Look Who's Talking! Impact of Communication Relationship Satisfaction on Justice Perceptions

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Executive Summary

Communication in an organization forms an important part of most organizational processes. Effective communication leads to not only successful implementation of other processes such as change and divestitures, but also to positive organizational perceptions among employees. It encourages the perceptions of distributive and procedural justice leading to greater job satisfaction and performance among employees.

This study looked at communication relationship satisfaction (CRS) and its impact on perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Communication relationship satisfaction (CRS) is an umbrella concept to convey the extent to which available information meets the task-related and general information needs of employees. Employees assess their satisfaction with communications inside organizations on four different facets: (a) with supervisors (b) with peers (c) with top management and (d) with the organization as such (Putti, Aryee and Phua, 1990).

Perceived justice is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing three dimensions, namely distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the tangible outcomes of a dispute, negotiation, or decision involving two or more parties. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the policies, procedures, and criteria used by decision makers in arriving at the outcome of a dispute or negotiation. Interactional justice refers to the manner in which people are treated during the conflict resolution process

Building upon previous research, we predicted that CRS across all facets will be positively related to all forms of organizational justice. We also predicted that CRS with top management will be the strongest predictor of distributive and procedural justice and CRS with supervisor will be the strongest predictor of interactional justice

292 executives belonging to different organizations were surveyed and the results supported the hypotheses:

- CRS was found to be strongly related to all the three components of organizational justice.
- Employees appeared to give far more importance to communication from the top management and their immediate supervisors than to the general communication from the organization as an entity.

The results of this study become important in light of the recent layoffs and changes that are occurring in the corporate world. Clearly, any communication likely to impact perceptions of justice should be routed through the more appropriate channels.

Communication is a critical organizational process. Several scholars have found that communication influences employees' attitudes and behaviour (Bobocel, McCline and Folger, 1997; Goldhaber, *et al*, 1978). Studies on communication within organizations have focused on group processes (Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Shaw, 1981; McGrath, 1984), impression management (Arndt and Bigelow, 2000), and leader behaviour (Watson, 1982; Penley and Hawkins, 1985). Numerous studies have reported a positive relation between organizational communication and job satisfaction and performance (Berman and Hellweg, 1989; Harrison, 1985; Penley and Hawkins, 1985). Importance of communication as a process can be understood from the research evidence that between 50 and 90 per cent of a manager's time may be spent communicating (Kelly, 1964; Mintzberg, 1973).

Organizational justice has emerged as an important predictor of organizational attitudes and behaviours. Two recent meta-analytic studies (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt, *et al,* 2001) have highlighted the importance of perceptions of justice as predictors of organizational outcomes. Given this, it becomes important for organizations to foster positive perceptions of organizational justice.

Researchers of justice at workplace have highlighted the direct and indirect roles of communication in shaping justice perceptions (Ambrose and Cropanzano, 2003; Folger and Bies, 1989, Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). In a longitudinal study, Gopinath and Becker (2000) found that communication was significantly related to perceptions of procedural justice. However, their research was situated in an atypical context of divestiture and layoff, thereby rendering the external validity suspect. Moideenkutty, *et al* (2001) found that satisfaction with supervisory communication had positive attitudinal outcomes including such correlates of justice as perceived organizational support and affective commitment. In a subsequent study (Moideenkutty, *et al* (2006), they found that satisfaction with supervisory communication strongly correlated with procedural and distributive justice. Yamaguchi (2005) found that different facets of interpersonal communication explained 62 per cent of variance in procedural justice. Based on this limited evidence, it is plausible to postulate that satisfaction with different aspects of communication in an organization will shape justice perceptions.

While all these studies have made an attempt to understand the impact of communication on organizational justice perceptions, we think that these efforts are incomplete. The studies have either looked at one or two dimensions of justice or treated communication from a singular perspective. We do not know satisfaction with which aspect of communication leads to what facet of justice perception and their relative importance in shaping justice perceptions. We have theorized and tested such disaggregated relationships in this paper.

