



Relationship between performance appraisal communication, procedural justice and job satisfaction

Azman Ismail¹, Nur Asilah Kithuru Mohamed², Mohamad Rahmad Rayee³

¹Faculty of Economics & Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, ²Institute of Islamic Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, ³Faculty of Science Cognitive & Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

Correspondence: Nur Asilah Kithuru Mohamed (email: asilah.kithuru@gmail.com)

Abstract

Performance appraisal communication is a segment of performance appraisal management denoting the process of sharing and transferring appraisal information from appraiser to appraisee either face-to-face or through technical and communication gadgets. The traditional performance appraisal was based on past performance of the employees, single-source feedback, non-participation style in decision making and boss-centred approach. It did not consider the development aspects of the employee performance as it was preoccupied with judging the performance of the organization as a whole. To address the drawback of this approach, modern approaches were introduced in the era of globalization which centred on humanistic perspectives, system thinking and contingency views. In the light of the new approaches, this paper examines the effect of performance appraisal communication and procedural justice on job satisfaction using 99 usable questionnaires collected from employees who work at public tertiary educational institutions in East Malaysia. The outcomes of stepwise regression analysis showed that relationship between feedback, treatment and procedural justice significantly correlated with job satisfaction. In sum, this result demonstrates that the ability of appraisers to appropriately provide feedback and treatment will strongly invoke appraisees' feelings of procedural justice and this may lead to an enhanced job satisfaction in the organization studied.

Keywords: appraisees' feelings, employee feedback, employee performance, job satisfaction, performance appraisal communication, procedural justice

Introduction

Performance appraisal is an important area under performance management that has been widely researched and practiced continuously by almost all kind of organizations such as business school, business houses, government and non-government organizations (Iqbal, 2012). Organizational perspective often define performance appraisal as a group of employees' behaviours, traits and output are being evaluated individually in a specified period of time usually using yearly assessment by their managers (Esfahani et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2011, 2014; Karimi et al., 2011; Rowland & Hall, 2013). Organizations practice performance appraisal as a method to identify employees' strength and weakness, provide acknowledgment to high performing employees, retain and assess human resource and update human resource information system in short term period where in a long term period, it is use to plan employees' career development, staff motivation programs, staff performance management and staff attitudinal changes (Esfahani et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2013, 2014; Kampkotter, 2014; Siti Salwa et al., 2015; Warokka et al., 2012).

Formal performance appraisal on individual started in the era dynasty of Wei in China from 221 to 265 A.D. The emperor employed an *Imperial Rater* to rate or appraises the performance of his official family

members (Monappa & Saiyadain, 1997). In 1883 before World War I, New York City Civil Service introduced a formal appraisal programme to evaluate their employees' performance. Military and government organizations used performance appraisal primarily because of the necessity to recognize the top performers to higher organizational level, large size, hierarchical structure and geographic dispersal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Wiese & Buckley, 1998). In Malaysia, the implementation of performance appraisal began a couple of decades ago. In 1992, new performance appraisal system was introduced in Malaysia that focusing on public sector to achieve higher productivity and education quality (Phin, 2015). Many researchers give more attention on the progress of performance appraisal in Malaysia such as Poon (2004), study about effect of performance rating manipulated by the raters will decrease in job satisfaction and then led to intention to quit the jobs. Other example is Ismail et al. (2014) study found that employees' feels satisfied whenever the managers provide clear explanation appraisal practices and adequate feedback in determining performance score. Others studies such as Ismail et al. (2011, 2013) found out that performance appraisal effect on individuals behaviours and attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction, procedural justice).

Traditionally, performance appraisal was used based on past performance of the employees which has directive style where it applying single-source feedback, non participation style in decision making and boss centred approach (Ismail et al., 2014; Shahraji et al., 2012). It did not consider the development aspects of the employee performance and its primary concern is to judge the performance of the organization as a whole by the past performance of its employee. This approach is suitable to evaluate employees' productivity in organizations that operate in stable and less competition environments (Ismail et al., 2014). To address the drawback of this approach, modern approaches were introduced in the era of globalization based on humanistic perspective, system thinking and contingency view (Ismail et al., 2014). Modern performance appraisal approach is a structured formal interaction between appraisers and appraisees which usually takes the form of a regular interview (Phin, 2015) which is focusing more on using a feedback process to helps to strengthen the relationship between appraisers and appraisees and to improve communication throughout the organization (Phin, 2015). Besides that, this approach evaluate employees performance from multiple perspective to obtain accurate and reliable information for developing human resource knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes (Ismail et al., 2013). This appraisal approach allows manager to use communication style in achieving performance appraisal goal.

