

The Moderating Effect of “Gender Similarity between Manager-Subordinate” on the Relationship between Organisational Justice and Job Satisfaction among Knowledge Workers

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ABSTRACT

K-workers embodying high value tacit knowledge are the linchpin of the k-economy. Their satisfaction with the job is the key to keeping them produce for the organisation. Their perception of how justly they are treated i.e. organisational justice is ever more important in managing the k-workers and in keeping them satisfied. Additionally, the evolving k-workforce will become increasingly feminised. How will this effect the justice and job satisfaction equation? This study explored these two questions using a mailed survey which netted a sample of 401 k-workers with MSC stasured companies. The study found that procedural justice is a key factor in job satisfaction of the k-workers. However, gender similarity i.e. female-female or male-male supervisor-supervisee pairs moderates the relationship between justice variables and job satisfaction (JS). The moderation effect of gender similarity is, however, complex. Although the gender factor accounts for only a small amount of variance in JS, it adds to the manager's toolkit in dealing with k-workers including the women k-workers.

Keywords

Organisational justice, Job satisfaction, Gender and k-workers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The launch of the KBased Economy Master Plan in 2002 marked an important watershed in the Malaysian economic development. It

heralded the official commitment to the development of knowledge economy. The key ingredient for k-economy is the new human capital referred to by Peter Drucker as K-workers (Halimah, 2004; Govender & Bayat, 2000). These group workers are described generally in the literature as mobile, more self-centred, professionally inclined, expected to be treated respectfully, wield

greater power vis-à-vis the employers, seeking greater sense of growth and accomplishment than monetary rewards. (Amar, 2004; Chan & Renee, 2003; Rudiger & McVerry, 2007). In short, they must be managed differently from the workers of the industrial economy about whom we know more. In the innovation economy, organisations will depend increasingly on these k-workers for value creation and hence, the need to keep them satisfied.

K-economies also exhibit high levels of feminization of the workplace. In Europe, greater proportion of women are k-workers than men and there is a clear feminization of the kworkforce (Rudiger & McVerry, 2007: 16) In Malaysia, the overall, labour force participation rate for the women is 46% compared to 80% for the men in 2006 (<http://www.mohr.gov.my>). With female students making up 60-70% of total student enrolment in higher educational institutions (Hazman 2005), the composition of women in the workforce especially in executive, managerial, professional and technical ranks with high knowledge application will invariably increase. The k-worker population is expected to see greater presence of women and hence, a greater role for the women in the evolving k-economy.

As much as it is clear that k-workers are different from the industrial workers and they must be managed differently (Amar, 2004; Chane & Renee, 2003) , it also equally clear that the workplace in the knowledge economy is going to be more feminised as is the trend everywhere (Rudiger & McVerry, 2007). The increasing presence of women facilitated by the keconomy may reduce or exacerbate gender insensitivity at the workplace. The greater likelihood of female superiors may offer a better and more satisfying working environment. Hence the key question addressed in this study is: will gender similiarity (female) between manager and subordinate offer greater comfort at the workplace moderate the effect of justice perceptions of k-workers on job satisfaction?

This paper reports a study carried out to examine the

influence of justice variables on the job satisfaction of k-workers with gender similarity of the manager-supervisee i.e. k-worker as the moderator.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following sections, the literature related to the main constructs of this study is reviewed to develop the conceptual framework of the study.

2.1 Gender Similarity

Women's movement into management positions over the past four decades has propelled an abundance of research into the similarities and differences between female and male managers and the tensions in the relationship (Ohlott, Ruderman & McCauley, 2004). Women and men are different in their traits and behavior thus, they need to be managed differently since then many behaviorist scientists have studied whether the behavior of men and women are situation bound or the result of more stable, gender differences (DuBrin, 2002). Previous studies have shown that justice outcomes differ by gender (Carlsson, Keane & Martin, 2003). Simpson & Kaminski (2007) and Shappe (1998) showed the relationship between justice and job satisfaction was lower for women.

