

Perception of Interactional Injustice and Affective Commitment: A Moderated Mediation Approach

Wei Zhang^{1,a}

¹Department of Human Resource Management, The City College of Dongguan University of technology, Dongguan, Guangdong, China.

^a Email: zhangwei_hitsz@163.com

ABSTRACT

Perception of justice is very important to a team or an organization, because it plays a key role in guiding the behavior of team members or individuals. In this article, we propose a theoretical model to explore the relationship between employees' perception of interactional injustice and affective commitment under Chinese culture. Drawing on social exchange theory and using a moderated-mediation approach, we predicted that employees' perception of interactional injustice would lower leader-member exchange (LMX) and their relationship would be stronger for the employees with low power distance than the ones with high power distance; leader-member exchange (LMX) would mediate the effect of employees' perception of interactional injustice and affective commitment. In the end, we discussed the implications and limitations of our research.

Keywords: Perception of interactional injustice, leader-member exchange (LMX), power distance, affective commitment

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past research, perception of justice is a significant paradigm in organizational justice study. Many studies have shown that organizational justice perceptions are positively related to a large number of outcomes, including organizational commitment, job satisfaction, evaluations of authority, organizational citizenship behavior, and trust [1,2]. According to related research, there are three kinds of justice: distribute justice, procedure justice, and interaction justice. Lots of researchers refer to interaction justice, which emphasizes the respect and dignity with which decision makers treated others [3,4]. For example, Masterson et al. (2000) proved that interactional justice could predict supervisory citizenship behaviors, supervisory satisfaction, and performance [5]. Some researchers claim that interactional justice positively affects affective trust and significantly improves employees' willingness to engage in customer centric behaviors[6,7]. However, few researchers study employees' perception of interactional injustice under Chinese culture. So, in this article, we study that what will happen if employees get perception of interactional injustice in China where fairness is definitely important.

Employees' perception of interactional injustice may be influenced by his or her power distance, which can affect the levels of formal hierarchy within organizations, participative decision making and centralization[8]. In the prior research, some researches involve the relationship between justice and power distance. The results showed, for instance, that group power distance could moderate the relationships between procedural justice climate and individual-level outcomes [9]. Wang et al. (2012) do some research about how power distance moderates the relationship between interactional justice and abusive supervision[10]. Whereas, no research studies that power distance moderates the relationship between employees' perception of interactional injustice and leader-member exchange, consequently influencing employees' affective commitment under Chinese culture. Figure 1 depicts these relationships schematically.

The significance of this study lies in the following reasons: first, we make the theory of justice richer. A great number of researches involve in employees' and supervisors' justice perception or organizational justice climate, but this study refers to injustice perception. Second, we study the relationship between employees' perception of interactional injustice and affective

commitment from a unique perspective that power distance and leader-member exchange are regarded as moderation and mediation respectively under Chinese culture. Third, from practice degree, we tell group leaders that it is important to make a justice environment and strengthen leader-member exchange.

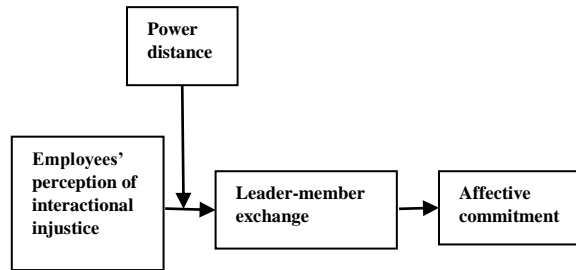


Figure 1 Depicts the theoretical model hypothesized in this study.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Employees' Perception of Interactional Injustice, Leader-member Exchange, and Affective Commitment.

“Essence” of social exchange theory is that social exchange comprises actions contingent on the rewarding reactions of others, which over time provide for mutually and rewarding transactions and relationships [11]. From this perspective, group members are more likely to reciprocate the respectful treatment that they get from their supervisor by positive interpersonal behaviors which in turn benefit the members of authority[12]. As everyone is sensitive to the different ways others treat them at most time [13], if leader treats employees with polite and respect manner, one will think that he gets respect rights and better statuses in an organization [14]. However, if organizational decisions and managerial actions are deemed injustice, the affected employees will experience feelings of resentment, anger and outrage[15]. As a result, perception of interactional injustice will come out.

