

# An Investigation of Relationship between Organizational Inequity Perception and Work Ethics

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## Abstract

This research has investigated the relationship between organizational inequity perception and work ethic among employees of Islamic Azad University as the largest private organization in Iran. The research method is cross-sectional survey and the population includes all of the personnel of Islamic Azad Universities in Fars, Boushehr and Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad provinces. A sample of 481 respondents was drawn using simple random sampling method. The measurement tool was a questionnaire, including two scales. Construct-related validity was established through factor analysis and reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Descriptive research findings show that the personnel have a moderate work ethic, and that the perception of organizational inequity is high among the employees. The inferential findings show that there is a significant negative relationship between organizational inequity perception and work ethic. In other words, with an increase in organizational inequity perception there is a decrease in work ethic. The inferential findings also show that from among demographic variables, only age and job history have a significant relationship with work ethic. The prediction of the work ethic, based on the sum of independent variables, using multivariate regression analysis shows that only organizational inequity perception is the predictor of the work ethic, which can explain 0.089 of the variance of the work ethic.

**Keywords:** Organizational Inequity Perception, Work Ethic, Employees

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## **Introduction**

Modern societies are organizational societies. We all are born in organizations, live under their predominance, and finally die inside them (Hall, 2004). Organizations provide personal and collective interests of individuals in a society; however, their success depends on work ethic of human resources. Work ethic is a set of internalized, favored, and proper behaviors in employees, which is necessary for success and development of an organization (Smith & Nobel, 2004). Organizational researchers have presented many indices for definition of the concept. Originating in Weber's work (1904), current conceptualizations tend to view work ethic as an attitudinal construct pertaining to work-oriented values. An individual espousing a high work ethic will place great value on hard work, autonomy, fairness, logical and efficient use of time, delay of gratification, and the intrinsic value of work (Cherrington, 1979; Furnham, 1984). Regardless of the way work ethic is defined, researchers believe that an appropriate work ethic leads to more productivity and achievement in organizational goals, and that an inappropriate work ethic will result in the loss of resources and less productivity in an organization. Work ethic is influenced by many variables (Steers et al., 2002). Some studies have focused on organizational inequality perception (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Greenberg, 1990) and their main question is whether organizational inequity perception has any relationship with work ethic or not.

Based on the accessible studies and resources, work ethic is an important social problem in Iran (Moidfar, 2004). For example, national productivity, as an indicator of organizational performance, is approximately zero (Khani, 2005) and useful work hour is 1-4 hours (Sarafraz, 2003) a day (Khani, 2005). This situation is not appropriate for Iran, a country striving to be the top in southwest Asia, and Middle East in 2025. As a result, the main purpose of this research is to investigate work ethic among employees of Islamic Azad University, as the biggest private organization in Iran, and to determine its relationship to organizational inequity perception.

## **Research Questions**

This study tries to answer the following questions:

Is there a significant relationship between organizational inequity perception and work ethic?

Is there a significant relationship between demographic variables and work ethic?

## **Review of Literature**

Many scholars believe that equality or justice is a fundamental basis for social actions (Moor, 1978) and so, it is the primary factor for the health of the social institutions. Initially, Adams (1965), in his framework of equity theory, stated that under equitable conditions, each employee provides his or her organization with some inputs such as effort, loyalty, skill, ability, adaptability, tolerance, personal sacrifice, and so on, and in return, receives some outputs (or outcomes) from the organization, such as financial rewards, salary, pension, reputation, praise and thanks, promotion, etc. This is a fair situation which motivates employees to work harder and consequently can promote the success of the organization to attain its goals. However, when some employees feel there is no balance between inputs and outcomes, in comparison with others, they will be dissatisfied and so try to reduce it behaviorally or cognitively. Adams (1965) proposed six different modes of reducing inequity: (a) altering inputs; (b) altering outcomes; (c) cognitively distorting inputs or outcomes; (d) leaving the field; (e) acting on the object of comparison by altering or cognitively distorting the others' inputs or outcomes; and (f) changing the object of comparison.

