

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AND EMPLOYEE SILENCE: A STUDY ON PUBLIC EMPLOYEES¹

Ayşe Yavuz, PhD

Selcuk University, Taskent Vocational School, Konya, Turkey
e-mail: ayseyavuz@selcuk.edu.tr

Abstract

Even though technological developments continue to be experienced at a dizzying pace in today's business world, the human factor continues to maintain its importance. For this reason, many managerial issues continue to emerge. The concept of organizational justice is one of these issues, which reveals the expectations of the employees from the organization in return for the effort they spend for the organization. Employees in organizations where organizational justice is provided work more happily. Employee silence, which is another concept related to the human factor, is the behavior of employees to avoid expressing their positive or negative thoughts about the organization. It is critical for the success of the organization that the employees can express their ideas clearly and easily express their suggestions and problems. It is thought that in businesses where organizational justice exists, employees can freely express their opinions and thus silence behaviors will decrease. In this study, the relationship between organizational justice and employee silence is examined. Research data were collected from public servants in a district of Konya through a survey technique. The obtained data were analyzed with statistical methods. As a result, a significant relationship was found between the concepts of organizational justice and organizational silence.

Keywords: Organizational Justice, Organizational Silence, Organization.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world where technology is developing rapidly, the way for organizations to compete depends on having qualified human resources. In today's competitive conditions, it is not enough for organizations to make a profit. In order to maintain its existence, it must satisfy both its internal and external customers. For organizations, the most important capital element that cannot be imitated by competitors is human resources. The ability of organizations to use human resources efficiently depends on the policies they will follow. At this point, the importance of the concept of organizational justice emerges. The perception of organizational justice is highly effective on employees. In enterprises where organizational justice is ensured, employees can work happier, more peacefully and satisfied with their jobs. In organizations that are unfair or perceived in that way, it may cause employees to experience a sense of burnout, decrease in their performance and motivation, and leave their jobs. In addition, some employees may continue to work and experience a state of introversion and silence. At this point, the concept of employee silence emerges. The concept of employee silence emerges as a situation where employees do not express their opinions on organizational issues. In this case, employees do not share their ideas, suggestions and thoughts with their organizations.

CONCEPTIAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational Justice

Employees make a certain judgment about whether the processes, duties, rewards and behaviors shown to them are fair or not and develop a certain attitude towards the organization in line with this judgment (Greenberg, 1990, p.399). Employees' relations with their managers, colleagues and the organization and the exchanges that occur within the organization provide the formation of a perception of organizational justice (Beugre, 1998, p.351). The perception of the decisions and practices taken by the organization management as fair by the employees will reflect positively on the motivation and performance of the employees (Koçel, 2014, p.530). A sense of fairness perceived as positive will make employees trust the organization more and feel valued. A sense of justice perceived negatively will lead to negative behaviors (Özmen et al., 2007, p.19).

Organizational justice has been expressed as a phenomenon that affects the attitudes of employees within the organization, includes factors such as division of labor, wages, rest conditions and determines the quality of social interaction within the organization (Poyraz et al., 2009, p.73). According to another definition, organizational justice refers to the distribution of duties of employees, their level of pay, their compliance with overtime, distribution of rewards, authorization, etc. It is explained as the process of evaluating managerial decisions for variables (İçerli, 2010, p.69). Organizational justice includes consequences that affect employees' relationships with others and their psychological, physical, and social well-being (Pettola et al., 2007).

The concept of organizational justice was initially considered as two dimensions as distributive justice and procedural justice (Greenberg, 1987, p.13). Later, the interactional justice dimension was introduced into the literature as a third dimension (Colquitt, 2001, p.392). Distributed justice is explained as the perceived fairness of the outputs that the employee receives from the organization. Organizational outputs can be distributed based on need, contribution and equality. At this point, employees compare themselves with others and decide whether the distribution is fair or not (Alsalem and Alhaiani, 2007). Distributive justice is based on Adams' theory of equality. Distributional justice is the perception of fairness in relation to the amount of earnings of employees (Folger and Konovsky, 1989, p.115). Procedural justice is a concept about giving employees a say in the decision-making process of the organization and in the implementation of this process (Steiner and Bertolino, 2006, p.2). Procedural justice is the perception of fairness in relation to the means used to quantify the gains made by employees (Folger and Konovsky, 1989, p.115). Interactional justice is the perceptions of fairness in relation to interpersonal behavior exhibited during the implementation of procedures and decisions (Bies and Moag, 1986). Interactional justice is a different type of justice from procedural justice. While procedures are related to the structural nature of the decision-making processes of the organization, interactional justice refers to the social change between two people (Karademir and Çoban, 2010, p.55).