Performance appraisal communication is a segment of performance appraisal management where it is the process of sharing and transferring appraisals information from appraiser to appraisees either face-to-face or through technical and communication gadgets (Ahmad & Bujang, 2013). It consists of two salient features which are feedback and treatment (Cook & Crossman, 2004; Ismail et al., 2011, 2013, 2014; Md Nor et al., 2014). Feedback is often define as face-to-face session involving the employee and supervisor in delivering the information about appraisees performance such as provide constructive advice to appraisees about possible area for improvement, listen appraisees' justification and discussing the appraisal outcomes (Elicker et al., 2006; Ismail et al., 2011, 2014). Whereas treatment defines as comfortable style used by appraiser or manager in dealing with appraisee for example explanation, discussion and decision making styles (Ismail et al., 2013; Md Nor et al., 2014).

Extant research about performance appraisal management reveals that practice of communication style in allocating performance ratings may have significant impact on appraisees' attitudes and behaviour, especially job satisfaction (Cook & Crossman, 2004; Ismail et al., 2014; Kampkotter, 2014; Karimi et al., 2011; Md Nor et al., 2014). Job satisfaction can be define as enjoyable or excitement of doing their job (Ismail et al., 2011, 2014; Md Nor et al., 2014).

Interestingly, a thorough review of performance appraisal literature reveals that practice of communication style in allocating performance rating is indirectly influenced by procedural justice (Ismail et al., 2011, 2013). Procedural justice defines as issues of fairness concerning about process, methods and mechanisms used to determine the outcomes of employees' performance appraisal (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Within a performance appraisal framework, the ability of appraisers to properly using communication style while evaluating may lead to an increased feelings of procedural justice in

organization. As a result, it may lead to greater job satisfaction in organization (Altahayneh, 2014; Fields et al., 2000; Iqbal, 2013; Ismail et al., 2013; Phin, 2015; Sareshkeh et al., 2012; Sindhav et al., 2006).

Although the nature of this relationship is significant, little is known about the mediating effect of procedural justice in performance appraisal models. Many scholars argue that the role of procedural justice as mediator is less emphasized in previous study because they neglected the role of human affective in influencing the effect of performance appraisal communication on individual attitudes and behaviours in the workplace besides of they have much described the performance appraisal characteristics (Sabeen & Mehboob, 2008; Sogra et al., 2009). As a result, it did not provide sufficient guidelines that can be employ by practitioners to plan effective performance appraisal policies in order to improve employees' feelings of procedural justice in responsive organizations (Cloutier & Vilhuber, 2008; Kavanagh et al., 2007). Hence, it motivates the researchers to further explore the nature of this relationship.

Purpose of study

This study has two major objectives: first, to examine the mediating effect of procedural justice in the relationship between feedback and job satisfaction. Second is to examine the mediating effect of procedural justice in the relationship between treatment and job satisfaction.

Literature review

Recent studies used an indirect effects model to investigate the role of communication in performance appraisal system using different samples, such as 783 employees work in Hong Kong (Fields et al., 2000), 775 passengers in a medium-sized airport in the Midwest, United States (Sindhav et al., 2006), 131 employees work in Iranian Sports Federation (Sareshkeh, 2012), 129 employees in Malaysian post office (Ismail et al., 2013), 130 employees working at educational instate in Pakistan (Iqbal, 2013), 166 employees who work in public school of Zarqa, Jordan (Altahayneh et al., 2014), 171 employees work at private education industry in Malaysia (Phin, 2015). These studies found that employees who perceived justice about the ability of appraisers to practice communication styles in allocating performance ratings had been an important predictor of job satisfaction in the organization (Altahayneh, 2014; Fields et al., 2000; Iqbal, 2013; Ismail et al., 2013; Phin, 2015; Sareshkeh et al., 2012; Sindhav et al., 2006).

These findings are consistent with the notion of due process appraisal system theory and in control theory. Due process appraisal system theory suggests three justice characteristics; adequate notice (e.g., explanation, discussion and feedback about performance criteria), fair hearing (e.g., informing performance assessment and their procedures through a formal review session) and judgment based on evidence (e.g., applying consistent performance criteria and honesty and fairness principles, as well as providing better explanation about performance ratings and reward allocation) (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Besides that, in control theory that developed by Thibaut and Walker (1975) stated that individuals prefer to participate in decision making process rather than being passive recipients. Based on these justice theories, if employees have perceived justice about the performance appraisal systems using communication style approach by appraisers may strongly invoke employees' job satisfaction (Altahayneh, 2014; Fields et al., 2000; Iqbal, 2013; Ismail et al., 2013; Phin, 2015; Sareshkeh et al., 2012; Sindhav et al., 2006).

