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Investigating the Mediating Effect of Ethical Climate on Organizational Justice and Burnout: A Study on Financial Sector

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Abstract

The literature suggests that ethical climate today is more critical in organizations to sustain positive attitudes and behaviours of employees. Ethical climate is considered to be highly relevant to the financial industry, since it enhances service-providers' contact with customers. This paper examines the interaction between burnout and organizational justice as well as the mediating effect of ethical climate on this relationship. For this purpose, the data (N=543) was collected from the employees working in the financial services, operating in Istanbul. All research hypotheses including mediation were tested by multiple regression analyses to determine whether the conditions of mediation outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) were addressed. Empirical results indicate that, ethical climate has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between employees' organizational justice perception and burnout. This effect appears particularly for the dimension of distributive justice and depersonalization relation. It can be inferred from the findings that ethical climate plays an important role in governing the relationship between distributive justice and depersonalization. The findings do not show any mediating effect of ethical climate on procedural justice and burnout relation.

Keywords: Organizational Justice, Burnout, Ethical Climate, Mediation.

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1. Introduction

Last decade showed that, corporations are much more employed with corporate ethics like using ethics hotlines, establishing ethical codes and organizing ethics committees for ensuring ethical compliance within the organization. This concern with ethical behavior has required the policy of building a moral climate (Bowie and Schneider, 2011, 11). Ethical climate is today a major component of the organizational culture that affects the overall managerial policies (Victor and Cullen, 1988, 101). It can empower satisfaction and commitment which are essentials of employee happiness (DeConnick, 2010, 384). Employees tend to acquire the goals in an ethical climate constituted on fair foundations since fair type of organizational environment motivates employees by increasing their satisfaction (Gökmen and Öztürk, 2012, 82). Justice, on the other hand, is a fundamental social expectation that motivates employee behavior (Trevino and Weaver, 2001, 652). As deontologic view states, justice theory questions whether the decisions taken are fair or not. The justice in an organization only deals with the utility in an organization but also with the fair balance of punishments and responsibilities (Karabay, 2015, 91). Organizational justice and injustice are widely noted influences on employees' ethical behavior (Trevino and Weaver, 2001, 651). In addition, because ethical climate consists of perceptions of trust, responsibility, and high moral standards regarding perceived rightness or wrongness (Luria and Yagil, 2008, 277), if perception of employees on managers' necessity to behave ethically increases, managers have to meet high fairness standards (Folger, 1987; cited in Rousseau, 1995). One of the situations creating mental tension and stress is an individual's job and working environment (Ashtari et al, 2009). Things worsen when the work environment is uncomfortable, so employees usually try to cut off relations as they are affected psychologically (Cropanzano et al, 1997, 162). Burnout is an influential factor in employees' attitudes and behaviors and appears as one of the most negative outcomes among employees (Keel, 1993). Therefore, organizations use various strategies to maintain employee performance like task performance or adjustment to change at acceptable levels despite experiencing burnout (Demerouti et al, 2014, 96). Despite increasing interest on organizational climate among scholars, there is a scarcity of evidence presenting the impact of ethical climate among employees' job related attitudes. In particular, there is limited research that examines the mediating role of ethical climate on the relationship between organizational justice and burnout behavior. This deficiency is also true for the financial sector. Financial sector serves as the backbone of many economies. Recent scandals in the financial sector have also highlighted emerging necessity of ethical conduct in financial services (Stevens et al, 2005, 181). In this study, we aim to examine the effects of justice and ethical climate perceptions of employees' on their burnout behaviors. Within this frame, this study begins with literature review. Research methodology, analysis and findings are evaluated in the following section. Last section includes the discussion and conclusion about research findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organizational Justice and Burnout

