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Effect of perceived procedural justice on faculty members' silence: the mediating role of trust in supervisor

Tijen Tulubas [a] *, Cevat Celep [b]

[a]*Instructor, Namık Kemal University School of Foreign Languages,Tekirdağ, 59000, TURKEY*
[b]*Professor, Kocaeli Univerity Faculty of Education, Kocaeli 41000, TURKEY*

Abstract

Although employees are expected to contribute to the development of organization with their knowledge, ideas, opinions and suggestions, they sometimes prefer to remain silent. Perceived justice, especially procedural justice can be important in employers' decision to speak up about organizational issues. This study aims to examine the effects of justice on faculty members' silence. It also aims to study whether trust in supervisor mediate the effect of perceived justice on faculty members' silence. Our study showed perceived justice predicts faculty members' silence. Trust in supervisor is found to mediate the effect of perceived justice and perceived procedural justice on faculty members' silence.

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1. Introduction

Universities are expected to promote cultural, economic and social development of the society as well as to educate the members of the society. To achieve this responsibility, faculty members hold a crucial position in training individuals who will directly join the workforce, producing solutions to social problems through scientific studies and thus rendering social development possible.

It seems essential that faculty members work in an atmosphere where they can cooperate in conformity and freely share their knowledge and experience gained through scientific inquiry. However, working in conformity should not be regarded as silently and passively doing what is expected without any opposition to policies and status quo. Recent studies indicate that employees' doing what is expected without speaking up any concerns could be a sign of withdrawal or a way of protesting organizational practices (Brinsfield, 2009). From this point of view, silence must be more than a passive acceptance of current situation. Silence could be a kind of message or a kind of talk (VanDyne et. al., 2003). In other words, silence is more than nothingness (Brinsfield, Edwards & Greenberg, 2009). As Pinder and Harlos (2001) state, silence is an active, conscious, intentional and purposeful behavior.

Faculty members may prefer to remain silent due to some organisational factors. Research indicates that perceived organisational justice could have a role in employee silence (Harlos, 1997; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).   As Colquitt and Greenberg (2003) state, employees work for the organization as

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* TijenTÜLÜBAŞ. Tel.: +90-505-334-6476
E-mail address: tijenozek@hotmail.com

long as they believe there is justice in distribution of resources and organisational procedures as well as attitudes of management towards employees. On the other hand, employees perceptions of injustice may result in their withdrawal or could lead to some attitudes that can produce negative outcomes for the organization (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lar, 2010). According to Harlos (1997), employee silence is a purposeful strategy against perceived injustice in the organisation. Therefore, a climate of justice or perceived justice could affect employees' decisions to speak up or remain silent.

Previous studies on perceived justice indicate that procedural justice is more influential on employees to perceive organisational practices as fair (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2010). Employees with a higher procedural justice perception believe that decision making procedures in the organisation are designed to produce fair outcomes (Rahim at.al., 2000). According to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), employees with a higher procedural justice perception is usually concinced that his/her contribution to organisation will be respected and speaking up will not result in negative consequences? Moreover, procedural justice concerns employees' opportunities to communicate their ideas freely, to criticise organisational decisions and to redesign organisational procedures accordingly (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). That's why, perceived procedural justice could be more significant in predicting faculty members' silence.

There is an extensive interaction among teaching staff at universities, as in other educational organisations, which significantly influences organisational effectiveness. Thus, trust could be another significant concept in understanding faculty members' activities for the benefit or at the expense of organisational practices (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Zeinabadi and Rastegarpour (2010) indicate the significance of trust in supervisor in the formation of a climate of trust in organisations. They also claim that trust in supervisor is a distinctive factor in effectiveness of educational organisations. Supervisors at universities are both physically and personally closer to faculty members, so they affect faculty members' daily activities more. Therefore, their in-role and extra-role behaviours could be much more related to trust in supervisor. As some researchers indicate, especially affective trust in supervisor could influence numerous organisational outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, effective in-role and extra-role behaviours, effective communication and knowledge sharing (Dirk & Ferrin, 2002; Singh & Srivastava, 2009).

Studies on building trust in supervisor show that justice perception is a significant factor in this process (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Colquitt et.al., 2001; Cammerman et.al., 2007; Zeinabadi & Rastegarpour, 2010). When employees perceive justice in the distribution of resources (distributive justice), can take part in decision making processes (procedural justice) and believe that the supervisor is in a fair interaction with them, they tend to trust in supervisor (DeConinck, 2010). Based on their meta-analysis on justice, Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) states that perceived procedural justice is especially significant in predicting employees' trust in supervisor.

