

Do Distributive Justice Really Make Public Officers Feels More Obligated in Their Job?

Djony Harijanto

Magister of Management Program, Faculty of Economic and Business, Islamic University of Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Ida Bagus Agung Dharmanegara*

Faculty of Economic and Business, Warmadewa University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Hafid Aditya Pradesa

Polytechnic of STIA LAN Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Hasrudy Tanjung

Faculty of Economic and Business, Muhammadiyah University of Medan, Medan, Indonesia

Abstract

Social exchange theory and organizational justice theory has been seen as a standard and has become an important basis for many researches on attitudes and behavior of employees working in various organizations. This study aims to build and test a model based on the integration of these two important theories in predicting the felt obligation felt by employees working in public organizations. Public officers who work at the Agency for Personnel and Human Resources Development in Malang, East Java, Indonesia are the target population in the study. Non-probability sampling was used in this study, with 88 officers who participated in this study. By using path analysis, testing for each relationship between variables shows the results of the path coefficient. Findings suggest that even it confirms social exchange and justice theory, positive felt obligation among public employees would be more influenced with higher perceptions of distributive justice rather than perceived organizational support. Practical implications for organizations and future studies are also addressed.

Keywords: Distributive Justice, Felt Obligation, Perceived Organizational Support, Public Officers

Introduction

For those who have experienced administration in public sphere, they would have recognize many possibilities in managing public value and organization. The problem, a lack of obligation regarding the work dimensions involved with public value transition. This was attributed to the recently approved public organization legislation. Individuals who work in the public sector are often required to be more productive, proactive, and with integrity in their work and every outcome it produces. It can also be understood that several forms of mechanisms within employees who work in the public sector cannot be separated from the unique nature of public organizations. As the form of public service provided and its unique nature in encouraging service user satisfaction (Novira et al., 2020), in the perspective of behavior in organizations the motivation of an employee working in the public sector (Agustina et al., 2021; Putranto et al., 2018; Putranto & Anwar, 2021; Supriatna et al., 2019), then felt obligation is also an interesting thing to study for employees working in the public sector. Felt obligation is about the extent to which employees perceive their sense of obligation in completing their duties and work.

Corresponding Author: Ida Bagus Agung Dharmanegara (gusdhewun@gmail.com)

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Felt obligation is a form of attitude from someone who is very important in his work. This form of attitude is believed to be included in the category of a person's attitude towards his work and is often framed from social exchange theory (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Pradesa et al., 2018). Felt obligation is seen as important as a result of perceived organizational support, about the extent to which individuals feel supported and cared for by their organization. Several studies have reviewed the perceived obligation of public sector employees (Pradesa, 2018; Pradesa et al., 2019) and confirm that such an attitude model is possible and proven to be important in public sector organizations.

Meanwhile, several empirical results in Indonesia have shown distributive justice is often seen as the main aspect of organizational justice that is felt by individuals from their organizations (Dawud et al., 2018; Hidayat et al., 2017; Pemecutan et al., 2016). Organizational justice has good benefits for the organization, especially by harmonizing the relationship between individuals and organizations (Nazir et al., 2019; Yean & Yusof, 2016). On the other hand, the perception of justice can improve the individual's self-concept and assessment of organizational status, which can strengthen the relationship between personality and individual outcomes.

It has been widely understood that feeling supported by the organization is something that is highly expected by individuals, where this will have an impact on how the attitude and behavior of a person forms as a form of retaliation for the treatment he receives. Felt obligation is one of the most important things considered as a result of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Pradesa et al., 2018). In addition, attitudinal mechanisms that can encourage felt obligation are still considered to be diverse, but more often this is viewed from the lens of social exchange theory. In addition, felt obligation can be linked to other forms of attitude mechanism towards the organization, especially affective commitment and ethical work climate (Pradesa et al., 2018, 2019, 2021). The empirical findings indicate that the potential of felt obligation as a form of attitude towards work can be viewed from a theoretical perspective other than social exchange theory. The reciprocal norm between individuals and their organizations is the basic premise of why felt obligation can be considered as a positive outcome of the individual attitude mechanism.

