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EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO PERCEIVED
INJUSTICE :
ANGER, ENVY, OR SADNESS ?*

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Abstract: Organizational justice research has mainly focused on attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Although the roles of emotions are often discussed in justice theories, they have been largely underresearched. The objective of current study was to examine the emotional reactions of employees to perceived injustice, in a field setting. The study analyzed the emotional responses of employees (N= 408) to decision of annual bonus. The study, being conducted on employees of different sectors of Pakistan, measured the employees' perceptions of justice (distributive and procedural) and feeling of emotions (Anger, Envy, and Sadness) after the announcement of annual bonus. We found that sadness was more strongly related to perceptions of injustice as compared to anger and envy. Generally, the results found support for our hypotheses. We concluded with limitations and directions for future research.

Key words: Distributive justice, procedural justice, envy, anger, sadness

Résumé:

La recherche sur la justice organisationnelle a surtout porté sur les attitudes, cognitives, et les comportements. Bien que le rôle des émotions sont souvent abordées dans les théories de justice, ils ont été largement sous recherché. L'objectif de la présente étude était d'examiner les réactions des employés à l'injustice, dans un terrain. L'étude a analysé les réponses émotionnelles des travailleurs salariés (N = 408) de la décision de la prime annuelle. L'étude, menée sur les employés des différents secteurs du Pakistan, a mesuré les perceptions de la justice (distributive et procédural) et le sentiment d'émotions (colère, jalousie, et la tristesse), après l'annonce de la prime annuelle. Nous avons constaté que la tristesse était plus fortement liée à la perception d'injustice par rapport à la colère et l'envie. Nous avons conclu avec des limites et des directions de recherche pour l'avenir.

Mot Clés: La justice organisationnelle, colère, jalousie, tristesse

Introduction

Organizational justice scholars have long considered that emotions play a pivotal role in the experience of injustice. Previous researchers, for example, Homans (1961) argued that people feel anger when they are underrewarded and guilt when they are overrewarded. Other writers have argued that negative emotions such as anger are likely to result when individuals perceive that organizational decisions are unjust and they attribute the responsibility of unfairness to others (Folger, 1986; Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993). Harlos and Pinder (2000) argued that individuals who experience injustice often describe a “hot and burning” experience which can involve different emotions like anger, hostility, shame, and guilt. According to Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, and Grandey (2000) justice theories that are devoid of emotion are likely missing the fundamental aspects of the experience of injustice.

Although there is a strong theoretical association between emotions and (in)justice, emotions have been largely underresearched (Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). The objective of current study was to investigate the relationship between two justice facets (procedural and distributive) and three types of discrete emotions (anger, sadness, and envy) in a field setting. The current study contributed in at least three ways to the research on emotions and organizational justice.

First, most of the previous studies examining the role of emotions and organizational justice have been conducted in laboratory setting using undergraduate participants (Cropanzano et al., 2000; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Weiss et al., 1999). The current study extended this research in field setting and examined the relationship between two justice facets (procedural and distributive Justice) and three types of emotions (Anger, sadness, and envy) in the context of annual bonus received by the employees.

Second, previous studies investigating the relationship between emotions and justice have focused on emotions like anger, hostility, shame, guilt, happiness, pride, joy, disappointment, and frustration (see Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Weiss et al., 1999); the role of envy as an emotional outcome of

perceived injustice has mainly been neglected. We investigated whether envy can be elicited in response to perceived (in)justice.

Third, in previous studies researchers have maintained that favorable outcomes trigger global happiness or unhappiness, whereas elicitation of other discrete emotions depends on procedural justice information. Recent research by Barclay et al. (2005) suggested that procedural justice also leads to outcomes which are socioemotional in nature. The current study investigated whether the emotions are associated only with economic outcomes or they are also associated with socioemotional outcomes.

