

THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF EQUITY SENSITIVITY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT: This study explores equity sensitivity as an explanation for the differences in individuals' organizational citizenship behaviors in response to their perceptions of organizational justice. The concept of equity sensitivity recognizes three categories of individuals: benevolents, entitleds, and sensitives. As predicted, benevolents perform more OCBs than entitleds regardless of the level of perceived justice. However, sensitives did not react as hypothesized and instead reacted similarly to benevolents. Entitleds were the most sensitive to perceived justice, responding consistently with Adam's (1963, 1965) equity theory.

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), which are job behaviors that exist outside of the technical core of the job yet serve by supporting the psychological and social context of work, have emerged as a popular area of study during the past 20 years (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). OCBs were initially defined as job behaviors that are discretionary, not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, yet, in the aggregate, contribute to organizational effectiveness (Organ, 1988). Examples of OCB may include helping a co-worker who has been absent from work, volunteering for extra duty when needed, representing the company enthusiastically at public functions, and acting in ways that improve morale, and resolving unconstructive interpersonal conflict (Organ, 1990).

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OCB is one type in a family of behaviors that captures the types of cooperation needed to facilitate task performance in organizations. Other constructs that describe similar types of performance include contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993) extra-role behavior (Van Dyne & Cummings, 1990), organizational spontaneity (George & Brief, 1992) and prosocial organizational behavior (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). While differences among these constructs exist, recent work suggests that there may be advantages in finding the common ground among them. Indeed, Organ (1997) has recently suggested that OCB may best be represented as synonymous with contextual performance as described by Borman and Motowidlo (1993), however Organ (1997) concluded that he still wished the construct to be called OCB.

OCB researchers have conducted numerous studies in the search for the causes of an employee's decision to perform OCB. Many of the first studies focused on workplace attitudes as predictors of OCB. Among the attitudinal constructs found to be related to OCB are job satisfaction (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Smith, Organ & Near, 1983; Williams & Anderson, 1991), perceptions of fairness (e.g., Aquino, 1995; Konovsky & Folger, 1991; Konovsky & Organ, 1996; Moorman, 1991; Organ & Moorman, 1993), and perceived organizational support (Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998). These studies have typically taken a social exchange approach in which employees' commitment to the organization is based on their beliefs of the organization's commitment to them (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Both the employer and the employee fulfill their exchange obligations and act in a manner that maximizes reciprocity on the part of the other.

Early researchers assumed that job satisfaction would be a better predictor of OCBs than in-role performance (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith et al., 1983). However, based on Organ's (1990) view that job satisfaction measures captured underlying beliefs about job fairness, later researchers suggested that perceptions of justice were a better predictor of OCB than job satisfaction (Farh, Podsakoff, & Organ, 1990; Moorman, 1991; Organ & Moorman, 1993). Perceptions of fairness tapped into employee beliefs about the fairness of their social and economic exchanges with organizations. If exchanges were deemed fair, the employees would be more likely to reciprocate the fairness by performing in ways that benefit the organization. Because employees may not have the opportunity to change their task performance easily, Organ (1988) suggested that OCB may be the form of job performance mostly likely affected. Research results from studies throughout the 1990s and early 2000s have confirmed the robust relationship between perceptions of fairness and OCB performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Moorman, 1991; Organ & Moorman, 1993; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

After confirming the positive relationship between perceptions of justice and OCBs researchers turned their attention to dispositional variables to help explain the differences in OCBs (Konovsky & Organ, 1996; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; Neuman & Kickul, 1998). These variables have included conscientiousness, agreeableness (Neuman & Kickul, 1998) positive affectivity, negative affectivity, (Konovsky & Organ, 1996; Organ & Ryan, 1995), individualism/collectivism (Moorman & Blakely, 1995), and prosocial personality orientation (Penner, Midili, & Kegelmeyer, 1997). However, Organ and Ryan's (1995) meta-analysis revealed that of several dispositional variables (e.g., agreeableness, positive and negative affectivity), only conscientiousness was a significant predictor of OCB. Even with the discouraging findings on dispositional variables, there is still hope as Organ and Ryan (1995) state "Only a limited set of dispositional variables have been examined, and the extent of research on disposition and OCB has not been as extensive as that on attitudes" (p. 795). One way in which the search for dispositional causes has been hindered is that most work only focused on direct effects between personality traits and OCB performance. However, Organ (1990) has also suggested that dispositional variables may affect OCB indirectly by moderating relationships between work context variables and OCB. Hence, the purpose of the present study is to explore how a dispositional variable may affect OCB by affecting the nature of previously determined relationships. Specifically, our purpose is to examine the dispositional variable of equity sensitivity as a moderator in the relationship between perceptions of justice and OCB. Our hypotheses development begins with a discussion of organizational justice, followed by an overview of equity sensitivity.

PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

Organizational justice pertains to members' views of whether they are being treated fairly by the organization (Greenberg, 1987). Research has recognized several components of organizational justice—distributive, procedural, interactional, and informational (e.g., Colquitt, 2001; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Moorman, 1991; Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the allocation of resources by the organization. This view stems from equity theory in which members make judgments about whether the outcomes (e.g., performance ratings, pay, promotions) offered by the organization are fair given the amount of effort they have put forth (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the process used to make allocation decisions (Korsgaard, Schweiger, & Sapienza, 1995). For example, employees may question how promotions or raises were determined. Interactional justice

reflects employees' feelings of how fair they are treated by their supervisors. Finally, informational justice refers to the fairness in the communication process of company procedures. For example, an employee's perception of the candidness of a supervisor's communication would reflect this component (Colquitt, 2001).

When employees believe they are being unfairly treated, by the organization or by their supervisor, they will likely believe that the social exchange has been violated. If these employees perceive that the cost of remaining in the relationship outweighs the benefits, they will withdraw from the relationship. This withdrawal can come in the form of lower performance (e.g., Cowherd & Levine, 1992), increased absenteeism and turnover (e.g., Hulin, 1991), deviant behaviors (Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999), decreased affective commitment (Barling & Phillips, 1993; Folger & Konovsky, 1989; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992) and reduced citizenship behaviors (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Moorman, 1991). When employees perceive a fair working environment, they will likely respond in accordance with social exchange and perform more OCBs. Consistent with past research, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of organizational justice will be positively related to OCB.

In his early article exploring the motivational basis of OCB performance, Organ (1990) suggested that any attempt to understand how perceptions of fairness related to OCB should attempt to measure subjects' threshold of fairness. His point was that subjects would vary in the degree that perceived unfairness prompted action based on how much they were concerned with fairness and unfairness. Subjects' would be more likely to act in response to fairness or unfairness if such unfairness really mattered to them. Organ's (1990) conception of a threshold of fairness can be described by equity sensitivity.

EQUITY SENSITIVITY

According to equity theory, individuals are motivated by a comparison of their inputs (e.g., effort, training, quality of performance) versus their outcomes (e.g., pay, job title) relative to the same ratio of others (Adams, 1963, 1965). According to Adams (1963), when the input-outcome ratio, compared to the ratio of the comparison other, is unequal the individual is motivated to restore equity by any one of a number of mechanisms. Instead of assuming that all individuals prefer to have equal outcome/input ratios with comparative others, equity researchers have recognized that individuals vary in their sensitivity to violations of

Adam's equity theory (1963, 1965) (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1985; Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987; Vecchio, 1981). Huseman et al. (1987) identified three categories to capture individuals' equity preferences: benevolents, entitleds, and sensitives. As originally conceptualized, benevolents have the greatest tolerance for under-reward situations and prefer their ratio of outcomes to inputs to be less than a comparison other. Entitleds tend to be more focused on outcomes with less regard for inputs and prefer their outcomes to inputs ratio to be greater than a comparison other. Sensitives act in accordance with Adam's (1965) equity theory and prefer their outcomes/input ratio to be equal to that of a comparison other.

Findings have been mixed with respect to these predicted patterns. For example, O'Neill and Mone (1998) found that benevolents with low self-efficacy experienced more job satisfaction and less intent to leave than entitleds with low self-efficacy. However, when self-efficacy was high, benevolents and entitleds acted similarly with respect to job satisfaction and intent to leave. Bing and Burroughs (2001) confirmed the relationship between equity sensitivity and in-role job performance such that as benevolence increased so did in-role job performance. Also, there was no support for their hypothesis of an interaction between equity sensitivity and conscientiousness with job performance. Specifically they hypothesized that increases in benevolence result in greater job performance to a greater degree for those low in conscientiousness compared with those high in conscientiousness. However, in one of their two studies they did find, as hypothesized, a significant interaction between benevolence and agreeableness with job performance such that as benevolence increased so did job performance for those whose agreeableness was low.

