

Impact of Prayer on the Relationship between Supervisory Support and Employee's Perception of Workplace Equity

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This research study advances the body of knowledge of leadership studies by examining the impact of prayer on the relationship between supervisory support and employee perception of organizational equity. Studies have shown a positive correlation between prayer and motivation. Equity theory is an organizational development theory which focuses on the employee perception of workplace fairness and equity to determine the level of employee satisfaction. Three surveys, the Supervisory Support, the Multidimensional Prayer Inventory, and the Distributive Justice Index, measured the impact of prayer on the relationship between supervisory support and the perception of workplace equity of business professionals. Leaders equipped with an increased knowledge in this area will have a better understanding of factors that influence perceptions of equity in the workplace which contribute to overall employee satisfaction.

Equity theory examines and articulates the process in ascribing fairness to the exchange relationship between an employee and employer. The exchange between the two is not purely an economic matter, although significant, as there are elements of justice involved that supervene economics and underlies perceptions of equity or inequity (Adams, 1963). Equity theory is a motivational theory that describes employee behavior (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2005). Previous studies illustrate motivating environments seem to have a significant positive relationship on employee job satisfaction and worker performance (Katzell, 1980; Prichard, Dunnette, & Jorgenson, 1972).

Faith, spirituality, and prayer have been correlated to an increase in motivation (McCullough, 1995; Masters, 2005). The vast majority of adult Americans, over 90%, engage in prayer (Laird, Snyder, Rapoff & Green, 2004). Statistically, one expects the majority of employees in any given organization to pray. Prayer plays a particularly important role in motivation (Marsden, Karagianni, & Morgan, 2007; Neyrinck, Vansteenkiste, & Lens, 2006) and

as a component of spirituality is positively related to an enhanced outlook on life (Conti et al., 2003; Masters, 2005; Seskevich, Crater, & Lane, 2004).

Purpose of Study

While literature provides data regarding employee motivations and perceptions, prayer has not been examined as a motivating factor as it relates to employees perceptions of workplace equity. This study examined prayer as a moderating variable on the relationship between supervisory satisfaction and employee perception of workplace equity.

Statement of Problem

Research exploring prayer as it relates to employees perception of workplace, fairness, and equity has yet to be addressed. This research aimed to fill the gap in the body of knowledge by examining the relationship between prayer and intrinsic motivational factors of successfully adapted and adjusted employees. Managers and employees will find this study useful as they increase their understanding of motivational factors involving increased worker productivity.

Theoretical Foundation

Prayer. In a review of the literature, prayer is a complex, multidimensional construct (Ladd & Spilka, 2002). James, as cited by Harrison (1999), defined prayer as every kind of inward communication with the power recognized as divine. In general, prayer is an address to God (Balentine, 1984). Although there has been ambiguity in defining prayer, there have been contemporary research findings that document positive correlates of the benefits of prayers including greater purpose in life, enhanced marital satisfaction, existential well-being, religious satisfaction, increased hardiness, and recovery from alcohol dependence (McCullough, 1995). These findings are based on an individuals' prayer (address) to God.

Findings in a study that measured visualization, intercessory prayer, and expectancy for critically ill patients (Conti et al., 2003) demonstrated that patients who expected to receive prayer reported feeling significantly better than patients who expected to receive positive visualization. The effects of prayer and positive visualization could not be distinguished from the effect of expectancy.

Masters (2005) conducted an empirical research study on the effects of a form of prayer on a wide array of conditions and outcome variables, including rheumatoid arthritis, cardiac disease, substance abuse, and measures of mental health including self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. The study did not provide strong evidence, but did uncover a relationship between prayer and the tested conditions.

Nelson, Quick, and Quick (1989) examined characteristics of executives who were identified as successfully handing stress in their workplace and prayer was a strategy identified that the executives used as coping strategies. Richter et al. (2002) examined factors that successful participants in a smoking cessation study used and prayer was one of the methods that a majority of the successful quitters used. Similarly, Marsden et al. (2007) identified prayer as a positive motivating factor for women completing a treatment regimen in a healthcare facility.

In work settings, spirituality and prayer had a positive correlation to intrinsic motivation and goal setting among managers from across service industries (Biswas & Biswas, 2007).

Furthermore, results of a 2005 study (Duffy & Bluestein, 2005) indicated that individuals who pray as part of an overall spiritual relationship with a higher power and are religious due to intrinsic motivation tend to be more confident in their ability to make career decisions and are open to exploring a variety of career options.

