

**Multi-Dimensions of Organizational Justice and Affective Commitment in a Collegiate Team Sport Setting: The Moderating Effect of Group Cohesion**

*Jae-Pil Ha, University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

*Sun Kang, University of Louisville*

*Jae-Hyun Ha, The College of Saint Rose*

*Keunsu Han, Towson University*

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The perception of fairness is a key construct in organizational justice, directly affecting group members' attitudes and behaviors. . For instance, it is plausible that an authority figure's unfair treatment of members in an organization or group often gives rise to a lack of effort and corporation (Whisenant & Smucker, 2009). Likewise, in a team sport setting, athletes' perceptions of fairness by coaches are likely to either negatively or positively influence their attitudes and behaviors in a sport team. For example, athletes who have unfair perceptions (i.e., negative perceptions of fairness) in their teams would show detrimental behaviors, such as group fragmentation, drop out of the teams, and withholding effort (Jordan, Gillentine, & Hunt 2004), and negatively affect the team's athletic performance (e.g., a win-loss record) at the end. In contrast, athletes having positive perceptions of fairness would reveal favorable attitudes and behaviors for their teams, such as increased satisfaction, commitment, performance, and group cohesion (Jordan et al., 2004) and lead to a successful athletic team. Given that fairness is such an important issue in a workplace or organization, there have been numerous studies that focus on the relationships between individuals' perceptions of fairness and outcome variables for organizational effectiveness, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, group cohesion, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), turnover intention, trust, and work performance (Cohen-Charah, & Spectator, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001 ). Although there have been several attempts made to examine the relationships between organizational justice and several outcome variables in athletic settings, most prior studies have primarily concentrated on interscholastic athletics rather than intercollegiate athletics. Accordingly, the examination of the relationship between organizational justice and organizational outcome variables (i.e., group cohesion, organizational commitment) in intercollegiate athletics would extend previous studies and provide meaningful information for coaches in collegiate athletics to develop proper strategies intended to effectively manage student-athletes.

Research on perceptions of fairness has been conducted within the framework of organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987). Over the past 40 years, scholars in the field of organizational justice have worked with four dimensions of organizational justice: (a) distributive justice (perceived fairness of outcomes one receives), (b) procedural justice (perceived fairness based on process or procedure), (c) interpersonal justice (perceived fairness of treatment with respect, dignity, and in a polite manner by authority figures), and (d) informational justice (the extent to which proper information is honestly provided by decision makers). One of the most important outcome variables in relation to such multi-dimensional aspects of organizational justice was the organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment. According to a review of literatures in organizational justice, when employees perceive that they are treated fairly in an organization, they are more likely to be committed and become more identified with or attached to the organization (Andrew, Kacmar, Blakely, & Bucklew, 2008; Folger & Konovsky, 1989; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Affective commitment on the other hand is not solely affected by organizational justice (Martin & Bennet, 1996), but also affected by work group cohesion (Wech, Mossholder, Steel, & Bennet, 1998). Conceptually, individuals with high perceptions of group cohesion are more likely to remain as a part of one's group, become loyal to the group, and identify themselves with the belonging group (Friedkin, 2004).With its perceived importance in organizational context, previous empirical studies found that group cohesion was positively associated with affective commitment (Griffith, 1988; Wech, Mossholder, Steel, & Bennett, 1998). In addition, group cohesion has played a moderating role between organizational justice and affective commitment outside of sport management literature (Andrew et al., 2008). Therefore, this study aimed to examine (a) the effect of multi-dimensions of organizational justice on affective commitment and (b) the moderating effect of group cohesion on the relationship between the multi-dimensions of organizational justice and affective commitment in a collegiate team sport setting.

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The participants of the study were student-athletes from two large NCAA Division I-A institutions of Southeastern universities using a convenience sampling. A total of 282 samples were collected and 253 valid samples were analyzed. The sample consisted of 61.3% males ( $n = 155$ ) and 38.7% females ( $n = 98$ ) with an average age of 19.69. Participants' grades were divided into the following groups: freshman ( $n = 80$ ), sophomore ( $n = 40$ ), junior ( $n = 64$ ), and senior ( $n = 69$ ). The four dimensions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justices) were measured by the organizational scale (Colquitt, 2001), which consisted of 17 items. The work by Tremble, Payne, Finch, and Bullis (2003) provided a 6-item scale to measure affective commitment. Lastly, 8 items were adopted and modified from the work of Dobbins and Zaccaro (1986) in order to measure group cohesion.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to confirm internal consistency. To examine the relationships between four dimensions of organizational justice and affective commitment and the moderating effect of group cohesion between the two variables, four separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed. Specifically, we first entered demographic variables, such as gender and age, as control variables due to its impacts on affective commitment (Colbert & Kwon, 2000; Lok & Crawford, 2001). In the second step, each of the four organizational justices was entered into four separate regression analyses. Then, group cohesion, moderator, was entered in the third step in each of the four regressions. As a final step, the cross-product term (interaction term) which was generated by multiplying the independent variables and the moderator (four dimensions of justice  $\times$  group cohesion) was entered in the final step of the four regression analyses. To further examine the form of interaction, the researchers plotted two slopes for the final equation (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989): one at 1 standard deviation below the mean of group cohesion and the other at 1 standard deviation above the mean.

All Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above the traditional cut-off of .70 ranging from .85 (interpersonal justice) to .95 (affective commitment) (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994). The results of the four regressions indicated that the relationship between the four dimensions of organizational justice and affective commitment after controlling age and gender was positively significant: a) procedural justice ( $\beta = .64$ ), (b) distributive justice ( $\beta = .78$ ), (c) interpersonal justice ( $\beta = .81$ ), and (d) informational justice ( $\beta = .88$ ). More specifically, beyond the variance contributed by gender and age, procedural, distributive, interpersonal, and informational justices explained approximately 38% ( $\Delta R^2 = .38$ ), 49% ( $\Delta R^2 = .49$ ), 48% ( $\Delta R^2 = .48$ ), and 49% ( $\Delta R^2 = .49$ ) of variance in affective commitment, respectively. With respect to the moderating effect of group cohesion, the results indicated that group cohesion only moderated the relationship between distributive justice and group cohesion ( $\beta = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Specifically, the distributive justice  $\times$  group cohesion interaction graph revealed that the positive relationship between distributive justice and group cohesion was significantly stronger among student-athletes reporting high levels of group cohesion than among those reporting low levels of group cohesion.

The findings indicated that student-athletes were more likely to be attached or committed to the team once they believe that they were being treated fairly and rewarded by their coaches. Consequently, developing strategies intended to improve athletes' perceptions of fairness is critical. Another finding of the study was that only distributive justice had a stronger relationship with affective commitment among student-athletes reporting high levels of group cohesion compared to their counterparts. With this finding, it is implied that coaches should emphasize not only on fairly rewarding for athletes' efforts, performances, and athletic skills, but also the team unity among team members. In turn, student athletes would be able to enhance their perception of attachment/ loyalty to the team and eventually improve the team's athletic performance. Further theoretical and practical implications and directions for future research will be presented.