This study tries to explore the simple theoretical integration of social exchange theory and organizational justice theory. These two theories are the main foundation in developing the conceptual framework in this research, including building relationships between concepts. Theoretically, felt obligation is the most important outcome in the model, and is believed to be the result of distributive justice and perceived organizational support felt by employees. Meanwhile, empirically, the relationship between distributive justice and perceived organizational support has been tested previously (Dawud et al., 2018; Pemecutan et al., 2016) as well as perceived organizational support on felt obligation (Arshadi, 2011; Caesens et al., 2016; Eisenberger et al., 2001). In general, the concept of perceived organizational support has become an interesting and well-developed discussion when reviewed with antecedents and potential outcomes in organizations (Ahmed & Nawaz, 2015; Kurtessis et al., 2017). So that the conceptual framework model built in this study is based on how organizational support encourages employee felt obligation, and besides how organizational support can mediate the effect of distributive justice toward felt obligation.

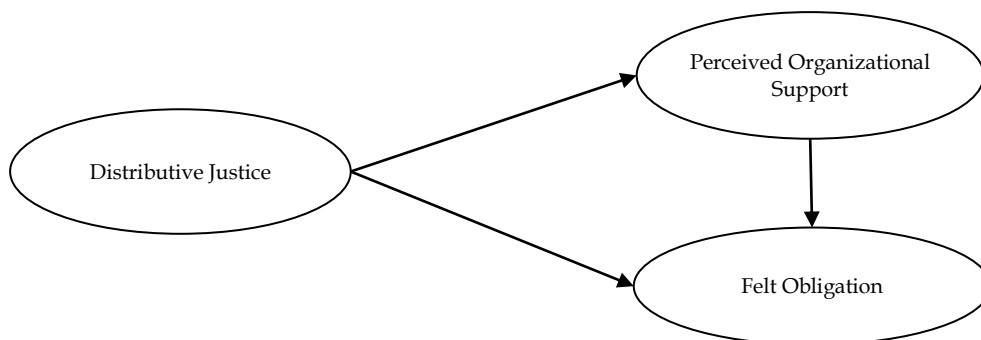


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Developed in This Study

Although previous research stresses the importance of perceived organizational support in the development of employee felt obligation, organizational justice issues will also be examined in the current study. The social exchange model of felt obligation proposed here differs from models

proposed in previous work (Caesens et al., 2016; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Pradesa et al., 2019). Furthermore, the proposed model was tested in an public organization environment as opposed to an industrial or profit oriented organizational setting. In this study would have to extend the understanding about the concept and existing literature in three ways. First, considering social exchange mechanism, the role of distributive justice and perceived organizational support among public officers indicated more significant in affecting felt obligation. Second, felt obligation could be considered as outcome of organizational justice when it observed and tested in lens of social exchange theory. In sum, it is expected that POS would mediate the effect of distributive justice on felt obligation.

Methods

Quantitative methods were used in this study to test and analyze the data that had been collected in order to answer the previous research questions. The conceptual framework model formed in this study is based on the perspective of organizational justice and social exchange theory. The instrument used in this study was adopted from previous empirical research. Distributive justice was measured in five indicators that refers to Deconinck & Johnson, (2009); with an example of items from the distributive justice scale is: "Fairly rewarding consider responsibilities". Perceived organizational support was measured in six indicator that refers to Eisenberger et al., (2001); with an example of items from the POS scale is : "Organization values my contribution". Felt obligation was measured in five indicator that refers to Eisenberger et al., (2001); with an example of items from the felt obligation scale is "Feel personal obligation to help achieving organizational goals". These item rated each construct mixed in a random order to try to prevent participants from having their same pattern of responses in each construct measure. Ratings were obtained with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 - *very disagree* to 5 = *very agree*.

The conceptual framework model built in this study was tested on a sample of public officers who working at the Human Resources and Personnel Development Agency in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Sampling was carried out by means of snowball sampling, with the distribution of an online questionnaire instrument carried out for one month in November 2021. It was not possible to randomly assign participants to groups; and the officers were given a chance to fill the online questionnaire. A link was sent to a group of individuals via their smartphone informing them of the nature of the research and inviting them to participate in this optional survey about their workplace experience. Quantitative data were obtained from 88 public officers who voluntarily participate as research respondents. The data collected was then analyzed using path analysis techniques using SmartPLS software.