Leader-member exchange refers to the quality of the exchange relationship that develops between employees and supervisors [16]. On one hand, under Chinese culture, if employees experience the interactional injustice from supervisors, they will think that supervisors don't value and esteem them. What's worse, employees will feel that they are used and despised by their supervisors. For a long time, they will not make good relationship with supervisors actively, thus reducing the quality of leader-member exchange. According to social exchange theory, employees tend to exchange their commitment for an employer's support and interaction [17,18]. Lower quality of leader-member exchange can decrease affective commitment which refers to a positive emotional attachment between

employers and employees[19]. On the other hand, interactional injustice treatment suggests having low status and negative relations with leaders. After interactional injustice treatment, one may hold that he is not worth as much as those who are treated fairly [20]. Therefore, when employees hold the perception of interactional injustice, they will depreciate self-worth and lose confidence about themselves and their supervisors, thus lessening leader-member exchange, which in turn leads to lose affective commitment. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Employees' perception of interactional injustice is negatively to affective commitment via leader-member exchange.

2.2. Power Distance as Moderator in the Relation Between Employees' Perception of Interactional Injustice and LMX.

Power distance is one of the most significant elements in internal social context. It is considered one of the most relevant values when examining the role of employment relationships and perceptions of justice across subordinate-leader relationships [21, 22]. Individuals who have large power distance values affirm that there are inherent status differences between leaders and employees and they should not doubt the instructions or policies issued by a person of higher official status in the organization. By contrast, if individuals have small power distance values, they hold that they should share authority, have equal rights and voice with their leaders[23]. This difference is thought to influence how an individual perceives and reacts to authority. When treated with little dignity by decision makers or supervisors, employees with low power distance, who're more likely to expect and establish personalized relationships with their superiors as they see the leader as approachable [24], are more likely to regard the supervisors' behavior as interactional injustice. Because they care more about how they are treated by the person with whom they are connected [25]. Based on social exchange theory, after experiencing that, they will not actively connect with the supervisor who has betrayed them. Whereas, employees with high power distance are more likely to esteem, defer to, and trust supervisors [26]. Therefore, these employees, who can endure much more leaders' criticism and insults, don't think supervisors' behavior is interactional injustice, thus less likely to react adversely to supervisors. As a result, under Chinese culture where power distance is relatively high, they may continue their previous relationship and not reduce leader-member exchange. According to above reasons, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Power distance moderates the relationship between employees' perception of

interactional injustice and leader-member exchange such that the relationship is stronger for the employees with low power distance than the ones with high power distance.

3. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Conclusion

From above statement and inference, we hold that employees' perception of interactional injustice is negatively to affective commitment via leader-member exchange and power distance moderates the relationship between employees' perception of interactional injustice and leader-member exchange in Chinese context. What's more, employees' perception of interactional injustice, who have lower power distance, can result in much less leader-member exchange.

3.2. Implications

First, under Chinese culture, we proposed a theoretical model showing that employees' perception of interactional injustice can lead to less leader-team exchange, then less leader-member exchange in turn can lessen affective commitment. Using a moderated-mediation approach, the study explains that employees who hold lower level of power distance can be more sensitive to injustice, and then influence their affective commitment through leader-member exchange. With respect to these, supervisors have to pay attention to the employees with lower power distance and their justice perception, especially in Chinese social context.

Second, despite the justice perception from unit-level perspective makes sense, we also remind readers that they should not underestimate the importance of relevant, individual-level relational considerations [27]. Previous research has shown that there is a link between perceptions of fairness at the individual level and perceptions of the quality of the dualistic relationship between leaders and employees [28]. Our research further puts forward the importance of individual-level justice perception and enriches the prior research.

Third, the results of this study also have implications for managers to increase the use of employee' affective commitment. On one hand, supervisors should give more respects and dignity to employees and make them feel interactional justice; on the other hand, more communication and exchange are supposed to have between supervisors and employees.

3.3. Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in our research. Firstly, we simply use leader-member exchange as a mediator and power distance as a moderator. In the future research, more studies should be made to demonstrate