Trust in supervisor is considered to have a mediating role in the relationship between some organisational variables (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Yang, Mossholder and Peng (2009) state that trust in supervisor can act as a mediator in the relationship between perceived justice and such organisational variables as performance, OCB and some other extra-role behaviours. Faculty members' decision whether to share their knowledge and ideas for the benefit of organisation could be regarded extra-role behaviour. Therefore, trust in supervisor could have a mediating role in the relationship between perceived justice and silence. In other words, faculty members' justice perception might affect their silence either directly or via trust in supervisor. Due to the fact that perceived procedural justice is more effective on trust in supervisor (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), perceived procedural justice could be expected to predict employee silence more strongly via trust in supervisor.

The present study aims to investigate the effect of faculty members' justice perceptions on their silence and the mediating role of trust in supervisor in this relationship. We also aim to research the effect of perceived procedural justice on faculty members' silence via trust in supervisor. A closer look at how perceived justice affects faculty members' silence might shed light on the measures to be taken so as to encourage faculty members to share their knowledge, ideas and suggestions for the benefit of organisation.

2. Employee Silence

Employee silence was first mentioned in the literature by social scientist Albert Hirchmann in 1970 and it was later developed further by some other scientists (in Brinsfield et.al, 2009). At first, silence was considered to be a passive attitude against an unpleasant situation, a passive acceptance of the present situation or a sign of commitment. However, silence started to be viewed from a different perspective in recent studies (Brinsfield, 2009).

Morrison and Milliken (2000) use the term "organisational silence" and refer to silence as an organisational level phenomenon. According to them, organisational silence occurs when employees intentionally withhold their knowledge and ideas regarding organisational issues. In other words, employees might prefer to withhold their knowledge, ideas and suggestions which might promote organisational development. Pinder and Harlos (2001) regard silence an individual phenomenon and use the term "employee silence". They define employee silence as "the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organisational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress" (p.334). According to them, employee silence is a means of communication which includes emotions, consciousness and intention.

When employees remain silent, they withhold some information regarding their organisation. This information could be based on either some objective data or some subjective judgment such as an idea or a concern. Silence is also conscious and intentional which is usually motivated by some other factors. Only under these conditions silence in the workplace can be considered as employee silence (Brinsfield, 2009). Thus, employee silence can be defined in broad terms as employees' intentional withholding of their knowledge, ideas, opinions, suggestions, and advice regarding organisational issues and avoiding expressing them either verbally or in any written form.

3. Organisational Justice

In organisational science literature, justice is considered to be a significant constituent of organisational effectiveness (Colquitt et.al., 2001). Organisational justice is a term that defines whether employees' perceive they are treated fairly in the workplace and how their perception influences other work-related variables (Moorman, 1991). Perceived organisational justice affects several organisational behaviours (Greenberg, 1990).

Based on variables influencing justice perceptions, there types of perceived justice have been defined: (1) distributive, procedural and interactive justice.

3.1. Distributive Justice

Distributive justice is related to fair distribution of organisational resources among employees (Moorman, 1991). These organisational resources could be salary, financial rewards, appreciation, promotion, status, honest feedback, and prestige. Employees expect to gain these resources in exchange of their contribution to the organisation through their efforts, training, experience and knowledge (DeConinck & Stillwell, 2004).

Equity, equality and need are three basic principles in building distributive justice perception (Cohen, 1987; Fortin, 2008). According to Rahim et.al. (2000), equity is about the consistency between employees' contribution to the organisation and what they get in return. In addition to equity, employees observe the consistency between effort and gain in the case of other employees and compare it to what they gain in return to their efforts. If the employee feels that organisational resources are not distributed in proportion to contribution to organisation, they develop a perception of injustice (Fortin, 2008). Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) indicate that the valence of organisational resources is also critical in building justice perception. The more the employee need these resources, the more effective their fair distribution among employees.

3.2. Procedural Justice

Procedural justice is related to the procedures used for the distribution of organisational resources and outcomes. Thus, procedural justice is more about how decisions are made about resource allocation and whether formal decision making procedures are based on some normative principles. In other words, employees want to make sure that decision makers will be fair and this requires well-organized decision making procedures in the organisation (Rahim et.al., 2000). In order to build a stronger justice perception, it is crucial that these procedures are consistent, true, redesignable, ethical, representative of employees' needs and without prejudice(Colquitt, Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005).