COMMUNICATION RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION (CRS)

Various studies have verified the importance of communication within organizations and its effects on job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Clampitt and Downs, 1993; Pettit, Goris, and Vaught, 1997; Putti, Aryee and Phua, 1990; Wanguri, 1995). Effective communication within organizations is also considered a source of strategic competitive advantage (Tucker, Meyer and Westerman, 1996). However, communication effectiveness should not be mistaken for communication satisfaction (Thayer, 1968).

A prominent stream of research on communication in formal organizations comprises of communication audits developed and validated in 1970s by Division IV of International Communication Association. Subsequent research has supported the utility of these audits for improvement in organizationally desirable outcomes (Brooks, Callicoat and Siegerdt, 1979; Hargie, Tourish and Wilson, 2002). One component of this audit examines the satisfaction of employees with communication inside organizations. Employees often need information about their roles and tasks and seek feedback on their performance. Moreover, employees may occasionally need to know about various policies and strategic directions of the organization. A healthy environment of communication is also characterized by open discussions and debate on issues related to work and workplace.

Communication relationship satisfaction (CRS) is an umbrella concept to convey the extent to which available information meets the task-related and general information needs of employees (Putti, Aryee and Phua, 1990). Thus communication satisfaction is not about effectiveness of communication but whether the information requirements of an employee have been adequately

met by different sources of communication within an organization.

Hackman and Lawler (1971) observed that feedback about job performance could come from different sources. Subsequent studies found five sources of feedback to an employee – organization, supervisor, coworkers, tasks, and self (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001; Greller and Herold, 1975). Of these, organization, supervisor, and coworkers form important sources of communication satisfaction for employees since these sources are outside the employee's control and feedback would be discretionary.

Guzley (1992) found five factors responsible for the communication climate of an organization: superior-subordinate communication, superior-subordinate candor, quality of information, opportunities of upward communication, and reliability of information. While the first two factors pertain to an employee's communication with supervisor, the other three would also depend on communication relationships with (a) coworkers and (b) the top management. Besides these three facets of relationships, employees may perceive organization as a separate entity and have expectations from the organization *per se*. Employees personify organizations (Levinson, 1965) and form opinions about their relationship with the organization (e.g., perceived organization support; Eisenberger, *et al,* 1986). Hence employees may also form separate perceptions about communication from the organization and evince satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it. Thus it emerges that employees assess their satisfaction with communications inside organizations on four different facets: (a) with supervisors (b) with peers (c) with top management and (d) with the organization as such (Putti, Aryee and Phua, 1990).

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

Justice at workplace is an important variable that influences many critical attitudes and behaviours of employees. Meta-analyses have found that justice perceptions influence job performance, organizational citizenship behaviours, counterproductive work behaviours, withdrawal, job satisfaction, and trust (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt, *et al*, 2001). Hence it becomes important to know the factors shaping organizational justice so that managers can influence the justice perceptions accordingly.

Perceived justice is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing three dimensions, namely distributive, procedural, and interactional justice.

Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the tangible outcomes of a dispute, negotiation, or decision involving two or more parties (Greenberg, 1990). The concept of distributive justice has its origins in social exchange theory (Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964), which emphasizes the role of equity in shaping subsequent exchanges. The equity principle defines a fair exchange as the one in which each party to an exchange receives an outcome in proportion to one's contributions to the exchange. The second theoretical base for distributive justice is the relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1984; Martin, 1981) where on comparison with referent others, individuals may find that they have received less rewards and therefore perceive injustice. Relative deprivation theory deals with upward comparison made by people lower in the hierarchy.

Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the policies, procedures, and criteria used by decision makers in arriving at the outcome of a dispute or negotiation (Lind and Tyler, 1988). Fair procedures should be consistent, unbiased, representative of all parties' interests, and based on accurate information and ethical standards. Fair procedures also allow focal parties to provide input into the decision (Goodwin and Ross, 1992).