Organizational Silence

The first studies on employee silence date back to the 1970s and Hirschman's work. Hirschman (1970) expressed silence as a passive but positive situation that symbolizes loyalty to the organization. Organizational silence is expressed as employees who do not want to express their concerns prefer silence due to fear (Milliken and Morrison, 2003, p.1563), and employees deliberately do not want to express their ideas and opinions

(Scott, 1993). Employee silence is the deliberate retention and non-sharing of information for a variety of reasons (Pinder and Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang and Botero; 2003).

The theoretical foundations underlying the preference of employees to silence in organizations are based on waiting theory, silence spiral, silence effect, self-adaptation theory and cost-benefit analyses (Premeaux, 2001, p.9; Uçar, 2016, p.71). Many reasons such as the structure of the organization, the culture that dominates the organization, economic crises, fear of relocation of employees, fear of dismissal affect the size and direction of silence. In such cases, employees prefer to remain silent instead of talking (Kahveci, 2010, p. 6).

Although employee silence in organizations is initially perceived as organizational commitment, it is essentially expressed as the employee consciously conceal information despite having knowledge of all positive or negative aspects of the organization (Çakıcı, 2010, p.9). The reasons for employee silence are listed as employees' distrust of their managers, exclusion, seeing speech as risky and fear that relationships will deteriorate (Gül and Özcan, 2011, p.113).

There are many researches about organizational justice and organizational silence. Wang and Jiang (2015, p.211) concluded in their study that bad managers negatively affect the perception of interactional justice and that there is a positive relationship between the perception of interactional justice and employee silence. Duan et al. (2010) revealed that the fair treatment of managers has a negative effect on employee silence. Ünlü et al. (2015) stated that there are negative relations between the dimensions of organizational justice and defensive silence and positive relations between protectionist and accepting silence. In their study, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008, p.37) revealed that the silence levels of employees were lower in organizations with a high climate of procedural justice.

RESEARCH METHOD AND FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to reveal whether there is a relationship between public sector employees' perceptions of organizational justice and employee silence behaviors. The study is empirical research. In the study, survey technique was used to collect the data. The questionnaires were applied face-to-face to employees. The questionnaire is designed in three parts. In the first part, information about the demographic characteristics of the employees, in the second part; statements about perceptions of organizational justice and statements about perceptions of organizational silence are included in the

third section. The organizational justice scale used in the study was adapted from the study of Niehoff and Moorman (1993), and the organizational silence scale was adapted from the study of Van Dyne et al. (2003). The organizational justice scale consists of 20 expressions and the employee silence scale consists of 15 statements. The scales used in the study were designed as five-point Likert-type scales ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree".

The research was carried out on public sector employees in a district of Konya province. Since it was possible to reach all the employees, there was no need to determine the sample. A total of 100 employees operating in the current district participated in the study.

With this study, it is aimed to determine the relationship between organizational justice and employee silence and for this purpose, the following hypothesis was put forward.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between organizational justice and employee silence.

SPSS 25.0 program was used to analyze the data in the study. First, reliability analysis was applied to test the reliability of the scales. As a result of the reliability analysis of the organizational justice scale, Cronbach's Alpha value for 20 statements was calculated as 0.97. As a result of the reliability analysis of the employee silence scale, Cronbach's Alpha value for 15 statements was found to be 0.90. According to the obtained values, it is seen that both scales are reliable.

