Justice and Organizational Citizenship Behavior: What Is the Relationship?

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational justice has been recognized as an important issue in the effective functioning of organizations (Greenberg, 1990; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Greenberg and Tyler (1987) suggested that people are concerned about matters of justice and that justice does influence job attitudes, and in fact, may explain a wide variety of organizational behaviors as well (Greenberg, 1990). Unfortunately, research in organizational justice has focused more on job attitudes (Greenberg, 1990), limiting our knowledge concerning justice effects on important organizational behaviors. Recently, Organ (1988) claimed that one important behavior across people and over time that makes an organization more effective is organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, one issue of interest for the organizational justice literature and in the effective functioning of organizations may be the relationship between justice and organizational citizenship behavior.

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The organizational justice literature is the result of attempts to explain the role of fairness in the workplace (Greenberg, 1987). The distinction is made between distributive justice, which focuses on the fairness of the outcomes received from decision procedures, and procedural justice, which focuses on the fairness of the procedures themselves (Greenberg, 1990). Research has also provided evidence that people consider the quality of their treatment by others as a determinant of fairness (this is usually called “interactional justice,” see Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Bies, 1986; Tyler, 1988). Thus, Greenberg (1990) concluded that procedural justice is influenced by the structural characteristics of the decision and the quality of the interpersonal treatment associated with the decision making (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991, p. 699).

The justice literature has primarily focused on the distinction between procedural and distributive justice (e.g., Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Greenberg, 1986; Tyler & Caine, 1981). The research on procedural justice has focused on specific issues within organizations. These issues include such areas as drug testing (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991), grievance systems (Gordon & Fryxell, 1989), layoffs (Brockner & Greenberg, 1990), pay raises (Folger & Konovsky, 1989), and performance appraisal (Greenberg, 1986). The justice research has not focused on employees' overall perceptions of the fairness of the organization.

Greenberg (1988) suggested that organizations may strive to establish a “culture of fairness” since such organizations may reap benefits that might include attracting and maintaining the best job candidates (pp. 67-68). The implication is that the best job candidates will make the organization more effective because of their attitudes and behaviors. Little research focuses on whether perceptions of overall fairness or perceptions of a “culture of fairness” influence employee attitudes and/or behaviors.

A “culture of fairness” may mean that employees believe they will be rewarded well for their performance. Perceptions of overall fairness may also mean that employees believe that, overall, the rules that are used to make decisions are fair or that they will be treated with respect. In turn, these perceptions may lead to more global organizational evaluations, such as that the management in this organization is honest and ethical.

Organ (1988) argued that “perceived fairness is a particularly salient attribute of the exchange relationship between individuals or between an individual and a larger entity, such as the organization” (pp. 67-68). Employees not only enter into an economic exchange with their employers, but they also enter into a social exchange. Although both exchanges involve fairness, the fairness of the social exchange is based on a “global, intuitive assessment” (Organ, 1990, p. 63). “Fairness in social exchange requires only a sense that the relationship is based on ‘good faith’ recognition of each other’s contributions” (Organ, 1990, p. 63). Thus, employees’ perceptions of overall fairness may include both a specific assessment of the fairness of the economic exchange, and a global assessment of the social exchange.

Social exchange theory (Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964) predicts that, given certain conditions, people seek to reciprocate those who benefit them (Bateman & Organ, 1983, p. 588). One behavior that employees may exhibit to reciprocate those who