Interactional justice refers to the manner in which people are treated during the conflict resolution process (e.g., with courtesy and respect or rudely; Bies and Shapiro, 1988). Previous studies conducted across a variety of situations (e.g., service encounters, job performance evaluations, recruitment) have identified a number of elements associated with interactional justice, such as truthfulness, the provision of an explanation, politeness, friendliness, sensitivity, interest, honesty, empathy, concern, and effort (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985; Ulrich, 1984). We have taken these three forms of justice perceptions (i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional) as variables in this research.

COMMUNICATION RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AND JUSTICE

As previously suggested, communication is likely to play an important role in shaping employees' justice perceptions. In a meta-analysis of the effects of offering explanations on justice, Shaw, Wild and Colquitt (2003) found that providing explanation had a significant impact (corrected meta-analytic correlation = 0.26) on distributive justice. Perceived adequacy of provided explanations had an even stronger impact (corrected meta-analytic correlation = 0.45) on distributive justice. Employees will receive such explanations from their top management and supervisors. Moreover, employees will also evaluate the extent to which organizational communication — such as widely available policy documents, memos, and circulars — on the whole adequately explains the distribution of reward and punishment, allocation and scheduling of work. Hence the satisfaction employees get from their communication with top management, supervisor, and organization is likely to positively influence their distributive justice perceptions.

Hypothesis 1a: Communication relationship satisfaction with top management, supervisor, and organization positively influences distributive justice.

We postulate a hierarchy among these three antecedents of distributive justice. Supervisors may appraise employees' performance, but the ultimate allocation or withdrawal of rewards and/or punishment bears the influence of top management. Employees thus tend to attribute such decisions to the top management and form consonant attitudes especially during downsizing (Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002). Supervisors are expected to serve as the link between top management and employees; hence employees may view a part of what the supervisor communicates as stemming from top management. We expect communication relationship satisfaction with top management to have the strongest impact on the distributive justice perceptions. Employees may seek—and possibly get—clarifications regarding the distribution of rewards and punishments from their supervisors as supervisors are more readily available for such conversations. Communication satisfaction with supervisors will also impact employees' judgment of the adequacy of offered explanations, besides being a source of such explanations. Coming to organizational communication, we believe that it will have the least

impact on distributive justice because of two reasons. Firstly, organizational communication, targeted at a wide audience, is impersonal in nature. Next, organizational communication is often a one-way process, offering little scope for seeking fresh answers or explanations. Hence we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1b: Communication relationship satisfaction with top management (CRS-T) will have the strongest impact on distributive justice followed by communication relationship satisfaction with supervisor (CRS-S), and communication relationship satisfaction with organization (CRS-O).

Greenberg (1986, 1990) suggested that communication can shape procedural justice perceptions. Gopinath and Becker (2000) found that during divestitures and layoffs, communication from top management significantly shaped procedural justice perceptions. The zero-order correlations between communication and procedural justice varied from 0.38 to 0.47 (all correlations significant at 1% level). The communication from top management included such items as summaries of questions and answers sent through e-mail, discussion in open forums and meetings, personal meetings, and bulletin board messages.

Organizational policies allowing employees to voice their concerns or soliciting employees' inputs in decision-making provide employees with the feeling that they have been heard even if their inputs could not be implemented (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1996). Several researchers (Dipboye and Pontbriand, 1981; Greenberg, 1987; Korsgaard and Roberson, 1995; Landy, Barnes-Farrell and Cleveland, 1980) have shown that the opportunity to have a voice in decision making or in performance appraisal process affects the perceptions of procedural fairness. Similarly, Greenberg (1986) found that the opportunity to challenge/rebut evaluations, among other factors, determined procedural justice. These aspects of communication (e.g., voicing concerns, having a say in decision making) are reflected in the satisfaction employees would have with organizational communication.