The literature has been used as a foundation to develop a conceptual framework for this study as shown in Figure 1.

Performance appraisal communication

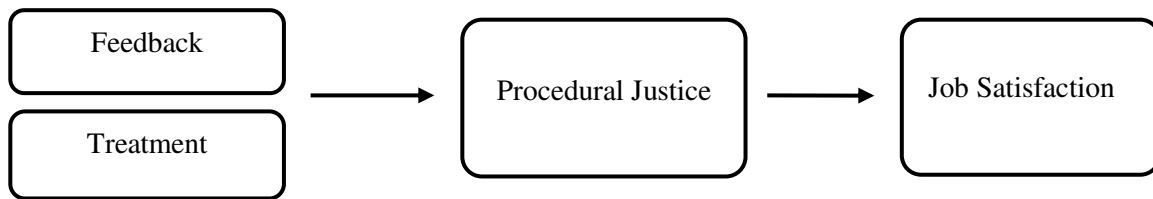


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Based on the framework, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: Procedural justice positively mediates the relationship between feedback and job satisfaction.

H2: Procedural justice positively mediates the relationship between treatment and job satisfaction.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a cross-sectional method which allowed the researchers to integrate the performance appraisal research literature, the in-depth interview, pilot study and the actual survey as the main procedure to collect data for this study. Benefit of using this method may improve the inadequacy of single method and increase the ability to gather accurate, less bias and high quality data (Cresswell, 2014; Ismail et al., 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The context of this study is at public tertiary educational institutions in east Malaysia. For confidential reasons, the name of these institutions is kept anonymous. These institutions are built to develop knowledgeable society as demanded by the government. They are providing many courses for diplomas', bachelors' and postgraduates' such as medic, engineering, social sciences, accountancy, information technologies and others. At the first step of data collection, the researchers had drafted semi-structured interview questions covering three major issues: 1) features of practice of communication style in performance appraisal systems, 2) features of procedural justice, and 3) features of job satisfaction. Secondly, a purposive sampling technique was used to identify several experienced interviewees, i.e., 10 managerial staff and experienced supporting staff who had worked in the institution. Thirdly, the in-depth interview was conducted involving the interviewees in order to understand the nature and characteristics of managers' communication in performance appraisal systems, procedural justice and job satisfaction, as well as the relationship between such variables in the organization. Thus, the information gathered from the interview was recorded, categorized according to the research variables, and constantly compared to the related literature review in order to obtain a clear understanding of the particular phenomena under study and put the research results in a proper context. The results of the triangulated process were used as a guideline to develop the content and format of survey questionnaires for a pilot study. Finally, a pilot study was done through a discussion on the pilot questionnaires with the interviewed respondents. Their views were sought to verify the content and format of survey questionnaires for an actual surveys. In order to increase the validity and reliability of research findings, a back translation technique was employed to translate the survey questionnaires into English and Malay languages (Cresswell, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Measures

The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections. Firstly, feedback had 10 items and treatment had 5 items that were developed based on the workplace of performance appraisal research literature (Brown et al., 2010; Ismail et al., 2011; Kalb et al., 2006; Kelly et al., 2008; Sabeen & Mehboob, 2008; Sogra et al., 2009). The dimensions used to measure feedback were explanation, clarification, exchange

experience, praise, and advice. Conversely, the dimensions used to measure treatment are discussion, suggestion, debatable, and appeal. Secondly, procedural justice had 4 items that were developed based on procedural justice literature (Cloutier & Vilhuber, 2008; Ismail et al., 2011, 2013; Kavanagh et al., 2007). These items discover the issues of performance appraisal criteria and procedures. Thirdly, job satisfaction section had 7 items that were developed based on Warr's (1979) job satisfaction scale. The dimensions used to measure this construct are satisfaction with intrinsic and extrinsic job facets. All the items used in the questionnaires were measured using a 7-item scale ranging from "strongly disagree/dissatisfied" (1) to "strongly agree/satisfied" (7). Demographic variables were used as the controlling variable because this study focused on employee attitudes.

