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Office of Aviation Medicine
Washington, D.C. 20591

Procedural Justice, Occupational Identification, and Organizational Commitment

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June 1992

Final Report

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Technical Report Documentation Page

1. Report No.	2. Government Accession No.	3. Recipient's Catalog No.
DOT/FAA/AM-92/21		

4. Title and Subtitle	5. Report Date
PROCEDURAL JUSTICE, OCCUPATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT	June 1992
	6. Performing Organization Code
7. Author(s) L. A. Witt, Ph.D.	8. Performing Organization Report No.
9. Performing Organization Name and Address FAA Civil Aeromedical Institute P. O. Box 25082 Oklahoma City, OK 73125	10. Work Unit No. (TRAIS)
	11. Contract or Grant No.
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address Office of Aviation Medicine Federal Aviation Administration 800 Independence Avenue, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20591	13. Type of Report and Period Covered
	14. Sponsoring Agency Code

15. Supplementary Notes

This work was performed under task AM-C-92-HRR-122.

16. Abstract

Extending Tyler's (1989) group-value model, the present study tested the hypothesis that procedural justice may be of differential salience in the development of organizational commitment among individuals who identify primarily with their employing organization versus their occupation. Data collected from 1,235 FAA employees indicated that procedural justice scores were moderately related to commitment scores. Contrary to the hypothesis, occupational identification had no moderating effect on the procedural justice-organizational commitment relationship. Consistent with the multiple commitment literature, employees identifying primarily with their occupation perceived more procedural justice, but expressed less commitment to the organization, than those identifying with their organization. These results provide little support for this extension of the group-value model of procedural justice but some support for the multiple commitment approach to the study of work commitment.

17. Key Words	18. Distribution Statement
Procedural Justice Participation in Organizational Commitment Multiple Organizational Commitment Social Identity Theory	Document is available to the public through the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia 22161

19. Security Classif. (of this report)	20. Security Classif. (of this page)	21. No. of Pages	22. Price
Unclassified	Unclassified	13	

Form DOT F 1700.7 (8-72) Reproduction of completed page authorized

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE, OCCUPATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

The growing interest in organizational commitment has been congruent with the assumptions implicit in the organizational science literature that the antecedents of organizational commitment are under "management's capacity to influence" (Angle & Perry, 1983, p. 144) and that the outcomes of commitment are favorable (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989; Randall, 1990). Some researchers have conceptualized organizational commitment as an affective involvement with the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Others have viewed commitment in terms of an assessment of the costs and benefits that employees associate with remaining in or leaving the organization (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981). Both perspectives share the notion that employees who are committed to the organization are more likely to remain in the organization than those who are not. Given the cost of unwanted attrition among highly-skilled workers, the study of organizational commitment and identification of its antecedents are important to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Work by Konovsky, Folger, and Cropanzo (1987) suggests that perceptions of procedural justice may affect organizational commitment.

The present study was designed to expand the conceptual bounds of the commitment construct by investigating: (a) the relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and organizational commitment, (b) the effect of occupational identification on perceptions of procedural justice and organizational commitment, and (c) the moderating effect, if any, of occupational identification on the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment.

Procedural Justice

Greenberg and Folger (1983) noted that when assessing the fairness of managerial decisions, employees are concerned not only with the resultant outcomes (e.g., How much of a raise will I get?) but also with how the decision was made (e.g., What criteria were used?). The issue of the outcome has been addressed in terms of distributive justice (Adams, 1963). The concern over how the decision was made has been discussed in terms of "procedural justice" (Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

An emerging literature has examined the effects of performance appraisals on employee perceptions of procedural justice. Greenberg (1986) argued that the processes by which job information is collected and by which performance ratings are made relate to matters of procedural justice. Evidence suggests that an evaluation perceived as fair is one that contains fair procedures (Landy, Barnes, & Murphy, 1978; Landy, Barnes-Farrell, & Cleveland, 1980). The issue of perceived fairness in personnel decisions (e.g., who is recognized, promoted) is of both practical and conceptual importance, as employee attributions of fairness or unfairness will affect their attitudes and behaviors.