Walster et al. (1978) believe that in this condition, four responses may be formed: (a) individuals will try to maximize their outcomes; (b) groups develop definitions of equity and approve group members on the basis of those definitions; (c) inequity leads to psychological distress proportional to the size of the inequity; and (d) such distress will lead to attempts to eliminate it by restoring equity. To sum up, as Adams (1965) pointed out, organizational inequity, which refers to people's perceptions of unfairness in organizations, has a negative impact on the motivation of employees for harder work. Cropanzano et al. (2007) argued that organizational equity is a sort of glue that allows people to work together effectively; in

contrast, organizational inequity is like a corrosive factor that can dissolve bonds within the community and damage individuals and organizations. Some research findings have confirmed that distributive inequity is an important predictor of employees' dissatisfaction (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), distrust of management (Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Lind & Tyler, 1988; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992) and minimization of work performance (Leventhal, 1976). Although Adams (1965) only stressed on uni-dimensional concept of distributive inequity, many studies have focused on the effect of other dimensions of organizational inequity regarding organizational behaviors and functioning.

The studies on distributive inequity in an organization shifted the emphasis on procedural inequity in the 1980s (Schminke et al. 1997). Procedural inequity as an important resource in social exchange (Loi et al. 2006) refers to the perceived unfairness of the means used to determine the amount of benefits (Folger & Konovsky 1989). In other words, procedural inequity perspective focuses on the unfairness of the evaluation procedures used to determine ratings (Greenberg, 1986). The fairness of the decision making process itself seems to be more important than the actual amount of compensation that is received by an individual (Teprstra & Honoree, 2003). According to Cropanzano et al. (2007) if the decision-making process is perceived as just, employees show greater loyalty and more willingness to perform to the best interest of an organization (Cropanzano et al. 2007). Some researchers have shown that procedural inequity decreases organizational commitment (Warner et al. 2005) and has a negative effect on performance of job duties (Loi et al. 2006).

Research on procedural inequity in an organization in 1990s began to stress on interactional inequity that focuses on the unfairness of the interpersonal treatment an individual receives from the decision maker (Ambrose et al. 2007). A person is interactionally just if he or she appropriately shares information and avoids rude or cruel remarks and since interactional inequity emphasizes one-to-one transactions, employees seek it from their supervisors (Cropanzano et al. 2007). According to Greenberg (1990) interactional inequity has come to be seen as including two specific types of interpersonal behavior; (a) interpersonal equity, which reflects the degree to which people are treated with politeness, dignity and respect by others; and (b)

informational equity, that focuses on the explanations provided to people suggesting, for example, why procedures were used in a certain way or why outcomes were distributed in a certain fashion. Interactional inequity suggests that perceptions of procedural inequity can originate from an organization's procedures and how those procedures are implemented (Tyler & Bies, 1990). Cheng and Stockdale (2003) found that organizational commitment was significantly predicted by interpersonal equity.

## **Method**

The research is a survey study. The population is all employees (excluding faculty members) of Islamic Azad University (including 26 branches) in three provinces including Fars, Bushehr, and Kohgiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad, working in the academic year of 2009-10. The population size was 2539, including 1953 males and 586 females. Based on the sampling table of Morgan and Krejcie (1970), a sample of 335 was selected, but to achieve a further accurate estimation, the sample was increased to 500. However, at the end, 481 participants were accessible. The measurement tools were two researcher-made scales measuring organizational inequity perception and work ethic. With regard to the mentioned perspectives, the organizational inequity perception scale was divided into three parts including interactional, distributive, and procedural dimensions, and the work ethic scale was defined in terms of group cooperation and commitment based on the conceptual definitions of work ethic (Miller et al. 2002). The validity of the scales was established through factor analysis, and the reliability was calculated via Cronbach alpha coefficient.