Based on the theories of equity (Adams, 1963) and social exchange (Blau, 1964); organizational justice, in the simplest term, is the employee fairness perception towards decisions, policies and procedures occurred in the work place (Greenberg, 2006; Moorman, 1991). Eventually, these comparisons and concerns happening among counterparts, may bring about positive or negative attitudes and behaviours in terms of employee workload, job duties and responsibilities (Mourssi-Alfash, 2014: 6). Apart from two-dimensional organizational justice descriptions of Leventhal (1976) and Greenberg (1986), consisting procedural justice and distributive justice; Bies and Moag (1986) contributed to the literature by addressing the third element as interactional justice. In addition to these, Colquitt (2001: 389) classified the organizational justice concept with distributive justice (the outcomes employees gained from their contribution to the organization), procedural justice (the outputs caused by policies and procedures concerted by the organization), interpersonal justice (employee assessments towards supervisor treatments in the sense of courtesy and respect) and informational justice (the dialogue channel judgement happening between employers and managers during the information and feedback transmission).

Related with our study, while Niehoff and Moorman (1993: 537) contextualized distributive justice dimension with

different job outcomes, such as pay level, work schedule, work load, and job responsibilities, they scrutinized procedural justice by referring formal procedures (accurate and unbiased information, follower voice, objection process) and interactional justice (degree of followers' need consideration, sufficient explanation for work decisions). As the dependent variable of the present study, burnout is defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment which causes professionals to display a loss of concern, negative and cynical attitudes, a lack of consideration, and a propensity to assess one's self in a negative manner (Maslach and Leiter, 2008: 498; Koonce, 2014: 18). Maslach and Jackson (1981:101) characterized the dimensions of burnout as emotional exhaustion reflecting directly overextended feelings and depersonalization representing employee's relentless and impersonal reaction against people under his or her responsibility. Connected with human service professions, the main predictors of burnout were identified as; caseload size, the type of cases being treated, age and years of experience in the field, gender, work environments and conditions, justice perceptions, gratitude, job satisfaction, and personal stressors (Acker, 2011; Ballenger-Browning et al., 2011; Koonce, 2014).

The effect of organizational justice on burnout has been investigated by a number of recent studies Lambert et al. (2010) showed that both distributive and procedural justice were linked negatively with burnout. On the other hand, Cole et al. (2010) explained that distributive and interpersonal justice dimensions had a negative effect on emotional exhaustion, while Şeşen (2011) and Moliner et al. (2005) indicated a predominant impact of distributive and interactional justice on burnout, they couldn't find a significant relation in respect of procedural justice. Apart from these, Chenevert et al. (2013) brought to light that, procedural and interactional justices had an indirect effect on burnout through distributive injustice from the point of Canadian healthcare employees. In terms of different service sectors such as; education (Karakus, Ustuner and Toprak, 2014; Yıldırım, Ekinci and Öter, 2012), healthcare (Al-Zahrani, 2011; Uluköy, 2014) and employment (Liljegren and Ekberg, 2009), a significant inverse association has been found out between distributive, procedural and interactional organizational justice dimensions and burnout.

2.2. Organizational Justice and Ethical Climate

Ethical climate can be defined as “the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content” (Victor and Cullen, 1988, 101). Working in an ethical climate is critical because when employees are treated fairly, they are more willing to subordinate their own short-term individual interests to the interests of a group or organization (Lind and Tyler, 1988, 191). When the expectations are not met there will be a conflict between the employees and the organization (Valentine et al., 2002, 351). Employees' ethical behavior is influenced by whether or not the company's policies, procedures, and decision making are fair and just (Baker et al., 2006). Justice and ethics, in this sense, interact with each other (Weaver and Trevino, 2001, 115-116). Organizational justice refers to employees' perception of fairness in the workplace (Greenberg, 1990) and therefore is highly related to ethical context (Luria and Yagil, 2008, 278). An employee's perceptions of the company's fairness will have an impact on his or her ethical decision making as an employee's moral intent is shaped by his or her perception of the company's fairness (Johnson, 2007; cited in McCain et al., 2010). Therefore, it can be claimed that the less unethical behavior among employees then there is higher organizational justice (Trevino and Weaver, 2001).