As mentioned previously, Moideenkutty, *et al* (2006) found that communication satisfaction with supervisor was significantly correlated with procedural justice ($r = 0.64, p < 0.01$). Bies, Shapiro and Cummings (1988) found that when supervisors gave credible explanations, sub-

ordinates' perceptions of procedural justice got enhanced despite having negative initial outcomes. Yamaguchi (2005) found that rational ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) and soft ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) interpersonal communication by supervisors significantly influenced procedural justice. Rational interpersonal communication consisted of tactics such as reasoning, conditional promise, and disclosure, while soft interpersonal communication comprised of tactics such as sympathy, praise, and friendly manner. In their meta-analytic study, Shaw, Wild and Colquitt (2003) demonstrated that providing explanation influenced procedural justice (corrected correlation = 0.32) and the adequacy of provided explanations had an even stronger impact on procedural justice (corrected correlation = 0.54). We believe that supervisors will be the most obvious source of explanations for employees, and may provide such explanations even when not explicitly asked. The above discussion leads us to believe that the satisfaction employees get from their communication with top management, organization, and supervisor is likely to positively influence their procedural justice perceptions.

Hypothesis 2a: Communication relationship satisfaction with top management, organization, and supervisor positively influences procedural justice.

The statements from top management as organizational representatives provide the strongest cues regarding the willingness of organization to follow consistent procedures and make unbiased decisions based on accurate information. As procedural justice pertains to organizational matters as a whole, we believe that organizational communication is the next most important antecedent. Lastly, communication with supervisor is the least important among these three antecedents as supervisors do not have much space to play a significant role in shaping policies, procedures, and hence procedural justice perception. As the work of Shaw, Wild and Colquitt (2003) suggests, their role is limited to offering *post-facto* explanations. Hence, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2b: Communication relationship satisfaction with top management (CRS-T) will have the strongest impact on procedural justice followed by communication relationship satisfaction with organization (CRS-O), and communication relationship satisfaction with supervisor (CRS-S).

Interactional justice is an important component of relationship between employees and supervisors (Moorman, 1991). Listening to employees, empathizing with them, and explaining decisions are examples of interpersonal behaviours that lead to interactional justice perceptions (Bies and Moag, 1986; Skarlicki and Folger, 1997; Tyler and Bies, 1989). These behaviours can be shown by immediate supervisors—in cases of routine decisions—or members of top management in cases of more infrequent yet important decisions. While peers do not make decisions, their willingness to listen to and empathize with their colleagues also impacts interactional justice perceptions. As Lamertz (2002) argued, employees' informal communications with peers shape the perceptions of interactional justice. Hence we expect that communication relationship satisfaction with supervisors, top management, and peers influence interactional justice perception.

Hypothesis 3a: Communication relationship satisfaction with supervisor, top management, and peers positively influences interactional justice.

The relative importance of these three antecedents emerges as we focus more closely on the nature of interactional justice. While supervisors may not have much role in the shaping of policies and procedures for the organization, they are the ones responsible for their communication and implementation. As a result, employees will interact more frequently with supervisors regarding organizational functioning and decision making. Due to more frequent encounters, communication with supervisors is likely to have the strongest influence on interactional justice perception. The less frequent communication with top management will accordingly have less impact on employees' interactional justice perceptions. Interactions with peers may convey decisions, but adequate explanation may not be provided. Hence communication with peers will have the smallest influence—among these three antecedents—on interactional justice. Hence we have formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3b: Communication relationship satisfaction with supervisor (CRS-S) will have the strongest impact on interactional justice followed by communication relationship satisfaction with top management (CRS-T) and communication relationship satisfaction with peers (CRS-P).