Sample

The unit analysis for this study is employees who have worked at public tertiary educational institutions in east Malaysia. Prior to conducting the survey, the researchers have obtained permission to conduct this study from the HR office of the studied organization. 200 survey questionnaires were distributed using a convenience sampling technique to employees who work in different faculties and departments in the organization because the list of registered employees was not given to the researchers and this situation did not allow the researchers to choose randomly respondents in the organizations. Of the total number, 99 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding 49.5 percent response rate. Participants answered the survey questionnaires based on their consents and on a voluntary basis. The number of sample met the acceptable standards for using inference statistics (Ismail et al., 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Data analysis

The data gathered from the survey questionnaires were analysed using a Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 18.0. The process begins with exploratory factor analysis to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement scale (Hair et al., 2006; Ismail et al., 2012; Nunally & Bernstein, 1994). Factor analysis was done for all items representing the research variables followed by Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Test (KMO), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS), eigenvalue, variance explained and Cronbach alpha (α).

Results

Sample profile

Table 1 shows respondent profile, the majority of respondents were male (55.6%), ages between 30 to 39 years (39.4%), have Malaysian Examination Certificate (SPM) (37.4%), working experience from 1 to 5 years (30.3%), salary from RM1001 to RM2000 (48.5%), and working in administration division (45.5%).

Table 1. Profile of respondents (n = 99)

Sample Profile	Sub Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	55.6
	Female	44	44.4
Age	Less than 20 years	1	1.0
	20 - 29 years	35	35.4
	30 - 39 years	39	39.4
	40 - 49 years	20	20.2
	More than 49 years	4	4.0
Education	MCE/SPM	37	37.4
	HSC/STPM	9	9.1
	Diploma	11	11.1
	Bachelor	26	26.3
	Others	14	14.1
Length of Service	Less than 1 years	14	14.1
	1 - 5 years	30	30.3
	6 - 10 years	26	26.3
	11 - 15 years	14	14.1
	16 - 20 years	6	6.1
	More than 20 years	9	9.1
Salary	Less than RM 1000	17	17.2
	RM 1001 – RM 2000	48	48.5
	RM 2001 – RM 3000	14	14.1
	More than RM 3001	20	20.2
Position	Administration	45	45.5
	Technical	21	21.2
	academic	33	33.3

Note:

STPM/HSC : Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia/Higher School Certificate

SPM/MCE : Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysia Certificate of Education

Validity and reliability analysis

Table 2 shows the result for validity and reliability analysis for measurement scales. The result shows all variables that used for this research is exceeded the minimum standard of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's value of 0.6 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. Besides that, all research variables also exceeded the minimum standard of factor loading 0.5.

Table 2. The validity and reliability analysis for measurement scales

Measure	No. of items	Factor loadings	Alpha reliability
Feedback	10	0.64 to 0.83	0.92
Treatment	5	0.61 to 0.87	0.82
Procedural Justice	4	0.53 to 0.78	0.62
Job satisfaction	7	0.54 to 0.85	0.89
Bartlett's test of Sphericity = 1471.47, p=0.000			
Eigenvalue = 9.03			
Variance explained = 34.73			

Analysis of the constructs

Table 3 shows the result of Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics for the research variables. Mean value for the variables are from 4.9 to 6.0, signifying that the feedback, treatment, procedural justice and job satisfaction are ranging from high (4.9) to highest level (6.0). The correlation coefficients for the relationship between independent variable (i.e., feedback and treatment), mediating variable (i.e., procedural justice) and the dependent variable (i.e., job satisfaction) were less than 0.9, indicating the data was not affected by serious collinearity (Hair et al., 2006; Ismail et al., 2011, 2013).

Table 3. Pearson correlation analysis and descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Pearson Correlation			
			Feedback	Treatment	Procedural Justice	Job Satisfaction
Feedback	5.7	0.67	1			
Treatment	6.0	0.65	0.58**	1		
Procedural Justice	4.9	0.49	-0.23	0.59	1	
Job Satisfaction	5.7	0.73	0.47**	0.47**	0.17	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Outcomes of testing hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2

Table 4a and 5a shows that performance appraisal communication (e.g. feedback and treatment) insignificantly correlated with procedural justice ($\beta = -0.02, p > 0.05$; $\beta = 0.06, p > 0.05$), signifying that communication in performance appraisal did not act as an important determinant of procedural justice. Table 4b and 5b shows the result of direct effect which is indicates two findings that are; first, feedback significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$). Second, treatment significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$). In sum, feedback and treatment are important predictors of job satisfaction in the studied organization.

Table 4c and 5c shows the outcome of multiple regression analysis that were produced based on mediating model testing procedure as advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986). Table 4c shows that relationship between feedback and procedural justice positively and significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$), therefore H1 supported. Table 5c shows that relationship between treatment and procedural justice significantly correlated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.14, p > 0.05$), therefore H2 supported. This result is consistent with Baron and Kenny (1986)'s mediating model testing condition where the previously significant effect of treatment was reduced to non-significance after the inclusion of

procedural justice into the analysis. Statistically, this finding confirms that procedural justice does act as a mediating variable in the relationship between performance appraisal communication and job satisfaction.

