

## INTERACTIVE EFFECTS OF MULTI-FOCI JUSTICE CLIMATES ON TEAMS' PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT\*

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### Abstract

Psychological empowerment refers to the degree in which an employee feels that he controls events in the organization. This construct is studied on a group level as well, as a team members' common experience. Team empowerment is a multidimensional construct that includes the collective belief about freedom, independence and discretion in decision-making (autonomy), teams' effectiveness (potency), the importance and value of teams' work (meaningfulness), and the contribution of the teams' work to organizational performance (impact). Organizations are interested in empowering individuals and teams because empowerment relates to positive work outcomes. Justice climate, as an important component of the overall experience of the working environment, greatly determines psychological empowerment. The aim of this study is to verify the interactive effects of organizational, supervisory and peer justice climate on teams' psychological empowerment.

We analyzed data collected from 196 work teams from different organizations. Results of polynomial regression combined with response surface methodology show that with the increase of the level of congruence between multi-foci justice climates,

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teams' psychological empowerment increases as well. Misalignment between different sources of justice climate, a situation in which one source is fair while the other is unfair, does not affect the team members' joint perception of psychological empowerment. As long as the team perceives one source of justice as fair, the teams' psychological empowerment is high, regardless of the injustice of another source. Although the cross-sectional study design does not allow inferring causality, the theoretical implications of the results for the application of the congruence theory in the organizational context in understanding the effects of (mis)alignment between different sources of justice climate, as well as the practical applicability of the results in human resource management, are discussed.

**Key words:** teams' psychological empowerment, multi-foci justice climate

## INTRODUCTION

Very often, organizational research deals with attitudes and behaviors of individuals, while ignoring that these persons do not function alone. At their workplace, they are part of larger social structures - primarily teams, in which they share information, collectively devise events and mutually influence each other, and thus share a similar interpretation of organizational events (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Therefore, constructs at the group level are becoming increasingly important, especially if we want to grasp the full range of social context in which individuals operate (Cropanzano & Molina, 2015).

One of these group-level constructs is teams' psychological empowerment. It represents shared perception of the team members about the degree of a common choice in deciding how to carry out their task, their ability to perform well on their tasks, during which they feel that their work is meaningful and believe that their tasks are important for their organization (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011). As well as on the individual level, teams' psychological empowerment is a multidimensional construct comprised of four dimensions (potency, meaningfulness, autonomy and impact), which all contributes to the overall construct of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Potency is defined as the collective belief that the team can be effective (Guzzo, Yost, Campbell & Shea, 1993). Meaningfulness refers to the team experience of its tasks as something that is important and valuable, while autonomy relates to the degree in which team members experience substantial freedom, independence and discretion in their work. The team that produces significant and important work for the organization is an influential team (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Members of the team that has this impact seek out, share and collectively understand feedback from the other members of the organization (Ancona, 1990).

Employees' perceptions of crucial aspects of organizational functioning have a strong influence on psychological empowerment (Carless, 2004). Since experience of justice in the workplace is a notable component in those perceptions, it appears that fairness is an important determinant of psychological empowerment. Teams, as well as the individuals, evaluate the fairness of the events or the situations in their work environment. Teams usually evaluate the fairness of the allocation of resources (distributive justice climate), the procedures used to determine the allocation of these resources (procedural justice climate) and the interactional treatment they receive (interactional justice climate). Over time, teams' specific justice judgments cognitively combine into their overall opinion or the overall justice climate judgments (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Li, Cropanzano & Molina, 2015). Additionally, team members' shared perceptions about justice in their work environment, or multi-foci justice climate, can provoke both formal authorities (organization and supervisor), as well as the stakeholders that do not have formal authority over each other (peers). Justice climate has a more profound effect on the various outcomes, in comparison to the individuals' justice perceptions (e.g. Naumann & Bennett, 2000). Perceptions of justice positively relate to a broad range of organizationally relevant outcomes. At the same time, perceptions of injustice lead to numerous undesirable employee reactions (Conlon, Meyer & Nowakowski, 2005). However, what if a team simultaneously experiences both, fair and unfair treatment? How will this misalignment affect the teams' psychological empowerment?