As noted by Tyler (1990, p. 175), "People care about the decision-making process. They consider evidence about representation, neutrality, bias, honesty, quality of decision, and consistency." This concern can take many forms in work organizations. For example, rarely in organizations can all employees complete training that may increase promotion potential. Some employees may see the lack of opportunities for all employees as unfair (i.e., distributive injustice). If, however, the manager follows what is seen as a "fair" process to decide which employees are selected for training (e.g., when based on an objectively identified need), then employee job attitudes may be less negatively affected. In contrast, if the manager uses what is seen as an "unfair" process to make the decision (e.g., the manager's tennis partners are selected), then the injustice that the employee perceives may permeate other job attitudes. Specifically, perceptions of procedural injustice may lead individuals to consider leaving the organization. Employees seeing decisions as being made through unfair procedures may question the wisdom of remaining in such an unjust situation for the long-term. This notion is consistent with Konovsky et al.'s (1987) finding that perceptions of procedural justice were posi-

tively related to expressions of organizational commitment among 36 employees of a manufacturing plant.

Tyler (1986; 1989; 1990; Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Lind & Tyler, 1988) developed a group-value model of procedural justice, in which he discussed reactions to processes in the legal system. However, his concepts apply to justice in organizations (1989, p. 837-838):

> "...people in organizations focus on their long-term association with a group and with its authorities and institutions. People expect an organization to use neutral decision-making procedures enacted by trustworthy authorities so that, over time, all group members will benefit fairly from being members of the group... The linkage of procedural justice to issues of group identification also suggests the possibility that there will be limits to the areas in which procedural-justice issues arise, with those limits being defined by the contours of people's group identifications."

Extending Tyler's group-value model, it is suggested here that procedural justice may be of differential salience in the development of organizational commitment among individuals who identify most with their employing organization, versus those identifying elsewhere.

Organizational Commitment: Multiple Commitments

As noted by Zaccaro and Dobbins (1989), definitions of organizational commitment have typically discussed the relationship between an individual and the entire organization. Reichers (1985, 1986) emphasized differences between global organizational commitment and commitments to other organizational constituencies, such as senior management. She argued that commitment should be viewed as a collection of multiple commitments to various organizational groups. As noted by Reichers (1985, p. 470), "the question, 'what is it that individuals are committed to?' cannot be answered satisfactorily with the response 'organizational goals and values.'" Morrow (1983) discussed 5 aspects of work commitment -- values, career, job, organization, and union. Similarly, Becker (1990) demonstrated a utility in focusing on multiple "foci" of commitment.

In support of the multiple commitment perspective is a developing union commitment literature (e.g., Barling, Wade, & Fullagar, 1990) that has demonstrated differences between correlates of company and union commitment. Zaccaro and Dobbins (1989) found evidence of group and organizational commitments and different patterns of correlates. Gouldner (1957) reported that employees can have conflicting commitments to organizational versus professional, or career goals.

Professional Commitment

Researchers (e.g., Morrow & Wirth, 1989) have increasingly examined the implications of the effects of professionalism on commitment. For example, some managers may perceive commitment to or primary identification with one's profession, rather than to one's organization, as problematic for the organization (Raelin, 1986). Thus, empirical investigation of the effect of "professional commitment" or "occupational identification" may have some important practical implications.

The notion that workers have a commitment to their specialized occupation as opposed to, or in addition to, their employing organization is consistent with work by Gouldner (1957). Witt (in press) argued that difficulties with both definitions and operationalizations have contributed to the limited applicability of professional commitment and related constructs.