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of working executives from diverse organizations. The questionnaires were administered personally to 320 executives. The respondents were told about the purpose of this research and the voluntary nature of their participation. To encourage candid responses, both verbal and written assurances of confidentiality were given to potential respondents. On an average, it took twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire. A total of 294 responses (91.87%) were received of which 292 (91.25%) were usable. Approximately 33.1 per cent of the respondents were females and the rest (67%) were males. The average age of respondents was 32.5 years.

Measures

CRS was measured by Organization Communication Relationship (OCR) instrument developed by the International Communication Association. Following Putti, Aryee and Phua (1990), who used this instrument in their research, we selected the 19-item scale because of its substantial reliability estimate (above 0.70) and its ability to measure CRS across all the four dimensions. Using a 5-point Likert-type format the response categories ranged from 1 meaning "very little" to 5 meaning "very much." Three items measured CRS with the peers (CRS-P), nine items measured CRS with the supervisor (CRS-S), three items measured CRS with the top management (CRS-T), and four items measured CRS with the organization (CRS-O). A sample item from the CRS scale is: "I am free to disagree with my immediate superior."

We used the scale of Niehoff and Moorman (1993) to measure justice. It has reported reliabilities above 0.90 for all the three dimensions. Distributive justice (DJ) was measured using five items assessing the fairness of different work outcomes, including pay level, work schedule, work load, and job responsibilities. A sample item on the distributive justice scale is, "I consider my work load to be quite fair." Procedural justice (PJ) was measured with six items assessing the degree to which accurate and unbiased information is gathered and employees are allowed to appeal against decisions. A sample item on the procedural justice scale is "all job decisions are applied consistently across all affected employees." Interactional justice (IJ) was measured through nine items. A sample item on the procedural justice scale is, "the general manager offers adequate justification for decisions made about my job." All items used a seven-point response format.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and zero-order correlations of the study variables. All scales had satisfactory reliabilities (above 0.70) and hence we could use them as variables in further analysis (Hair, *et al*, 2006). As expected, CRS with top management, supervisor, and organization significantly correlated with distributive justice ($r = 0.53$, 0.40 and 0.42 respectively; all correlations significant at 1%). Similarly CRS-T, CRS-O, and CRS-S significantly correlated with procedural justice ($r = 0.54$, 0.53, and 0.53 respectively, all correlations significant at 1%). Lastly, CRS-S, CRS-T, and CRS-P also exhibited significant correlations with interactional justice ($r = 0.62$, 0.53 and 0.42 respectively, all correlations significant at 1%).

Since we had collected data on both the antecedents and consequences from the same source using survey method, we tested for the possibility of common method-common source variance affecting our results. Following Harman's one factor test reported by Podsakoff and

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviations, Reliability and Correlations among Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	CRS-P	CRS-S	CRS-T	CRS-O	DJ	PJ	IJ
CRS-P	4.10	0.87	0.86						
CRS-S	3.99	0.95	0.70**	0.95					
CRS-T	3.70	1.05	0.51**	0.57**	0.90				
CRS-O	3.79	0.88	0.56**	0.67**	0.66**	0.84			
DJ	4.92	1.22	0.28**	0.40**	0.53**	0.42**	0.85		
PJ	4.87	1.26	0.33**	0.53**	0.54**	0.53**	0.64**	0.92	
IJ	5.03	1.29	0.42**	0.62**	0.53**	0.55**	0.62**	0.84**	0.96

** $p < 0.01$

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Organ (1986), we factor analysed all the 39 items employed to measure the antecedent and consequence variables. The unrotated solution yielded six factors with eigen value more than one, and the first factor explained 47.56 per cent of the variance. Hence we could not conclude that the common-source-common-method variance problem would affect our hypothesis testing.

We used hierarchical regression to test hypotheses and analyse the order of importance of antecedent variables (Keith, 2006). We entered the antecedents of each justice dimension in a sequence governed by their hypothesized order of importance. We have presented the results of hierarchical regression for each of the dependent variables separately.

