The Influence of Distributive, Procedural and Interactive Organizational Justice in Public Organisations in Israel on the Burnout of Employees

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the implications of the three types of organizational justice on the burnout of public employees from public institutions from Arab sector in the north part of Israel. The research sample was made of 389 participants that have completed valid questionnaire, out of 500 distributed questionnaires, leading to a rate of response of 77.8%. The data was collected using the widely used questionnaire of Niehoff & Moorman for measuring the variable of organizational and the Maslach Burnout Inventory to assess burnout of employees. The hypothesis formulated about the existence of a negative correlation between each of the three: distributive, procedural and interactive organizational justice, on one hand, and the burnout of employees, on the other hand, were validated. Several recommendations for managers about actions to be taken to mitigate the burnout of employees due to perceived organizational justice were formulated.

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1. Introduction

The research objective of the paper was to identify the influence of the three components of organizational justice on the level of public employees working in the public organizations from the Arab communities situated in the Arab sector in the north of Israel. There was no previous research on the topic referring to this specific type of organizations and geographical area.

Organizational justice is defined by Barling and Philipps (1993) as the "result of the individual's perception of fairness and objectivity within the organization, i.e. the fair treatment of the organization towards the employee". In the organizational framework, the concept of organizational justice has accepted much research attention. Many studies have attempted to respond to the implications and perception of organizational justice in order to understand the nature of individuals' behavior within organizations, their implementation, and how they perceive the organization's procedures based on doing or not doing of justice (Meyer and Allen, 1997). If employees of an organization have a lower perception about the level of organizational justice in their organizations, then they react negatively, showing less work motivation, lower commitment, less job satisfaction, and increased professional burnout.

The influence and perception of attitudes and organizational behavior has also been analyzed in relation to the different dimensions of justice: distributive, procedural and, more recently interactional and informative. Organizational justice is considered as an indistinct unicum, at least in the perception of the subjects, or as a three- or four-dimensional construct, where multiple effects or outcomes have been associated, including satisfaction, performance, commitment, organizational support and organizational behavior of citizenship. The existence of a causal relationship between justice and these effects is proven by a certain number of research studies, but in regard to the mechanisms and processes that govern this relationship there is less clarity (Rashid, 2012).

Several researchers have stated that the predictive value of the various types of organizational justice varies according to the organizational context. They questioned regarding the way individuals think about justice at work (Cropanzano, 2007). It is suggested that the perceptions of individuals regarding procedural and distributive justice, and to a lesser extent, interactive, are rather human related.

Burnout is a painful experience, like any difficult experience, it is experienced as a sense of mental, physical and mental exhaustion, which is caused by constant and continuous mental workload (Malach-Pines, 2011). Ramdan et al. (2020) consider that burnout is accompanied by a collection of phenomena of physical

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and mental stress as a result of difficulties and pressures at the work of the professional, which creates within this professional a negative view towards the profession.

2. Literature review

The concept of professional burnout was first defined by the psychoanalyst Reuben Freudenberger in 1974 (Freudenberger, 1974). However, five years earlier, the American psychologist Bradley (Demerouti et al., 2014) wrote about social treatment of criminal youth and adolescents and about the pressures at work that can lead to burnout of social workers. Following Freudenberger's research, Christina Maslach led the study of the phenomenon of burnout and began the academic discussion about professional exhaustion (Maslach, 1976). In his studies, Freudenberger noticed that professionals and therapists many times suffer from physical exhaustion, chronic exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, and distancing from their patients. He noted that "the dictionary defines the verb 'burn out' as to 'fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources. And that is exactly what happens when a staff member in an alternative institution burns out for whatever reasons and becomes inoperative to all intents and purposes" (Freudenberger, 1974). He defined the concept of burnout as a "situation of fatigue or frustration resulting from commitment or investment in a particular factor, or a relationship that did not produce the desired results".

There are several definitions of the burnout phenomenon. Burnout is a collection of emotional difficulties that cause loss of potential and motivation, distancing, a sense of lack of personal professional achievements (Jackson and Maslach, 1982). Dedrick and Raschke (1990) define burnout as a low emotional feeling, a sense of distancing from others, lack of physical and mental energy, and inability to cope with frustrations). Also, burnout is a "feeling of exhaustion and heavy fatigue as a result of mental stress and personal conflict within the service professions, which requires continuous social contact with the public and service recipients. Most of these relationships are tense" (Schwarzer et al., 2008). Burnout is a phenomenon that harms professional people as a result of their inability to cope and to adjust to the daily work pressures, and this leads to a sense of inability to provide solutions for work needs, lack of interest in work, decrease in performance and emotional difficulties (Edmonson, 2001).