Conceptual Problems. Aranya and Ferris (1984) described professional commitment as the strength of identification with, and involvement in, one's profession. Tuma and Grimes (1981) described it in terms of the importance of breakthroughs, originality, and the generation of new knowledge. Both definitions are limited to only certain workers. An implicit assumption apparently held by researchers of professional commitment that only "professional" workers (i.e., those college-educated with specialized

training) can have commitments to their occupation, may be unnecessarily restricting the construct. As evidenced by statements such as, "I am an airway facilities technician" versus "I work for the Federal Aviation Administration," in response to the question, "What do you do?," some individuals may see themselves as having professions or occupations, while others have jobs. Blau (1988, p. 295) conceptualized *career commitment* as distinct from organizational commitment and defined it as the "attitude toward one's vocation." He focused on commitment to the vocation, rather than to a specific job within that vocation, thus extending the notions underlying the professional commitment construct to include all workers.

Operationalization Problems. Studies (e.g., Parasuraman & Nachman, 1987; Tuma & Grimes, 1981) have employed a number of measures, including: (a) organizational commitment questionnaires with changes in wording from "organizational" to "professional" commitment, and (b) behavioral measures, such as membership in professional associations and reading the professional literature. Such measures are inappropriate for workers with no "profession." Blau's (1988) operationalization of his career commitment "attitude" included desiring to remain in the vocation and perceiving the vocation as ideal. Neither a weak, positive correlation nor a negative correlation between such career or professional commitment scale scores and organizational commitment scale scores would indicate the extent to which an individual is differentially committed. While some researchers suggest that organizational and occupational commitments are not necessarily in conflict (Tuma & Grimes, 1981), different levels of identification or commitment are likely to have effects on other job attitudes. Participants in the studies of professional commitment have typically not been asked to identify which was more important or salient -- occupation or employing organization -- even though underlying much of the research has been the implicit assumption that individuals who most closely identify themselves with their profession or occupation may hold different attitudes from those who identify primarily with their employing organization.

Occupational Identification

Witt (in press) defined occupational identification or occupational commitment as the extent to which the individual identifies with an occupation (i.e., the occupation as a component of the self-concept). This is based on social identity theory and reflects the degree to which any worker (i.e., not just a professional) identifies with his/her occupation.

"That people are differentially concerned about their relationships with particular groups has long been recognized by social psychologists and postulated as an important determinant of behavior" is a key notion in social identity theory (Jackson, 1981, p. 138). Kelley (1955), for example, argued that highly valued groups provide standards and perspectives to guide behavior. As noted by Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 21), one's social identity serves two functions: (a) "it cognitively segments and orders the social environment, providing the individual with a systematic means of defining others;" and (b) it "enables the individual to locate or define him- or herself in the social environment."

Ashforth and Mael (1989) emphasized several important characteristics of social identification. First, identification is a perceptual cognitive construct; i.e., it is not necessarily associated with specific moods or behaviors. Second, it typically is maintained in situations involving failure. In other words, identification can develop even in the absence of interpersonal cohesion or similarity, but still have a profound effect on behavior and affect (Turner, 1985). Third, identification is distinct from internalization (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Fourth, consistent with the multiple commitment literature, one's social identity may be derived from the organization, work group, department, union, or other constituencies at work.

Stryker (1968, 1977) argued that one's commitment to an identity determines the extent to which the identity shapes behavior. Indeed, a person who lists "social philosopher" as number one on his/her list of responses to the Kuhn and McPartland (1954) Twenty Statements Test (i.e., "Who Am I?" Test) is likely to hold different

social attitudes than a person who lists "soccer fan." Similarly, employees who identify most closely with their occupation may be likely to hold different job attitudes than those who identify most closely with their employing organization. It is not argued here that employees who identify most closely with their occupation do not identify at all with their employer. However, congruent with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) assertion that identities are cognitively ordered, separated, and buffered, it is suggested that the primary identification with the occupation or employer will influence job attitudes.

