

## Investigating Organizational Justice and Conflict Management Styles among Bank Employees in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Conflicts that occur among employees can be prevented by managing the conflict effectively. Conflict management is important as it will affect employee's attitudes and behavior's. This study discusses how the specific organizational justice dimensions influenced the conflict management styles. The main objective of this research is to investigate which styles have significance relationship with organizational justice dimensions such as distributive justice and procedural justice. The study was conducted using random sampling method. The result shows that employees with high sensitivity in organizational justice issues used integrating, obliging and compromising styles while employees whom with low sensitivity on justice issues are more favorable with dominating and avoiding styles.

**Key words:** Procedural justice, distributive justice, conflict management styles, bank employees, justice dimensions

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizational justice is a well-established concept in organizational psychology studies among researchers over the last 20 years (Greenberg, 2001). Suliman and Al-Kathairi (2013) and Ghosh *et al.* (2014) verified that how employee's perceive justice in their organization will affect their attitudes towards the organization. For example, if they perceive organizational justice to be high, employees tend to be more satisfied and attached to their job. Organizational justice and conflict management styles have attracted the attention of researcher as organizations are rapidly progressing towards achieving high performing organizations which exposes employees to a variety of obstacles in their job and causes conflict among them in the organization (Ozgan, 2011). Trudel (2009) and Alzahrani (2013) highlighted negative effects such as higher turnover where employees perceive low organizational justice and ineffective conflict management styles. Hemdi *et al.* (2012), Nadiri and Tanova (2010) discovered that turnover among employees in an organizations influenced by organizational justice. The severity of turnover in Malaysian financial services sector has increased every year. Rubiah revealed that turnover rate among bank employees in Malaysia had increased from 9.3% in year 2009-10.1% in year 2010 and the highest

turnover rate found to be recorded by the financial services which is about 18.3%. Consequently, employees must be alert on issues regarding fairness in organization to resolve conflict as working together in a fair system is an important component of organizational success (Tatum and Eberlin, 2006). Therefore, perceived fairness in conflict management styles has become increasingly important for organizational excellence. Specifically, the present study will examine the relationships between the two dimensions of organizational justices; procedural and distributive justices and the five conflict management styles namely integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding.

### Literature review

**Distributive justice:** Distributive justice or commonly known as perceived fairness of outcomes and allocations, originated from the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) as well as theory of equity (Adams, 1965). Mowday and Colwell (2003) social exchange theories tend to view social relationships as similar to economic transactions in which individuals process their contributions to the relationship and the resultant benefits in a calculative manner while also evaluating inputs and outcomes with reference to a comparative standard. The equity theory contends that in assessing the fairness of allocations, people usually

weigh the ratio of outcomes as what they obtain from the relationship according to the inputs that they have channeled for the effort (Adams, 1965). For example, a person feels inequitably treated if his or her ratio of outcomes compared to the input is low. As a result, the particular person is motivated to reduce this inequity distress (Greenberg and Baron, 2003). There are varieties of ways to reduce inequity distress such as decreasing one's inputs, attempting to alter the comparison standard (other's outcome or inputs ratio), making cognitive adjustments to inputs and outcomes increasing one's outcomes from the relationship, switching loyalties or exiting the relationship (Greenberg and Colquitt, 2013).

In a study conducted by Konovsky (2000) it was discovered that equality norm plays an important role to reduce conflict. Need-based distributions are normally made when the parties distributing the rewards assumes a degree of responsibility for the welfare of the recipients. Equality rules and needs seem to be grounded in principle other than self-interest. Konovsky (2000) stated selection of the distributions involves an individual's self-serving attempts to maximize long term benefits over the relationship. In addition (Cropanzano and Ambrose, 2001) further emphasized that fairness perception involves concerns not only with respect to what outcome is decided but also how such decision is made. In conclusion, researchers (Cropanzano and Ambrose, 2001; Konovsky, 2000) indicated that equality and needs are related to high productivity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Distributive justice is defined as people's perceptions of fairness of the distribution of resources between people (Greenberg and Baron, 2003). Cropanzano *et al.* (2011) stated that within the context of a workplace, distributive justice is the perceived fairness of the amounts of compensation employees received. Distributive justice is related to the perception how engaged is the organizations to the fulfillments of the employee's needs (Crow *et al.*, 2012). Distributive justice is related to the expectation of personal outcomes such as pay satisfaction and job satisfaction and consequently, the quantity of rewards given to employees (Suliman and aL-Kathairi, 2013). Perception of fairness of distribution might lead to sentiments and behaviors as it is related to an individual's cognitive decision. Unfair management of individuals will cause negative attitudes and behaviors than those treated fairly (Greenberg and Colquitt, 2013).