Employees with a perception of distributive injustice first investigate the procedures to this distribution before they react to the situation. Therefore, procedural justice is considered to be more directly related to organisational behaviour (Colquitt et.al, 2001). That's why, procedural justice is organisation-oriented while distributive justice is outcome-oriented (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Due to this fact, many studies focus on procedural justice when they investigate the effect of justice on some organisational outcomes such as commitment, perceived organisational support and silence (Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993; Luo, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Fodchuck, 2009; Rego & Cunha, 2010).

3.3. Interactive Justice

Interactive justice is about employer's attitudes and behaviours towards employees (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Studies on interactional justice focus on four basic concepts significant in interactional justice perception: (1) truthfulness (honesty), (2) justification (explanation), (3) respect (politeness) and (4) propriety (Fortin, 2008). These concepts are important to make employees feel that they are treated with respect and sincerity which leads to a stronger perception of justice (Burton, 2008).

4. Trust in Supervisor

Mayer et.al (1995) define trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (p. 712). Dirks and Ferrin (2002) state in their meta-analysis on trust literature that trust in management can be investigated with a relation-based approach and character-based approach. Relation-based approach is about how an employee perceives his/her relationship with the employer. If the employee believes that their relationship is based on trust, goodwill and mutual responsibilities, s/he is more likely to develop trust in the supervisor. McAllister calls this view of trust "affective trust". Character-based approach, on the other hand, is about an employee's perception regarding supervisors character and its possible effects on his/her relationship with the supervisor. Since supervisor decisions greatly influence employees to achieve their personal goals as well as organisational goals, whether his/her supervisor will be fair and honest in decision making process is significant for the employee. This view of trust building is called "cognitive trust" by McAllister (1995).

According to Mayer et.al. (1995), ability, benevolence and integrity are three fundamental factors in building trust in supervisor. Ability is about whether the supervisor has the resources and skills to fulfill employees' expectations. In organisational context, goodwill and sincerity might not be enough for the supervisor to be effective. That's why, it is important that the supervisor has knowledge, experience, power and resources to meet employees' needs (Singh & Srivastana, 2009). Benevolence, on the other hand, is about supervisor's genuine care about employees and authentic concern in his/her relationship with them (Burke et.al, 2007).A benevolent supervisor makes employees feel that their values and welfare will be protected by the supervisor. Integrity is the third factor significant in trust building. Employees expect that supervisors adhere to some defined principles which are considered to be ethical and acceptable by the employees (Lapierre, 2007). Employees examine their supervisors activities, behaviours, image in and out of the organisation, and consistency between their behaviours. If they feel that the supervisor conforms to ethical principles and standards, they trust him/her (Mayer et.al., 1995). In fact,

integrity requires justice, consistency, being reliable, open and honest (Cho & Ringquist, 2010). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998) states that teachers trust in their supervisor is highly related to supervisor's being reliable, credible, polite, considerate and honest.

5. Method

This relational study aims to measure the effect of justice perception on faculty members silence and evaluate the mediating role of trust in supervisor in this relationship. The population includes faculty members (professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer, research assistant and instructor) working at Kocaeli University, Sakarya University and Namık Kemal University (except Faculty of Medicine) in 2020-2011 academic year. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, and includes 459 faculty members from above-mentioned universities.

5.1. Data Collection Tools

Data regarding justice were collected using "Organisational Justice Scale" developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) and adapted to Turkish by Polat (2007). This Likert type scale ranges from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*, and has three factors: distributive justice, procedural justice and interactive justice. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the whole scale is .97.

Data regarding employee silence were collected using "Scale of Faculty Members' Silence" adapted from Brinsfield's (2009) scale. The scale is Likert type and ranges from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the whole scale is .93.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (2003) "Scale of Trust in Colleagues" was used to collect data about faculty members trust in supervisor. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Polat (2007). The Likert type scale ranges from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is .97.