## **Results**

The results have been demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2. Based on the tables, KMO test is 0.785 for work ethic scale, and 0.852 for organizational inequity scale, which shows that the sample size is adequate. Moreover, Bartlett test is significant for both scales, suggesting that there is a significant correlation among variables. In total, the factor analysis of work ethic scale, after the elimination of seven items, extracted two factors, including group cooperation and work commitment, which explains 33% of the variance of the work ethic scale. In addition, factor analysis of organizational inequity scale, after the

deletion of two items, extracted three factors, including interactional, distributive, and procedural, which explain 53.1% of the variance of the organizational inequity scale. The reliability was calculated for the two scales, using Cronbach alpha coefficient, with a coefficient of 0.719 for work ethic scale, and 0.831 for organizational inequity scale.

Table 1: Validity and the Reliability of the Work Ethic Scale

| Items   | Factors           |             |
|---|-------------------|-------------|
|   | Group Cooperation | Commitment  |
|   | Factor Load       | Factor Load |
| I enjoy working with others                                   | .749              |             |
| I consult my co-workers about how to do my job better         | .722              |             |
| I help a co-worker with heavy responsibility                  | .719              |             |
| I am usually friendly at work                                 | .717              |             |
| The success of an organization is possible by collective work | .698              |             |
| I enjoy being member of a group                               | .638              |             |
| I am sometimes jealous of my co-workers' achievements         | .562              |             |
| I don't talk behind the back of my co-workers                 | .506              |             |
| Saturday mornings are so boring                               |                   | .750        |
| I am not in the mood for working if I feel a little malaise   |                   | .712        |
| I do my personal work beside office work                      |                   | .688        |
| I wish the yearly leave were more                             |                   | .642        |
| There is nothing wrong with bringing a cell phone to work     |                   | .580        |
| Eigene Value  | 3.2               | 1.4         |
| Explained Variance  | 22.9              | 10.1        |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy               | .785              |             |
| Significant of Bartlett's test of sphericity                  | .000              |             |
| Cronbach Alpha Coefficient                                    | .719              |             |

Table 2: Validity and Reliability of the Organizational Inequity Perception Scale

| Items   | Factors                |                       |                     |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|   | Interactional Inequity | Distributive Inequity | Procedural Inequity |
|   | Factor Load            | Factor Load           | Factor Load         |
| Authorities respect to employees                                    | .833                   |                       |                     |
| Authorities have friendly treatment to employees                    | .791                   |                       |                     |
| Authorities are truthful in dealing with employees                  | .755                   |                       |                     |
| Authorities don't have any prejudice to employees                   | .706                   |                       |                     |
| Authorities pay attention to employees needs                        | .544                   |                       |                     |
| In regarding to the stresses that I have, my reward is little       |                        | .728                  |                     |
| In regarding to the education that I have, my reward is little      |                        | .727                  |                     |
| In regarding to amount of work that I have, my reward is little     |                        | .682                  |                     |
| In regarding to the responsibility that I have, my reward is little |                        | .582                  |                     |
| It is not clear some colleagues how to rise                         |                        |                       | .738                |
| Some colleagues are really elite in attainment of rewards           |                        |                       | .689                |
| Some circulars are merely for few colleagues                        |                        |                       | .658                |
| It is not clear some colleagues how to punished                     |                        |                       | .634                |
| Eigene Value  | 4.8                    | 1.8                   | 1.4                 |
| Explained Variance  | 32.1                   | 11.8                  | 9.2                 |
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy                     | .852                   |                       |                     |
| Significant of Bartlett's test of sphericity                        | .000                   |                       |                     |
| Cronbach Alpha Coefficient  | .839                   |                       |                     |

In total, 481 participants answered the questionnaires, among whom, 357 (74.2%) were male, and 124 (25.8%) female. The mean age of respondents was 34.9 years and the mean education level of the

respondents is 15.8 years. 374 respondents (77.8%) were married and 107 (22.2%) were single. The mean length of career was 9.5 years. Based on the scales results, the range of the work ethic scale is 14-70, and the mean work ethic score is 50.05. In addition, the range of the organizational inequity perception scale is 13-65, and the mean organizational inequity score, is 43.2.

