

## **BEHIND EMOTION: ORGANIZATIONAL INJUSTICE PRACTICES AS A KEY ANTECEDENT OF COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIORS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Objective of this study was to explore the relationships between employee perceptions of organizational injustice and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). Survey data were collected from 120 individuals from organizations in service sector in Sri Lanka. As predicted, the relationship between perceived injustice practices and CWBs was found. This finding provides organizations with an insight into the emotional consequences of unfair human resource practices, and the potential implications for CWBs. Such knowledge may help employers to develop and practice justice that support the effective management of emotions at work. The finding is particularly relevant for organizations operating in service sector in Sri Lanka. This is one of the first studies to provide empirical support for the relationships between injustice, and CWBs in a Sri Lankan context. This study also provides further evidence for supporting the relationship between justice and CWBs and provides evidence that these propositions may hold across different cultural contexts. Implications for theory, research, and practice are also discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotion, Injustice, Counterproductive work behavior, Antecedents

### **INTRODUCTION**

Lazarus (1991) defined emotions as “ways of apprehending states of the world that have significance for personal well-being” (p.89). Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) are either aggressive (e.g. production deviance and abuse against other) or passive (e.g. employee withdrawal and failing to follow instructions) employee behaviors aimed at harming the current organization and/or its employees (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). Scholars are interested in studying CWBs as it is associated with harmful effects on employers (e.g. Jensen, Opland, & Ryan, 2009) and employees (e.g. Aube, Rousseau, Mama, & Morin, 2009).

On the other hand, the issue of organizational justice and its impacts on organizational outcomes is found to be significant. Greenberg (1990) defined organizational justice as employee perceptions of fairness in the workplace. It has shown to be associated with several favorable outcomes. However, if workplace human resource practices are injustice, its affect may be negative in terms of attitude, behavior and performance. Only few studies are conducted the negative effect of certain human resource practices such as work alienation, deviant behaviour, and CWB (Rauf, 2015). In existing literature, organizational justice is categorized into three broad categories namely “distributive”, “Procedural”, and “interactional” justice (Martinez-tur et al., 2006). Perception of justice in the workers may generate a state of mind with a positive attitude. This condition may in turn lead the workers to get engage in performing organizational performance (Williams, Pitre., & Zainuba, 2002). According to Asgari et al. (2008) when employee perceives justice practices they behave positively. Moorman (1991) emphasized that, organizational justice is regarding the organizational behaviors. While justice perception influences organizational performance, its

influence becomes negative when an organization applies injustice practices. If injustice practices are applied workers get emotion. Consequently, their behavior towards employees and organizations are negative and tend to involve CWBs. Studies also support for the relationship between procedural or interactional justice and emotions (e.g. Barclay et al., 2005). Miles et al, (2002) argue that negative perceptions of work environment relate to negative emotions, which are positively correlated with CWB. When people observe unfair situations may lead to negative emotions and CWB (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001). Studies in the area of the association of organizational injustice practices and CWBs are sparse. Therefore, identifying this harmful effect of injustice practices empirically is needed. The present study addresses this gap through an empirical investigation into the HRM practices in respect of organizational justice among a sample from Sri Lankan organizations. This study takes into account the perceived organizational injustice (distributive injustice, procedural injustice and interactional injustice) of Sri Lankan employees, and examines whether they have effects on CWBs. Further, extant empirical research is limited in its contextual scope. Further, injustice judgments and their relationship with emotional and behavioral outcomes may not be culture free. In addition to that, previous research has been conducted among 'Western' US/European samples (e.g. Greenberg, 2001). Therefore, this study aims at contributing to the extant literature by filling up this important gap. Therefore, it makes sense that injustice perception has positive relationship with CWBs. Based on the above argument the following conceptual frame work is drawn (see Figure below).

