

## Effect of Organizational Justice on Counterproductive Work Behavior among Employees in Public Universities in Western Region, Kenya

Authors: Jane A. Kisinyo<sup>1</sup>, Geoffrey K. Kimutai<sup>2</sup> & Stella Omari<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3</sup>Kisii University, P O Box 408-40200, Kisii, Kenya  
Author Email: [kisinyos@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kisinyos@yahoo.co.uk)

### Abstract

*Organizations the world over depend on factors such as human capital, good human resource management practices, and good behavior and attitude from employees to achieve their objectives. However, certain factors within many modern organizations make the organizational environment susceptible to negative employee behavior. The objective of this study was to establish the effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior (CWB) among employees in public universities in the Western region of Kenya. The study adopted the explanatory research design. Stratified sampling was used to select the universities, while simple random sampling was used to select individuals from each cluster. The sample population was 506, selected from a target population of 4,476 academic and non-academic staff. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 25. Cronbach alpha coefficient was >0.9. The study found that organizational justice had a significant effect on work behavior with  $r=-.576^{**}$ . The study recommends that public universities formulate and promote policies focusing on the improvement of organizational justice, to help in reducing negative employee work behavior.*

**Keywords:** counterproductive work behavior, organizational justice, distributive justice, interactional justice, procedural justice

### 1. Introduction

Bad behavior at the place of work is not new. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution to date, employers have had to contend with behavior from employees that damage organizational well-being (Klotz & Buckley, 2013) with employees acting in ways that hurt their coworkers or their organizations (Coye, Murphy & Spencer, 2010). As more contemporary and complex forms of organizations emerged, early management scholars and consultants also began to document and contend, more properly and systematically, with workers behaving poorly in this new environment (Klotz & Buckley, 2013). According to Everton, Mastrangelo & Jolton, (2005), with the introduction of the desktop personal computer and the internet, the chance for employees behaving badly is now exactly at their fingertips if they so choose (i.e., personal e-mail, online banking, downloading pornography).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is any deliberate behavior on the part of an organization's member and which the organization views as different from its legal interests (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). It is voluntary behavior that contravenes or goes against the significant organizational norms, and in so doing, threatens the interests of both the organization and its members (Saeed, Mizna, Lodhi, Gill, Amin, & Iqbal, 2014). It is generally a very pervasive and expensive problem to organizations, and cuts across different industries and countries (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). CWB is responsible for giving an organization a negative image to both its external and internal stakeholders, and this situation becomes even worse when the recent economic scandals that hit the western markets are considered (Levine, 2010).

According to Biron (2010) CWB have premises in organizational typology, which is related to the organization itself. Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) for instance, suggests that certain organizational factors make the organizational environment more vulnerable and prone to counterproductive work behavior. An example includes organization justice, which is a worker's individual assessment and/or opinion of the ethical and moral standing of the way in which its managers act (Kasemsap, 2017). Employees' attitudes linked to the procedures, dealings and choices of the organization acts as a base for organizational justice. Organizational justice can be distributive, procedural and interactional (Shan, Ishaq & Shaheen, 2015). Distributive justice is underpinned in the equity theory meaning that employees compare their input ratio with the output ratio and if there is any discrepancy, they feel unjust. Procedural justice is concerned with the fairness of the process involved in the allocation of the outputs, together with perceptions of fair treatment of all employees without bias. Interactional justice on the other hand is concerned with the level of fairness of treatment in the course of the social exchange process (Shan, et al. 2015). It has been recognized that when workers perceive fairness from the organization, they labor with more commitment and effort (Kasemsap, 2017) as a way of reciprocating the fair treatment they receive from the organization (Thornton and Rupp, 2016), thus avoiding CWB.

Justice within an organization could be determined by many factors, for instance, organizational leadership (Campbell, White & Durant, 2007). The whole organizational structure, including things like pay system, behavior of colleagues, also determine organizational justice (Mayer, Nishii, Schneider & Goldstein, 2007). The idea behind organizational justice is the fact that employees are actually active observers, who see how rewards and punishment in organizations are allocated. According to Colquitt (2001), such allocations may seem fair or unfair based on (i) distributive justice - whether one deserves what they received, for example decisions about promotions, separation, training, and transfers (Everton, Jolton & Mastrangelo, 2007); (ii) procedural justice - whether the process of allocation was fair, for example discrimination and work relations (Roberson & Stevens, 2005); and (iii) interactional justice - whether one was treated respectfully and with dignity.