An important issue is the measurement of occupational identification. Identity theory (cf. Jackson, 1981) holds that the position of an identity in one's identity hierarchy is equivalent to one's commitment to that identity. Thus, "occupational identification" may reflect "occupational commitment." Given this definition, occupational identification may best be assessed by the selection of occupation- vs. organization-relevant identities. This approach is in contrast to that of professional and career commitment constructs, which do not include relative importance of organizational commitment or identification as part of the constructs. However, it is somewhat consistent with work by Becker (1992), who assessed identification but did not look at the occupation as a relevant constituency. He asked his subjects, "How attached are you to the following people and groups?" (top management, supervisor, and workgroup). He provided a 7-point response scale (1 = not at all; 7 = completely). He then provided 5 items based on Ashforth and Mael's (1989) discussion of social identification to assess identification with each of these groups.

Following this approach, Witt (in press) found that occupational identification moderated the relationships between perceived fairness in work assignments and organizational commitment. Perceptions of fairness in work assignments were more strongly related to expressions of organizational commitment among employees identifying with their occupation than among those identifying with their organization. Among individuals perceiving unfairness in work assignments, the former group were much more committed to the organization than the latter group. Witt (in press) noted that at first glance, this could appear counterintuitive, as one prediction would be that employees who identify with their occupation might be concerned only with their occupation (e.g., "I am an attorney; where I practice my occupation is not as important."). His explanation of the counterintuitive finding was based on Schneider's (1983) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework, which holds that people select themselves into and out of organizations until they find one that best fits them. Consistent with the ASA framework, individuals who identified primarily their occupation may have carefully selected an organization as the appropriate place for them to be. In contrast, individuals not identifying with their occupation may have taken jobs of convenience. Because the former group may have more carefully selected their organization and thus may be more concerned with the long-term, the fairness of current work assignments may have been of less salience to them.

The Present Study

The present study examined two hypotheses. First, consistent with work by Konovsky et al. (1987), it was hypothesized that perceptions of procedural justice would be positively related to organizational commitment. In other words, individuals who perceive the decisions of organization authorities (particularly personnel decisions) as having been based on fair procedures may be more likely to be committed to their employing organization.

Second, it was hypothesized that occupational identification would moderate that relationship; i.e., that perceptions of procedural justice would be more strongly related to organizational commitment among organizationally-rather than occupationally-identifying employees. This hypothesis is based on Witt's (in press) findings and an extension of the group-value model, which implies that procedural justice may be of differential salience among individuals who are committed to their organization, versus those committed elsewhere. Because occupationally-identifying employees may more carefully select their employer and perhaps have fewer alterna-

tives for employment, procedural justice may have less salience in the decision to remain in or leave the organization for them.

METHOD

Subjects

The sample was comprised of 1,235 of 2,103 (58.7%) employees (61.5% males and 38.5% females) working at the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center in Oklahoma City, who completed job attitude scales as a part of a larger study (Federal Aviation Administration, 1991) of employee attitudes about various aspects of their employing organization. Included were biodata items assessing racial group, age, tenure, supervisory status, education, and pay grade. Only about 20% of the employees classified themselves as members of a minority racial group. Responses to an age item were as follows: ages 17 to 29 (7.9%), 30 to 39 (23.0%), 40 to 49 (39.0%), 50 to 59 (26.6%) and 60+ years (3.5%). Responses to an item assessing years in the organization at the current site were as follows: less than 1 year (12.1%), 1 to 3 years (25.9%), 4 to 10 years (26.0%), 11 to 15 years (14.6%), and 16 or more years of service (21.4%). Supervisory status reported by the respondents were as follows: non-supervisor (86.6%), supervisor (9.5%-), and manager (3.9%). The sample was relatively well educated: 12 years or less of formal education (12.9%), 13 to 15 years (51.7%), 16 years (24.5%), and 17 or more years (10.9%). Salary within the federal government is based upon grade level. Responses to the grade level item were: grade levels 1 to 4 (12.0%), grade levels 5 to 7 (19.2%), grade levels 8 to 10 (9.4%), grade levels 11 to 13 (43.3%), and grade levels 14+ (16.1%).

Measures

The Hrebiniak and Alutto (1972) 4-item instrument (M = 13.82, SD = 4.07, alpha =.85) was employed to assess organizational commitment. This scale measures the workers' calculative involvement with the organization by assessing their propensity to leave the organization as a function of alternative inducements (i.e., continuance commitment). High scores reflect greater commitment.