Results and Discussion

Means, correlations and alpha Cronbach for the variables used in this investigation are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Variables, Indicator Mean and Correlation Coefficient

Variables	Indicator	Mean	r
Distributive Justice $\alpha = 0.916$	Fairly rewarding consider responsibilities	4.25	.833
	Fairly rewarding consider account the amount of education and training	3.81	.831
	Fairly rewarding consider amount of effort	3.80	.802
	Fairly rewarding consider stresses and strains of job	3.72	.683
	Fairly rewarding consider work that have been done	3.90	.781
Perceived Organizational Support $\alpha = 0.931$	Organization cares about my opinions	3.92	.749
	Organization takes pride in accomplishments	3.77	.706
	Organization values my contribution	4.13	.856
	Organization appreciates any extra effort	4.07	.848
	Organization care about problem	4.08	.805
	Organization really cares about well-being	4.10	.838

Felt Obligation $\alpha = 0.702$	Feel personal obligation to help achieving organizational goals	4.17	.665
	Feel personal obligation to ensure high-quality product produced	4.14	.725
	Feel obligation to take time from personal schedule	3.92	.701
	Feel obligation to serve and satisfy others	3.85	.680
	Feeling owe to give 100 percent energy	3.63	-.188

Source: Data processed, 2021

Fairly rewarding consider responsibilities is an indicator that has the highest mean value among other indicators on the distributive justice variable. While fairly rewarding consider stresses and strains of job is an indicator with the lowest mean value. These results indicate that distributing fair rewards based on the responsibilities of individuals in the organization is the most indicative of distributive and fair human resource management practices. Distributive justice can increase individual perceptions and positive attitudes towards the organization.

In perceived organizational support, the indicator "Organization values my contribution" is the indicator with the highest mean value, which means that how well the organization values and values the contributions of its employees is what the organization shows as a form of support for individuals. While the indicator of organizational support that is rated the lowest is about the pride shown in the completion of tasks or work from employees. In felt obligation, the indicators of feel personal obligation to help achieving organizational goals and feel personal obligation to help achieving organizational goals are indicators with the highest mean value perceived by employees.

Coefficient of correlation are seen in the Table 1 show that validities as seen in each correlation coefficient among indicators in each construct measures demonstrate about a good fit, except for one indicator in felt obligation which is found below the critical value of 0.3, in which is "feeling owed to give 100 percent energy". Therefore, in the subsequent model testing, felt obligation can only be reflected by the four indicators used in the path analysis. Apart from this, Cronbach's alpha values for all variables observed in this study can be accepted or declared to be in the reliable category with a range of alpha values as sequentially: distributive justice $\alpha = 0.916$; perceived organizational support $\alpha = 0.931$; and felt obligation $\alpha = 0.702$. It is interesting to know that from this internal consistency value, both distributive justice and perceived organizational support are considered as very reliable constructs. Meanwhile, felt obligation is a construct with good internal consistency, although there is one indicator that is found to have no validity value that meets the criteria.

Table 2. Loading Factor

Variables	Indicator	Loading Factor	t _{statistic}
Distributive Justice	Fairly rewarding consider responsibilities	0.904	54.8220
	Fairly rewarding consider account the amount of education and training	0.895	35.6619
	Fairly rewarding consider amount of effort	0.879	29.3665
	Fairly rewarding consider stresses and strains of job	0.780	15.2162
	Fairly rewarding consider work that have been done	0.865	37.2823
Perceived Organizational Support	Organization cares about my opinions	0.833	24.1379
	Organization takes pride in accomplishments	0.795	15.4260
	Organization values my contribution	0.901	45.1018
	Organization appreciates any extra effort	0.895	35.5205
	Organization care about problem	0.860	22.7272
Felt Obligation	Organization really cares about well-being	0.894	47.9108
	Feel personal obligation to help achieving organizational goals	0.869	27.8651
	Feel personal obligation to ensure high-quality product produced	0.863	24.4701
	Feel obligation to take time from personal schedule	0.888	33.9638
	Feel obligation to serve and satisfy others	0.871	26.6003

Source: Data processed, 2021

Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to test the correctness of the entire series of relationships between the variables of this study as a whole, according to each construct model., respectively. As it seen above, Table 2 provides the loading factors of all main study factors. All the confirmatory factors were significantly related with each construct. From coefficient value of loading factor, findings shows that distributive justice is most reflected in the fairly rewarding consider

responsibilities, while perceived organizational support tends to be reflected by organization values my contribution. Felt obligation is most reflected by feel obligation to take time from personal schedule.