According to Aguilera, Rupp, Williams and Ganapathi (2007), employee's perceived justice at work has a powerful effect on his well-being in addition to the organizational outcomes like employee turnover, performance, etc. Also, if employees perceive they are undervalued by their organization and are not being supported, they might not build strong psychological ties with

their colleagues and the organization (Cheung & Law, 2008). Research by Nasir and Bashir (2012) indicates a considerably positive link connecting organizational justice and workplace deviance, with employees involving themselves in deviant acts such as intentionally coming late to work, gossiping about the managers, intentionally ignoring supervisors' instructions, etc. Deviance at work comes about in response to unequal treatment at the workplace. These claims are supported by equity theory which hypothesizes that workers compare their portion of outcomes (pay, promotions, raises) to inputs (education, training, skill and effort) (Henle, 2005). When employees get the same outcome from the same input as compared with other coworkers, they experience equity. Similarly, when there is an inconsistency between what they put in and the output share as compared with others, they will experience inequity. To restore their sense of equity, therefore, they will often resort to acts of deviance (Henle, 2005). Injustice is known to be detrimental to organizations, a corrosive solvent with the capability of dissolving bonds within organization, hurting individual employees, while harming the organization wholly (Cropanzano, Bowen & Gilliland, 2007).

It is therefore, in the best interest of organizations to treat their workers well, since it is not only good marketing for investors, customers and future employees, but also helps to reduce the likelihood that current employees will engage in counterproductive behavior (Everton *et al*, 2007). An environment which has equitable and fair outcome distributions, fair procedures, where employees are treated respectfully will have improved perceptions of justice (Galperin, 2002), which will probably lead to less CWB. Given this background, the study sought to examine the effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior among employees in public universities in Western Region in Kenya.

## 2. Methodology

This study used explanatory research design which is appropriate for studies that try to find an underlying relationship linking variables, enables generalization from a small section to a whole populace in order that deductions concerning some attributes, of that particular population can be made (Saunders, Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2011). It was undertaken in the western region of Kenya, which boasts of six public universities, namely Maseno, Rongo, Kisii, Kibabii, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Masinde Muliro University of Science Technology. The target population included academic and non-academic staff of the six universities, totaling 4,476 employees. A formula by Fisher (1963, as cited by Kothari, 2004) was employed in calculating the final sample size as follows:

$$n = Z^2 \frac{pq}{d^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

n = 384

Where:

n = the desired sample size

$z$  = the standard normal deviation at the required C.I = 1.96

$p$  = proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics of interest = 0.5

$q=1-p=0.5$ ,  $d$ =the level of statistical significance set = 0.05

Since the target population was less than 10,000, the following formula was used to determine the actual sample size:

$$nf = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$

$$nf = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384}{4476}}$$

= 354

Where:

$nf$  = required sample size when population is less than 10,000

$n$  = required sample size when population is more than 10,000 = 384

$N$  = estimated population = 4,476

Therefore 354 was the calculated sample size.

This sample size is also often increased by 30% to compensate for non-responses, according to Israel, 1992 cited in Ogega (2020). This therefore means that:

Calculated sample size = 354

Additional 30% (meant to cater for the non-responses) = 152

Therefore, the final sample size = 506

This study employed stratified sampling design to choose the Western region of Kenya, and all the public universities in the region. The academic and non-academic staff were then grouped into clusters. Thereafter simple random sampling was used to select individuals from each cluster. The data herein was obtained through questionnaires put in a matrix form on a likert scale where respondents were supposed to tick the relevant response inside a box. Data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed statistically using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 25. Inferential statistics was used to examine the relationship between the variables. Testing was then done using simple linear regression analysis to establish the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable as had been hypothesized.

To determine the reliability of the research instrument in this study, a pilot study was done at Moi University, comparable to the institutions being used in the real study as far as characteristics and behaviors of interest were concerned. The instrument was reliable as all the variables met the threshold of a minimum of 0.70. Validity was also assured as the sample was acceptable, with KMO values of 0.505 and 0.538.

### 3.0 Results

#### 3.1 Demographic Information

The information regarding the demographic profile of the respondents included institution they worked for, gender, age, academic qualification, years worked and position held. The majority were from the oldest institution among the six (Maseno University) at 38%, for both academic and non-academic staff. The majority of the respondents were male (63% and 57%) for the academic and non-academic staff respectively. Among the academic staff, the majority were between the ages 40-49, while among the non-academic, the majority were between 30-39. Over 51% of the academic staff were PhD holders, whereas the majority of non-academic staff had Bachelors degree (31%). On work experience among the academic staff, the highest was 1-5 years at 44%, whereas 40% of the non-academic staff had worked for 6-10 years. The position held by the vast majority of academic staff was that of lecturer (69%), while most non-academic staff fell among the others (43%), which included drivers, sweepers, clerks, etc.

#### 3.2 Effect of Organizational Justice on Counterproductive Work Behavior

This study sought to find out the effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior among employees in public universities in western region of Kenya.