Leiter and Maslach (2005) define burnout as the dislocation of "what people are and what they do. It represents an erosion in value, dignity, spirit of desire - an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady which gradually spreads and persists over time, placing people in a descending spiral from where the recovery is hard". Maslach et al. (1996) consider that burnout is "... a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform". In their approach, burnout has three dimensions. The first dimension, exhaustion refers to "serious and persistent fatigue, and feeling emotionally drained and worn out". Cynicism, the second dimension of burnout consists of an employee's "loss of interest and enthusiasm, and doubts about the significance and meaning of one's job". Lack of professional efficacy is the third dimension of burnout according to Maslach et al. (1996) and consists of employee's "feelings of incompetence and ineffectiveness and reduced personal accomplishment at work".

According to the above definitions, the phenomenon of burnout can be defined as a collection of prominent phenomena that are characterized by emotional inequality and lack of feeling towards the immediate environment. This phenomenon harms the individual when his/her repeated efforts to adapt to the pressure of the professional role and the continuous coping in the work environment fail.

In our opinion, it is important to distinguish between phenomena that are related to professional burnout and workload. Burnout is not a temporary feeling of fatigue and anxiety, although these are sometimes early symptoms of burnout. In addition, burnout is different from daily mental stresses of the individual in the regular work, and there are usually pressures in our ongoing work. The reasons for these pressures can be examined and to accept treatment depending on the cause. These pressures are usually temporary and disappear when they are properly treated. This is different from the burnout that is characterized by chronic, non-transitory stress which is caused by these unresolved early pressures (Hsu et al., 2010). Consequently, the burnout syndrome is an "exhaustion state" in which the employee is cynical in relation with the importance of his profession and is unsure about its ability to do his work.

The concept of justice comes from the Latin word (Jus), which means truth telling. From a religious point of view the meaning is the person who speaks the truth is who is just. Philosophically, justice reflects cultural, educational, social and human values and is the basis for the development of society as whole. Consequently, justice is related to social political and economic concepts, as well as the religious and philosophical concepts. The purpose of every regime and each society is honesty, collaboration, friendship and justice doing for social, cultural, educational and organizational development and proper organizational development.

Folger and Skarlicki (1999) defined organizational justice "as the employee's perception of inputs and outputs that he/she invests and accepts in the organization". Steiner and Rolland (2006) defined organizational justice in a relative way according to which the employee examines himself in relation to others. They argue that an employee uses for this purpose a large variety of criteria such as: his/her

seniority, age, level of education, the investment made in his own work, next, relates them to the same type of data about other employees and compares it to what he gets as rewards and to what rewards get the others employees. When the employee compares his own situation to the situation of other employees, he examines a response in accordance with his own sense of the relative process (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001). Leventhal (1980) explains that the perception of organizational justice is the belief of the individual that the division of the reward or the process in which this division is determined satisfies a certain criterion by which the individual judges the division. He distinguishes between two perceptions: first, the perception of distributive justice - the belief of the individual that the distribution of the reward is appropriate, i.e., the outputs or punishments are adapted to a particular criterion such as needs, contributions or anything else that a person judges according to it; and, second, the perception of procedural justice - the belief of a person that the decision-making process that determines the division is appropriate (Leventhal, 1980).

Organizational justice can be divided into two main components: the first, distributive justice (DJ) that is related to the perception about the fairness of the outputs of the organization that the employee receives following his/ her efforts at work; the second, procedural Justice (PJ) that is related to the perception about the fairness of the process of distributing those outputs. Procedural justice can be divided also into two components: formal procedural justice (FPJ) and interactional justice (IJ), defined as informal justice in interpersonal interaction justice.

Distributive justice implies the correctness of the distribution of work results. It is based on three rules: equity, equality and need. It can even be said that the distributive justice was born from the theory of equity is based on the idea that the results allocation reflects into inputs. The theory of equity states that employees assess the extent to which their work results are proportionate to their contribution. Inequality is perceived when the proportion of results is higher or smaller than what they invested. Using a fair allocation method, employees who work more or are more productive think they need to get more than others who have not invested to the same extent. An example of equity involves performance-based payment systems. Practice has shown that people feel a psychological discomfort depending on the proportion of the perceived inequality. In addition, equity in distribution validates the feelings of individuals as members of the group, allowing organizations to produce efficiently and effectively. Older and newer research are strongly arguing for the application of the theory of equity to the field of organizational relationships between participants in the work process, managers and subordinates as various categories of employees.