2.2 Job Satisfaction

Hall (1990) views job satisfaction as a sequence of related work experiences and activities, directed at personal and organisational goals, which a person possess during his or her lifetime, that are partly under their control and partly under of others (Orpen, 2000). A recent study of k-workers found that, unlike p-workers; k-workers are not focused on high salary and bonus (Rudiger & McVerry, 2007). K-workers are more interested in the challenge of the job, exposure to new technologies, job opportunities, work environment, and on-the-job training (Steward, 2000). Studies have shown that just treatment of worker contributes to higher job satisfaction which in turn promotes human capital retention (Masterson, 2000). Simpson & Kaminski (2007) and Shappe (1998), showed that job satisfaction among women is affected slightly differently compared to men. With specific reference to k-workers, Chan and Renee (2003) state that a fair process profoundly, influences attitudes and behavior critical to high performance. Thus, to ensure retention of k-workers, knowledge intensive firms must seek to develop greater job satisfaction by structuring the job environment to cater to the unique needs of these groups of workers.

2.3 Organisational Justice

Organisational justice describes the extent fairness perceived by employees in the workplace (Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991). The Theory of Organisational

Justice (Greenberg, 1990) explains that employees' feelings of equity in the workplace are determined by two main factors. Firstly, how decisions affecting them are made (procedural justice) and secondly, by the outcomes of these decisions (distributive justice). Colquitt (2001) extends the definition of organisational justice by stating that another element of organisational justice included how people should be treated interpersonally (interactional justice).

Perceptions about whether the decision-making procedure is just or unjust are likely to inform their level of trust. However, the degree of trust engendered may be altered by the perceived fairness of the interpersonal treatment received. Distributive justice draws on Adam's (1965) equity theory to propose that people compare the ratio of their own inputs and outcomes with those of relevant others, and judge outcome fairness according to the match between the inputs and outcomes of each party. The occurrence positive inequality occurs when a person receives more than he or she deserves to have. When the employee feels that they had a greater claim to an outcome compared with the person receiving it or known as negative inequity which will lead to feelings of anger and possibly mistrust (Folger & Cropanzano, 2000). Compared to distributive and procedural justice, interactional justice is a type of justice that deals with relationship between supervisor and supervisee in the workplace and this relationship will shape the attitudes and behaviors of the subordinates (Chacko, 1990).

3.0 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

From the above review, it is posited that the treatment of the k-workers i.e. their justice perceptions, will positively influence the level of job satisfaction. With greater feminization of the k-workplace, it is also posited that where the managers and subordinates are of the female gender, the justice-satisfaction relationship will be higher than when it is not.

3.1 Hypothesis

1. Procedural justice has a significant effect on the job satisfaction.
2. Distributive justice has a significant effect on the job satisfaction.
3. Interactional justice has a significant effect on the job satisfaction.
4. Gender similarity between supervisor and supervisee enhances the relationship (Female-Female) between procedural, interactional and distributive justice and job satisfaction.

3.2 Research Model

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, the theoretical framework for this study is shown in Figure 1.

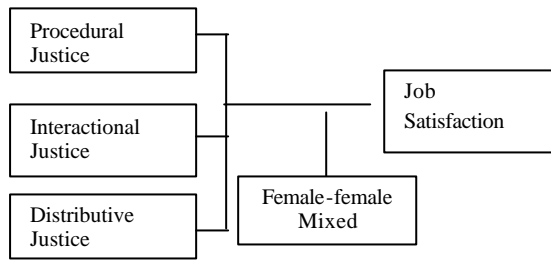


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the Study

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This following section outlines the design, sample, measurement and data collection.

4.1 Populations and sample

As there is no one accepted definition of k-workers, the definition used by Malaysian Development Corporation (MDec but previously abbreviated as MDC) is used to identify these workers. K-workers are defined as:

1. Workers who have five or more years' professional experience in multimedia or information and communication technology (ICT) business or in a field that is heavy user of multimedia.
2. Possesses a university degree (any discipline) or a graduate diploma (multimedia or ICT) from a professional experience in multimedia or ICT businesses or in a field that is heavy user of multimedia, and
3. Possesses a master degree or higher in any discipline.