Table 1 Model Summary of Organizational Justice and Work Behavior

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.576 <sup>a</sup>	0.332	0.330	0.47630

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Justice

b. Dependent Variable: Work Behavior

The model summary presented in table 1 shows that for organizational justice ( $X_1$ ), the outcome was: the coefficient of determination (R square) of 0.332. This indicated that the model explained 33.2% change in the dependent variable. Adjustment of the R square did not change the results substantially, having reduced the explanatory behavior of the predictor from 33.2% to 33%. This means that the model is fit to be used to generalize the findings.

Table 2 Linear Regression ANOVA Results for Organization Justice

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.288	1	45.288	199.632	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	91.198	402	0.227		
	Total	136.486	403			

a. Dependent Variable: Worker behavior / b. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Justice

Table 2 shows the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the relationship between organizational justice and CWB. The results indicated that the model is statistically significant in explaining the relationship between organizational justice and CWB in the public universities in Western Kenya ( $p$ -value $<0.05$ ). In this regard, the null hypotheses  $H_{01}$  is rejected and it is concluded that there is indeed significant effect of organizational justice on CWB in the public universities in Western Kenya region.

Table 3 Coefficients of Organization Justice and Counterproductive Work Behavior

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.674	0.096		48.715	0.000
OJ	-0.481	0.034	-0.576	-14.129	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Counterproductive Work Behavior

Table 3 presents the regression results of organization justice on counterproductive work behavior, with a constant ( $p$ -value = 0.000) of 4.674. This implies that even without organizational justice, the public universities seemed to display some form of negative work behavior. The gradient coefficient of -0.481 is the extent to which a unit change in organizational justice caused a change in work behavior. Therefore, the organization justice and work behavior model can now be presented as:

$$Y = 4.674 + -0.481X_1 + \varepsilon$$

T-test was used to identify whether the predictor was making a significant contribution to the model. The results show that organizational justice ( $t = -14.129$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This means that organization justice was significant ( $p$ -value = 0.000) in negatively influencing counterproductive work behavior in public universities in western Kenya region.

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of the study was to determine the effect of organizational justice on employee work behavior. Yean and Yusof (2016) showed that if employees perceive that actions and practices in the organization are fair and honest, they will show more extra-role behavior and other positive work behaviors which are beneficial to the development of the organization. It has also been recognized that when workers perceive fairness from the organization, they labor with more commitment and effort (Aguilera, et al. 2007) thus avoiding CWB. In this regard organizational justice is presumed to be a universal predictor of positive employee and organizational outcomes, curbing CWB. This is supported by the findings of this study which indicate that there is significantly negative association  $r = -.576^a$   $**P < 0.01$  between organizational justice and counterproductive work behavior in public universities in western Kenya region. The

multiple regression results show  $t = -14.129$  and  $P=0.00$ . The model explained 33.2% of the variation in employee work behaviour.

These findings are in line with those of Pan, Chen, Hao and Bi (2018) and Nasir and Bashir (2012) who also found a significant relationship between organizational justice and employee work behavior. The idea behind organizational justice is that employees, being active observers of the goings on within organizations, see how both rewards and punishment are meted out. They may perceive such allocations as fair or unfair based on distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Thus, the transaction process of organizational justice and counterproductive behavior is rooted in the equity theory which hypothesizes that workers compare their portion of outcomes to inputs and experience either equity or inequity.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concluded that organizational justice significantly and negatively affected employee work behavior in public universities in western Kenya region. Therefore, a solid organizational justice system should be entrenched in the strategic HRM processes and practices of these universities in order to secure and sustain employee productivity and positive behavior. For example, instead of screening employees for potentially deviant tendencies, organizations should focus on creating a fair work environment that prevents such behavior. In such an environment, employees are treated with respect, there are fair procedures, as well as equitable outcome distributions. Apart from that, all categories of justice, whether distributive, procedural or interactional should be seen to be fair by all employees so that deviance at work does not result.

## Recommendations

Public universities should develop strategies that can insulate their staff from engaging in CWB by implementing policies that enhance justice within them. The universities must therefore adjust to a culture that is based on equity, with employees adopting the same frame of mind, and management actively participating in ensuring that justice filters down to the whole organization, by promoting and maintaining this organization climate. Any employee who violates organizational norms should be punished, with the severity of the violation matching the punishment.