In addition to its effect on outcomes, procedural justice is related to ethical climate because by making fair decisions, managers serve as moral role models (Brown et al., 2005). In the related literature, limited research supports the relation between ethical climate and justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Page, 2007; Trevino and Weaver, 2001; Luria and Yagil, 2008). Martinez –Tur et al (2014, 99) investigated the relationship between the strength of the justice climate and the strength of burnout. According to findings, interactional justice was able to predict group burnout. Research on organizational ethics and on organizational justice often focused on similar behavioral outcomes (Trevino and Weaver, 2001, 652) while research on organizational justice has focused on outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior (Moorman et al., 1998). Ethics researchers additionally have studied behaviors, such as peer reporting of unethical employee behavior that can help the organization by alerting management to problems (Trevino and Victor, 1992). Colquitt et al. (2001) examined antecedents and consequences of procedural justice climate in a sample of manufacturing teams. The results showed that climate level (i.e., the average procedural justice perception within the team) was significantly related to both team performance and team absenteeism. Moreover, the effects of

climate level were moderated by climate strength, such that the relationships were more beneficial in stronger climates (Colquitt et al., 2001, 425). Trevino and Weaver (2001) in their study showed that when employees perceive general organizational justice and ethics program follow-through, there is less unethical behavior and greater willingness to report problems (Trevino and Weaver, 2001, 651). McCain et al (2009) in their paper examined the antecedents and consequence of casino employees' ethical behavior. Findings showed that casino employees' ethical behavior was positively influenced by both procedural and distributive justice, with the former a slightly stronger motivator. Buckley et al. (2001) claimed if one organization doesn't have ethical climate, the situation describing as unfairness will increase. Accordance with those researchers, it could be stated that ethical work climate has a positive impact on perceptions of organizational justice.

2.3. Mediating Effect of Ethical Climate on Organizational Justice and Burnout

Ethical climate is associated with perceptions of trust, responsibility, and high moral standards regarding perceived rightness or wrongness (Luria and Yagil, 2008, 277) within the organization. Latest researches have demonstrated that work stress and job outcomes may bring out considerable negative consequences for employees' behaviors within organizations (Jaramillo et al, 2005). Recent research shows that burnout is critical in explaining a wide range of behaviors and attitudes in high-stress work places (Lee and Ashforth, 1996). After the concept has been in researchers' agenda the scholars examined the antecedents and consequences of job burnout (Cordes, 1993; Ting and Ling, 2011). When the ethics literature is concerned, it can be claimed that most researches have focused on clarifying the predictors of an ethical climate rather than the direct or indirect effect of ethical climate on organizational outcomes (Shin, 2012, 299). This is also valid for the studies that investigated the mediating effect of ethical climate on various job related behaviours. This scarcity is also true for studies that examined the relationship between ethical climate and burnout. Luria and Yagil (2008) in their study examined the relationship between ethical climate and the fair treatment of employees by an organization. Findings indicated that ethical climate was found to be associated with service performance which, in turn, was found to fully mediate the relationship of ethical climate with customer satisfaction. Ethical climate was also found to correlate positively with procedural justice.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Goal and the Theoretical Model

In this study, it was intended to examine whether employees' perceptions of ethical climate mediates the justice and burnout relationship. Theoretical model of the research is demonstrated in Figure 1. The following hypotheses are proposed for testing:

H1a: Procedural justice is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

H1b: Procedural justice is negatively associated with depersonalization.

H1c: Distributive justice is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

H1d: Distributive justice is negatively associated with depersonalization.

H2a: Procedural justice is positively associated with ethical climate.

H2b: Distributive justice is positively associated with ethical climate.

H3a: Ethical climate is negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

H3b: Ethical climate is negatively associated with depersonalization.

