

Interactional Justice Moderated the Effect of Protestant Work Ethic on Social Loafing

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between Protestant work ethic and social loafing and whether interactional justice was a moderator of this linkage. Responses to the survey were analyzed using a sample of 406 from Shanxi province in China. The factor analysis indicated six dimensions of PWE, that is, admiration of work itself, success comes from hard work, work as an end, asceticism, ant-leisure, and internal control. Results showed that the dimensions of "Admiration of work itself" and "Ant-leisure" related significantly to social loafing and interactional justice played a moderating role in the relationship between PWE and social loafing. The limitations and directions for future research are offered finally.

Keywords: Protestant work ethic, social loafing, interactional justice.

INTRODUCTION

Today's fast-changing environment and increasingly fierce competition make organizations more inclined to adopt team-based work groups. This is because team-based work groups not only enhance the democratic atmosphere, but also can inspire the employees' willingness to participate. Furthermore, many of the tasks can't be accomplished alone. This increased use of groups has led to research attention on how to maximize group productivity. On the other hand, research also showed that people pour less contribution into group than into individual work, which is described as social loafing [1-2]. Social loafing has been defined as the reduction in motivation and effort when individuals work collectively, compared with when they work individually [3]. And it is a type of social disease, having "negative consequences for individuals, social institutions, and societies" [2, pp.831]. Therefore it is important to identify factors that reduce or moderate social loafing.

Originating in Weber's work, large body of research starts to explore Protestant work ethic (PWE). Previous research paid attention to the characteristics of the individuals who endorse the value of PWE [4-8]. With the deepening of the research, much began to focus on the impact of PWE on employees' behavior and performance in organization. PWE has been found to be significantly associated with job involvement [9-10], job satisfaction [11-12], organizational commitment

[13-15], organizational citizenship behavior [16-17], academic performance [18-19], counterproductive work behavior [17]. All of these research indicated that PWE was the predictor of individual work attitude and behavior.

In an attempt to uncover an explanation for social loafing, much research has been conducted. The conclusions suggest social loafing is often driven by situational factors and individual difference factors. Individual difference factors including: conscientiousness, felt responsibility [20], need for cognition [21], intrinsic task involvement [22], individual's preference for group work [23], and the situational factors contain: task interdependence, task visibility, distributive justice, procedural justice, work group size, group cohesiveness [24], role ambiguity, peer leader [25], leader-member exchange (LMX) [26], social comparisons [27], disjunctive task, conjunctive task [28].

In the current study, we seek to continue broadening the literature on social loafing and PWE by exploring the relationship between them and the moderating effect of interactional justice. To the best of our knowledge, previous research has not proved the combined effects of these factors in a single study. Only one related research explored the moderating effect of PWE on social loafing in laboratory setting [29]. Although laboratory experiments were necessary for refining a theoretical framework of social loafing, empirical studies are needed in order to determine the degree to which the results generalize to intact organizational work groups [24]. The key contribution of this study therefore lies in its examination of the effect of PWE on social loafing to understand what types of

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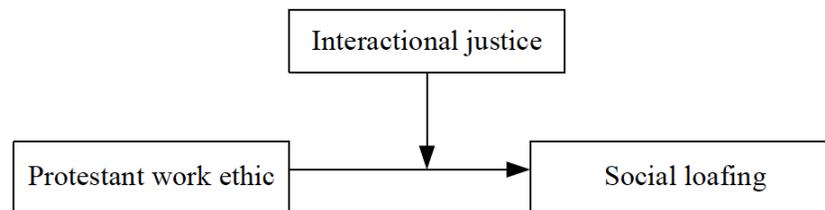


Figure 1: The research model.

individuals might be most or least prone to social loafing [29]. Additionally, we also explore how the relationship between PWE and social loafing be moderated by interactional justice. According the interactional psychology perspective, individual behavior is determined by the interplay of personal and situational variables [30]. Interactional justice is considered as the interactional relation between employees and their supervisors and has been showed having more significant effect on key outcome variables than distributive and procedural justice [31]. Furthermore, social exchange theory also suggests people reciprocate the benefits they receive in the workplace [32]. In contrary, if individuals who perceive injustice or harm in organization are more likely to return negative reactions. By noting the potential moderating role of interactional justice not only offers a more comprehensive picture of the relation between PWE and social loafing, but also helps deepen the understanding of the factors which drive social loafing. Our research model is proposed, shown in Figure 1.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