**Procedural justice:** In organizational context, procedural justice is a vital resource in social exchange. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the resources used to decide the amount of benefits. Procedural justice

is one of three components of organizational justice (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2014). They found that procedural justice is an application of procedures with concern of perceived fairness in organizations. Besides that, numerous researchers found that procedural justice as the employee's awareness on determination of job distribution techniques and the way they fare in their job performance (Tyler and Lind, 1992). Thus, past literatures confirm that perception fairness in distribution of work responsibility will provide high motivation to employees that will affect their job performance (Tyler and Lind, 1992).

Besides that there are several critical factors that contribute to procedural justice other than fairness such as, two way communication, trust in supervisor, clarity of expectations and understanding of the performance appraisal process as discovered by Lemons and Jones (2001). Perception of procedural justice are high if there are actions to insure the results of monitoring are accurate and the organization has appeal procedures to correct unreasonable outcome (Greenberg, 2001). In order to achieve these outcomes the procedures should be constant, bias free and include the concerns of all employees and be morally acceptable (Leventhal, 1980). In addition, procedural justice supplements distributive justice in that the former is a social heuristic, useful when it is too difficult to evaluate the correctness of outcomes or inputs. Outcomes are sometimes too complex or vague to consider in the calculative manner described by equity theory. Thus, as a mental shortcut, people may assess the overall quality of the procedure underlying the decision outcome (Tyler and Lind, 1992).

Procedural and distributive justices are recognized as predicting reactions to decisions (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). Therefore, both justices need to be studied jointly. Recognizing this (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998) had come out with cognitions theory, a two-factor theory of justice that incorporates these two justice's interactions as a key feature. For example when individuals encounter poor outcome distributions they will consider whether the procedure contributed to the outcome. Thus, perceptions of both outcomes and procedures create an overall sense of justice. Unfair outcomes accompanied by unfair procedures enhance a sense of being unjustly treated (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997).

**Conflict management styles:** Rahim (2002, 1983) outlined five types of conflict management styles such as integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding styles. The first style is integrating style. This style is linked with problem solving and involves openness, sharing information, searching for alternatives

and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. The second style is obliging style. Obliging style is linked with low concern for self and high concern for others while attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing the commonalities to satisfy the concern of the party. An obliging person neglects his or her own concern to satisfy the concern of the other party. The third style, compromising style, intermediates between concern for self and others. It involves “give and take” situation where both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. On the other hand, dominating style involves high concern for self and low concern for the other party involved in the conflict and described as a win-lose situation. Avoiding style is the last style among those five styles. Avoiding style involves low concern for self and others which is associated with withdrawal or sidestepping the actual situation. An avoiding person fails to satisfy his own concern as well as other party’s concern. The avoiding style is suitable when an employee wants to reduce tensions, stalling for more time or when he is in a lower position of authority (Rahim, 2002).

Justice in organization has been shown to be a central concern of employees (Sheppard *et al.*, 1992). Volkema and Bergmann (1995) found that employees often identify justice-related issues such as inequitable distribution of rewards and unfair evaluation as sources of conflict between them and their superiors. Nevertheless, several studies have indicated that positive perceptions lead to the use of cooperative behaviour. For example, Moorman (1991) found that employees who perceived greater levels of justice are generally engaged in more organizational citizenship behaviour. Similarly, greater frequencies of integrative (win-win) behaviours and concessions have generally been observed when negotiators perceive others to have acted in a trustworthy or fair fashion (Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). Thus, when managing conflict with their superiors, employees who perceive that organizational justice is present may frequently use more cooperative styles (e.g., integrating, obliging and compromising) rather than less cooperative styles (e.g., dominating and avoiding). This expectation is based on the following consistent finding in the organizational justice literature: greater levels of perceived justice are generally related to more positive work attitudes and behaviours (Tyler and Lind, 1992) and thus, possibly to more positive conflict management behaviors. Tatum *et al.* (2003) discovered that there is a significant relationship between organizational justice and conflict management styles. Tatum *et al.* (2003) also found that employees who are sensitive to organizational justice

issues are more likely to be aware of potential conflicts that might arise during an encounter with an employee. These employees will not seek to dominate or avoid negotiation with an employee but rather chose the integrating style (Sheppard *et al.*, 1992). Consequently, Sheppard and Lewicki (1992) discovered that the most likely and beneficial approach to addressing conflict for the employees who are highly sensitive to organizational justice issues is the integrative style as employees who perceive fairness in organizational justice are more likely to achieve integrating outcomes such as information sharing, employee involvement and a genuine demonstration of care and concern from other employees. Therefore the hypotheses for this study will assume direct relationships between both dimensions of organizational justice (distributive justice and procedural justice) and conflict management styles (integrating, obliging style, compromising style, dominating style and avoiding style).

