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Distributive Justice and Employees' Commitment to Supervisor in Selected Hospitals in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

In this research, we investigated the relationship between distributive justice and employees' commitment to supervisor in Rivers State of Nigeria. Ninety-nine (99) out of 103 employees of selected hospitals responded to the questionnaire and 13 copies of the questionnaire were voided because of incomplete response. The spearman rank correlation coefficient was used for data analysis. This study found a positive and significant relationship between distributive justice and employees' commitment to supervisor. We found that employees tend to easily identify with supervisors than internalize their supervisor's values. We concluded that, fairness of outcome is an effective way of boosting employees' commitment to supervisor in Nigeria. We observed that, pseudo-commitment could exist in organizations where distributive injustice is present. Hence, we recommended that employees' benefits should be distributed in a way that incorporates the principles of equity, equality and need.

Keywords: *Distributive justice, employees' commitment to supervisor, identification with supervisor, internalization of supervisor's values.*

1. Introduction

The issue of justice or fairness is the greatest interest of mankind and every individual desire fair treatment at all times. Lerner, (2003) found that justice affects employees' effectiveness because of the strong interpersonal relationship that result from fair treatment. The service quality of an organization like a hospital cannot be achieved where employees are dissatisfied and psychologically divorced from their supervisors and organizations. Wong and Sohal, (2003) sees customers' perceived service quality as the same with the behavioral disposition of employee. The employees' commitment to supervisors tends to result in their readiness to commit to the overall organizational. In essence, the level of commitment is capable of influencing the quality of service rendered by the employee. Agus, Barker and Kandampully, (2007) remarked that, behaviors that relate to the employees can impact on the quality of service rendered by the organization.

Many of the labour actions in Nigerian workplace relate to wages and salaries. Elsewhere, the work of Adams, (1965 in Cropanzano, Bowen and Gilliland, 2007) reviewed that the problem is not with insufficient wages and salaries! It is more of inequitable distributions of wages and salaries found in employees' pay bag. We believe that, employees tend to commit themselves to their supervisors, when they have reasonable grounds to conclude that they have received fairness in their pay bags. It is on this premise that we propose the benefit of employees' commitment to supervisor consequent on the fair distribution of outcomes to employees.

Chen, Tsui and Farh, (2002) observed that, the concept of commitment has become popular in recent years. Hence, researchers have begun to study the foci of commitments. The researchers mentioned that, away from the organization as a focus of commitment, some other foci include: top management, supervisors, co-workers, customers inter alia. Amongst these foci of commitment, the supervisor was termed the most important when it has to do with the employees. This is because; the supervisors act as an agent of the organization, interacting frequently with employees and administer rewards to them (Farh, et al, 1990 in Chen, et al. 2002).

Becker, Billings, Eveleth and Gilbert, (1996, p.464) found that commitment to supervisors had a stronger association with performance than commitment to organizations. The positive relationships found between employees' commitment to supervisor and other positive organizational outcomes necessitates more research on the factors that might cause

heightened employee commitment to the supervisor. In line with this purpose, this study seeks to examine whether or not distributive justice could increase commitment to supervisors. This study appropriately fills the knowledge gap, as no known study ever investigated this relationship within the Nigerian context and specifically with reference to the health sector. The results of the current study have important implications for organizations in that the impact of the relationship formed between a supervisor/manager and their employees can enhance organizational performance. The importance of understanding the relationship that exists between distributive justice and employees' commitment to supervisor will benefit organizations by helping strategic managers provide lower level managers with more effective training on how to maintain justice in the workplace in order to enhance employees' commitment to supervisor.

The main purpose of this study is to verify the impact of distributive justice on employees' commitment to supervisor. Specifically, this study is set out with the sub purposes of verifying the following relationships:

- i. The relationship between distributive justice and identification with supervisor
- ii. The relationship between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's values

Drawing from the foregoing research purpose(s), the main focus research question was generated - what is the relationship between organizational justice and employees' commitment to supervisor? More specifically, the study is set to answer the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between distributive justice and identification with supervisor?
- ii. What is the relationship between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's values?

The following research hypotheses were in turn put forward for testing.

- i. There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and identification with supervisor.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's values.

