Cross-cultural Fairness and Equity Research in Inter-organizational Relationships and Applied Statistical Methods for its Qualitative Measurement

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Research on Fairness and Equity linked closely to Justice has academic roots in multiple disciplines such as social psychology or philosophy. In the past few years an emphasized focus was placed on fairness among entities participating in business transactions with the objective of identifying the impact of human and business ethical attitude on business interactions. Measuring fairness by itself has its challenges due to its subjective nature. It is assumed that a business relationship, which is considered fair, is more balanced and stable. As a part of broader research on this topic, it is essential to understand what methods and techniques were used previously to evaluate fairness and equity when comparing findings in a cross-cultural setting. My objective in this paper is to summarize and evaluate the statistical methods used by the international research community to analyze and interpret fairness and equity in Inter-organizational Relationships.

Keywords: fairness, inter-organizational relationships, applied statistics

1. Introduction

The research on Fairness and Equity often referred to as Justice has its academic roots in many fields of social sciences. This paper intends to review some fundamental approaches to the measurement of Fairness and Equity. The objective is to compare statistical methodologies used in the current fairness research in the field of management specifically applied when a model is set in a cross-cultural environment. In the first part, I will give an overview on fairness research by taking a walk through the different disciplines' approach to fairness. This introduction will lead the way to the managerial interpretation and research of fairness, specifically focusing on the interorganizational application. The second part of the paper will show specific statistical methods with examples from empirical studies on fairness.

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2. Fairness and Equity Literature Overview

Fairness has an extensive academic literature. Navigating through the different interpretations of fairness is a challenging task. The question of fairness was embraced by many great thinkers of human history. Discussions of fairness and justice are illustrated in Aristotle‘s teaching. "Equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally" (Aristotle 350BC, Book VIII.). Aristotle pointed the attention to horizontal and vertical equity where equals and unequals are defined according to principles such as income or wealth levels. In this basic approach, the question is how fair an action or policy is to treat everyone in the same way unless the individuals are involved differently in such a manner that makes it relevant to the situation to be handled in a differentiated way. *Political philosophy* continuously emphasizes the importance of applying ethical aspects when defining fairness which is linked and related to defining justice as well. John Rawls' work on "A Theory of Justice" (Rawls 1971), influenced justice and fairness debates in the last decades, assumes that justice can only be developed under conditions which are fair to all involved parties.

Fairness is not only a central theme of philosophy. It's a basic element of *economics research* as well in terms of viewing the different ways of wealth or income distribution. Looking specifically at welfare economics, which focuses on maximizing social welfare, distribution must be Pareto efficient where no individuals or groups of individuals can be better off without making anyone else worse off. However, this does not help the choice of set of ethical values guiding the differentiation of individual preferences which are aggregated in the total social welfare. To reach a fair distribution, the division of goods must be *Pareto efficient* and *equitable* which means that every person's subjective valuation of their own share of basket of goods must be the same (Varian 2008). A *fair division* assumes equitable, envy-free share of goods in a Pareto efficient balance. „Because this type of policy is almost never possible, economists have been forced to fall back on the concept of potential Pareto improvements, for instance, in cost-benefit analysis. This is where winners gain more than losers lose and therefore, potentially, are able to make compensation so that no one loses. Compensation schemes are very difficult to design, however, because it is so hard to identify the winners and losers." (Wilber 1998, 5). As a result, ethical guidelines used are in line with the utilitarianism approach providing "the greatest good for the greatest number" (Wilber 1998, 5). Ethics can influence economics in the following channels. Firstly it shapes the way economics theories are developed and applied. This is followed by the economic actors and their ethical values which can impact and shape their own actions and behaviours. Thirdly, institutions and policies related to economics can fall under ethical evaluation as well. (Wilber 1998).

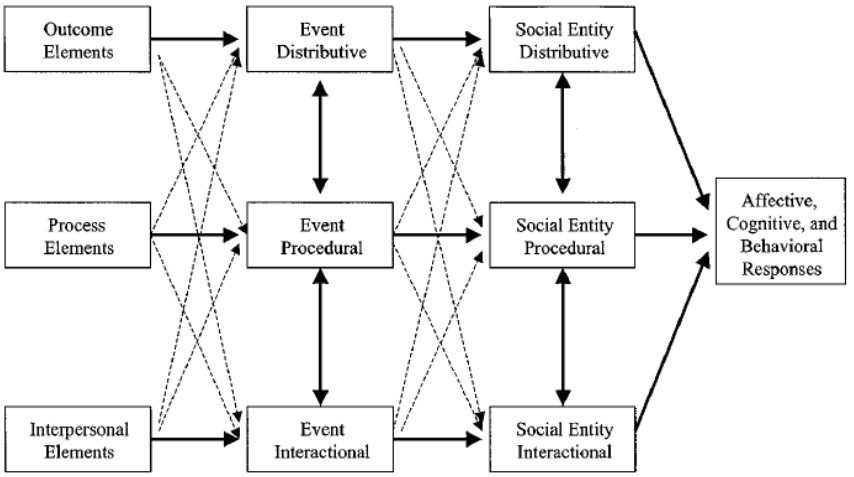
Social Psychology has a number of researches in the twentieth century theorizing on fairness under the Organizational Justice studies. In the 1960s Homan put down the foundation of *social exchange theory* in which he proposes that an indi-