## References

- Aguilera, R.V., Rupp, D.E., Williams, C.A. & Ganapathi, J. (2007), "Putting the S back in corporate social responsibility: a multilevel theory of social change in organizations". *Academy of Management Review*, 32(3), 836-63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159338>

- Bennet, R. J. & Robinson, S. L. (2000). Development of a measure of workplace deviance. *Journal Applied Psychology*, 349-356. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.3.349>
- Biron, M. (2010), "Negative reciprocity and the association between perceived organizational ethical values and organizational deviance". *Human Relations*, 63(6), 875-897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709347159>
- Campbell, K.S., White, C.D. & Durant, R. (2007), "Necessary evils, in justice and rapport management". *Journal of Business Communication*, 44(2), 161-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943606297904>
- Cheung, M.F.Y. & Law, M.C.C. (2008), "Relationships of organizational justice and organizational identification: the mediating effects of perceived organizational support in Hong Kong". *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 14(2), 213-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602380701430879>
- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the Dimensionality of Organizational Justice: A Construct Validation of a Measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86 (3), 386-400.
- Coye, R.W., Murphy, P.J. & Spencer, P.E. (2010), "Using historic mutinies to understand defiance in modern organizations". *Journal of Management History*, 16(2), 270-87. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17511341011030147>
- Cropanzano, R., Bowen, D.E. & Gilliland, S.W. (2007), "The management of organizational justice". *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21(4), 34-48. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2007.27895338>
- Everton, W.J., Mastrangelo, P.M. & Jolton, J.A. (2005), "Personality correlates of employees' personal use of work computers". *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, (8)2, 143-53. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2005.8.143>
- Everton, W. J., Jolton, J. A. & Mastrangelo, P. M. (2007). Be nice and fair or else: understanding reasons for employees; deviant behaviors. *Journal of Management Development*, 26(2), 117-131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02621710710726035>
- Fox, S., Spector, P. E. & Miles, D. (2001). Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) in response to job stressors and organizational justice: Some mediator and moderator tests for autonomy and emotions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (59), 291-309. DOI:10.1006/jvbe.2001.1803
- Galperin, B. L. (2002). Determinants of deviance in the workplace: an empirical examination in Canada and Mexico [unpublished doctoral dissertation], Concordia University, Montreal



- Gruys, M. L. & Sackett, P. R. (2003). Investigating the dimensionality of counterproductive work behavior. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 11(1), 30-42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2389.00224>
- Henle, C. A. (2005). Predicting workplace CWB from the interaction between organizational justice and personality. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 17(2), 247-263. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40604498>
- Kasemsap, K. (2017). Exploring the Role of Organizational Justice in the Modern Workplace. *Handbook of Research on Organizational Culture and Diversity in the Modern Workforce*. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2250-8.ch015
- Klotz, A.C. & Buckley, M. R. (2013) "A historical perspective of counterproductive work behavior targeting the organization". *Journal of Management History*, 19(1), 114 – 132. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17511341311286222>.
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Ltd.
- Levine, E. L. (2010). Emotion & power (as social influence): Their impact on organizational citizenship and counterproductive individual and organizational behavior. *Human Resource Management Review* (20), 4-17. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.03.011.
- Mayer, D., Nishii, L., Schneider, B. and Goldstein, H. (2007), "The precursors and products of justice climates: group leader antecedents and employee attitudinal consequences". *Personnel Psychology*, (60), 929-63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2007.00096.x>
- Nasir, M. & Bashir, A. (2012),"Examining workplace deviance in public sector organizations of Pakistan". *International Journal of Social Economics*, 39(4), 240-253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03068291211205677>
- Ogega, M. R. (2020). *Role of Diversity Management Policies on Employee Commitment at The County Governments in Kenya: A Focus on Organizational Leadership*. Kisii University, PhD Thesis.
- Pan, X., Chen, M., Hao, Z. & Bi, W. (2018). The effects of organizational justice on positive organizational behavior: Evidence from a large sample survey and a situational experiment. *Frontiers in psychology* (3)2315. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02315>
- Roberson, Q.M. & Stevens, C.K. (2006). "Making sense of diversity in the workplace: organizational justice and language abstraction in employees' accounts of diversity-

related incidents”. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(2), 379-91.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.2.379>

Saeed, R., Mizna, M.S., Lodhi, R. N., Gill, A. A., Amin, A. & Iqbal, A. (2014). “Impact of Human resource practices on deviant workplace behavior: a study on banking sector employees”. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 4(2), 81-86.

Saunders, M. N., Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2011). *Research methods for business students*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed, New Delhi: Pearson Education.

Shan, S., Ishaq, H. M. & Shaheen, M. A. (2015). Impact of organizational justice on job performance in libraries: Mediating role of leader-member exchange relationship. *Library Management* (36)1/2, 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-01-2014-0003>

Thornton, M. A. & Rupp, D. E. (2016). The joint effects of justice climate, group moral identity, and corporate social responsibility on the prosocial and deviant behaviors of groups. *Journal of Business Ethics* (137)4, 677-697. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2748-4>

Yean, T. F. & Yusof, A. A. (2016). Organizational Justice: A conceptual discussion. *Procedia – social and behavioral sciences* (219), 798-803.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.082>