In order to measure the relationship between the two constructs totally, and their dimensions, simple linear regression test was used. The results are presented in Table 3. Based on Table 3, the relationship between organizational inequity perception and work ethic overall, is significant. The table also illustrates that the relationships between various dimensions of the two constructs are significant, except for the relationship between procedural inequity perception and group cooperativeness, and distributive inequity perception and group cooperati

Table 3: The relationship between Organizational inequity perception and Work ethic

| Variables   | R    | Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | F    | Sig  | Beta  | t    | Sig  |
|---|------|-------------------------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| Organizational inequity perception Work ethic       | .159 | .025                    | 12.8 | .000 | -.159 | -3.5 | .000 |
| Interactional inequity perception Group cooperative | .145 | .021                    | 10.3 | .001 | -.145 | -3.2 | .001 |
| Interactional inequity perception Commitment        | .130 | .017                    | 8.3  | .004 | -.13  | -2.9 | .004 |
| Procedural inequity perception Group cooperative    | .042 | .002                    | .83  | .36  | .04   | .91  | .363 |
| Procedural inequity perception Commitment           | .283 | .080                    | 41.8 | .000 | -.283 | -6.4 | .000 |
| Distributive inequity perception Group cooperative  | .086 | .007                    | 3.6  | .059 | .09   | 1.8  | .059 |
| Distributive inequity perception Commitment         | .180 | .032                    | 15.9 | .000 | -.18  | -4   | .000 |

Is there a significant relationship between demographic variables and work ethic?

In the framework of demographic variables, five variables including age, job history, education level, gender, and marital status have been considered. With regard to measurement of age, job history, and education, in an interval level, simple linear regression was used to



investigate their relationships with work ethic. The results are presented in Table 4. Given that gender and marital status are dichotomous variables, two independent samples t-test were used to determine their relationship with work ethic. The results have been shown in Table 5

Table 4: The relationship between Age, Job History and Education to Work Ethic

| Variables                 | R    | R Square | F   | Sig  | Beta | t   | Sig  |
|---------------------------|------|----------|-----|------|------|-----|------|
| Age<br>Work Ethic         | .119 | .014     | 6.9 | .009 | .119 | 2.6 | .009 |
| Job History<br>Work Ethic | .120 | .015     | 7   | .008 | .120 | 2.6 | .008 |
| Education<br>Work Ethic   | .04  | .001     | .66 | .415 | .04  | .82 | .415 |

Table 5: The relationship between Gender and Marital Status to Work Ethic

| Variables      |         | N   | Mean Work Ethic | SD  | T    | df  | Sig  |
|----------------|---------|-----|-----------------|-----|------|-----|------|
| Gender         | Male    | 357 | 50              | 6.2 | .27  | 479 | .782 |
|                | Female  | 124 | 50.2            | 5.9 |      |     |      |
| Marital Status | Single  | 107 | 49.9            | 6.6 | -.12 | 479 | .902 |
|                | Married | 374 | 50.06           | 6   |      |     |      |

#### Prediction of Work Ethic based on the Sum of Independent Variables

In order to predict the dependent variable based on the sum of the independent variables and to reveal how much of the variance of the work ethic can be explained by the dependent variables, multivariate regression analysis was run the results of which have been presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Prediction of work ethic based on independent variables

| Independent Variables              | R    | R Square | Adjusted R Square | F   | Sig  | Beta  | t     | Sig  |
|------------------------------------|------|----------|-------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|------|
| Constant                           | .321 | .102     | .089              | 5.9 | .000 |       | 13.6  | .000 |
| Organizational inequity perception |      |          |                   |     |      | .179  | -3.8  | .000 |
| Age                                |      |          |                   |     |      | .073  | 1.2   | .242 |
| Gender                             |      |          |                   |     |      | -.042 | -.907 | .365 |
| Education                          |      |          |                   |     |      | .070  | 1.5   | .125 |
| Marital Status                     |      |          |                   |     |      | -.05  | -1.1  | .293 |
| Job History                        |      |          |                   |     |      | .101  | 1.6   | .106 |