### **Hypotheses of study**

**Hypotheses:** There is a significant relationship between organizational justice and conflict management style:

- H<sub>1,1</sub>: there is a significant relationship between distributive justice and integrating style
- H<sub>1,2</sub>: there is a significant relationship between distributive justice and obliging style
- H<sub>1,3</sub>: there is a significant relationship between distributive justice and compromising style
- H<sub>1,4</sub>: there is a significant relationship between distributive justice and dominating style
- H<sub>1,5</sub>: there is a significant relationship between distributive justice and avoiding style
- H<sub>1,6</sub>: there is a significant relationship between procedural justice and integrating style
- H<sub>1,7</sub>: there is a significant relationship between procedural justice and obliging style
- H<sub>1,8</sub>: there is a significant relationship between procedural justice and compromising style
- H<sub>1,9</sub>: there is a significant relationship between procedural justice and dominating style
- H<sub>1,10</sub>: there is a significant relationship between procedural justice and avoiding style

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The sample for this study comprises of employees working in commercial banks in Malaysia. Random sampling was used in selecting the samples from the population. Data were obtained through survey questionnaire.

**Research instrument:** Conflict management styles were measured by using the form C of ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983). This multi-item instrument contains 27 items uses a 5 point likert scale to assess employee's style of handling conflict. The ROCI-II was designed to measure 5 dimensions or styles of resolving conflict. About 7 items for measuring integrating style, 6 items each for measuring obligating style, 4 items for measuring compromising style, 5 items for measuring avoiding style and 5 items for measuring dominating style. Past studies have shown each of these five styles has an acceptable level of reliability with Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.95, 0.85, 0.78, 0.84 and 0.70, respectively (Rahim, 1983). The present study adopted the 10 item scale developed by Rahim to assess organizational justice such as distributive justice (4 items) and procedural justice (6 items). Past studies have shown each of these dimensions has an acceptable level of reliability with Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.96 and 0.85, respectively (Rahman, 2012).

**Data analysis technique:** Data was analyzed by using Software Package Social Science (SPSS) Version 23. Reliability and factor analysis was used to check the consistency and dimensionality of the scale items. Pearson inter-correlation was used to measure the relationships among conflict handling styles and organizational commitment. Multiple regression analysis is performed to analyze whether the hypotheses were acceptable or rejected and directly explains the hypotheses relationships.

## RESULTS

The survey was distributed to 1200 bank employees. From the total of 300 responses received, only data from 255 respondents were usable. Based on ethnic groups, 52% of the respondents are Malay, 26% are Chinese and 21% are Indian while other races made up the rest. By gender, 63% were female and 37% were male. In terms of age the highest proportion of respondents fell into those above 31-40 years old. They accounted for 45% of the total number of respondents. This was followed by the 21-30 years age group (23%) while respondents on 41 year above age group accounted for the remaining.

**Reliability analysis:** The Cronbach's alpha values for distributive and procedural justices were 0.83 and 0.89, respectively. Meanwhile, conflict management styles variable included compromising, obliging, integrating, dominating and avoiding styles had Cronbach's alpha values of 0.91, 0.93, 0.90, 0.84 and 0.81, respectively. All of the values were above 0.60 and therefore the internal

Table 1: Reliability coefficients of the variables

Variables	No. of items (original)	No. of items (after factor analyses)	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Organizational justice</b>			
Distributive justice	4	4	0.83
Procedural Justice	6	4	0.89
<b>Conflict management styles</b>			
Compromising	4	4	0.91
Obliging	6	4	0.93
Integrating	7	7	0.90
Dominating	5	5	0.84
Avoiding	5	4	0.81

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient for variables

Variables	DJ	PJ	COM	OBG	IN	DOM	AV
DJ		0.55**	0.63**	0.42**	0.41**	0-0.24**	0-.21**
PJ			0.56**	0.52**	0.47**	0-0.27**	0-.26**
COM				0.48**	0.61**	0-0.23**	0-.22**
OBG					0.63**	0-0.19**	0-.13**
IN						0-0.16**	0-.15**
DOM							0.61**
AV							

consistency of the measures used in this study was acceptable. Table 1 exhibits the reliability coefficients of all of the items for each variable.

**Pearson correlation:** Distributive justice was found to be positively correlated with procedural justice ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), compromising style ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), obliging style ( $r = 0.42$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), integrating style ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and negatively correlated with dominating ( $r = -0.24$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and avoiding styles ( $-0.21$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Besides that, procedural justice was found to be positively correlated with compromising style ( $r = 0.56$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), obliging style ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) integrating style ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and negatively correlated with dominating ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and avoiding styles ( $-0.26$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Compromising style was positively correlated obliging style ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) integrating style ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and negatively correlated with dominating ( $r = -0.23$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and avoiding styles ( $-0.22$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In addition, obliging style was found to be positively correlated with integrative style ( $r = 0.63$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and negatively correlated with dominating ( $r = -0.19$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and avoiding styles ( $r = -0.13$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Integrative style was found to be negatively correlated with dominating ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and avoiding styles ( $r = -0.15$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Dominating style was found to be positively correlated with avoiding style ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The Pearson correlations of the study variables are shown in Table 2.