To our knowledge, there is no research that explicitly examined the effects of (in)congruence between team members' shared perceptions of justice driven by various stakeholders on teams' psychological empowerment. In line with this, the aim of this study is to explore the interactive effects of multi-foci justice climates (organization, supervisor and peers) on teams' psychological empowerment. We propose that both forms of justice climate in (any) combination increase the teams' psychological empowerment. Precisely, when teams' perceptions of justice from both sources are congruent (i.e., aligned: both sources fair, or unfair), the teams' perceived psychological empowerment will linearly increase as perceptions of justice climate deriving from both sources increase. Further, when teams' perception of justice sources is incongruent (i.e., misaligned: one source fair, another unfair), this will adversely affect the teams' psychological empowerment. Specifically, teams' psychological empowerment will decrease more sharply as the degree of misalignment (i.e., the degree to which the levels of the two justice climate sources differ from one another) increases. The direction of misalignment (i.e., which source affects the empowerment more) will not matter since the teams' psychological empowerment depends on the justice in the organizational context in general (Safarzadeh et al, 2013).

## METHOD

### Participants

This research was conducted on a sample of  $N = 196$  teams (total of  $N = 659$  team members) from  $N = 69$  organizations from a variety of different industries. Team size varied from three to five team members. While selecting the sample, we took into account a clear hierarchical relationship: the team members were responsible to one, immediate supervisor, and they had no formal authority over each other. Team members shared a common (group) goal while being interdependent in performing their tasks. They had minimum team tenure of one-year duration. The gender composition of the sample was 60% female on average. There were 65% of teams up to 40 years old on average. On average, more than 50% of teams had organizational tenure (and more than 40% team tenure) longer than six years. On average, 50% of teams were academically educated.

### Instruments and procedure.

This research was conducted in the team members' institutions. Participation was confidential and voluntary. Each team member filled out a questionnaire in approximately 25 minutes. This unique survey consisted of multiple scales. All the items were constructed by using a referent-shift approach, and measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Individual estimations of each team member were aggregated on a group-level, as a teams' mean value estimation. Hence, we presented all the measured variables on a team-level analysis. Prior to this analysis we confirmed the aggregation prerequisites, by calculating indicators of multi-item interrater agreement ( $r_{\text{wgi}}$ ) and intraclass correlation coefficients ( $\text{ICC}_{(1)}$ ,  $\text{ICC}_{(2)}$ ). Additionally, factorial structure of each construct was confirmed using CFA.

Organizational and Supervisory Justice Climate Questionnaire (OSJCQ; adjusted from Jakopec & Sušanj, 2014) and Intraunit Justice Climate Questionnaire (IJCQ; translated from Li, Cropanzano & Benson, 2007) captured teams' perceived multi-foci justice. OSJCQ consists of 34 items and measures teams' perceived justice of the formal authorities. One-factor measure of overall organizational justice climate consists of 17 items related to teams' distributive, procedural and interactional justice perceptions ( $r_{\text{wgi}} = .86$ ;  $\text{ICC}_{(1)} = .29$ ;  $\text{ICC}_{(2)} = .96$ ;  $\chi^2$  [df = 90;  $N = 196$ ] = 132.8,  $p < .001$ ; NC = 1.5; CFI = .99; TLI = .98; NFI = .96; PGFI = .55; RMSEA = .05; AIC = 258.8). The same 17 items, with the variation of the source only, measure overall supervisory justice climate ( $r_{\text{wgi}} = .87$ ;  $\text{ICC}_{(1)} = .24$ ;  $\text{ICC}_{(2)} = .95$ ;  $\chi^2$  [df = 62;  $N = 196$ ] = 113.2,  $p < .001$ ; NC = 1.8; CFI = .99; TLI = .97; NFI = .97; PGFI = .38; RMSEA = .06; AIC = 295.2). IJCQ measures teams' perceived overall justice from peers, the ones that do not have formal authority over each other, and consists of 14

items, in terms of content, parallel to the ones of the formal authorities. All the items are saturated on one latent factor of overall peer justice climate ( $r_{\text{wgj}} = .89$ ;  $ICC_{(1)} = .14$ ;  $ICC_{(2)} = .90$ ;  $\chi^2[\text{df} = 44; N = 196] = 75.8, p < .001$ ;  $NC = 1.7$ ;  $CFI = .97$ ;  $TLI = .95$ ;  $NFI = .94$ ;  $PGFI = .40$ ;  $RMSEA = .06$ ;  $AIC = 197.8$ ).