PWE and Social Loafing

George [22] found intrinsic involvement is negatively associated with social loafing, intrinsic involvement referred to “the belief that the work being done is meaningful and significant and that one’s own efforts are an important contribution to the employing organization”. Abele and Diehl [33] examined the reduction of individual motivation in the group performance; specifically examine the impact of PWE on free-rider and sucker effect. The conclusion showed people with a high PWE did not show the free-rider effect, that is, they were working equally hard on the task, no matter whether working alone or working in groups. One direct related literature is Smrt and Karau [29]. They proposed that PWE moderated the effects of work condition on individual effort and individuals with a strong PWE are unlikely to engage in social loafing. Also, According to Townsend and Thompson [34], high PWE of team members are less likely to social loaf for the cooperative teams. In addition, according to the

collective effort model proposed by Karau and Williams [35], if people expect their efforts are instrumental in obtaining valued outcomes, they would be unlikely to engage in social loafing. For the individuals with a strong endorsement of PWE, they believe that hard work can bring success, does not appear social loafing. Additionally, the existing research has proved PWE can positively and significantly predict the conduct and performance of employees [14]. Therefore, we believe that people with a high PWE are hard working, intrinsically motivated, persistent and will exert effort regardless work individually or collectively. Given this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: PWE would be negatively related to social loafing.

Interactional Justice

Despite the four dimensions of organizational justice have been accepted widely, our study only focuses on interactional justice, which is defined as the extent to which employees perceive that they are treated with respect and dignity in their interpersonal interaction [36]. To date, research has proved that interactional justice can predict negatively emotional exhaustion [37], organizational deviance [38], counterproductive work behavior [39], organizational retaliatory behavior [40], turnover intention [41], employee silence [42]. Moreover, Murphy *et al.* [26] suggested interactional justice related to social loafing negatively and LMX played a mediator role in this linkage. Lin and Huang [43] proposed that interactional justice is related to knowledge contribution loafing negatively. According to the above conclusions, we proposed that individuals who are treated unjustly by his or her supervisor at work may respond by engaging in social loafing. Hence, we predict:

Hypothesis 2: The relation between PWE and social loafing will be moderated by interactional justice such that there will be a stronger negative relationship between PWE and social loafing when interactional justice is high.

METHODS

Sample and Procedures

Research data were collected in two ways. Some were collected on site in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. The others were collected online. The final valid questionnaires were 406, with a response of 96.7%. The participants consisted of 230 men and 176 women. Of the respondents, 59.4% were ordinary employees, 18% were first-line managers, 18.5% were middle managers, and 3.7% were top managers. In terms of educational background, 36.9% had associate degree or less, 30.5% had an undergraduate degree, 31.8% had a post-graduate degree, and 0.8% chose not to respond.

Measures

PWE

Among the scales to be constructed to measure PWE, the Protestant Work Ethic Scale from Mirels and Garrett [44] was widely used for assessing PWE in a plenty of research and shows good evidence for internal consistency. So, the present study use this scale. This scale indexes both the belief that hard work can lead to success and the value of an ascetic lifestyle and the denunciation of time spent in leisure. Three of the total 19 items are reverse scoring items. Responses are assessed using a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 “*strongly disagree*” to 5 “*strongly agree*” ($\alpha = .72$).

Social Loafing

Five of the 10 items developed by George [22] were adopted to assess the extent to which employees tend to engage in social loafing. A lot of research used directly or adapted from this scale to measured social loafing [23-26]. Therefore, we also used this scale. Example items include: “Defers responsibilities he or she should assume to other group members” and “Puts forth less effort than other members of his or her work group”. Participants responded on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = .72$).

Interactional Justice

Perceptions of interactional justice were measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Moorman [45]. Participants responded on a 5-point scale, with anchors ranging from 1 “*strongly disagree*” to 5 “*strongly agree*” ($\alpha = .88$). Example items include “My supervisor was able to suppress personal biases” and “My supervisor treated you with kindness and consideration”.