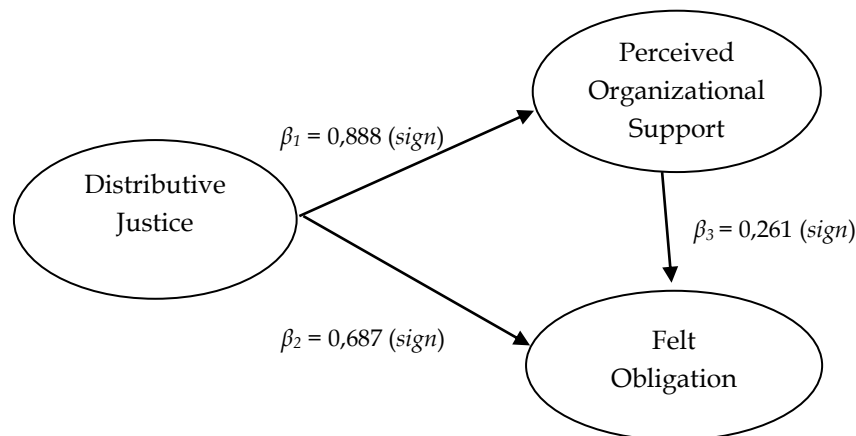


Figure 2. Path Coefficient

Source: Developed in This Study

Distributive justice is the important construct which is found to have strong effect on POS ($\beta = 0.888$) and felt obligation ($\beta = 0.687$). While POS itself have quite moderate effect on felt obligation ($\beta = 0.261$). As predicted, public officers with higher perception of distributive justice were found to have significantly higher perceived organizational support and felt obligation. The results show significant effect between distributive justice on perceived organizational support, on the other hand there is also significant effect from perceived organizational support on felt obligation. From that two significant paths, it can be calculated that the indirect effect is $\beta_1 \times \beta_3 = 0.888 \times 0.261 = 0.232$. The indirect effect of distributive justice on felt obligation through POS is confirmed to be significant, but when compared to the value of the direct effect of distributive justice on felt obligation, the difference and range for both coefficient value is very large.

The findings of this study become interesting when viewed from the theoretical perspective of each of those that form it. Research findings reveal that perceived organizational support is the most important outcome of distributive justice. This finding is consistent with the theory development, the findings indicate a marginally significant main effect relationship between distributive justice and perceived organizational support. While felt obligation is more likely to be influenced by distributive justice than perceived organizational support. The theoretical implication is that felt obligation can be explained more by the organizational justice rather than social exchange theory. Individual who work in public organizations feel more obligated to their work due to the feeling of being treated fairly for their rights and obligations. Although this sense of obligation to accomplish the job is also explained in the framework of social exchange theory, empirical research results reveal that a sense of justice in work is more capable of having an impact on a person's attitude towards his work.

Taken together, results suggest that the relationship between perceived distributive justice and perceived obligation is mediated by perceived organizational support in public organizations. But from the findings it can be suggested that these group-related variables are more important than perceptions of justice and obligation in the present context. Given the seeming importance of public officers' distributive justice perceptions, other noteworthy findings of the present study is the positive relationship between this type of justice perception with perceived organizational support and felt obligation. People who work in public organization would like to feel treated well and fair by their organization. For public manager or leader, this implies in how they prefer to apply better policy in managing human resources in organization.

Conclusion

The main conclusion in this study is that theoretically the perspective of social exchange can be associated with fairness in organizations, but with different impact values if it is related to the felt obligation felt by individuals. This study adds value by offering empirical evidence in arguing that distributive justice could be a better predictor for felt obligation rather than perceived organizational support. The findings of this study can be considered applicable to public organizations. When public officers are obey organizational rules and policies that they believe to be fair, this is when they could

perceive higher support from their organization, it will cause change at the workplace associated with felt obligation. These results suggest that public officers who are more feels treated fairly in their rights and obligations will likely demonstrate more positive attitude that is supportive of the change in public organization. Specifically, the results of the present study suggest that employees who are more positive of their employing organizations are more likely to perceive their feeling that organization is supporting them. Nevertheless, the effect found in this current study would have some important implications for today's changing in public organizations. This study adds to the growing number of studies that have found a positive connection between public officers' distributive justice, perceived organizational support and felt obligation. It recommended that performing similar studies that continue not only to examine the relationships between these variables, but also by integrating with another conceptual framework from another theory perspective. Future studies might increase the possibility for using confounding variables in conceptual model. However, further research should examine respondents across different sectors and geographic locations, while a wider scale would help establish the reliability and validity of the current findings.

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