Team Empowerment Questionnaire (translated from Kirkman et al., 2004), which consists of 12 items, measures teams' perceived potency, meaningfulness, autonomy and impact. Measure of overall team psychological empowerment was used ( $r_{\text{wgj}} = .93$ ;  $ICC_{(1)} = .09$ ;  $ICC_{(2)} = .79$ ;  $\chi^2[\text{df} = 49; N = 196] = 105.8, p < .001$ ;  $NC = 2.1$ ;  $CFI = .93$ ;  $TLI = .91$ ;  $NFI = .9$ ;  $PGFI = .44$ ;  $RMSEA = .07$ ;  $AIC = 187.7$ ).

Finally, polynomial regression analysis combined with response surface methodology captured interactive effects of multi-foci justice climate on teams' psychological empowerment. We followed the procedure thoroughly explained in Shanock et al (2010, 2014). In the first step of the regression analysis, we included teams' characteristics (age, gender, team tenure and education) as control variables. In the second step, we entered centered justice climates, their quadrats and interactions (polynomial regression equation). Additionally, we modelled response surface plots to visually aid the interpretation.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all variables measured.

	Descriptive statistics			Correlations		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	2	3	4
1. Organizational justice climate	3.34	.67	.97	.68**	.44**	.63**
2. Supervisory justice climate	3.69	.63	.97	-	.65**	.63**
3. Peer justice climate	3.66	.46	.89		-	.66**
4. Teams' psychological empowerment	3.92	.36	.84			-

As expected, teams which perceive their work context (organization, supervisor, and peers) as fair, experience higher levels of psychological empowerment.

Table 2 and Figure 1 present the interactive effects of organizational, supervisory and peer justice climates on teams' psychological empowerment.

In line with the assumptions, when sources of justice climate are aligned, the level of teams' psychological empowerment increase, as teams' perceptions of justice from organization, supervisor and peers increase (significant and positive  $a_1$ , insignificant

$a_2$  coefficient). When justice climates simultaneously decrease, teams' psychological empowerment significantly declines as well.

However, teams' psychological empowerment does not decrease more sharply as the degree of misalignment between justice climates increases (insignificant  $a_4$ ), to the contrary, it is on a very high level as long as team perceives at least one source of justice as completely fair.

Additionally, all sources of justice climate are equally important for predicting teams' psychological empowerment (insignificant  $a_3$ ). Only when it comes to the interaction between organizational and supervisory justice climates, results show that the organizational justice climate affects empowerment more than the supervisory justice climate (significant and negative  $a_3$ ).

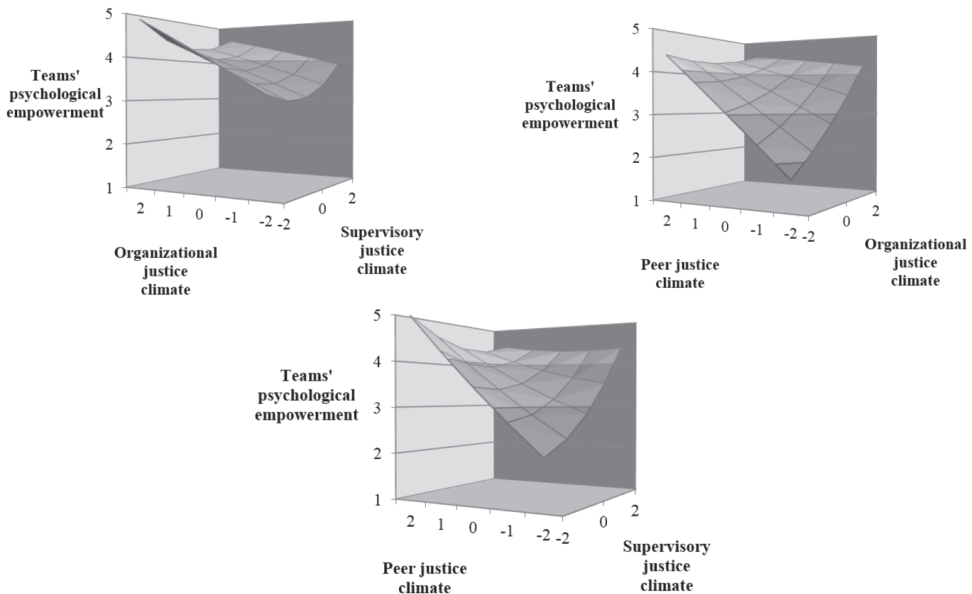


Figure 1. The effects of (in)congruence between multi-foci justice climate on teams' psychological empowerment.