Procedural justice is another type of organizational justice that reflects the correctness of the resulting procedures. The distinction between types of justice helps to clarify the item that should be emphasized, first, the appropriate theoretical rules to be applied, and the second the actual respect of the existing rules during the application of them (Rupp, 2015). Leventhal's Theory (Leventhal, 1980) on the fairness of procedural justice includes eight aspects of the process: consistent per person and beyond, unbearable error, using accurate information, can be correct, should represent the employee's concerns, and should be based on prevalent moral standardized norms. Another approach to the dimensions of organizational justice was proposed by Bies (2015) who reduced the measures of procedural justice to three basic ones: accuracy, voice and consistency. Shen (2014) introduced the context of the settlement of a dispute, a concept of procedural justice which they discussed in terms of an individual's control over discontent and over its effects. We conclude that procedural justice is the study of the fairness of allocating resources.

Interactive justice is the third type of organizational justice. It focuses on the process of exchanging interpersonal information about procedures and results between employees and their direct supervisor. Interpersonal justice refers to the judicial perception of employees that is based on the quality of the interpersonal relationship that they have with their direct manager while performing a specific work process. The quality of the interpersonal relationship is determined by several factors such as: a) the justification of the decisions made by the supervisor; b) the respect that is shown by the supervisor; c) the reliable communication between the employee and the supervisor during the work process; d) the extent to which the supervisor refrains itself from causing prejudice to the employee. Qiu and Yan (2009) divided this type of organizational justice into two subdimensions. The first is interpersonal sensitivity defined as the employee's sensitivity to the interpersonal relationship that he/she accepts from the supervisor, for example, when he/she treats subordinated employees with respect and politeness. The second dimension is social accountability defined as the supervisor's justification for his/her decisions. The interactions between employee and employer can be judged both in terms of the formal process and at the informal level, and this is also the difference between the perception of interpersonal justice and the perception of procedural justice. In the perception of interpersonal justice, the employee examines informal relationships, while procedural justice refers only to formal processes (Qiu and Yan, 2009).

Considering the above, it can be concluded that the lack of organizational justice and perceived inequality among employees can lead to negative work outcomes that affect the well-being of the employee: dissatisfaction, damage to the organizational commitment, and a decrease in the civic behavior of the organization, and ultimately burnout. When an employee accepts what he/she deserves and feels positive about organizational justice, he/she reaches an internal psychological balance that increases his/her motivation for work and civic behavior within the organization (Ho and Chang, 2009).

On the other hand, when the employee feels organizational injustice, he/she behaves accordingly and lowers the level of performance with decreasing in the motivation and civic behavior (OB) (Greenberg & Baron, 2003). This can exhaust the employee to the point of professional burnout. The results of the study of (Nastase et al., 2020) indicated that there is a negative average relation between organizational justice perception and the level of professional burnout in public organizations in Israel (Pearson correlation coefficient was -0,415, significant at 0.01 level (1-tailed)).

3. Research methodology

We intended to identify the connections between the three components of organizational justice and burnout by a research on the employees in the Arab public sector in Israel. The main research question is the following: 1. How the perception of distributive justice, procedural justice and interactive justice affects the level of burnout of the employees in the Arab public sector in the north area of Israel? We have formulated the following three hypotheses:

- H1. There is a negative relation between perceived distributive justice (DJ) and the level of professional burnout (PB). As more perceived distributive justice exists within the Arab public organization, so the level of professional burnout of the employees of these organizations is lower.
- H2. There is a negative relation between perceived procedural justice (PJ) and the level of professional burnout. As a more perceived procedural justice exists in the Arab public organization, the lower is the level of professional burnout of public employees.
- H3. There is a negative relation between perceived interactive justice (IJ) and the level of professional burnout. As a more perceived interactive justice exists in the Arab public organizations. the lower is the level of professional burnout of public employees of these organizations.

The sample size was 389 participants that have completed valid questionnaire, out of 500 distributed questionnaires, leading to a rate of response of 77.8%. All respondents were working in various public organizations from the Arab sector in the north area of Israel. The questionnaire used in the survey consisted of: Part A – Demographic background; Part B –the standard questionnaire proposed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) for measuring the level of perceived organizational justice; Part C –the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), proposed by Maslach et al. (1996) for measuring the level of professional burnout. We have used MBI to assess burnout because it is a valid and reliable research instrument (Maslach et al., 2008; Maslach et al., 2017).

The pencil and paper questionnaires were distributed in the field, directly by the one of the authors to various random employees of public organizations from the Arab sector in the northern part of Israel during the months of November and December 2019.