6. Findings

In order to investigate the effect of faculty members' justice perception on their silence, a regression analysis was conducted. In the analysis, both global justice perception and the sub-dimensions were included. Effect of trust in supervisor on faculty members' silence was also investigated through regression analysis. Results of the regression analysis are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Regression Analysis Regarding the Effects of Perceived Justice, Perceived Distributive, Procedural, Interactive Justice, and Trust in Supervisor on Faculty Members' Silence

	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	3,985	0,104		38,334	0,000
Perceived Justice	0,323	0,034	0,420	9,620	0,000
	Dependent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=92, 537	**R=0,420**	**R^2=0,176**	**p < .01**	
Constant	3,965	0,105		37,918	0,000
Perceived Distributive Justice	0,314	0,034	0,408	9,355	0,000
	Dependent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=87,525	**R=0,408**	**R^2=0,166**	**p < .01**	

	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	3,842	0,093		41,106	0,000
Perceived Procedural Justice	0,287	0,031	0,406	9,256	0,000
	Dependent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=85,675	**R=0,406**	**R^2=0,165**	**p < .01**	

Table 1.(Continued)

	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	3,870	0,104		37,107	0,000
Perceived Interactional Justice	0,264	0,031	0,374	8,478	0,000
	Dependent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=71,884	**R=0,374**	**R^2=0,140**	**p <.01**	
Constant	4,108	0,110		37,245	0,000
Trust in Supervisor	0,348	0,034	0,439	10,243	0,000
	Dependent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=104,929	**R=0,439**	**R^2=0,193**	**p < .01**	

According to the results of the regression analysis, perceived justice has a significant effect on faculty members' silence (R= 0, 420, R^2= 0,18, F= 92,537, p < .01). Perceived justice explains % 18 of the total variance of faculty members' silence. The analysis regarding the effects of perceived distributive, procedural and interactive justice also reveals that faculty members' silence was significantly affected by these sub-dimensions of perceived justice. According to the results of the analysis, perceived distributive justice explains % 17 of the total variance of faculty members' silence. Perceived procedural justice explains % 17 while perceived interactive justice explains %14.

Trust in supervisor has a significant effect on faculty members' silence (R=0,439, R^2= 0,19, F= 104,929, p<.01) as well. According to the results of the analysis, trust in supervisor explains %19 of faculty members' silence. It can be stated that trust in supervisor is as significant as perceived justice in its effect on faculty members' silence.

To investigate the effect of perceived justice on faculty members' silence via trust in supervisor, and to evaluate the mediating role of trust in supervisor in the relationship between perceived justice and silence, regression analysis was carried out. First, the effect of perceived justice on trust in supervisor was analysed. Then, a multiple regression analysis was carried out to investigate the effect of trust in supervisor on faculty members' silence. Results of the analysis were given in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Analysis Regarding the Effect of Perceived Justice on Faculty Members' Silence via Trust in Supervisor and the Mediating Role of Trust in Supervisor in the Relationship between Perceived Justice and Silence

	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	0,690	0,076		9,028	0,000
Perceived Justice	0,821	0,025	0,846	33,257	0,000
	Independent Variable: *Trust in Supervisor*				
	F=1106, 056	**R=0,846**	**R^2=0,716**	**p=,000**	
Constant	4,135	0,112		37,028	0,000
Perceived Justice	0,141	0,062	0,183	2,280	0,023
Trust in Supervisor	0,222	0,063	0,282	3,510	0,000
	Independent Variable: *Silence*				

F=53, 727	**R=0,448**	**R^2=0,201**	**p=,000**		

The results of the regression analysis indicate that perceived justice has a significant effect on trust in supervisor (R= 0, 846, R^2= 0,72, F= 1106,056 , p < .01). According to these results, perceived justice explains %72 of the total variance of trust in supervisor. It can be said that perceived justice can affect faculty members' silence through increasing or decreasing trust in the supervisor.

A closer look at the results of the multiple regression analysis reveals that trust in supervisor can have a mediating role in the effect of perceived justice on faculty members' silence. Together with trust in supervisor, perceived justice explains %20 of the total variance of faculty members' silence.

The effect of procedural justice on faculty members' silence via trust in supervisor is also investigated. The results of the multiple regression analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the Analysis Regarding the Mediating Role of Trust in Supervisor in the Relationship between Perceived Procedural Justice and Silence

	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	1,046	0,073		14,238	0,000
Perceived Procedural Justice	0,728	0,024	0,818	29,972	0,000
	Independent Variable: *Trust in Supervisor*				
	F= 898,292	**R=0,818**	**R^2=0,670**	**p=,000**	
Constant	4,110	0,111		37,159	,000
Perceived Procedural Justice	0,101	0,52	0,142	1,923	,050
Trust in Supervisor	0,257	0,59	0,325	4,393	,000
	Independent Variable: *Silence*				
	F=54, 271	**R=0,449**	**R^2=0,201**	**p=,000**	

The results of the regression analysis indicate that perceived procedural justice predicts trust in supervisor significantly (R= 0,818; R^2= 0, 670; F= 898, 292, p<.01). Perceived procedural justice explains % 67 of the total variance of trust in supervisor. The result of the multiple regression analysis reveals that trust has a mediating role in the relationship between perceived procedural justice and faculty members' silence. The effect of perceived procedural justice is stronger via trust in supervisor and they together explain %20 of the total variance of faculty members' silence.