Restrictions imposed by the organizations constituted a major limitation to this research work. The hospitals investigated in this study are private hospitals only. These hospitals are always mindful of competitive forces, especially the threat from rival hospitals. In order to avoid slip of sensitive organizational information into the hands of competitors, some of the hospitals took a lot of time to probe the researchers' identity. Getting information from the Ministry of Health required ethical approval and other stringent measures intended to avert the likelihood of litigations from hospitals on grounds of release of hospital information to a third party, other than a regulatory agency. Also, respondents' indifference and apathy imposed the limitation of getting responses in good time.

This study was only carried out within the Nigerian health sector, with specific interest in Rivers State of Nigeria. The health sector players include both private and public hospitals, but only private hospitals were studied. Of the hospitals in Rivers State, only selected hospitals were studied. The scope of the study excludes supervisors and/or managerial position. Only the employees who had supervisors constituted the unit of analysis in this study.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Distributive Justice

According to Moorman, (1991), distributive justice is the fairness of outcomes an employee receives. The ability to maintain fairness in the organization is crucial to success. If the employee perceives a just atmosphere, the employee may exhibit a commitment to the supervisor which in turn will promote the organization's prosperity. Alsalem and Alhaiani, (2007) stated that employees determine the fairness of distributed outcomes by comparing their own outcomes with those of other employees. Greenberg (1990) defined distributive justice as an "individual's judgment or perceived fairness of resource allocation." This falls in line with Adam's (1963) propositions. Adams postulated that individuals will arrive at the level of perceived justice by comparing the ratio of their inputs and outputs to similar ratio of referent individuals within the organization. Greenberg, (1990) believe that individuals will adjust their behavior and/or mental perceptions to align with the justice atmosphere within the organization.

Cropanzano et al., (2007, p.37) remarked "Equity theory is believed to be one of the earliest theories of distributive justice...." This is in line with Adams, (1965) equity theory of distributive justice represented by the following equation:

$$\frac{O_1}{I_1} = \frac{O_2}{I_2}$$

According to equity theory by Adams, (1965 in Cropanzano, et al, 2007), employees' interest is in the ratio of their outcomes (O_1) in relation to inputs (I_1). The relevance of this ratio is in its comparison with referent individuals' outcomes (O_2) relative to their inputs (I_2). The study proposed that, things are "equitable" when the ratios are not out of alignment. In essence, both sides of the equality should be in agreement. When the ratios are not in agreement, employees may feel dissatisfied and decide to adjust inputs downwards to a proportionate level with outcomes.

2.2. Administration of Distributive Justice

Cropanzano, et al. (2007, p.36) explained three ways of administering the justice of outcome (distributive justice). In a table of organizational justice components presented by the researchers, distributive justice was explained as the “appropriateness of outcomes.” The three different ways to administer distributive justice were explained as follows:

- Equity: This deals with employees’ reward vis-à-vis their contributions.
- Equality: This involves the measure of outcomes or rewards that nearly equals the outcomes or rewards of all the other employees.
- Need: This principle relates to the provision of benefits with reference to employees’ situational demands or personal requirements.

2.3. Employees’ Commitment to Supervisor

Employees’ commitment to supervisor is a more recent construct. Chen, et al. (2002) and Becker, *et al.* (1996) offered two dimensions of employees’ commitment to supervisor. These include: identification with supervisor and internalization of supervisor’s values. Becker et al. (1996, p.465) sought to understand the potential relationship between employees “commitment as a multidimensional phenomenon and performance.” The study probed into the concept of multiple and varied targets within an organization and found that, “employee commitment to supervisors was more strongly linked to performance than employee commitment to the overall organization.” In another study, Becker (1992) found that multiple commitments predicted satisfaction and intent to quit.

Chen et al, (2002) investigated the importance of commitment to supervisor and the impact it has on work outcomes. Chen, et al. (2002, p.352) concluded that “loyalty to supervisor seems to be more important than organizational commitment in explaining employee’s performance.” However, the researchers further hypothesized that the stronger correlation between loyalty to supervisor and employee outcomes may have cultural undertones. The researchers advocated for more researches in different cultural contexts to further probe the effect of culture in the strong association.

2.4. Identification with Supervisor

According to Becker et al, (1996); identification with supervisor occurs when the subordinate admires some attitudes, behaviors, personality traits or accomplishments of the manager, such that they may feel proud to be associated with or loyal to the supervisor who has these admired attributes. According to O’Reilly and Chatman, (1986, p. 493 in Chen et al. 2002, p. 340), the subordinate’s identification with the supervisor may or may not include the internalization of the supervisor’s values.

