupp, Shao, Jones, & Liao, 2014).

There is a growing body of empirical evidence that demonstrates the potential of organisational justice in creating compelling benefits for organisations and employees alike. Multi-foci research and theory have primarily focussed on main and mediating effects of different sources of justice on employee reactions. As such, there is a dearth of studies that have considered the possibility of joint interactional effects of various justice sources on employee attitudes and behaviours (Lavelle, Rupp, Manegold, & Thornton, in press).

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The findings from the limited research that has examined such joint interactional effects (see Jakopec & Sušanj, 2014a; Price, Lavelle, Henley, Cocchiara, & Buchanan, 2006) suggest that different sources of justice may jointly affect employee reactions and that perception of justice from only one source is simply insufficient. Paradoxically, if one source is fair whilst the other is unfair, it can result in a more negative effect than in a situation where both sources are unfair.

The possibility of detecting multi-foci interactive effects is intriguing, and the literature, as well as organisational practice, could benefit from more research in this area (Rupp et al., 2014). Therefore, the proposed study aims to capture employees' reactions (i.e., work engagement and job performance) in a situation where they simultaneously perceive (in)justices deriving from multiple sources (i.e., the organisation, supervisors, clients/customers).

The theory of congruence in organisational research (see Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Edwards, 1994), including studies of P-O fit, performance ratings, or supervisory versus organisational support, justifies the following hypotheses.

Firstly, an additive model of justice is proposed, wherein both forms of justice in (any) combination enhance both outcomes. Specifically, when employees' perceptions of justice from both sources are in agreement (i.e., aligned), their work engagement and job performance will increase as perceptions of justice deriving from both sources increase.

Secondly, when employees' perception of justice sources are misaligned (i.e., one fair, another unfair), this will adversely affect their work engagement and job performance. Specifically, both outcomes will decrease more sharply as the degree of misalignment (i.e., the extent to which the levels of the two justice sources differ from one another) increases. The direction of misalignment (i.e., which source affects the outcome more) will not matter.

The results of this research might also widen the applicability of congruence theory to understanding the effects of (mis)alignment of these justice sources.

Methods

Sample

Participants will be recruited from a convenience sample of employees in non-managerial positions from three industries (banks, call centres, and insurance companies) across six European countries: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland and Slovenia. Participants within these specific industries and positions could be affected by the level of (in)justice coming from all three sources (i.e., their organisation, their supervisor, and their clients/customers). Employees frequently engage in interactions with both their immediate supervisor and clients/customers (Lavelle et al., in press). It can therefore be assumed that the treatment coming from such sources is salient. Additionally, the employees' organisation itself defines the allocation of resources, as well as the procedures followed by the interpersonal and informational treatment. Consequently, the proposed study captures the holistic context in which justice perceptions develop.

This study aims to collect data from 150 employees in each country. This number is based on the theoretical expectation of medium effect size, the chosen method of data analysis, and the number of variables included in the analysis. Additional equations (e.g., imputation of expected predictors, statistical power, etc.) were conducted using the software G*Power.

Measures

A multi-source cross-sectional survey design approach will be used to address the research question. More precisely, one part of the data will be obtained through a self-assessment questionnaire. Information about the employees' job performance, including objective measures where possible, will be obtained from the employees' immediate supervisor. This will allow for the control of the possibility of the common method variance issue.

To assess the employees' perceptions of overall (i.e., distributive, procedural and interactional) justice coming from the supervisor and the organisation, an adapted version of the Supervisory and Organisational Justice Measure (Jakopec & Sušanj, 2014b) will be included. To our knowledge, this is the only existing validated multi-foci measure of justice. The items for interactional justice have been adapted to include perceptions of justice coming from clients/customers. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), a widely accepted scale in organisational research, will capture employees' work engagement as an organisationally relevant outcome (i.e., people who are engaged in their job tend to do better work) related to justice perceptions. The widely used Measure of Organizational Citizenship and in-role Behaviours (Williams & Anderson, 1991) will capture employee performance, which is a crucial determinant of organisational success. Both the employees and their supervisor will complete this measure. A scale consisting of 10 items, constructed specifically for this study, will measure employees' values and expectations regarding multi-foci justice treatment, in an attempt to capture the possible processes underlying employees' reactions to the (mis)alignment of justice sources. The socio-demographic section specifically designed for this study includes questions regarding gender, age, marital status, number of children, level of education, full/part time job, hierarchical level in the organisation, work experience and organisational tenure. They are included in order to control for the effect of the employees' individual differences.