7. Discussion

Employee silence is a conscious and intentional behaviour (Brinsfield, 2009) which could be developed against perceived injustice in the workplace (Harlos, 1997). In the light of our findings, it can be said that faculty members might use silence as a strategy against injustice in the organisation. As results indicate, faculty members could avoid sharing their knowledge, ideas and suggestions regarding organisational issues when they perceive that resource allocation and the procedures to distribute resources are not fair. As mentioned earlier, perceived inconsistency between employees' contribution to organisation and their gain in return, or inconsistency between what each employee gains for the same contribution could lead to perceived distributive injustice. Faculty members could remain silent due to a similar perception. In other words, a perceived inconsistency in the allocation of such resources as promotion, financial support, appreciation and status could make faculty members feel that their contribution is not regarded as valuable, which may eventually result in silence. Interactive justice, that's managements' attitudes towards faculty members regarding organisational practices, has an influence on faculty

members' silence, but it is not as significant as fair allocation of resources or use of fair procedures in decision making, which might indicate that treatment with respect or sincerity does not change faculty members' perception that they are treated unfairly in the organisation. The effect of perceived justice and trust in supervisor on faculty members' silence can be modeled as in Figure 1.
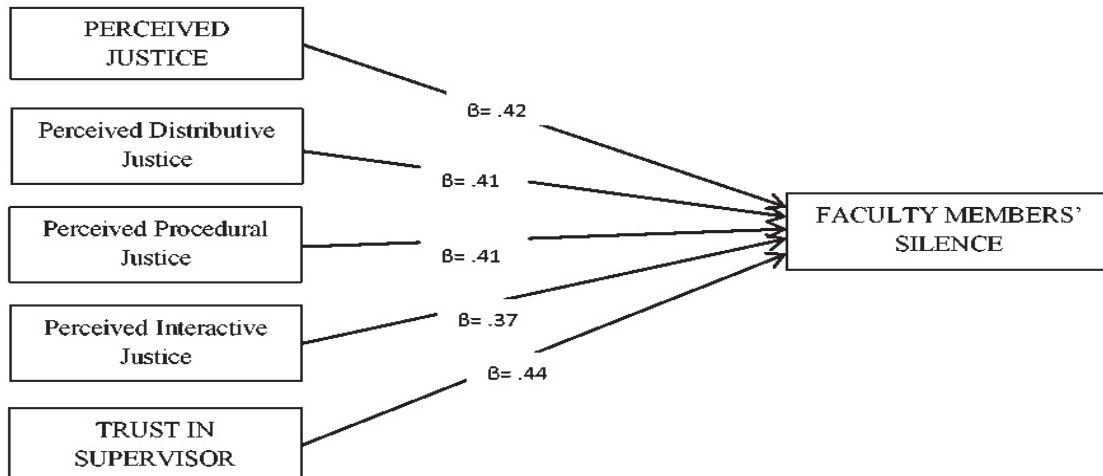

Figure 1. Model of the Effect of Perceived Justice and Trust in Supervisor on Faculty Members' Silence

