



Validating justice climate and peer justice in a real work setting



Agustin Molina^{a,*}, Carolina Moliner^b, Vicente Martínez-Tur^b, Russell Cropanzano^c, José María Peiró^{b,d}

^a Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

^b IDOCAL, University of Valencia, Spain

^c University of Colorado at Boulder, USA

^d Instituto Valenciano de Investigaciones Económicas (IVIE), Valencia, Spain

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ABSTRACT

In this study we tested the validity of justice climate and peer justice, measured as second-order constructs, in a real work setting. First, we investigated the appropriateness of aggregating first-order facets of justice climate and peer justice to work-unit level of analysis. Second, we examined the construct validity of justice climate and peer justice as two different factor structures. Third, we tested the hierarchical structure of justice climate and peer justice as second-order factors. Finally, we examined the predictive validity of second-order factors justice climate and peer justice within a nomological network composed of reciprocity with the supervisor and reciprocity with coworkers. We conducted these analyses in a sample of 532 employees nested in 79 organizations. Our results suggest the validity of justice climate and peer justice measured as second-order factors. We discuss these results and their implications for organizational justice research.

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La validación del clima de justicia y de la justicia entre compañeros en un entorno real de trabajo

RESUMEN

Este estudio examina la validez del clima de justicia y clima de justicia entre compañeros como constructos de segundo orden en un contexto real de trabajo. Primero, se examinó la agregación al nivel grupal de las facetas de primer orden de cada clima. Segundo, se examinó la validez de constructo clima de justicia y clima de justicia entre compañeros por separado. Tercero, se analizó la estructura jerárquica de ambos climas como constructos de segundo orden. Finalmente, se calculó la validez predictiva de estos constructos de segundo orden en una red nomológica constituida por reciprocidad con el supervisor y con los compañeros de trabajo. Estos análisis fueron realizados con una muestra de 532 trabajadores agrupados en 79 organizaciones. Los resultados plantean la validez del clima de justicia y clima de justicia entre compañeros como factores de segundo orden. Se discuten los resultados y sus implicaciones para la justicia organizacional.

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Palabras clave:

Clima de justicia

Clima de justicia entre compañeros

Reciprocidad con el supervisor

Reciprocidad con los compañeros de trabajo

As more and more organizations aim to achieve their goals through work groups and teams (e.g., Colquitt, Zapata-Phelan, & Roberson, 2005), the relationships among coworkers have become

crucial. The nature and complexity of tasks in modern organizations require well-articulated work units (Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). Cooperation among members of work units allows organizations to better respond to societal and economic demands. Work units that fail to articulate their internal processes have to deal with negative consequences, such as social loafing or team conflict, which may reduce their effectiveness (Kidwell & Bennett, 1993; Shaw et al., 2011).

* Corresponding author. Escuela de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Av. Vicuña Mackenna 4860, 7820436 Macul, Santiago, Chile.
E-mail address: agustin.molina@uc.cl (A. Molina).

Organizational justice research has a lot to offer in this domain. To capture the importance that organizations assign to work units, organizational justice scholars have developed a line of research called justice climate (e.g., Naumann & Bennett, 2000). This research has focused on the way coworkers are treated by an individual or entity outside the group, usually an authority figure (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2005; Ehrhart, 2004; Zhang & Jia, 2013). Despite predicting important organizational outcomes—see Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner, and Bernerth's (2012) meta-analysis—, justice climate neglects the interaction processes that take place among members of the same work unit. To capture this internal phenomenon, Cropanzano, Li, and James (2007) referred to what goes on inside a work unit as intra-unit justice. Cropanzano, Li, and Benson (2011) later relabeled this construct as peer justice.

Due to the importance attributed to justice climate (Whitman et al., 2012) and the novelty and potential of peer justice (Li & Cropanzano, 2009), Li, Cropanzano, and Bagger (2013) recently conducted an empirical examination of the factorial structure of these constructs. Consistent with the tendency toward an overall approach to justice (e.g., Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005; Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Hauenstein, McGonigle, & Flinder, 2001; Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Törnblom & Vermunt, 1999), Li et al. (2013) observed that justice climate and peer justice were best represented through a hierarchical—second-order—structure that combined the first-order facets of these constructs—i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. It is important to point out that Li and colleagues tested these hierarchical models with a sample of undergraduate students.