the relationship between employees' perception of interactional injustice and affective commitment, which could give more explanations about what is inside the "black box", using other mediators or moderators. Secondly, we can't elaborate the mediating role of leader-member exchange. Because we don't prove whether the relationship is partially mediated or fully mediated. Furthermore, the outcome is single. More efforts should be put in solving these problems in the future. The third is that our research is studied based on individual level. Future research can be done based on unit or cross level. Moreover, our research only proposes a theoretical model in Chinese culture, which has no data validation. In the following studies, more practical researches are needed to find out whether our model can be proved in different culture.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cohen-Charash, Y. & Spector, P. E. (2001). The role of justice in organizations: A meta-analysis. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86, 278–321.
- [2] Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 425–445.
- [3] Bies, R. J., & Moag, J. S. (1986). Interactional justice: Communication criteria of fairness. In R. J. Lewicki, B. H. Sheppard, & M. H. Bazerman (Eds.), *Research on negotiation in organizations*, CT: JAI Press, Greenwich, pp43-55.
- [4] Wei, Z., Zhou, M., & Ren, J. (2015). Is servant leadership always good and authoritarian leadership always bad? a group-level model of servant and authoritarian leadership, power distance, interactional justice climate, and OCB. *International Conference on Service Systems & Service Management*. IEEE.
- [5] Masterson, S. S., Lewis, K., Goldman, B. M., & Taylor, M. S. (2000). A CROSS-LEVEL MULTIFOCI FRAMEWORK OF JUSTICE 255 Integrating justice and social exchange: The differing effects of fair procedures and treatment on work relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 738–748.
- [6] Liu Yang, Cheng Peng, Ouyang Zhe (2021). How trust mediate the effects of perceived justice on loyalty: A study in the context of automotive recall in China. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58:102322.

- [7] Thuy T. Dang, Anh D. Pham(2020). What make banks' front-line staff more customer oriented? The role of interactional justice. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 38(4):777-798.
- [8] Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [9] Jixia Yang & Kevin W. Mossholder .(2007). Procedural Justice Climate and Group Power Distance: An Examination of Cross-Level Interaction Effects. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 3, 681–692
- [10] Wang, W., Mao, J., Wu, W., & Liu, J.(2012). Abusive supervision and workplace deviance: The mediating role of interactional justice and the moderating role of power distance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 50: 43-60.
- [11] Homans, G. C.(1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, 63: 597-606.
- [12] Daniel S. Whitman & Suzette Caleo.(2012). Fairness at the Collective Level: A Meta-Analytic Examination of the Consequences and Boundary Conditions of Organizational Justice Climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 97, No. 4, 776–791
- [13] Williams, K. D. (2007). Ostracism. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58: 425-452.
- [14] Tyler, T. R., DeGoey, P., & Smith, H. (1996). Understanding why the justice of group procedures matters: A test of the psychological dynamics of the group-value model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70: 913-930.
- [15] Skarlicki, D. P., & Folger, R. (1997). Retaliation in the workplace: The roles of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82: 434-443.
- [16] Liden, R. C., Sparrowe, R. T., & Wayne, S. J. (1997). Leader–member exchange theory: The past and potential for the future. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 15, 47–119.
- [17] Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D.(1986). Perceived organizational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71: 500-507.
- [18] Eisenberger, R., Fasolo, P., & Davis-LaMastro, V.(1990). Perceived organizational support and employee diligence, commitment, and innovation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75: 51-59.
- [19] Mowday, R. T., Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W.(1979). The measurement of organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14: 224-247.
- [20] Lind, E. A., & Tyler, T. (1998). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. New York: Plenum.
- [21] Hui, C., Lee, C., & Rousseau, D. M. (2004). Employment relationships in China: Do workers relate to the organization or people? *Organization Science*, 15(2): 232-240.
- [22] Lee, C., Pillutla, M., & Law, K. S. (2000). Power-distance, gender and organizational justice. *Journal of Management*, 26, 685–704.
- [23] Jixia Yang & Kevin W. Mossholder. (2007). Procedural Justice Climate and Group Power Distance: An Examination of Cross-Level Interaction Effects. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 3, 681–692
- [24] Hofstede , G . (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- [25] Major, B., Zubek, J. M., Cooper, M. L., Cozzarelli, C., & Richards, C. (1997). Mixed messages: Implications of social conflict and social support within close relationships for adjustment to a stressful life event. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 1349–1363.
- [26] Kirkman, B. L., Chen, G., Farh, J.-L., Chen, Z. X., & Lowe, K. B. (2009). Individual power distance orientation and follower reactions to transformational leaders: A cross-level, cross-cultural examination. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52, 744–764.
- [27] Daniel S. Whitman & Suzette Caleo . (2012). Fairness at the Collective Level: A Meta-Analytic Examination of the Consequences and Boundary Conditions of Organizational Justice Climate. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 97, No. 4, 776–791.
- [28] Erdogan, B., & Liden, R. C. (2006). Collectivism as a moderator of responses to organizational justice: Implications for leader-member exchange and ingratiation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27, 1–17.