Reasons for studying two organizational justice facets and three discrete emotions

The choice of studying two facets of organizational justice (procedural & distributive) is based on high power distance and status centered cultural norms of Pakistan. According to Beugré (2007), in status centered cultures, the relationships between employees and managers may take paternalistic form and deference to authority may be considered as a normal way of dealing with supervisors. Previous research on impact of power distance has also provided evidence that people belonging to such cultures tend to tolerate injustices emanating from authority figures. Morris and Leung (2000) stated that “...in high power distance cultures, people’s acceptance of unequal social prerogatives promotes the tolerance of unfair treatment whereas in low power distance societies, rejection of inequality makes people less tolerant of unfair treatment” (p.117). To further probe the arguments of Beugré (2007) in field setting of Pakistani telecommunication organizations, we conducted 10 interviews with managers and employees and assessed their concerns regarding distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Based on the analysis of these interviews, we concluded that a typical Pakistani employee was more concerned with distributive and procedural justice aspects while interactional justice was not considered important. We, therefore, included procedural and distributive justice dimensions in our analysis.

The three discrete emotions i.e. anger, sadness, and envy were chosen for a number of reasons. Anger has been shown to occur as response of perceived injustice in early justice theories (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961) and so it seemed reasonable to predict anger as

one of the emotional reaction of perceived injustice. Sadness, being inward focused emotion, was added to our analysis to balance the outward focused emotion of anger. Envy as an emotional outcome was selected because it has been mainly underresearched in justice and emotion studies.

Theoretical relationship between justice and emotions

Weiss et al. (1999) argued that (in)justice could be understood as a special instance of more general appraisal models of emotion. (In)justice and emotions are appraised in the same way. This similarity helps us to understand the relationship between justice and emotions. General models of emotions assume that appraisal occurs in two stages: primary and secondary (Lazarus, 1991). Primary appraisal is generally directed towards determining the relevance of event to one's well-being, goals, and/or values, whereas secondary appraisal involves interpreting and assigning meaning to an event. One of the several components of secondary appraisal includes that who is responsible for the event (e.g., self vs. other; Lazarus, 1991).

Outcomes appear to be driving force behind the initiation of an appraisal process. Primary justice appraisals are initiated when unfavorable outcomes are experienced. Procedures are considered in secondary appraisals. According to Brockner and Weisenfeld (1996) procedural justice plays an important role in secondary appraisal when outcomes are not favorable. Recent theoretical advances have, however, demonstrated that unfavorable outcomes are not the only facet of fairness that can trigger an appraisal. Justice scholars (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) have argued that all the three justice facets are, in some sense, derived from the individual expectations of outcomes, which can be economic and socioemotional. Procedural and interactional justices lead to socioemotional outcomes because of their symbolic value. Procedural justice can convey someone about his/her standing and value to the group (Tyler & Lind, 1992), whereas fair interpersonal treatment can acknowledge one's dignity and intrinsic worth (Bies & Moag, 1986).

Both steps of two-stage model are satisfied. First, an expected outcome (socioemotional) has been violated and second, the violation can be attributed to an unfair procedure or

person (i.e. supervisor). Fairness theory also holds that violation of procedural and/or interactional justice can be associated with negative emotions independent of outcome favorability (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). Fairness theory suggest that regardless of the type of violation that occurs, individuals try to make sense of it that how the situation would, could, or should have been different. Moreover, group value models of fairness suggest that individuals are sensitive to violations of procedural justice because it signals the degree to which individuals are valued, have standing, and/or are respected in the group (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Uncertainty management theories (Van den Bos, 2001; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002) support the importance of procedural and interactional justice facets. When confronted with uncertain or unclear situation, individuals rely on procedural and interactional justice information to make prediction about the outcomes. In summary, procedural and interactional justice can serve a dual role: as outcomes in their own right and as sources of information that individuals use to interpret their distributive outcomes.

Organizational justice and anger

Anger, arise when events are regarded as sufficiently serious or threatening (e.g. low outcome, unfair procedures, and unfair treatment) and individuals attribute the responsibility to others (Smith et al., 1993). According to Homans (1961), individuals feel anger when they are underrewarded. Similarly, low procedural justice can be a negative outcome in its own right and can trigger unfairness perceptions independent of the outcome favorability (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). The violation of distributive justice and procedural justice norms lead to anger due to unfavorable outcomes in respect of economic terms and socioemotional terms. Hence, it can be hypothesized:

H1: There is negative relationship between distributive justice perceptions and anger

H2: There is negative relationship between procedural justice perceptions and anger