2.5. Internalization of Supervisor’s Values

According to Becker et al (1996), an employee is said to internalize the supervisor’s values when the subordinate copies the attitudes and behaviors of the supervisor. This occurs when the supervisor’s attitudes and behaviors are in alignment with the subordinate’s value systems. In other words, the values of the subordinate and those of his/her supervisor are similar.

2.6. The Extended Dimensions of Commitment to Supervisor

Chen et al. (2002) postulated that “loyalty to supervisor may extend beyond identification and internalization” given a culture characterized with high levels of interpersonal relationships or people centeredness. Hence, employees may become committed to their supervisors on the basis of familiarity, frequent interactions, help rendered, common identity and so on. According to Chen, et al, (2002, p.345-347), the foregoing proposition gave rise to three additional dimensions of commitment to supervisor (dedication to, extra effort for and attachment to supervisor). The construct has become increasingly measured with five dimensions by other researchers like Nwibere and Olu-Daniels (2014).

3. Methodology

Self-administered survey questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. With the aid of observation, we studied the justice climate as demonstrated by side comments, observable work attitudes, mode of response to patients and other observed gesture statements of employees. In one of the hospitals, the researchers noted an employee who made the comment: “tell them to pay salary first.” i.e. tell management to pay salaries before directing us to fill questionnaires for you! Others were found to make similar statements in gesture, attitude to work and responses to patients. We found out that this statement could mean more details than may be found in the responses seen in the questionnaire. Using systematic random sampling, data were collected from six hospitals registered with the state ministry of health. All six hospitals were private hospitals, with a total population of 138 (one hundred and thirty-eight) employees. Using the Taro Yemen procedure for determining sample size, 103 (one hundred and three) copies of the questionnaire were distributed

employees constituting a mix of nurses, doctors and administrative staffs, provided the individual has a supervisor. Copies of the questionnaire returned were 99 (ninety-nine). Of the copies returned, only 86 (eighty-six) were statistically usable. Distributive justice was measured using Colquitt, (2001) items, while the measures of Commitment to Supervisor adopted for this study are based on the earlier study of Becker, et al. (1996) and include: Identification with supervisor and Internalization of supervisor's values. These items were referred to as the original dimensions of commitment to supervisor in the work of Chen, et al. (2002). These items were modified to suit the purpose of this study and the peculiar Nigerian environmental circumstances. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with the commitment to supervisor items, on a Likert Scale of 1 to 7. A score of 1 represents strongly disagree, whereas 7 represents strongly agree. Using the spearman's rank correlation coefficient, data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.

4. Results and Interpretation

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and Identification with Supervisor.

Correlations				
			Distributive	Identification
Spearman's rho	Distributive	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.900**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	86	86
	Identification	Correlation Coefficient	.900**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	86	86

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1: Test of hypothesis one

Since the rho-value is 0.900, it means there is a correlation and a strong relationship existing between the variables. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected as the result reveals that there is significant relationship between distributive justice and identification with supervisor.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND INTERNALIZATION OF SUPERVISOR'S VALUES (HYPOTHESIS TWO)

- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and Internalization of Supervisor's Values

			Distributive	Internalization
Spearman's rho	Distributive	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.728**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	86	86
	Internalization	Correlation Coefficient	.728**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	86	86

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Test of hypothesis two Correlations

Since the rho is 0.728, its means there is a strong correlation between the variables. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected as the result reveals that there is significant relationship between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's values.

5. Discussion of Findings

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and Identification with Supervisor.

The spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between distributive justice and identification with supervisor. The analysis produced a result 0.9 rho value, with the significance level of 0.05 (two-tailed). This shows a strong correlation between the variables. Hence, the employees of the selected hospitals had close association with the supervisor and were satisfied to be subordinates to their supervisors; when job outcomes were fair. On the contrary, when job outcomes were unjust, the employees were detached from their supervisors.

- H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between distributive justice and Internalization of Supervisor's Values

Data analysis resulted in the correlation value of 0.728, using a level of significance of 0.05 (two-tailed). This shows a strong correlation between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's value. The strong positive correlation indicates that, employees' values will be in congruence with their supervisors' values, when distributive justice is received from the organization. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted which states: there is significant relationship between distributive justice and internalization of supervisor's values. However, it is worthy of note that, when distributive justice was correlated to identification with supervisors in hypothesis 1 (one), it returned rho of 0.9. Contrariwise, when same distributive justice was correlated with internalization of supervisor's values, it returned rho of 0.728. This suggests that employees find it a little more difficult to internalize supervisor's value than identify with supervisor.