Occupational identification was assessed by one item (M = 1.47, SD = .50) asking participants to indicate with which of 5 possible responses they most closely identified. These responses were "your profession or occupational specialty (what you do)" and 4 organizational referents, ranging from the fairly immediate work unit to the global organization. Responses were recoded into 2 categories: (a) individuals who selected their occupation, and (b) remaining individuals who selected a unit of their organization.

Procedural justice was measured by 4 items selected from the Kacmar and Ferris (1991) Perceptions of Organizational Politics Scale ("Favoritism [not merit] gets people ahead here" [reverse scored]; "Promotions go to top performers;" "Rewards come to hard workers;" and "Pay and promotion decisions are based solely on merit") presented on a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "inclined to disagree," 3 = "neither disagree or agree," 4 = "inclined to agree," and 5 = "strongly agree). Item responses were summed to form a total score (M = 13.1, SD = 4.33, alpha =.87). High scores reflect perceptions of procedural justice.

RESULTS

Procedural justice scores were moderately related to commitment scores (r = .48, p < .01). This effect size is slightly greater than Konovsky et al.'s (1987) finding that a measure of "component procedural justice" was related (r = .38, p < .05) to affective organizational commitment.

Results of one-way analyses of variance indicated that employees selecting the occupation as the primary identity perceived more procedural justice (N = 656, M = 13.6, SD = 4.43) and expressed slightly lower commitment to the organization (M = 13.5, SD = 4.13) than did employees selecting an entity of the organization (N = 579; procedural justice: M = 12.47, SD = 4.46, F = 21.08, p < .01; commitment: M = 14.23, SD = 3.98, F = 10.07, p < .01).

Pay grade may influence perceptions of procedural justice and commitment expressions: employees in higher grades may see more justice and have the desire to remain in the organization, because they have more decisional control. Similarly, tenure in the organization may influence these variables: employees in the organization longer may report higher commitment and procedural justice to maintain cognitive consistency (i.e., employees who see injustice and wish to leave but stay may experience cognitive inconsistency and resulting stress, so they may alter their perceptions and feelings to remain consistent with the decision to remain in the organization). Because these biodata variables may confound the occupational identification group differences in commitment and procedural justice, analyses of covariance were run to control for the possible biodata effects. The main effects of occupational identification remained even after controlling for the effects of pay grade and tenure (commitment: $F = 11.9$, $p < .01$; procedural justice: $F = 26.6$, $p < .01$).

Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analysis (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) was used to determine whether or not occupational identification scores moderated the relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment scores were regressed on occupational identification and procedural justice scores, after which their cross-product was entered into the equation. The cross-product term added virtually no variance to the equation ($\Delta R^2 = .0003$, $F = .38$, *ns*). Thus, occupational identification did not moderate the procedural justice-organizational commitment relationship.

DISCUSSION

Two caveats are emphasized before the results are discussed. First, the present study neither examined nor controlled for the possible confounding effects of such individual differences as length of occupational socialization, availability of career options, and differing career or occupational goals (cf. Miller & Wager, 1971). Second, other measures of occupational identification (e.g., use of the terms "work," "field," or "career;" various types of "professional" behaviors) or organizational commitment may have yielded different results. Morrow and Goetz (1988) suggested that professional commitment should be assessed multi-dimensionally, as dimensions of professional commitment have been differentially related to other components of work commitment (Bartol, 1979). This may apply to occupational identification as well.

Despite these problems, the present study has extended the multiple commitment and procedural justice literatures. The individual's selection of his/her primary identification permitted a test of this extension of the group-value model. The procedure enabled a comparison of identification with the occupation versus with organizational constituencies. Although this unidimensional approach may have precluded many important aspects of occupational identification, it did provide an index of the importance of one's occupation as a component in individual identity.