H4a: Ethical climate mediates the procedural justice and emotional exhaustion relationship.

H4b: Ethical climate mediates the procedural justice and depersonalization relationship.

H4c: Ethical climate mediates the distributive justice and emotional exhaustion relationship.

H4d: Ethical climate mediates the distributive justice and depersonalization relationship.

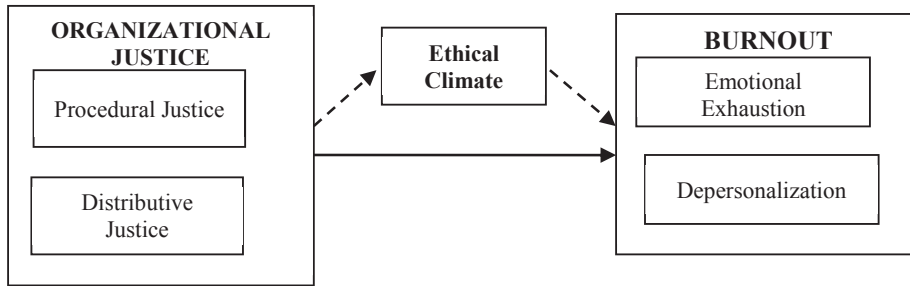


Figure 1: The Conceptual Research Model

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 543 employees (of which 281 of them - %51,7% - are male) from financial services industry including banks (%) 19,4; factoring institutions (%) 1,5; insurance companies (%) 33,4 and capital market institutions (%) 45,7. Participants’ tenure in their organizations ranges between 1 to 17 years. Most of the participants (70,2%) have a university degree. The occupations of the participants include staff positions (76,2%), managerial positions (22,5%) and entrepreneur (1,3%).

When the scales of the research are considered; employees’ perception of the ethical climate was measured with the Ethical Climate Scale of Schwepker (2001) which is based on the scale of Qualls and Puto (1989). The scale has one dimension. The scale for organizational justice was adopted from Niehoff and Moorman (1993). The scale has three sub-dimensions. Burnout scale was adopted from Maslach Burnout Inventory (1997). The scale has three sub-dimensions. Responses were obtained using 5point Likert-type scale where (1) is ‘strongly agree’ and (5) representing ‘strongly disagree’.

3.3. Analysis and Findings

3.3.1. Factor Analysis

The best fit of the data was obtained with a principal component analysis through varimax rotation. The result of the factor analysis of research variables is presented in Table 1. A strong factor structure is supplied through the factor analyses performed upon variables concerned with organizational justice, ethical climate and the burnout behaviour of employees. This indicates that the questionnaire statements used to measure these concepts were loaded to the variables.

Table 1. Factor Analysis Results

ITEMS	Factor Loadings				
	EC	EA	PJ	DEP	DJ
ec2: My company strictly enforces a code of ethics	,868				
ec3: My company has policies with regards to ethical behaviour.	,867				
ec4: My company strictly enforces policies regarding ethical behaviour	,856				
ec1: My company has a formal, written code of ethics.	,835				
ec5: Top management in my company has let it be known in no uncertain terms that unethical behaviours will not be tolerated	,805				