RESULTS

Factor Analysis of PWE Items

First, we conducted the KMO and Bartlett's Test. The value of KMO was 0.80 and the statistical significance probability value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. It is appropriate to conduct factor analysis in terms of the above conditions. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax-rotation was conducted on the data of the questionnaires. Items with a factor loading of .40 or greater on a factor were selected. The factor analysis suggested six components, accounting for 55.46% of the total variance among the 19 PWE items. The factors loadings for this analysis were presented in Table 1.

Three items (Item 4, 5, 10) were loaded on the first factor, which explained 12.59% of the variance and which we labeled “Admiration of work itself”. For Factor 2, Success comes from hard work, 9.91% of the variance can be explained by Items 2, 6, 7 and 8. Item 16, 17, 18 and 19 were loaded on Factor 3, which accounted for 9.82% of the variance and labeled “Work as an end”. And the fourth factor with four items loading on it comprised items 1, 11, 12 and 14; it explained 8.06% of the variance and was labeled as “Asceticism”. For Factor 5, Ant-leisure, 7.64% of the variance can be explained by Items 9 and 15. Finally, Items 3 and 13 were loaded on the sixth factor, which explained 7.44% of the variance and which we labeled “Internal control”.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables. In order to further clarify the relationship between Protestant work ethic and social loafing, we conducted a multiple regression analysis. We chose position and the gender of direct leader as control variables. Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis.

The first factor “Admiration of work itself” negatively and significantly related to social loafing ($t = -2.38, p = .018$). The fifth factor “Ant-leisure” negatively and significantly related to social loafing ($t = 5.86, p = .000$). The relationship between the remaining four dimensions and social loafing were not significant. In regard to the global PWE, it has a positive significantly relationship with social loafing ($\beta = -0.12, t = -2.45, p = .015$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 1: Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation of PWE Scale

Items	Admiration of work itself	Success comes from hard work	Work as an end	Asceticism	Ant-leisure	Internal control
PWE4	0.73	0.15	0.06	-0.02	0.03	0.10
PWE10	0.66	0.06	0.15	0.16	-0.14	0.14
PWE5	0.55	0.36	0.09	0.00	-0.16	-0.19
PWE2	-0.10	0.68	0.00	0.21	-0.04	-0.05
PWE7	0.26	0.65	0.19	-0.11	-0.07	0.20
PWE8	0.21	0.53	0.14	0.13	0.03	0.08
PWE6	0.40	0.51	0.21	0.10	0.00	-0.10
PWE19	0.07	0.33	0.72	0.14	0.04	-0.14
PWE18	0.03	0.10	0.64	0.13	0.12	0.36
PWE17	0.52	0.05	0.54	0.00	0.07	0.01
PWE16	0.28	0.09	0.50	-0.16	-0.20	-0.03
PWE1	0.10	0.16	-0.08	0.62	0.00	0.23
PWE14	-0.20	0.20	0.00	0.60	-0.18	0.19
PWE12	0.37	-0.08	0.30	0.56	-0.05	-0.06
PWE11	0.43	0.16	0.23	0.48	0.00	-0.39
PWE15	-0.03	-0.07	-0.11	0.01	0.82	0.00
PWE9	-0.10	0.02	0.14	-0.17	0.78	-0.09
PWE13	0.05	0.06	-0.19	-0.17	0.12	-0.71
PWE3	0.34	0.26	-0.21	0.16	0.03	0.62

Note. Factor loading > .40 are in boldface. PWE= Protestant work ethic.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Position	1.66	.91	-									
2. Gender of direct leader	1.21	.41	-.174**	-								
3. Admiration of work itself	3.62	.69	.137**	-.088	-							
4. Success comes from hard work	3.17	.63	.186**	-.086	.476**	-						
5. Work as an end	3.45	.65	.126*	-.145**	.440**	.420**	-					
6. Asceticism	3.20	.64	.056	-.077	.352**	.374**	.309**	-				
7. Ant-leisure	2.59	.77	.102*	.014	-.160**	-.105*	-.021	-.169**	-			
8. Internal control	2.97	.58	.049	-.049	.215**	.146**	.023	.090	-.002	-		
9. Interactional justice	3.33	.75	.162**	-.068	.255**	.197**	.263**	.132**	.000	-.026	-	
10. Social loafing	2.08	.65	-.106*	-.136**	-.129**	-.115*	-.099*	.027	-.117*	.029	-.056	-