Organizational justice and envy

Envy occurs “when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it” (Parrot & Smith, 1993, p. 906). Although, previous studies have examined the relationship between envy and objective injustice beliefs (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007, Smith et al., 1994), they did not differentiate between different justice dimensions. However, some studies did examine the relationship between envy and outcomes like promotion (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004) or grades (Lieblich, 1971). Similarly, theoretical works on envy have not taken into consideration multi-foci model of organizational justice. Rather, envy theories are based on relative deprivation (Ben-Ze’ev, 1992) and inferior position in social comparisons (Ben-Ze’ev, 1992; Smith et al., 1884). Some argued that injustice is not necessary for the elicitation of envy (Ben-Ze’ev, 1992; Feather & Sherman, 2002) rather it is one’s inferior position as compared to someone else which leads to envious feelings.

The bases for envy are social comparison processes. Recent study by Cohen-Charash and Mueller (2007) has shown that justice perceptions can moderate the relationship of envy and counterproductive work behavior. Similarly, Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) found that envy did not exhibit any main effects; rather it showed a process by outcome interaction. Hence, we can hypothesize that envy is not elicited in primary appraisal process- the process initiated on the basis of violations of outcomes.

H3: There is no significant negative relationship between distributive justice perceptions and envy.

H4: There is no significant negative relationship between procedural justice perceptions and envy.

Organizational justice and sadness

Sadness is an inward focused emotion (Tangney & Salovey, 1999). Expressions of sadness may be seen as expressions of avoidance, suggesting a person's reticence toward interaction, submissiveness, and timidity (Madera & Smith, 2009). Previous studies examining the relationship between justice perceptions and sadness showed that sadness occurred when outcomes were unfavorable. Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt (1998) argued that sadness is one of the emotional reactions to perceived injustice. Similarly,

Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) showed that in case of unfavorable economic outcomes the sadness was greater. In the line of reasoning given above, we can predict that sadness also occurs when there are violations of socioemotional outcomes. Hence, we can hypothesize:

H5: There is negative relationship between distributive justice perceptions and sadness.

H6: There is negative relationship between procedural justice perceptions and sadness.

Method

Sample

Study participants were employees from different organizations of Pakistan. These are medium and large sized organizations having more than 2000 employees. They show resemblance regarding core business operations, compensation plans, fringe benefits, career growth etc. The questionnaires were sent to respondents just after 2 days of the announcement of their annual bonus. Out of 500 questionnaires, 408 completed questionnaires were received, depicting a response rate of 81.6%. Due to sensitive nature of questionnaire, we followed the recommendations of Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler (2006) and did not collect any demographic data like age, gender, experience etc.

Procedure

All the measures were adapted in Pakistani context by conducting a focus group study (Three Pakistani PhD candidates and two human resource (HR) managers participated). All items were checked for proper wording and some words and statements were rephrased. The questionnaire was translated from English to Urdu language and then two experts did backward translation. All items were measured on 5 point likert scale. In each organization, the HR department was contacted for taking permission regarding

administering of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents under joint cover letter from the HR manager and authors. After completion, the respondents deposited the questionnaires to the designated person in the HR department.

Measures

Envy

To elicit episodic envy, we followed particular instructions based on previous studies (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Heider, 1958; Salovey, 1991). We presented participants with the following instructions:

Choose a person (X) in your organization with whom you work frequently and to whom you constantly compare yourself. This person should be perceived by you as more successful than yourself at gaining things (Like recent salary increment) that you strive for and that are very important to your self-worth.

We adapted 9-item scale (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007) in Pakistani context. Two items (“I feel gall” and “I feel rancor”) were excluded from the measure on the basis of recommendations of focus group. Remaining items included “I lack some of the things X has”, “I feel bitter”, “I feel envious”, “I want to have what X has”, “I feel irritated/annoyed”, “I feel some hatred towards X”, and “X has things going for him/her better as compared to me”. The rating scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Anger

Respondents were instructed to indicate that how they felt when they heard about the decision of last annual bonus. We used a 15 items trait anger scale from State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory, (STAXI) developed by Spielberger (1996). Out of the 15 items, 7 items were excluded from the measure on the basis of recommendations of focus group. Remaining items included “I felt mad”, “I felt like I was about to explode”, “I felt like banging on the table”, “I felt like breaking things”, “I became furious”, “I was burned

up”, and “I felt angry”. The rating scale ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely very large).