In the present study, we contribute to the justice literature by reexamining the factorial structure of justice climate and peer justice reported by Li et al. (2013) using data collected in a formal work environment in the service industry. Specifically, we test our model with a sample of employees working in health care services who have direct contact with customers. The main purpose of these organizations is to improve the quality of life of their customers. Therefore, cooperation among coworkers is necessary because attending to each customer requires the simultaneous involvement of different sets of skills and knowledge. Hence, work-unit members are compelled to work closely together to fully meet their customers' needs. In other words, the ongoing social interactions that take place in this context provide an ideal setting in which to examine justice climate and peer justice within a formal work environment.

In the following sections, we first describe the conceptual basis underlying the difference between justice climate and peer justice. We then describe the benefits that have motivated scholars to study organizational justice using an overall approach. Finally, we describe the specific steps followed to analyze the data.

Unit-Level Fairness: Justice Climate and Peer Justice

Justice scholars have identified several sources or foci of fairness from which employees can potentially make differential justice perceptions. This line of inquiry focusing on the perpetrator of an (in)just act has been referred to as *multifoci* research (Liao & Rupp, 2005). In addition to upper management, multifoci research has identified further sources of fairness, such as coworkers and customers (Branscombe, Spears, Ellemers, & Doosje, 2002; Lavelle et al., 2009; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). Unit-level research has built on these findings and distinguished justice climate from peer justice.

Justice climate has been defined as a shared perception of the fairness with which the unit is collectively treated by an authority figure (Li & Cropanzano, 2009). However, some scholars have noted that, during their daily activities, employees not only

perceive the treatment they receive from outside the group (i.e., justice climate) (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2007), but they are also capable of perceiving the treatment they receive from within the group (i.e., coworkers) (e.g., Lavelle et al., 2007). Peer justice refers to the shared perception of the fairness with which coworkers generally treat one another (Li et al., 2013).

Research on justice climate has been very fruitful, showing that justice climate is related not only to individual-level attitudes and behaviors, such as satisfaction, commitment, and helping behaviors (Liao & Rupp, 2005; Mayer, Nishii, Schneider, & Goldstein, 2007; Mossholder, Bennett, & Martin, 1998; Naumann & Bennett, 2000; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010), but also to unit-level behavior, such as team performance, team absenteeism, unit-level organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and customer service orientation (Colquitt, Noe, & Jackson, 2002; Simons & Roberson, 2003; for a meta-analysis see Whitman et al., 2012).

Peer justice, in contrast, is still a novel construct within the organizational justice literature. Despite its novelty, the facets of peer justice have been related to team processes and outcomes such as task performance, team citizenship behaviors (Cropanzano et al., 2011), and team satisfaction (Li et al., 2013). These studies have been conducted using data collected from undergraduate students.

Overall Approach to Justice in the Workplace

Research has shown that employees develop fairness perceptions from as many as four justice events (Colquitt, 2001). Employees judge fairness based on their experiences with resource distribution (*distributive justice*), with the processes through which those resources are allocated (*procedural justice*), and with the quality of social interactions that take place during the allocation of resources (*interactional justice*). Research has further divided interactional justice into *interpersonal justice*—i.e., the extent to which employees are treated with dignity and respect—and *informational justice*—i.e., the extent to which the explanations provided to employees convey information about procedures and outcomes (Bies & Moag, 1986). Even though these facets are conceptually distinct (see Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), justice scholars have begun to consider an overall approach to justice as an alternative to the more traditional facets perspective (e.g., Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Choi, 2008; Greenberg, 2001; Hauenstein et al., 2001; Holtz & Harold, 2009; Jones & Martens, 2009; Kim & Leung, 2007; Lind, 2001).

According to Ambrose and Schminke (2007), the overall approach to organizational justice has several benefits for the fairness literature. These benefits include a more precise representation of individuals' and groups' justice experiences, in contrast to solely focusing on the discrete justice facets. The overall approach also allows scholars to examine the total impact of justice, rather than the separate effects of its facets. Moreover, an overall approach to justice provides a more parsimonious way to theorize about the effects of justice. Ambrose and Schminke further suggested that these benefits should not be restricted to individual-level research, and they made a call for research at the unit-level of analysis to examine the overall approach to justice. These observations are of great importance to the emerging literature on multifoci climates, since they allow justice researchers to focus more clearly on the source of justice (e.g., coworkers). As we describe in the following paragraphs, the overall approach to unit-level fairness is consistent with both empirical evidence and theoretical arguments.

We first focus on the empirical evidence. In the case of justice climate, research has been accumulating for more than a decade (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2002; Ehrhart, 2004; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Lipponen & Wisse, 2010; Naumann & Bennett, 2000). Whitman et al. (2012) recently conducted a meta-analysis to further examine justice

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