The kworkers in the MSC stasured companies were survey for this study. The use of MSC stasured companies as a strategy to locate k-workers was based on the rules imposed by MDec on companies in qualifying for the MSC status. These companies must, among others, maintain at least 40% of knowledge workers during years of operation. Report published by MDC in 2004 indicated there was 16,624 kworkers in the MSC stasured companies. Since not all employees of MSC stasured companies are k-workers, information about their nature of work was used to eliminate those are do not fit the k-worker definition.

4.2 Measurements

The study involves three constructs namely, organizational justice, job satisfaction and gender similarity. There are 3 justice variables, procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes that an individual receives (McDowall & Fletcher, 2003). This was measured by using four measurement items. Procedural justice is the perceived fairness of procedures, which are used to determine

outcome decisions (Folger & Cropanzano, 2000) which was measured using Moorman's (1991) six-item measure. Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .89. Interactional justice was measured using 9 items with Likert scale. Job satisfaction was measured using Hackman and Oldham's Job Diagnostics Survey (1980).

The gender mix of the supervisor-supervisee was measured as a categorical variable i.e. female-female and mixed categories. T The gender variables were dummy coded with the mixed category as 0 (the baseline) while the female-female dummy variables were coded as 1 (www2.chass.ncsu.edu).

5.0 RESULTS

This section explains the profile of the respondents and also the results of the hypothesis testing.

5.1 Response and Profile of Respondents

Out of 1950 questionnaires sent, 532 questionnaires were received and only 401 was usable for data analysis. This indicates the rate of return is at 20%. The sample profile of the respondents and supervisor are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents.

Demographics	N	%
<u>Sex</u>		
Male	210	52.4
Female	191	47.6
<u>Race</u>		
Malay	131	32.7
Chinese	170	42.4
Indian	95	23.7
Others	5	1.2
<u>Tenure (in years)</u>		
Low (5-7yrs)	236	58.9
Moderate (8-10yrs)	114	28.4
High (>10 yrs)	51	12.7

Table 2: Profile of the Supervisors.

Demographics	N	%
<u>Sex</u>		
Male	256	63.8
Female	145	36.2
<u>Gender Matches</u>		
Female-Female (F-F)	123	30.6
Male-Male (M-M)	190	47.3
Mixed (M)	88	21.9
<u>Race</u>		
Malays	80	20
Chinese	231	57.6
Indian	85	21.2
Others	5	1.2

As shown in Table 1, about 52% of the respondents were male and with the remaining 48 % being female. As for

the race, two larger group are Chinese (42.4%) and Malay (32.7%). Majority of the respondents have about 5 to 7 years of experience in their job. Based on the data on gender, 222 respondents of the total of 401 had supervisors of same gender. Lastly, similarly to respondents, majority of the supervisor are also Chinese (57.6%).

5.2 Test of hypotheses

Cronbach's alpha for the multi-item measures ranged between .84 to .93, which exceeded the threshold level of 0.70 stipulated by Nunnally (1978).

The results of the three-step hierarchical regression depicted in Table 3 were undertaken to not only test the hypotheses of this study but also to show the improvement in explanatory power of the moderated model.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results.

Independent Variables	Mod. 1	Mod. 2	Mod. 3
Main Effect			
Procedural Justice	.782*	.736*	.741*
Interactional justice	-.016	.003	-.032
Distributive justice	-.049	-.027	-.021
Moderating Variable			
Female-Female (FF)	-	-.021	-.085
Mixed		-.159*	-.159*
Interaction Effects			
Procedural Justice * FF	-	-	.040
Interactional Justice * FF	-	-	.071*
Distributive Justice * FF	-	-	.101*
R ²	.588	.609	.622
Adj. R ²	.585	.604	.614
R ² Change	.588	.021	.012
F Change	189.2*	10.6*	4.2*

Note. N = 401, *p<0.05, **p<.0.1

As shown in Table 3 when the three components of organisational justice were entered into the regression analysis in the first step, R² was 0.588 indicating that 59% of job satisfaction is explained by the 3 justice variables. From Model 1, it can be observed that only procedural justice ($\beta = .782$, $p < .05$) has a significant and positive relationship with job satisfaction of this k-workers. Therefore, hypotheses 2 and 3 are not supported while there is good support for hypothesis 1.