Equity theory. Adams' article, "Toward an Understanding of Inequity" (1963), has widely been credited as the genesis of equity theory. The theory examines and articulates the process in ascribing fairness to the exchange relationship between an employee and employer. The exchange between the two is not purely an economic matter as there are elements of justice involved that supervene economics and underlies perceptions of equity or inequity (Adams).

Equity theory expands on the anxiety and frustration produced by cognitive dissonance and attributes the dissonance to the perceived inequity a person ascribes to a social exchange process.

With this understanding of dissonance as the foundation of equity theory, equity theory explains how people's perceptions of how fairly they are treated in social exchanges at work (e.g., amount of pay increase each year, how well their supervisor treats them, etc.) can influence employee motivation (Ivancevich et al., 2005).

Equity theory is often used in conjunction with other social comparison constructs such as equity-sensitive theory and self-efficacy theory (O'Neil & Mone, 1998). Equity-sensitivity is an individual difference that characterizes how individuals react to situations perceived to be equitable or inequitable. Whereas equity theory characterizes the process of an individual perceiving if a social exchange relationship is far, equity-sensitivity explains the differences in individual reactions to the inequity. Benevolent, entitled, or equity-sensitive are the different reactions. O'Neil and Mone suggested that this construct had a positive impact on job satisfaction and intent to leave with health care employees.

Inequity in external referents (similar positions outside the organization) was not weighted as heavily by workers in terms of impacting job satisfaction and organizational commitment because of the variety of pay scales that exist in various organizations. Inequity in external referents did correlate to a stronger intent to leave the organization. Workers used individual versus referent groups and a magnification or cumulative effect occurred. If a worker's pay equity was compatible internally, but in comparison to an external referent group of workers is under-rewarded, the worker will more than likely have a perception of inequity. As identified earlier, this is clearly different than when a worker compares pay to an individual external referent. The findings suggest that the use of group referent may enhance the validity of the perception that an individual is underpaid or overpaid to a greater degree than an individual referent (Shore, Jordan, & Tashchian, 2006).

Shaw and Gupta (2001) conducted a study on pay fairness and job performance, job search intent, health complaints, depression, and life satisfaction with respect to the exacerbation of financial need. This study demonstrated that the worker's level of financial need was an exacerbating effect on the worker's perception of pay fairness and job performance, depression, and health complaints.

Much of the literature examines the turnover process as an indication of equity theory and job satisfaction (Griffeth & Gaertner, 2001; Huselid & Day, 1991; Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Sixma, 1994; Williams, 1990) from the person/worker point of view.

A study conducted in 2001 (Van Dierendonck, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 2001) reviewed burnout and inequity among human service professionals. Consistent with equity theory, the

human service professionals who felt more deprived or advantaged in the social exchange relationships with the clients resulted longitudinally in greater emotional exhaustion (burnout).

Other variables that impact perceptions of equity among workers are working conditions, job assignments, and pay level. A high-incentive laden working environment (Katzell, 1980), whereby pay is based on production tends to have a strong correlation between equity and job satisfaction as opposed to low-incentive conditions (flat base pay).

With respect to race and gender as variables to pay equity, Tang, Tang, and Homaifar (2006) found that: (a) income contributes to pay satisfaction in all groups (men, women, and Caucasian) except African Americans; (b) pay equity and total pay satisfaction was significant across gender and ethnicity; and (c) African Americans and women scored significantly higher on a LOM (Love of Money) scale than Caucasian men. The study theorized that African Americans and women may feel poorer financially and psychologically because they had to have lower incomes historically, have experienced financial hardships, and are more obsessed with money than men and Caucasians.

Supervisory Support

Taking a distributive justice approach, O'Neil and Mone (2005) cited several studies that examine referent selection by examining several factors that influence employee's perception of equity among them supervisory behavior. Research has shown the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationship have links to work outcomes (Golden & Veiga, 2008). Employee perceptions of supervisory support have a high correlation to positive job outcomes (performance, satisfaction, intent to stay, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior) and tend to be a significant influencer of an employee's perception of well-being (Hooper & Martin, 2008).