ec7: If a salesperson in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behaviour that results in primarily corporate gain (rather than personal gain), she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	,742				
ec6: If a salesperson in my company is discovered to have engaged in unethical behaviour that results primarily in personal gain (rather than corporate gain), she or he will be promptly reprimanded.	,734				
ea2: I feel used up at the end of the workday		,806			
ea3: I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.		,805			
ea5: I feel burned out from my work.		,784			
ea4: Working with people all day is really a strain for me.		,749			
ea7: I feel I'm working too hard on my job.		,725			
ea6: I feel frustrated by my job		,712			
ea1: I feel emotionally drained from my work.		,703			
ea8: Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.		,553			
oj8: To make job decisions, my general manager collects accurate and complete information			,842		
oj9: My general manager clarifies decisions and provides additional information when requested by employees.			,780		
oj7: My general manager makes sure that all employee concerns are heard before job decisions are made.			,761		
oj10: Employees are allowed to challenge or appeal job decisions made by the general manager.			,750		
oj6: Job decisions are made by the general manager in an unbiased manner.			,712		
dep2: I've become more callous toward people since I took this job				,807	
dep4: I don't really care what happens to some recipients.				,748	
dep1: I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal 'objects'				,688	
dep3: I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally				,683	
dep5: I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems.				,640	
oj2: I think that my level of pay is fair.					,855
oj4: Overall, the rewards I receive here are quite fair.					,853
oj3: I consider my work load to be quite fair.					,712
oj5: I feel that my job responsibilities are fair.					,709
Cronbach Alpha (α)	$\alpha=0,938$	$\alpha=0,922$	$\alpha=0,907$	$\alpha=0,858$	$\alpha=0,906$
<i>Total Variance Explained: 70,907. Ethical climate (EC); Procedural Justice (PJ); Distributive Justice (DJ); Emotional Exhaustion (EA); Depersonalization (DEP)</i>					

3.3.2. Correlation and Regression Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations among all scales used in the analyses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	1	2	3	4
Distributive Justice	3,06	1,11	543	1			
Procedural Justice	3,41	,96	543	,596**	1		
Ethical Climate	3,91	,918	543	,395**	,493**	1	
Emotional Exhaustion	2,64	1,04	543	-,504**	-,460**	-,362**	1
Depersonalization	2,16	,98	543	-,332**	-,385**	-,388**	,658**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation coefficients were calculated and it was found that each variable was correlated to the others for all the participants.

In this research, we examined whether ethical climate mediated the relationship organizational justice and burnout by hierarchical regression models outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986).

Table 3. Regression Results of Mediation Effect of Ethical Climate on Organizational Justice and Emotional Exhaustion

	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Unstandardized β	Sig.	Adjusted R ²	F Value
1. Regression	Distributive Justice	Emotional exhaustion	-,337	0,000	0,291	111,999
	Procedural Justice		-,269	0,000		
2. Regression	Distributive Justice	Ethical Climate	,130	0,001	0,256	94,319
	Procedural Justice		,379	0,000		
3. Regression	Ethical Climate	Emotional exhaustion	-,414	0,000	0,130	81,729
4. Regression	Distributive Justice	Emotional exhaustion	-,317	0,000	0,303	79,429
	Procedural Justice		-,210	0,000		
	Ethical Climate		-,154	0,001		

As illustrated in Table 3, distributive justice ($p=.000$; $\beta=$, -,337; $R^2=$,291; $F=$ 111,999) and procedural justice ($p=.000$; $\beta=$, -,269; $R^2=$,291; $F=$ 111,999) significantly have negative effect on emotional exhaustion. We accept *H1a* and *H1c*. In second regression model, distributive justice ($p=.001$; $\beta=$,130; $R^2=$,256; $F=$ 94,319) and procedural justice ($p=.000$; $\beta=$,379; $R^2=$,256; $F=$ 94,319) also affect ethical climate positively. Thus, *H2a* and *H2b* are accepted. Third regression analysis reveals the effect of ethical climate on emotional exhaustion ($p=.000$; $\beta=$, -,414; $R^2=$,130; $F=$ 81,729). We accept *H3a* hypothesis. When ethical climate is included as a mediating variable to the fourth regression model, the

findings illustrate that; the relationship between the distributive justice and emotional exhaustion still remain significant however ethical climate does not have any mediation effect between organizational justice dimensions and emotional exhaustion relation. We reject the hypotheses of *H4a* and *H4c*.