Finally, to examine the moderating effect of gender similarity, a second and third regression models were tested by adding the moderators and independent

variables (IV) and interaction terms respectively. The mixed gender was a significant influence on job satisfaction as an IV but Female-Female was not. Of the 3 interaction terms created to test for gender similarity, 2 showed significant influence on job satisfaction. Hence, the 2 IVs showed significantly different influence on DV under a given condition as specified by the dummy variables. Therefore, the hypothesis positing a positive moderating effect of gender similarity was supported for interactional and distributive justice.

6.0 CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Masterson (2000) asserted that fairness is an important element in determining the employees' actions and reactions. In the psychological contract that defines the terms of engagement, justice is a basic expectation. When employees think that they are being treated with courtesy and respect, are informed of and allowed to influence the processes and provided with rewards that conform to their sense of equity, they will reciprocate in creative and productive ways. This study showed that procedural justice has a positive and strong relationship ($R^2 = .588$) with job satisfaction among k-workers of the MSC stasued firms. Perception of their role in shaping and agreement of the processes by which work is performed is the key driver of job satisfaction (JS). This is a common finding among k-workers' researchers because of the nature of k-workers. They are people who have experience and education and are creative. According to Amar (2004), k-workers prefer to work independently with less intervention from their superior. They want to their supervisor to trust them and are willing to delegate responsibilities together with authority. However, in managing kworkers, Trinidad and Normore (2005) said that when knowledge workers perceived high levels of procedural and interactional justice, it will moderate the relationship between psychological contract breach and knowledge commitment.

Surprisingly, interaction and distributive justice did not show main effect on job satisfaction quite unlike other studies like Yusof and Shamsuri (2006) who found that distributive justice has a direct positive influence on job satisfaction. Interactional and distributive justice showed significant effect on JS under the specified moderation conditions of gender similarity. The key research question was whether gender similarity between supervisors and supervisees moderates the influence of organisational justice on job satisfaction of kworkers? The study confirmed that it does. For a female k-worker, having a female superior appears to increase the effect of interactional and distributive justice on JS.

While 1 of the 3 main hypotheses and 2 of the 3 moderation hypotheses were supported, procedural justice alone accounted for the bulk of the explained variance in job satisfaction. The moderation effect,

although significant, was in terms of the incremental effect size small, at best (Cohen, 1977). The gender similarity or dissimilarity will not, as judged from the incremental effect size (R^2), provide managers with any real design choices when dealing with k-workers. However, it does alert managers to the gender factor in k-workplace. With increasing feminisation of the k-workers, knowledge of the effect of gender similarity (i.e. Female-Female or Mixed) will be useful. Since ideas are locked in the k-worker's mind, satisfying them is the key to unlocking it (Chan & Renee, 2003; Chen, Meindl, and Hui, 2000). Gender similarity may be another option in the manager's toolkit to unlock the female k-workers creative talents.

As with any study, several caveats are in order. To the extent that MSC status is conferred to ICT related industries an firms, not all sectors and firms that can be classified as knowledge intensive are included in this survey. The findings must be read with this caveat. MDec uses a definition of k-workers which was adopted to identify the k-workers. As submitted by P. Drucker, K-workers are known by the nature of work (conceptual) that they do and the value of work accomplished (high value added). To the extent that qualifications and industry based criteria is inadequate, the survey would have excluded many k-workers. Hence, there is some risk in generalisation the results to all k-workers.

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