The review of the literature substantiates the concepts of equity theory and identifies the relationship between positive perceptions of pay equity and increased perception of job satisfaction among workers. As previously identified under the review of literature concerning prayer, individuals who exhibit prayer have an increased sense of motivation to achieve goals. Prayer, as a religious coping effort, can have a significant impact in addressing problems (Carver et al., 1989) and reducing stress and anxiety (Moberg, 2005). A study by Turton and Francis (2007) identified a positive correlative between prayer and work-related psychological health. Further, Bacchus, and Holley (2004) found that individuals use prayer to find personal strength, peace, and guidance to cope with stressful situations in the workplace. When combining employee's perception of workplace equity with prayer as a motivating factor and coping mechanism, it can result in employees who experience inequity in their jobs not being dissatisfied as a result of the role prayer plays in motivating them in achieving goals and coping with workplace stress. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- H₁: Employees with a higher existence of prayer have a higher sense of workplace equity.
- H₂: The level of prayer moderates the link between supervisory support and employee perception of workplace equity.

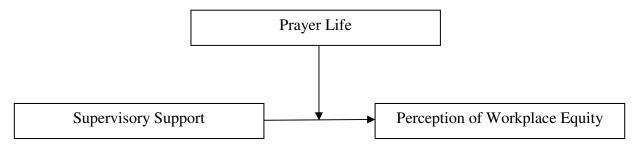


Figure 1. Examining whether the level of prayer moderates the relationship between supervisory support and employee's perception of workplace equity.

Method

Research Design

A survey was constructed to determine the moderating effect prayer life has on the relationship between supervisory support and employee perception of workplace equity. The survey instrument consists of three surveys that have been modified for this study. The Multidimensional Prayer Inventory (MPI) (Laird et al., 2004) measures the existence and frequency of prayer among employees; Supervisory Support (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) measures employee's perception of the support they are receiving from their supervisor, and the Distributive Justice Index (Mansour-Cole & Scott, 1998) measures employee perception of equity in the workplace.

Sample

An online survey was distributed using four professional networking listservs. One of the listservs was geared at African American business professionals and the other three listservs were geared towards African American males who are members of a Greek Fraternity. The surveys bore no identifying marks and the responses were anonymous, apart from those participants who chose to leave an email address for entry into a raffle for participation. The participants were given three weeks to complete the survey. After 21 days an email was sent to all participants on the listservs encouraging those who had not already done so to complete the survey and notifying them that the survey's active weblink would expire in seven days. Seventy-one surveys in all were received. Fifteen of the surveys were discarded because the respondents only completed the first three questions of the survey (demographic information). The final number of participants was 56.

Measurements

Perceptions of Supervisory Support. The Supervisory Support scale by Greenhaus et al. (1990) assessed employee perception of supervisory support received in the workplace. This nine item survey used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The coefficient alpha measured .95 which indicates strong reliability

Multidimensional Prayer Inventory. The Multidimensional Prayer Inventory (Laird et al., 2004) measured the existence and frequency of prayer among the participants. The 21-item instrument consisted of Quantitative and Qualitative items. The coefficient alpha measured .95. Previously the 15 prayer type items, collectively known as the Qualitative Prayer Scale, was tested to assess reliability. The Cronbach's alpha was .92. The validity of the Qualitative Prayer Scale was measured using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Both measures supported the use of factor analysis (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .88; Bartlett's $x^2 = 1017$, p < .001). Frequency per week, frequency per day, and duration were known as the Quantitative Prayer Scale and correlations were significant (p < .01).

Distributive Justice Index. This modified version of the Distributive Justice Index, as developed by Mansour-Cole and Scott (1998), assessed the degree of perceived fairness in an employee's work situation compared to co-workers. The coefficient alpha measured .94 and was positively correlated to job satisfaction.

The survey was piloted to a group of 10 professionals. Feedback was received regarding the flow of the survey and the ease in understanding questions and directions. As a result, minor changes in the response category were made to the Distributive Justice Index.

Data Analysis Procedures

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 15 Grad Pack was used to analyze the data. The results of each individual survey were coded to a variable describing the survey (i.e., SupSat for Supervisor Satisfaction, Pralife for Prayer Life, etc.) and a moderating variable was created to represent the combined relationship of prayer life and supervisory satisfaction on workplace equity. Descriptive analysis was performed and a correlation matrix assessed the relationship between workplace equity, supervisory support, and prayer life while controlling for gender, age, and ethnicity. A multiple regression analysis was conducted using prayer as a moderating variable on the relationship between workplace equity and supervisory satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive statistic. Table 1 presents means, correlations, and reliability coefficients, where applicable, for all study variables. The reliabilities for the scales were very good, with alphas ranging from .93 to .95. Gender was both positively correlated with ethnicity and negatively correlated with workplace equity at a significant level (p < .05). Supervisory support and workplace equity were negatively correlated at a significant level (p < .01).