Our findings indicate that perceived justice has a strong influence on faculty members' trust in supervisor, which is consistent with the results of previous studies (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Colquitt et.al., 2001; Cammerman et.al., 2007; Zeinabadi & Rastegarpour, 2010). The results also show that faculty members' trust has a stronger influence on their silence compared to perceived justice. This could be due to the fact that universities are not mechanical organisations where every procedure is determined by rules and regulations. In universities, as in other educational organisations, there has to be extensive interaction among the members of the organisation and this interaction is influential on organisational procedures. Similarly, mental processes play a crucial role in the achievement of organisational outcomes. As a result, trust becomes highly important in universities. Trust in supervisor is even more important since supervisors are more influential on the daily practices of faculty members as well as their prospective career. Furthermore, justice in the organisation could be achieved to some extent in the light of formal regulations. However, justice in the organisational practices does not guarantee that supervisor is reliable. In other words, supervisor might have to stick to rules and regulations in daily organisational practices, but this obligation is insufficient for the faculty members to trust in their supervisor. This could be the reason why perceived justice becomes a stronger predictor of faculty members' silence when it is supported by trust in supervisor. The effect of perceived justice on silence via trust in supervisor can be modeled as in Figure 2.
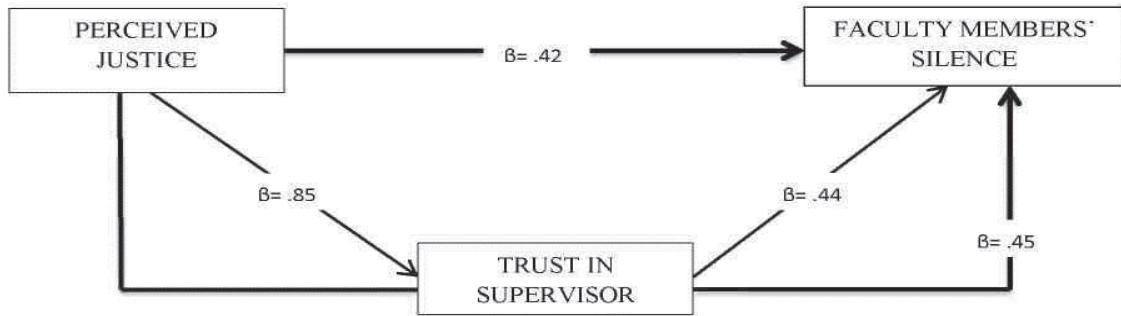
Figure 2. Model of the Effect of Perceived Justice on Faculty Members' Silence and the Mediating Role of Trust in Supervisor

The effect of perceive procedural justice on faculty members silence and the mediating role of trust in supervisor can be seen in our model in Figure 3.
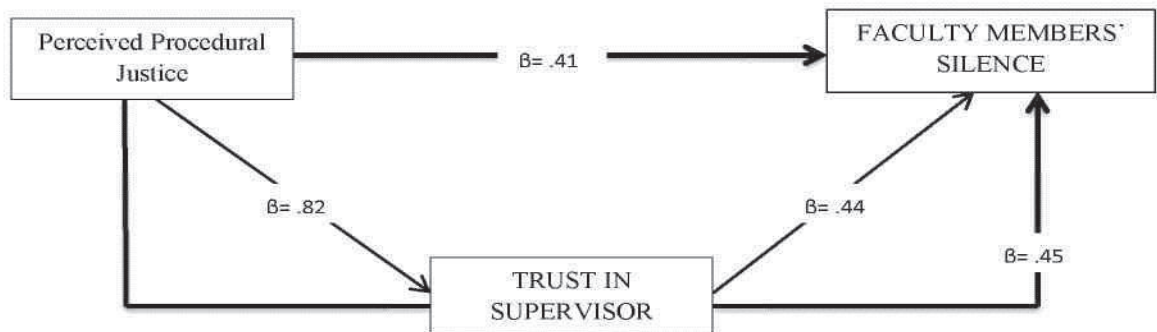

Figure 3. Model of the Effect of Perceived Procedural Justice on Faculty Members' Silence and the Mediating Role of Trust in Supervisor

Faculty members' knowledge, ideas and suggestions could increase the quality of organisational decisions, and therefore, sould be regarded an essential component of decision making processes. However, when faculty members do not believe that these processes do not produce fair outcomes, they might prefer to remain silent. In other words, perceived procedural injustice might lead to silence. The findings of our study indicates that perceived procedural justice is significant in predicting faculty members' silence and trust in supervisor can act as a mediator in this relationship. Procedural justice is related to decision making processes, and supervisors are highly influential on decisions related to daily practices in universities. Therefore, it is not surprising that trust in supervisor increases the effect of perceived procedural justice on their silence. When faculty members do not trust their supervisor, they might feel that s/he will not make fair decisions regarding their contribution to the organisation, which might lead to their withdrawal.

The findings of our study are significant in understanding the effect of perceived justice and trust in supervisor on faculty members' silence. Yet, it is essential to conduct further research to develop a more thorough understanding of silence in universities. A closer look at some other organisational factors such as commitment and leadership as well as some individual factors such as self-confidence or locus of control could give a more clear picture of the factors underlying faculty members' silence.

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