In studies investigating the relationships between equity sensitivity and the performance of OCB, Konovsky and Organ (1996) found that equity sensitivity did not account for significant variance in the performance of OCB beyond that explained by a composite variable formed by combining satisfaction and perceived fairness. On the other hand, Fok, Hartman, Patti, and Razek (1999) report a significant zero-order correlation between equity sensitivity and a willingness to perform OCB, though they report no efforts to control for any other effects. They suggest that this correlation indicates that benevolents would be more likely to engage in OCB performance than entitleds. Finally, Kickul and Lester (2001) found support for an interactive effect between equity sensitivity and certain forms of breach of contract with OCBs that are "organization" directed rather than other "directed" (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Research examining equity sensitivity in under and over reward situations has been more consistent. Huseman et al. (1985) found that regardless of the reward situation, benevolents have the highest level of job satisfaction whereas entitleds have the least. Specifically, as the level

of reward moves from an under reward situation to an over-reward situation, the level of job satisfaction increases for both benevolents and entitleds. Similarly, benevolents are willing to work harder for less pay than sensitives or entitleds (Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1989). Given that benevolents have the strongest tolerance for under-reward situations and are more satisfied regardless of the level of reward, it is likely that they will perform more OCBs than entitleds. Consequently, our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Benevolents will perform more OCBs than sensitives and sensitives will perform more OCB than entitleds.

Organ's (1990) discussion of the effect of the "threshold of fairness" would suggest that employees would differ in the degree they would perform OCBs to reciprocate fair treatment based on whether the fairness or unfairness is significant to them. Benevolents are less likely than entitleds to see fair or unfair treatment as an important antecedent to OCB performance. However, because they are more tolerant of unfair treatment, their OCB performance would generally be high and relatively unaffected by justice/fairness perceptions. On the other hand, entitleds are concerned with fairness, but are less likely to react to fair treatment unless that treatment is extremely fair (i.e., over-reward). Thus their OCB performance would start very low and would increase only slightly in the face of fair treatment. The slope of the line would be very shallow reflecting a slow rate of increase. Equity sensitives, however, are likely to increase their OCB performance in proportion to the increase in fairness perceptions. When treated unfairly, they will withhold OCB, but would be willing to increase OCB appropriately as fairness increases. Thus, their line would start low, but would increase at a more dramatic rate than the entitled. Our third hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Equity sensitivity will moderate the relationship between justice and OCB such that the relationship will be more pronounced for equity sensitives than for benevolents or entitleds.

The exact nature of the moderating effect of equity sensitivity in our third hypothesis is depicted in Figure 1.

METHOD

Sample

The sample used in this study consisted of full time employees, from a variety of organizations, who were enrolled in a part-time MBA program

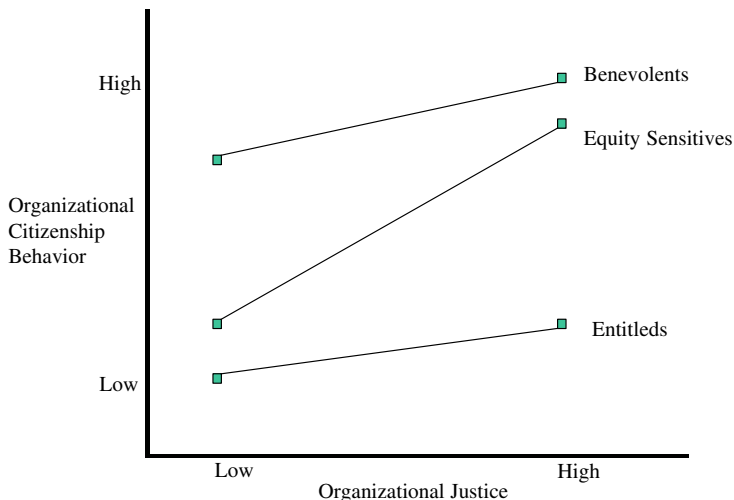
at a large, state university. The questionnaire containing measures of procedural justice, equity sensitivity, and organizational citizenship behavior was posted to a web site. An email was sent to 239 MBA students directing them to the web site and asking for their assistance in completing the on-line questionnaire. Anonymity was guaranteed. One hundred and eight of the students completed the questionnaire for a response rate of 45%. The average age of the respondents was 34.5 years with a standard deviation of 9.45. Fifty-six (56%) of the sample were males.