A number of theoretical underpinnings could be deduced from the results of this study. First, observation reviewed that some employees exhibited traces of commitment to supervisor, despite unfair outcomes received from the organization. This can only be explained in the light of Herzberg's two factor theory. According to Fredrick Herzberg, employees who love the job content (nature of the job) do not find the job context (outcomes) as a source of motivation. The job context only constitutes hygiene factors in determining level of job satisfaction. Such employees will be buried in their jobs, not particular about wages and salaries, hence found their supervisors acceptable as long as the job content remains acceptable. However true this proposition may be, we do not find it relevant to this caliber of employees who are likely to be operating at the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Another possible and most likely explanation for this behavior is the need to retain the job. With the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria at the time of this study, employees may decide to 'fake' commitment to their supervisors in order to avoid loss of job. During performance appraisal, it is not impossible for employees to be more committed to their supervisors. This is a way of gaining a good appraisal, but not because of fair treatment received from the organization. Chen et al (2002, p. 341) postulated that, "attachment may arise out of: attraction based on familiarity, frequent interactions, common identity, indebtedness toward another individual for favors granted, or role obligation to an authority figure." In the Nigerian environment, because of the effect of unemployment, it is expected that, the fear of loss of job may compel an employee to show a 'pseudo-commitment' to his/her supervisor in order to retain his/her job.

6. Conclusion

Justice is an important construct in nearly all aspects of human endeavors. It shows up always in the complaints of people, when they merely express dissatisfaction and continues until it degenerates to solidarity rallies and union struggles for rewards/benefits in workplaces and conflicts in other places, like the family level. Employees do not want to be cheated; therefore, the importance of an employee's perceptions of being treated fairly should not be overlooked or dismissed by organizations and supervisors. We therefore conclude that the best approach to conflict management is justice administration.

Perceptions of unfair distribution of work rewards relative to work inputs dissatisfy employees (Adams, 1963). Adams postulated that, an employee who perceives distributive injustice tends to restore justice by adjusting (upwards or downwards) his or her own performance. In the present study, distributive justice was demonstrated and confirmed as capable of enhancing employees' commitment to supervisor. This is an addition to knowledge. As an implication, organizations must pursue justice in the work place at all cost in order to ensure that commitment and confidence of employees are not lost.

We conclude that expressed commitment to supervisor could be 'pseudo.' Turnley and Feldman (1999) summarized four possible responses to dissatisfaction that might apply to employees who feel they have been unjustly treated. One of these four responses was termed loyalty behavior, which is positive and passive; involving rationalizing the injustice. This loyalty behavior, arising from unjust treatment is what we refer to as *pseudo-commitment*

7. Recommendations

The findings from this study provide a stepping stone upon which to build future research on organizational justice and its causal outcomes. The possible avenues of future exploration that might be considered are many, several of which will be described here.

First, it is recommended that moderating variables be introduced in future studies in order to determine the effect of other variables such as: employee age, tenure of employee with supervisor and unemployment effect (e.g., fear of dismissal).

Second, future research should also follow the longitudinal approach to predict beliefs and behavior over time since the model of this study is cross-sectional, which measures the intention only at a single point in time. When a longitudinal approach is adopted, the presence of *pseudo-commitment* can be better uncovered.

Third, the present study dealt with employees working for private organization which may have closer supervisor and as such, closer identification with supervisors. HR management systems in the public institutions may be different; hence, closer relationship with supervisor may have little or no attention. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the generalization of these findings to public organizations. Future research should also attempt to achieve a larger random sample to determine whether general results apply to a larger population and sample size.

Lastly, similar studies might be carried out to further research this study's variables in other industries and cultural settings. For example, since this study was conducted in the health sector, it might prove valuable to explore the relationship between distributive justice and employees' commitment to supervisor in the manufacturing, agricultural, oil and gas, among other sectors of the economy in order to confirm whether or not the interplay between these variables are similar across industries. The fat pay bag of employees in the oil and gas industry, may account for a stronger presence of commitment to supervisor.

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