The final sample was made of 59,6% male respondents and 40,4% female respondents. According to age criteria, 44,5% respondents are older than 46 years, while only 26,7% of employees are between 36 and 44 years old. Young employees between 26 and 25 years old represented 28,8% of the sample, indicating a good trend of employing young people in public organizations from the researched area. According to their seniority 64% of respondents have a seniority greater than 10 years, 36% have a seniority less than 10 years. This latter group is equally divided between those with a short seniority (less than 5 years) and those with an average seniority (between 6 and 10 years). According to their level of education, 317 respondents (81,4%) got a higher education degree (bachelor, master, PhD), with 170 people (43,7%) having a master's degree being the most important group. The sample of the research comprised 175 managers (45%), 169 junior managers (43,4%) and only 45 employees (11,6%), fact that made this sample highly relevant for the managers of public administration. The main reason for it is that employees either did not complete the questionnaire or did it only partially, so we had to reject them. The last grouping of respondents is based on the criterion of the cultural group they identified with. The highest percentage of respondents are Muslim (58,6%), followed by Christian (19%), Bedouin (17,5%), Druze (4.4%), Jews (0,3%) and other (0,3%).

4. Discussion of results

The statistical results about the first hypothesis related to the negative relation between perceived distributive justice and the level of professional burnout are shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Pearson Correlations between distributive justice and level of professional burnout

N = 389	Distributive justice	Professional burnout
Distributive justice	1	-.376**
Professional burnout	-.376**	1

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).*

We have found that there was a negative average correlation between the *Distributive justice* and the *Professional burnout* ($r = -.376$). The stronger is the perceived distributive justice by the employees of public organizations in Israel the less their professional burnout. Thus, according with our results, approximatively 14% from the variation of the *Professional burnout* could be explained by the variation of the *Distributive justice*. The results demonstrate that if employees consider that the results of their work were distributed in a an equitable, equal and fair way as being linked to their personal effort then they are having less stress generated by the inequality and inequity they perceive to exist in their organization. Consequently, managers of an organization should design and implement a reward system that should be based on the rules of the equity theory. According to Li (2009), organizations use equity as a main distribution rule because companies consider that it is a suitable rewards allocation rule; organizations believe that a fair system is profitable; organizations are trying to avoid conflicts, weak employees are being eliminated.

The statistical results about the second hypothesis related to the negative relation between perceived procedural justice and the level of professional burnout are presented in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations between procedural justice and level of professional burnout

N=389	Procedural justice	Professional burnout
Procedural justice	1	-.393**
Professional burnout	-.393**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

We have found that there was a negative average correlation between the Procedural justice and the Professional burnout ($r = -.393$). The stronger is perceived distributive justice by the employees of public organizations in Israel the less strong is their professional burnout. Thus, according with our results, approximatively 15% from the variation of the Professional burnout could be explained by the variation of the Procedural justice. Our results indicate that if the managers of an organization want to avoid the burnout of their employees, managers should also be concerned with their employees' perception about the fairness of the way the procedures and rules of the reward system are applied by managers. The results of Riolli and Savicki (2006) indicated that lower procedural justice was correlated with higher burnout, strain, and turnover. They also found that higher strain was correlated to higher turnover above and beyond the influence of procedural justice.

Finally, the statistical results about the third hypothesis related to the negative relation between perceived interactive justice and the level of professional burnout are presented in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Pearson Correlations between interactive justice and level of professional burnout

N= 389	Interactive justice	Professional burnout
Interactive justice	1	-.346**
Professional burnout	-.346**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

There was a negative average correlation between the Interactive justice and the Professional burnout ($r = -.346$). The stronger is perceived interactive justice by the employees of public organizations in Israel the less strong is their professional burnout. Thus, according with our results, approximatively 12% from the variation of the Professional burnout could be explained by the variation of the Interactive justice. This result underline the importance a manager should give to the various ways he/ she could increase the quality of the interpersonal relationship with his/ her direct subordinates during their work. In order to increase the perception of their subordinates about the fairness of the interpersonal relationship managers should tell them about the reasons of their decisions, show them respect, provide reliable communication about their work and performance and refraining from causing them any prejudice.

5. Conclusions

Our study is adding new validation of the strong effect of organizational justice perceptions on the burnout of public employees in organizations from Israel. We surveyed public employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactive justice and found that they negatively influence burnout adding to other studies conclusions about their negative effects such as "counterproductive work behaviors, turnover intentions, workplace hostility, revenge, and retaliation", as shown by metanalyses done by (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013).

The study is original, being the first academic research about this topic and this specific type of organizations and geographical area.

The study made several recommendations, presented above, for managers in respect to support their efforts to mitigate the work burnout of their employees in order to increase the perceived level of distributive, procedural and interactive organizational justice in their organization.

The main limitation of this study is the convenience sample, that did not allowed for generalizing the results to the whole population.

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