Measures

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB was measured with the 22 item scale developed by Moorman and Blakely (1992, 1995). This multi-dimensional scale was based on Graham's (1989) OCB dimensions of interpersonal helping (six items), individual initiative (five items), loyal boosterism (six items), and personal industry (five items). Interpersonal helping focuses on helping co-workers when such help is needed. Individual initiative focuses on communications to others in the work place to improve individual and group performance. Loyal boosterism focuses on promoting the organization's image. Personal industry focuses on task performance above and beyond normal role expectations. A confirmatory factor analysis

Figure 1
Graphical depiction of the hypothesized moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between organizational justice and organizational citizenship behavior



(Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993) of this four dimension scale was conducted. The confirmatory fit index (CFI), developed by Bentler (1990), was .90, which indicated that the data fit the model adequately; the RMSEA was .077, also indicating an adequate fit. Cronbach's alphas for the interpersonal helping, individual initiative, loyal boosterism, and personal industry dimensions were .86, .84, .84, and .77, respectively. The alpha for the whole scale was .94.

Equity Sensitivity

Equity sensitivity was measured with the Equity Sensitivity Instrument (ESI) developed by Huseman et al. (1985). King and Miles' (1994) research support the validity of this instrument in which respondents allocate 10 points between two response choices for each of five pairs of statements. One statement in each pair was the entitled response and the other statement was the benevolent response. We followed the Huseman et al. procedure by summing the points for the benevolent responses. In the present study, scores ranged from 0 to 46 ($M = 29.98$, $S.D. = 8.20$). Following the procedure described in King, Miles, and Day (1993), the sample was divided into the three equity sensitivity groups by trichotomizing the sample at approximately $1/2$ standard deviation from the mean. This procedure resulted in those with a score of less than 26 being classified as entitleds ($n = 28$, $M = 19.75$, $S.D. = 7.37$), those with a score of from 26 to 34 being classified as equity sensitives ($n = 53$, $M = 28.79$, $S.D. = 2.58$), and those with a score of 34 or greater being classified as benevolents ($n = 27$, $M = 38.93$, $S.D. = 3.54$). Cronbach's alpha for the entire sample was .84.

Justice

Justice was measured with the 22 item scale developed by Colquit (2001). The scale measures four justice dimensions; procedural justice measured by seven items, distributive justice measured by four items, interpersonal justice measured by four items, and informational justice measured by five items. Because the four dimensions were highly correlated and for reasons of parsimony, and because we did not hypothesize any different relationships between dimensions of justice and the other variables, the four dimensions were collapsed into one overall measure of justice. Cronbach's α for the 22 item measure was .96. This procedure is consistent with past research in which justice measures of fairness are combined (e.g., Konvosky & Organ, 1996).

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. The initial hypothesis, that organi-

zational justice is positively related to OCB, was supported ($r = .26$, $p < .05$). In order to test the second and third hypotheses, equity sensitivity was trichotomized according to the method described previously. The second hypothesis, that benevolents perform more OCBs than entitleds, was examined by a t -test. Results indicated that benevolents performed more OCBs ($M = 5.49$) than did the entitleds ($M = 4.45$), ($t(53) = 2.06$, $p < .05$), thereby providing support for hypothesis 2.

The third hypothesis, that equity sensitivity moderates the relationship between justice and OCB, was examined by conducting a MANOVA. Equity sensitivity was trichotomized according to the method described previously. The justice measure was dichotomized at the median (3.64) into low and high organizational justice. The MANOVA indicated a significant overall interactive effect (Wilks' 8.77, $F(8,198) = .77$, $p < .001$).