Table 4. Regression Results of Mediation Effect of Ethical Climate on Organizational Justice and Depersonalization

	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Unstandardized β	Sig.	Adjusted R ²	F Value
1st Regression	Distributive Justice	Depersonalization	-,140	0,001	0,161	53,064
	Procedural Justice		-,295	0,000		
2nd Regression	Distributive Justice	Ethical Climate	,130	0,001	0,256	94,319
	Procedural Justice		,379	0,000		
3rd Regression	Ethical Climate	Depersonalization	-,416	0,000	0,149	95,971
4rd Regression	Distributive Justice	Depersonalization	-,106	0,013	0,205	47,517
	Procedural Justice		-,195	0,000		
	Ethical Climate		-,264	0,000		

As illustrated in Table 4, distributive justice ($p=.001$; $\beta=-,140$; $R^2=,161$; $F=53,064$) and procedural justice ($p=.000$; $\beta=-,295$; $R^2=,161$; $F=53,064$) significantly have negative effect on depersonalization. We accept *H1b* and *H1d*. In second regression model, *H2a* and *H2b* are accepted as previously mentioned in Table 3. Third regression analysis reveals the effect of ethical climate on depersonalization ($p=.000$; $\beta=-,416$; $R^2=,149$; $F=95,971$). We accept *H3b* hypothesis. When regressed together the significant effect of ethical climate on depersonalization increases ($p=.0013$; $\beta=-,106$; $F=47,517$). It is because of the overshadowing effect of the ethical climate; in other words, ethical climate plays a mediating role (partial mediation) in the negative relation between distributive justice and depersonalization. Accordingly, *H4d* is accepted. *H4b* is rejected since there is no mediation between procedural justice and depersonalization. Mediation effect is question when appears each of the two variables are related significantly as well as a third variable take places as a mediator (Türkay et al., 2012, 214-217). Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) ensures the mediating effect in addition to the main hypothesis testing (Jackson et al., 2013, 158). The results indicate that all of the mediation effects are significant ($p<0.01$). It can be stated that the influence of organizational justice (distributive justice) on burnout (depersonalization) increases with the mediating effect of ethical climate.

4. Conclusion

Ethics as the basics for an impartial internal environment in an organization indicates what is right and what is wrong in business that leads employees and stakeholders with moral values. Unethical climate creates important problems for the organizations. These behaviors both negatively affect the employees' own performance and the performance of other employees who are subjected to these behaviors. Today, organizational justice that has been studied on for many years appears as an important determinant of work-related attitudes and behaviors. How employees perceive the overall fairness and justice of the organization determines their decisions about their relationships with it. Furthermore, in return for organizational justice, employees tend to behave more ethically so as to conform to the company's expectations. They are also motivated to be good organizational citizens and display

helpful behavior. With this study, it was mainly aimed to understand the effects of organizational justice on burnout as well as the mediating effect of ethical climate on this relationship. For this purpose, the data was collected from the employees working in the financial sector, operating in Istanbul. According to the findings, organizational justice negatively affects both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization dimensions of burnout behavior. Furthermore, the findings present a supporting evidence of the partial mediating effect of ethical climate on justice and burnout behavior. This is particularly evident for the mediating effect of ethical climate on the distributive justice and depersonalization relation. Findings do not show any mediating effect of ethical climate on procedural justice and burnout dimensions. The results also demonstrate consistency with the previous researches [(Martinez –Tur et al, 2014; Lambert et al (2010), Chenevert et al. (2013)] on this topic. Thus, organizational justice is assumed to have positive effect on employees, reducing burnout through ethical climate. However, this study confirms that, ethical climate only mediates the relation between distributive justice and depersonalization behavior. Although this study contributes to the understanding of ethical climate relation with the justice perceptions and burnout behaviors of employees in Turkey, it also has some limitations. Since the sample size in Turkish financial sector is too large gathering the data was time consuming as well as costly. Another limitation is that ethical climate in the related literature is distinguished into various climate types. Future research should also concentrate on these climate types to present much precise evidence on employees' job related outcomes.

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