Sadness

We developed four items measure for sadness using synonyms of sadness. The items included “I felt heartbreaking”, “I felt cheerless”, “I felt sad”, and “I felt gloomy”. All items were measured on five point likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely very large).

Perceived distributive and procedural justice

We used the most recent comprehensive indirect Colquitt’s (2001) measure published in the justice literature. Our choice was due to following noteworthy characteristics of this measure (Colquitt & Shaw, 2005): first, items were generated on close examination of literature and all items were based on semantic works. Second, it provides the convertibility, meaning that the measure can be tailored to fit any particular event context. Our objective was to measure the distributive and procedural justice perceptions of employees regarding decision of annual bonus. We adapted the measure according to our research context and used the four items for distributive justice including “your annual bonus reflect the efforts you have put into your work”, “your annual bonus is appropriate for the work you have completed”, “your annual bonus reflects what you have contributed to the organization”, and “your annual bonus is justified as compared to your performance”. A separate study, conducted by first author, validated this measure in Pakistani context where three of the procedural justice items were deleted due to low factor loadings. Hence, we used four items for procedural justice comprising of “Those procedures have been applied consistently”, “Those procedures have been free of bias”, “Those procedures have been based on accurate information”, and “Those procedures are ethically and morally acceptable”. The rating scales ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on multi items scales. Through an analysis of the principal components using varimax rotation, the aim was to identify the number of components. Items having low factor loadings or high cross loadings on more than one factors were excluded from the analysis. A five-factor model emerged from the data accounting for approximately 61.79% of the variance. The first factor incorporated all four items of distributive justice scale ($\alpha = .85$). It accounted for 22.11% of the variance, with an eigen value of 4.20. The second factor was comprised of five of the seven items measuring envy ($\alpha = .73$) and constituted 16.5% of the total variance, its eigen value was 3.14. The third factor was comprised of four items measuring procedural justice ($\alpha = .79$) and accounted for 10.02% of the variance with eigen value of 1.90. Fourth factor was comprised of three of the four items measuring sadness ($\alpha = .75$), it accounted for 7.76% of total variance with eigen value of 1.47. The fifth and final factor brought together three of the seven items from the scale measuring anger ($\alpha = .68$). It explained 5.41% of the variance, and its eigen value was 1.03. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha values for all the scales, except anger, were above the recommended level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). (See Appendix – 1 for detailed factor loadings)

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables in this study. The zero-order correlation between sadness and procedural justice was $-.19$ ($p < .01$); between sadness and distributive justice was $-.21$ ($p < .01$); between sadness and anger was $.45$ ($p < .01$); between sadness and envy was $.25$ ($p < .01$); between envy and anger was $.22$ ($p < .01$); between procedural justice and distributive justice, it was $.44$ ($p < .01$). Our measures of anger and sadness have a fairly low means i.e. 1.65 and 1.69 respectively. These means, however, are not surprising and are consistent with prior studies. For example, Barclay et al. (2005) reported a mean of 1.52 on 5-point scale for inward-focused emotions.

TABLE 1

Mean, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables^a

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Procedural Justice	3.21	0.86	(.79)				
2. Distributive Justice	3.05	0.97	.44**	(.85)			
3. Anger	1.65	0.77	.05	-.07	(.68)		
4. Envy	2.42	0.75	-.05	-.01	.22**	(.73)	
5. Sadness	1.69	0.85	-.19**	-.21**	.45**	.25**	(.75)

^a n = 408. Cronbach alpha coefficients for multi-item scales are listed on the diagonal in parentheses.

* p < .05 , ** p < .01

Regression Analyses

The six hypotheses were tested via multiple regression analysis. We tested hypothesis 1 and 2, concerning the effects of procedural and distributive justice on anger (See table 2). Hypotheses 3 and 4, concerning the effects of procedural and distributive justice on envy (see table 3) and hypotheses 5 and 6 concerning the effects of procedural and distributive justice on sadness (see table 4).

Effects of procedural and distributive justice on anger (Hypotheses 1 & 2) Distributive justice had a significant, negative effect on anger ($\beta = -.114, p < .05$), while procedural justice does not have significant negative effect on anger. Hypotheses 1 received significant support but hypothesis 2 was not supported (See table 2).

distributive justice on anger, it was very small. This also supports that employees, being feared of losing the jobs, show very less anger in response to injustice conditions.