The exact nature of the relationship between organizational justice, equity sensitivity, and OCB, graphically presented in Figure 2 below, is not exactly as hypothesized. Instead of the relationship between organizational justice and OCB being most pronounced for equity sensitives, the analysis indicates that the relationship is most pronounced for entitleds. Entitleds who perceive low organizational justice report doing significantly less OCBs than any other equity sensitivity/organizational justice condition.

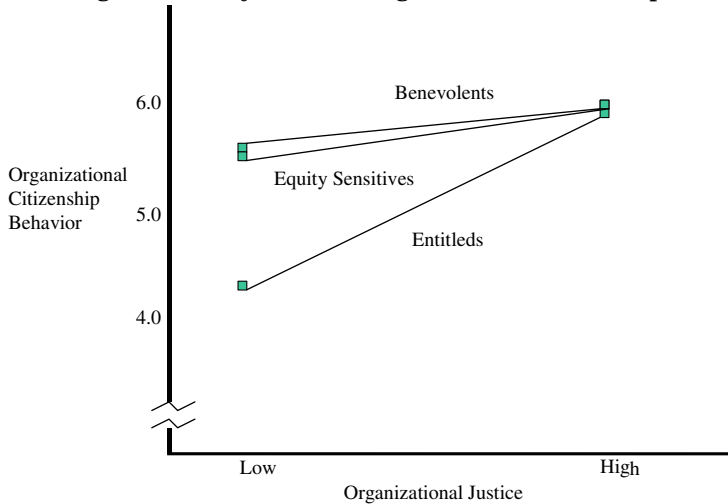
In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the relationship between perceptions of justice and OCB, a post-hoc analysis was performed in which the OCB dimensions were isolated. Specifically, univariate ANOVAs were performed and are presented in Table 2. There was a significant interactive effect on interpersonal helping ($F = 5.51$,

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Equity Sensitivity	29.98	8.20	–					
2. Organizational Justice	3.50	0.96	.01	–				
3. Interpersonal Helping	5.70	1.01	.55***	.11	–			
4. Individual Initiative	5.58	1.09	.44***	.22**	.77***	–		
5. Loyal Boosterism	5.26	1.19	.46***	.38***	.66***	.70***	–	
6. Personal Industry	5.53	1.00	.42***	.07	.74***	.70***	.50***	–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 2
Graphical depiction of results of equity sensitivity moderating the relationship between organizational justice and organizational citizenship behavior



$p < .01$) and on personal industry ($F = 10.28, p < .001$). The interactive effects were marginally significant on loyal boosterism ($F = 2.88, p < .06$) and on individual initiative ($F = 2.58, p < .08$).

DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that as perceptions of justice increase, so does the level of OCB. This finding adds further support to past research that suggests that a fair working environment is important for promoting the performance of OCBs (e.g., Organ & Ryan, 1995). Our finding, that benevolents perform more OCBs than entitleds, is also consistent with the expected patterns of the equity sensitivity construct and consistent with past research examining this relationship (Fok et al., 1999). The moderating effect of equity sensitivity was significant for all OCB dimensions, but not as hypothesized. Apparently, since benevolents are more tolerant of under reward situations, they continued to exhibit more OCBs even when there was low organizational justice. However, when organizational justice was high, benevolents exhibited only slightly more OCBs than entitleds, with entitleds showing a dramatic increase in OCBs. It seems that entitleds are in fact willing to perform OCBs, but much more so when organizational justice is high. Perhaps entitleds feel that OCBs will ultimately be rewarded since the organization recognizes their efforts and treats them with respect. If additional research supports

Table 2
Analysis of Variance Table for Organizational Citizenship Behavior Dimensions

Source	SS	df	F
Dependent variable: Interpersonal helping			
Equity Sensitivity	15.45	2	9.54***
Organizational Justice	5.47	1	6.75**
Equity Sensitivity × Organizational Justice	8.92	2	5.51**
Error	82.62	102	
Dependent variable: Personal Industry			
Equity Sensitivity	5.40	2	3.38*
Organizational Justice	7.37	1	9.22**
Equity Sensitivity × Organizational Justice	16.43	2	10.28***
Error	81.46	102	
Dependent variable: Loyal Boosterism			
Equity Sensitivity	13.11	2	6.05**
Organizational Justice	25.77	1	23.80***
Equity Sensitivity × Organizational Justice	6.23	2	2.88
Error	110.46	102	
Dependent variable: Individual initiative			
Equity Sensitivity	8.32	2	4.00*
Organizational Justice	9.04	1	8.69**
Equity Sensitivity X Organizational Justice	5.36	2	2.58
Error	106.08	102	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

our result that entitlements who perceive low organizational justice perform significantly lower OCB, organizations would need to be particularly concerned about justice perceptions for this particular group. We are not suggesting that justice is unimportant for the sensitives or benevolents, however, reactions to perceptions of injustice may simply be more pronounced for entitlements.