Regression analysis. Separate 3-step, hierarchical regression analyses were performed for each outcome variable. In Step 1, three control variables were entered: gender, age, and ethnicity. Race, gender, and age are demographic differences that may impact perceptions of equity in the work place (Shore et al., 2006). Prayer life was also entered as a control variable as its moderating effect on the relationship in question was observed. As Table 2 shows no variables in this step were significant predictors of employee perception of workplace equity. In Step 2 supervisory support was entered was a significant predictor for workplace equity (p < .01). In Step 3 the moderating variable prayer life was entered into the model. This variable was not a significant predictor of workplace equity.

Table 1	
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for all Va	ıriables

Variables ^a	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	1.18	.39						
2. Age	3.39	1.04	04					
3. Ethnicity	1.07	.53	.29*	18				
4. Workplace Equity	3.27	.88	27*	02	18	(.94)		
5. Supervisory Satisfaction	2.82	1.14	.25	.23	.04	45**		
6. Prayer Life	4.28	1.25	.08	.19	.14	01	12	(.93)

^a For gender, 1 = male and 2 = female. For age, 1 = 0-17, 2 = 18-29, 3 = 30-39, 4 = 40-49, 5 = 50-59, 6 = 60+. For ethnicity, 1 = African American, 2 = Latino/ Hispanic, 3 = Asian American/Pacific Islander, 4 = Native American/ American Indian, 5 = White, 6 = Other.

Table 2
Results of Regression Analyses

Independent variables	B	SE	В
Step 1			
Age	58	.32	26
Gender	02	.12	02
Ethnicity	18	.23	12
Prayer Life	04	.10	06
Step 2	31	.11	41**
Step 3			
Prayer Life X	06	.11	41

Note. $R^2 = .10$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .25$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .26$ for Step 3. **p < .01.

^{*} *p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

Discussion

Prayer as a Moderating Variable

H₁: Employees with a higher existence of prayer have a higher sense of workplace equity.

Prayer life and workplace equity were not shown to have significant correlation. This is somewhat surprising given the amount of research available that shows a correlation between prayer and increased motivation (Marsden et al., 2007). Further, Nelson et al. (1989) provided the basis for testing this relationship with the identification of prayer as a coping mechanism for business executives. Referencing Table 1, the mean Workplace Equity score was 3.27. The majority of respondents were either generally neutral towards the equity they receive on the job. This may have had a neutralizing effect on prayer. If the respondents overall felt fairly neutral about their jobs, they may not have seen the need for prayer to help them cope with their employment. The coping mechanism of prayer may be exacerbated by a high sense of unfairness or stress on the job.

H₂: The level of prayer moderates the relationship between supervisory support and employee's perception of workplace equity.

Prayer life did not moderate the relationship between supervisory support and workplace equity. In Table 1, similar to the response for workplace equity, the mean for Supervisory Satisfaction was 2.82. With 1 (*the best*) and 5 (*the worst*), the respondents were generally agreed that they were satisfied with the extent and support of supervision they receive. As a result, the respondents may not have felt prayer was needed to alleviate a stressful work situation. Consistent with previous research, supervisory satisfaction, and workplace equity were found to have significant correlation (Hooper & Martin, 2008).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although four listservs were used to obtain respondents for the survey, the sample was a very homogenous group. The overwhelming majority were men (81%) and African American (99%). The age group 30–39 represented the largest response rate at 38%. This was 13% higher than the next closet age group. The respondents were not representative of a broad age range as 80% of them were between the ages 18–49. Of the respondents, 47% responded as Protestant-Baptists and this may have skewed the prayer life scale. The industries (banking/financial, real estate, education, nonprofit, etc.) the respondents are employed in were not captured on the survey. This information could prove useful to determine correlations.

A more comprehensive sample should be obtained for further research. In addition, as Ladd and Spilka (2002) emphasized, prayer is a complex multidimensional construct. The relationship between an individual's prayer life and situations in the workplace that are characterized and identified as stressful need further empirical data so that leaders and managers of increasingly diverse work forces have tools that equip them with producing and leading a healthy functioning and productive workforce.

About the Author

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