Note. N=406. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3: Predictors of Social Loafing

Variables	Social loafing	
	β	95% CI
Position	-.090	[12.76, 19.01]
Gender of direct leader	-.162	[-0.68, 0.03]
Admiration of work itself	-.142*	[-2.06, -0.52]
Success comes from hard work	-.090	[-0.41, -0.04]
Work as an end	-.036	[-0.25, 0.03]
Asceticism	.090	[-0.19, 0.10]
Ant-leisure	-.135**	[-0.02, 0.25]
Internal control	.064	[-0.50, -0.08]
R^2		0.086
F		4.628

Note N=406. CI= confidence interval. Position: ordinary employees=1; first-line managers=2; middle managers=3; top managers=4. Gender of direct leader: male=1; female=2.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4: Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Social Loafing

Predictors	Social loafing	
	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.04**	
Control variables		
Step 2	.05*	
PWE		-.12*
Interactional justice		-.02
Step 3	.07**	
PWE \times Interactional justice		-.15**

Note. Control variables include position and the gender of direct leader. PWE=Protestant work ethic. PWE and interactional justice are standardized.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To test the second hypothesis a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted predicting social loafing. Table 4 presents the results of regression analysis. Predictors were entered in three blocks. The first block included the control variables: position and gender of direct leader. The second block included the independent variable and the moderator variable, namely PWE and interactional justice. The product term of PWE and interactional justice was entered into the third block. The interaction effect for PWE and interactional justice was significant for social loafing ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2, predicting that interactional justice would moderate the relationship between PWE and social loafing, was also supported. The interaction effect for PWE and interactional justice

is illustrated in Figure 1 and can be interpreted to mean that when the interactional justice is high, people who endorse PWE are rated as engaging in less social loafing.

DISCUSSION

This study addressed two questions: (a) "What is the relationship between PWE and social loafing?" and (b) "What role does interactional justice play in the relation between PWE and social loafing?" Regarding the first question, the data showed that both the global PWE and its dimensions of "Admiration of work itself" and "Anti-leisure" related negatively and significantly to social loafing. The PWE construct reflects individuals' work values and represents the degree to which

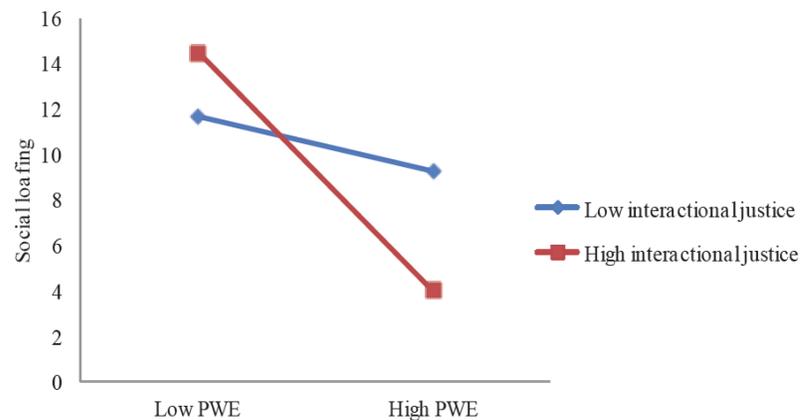


Figure 2: Moderating effects of interactional justice on the relationship between PWE and social loafing.

individuals hold the belief that work is intrinsically rewarding and not just a means to attaining external rewards [46]. The individual with the value of PWE emphasizes dedication to hard work and avoids idleness and waste in any form [47]. Even on group tasks the people who espouse a high PWE are likely to be positively related with effort in cases where others are taking advantage of their partner's contribution [33]. This conclusion also consists with Kidwell [48]. He thought it might be useful to place loafing in the context of ongoing struggles what was termed the Protestant work ethic. Moreover, Smrt and Karau [29] proposed that people who have a strong dispositional commitment to hard work appear to be resilient in the face of opportunities to slack off and do not succumb to the usual tendency to take it easy and free ride on the efforts of others when working on a collective task.