In the analyzes, demographic findings related to employees were given as Frequency (n) and Percentage (%). The standard deviation and mean values of the expressions in the scales are also included in the tables. The relationship between the research variables was analyzed by means of Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

Demographic findings of the employees participating in the study are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants According to Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	3	3,0
	Male	97	97,0
	Total	100	100,0
Marital Status	Single	72	72,0
	Married	28	28,0
	Total	100	100,0

Age	18-25	13	13,0
	26-30	34	34,0
	31-35	34	34,0
	35-45	7	7,0
	45+	12	12,0
	Total	100	100,0
Educational Status	Primary school	2	2,0
	Middle school	27	27,0
	High school	26	26,0
	Bachelor's	37	37,0
	Graduate	8	8,0
	Total	100	100,0
Working time at this workplace	Less than 1 year	15	15,0
	1-5 years	45	45,0
	5-10 years	33	33,0
	More than 10 years	7	7,0
	Total	100	100,0
Position	Chief	2	2,0
	Worker	40	40,0
	Officer	41	41,0
	Manager	6	6,0
	Engineer	2	2,0
	Chef	5	5,0
	Technician	4	4,0
	Total	100	100,0

The distribution of the research participants according to their demographic status is given in Table 1. It is seen that 97% of the participants are male and 3% are female. When the marital status of the participants is examined, it is seen that 72% of the employees participating in the research are married and 28% are single. When the distribution of the participants according to their ages is examined, the highest rate is in the 26-35 age range. When the distribution of the participants according to their educational status is examined, it is seen that 37% of most of the participants have a bachelor's degree. When the distribution of the participants according

to their working time in the current workplaces is examined, 45% of them work in this workplace in the range of 1-5 years. When the positions of the participants are examined, it is seen that 41% of them are officer and 40% of them are worker.

When the descriptive statistics of the expressions in the organizational justice scale are examined, the general average of the expressions measuring organizational justice is 3.52 and the standard deviation is 0.77. This result expresses a high level of organizational justice based on the rating scale. The overall average of the expressions on the scale created to measure employee silence is 4.05, while the standard deviation is 0.58. Among the sub-dimensions of employee silence, pro-social silence averaged 4.30; defensive silence averages 3.99; The average acquiescent silence was found to be 3.87. This result expresses a high level of employee silence based on the rating scale.

Table 2. The Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis

		Organizational Justice	Employee Silence
Organizational Justice	Pearson Correlation	1	,390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000
	N	100	100
Employee Silence	Pearson Correlation	,390**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	
	N	100	100
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between the organizational justice and employee silence scales and their sub-dimensions. A statistically significant and positive relationship was found between the participants' perceptions of organizational justice and their level of employee silence (Pearson's $r = 0.390$, $p < 0.01$). There is a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. The increasing perception of organizational justice affects the level of employee silence in the same direction. According to this result, the hypothesis "H₁: There is a significant relationship between organizational justice and employee silence" was accepted..

In their study, Ünlü et al. (2015) determined that there is a positive relationship between teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and their

protective and accepting silences. Wang and Jiang (2015: 209) stated that there is a positive relationship between interactional justice and employee silence, and the result of these studies and the result of the study show similar characteristics. The high perception of organizational justice shows that the employees of this sector believe that the practices applied to them are fair. The high level of employee silence has been seen that those working in the public sector prefer especially pro-social silence. Their level of defensive and accepting silence was also high.

CONCLUSION

The concept of organizational justice is related to the processes implemented in the workplace and the perceptions of employees about the results obtained. If employees compare themselves to other employees and think that the treatment they receive is fair, they think that there is organizational justice. When they think that internal practices are fair, they work with more morale and motivation. Their high motivation affects their business success and performance.

Employee silence is the situation where all kinds of ideas, suggestions or information related to the job are kept consciously due to various reasons and not shared with others. Organizations sometimes push employees to remain silent without realizing it or intentionally. Employees who think that their suggestions will not reach any results sometimes prefer to remain silent.

In the study, first, various demographic characteristics of the employees participating in the research were determined. The research was conducted in the public sector and determined as demographic variables such as gender, marital status, age, education level and working time. Correlation analysis was then performed to determine whether there was a relationship between organizational justice and employee silence. As a result of the analysis, a significant and positive relationship was found between organizational justice and employee silence. The reason for this situation is thought to be due to the stereotyped decision-making procedures and excessive hierarchical structure in the public sector. In addition, the idea of preventing conflict and other dangers among employees, the fear of punishment in employees can lead employees to remain silent even in an environment where there is organizational justice.

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