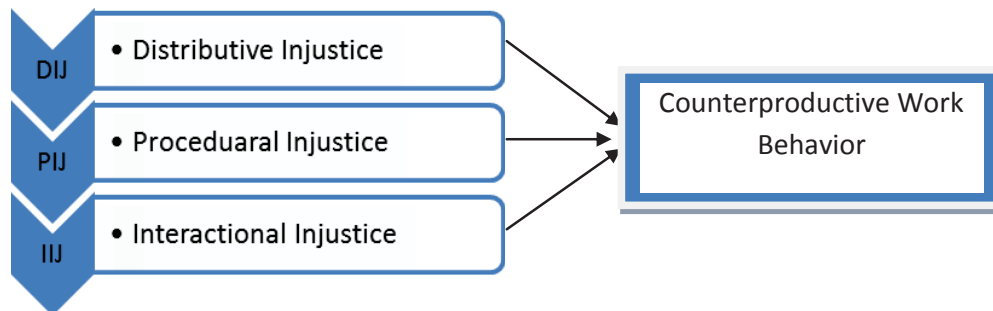


Figure1. The Conceptual Framework

Based on the above conceptual framework, following hypotheses are developed,

H<sub>1</sub>: The extent to which distributive injustice perceived by employees influences the counterproductive work behavior.

H<sub>2</sub>: Employees who perceive more procedural injustices would engage in more counterproductive work behavior.

H<sub>3</sub>: The more the interactional injustice perception among employees the higher the counterproductive work behavior.

## METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from a sample of 200 employees from service sector in Sri Lanka. In order to obtain fair responses respondents were assured of confidentiality. For the purpose of collecting unbiased responses employees were approached during their off time. Respondents were fully educated about the questionnaire and its contents. Distributive injustice (DIJ), procedural injustice (PIJ) was measured by using the 20-item scale developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) and Perceptions of interactional justice (IJ) were measured using 15 items. This scale items have been adapted to negative statements in order to measure the degree of perceived injustice. Responses were noted on five point likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). CWBs were measured using the scales developed by Spector et al. (2006).

Collected data in the form of individual responses was subjected to analyses to investigate the hypothesized, relationship between injustice and CWB. Data were also analyzed using descriptive, correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis between dimensions of organizational injustice (distributive injustice, procedural injustice, and interactional injustice) and counterproductive work behavior are presented in Table 2. Correlation between distributive injustice and CWBs reveal significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). Further the regression analysis using the enter method is also executed separately between dimensions of organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior. Based on the regression analysis, it is found that DIJ explains 18.7% variation in CWB i.e.  $R^2 = 0.187$ , ( $F = 11.088$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ). Hence,  $H_1$  is supported i.e. DIJ is significantly associated with CWBs.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Inter-Correlations, Reliabilities of Studied Variables

	M	SD	DIJ	PIJ	IJJ	CWB
DIJ	3.021	0.756	(0.72)			
PIJ	2.872	0.675	0.331**	(0.68)		
IJJ	3.043	0.891	0.410**	0.301**	(0.70)	
CWB	2.981	0.664	0.431**	0.642**	0.453**	(0.71)

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ . DIJ = Distributive Injustice Perception; PIJ= Procedural Injustice Perception; IJJ=Interactional Injustice Perception; CWB=Counterproductive Work Behavior; M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation. Reliabilities are in parenthesis.

As shown in Table 2, a result of the correlation analysis between PIJ and CWB indicates strong positive relationship. The value of pearson's  $r = 0.64$ . Based on the results of the regression analysis PIJ explains 42.4% variations in CWB ( $F = 35.425$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding reveal that  $H_2$  is supported i.e. PIJ is associated with CWBs. As presented in Table 2 correlation analysis between IJJ and CWB yields pearson's  $r = 0.45$ , and hence it can be confirmed that positive significant relationship exists between these two variables. Results of regression analysis also indicate that the IJJ explains 23% variation in CWB ( $F = 14.714$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Hence  $H_3$  is supported.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study concludes that all dimensions of injustice, that are distributive injustice, procedural injustice and interactional injustice have found to be associated with CWBs in organizations, especially in Sri Lanka. All three dimensions of organizational justice including distributive, interactional and procedural justice are important to reinforce employees' behavior as they collectively and individually showed significant impact on CWBs. Findings of this study suggest that organizational justice plays important role in shaping employees behavior at work place, particularly, negative behaviors such as CWBs. Leaders in service sector may control the employee emotions and CWBs enhance the level of employee positive behavior by employing organizational systems which strengthen justice in organizational practices and enhance their contributions in achieving organizational long term goals. This study provides evidence to senior practitioners in service sector of Sri Lanka that to erect justice in all procedures and systems of the organization can guarantee loyal and committed employees to serve over long period of time, thus reducing turnover and improving organizational productivity and efficiency which can be ultimately serve as a competitive advantage for the sector operating in this dynamic competitive environment.

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