Admiration of work itself dimension of PWE refers to the people see work as the center of life and think the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction brought by hard working is unparalleled. Therefore, no matter working collectively or individually, they will contribute to high effort levels to get good performance and success. The anti-leisure dimension of PWE defines that people should not have more leisure time to spend in relaxation and life would be more meaningful if spent less leisure time. Therefore, individuals with high scores of anti-leisure will not take more and longer breaks than they should and will work hard instead of reducing efforts when working collectively.

The second question of the study concerned the moderating effort of interactional justice. Our study showed that individual with high PWE would engage in less social loafing when interactional justice is high. The individual perceiving high interactional justice may think his /her supervisor can provide him/her with timely feedback about the decision and its implications and

treat him/her with kindness and consideration. According to social exchange theory [32], individuals tend to reciprocate benefits received. If the individuals who with high PWE perceived a high level of justice in the interactional relationship with their supervisors, they will further strengthen their psychological contract with organization and respond positively to return the organization by reducing behavior of social loafing in group work. On the other hand, Murphy *et al.* indicated that individuals attempt to respond to perceived injustice by engaging in social loafing [26]. Moreover, Tyler and Blader [49] proposed that the perception of whether he or she was treated fairly during communication affects an individual's willingness to cooperate and engage in the team task. Alam and Zaman [50] argued that if individuals received interactional justice in task and rewards allocation then they will be low tendency towards loafing at work place. Therefore people in high PWE who perceived been treated by their superiors with truthfulness, justification, respect, and propriety [51] will willing to engage in team work or tasks.

Our findings offer some practical implications for how organizations might reduce social loafing. First, the conclusions indicated that screening the employees with strong PWE might prove beneficial for preventing social loafing. Second, our study points to the importance of interactional justice as a moderator of the relation between PWE and social loafing. The result underscores the way a supervisor' communicate or treat with his or her subordinates have powerful effect on subordinates' behavior. Therefore, organization can enhance employees' perceived interactional justice to reduce social loafing.

Although the proposed hypotheses received strong empirical support, several limitations of our study deserve comment. First, the sample is 406 and come

from Shanxi province in China. On this point, the study has a limited sample size, which may limit the generalizing of our findings. A second limitation is the use of self-report data to assess social loafing, self-reports of undesirable behavior is nevertheless susceptible to underreporting and this may influenced our study results. To address this limitation, future studies can use an experimental or quasi-experimental method, or collect data on dependent and independent

variables at different times. Third, Colquitt [36] indicated interactional justice contains interpersonal justice and information justice. In the future, we should detach interactional justice into interpersonal and informational facets and explore the possibility that both types of interactional justice may separately moderate the relationship between PWE and social loafing in China culture context.

ANNEX

Measures	Item
PWE Mirels and Garrett (1971)	Most people spend too much time in un-profitable amusement
	Our society would have fewer problems if people had less leisure time
	Money acquired easily, e.g, through gambling or speculation is usually spent unwisely
	There are few satisfactions equal to the realization that one has done his best at a job
	The most difficult college courses usually turn out to be the most rewarding
	Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy
	The self-made man is likely to be more ethical than the man born to wealth
	I often feel I would be more successful if I sacrificed certain pleasures
	People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation
	Any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding
	People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough
	Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer
	Hard work offers little guarantee of success
	The credit card is a ticket to careless spending
	Life would be more meaningful if we had more leisure time
Social loafing George (1992)	The man who can approach an unpleasant task with enthusiasm is the person who gets ahead
	If one works hard enough he or she is likely to make a good life for him/herself
	I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do
	A distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character
	Defers responsibilities he or she should assume to other groupmembers
interactional justice Moorman (1991)	Puts forth less effort on the job when other groupmember sare around to do the work
	Does not do his or her share of the work
	Puts forth less effort than other members of his or her work group
	Takes it easy if other groupmember are around to do the work
interactional justice Moorman (1991)	Your supervisor considered your viewpoint
	Your supervisor was able to suppress personal biases
	Your supervisor provided you with timely feedback about the decision and its implications
	Your supervisor treated you with kindness and consideration
	Your supervisor showed concern for your rights as an employee
	Your supervisor took steps to deal with you in a truthful manner

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