Contrary to our prediction, sensitives did not vary their level of OCBs according to their perceptions of justice. We had hypothesized that the form of the moderating relationship would be that equity sensitives would react proportionately to changes in perceived fairness. If fairness perceptions were low, they would withhold OCB performance because withholding such performance would rebalance their outcome to input ratio as predicted by equity theory. As fairness perceptions increased, we expected the sensitives to increase their OCB performance to maintain that balance. Instead we found that sensitives did not increase their level of OCB performance as their fairness perceptions increased. Their level of OCB performance started relatively high and stayed there.

This result may be a function of the problem of defining perceptions of fairness merely as a form of equity. Equity theory is often used to

explain the effects of distributive justice where specific outcomes are judged as fair or unfair. Our measure of fairness however also included measures of procedural, interactional, and informational justice that are not tied to judgments about outcomes, but judgments of the procedures used to determine those outcomes. It may be that equity sensitives perceived relatively little change in the fairness of their outcomes, but perceived more dramatic changes in the fairness of the procedures. However, the fairness of these procedures held little importance in the formation of their outcome to input ratios. The results of our post hoc analysis of the four dimensions produced results that were somewhat inconsistent with those of the study by Kickul and Lester (2001). In their study equity sensitivity and certain forms of breach of contract interacted with OCBs that were directed toward the organization but not toward others. In the present study, the results of the univariate post hoc analysis produced inconclusive results.

Another possible explanation for these results is the use of volunteers as participants in the study. As suggested by Bing and Burroughs (2001), benevolents could be more likely than entitleds to volunteer to participate in the study, thereby creating a restriction of range. These respondents received nothing for their participation so it is possible all of the respondents tended toward benevolence. Future research that incorporates a captive audience would eliminate this problem.

This study does have limitations. Most notably, the sample size is small. A post hoc power analysis indicated that the statistical power was adequate for most analyses, but marginal for a few of the analyses. Further, a larger sample size would allow the dimensions of justice to be examined separately. Also, the common method bias is a problem. An improvement would be to obtain supervisory ratings of OCB or to, in some way, untangle self reports of equity sensitivity from self reports of perceived organizational justice. The latter two variables may be somewhat confounded. As noted by Organ (1990), due to the reactivity of measures of the threshold for fairness (*equity sensitivity*) like the one used in this study, an improvement would be to measure equity sensitivity unobtrusively. Additionally, as noted by Sauley and Bedeian (2000), the established scoring procedure we used for the ESI to classify individuals as entitleds, equity sensitives, or benevolents is problematic. They argue that because the groupings are sample specific and because of the use of cut-scores, the groupings the method produces may be incorrect.

This research does make several contributions to the OCB and justice literature. First, as Organ and Ryan (1995) suggested, additional dispositional variables need to be examined to further our understanding of the causes of OCB. Our results that equity sensitivity is related to OCB performance support the importance of including dispositional

predictors of OCB in our OCB models. Secondly, we assessed whether equity sensitivity would moderate the relationship found in other studies between perceptions of justice and OCB. Examining this relationship is a test of Organ's (1990) view that the motivation to perform OCB is influenced by a combination of situational and dispositional factors. Our results that equity sensitivity would influence the nature of the relationship between justice and OCB help us in our understanding of how and when justice perceptions influence work behavior. Additionally, our results may suggest an explanation why perceptions of distributive justice have not yet been found to predict OCB performance (Organ & Moorman, 1993). Past research has supported a relationship between procedural justice and OCB, but not distributive justice. It may be the case that including equity sensitivity as a moderator could allow researchers to uncover a relationship between distributive justice and OCB. Further research is needed on how equity sensitivity may intertwine with different dimensions of justice to predict OCB performance.

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