These results are consistent with the multiple commitment perspective, as they showed an effect, albeit a small one, of occupational identification on procedural justice and organizational commitment. The finding that organizationally-identifying employees expressed greater organizational commitment is consistent with work by Levinson (1970), which indicated that individuals who identified with the organization, and left that organization, experienced psychic loss. Efforts to socialize new employees that may increase identification with the organization may be well spent. However, in contrast to Raelin's (1986) argument, these results support studies (e.g., Randall, 1988) suggesting that primary commitment to constituencies other than the organization may not necessarily be a significant negative factor for the organization, as the differences were only about one-fourth of a standard deviation.

Becker (1992) argued that global organizational commitment should not be assessed, as such an approach ignores multiple foci and antecedents of commitment. He advocated matching the focus of the independent variable to that of the dependent variable. In the present study, the focus was on perceptions of procedural justice as an antecedent of the decision to remain

in or leave the employing organization (continuance commitment). The examination of occupational identification as a possible moderator of that relationship was congruent with Becker's suggestion.

The hypothesis tested in the present study provided no support for this extension of the group-value model of procedural justice. The employees' identification with their employing organization, versus their occupation, had no moderating effect on the procedural justice-organizational commitment relationship. The results suggest that fairness in how personnel decisions are made may not be differentially salient for occupationally- versus organizationally-identifying employees. Although other measures of group identification and procedural justice may have yielded different results, it is possible that the group-value model may be less appropriate in work contexts regarding work issues than in society at large regarding legal issues.

The relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and expressions of organizational commitment suggests that the fairness characterizing decision processes on the job may be associated with the desire to remain in the organization. These results have implications for the use of strategies to enhance justice perceptions in organizations, as they support Konovsky et al.'s (1989) finding that perceptions of procedural justice may have some effects on organizational commitment. Why should this be of concern to managers? Managers who pay particular attention to both the use of fair procedures and communication to subordinates about those procedures may be promoting organizational commitment among subordinates. Employees who perceive fairness in procedures may be more likely to perceive the outcomes as fair (Joy & Witt, in press). Indeed, a history of fairness can be a major asset to the manager. A manager who is seen as fair may also be seen as honest, ethical, honorable, and trustworthy (Messick et al., 1985). As noted by Greenberg (1990), a manager with a reputation for fairness may be evaluated less harshly when he/she commits what is seen as an unfavorable action than a manager with a reputation of unfairness. Similarly, a manager known as fair may be given the benefit of the doubt in times of environmental uncertainty. Moreover, discussion of the procedures (particularly during the decision process) may provide the subordinate with the opportunity to give some input. A phenomenon called the "fair process effect" suggests that such an opportunity may bring about positive attitudes; it occurs even when the employee is assured that his/her input will be considered, but when there is no way he/she can verify that it was (Greenberg & Folger, 1983).

As noted by Reis (1986), personality differences tend to influence what will be seen as just. In other words, the accuracy of perceptions may be reduced by individual disposition. Awareness of individual differences in perceiving fairness may provide some managers an excuse to ignore perceptions; i.e., a manager may say, "Some folks never see things as fair and don't try to consider my perspective, so why worry about it?" It is what the employee perceives that affects the employee and his/her colleagues. As stated by Greenberg et al. (1991, p. 113), the "astute manager" realizes the importance of the impression of fairness and focuses on "what others believe to be fair."

What can the managers who believe their decisions to be fair do to foster the impression of fairness? They can consider what subordinates may be looking for as they think about the manager's decision process. Greenberg et al. (1991, p. 114) listed 6 questions that employees consider in the process of assessing fairness: Does the manager: (a) adequately consider subordinates decisions? (b) appear to be neutral? (c) apply decision-making criteria consistently? (d) give subordinates timely feedback? (e) provide adequate explanations for his or her decisions? (f) treat subordinates with respect or dignity? A manager may solicit feedback from subordinates to determine whether or not answers to these questions about his/her behavior are "yes." When the employee perceives the decision criteria to be fair, he/she may be less likely to want to leave the organization.

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*U.S.GPO:1992-661-063/40094