**Multiple regression analysis:** In multiple regression analysis (Table 3) when organizational justice variables were entered into the regression equation in model 1 the  $R^2$  was found to be 0.42 and significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). It

Table 3: Relationships between organizational justice and conflict management styles

Variables	Std. Beta				
	Integrating style	Obliging style	Compromising style	Dominating style	Avoiding style
Distributive justice	0.13*	0.29***	0.31***	0-0.14***	0-0.07***
Procedural justice	0.31***	0.27***	0.35***	0-0.17***	0-0.03***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.42	0.36	0.39	0.05	0.09

\*\*\*, \*p<0.01, <0.10

indicated that organizational justice explained about 42% of the variables in the integrating style. In this regression model it can be observed that distributive justice ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.076$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) had significant and positive relationship with integrating style. Thus, hypothesis  $H_{1,1}$  and  $H_{1,6}$  were supported. For obliging style the  $R^2$  was found to be .36 and significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). It indicated that organizational justice explained about 36% of the variables in the obliging style as distributive justice ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) had significant and positive relationship with obliging style. Thus, hypothesis  $H_{1,2}$  and  $H_{1,7}$  were supported. Besides that, compromising style recorded the  $R^2$  value to be 0.49 and significant ( $p = 0.000$ ). It indicated that organizational justice explained about 36% of the variables in the compromising style as distributive justice ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) had significant and positive relationship with compromising style. Thus hypothesis  $H_{1,3}$  and  $H_{1,8}$  were supported. Conversely, the  $R^2$  value for dominating and avoiding styles was found to be 0.05 and 0.09 and significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), respectively. It indicated that organizational justice explained about 5% of the variables in the dominating style while 9% in the avoiding style. In this regression model it can be observed that distributive justice ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), ( $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ), ( $\beta = -0.03$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ) were negatively significant to dominating style and avoiding style, respectively. Therefore, hypotheses  $H_{1,4}$ ,  $H_{1,5}$ ,  $H_{1,9}$  and  $H_{1,10}$  were supported.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings revealed that the objectives of this study had been achieved. The dimensions of organizational justice were significantly correlated with all of the conflict management styles. Distributive justice and procedural justice were positively significant with three of the styles such as integrating, obliging and compromising while negatively significant with dominating and avoiding styles. Thus, implying the bank employee’s perception of the organizational justice in the banks is fully connected to conflict management styles.

Bank employees with higher sensitivity with fairness issues in organization tend to be integrative, obligated and compromising with each other in handling conflict as these styles are most favorable resolution approach. Additionally, these styles will enhance employee’s perception relating to organizational ethics and fair play these results from fair distribution of rewards among the employees. Furthermore, employees that select these styles are more inclined to share information, build trust and respect among themselves. Alternatively, employees with low compassion on issues related to justice and fairness in the organization will try to dominate or avoid the conflict. These employees are less inclined to not sharing any information and not keen to develop belief and esteem among them.

Employee’s knowledge, skills and ability in organizational justice must be developed in order to sustain and guarantee the professionalism and quality of their work life. This can be done by improving employee’s understanding on the strength and weaknesses of those organizational justice dimensions and progress towards the appropriate use depending on situation. Apart of that, employee’s perception of the organization will also be improved as the findings showed that some of the respondents agreed that justice in organization is very important and should not be ignored. Justice also could be better managed by improving employee awareness in accepting and appreciating the diversity of individuals within their organization. Consequently, justice is important in every organization. Therefore, it is proposed that the relevant parties in the banking industry organize programs such as team building, seminars or workshops related to organizational justice for the members of their organizations. Once, the members are able to comprehend issues related to organizational justice and how it impacts on workplace conflict it will help the organization in moving ahead in terms of work quality. Therefore, the banking industry is advised to recognize justice adequately to increase positive outcomes among employees.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings from this study should be viewed cautiously due to several methodological limitations. As

with all types of data collection techniques the self-administered questionnaire too has its share of shortcomings. One of the problems was that the respondents took longer time to answer the survey as they were very busy with their daily work responsibilities. Nevertheless the study provides an empirical glimpse of the organizational justice and conflict management styles prevalent among bank employees in Malaysia. The findings provide encouraging empirical illumination that an important aspect of organizational psychology has important applications for bank employees in Malaysia. For a broader and deeper understanding of the organizational justice and conflict management styles among bank employees in Malaysia, further research is warranted. Longitudinal and experimental studies need to be conducted to provide stronger causal evidence of how a set of work related variables can affect the variation in organizational justice and conflict management styles. Although, a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

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