

A Comperative Study on Perceptions and Reactions of Workers: A Research on Blue and White Collar Workers

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Extensive Summary

Emergence of human relations school in the late 1920's gave rise to behavioral studies which focus on psychological and sociological aspects of human in the workplace. According to some authors (O'Connor, 1999) human relations school only gave tools the modern day managers so as to increase workplace efficiency. So, the managers equipped with counseling and negotiation techniques can get rid of several troubles by establishing close relations with employees.

Among all these behavioral studies, scholars gave special importance to study how to increase employee motivation. Some of the authors (McClelland, 1961; Herzberg, 1966; Maslow, 1954; Alderfer, 1972) claimed that needs must be satisfied in order to motivate people. Others (Adams, 1963; Vroom, 1964 and Locke, 1968) believed that the motivation process should be examined instead of deciding which needs should be satisfied. Equity theory handles motivation issue with an approach based on comparison between employees in terms of their perception of equity. The beliefs of organizational participants concerning fairness of managerial actions lead to adjustment of their efforts according to theory. We are not interested in ways to motivate people by using basic mechanism defined in equity theory. Our study is more relevant to equity perceptions based on comparisons between colleagues and possible responses of organizational participants in case of their beliefs towards unfair treatments.

Equity theory of John Stacey Adams has made great contributions to the emergence of organizational justice as a field of study. Studies on organizational justice focus on the perceptions of employees concerning equity and the effect of such perceptions on their outputs (Pillai, Williams ve Tan, 2001). Organizational justice creates a climate of trust and solidarity according to the relevant literature (Aryee, Budhwar, and Chen 2002; Cropanzano and Rupp 2008; Colquitt and Rodell, 2011).

Perception of justice is related to evaluation of interactions between individuals and their tasks (Balassiano and Salles, 2012). So, it is possible to state that comparisons between employees shape their perceptions of equity and organizational justice. There are very important managerial consequences of underestimating the cases employees may perceive unequal. Some authors (McIntyre et.al, 2002; Lambert, Hogan and Griffin, 2007; Deconinck and Bachmann, 2009) determined that there is a close relation between job satisfaction and equity perceptions of employees. Khani, and Nia (2013) claim that equity perceptions of employees is also correlated with burnout.

Workforce composition has changed significantly since introduction of equity theory by Adams (1963). Diffusion of CAD, CAM and automation systems decrease percentage of blue collar workers in manufacturing organizations. It was required to recruit professionals who have ability to control sophisticated production technologies in such organizations. It is possible to see the two groups of workers in today's modern organizations. Blue and white collar employees may have different expectations, ambitions, beliefs and work values. So, members of these two groups may perceive equity differently and may show different reactions. If it is possible to find empirical support for this argument, managers should not use standard management techniques for these two groups.

This study aims at searching whether there is a difference in terms of equity perceptions and the responses of two groups towards inequality. There is lack of empirical studies comparing these two groups in this respect. So, we decided to adopt an exploratory approach instead of testing hypotheses. This study was carried out in an academic institution. Convenience sampling method was used to determine the sample. The sample consists of 279 employees -120 white collar workers, 159 blue collar workers- working in different units of the institution.

Two scales consist of 20 items which were applied and tested by Sozen, Yeloglu and Ates was used in this study. Scale 1 was developed to measure equity perceptions of employees and scale 2 measures whether employees show response against inequality. 100 point visual analogue scale was used in all items in scale 1 and 2. The scale has a reliability score of %79,25. The data were collected by a questionnaire form and analyzed by using statistical software (SPSS). Two types of analyses were applied to the data. Correlation analysis was used to examine whether perceptions of inequality lead to corrective actions or not in two groups. Exploratory factor analysis was used to reveal the dimensions of equity perceptions and type of responses preferred by the employees to correct inequality.

Findings suggest that there are fundamental differences between blue and white collar workers in terms of their perception of inequality and corrective responses against inequality. The results of correlation analyses show that there is a positive and statistically significant relation between equity perception of blue collar workers and their reaction against this situation. We haven't found the same type of relation for white collar workers. There is no statistical significant relation between inequality perception and reaction of white collar workers. So, it can be claimed that blue collar workers are more sensitive and proactive to their rights than white collar workers. However, it is not possible to generalize this finding. This relation may change due to several contingencies like sector, organizational size and age.

The results of exploratory factor analysis states that blue and white collar workers have different inequity perceptions and they prefer different methods to resolve the emerging situations. Findings revealed the specific dimensions of perceiving and resolving inequality for both groups.

The items concerning perception of inequity were classified under 2 factors for blue collar workers and under 3 factors for white collar workers. The findings show that the dimensions of inequality perceptions of blue collar workers are mostly shaped by the attitudes of colleagues and managers towards them. On the contrary, white collar workers are more interested in tangible aspects of business life. They tend to develop their perception of inequality around salary, promotion and status. It is evident from the findings that social factors are more important for blue collar workers. They neither have expectations to be promoted to higher levels in organizational hierarchy nor to receive extraordinary pay raises.

Findings of factor analysis concerning reactions of the employees towards inequality show that two groups prefer different actions. Blue collar workers decide to report the cases to their managers and they try to persuade them. Whistleblowing can be interpreted as a harmless reaction for blue collar workers to express themselves to their managers. White collar workers mostly prefer political reactions towards inequality.

The findings suggest that different managerial approaches are required for blue and white collar workers. These differences between two groups may require scholars to revise generalized statements regarding to conflict management, leadership, motivation and power practices.