Table 4a. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between feedback and procedural justice

Independent Variables	Mediating Variables (Procedural Justice)
Feedback	-0.02
R ²	0.00
Adjusted R ²	-0.01
F	0.05

Table 4b. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between feedback and job satisfaction

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable (Job Satisfaction)
Feedback	0.47***
R ²	0.22
Adjusted R ²	0.21
F	26.87***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4c. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between feedback, procedural justice and job satisfaction

Variables	Dependent Variable (Job Satisfaction) step 1
Feedback	0.47***
Procedural Justice	0.18*
R ²	0.25
Adjusted R ²	0.23
F	15.83***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5a. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between treatments and procedural justice

Independent Variables	Mediating Variables (Procedural Justice)
Treatment	0.06
R ²	0.00
Adjusted R ²	-0.01
F	0.33

Table 5b. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between treatment and job satisfaction

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable (Job Satisfaction)
Treatment	0.47***
R ²	0.22
Adjusted R ²	0.21
F	26.80***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5c. The results of multiple regressions showing the relationship between treatment, procedural justice and job satisfaction

Variables	Dependent Variable (Job Satisfaction) step 1
Treatment	0.46***
Procedural Justice	0.14
R ²	0.24
Adjusted R ²	0.22
F	14.80***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion and implication

The findings of this study reveal that procedural justice acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between performance appraisal communication and job satisfaction in the studied organization. In the organizational contexts, performance appraisal perform by employer to employees is to meet organization objective. Performance appraisal communication is one of method used to increase employees' understanding and make it easier to perform the process. For instance, employer often used formal or informal feedback to employees (e.g., face-to-face and group discussion) and appropriate treatment (e.g., explanation and decision making style) when dealing with appraiser's complaints and demand. According to interviewed respondents, these communication practices have increased employees' feeling of justice about the procedures of allocating performance ratings and this may lead to an increased in job satisfaction.

This study provides three major implications: theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology, and practical contribution. In terms of theoretical contribution, the findings of this study reveal an important outcome which is procedural justice mediates performance appraisal communication (i.e., feedback and treatment) on job satisfaction. This result is consistent with studies by Altahayneh, (2014), Fields et al., (2000), Iqbal, (2013), Phin (2015), Sareshkeh et al., (2012), Sindhav et al., (2006). With respect to the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaires used in this study have met the acceptable standards of the validity and reliability analyses. Thus, it could lead to produce accurate and reliable research findings.

Regarding practical contribution, the findings of this study may be used as guidelines by management to improve the use of communication style in increasing the effectiveness of performance appraisal process and outcomes in organizations. In order to meet such objectives, management needs to pay more attentions on the following suggestions: firstly, managers need to take high initiatives to inculcate spiritual values and good moral ethics in their souls. Secondly, communication openness and participation style in performance appraisal decisions need to be highly encouraged in order to increase employees understanding and decrease their misjudgments about performance appraisal. These suggestions will have a great potential to decrease misconduct and increase positive personal outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, trust, commitment, cooperation and performance). Thus, these positive outcomes may lead to supported organizational and human resource department's strategies and goals.

Conclusion

This study tested a theoretical framework that was developed based on the workplace performance appraisal research literature. The measurement scales used in this study satisfactorily met the requirements of the validity and reliability analyses. The outcomes of hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that procedural justice does act as a mediator between performance appraisal communication

(i.e., feedback and treatment) on job satisfaction in the studied organization. This result has also supported and broadened the research literature mostly published in Western and non-Western countries. These results further suggest that the ability of employer to appropriately implement performance appraisal communication in allocating performance ratings will help to enhance subsequent positive subordinates' outcomes (e.g., supports, appreciation, commitment, performance, and ethics). Thus, it may lead to maintain and achieved organizational strategic vision and missions in era of global competition.

The conclusion drawn from the results of this study should acknowledge several limitations. First, a cross-sectional research design was used to gather data at one point within the period of study. This may not be captured the development issue or causal connections between variables of interest. Second, this study only focused on particular elements of performance appraisal communication and neglected other important factor such as performance criteria, political behaviour, and leadership style. Thirdly, all subjects in this study worked for the public tertiary educational institutions in east Malaysia settings. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other organizations. Fourthly, other performance appraisal outcomes such as job commitment, performance and turnover that are significant for organizations and employees are not discussed in this study. Finally, convenient sampling technique was used to collect data on sample of a public tertiary educational institutions in east Malaysia. These limitations may decrease the ability of generalizing the results of this study to other organizational settings.

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