Table 2 shows the results of hierarchical regression to predict distributive justice. As per our hypothesis, we entered CRS-T in the first step followed by CRS-S and CRS-O in the second and third steps respectively. In hierarchical regression, we consider the change in R^2 to determine if an antecedent variable is important (Keith, 2006). As one can see from Table 2, entering the most important hypothesized predictor of distributive justice, i.e., CRS-T, led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.278$, $F[1,290] = 111.53$, $p < 0.001$). Entering the second most important predictor, i.e., CRS-S, also led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.013$, $F[1,289] = 5.42$, $p < 0.05$). However, the entry of the last variable, CRS-O, did not yield any significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $F[1,288] = 0.62$, $p = 0.43$). Hence, the results provide partial support to hypotheses 1a and 1b. The satisfaction that employees experience based on their communication with top management and supervisor shapes their perception of distributive justice.

Among these two, employees accord more importance to the communication from top management. It appears that the more general and broad organizational communication plays no role in employees' perception of distributive justice.

Table 3 shows the results of testing hypotheses 2a and 2b. As per our hypothesis, we entered CRST-T in the first step, followed by CRS-O and CRS-S in the second and third steps respectively. As shown in Table 3, entering the most important hypothesized predictor of procedural justice, i.e., CRS-T, led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.289$, $F[1,290] = 117.623$, $p < 0.001$). Entering the second most important predictor, i.e., CRS-O, again led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.055$, $F[1,289] = 24.133$, $p < 0.001$). The entry of the last variable, CRS-S, also yielded significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.034$, $F[1,288] = 15.593$, $p < 0.001$). Hence the results fully support hypotheses 2a and 2b. Communication relationship satisfaction with top management, organization, and supervisor emerged as predictors of procedural justice in that order. Employees expect to have their voice heard before decisions of consequence are made, and to have access to certain procedures of appeal when decisions are deemed unfair. They accord the highest importance to what the top management says while evaluating if their expectations are met or not. Then they look for satisfying communication from organization in the form of policies and procedures and lastly they consider their communication with supervisor to assess to what extent fair procedures were adopted to arrive at important decisions. It is interesting to note that employees include communication from all three sources—organization, top management,

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Distributive Justice

Model	Variables Entered	R^2	ΔR^2	df1	df2	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	CRS-T	0.278	0.278	1	290	111.53	0.000
2	CRS-S	0.291	0.013	1	289	5.42	0.021
3	CRS-O	0.293	0.002	1	288	0.62	0.431

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Procedural Justice

Model	Variables Entered	R^2	ΔR^2	df1	df2	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	CRS-T	0.289	0.289	1	290	117.623	0.000
2	CRS-O	0.343	0.055	1	289	24.133	0.000
3	CRS-S	0.377	0.034	1	288	15.593	0.000

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interactional Justice

Model	Variables Entered	R^2	ΔR^2	df1	df2	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	CRS-S	0.387	0.387	1	290	182.767	0.000
2	CRS-T	0.430	0.043	1	289	21.937	0.000
3	CRS-P	0.434	0.004	1	288	2.214	0.138

and supervisor—to form perceptions of procedural justice. Hence organizations need to have an integrated communication strategy not just for external stakeholders but also for internal customers, i.e., their employees.

Table 4 shows the results of testing hypotheses 3a and 3b. As hypothesized, we entered CRS-S in the first step, and then CRS-T and CRS-P in the second and third steps respectively. As shown in Table 4, entering the most important hypothesized predictor of interactional justice, i.e., CRS-S, led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.387$, $F[1,290] = 182.767$, $p < 0.001$). Entering the second most important predictor, i.e., CRS-T, again led to a statistically significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.043$, $F[1,289] = 21.937$, $p < 0.001$). However, the entry of the last predictor (CRS-P) did not result in a significant increase in the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.004$, $F[1,288] = 2.214$, $p = 0.138$). Hence, these results partially support hypotheses 3a and 3b. Communication relationship satisfaction with supervisor and top management emerged as the two most important predictors of interactional justice in that order. The frequent interactions with the supervisor provide the most powerful basis to form perceptions of interactional justice. The infrequent, yet critical interactions with top management also influence the assessment of interactional justice. However, peers do not play any role in shaping interactional justice.