Table 2. Interactive effects of multi-foci justice climates on teams' psychological empowerment

Teams' psychological empowerment											
Interaction between SJC and OJC			Interaction between OJC and PJC			Interaction between SJC and PJC					
Variable	$\Delta R^2$	$b^a$ (Model 1)	$b^a$ (Model 2)	Variable	$\Delta R^2$	$b^a$ (Model 1)	$b^a$ (Model 2)	Variable	$\Delta R^2$	$b^a$ (Model 1)	$b^a$ (Model 2)
Model 1 <sup>a</sup>	.05*			Model 1	.05*			Model 1	.05*		
Constant		3.99**	3.69**	Constant		3.99**	3.55**	Constant		3.99**	3.52**
Gender		-.09	-.08	Gender		-.10	-.08	Gender		-.09	-.05
Age		.12*	.18**	Age		.12*	.12*	Age		.12*	.01
Teams' tenure		-.05	.03	Teams' tenure		-.05	-.08	Teams' tenure		-.05	.09*
Education		-.08	-.02	Education		-.08	-.01	Education		-.08	-.03
Model 2	.51**			Model 2	.60**			Model 2	.50**		
SJC (b1)			.07	OJC (b1)			.34**	SJC (b1)			.24**
OJC (b2)			.30**	PJC (b2)			.38**	PJC (b2)			.38**
SJC <sup>2</sup> (b3)			.11*	OJC <sup>2</sup> (b3)			.05	SJC <sup>2</sup> (b3)			.10*
SJC * OJC (b4)			-.07	OJC * PJC (b4)			-.15*	SJC * PJC (b4)			-.17*
OJC <sup>2</sup> (b5)			-.01	PJC <sup>2</sup> (b5)			-.01	PJC <sup>2</sup> (b5)			.02
Surface Tests	Model 2	Model 2	Model 2	Surface Tests	Model 2	Model 2	Model 2	Surface Tests	Model 2	Model 2	Model 2
$a_1^b$	.37**	.72**	.72**	$a_1^b$	.72**	.72**	.72**	$a_1^b$	.62**	.62**	.62**
$a_2^c$	.05	-.10	-.10	$a_2^c$	-.10	-.10	-.10	$a_2^c$	-.05	-.05	-.05
$a_3^d$	-.23*	-.03	-.03	$a_3^d$	-.03	-.03	-.03	$a_3^d$	-.14	-.14	-.14
$a_4^e$	.17	.19	.19	$a_4^e$	.19	.19	.19	$a_4^e$	.29	.29	.29

Note: N = 196. <sup>a</sup> $\Delta R^2 = R^2$ . The polynomial regression was conveyed using the equation  $Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + e$ . SJC = supervisory justice climate; OJC = organizational justice climate; PJC = peer justice climate.  $b^a$  = unstandardized regression coefficient.  $a_1^b = (b_1 + b_2)$ .  $a_2^c = (b_3 + b_4 + b_5)$ .  $a_3^d = (b_1 - b_2)$ .  $a_4^e = (b_3 - b_4 + b_5)$ .

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

## DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to examine the interactive effects of multi-foci justice climates on teams' psychological empowerment. As proposed, organizational, supervisory and peer justice climates in combination, reinforce teams' psychological empowerment. The misalignment of justice climates does not negatively affect this group-level outcome, which is not in line with theories of congruence in organizational research. Teams' psychological empowerment is at a very high level, as long as the team perceives at least one source of justice as entirely fair.

This finding suggests compensatory mechanism, wherein fairness from one source of justice climate, successfully compensates unfairness from another, similarly to the case with justice dimensions – interactional justice can sometimes compensate distributive or procedural injustice (Greenberg, 2011). These results have important theoretical implications for the theories of congruence in the organizational context, showing that in some cases, incongruence does not adversely affect the outcomes.