All 66 items, alongside the socio-demographic questions, will be scored on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree), and will be presented in random order to form one unique questionnaire. This will minimise the possibility that employees' general attitude to the measured construct(s) could additionally influence their estimations. Any items that are not written in English will be translated using Brislin's (1970) method of back translation. Thereafter, the same method will be used to translate the entire questionnaire into the native languages of the target countries, if translated and adapted versions of the scales do not exist.

Proposed Analyses

After obtaining informed consent from the organisations and participants, data collection will commence. The next step will consist of managing collected data (both on a national and aggregated level) in an appropriate way.

The main statistical analysis (i.e., polynomial regression combined with response surface methodology) will simultaneously capture not only the main effects, but also rarely tested interactions of justice sources on work engagement and job performance. Specifically, this method takes into consideration how the *agreement* in the level of two predictors (i.e., all combinations of the three justice sources) relates to an outcome (i.e., work engagement and job performance). Additionally, this method provides an opportunity to determine how the *degree* (i.e., the extent to which the levels of the two justice sources differ from each other) and the *direction of the discrepancy* (i.e., which source of justice is higher than the other and may therefore affect the outcome more) between justice sources relate to work engagement and job performance. The step-by-step procedure suggested by Shanock, Baran, Gentry, Pattison, and Heggstad (2010) will be strictly followed and applied.

A polynomial regression combined with response surface methodology (PRCRSM) permits the incorporation of solely two predictors. As all the possible interactions will be tested, six PRCRSMs conducted on the same data might raise the issue of alpha-error-accumulation. The appropriate correction will prevent this familywise error rate.

Ethics

Initial ethical approval was sought following the submission of the final study outline, and accordingly, ethical approval was granted by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of the lead researcher's institution (University of Rijeka, Croatia).

Additionally, local institutional review boards (IRBs) in countries where data collection will be conducted have been approached in order to affiliate the project with the respective universities, and gain ethical approval from them accordingly. For Slovenia, Ireland and the Czech Republic, positive approvals are anticipated, which would render the ethical approval from Croatia subsidiary, although it would still possess an overarching function. One university requested an internal supervisor, who has already been appointed in order to affiliate the project to the university and supervise the local procedure.

The decision to obtain ethical approval on two levels was also made due to the limited jurisdiction of the IRBs in Denmark and Austria. In these countries, the ethics process is mainly limited to cases of medical studies and studies with vulnerable participants, or any other expected risks. These criteria do not apply to the proposed study.

Practical

In order to make this transnational research project successful, special attention has to be paid to several issues, such as time management, and staying motivated, connected and efficient. During the European Summer School, the team members, along with the research supervisor, agreed upon an action plan, team roles and the

schedule for carrying out this research project. Every team member has one of the following defined roles: communications officer, data and methodology expert, project manager, literature expert and policy analyst.

The research group communicates daily through social media. Skype meetings are scheduled once a month, in order to discuss the current status of assigned tasks and to make further plans. When necessary, an extra Skype meeting is arranged. Google Drive is used for the storing and sharing of all documents that are related to the research.

To date, the project team has managed to follow the schedule alongside other existing commitments (e.g., work- and study-related commitments).

Current Status of Project

At the time of writing, the IRB of the lead researcher and one of the junior researcher's institution (i.e. University of Rijeka, Croatia) has approved the study. Ethical approval has also been obtained by the junior researchers from their respective universities in Ireland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Although ethical approval has not been formally obtained in Denmark and Austria, the junior researchers have received confirmation from their universities that no ethical approval is required. Concurrently, the team members have already translated the instruments, and are currently conducting a comprehensive analysis of the literature, whilst developing questionnaires and searching for funding opportunities. Furthermore, they are planning for data collection and contacting organisations.

Prospective Discussion

It is anticipated that these findings might widen the applicability of congruence theory to understanding the effects of (mis)alignment of the aforementioned justice sources on employees' work engagement and job performance.

The proposed study will also have clear practical implications for both employees and employers in the workplace, and accordingly, could be used to inform work policies and practice regarding the relevance of developing and implementing consistently fair systems and processes for managing people. Full completion and disclosure of the project is expected by August 2015.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in publishing this article.

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