We found significant support of justice conditions on emotion of sadness. Our results showed that sadness is elicited when both economic and socioemotional outcomes are violated. Among all the three emotions examined in this study, the effects of justice conditions on sadness are strong. This can be explained as sadness is an inward focused emotion and is not expressed publicly. Even if it is expressed publicly, neither employer nor coworkers are harmed by it. So, in a context like Pakistan employees can feel sad about injustice conditions but they refrain from expressing anger due to fear of losing the jobs and reputation.

Regarding envy, our results supported our predictions and showed that envy is not elicited in response to injustice conditions. Neither distributive nor procedural justice directly elicit this emotion. Envy is experienced privately and occurs as a result of inferior feelings produced from social comparison between two persons. Justice conditions may not elicit envy rather it is one's inferior position as compared to someone which leads to envy. Our results are also in accordance with previous researches, for example, Krehbiel and Cropanzano (2000) found no direct effects of outcome favorability for envy.

Limitations and future research directions

The contributions and findings of our study should be considered in view of certain limitations. We used self report measures which may result in common method bias. However, the use of self reports is justified by the nature of the variables examined (Spector, 1994).

First, we measured anger, envy, and sadness using self reports. Emotions can only be best measured from the person experiencing them and any other measure not originating from the person experiencing them might prove invalid (Cohen-Charash & Mueller; 2007). Also, the self reports are the best way to measure the emotional experiences (Diener, 2000). We used retrospective self reports to measure individuals' reactions of anger, envy, and sadness to the decision of annual bonus. Although, in some cases, the retrospective reports can be problematic (Golden, 1992; Robinson & Clore, 2002), we

measured the emotional reactions to annual bonus just after 2 days of its announcement. So we believe that in our case the memory bias will not have any significant effects due to two reasons (a) the time span between recalling the event and actual event is very less i.e., 2 days, and (b) prior research has demonstrated that individuals are better able to accurately recall more salient events than less salient events (e.g., Fabiani & Donchin, 1995) and memories associated with some affect or emotional arousal are better remembered than those that are affectively neutral (Kihlstrom, Eich, Sandbrand, & Tobias, 2000). We believe that annual bonus is a salient event which occurs once in a year and people do remember their emotional and behavioral experiences associated with it.

Second, we measured the perceptions of organizational justice and the perceptions can be best measured by self reports. We also checked whether common method bias is indeed a problem in our study by conducting Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We conducted exploratory factor analysis on all of our measures and five factors structure emerged explaining 61.79% of the variance, showing that common method bias is not a problem in our case.

We believe that our findings may be generalizable to other countries having similar culture as that of Pakistan like India, Bangladesh, and Nepal etc. For the generalizability of these results to western context, this study needs to be replicated in other sectors and cultures. Future research should also examine the role of other dimensions of organizational justice (i.e. interpersonal and informational) in the elicitation of different emotions.

Another limitation is that we only assessed emotions but not the behaviors which are caused by these emotions. Future research should make injustice-emotion-behavior link explicit.

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APPENDIX – 1

Factor Loadings of the Five Factor Model (N=408)					
Item	Distributive Justice	Envy	Procedural Justice	Sadness	Anger
Your outcomes (salary increment, Promotion, Fringe Benefits etc) reflect the efforts you have put into your work	.827				
Your outcomes (salary increment, Promotion, Fringe Benefits etc) reflect what you have contributed to the organization	.813				
Your outcomes (salary increment, Promotion, Fringe Benefits etc) are appropriate for the work you have completed	.813				
Your outcomes (salary increment, Promotion, Fringe Benefits etc) are justified, as compared to your performance	.774				
I feel envious		.758			
I feel irritated/annoyed		.727			
I feel bitter		.727			
I feel some hatred towards X		.683			
I want to have what X has		.540			
Those procedures have been free of bias			.792		
Those procedures have been applied consistently			.749		
Those procedures are ethically and morally acceptable			.736		
Those procedures have been based on accurate information			.722		
I felt cheerless				.774	
I felt sad				.767	
I felt heartbreaking				.747	
I felt like banging on the table					.778
I felt like I was about to explode					.739
I felt mad					.671