Although the cross-sectional design of this study does not allow inferring causality, in order to accomplish and maintain high levels of teams' perceived potency, meaningfulness, autonomy and impact, it may be important to assure fair treatment at all levels of the organization. This might prevent the negative trickle-down effects (see Wo, Ambrose & Schminke, 2015), where the injustice of only one source, for example, organization, can transmit to another ones – supervisors or peers. For example, if the team simultaneously perceives their supervisor as unfair, while peers as fair, our results point to the conclusion that teams' perceived peer justice will compensate teams' perceived supervisory injustice and produce teams' feeling of empowerment. However, over time, employees will interpret received unfair treatment from authorities as a signal of inferiority of their co-workers (Tyler & Blader, 2000) that will not only inhibit desirable behaviors toward supervisor but towards peers as well (Peng, Schaubroeck & Li, 2014). Therefore, supervisory injustice climate may create a negative interpersonal dynamic in peer relations as well. The latter might provoke teams' perceptions of peer injustice as well. Naturally, when a team sees both sources of justice climate as unfair, teams' psychological empowerment is on a significantly lower level. These trickle-down effects, even on a group level analysis, are recognized in Croatian context as well (Jakopec, Bošnjak & Sušanj, 2014; Sušanj & Jakopec, 2014). However, further research should examine the mechanisms underlying these interactive effects of multi-foci justice climates.

These results offer clear messages for managers as well: with their fairness, they can compensate other sources' injustice. Namely, supervisors can apparently use fair allocation of the outcomes, just procedures used to define those outcomes, as well as appropriate treatment of their subordinates, as a substitute for unfair organizational policies or unjust peers behavior, in order to establish and maintain teams' psychological empowerment.



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## INTERAKCIJSKI UČINCI RAZLIČITIH IZVORA KLIME PRAVEDNOSTI NA PSIHOLOŠKU OSNAŽENOST TIMA

### Sažetak

Psihološka osnaženost se općenito odnosi na stupanj u kojem zaposlenik osjeća da ima kontrolu nad događajima u organizaciji. Ovaj se konstrukt proučava i na grupnoj razini, kao zajedničko iskustvo tima ili radne grupe. Timska osnaženost je višedimenzionalni konstrukt koji uključuje zajedničku percepciju članova tima o slobodi, nezavisnosti i diskreciji u odlučivanju (autonomija), kolektivno uvjerenje da tim može biti učinkovit (moć), skupni osjećaj da je posao tima važan i vrijedan (značenje) i uvjerenje da radom pridonose učinkovitosti organizacije (utjecaj). Organizacije su zainteresirane za osnaživanje pojedinaca i timova jer se osnaženost pokazala povezano s pozitivnim radnim ishodima, a u najvećoj je mjeri određena ukupnim doživljajem radnog okruženja, posebice klimom pravednosti. Cilj je istraživanja provjeriti interakcijske učinke doživljaja pravednosti organizacije, rukovoditelja i suradnika na psihološku osnaženost tima.

Podaci su prikupljeni od članova 196 timova u organizacijama različitih djelatnosti. Rezultati polinomne regresije i metode odzivnih površina pokazuju da s porastom razine usklađenosti različitih izvora klime pravednosti raste i psihološka osnaženost tima. Neusklađenost izvora klime pravednosti, odnosno situacije u kojima je jedan izvor pravedan, a drugi nepravedan, nema značajne učinke na zajedničku percepciju psihološke osnaženosti. Dokle god je jedan izvor percipiran pravednim, psihološka je osnaženost tima visoka, neovisno o nepravednosti drugog izvora. Iako, s obzirom na korelacijski nacrt istraživanja, nije moguće kauzalno zaključivanje, raspravlja se o teorijskim implikacijama rezultata za primjenu teorije sukladnosti u organizacijskom kontekstu u razumijevanju učinaka (ne)usklađenosti između različitih izvora klime pravednosti, kao i o praktičnoj primjenjivosti rezultata u upravljanju ljudskim resursima.

**Ključne riječi:** psihološka osnaženost tima, klime pravednosti različitih izvora

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