We believe that the outcomes of justice are too many and too important to ignore. To illustrate, justice perceptions lead to job performance and organizational citizenship behaviour (cf. Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001), while lack of justice leads employees to retaliate against the organizations (cf. Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). Hence, it is important for managers to understand what drives the justice perceptions of employees. Our research provides evidence to suggest that managers can use communication as a potent tool to positively influence fairness perceptions. Specifically, communication from the top management and supervisors, along with general

organizational communication, shapes employees' justice perceptions.

As a parsimonious overall model, we can say that CRS with top management and supervisor emerge as key communication variables which impact all types of justice perceptions. However, we have also found a noteworthy distinction between top management and supervisor in their potential to influence justice perceptions. Previous researchers have attached a lot of importance to the role of supervisor in employees' attitudes and behaviours (cf. Eisenberger, *et al*, 2002). A supervisor is perceived as a representative of the organization and actions by the supervisor are perceived as actions by the organization. Our research suggests that while the supervisor is an important entity in ensuring interactional justice to employees, top management plays a far more important role in ensuring perceptions of distributive and procedural justice to an employee.

This research is particularly relevant considering the recent economic slowdown. Many organizations are resorting to layoffs to handle this economic downturn. Amex, Jet airways, and Reliance Retail are some organizations that have laid off employees, though Jet Airways hired them back. We have reasons to believe that the two main variables of our research, satisfaction with communication and fairness perception of employees, play important roles in any layoff. In a study of an Indian manufacturing organization, Nirmala and Akhilesh (2006) found that implementers, survivors, and victims of layoff differed in their assessment of the content and manner of communication during the implementation of layoff. While the implementers of layoff expressed more favourable opinions, the survivors viewed the communication less favourably, and people who were laid off—termed as victims—viewed the content and manner of communication the least favourably. Based on our results, we can postulate that such perceived differences in the content and manner of communication will lead to differences in the assessment of fairness.

We also have evidence to believe that perceptions of fairness drive important attitudinal and behavioural outcomes after layoff. To illustrate, Brockner (1990) found that the lack of fairness perception during layoff adversely impacted the commitment and performance of layoff survivors. Fairness perception has been found to be an important predictor of layoff victims' attitudes and behaviours as well. For example, Wanberg, Bunce, and Gavin (1999) demonstrated that when laid off employees perceived the layoff process as fair, they were likely to (1) endorse their terminating organization, and (2) avoid suing their terminating organization. Similarly, Lind, *et al* (2000) illustrated that perceived fairness reduced the intention to file wrongful termination claims and actual filing of such claims. Gopinath and Becker (2000) too found that fairness perceptions during divestitures led to more favourable employee attitudes such as trust and commitment.

Given these pieces of evidence from literature and our own findings, we posit that the top management and supervisors should communicate properly in order to enhance the fairness perception of employees during layoff. And such improvement in fairness perceptions is likely to result in more favourable attitudes and behaviours of both survivors as well as laid-off employees.

This study has all the limitations found in a cross-sectional study. However, the strength of this study lies in the fact that it moved beyond the apparent notions of linkage between communication and justice, and researched at the disaggregated level of different dimensions of communication satisfaction and justice. Going forward, however, we see two important research agendas. Firstly, research should help us know what instances of communication increase or decrease satisfaction of employees with such communication. Such knowledge should help managers design appropriate communication policies. Next, we suspect that the communication satisfaction from different facets—for example, with top management and supervisor—may interact and impact the perceptions of justice. We need to understand interactions among which facets of communication would be a better candidate to offer us maximum predictive power *vis-à-vis* justice and other attitudes and behaviours of employees.

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