As Table 6 demonstrates, only organizational inequity perception is significant and can explain 0.089 of the variance observed in work ethic.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The main goal of this research was to investigate relationship between organizational inequity perception and work ethic among the employees of Azad Islamic Universities. In this study, two types of descriptive and inferential can be drawn. Based on the descriptive research findings, mean work ethic of Iranian employees is moderate. In other words, only 15.2 percent of employees have high work ethic, and 84.8 percent have moderate or weak work ethic. This research finding is frightening especially given that it occurred in the biggest private organization in Iran, which is supposed to be self-supporting. These research findings are compatible with Saroukhani and Talebian (2002) that showed that 71.1 percent of employees had moderate work ethic. However, the results do not confirm Moidfar's (2006) study in which he found that 70 percent of governmental employees in Tehran have high levels of work ethic. The main reason for the different between the two research findings may be that Moidfar (2006) used samples that were more homogeneous. The descriptive findings also show that mean organizational inequity perception among employees is 43.2 which is more than the actual mean which is 39. In other words, only less than 1 percent of employees believe that organizational inequity is low, 88.2 percent evaluate organizational inequity as moderate, and 11 percent believe that organizational inequity is high. This situation is also alarming in Iranian organizations.

The results also showed that organizational inequity perception had a significant impact on work ethic. In other words, increased organizational inequity perception meant a decrease in work ethic among employees. This research finding is compatible with Saroukhani and Talebian (2002), Iman and Asnaashari (2004), Chalabi (2006), Shokrkon and Neami (2006). They found that increase in organizational justice could increase work ethic among Iranian employees.

Age had a significant direct relationship with work ethic. This research findings is compatible with Mohseni Tabrizi and Mirzaee (2004), Kavian(2005), Chalabi (2006). They pointed out that there was a significant positive relationship between age and work ethic. However,

this research finding does not confirm Moidfar (2006) who showed that there was no significant relationship between age and work ethic, and Saroukhani and Talebian (2002), who concluded that there is a significant, but negative, relationship between age and work ethic.

Regarding gender, there was no significant difference between males and females in work ethic. This research finding is compatible with Saroukhani and Talebian (2002), Meriac (2009), Mohseni Tabrizi and Mirzaee (2004). They pointed out that there is no significant difference between males and females in work ethic. However, the result does not confirm Moidfar (2006) who showed that work ethic among females was higher than males.

Moreover, no significant difference was observed between single and married employees in terms of work ethic. There was also no significant relationship between education level and work ethic. This is not compatible with Moidfar (2006), and Kavian (2005) who show there was a significant negative relationship between education and work ethic.

On the other hand, there was a significant and direct relationship between job history and work ethic. This research finding is compatible with Moidfar (2006), and Kavian (2005) who suggest that there is a significant direct relationship between job history and work ethic, but it does not confirm Akbari (2002) who argues that there is no significant relationship between job history and work ethic.

Regarding the prediction of work ethic as a dependent variable based on the sum of independent variables, the results of multivariate regression analysis show that only organizational inequity perception is significant and can explain 0.089 of the observed variance in work ethic. The value of the explained variance shows that work ethic is a complex field that is influenced by many variables including within-organization and outside-organization variables. Management type (Filley & House, 1969), work alienation (Panahi & Ebrahimpour, 2008), job satisfaction (Blood, 1969), personality type (Spector, 1982), organization commitment (Meyer et al. 1993), citizenship (Moidfar, 2004), political satisfaction (Akbari & Ardeshiri, 2002), religiosity (Miller et al. 2002) are some important factors whose impacts on work ethic have been researched.

## Concluding Remarks

Based on the national development programs, Iran must obtain the first rank in Middle East by 2025. Accomplishing this goal needs employees with high work ethic. However, the present research findings show that work ethic of Iranian employees is moderate which can be alarming. Poor work ethic among the personnel of the biggest private organization in Iran suggests that this weakness among Iranian employees is a socio-cultural problem that must be addressed.

On the other hand, organizational inequity perception is high among the employees, which significantly contributes to the decrease in work ethic. Therefore, organizational equity in different dimensions including interactional, distributive, and procedural must be recognized, reconsidered, and promoted by authorities.

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