viduals' objective is maximizing gains while minimizing cost based on which they evaluate relationships (Homans 1961). This work inspired Adam's well-known performance based *Equity Theory* in which he suggests that people compare the ratio of inputs and outputs to determine the equitable state driving their satisfaction. This concept is applied in two ways. An individual looks at his or her own rewards and contribution ratio and adjusts either his or her inputs or outputs if unsatisfied. Secondarily, the output-input ratio of an individual is compared to others output-input ratio as well within an organization. If ratios are unequal, adjustments are made to rebalance them (Adams 1965). Adam's theory triggered the examination of the so called *Distributive Justice* research in social psychology during the 60s and 70s. Distributive Justice aims to determine the mechanisms driving the way of final allocation goods in a society. In the 70s the debate among sociologists continued with examining the way how a decision is made on distribution by developing the *Procedural Justice* approach stating that the distribution of outcomes cannot be fair without a fair procedure of making such a decision. Thibaut and Walker emphasized this point based on simulated trials, in which the chance of self-representation in the process positively influenced the capability of accepting a final decision even if it was a negative outcome for the individual (Greenberg 1990). Procedural justice deals with the aspect of an individual's fairness perception of the outcome allocation process by focusing on the formal procedures used for making the decision. Among the procedural justice models we find the so called Group Value, later renamed as Relational model. This approach states that besides Distributive and Procedural justice, feedbacks and responses from the group, especially the ones coming from the authority, play an important role when developing fairness perception (Tyler-Lind 1992). The authority is assessed through three main characteristics which are neutrality in decision making, trustworthiness representing the unbiased attitude and honour for the employees which includes honouring the employees' rights as well. The empirical testing of the Group Value model in a cross-cultural comparison showed rather similarities than differences among different cultures (Cropanzano et al. 2001). A third dimension of the organizational justice research is the *Interactional Justice*, which "refers to the perceived fairness of the enactment or implementation of procedures and has two sub-facets. Interpersonal justice captures the sincerity and respectfulness of authority communication, while informational justice concerns the use of honest and adequate explanations for decisions" (Colquitt et al. 2006, 111).

Integrative Justice theory targets to embrace all the three (distributive, procedural and interactional) aspects. Their main integrative models are to be presented here. Folger's *Referent Cognitions Theory* „maintains that an unfair judgment will result from a situation where an individual believes a more favourable outcome would have resulted from an alternative procedure that should have been used. Thus, the referent in this model refers to the awareness of procedural alternatives that

would lead to a more favourable outcome" (Cropanzano et al. 2001, 168). The contribution of the theory was that it defined the conditions needed to hold others accountable for an unfair treatment. The criticism of the theory was that it did not address the process by which accountability judgments are made. (Cropanzano et al. 2001). Based on the limitation of the theory, Folger modified and adjusted his theory referring to it as fairness theory in which he suggests that distinct judgments must be made to determine if a given situation is fair. „These judgments contrast the negativity of the situation, the actions of the target, and the moral conduct employed with counter factual scenarios of what would, could, and should have taken place" (Cropanzano et al. 2001, 168). Soon after the development of the fairness theory, a new model, the *Fairness Heuristic Theory* was introduced which synthesized several previous models. Its basic approach was that individuals often face situations in which they must concede to authority, which gives an opportunity to be exploited. It is being referred to as the fundamental social dilemma (Lind 2001, Cropanzano et al. 2001). "As a result of the possibility of being exploited and having one's identity threatened, individuals are often uncertain about their relationships with the authority. This uncertainty leads an individual to ask questions such as whether the authority can be trusted, if the authority will treat him or her in a nonbiased manner, and if the authority will look at him or her as a legitimate member of the society, organization, or work group" (Cropanzano et al. 2001, 168). However, to evaluate these situations correctly, accurate and adequate information is often unavailable which makes the individual rely on heuristics to guide their subsequent behaviours, responses and action (Lind 2001). "*Uncertainty management* theory recognizes that many aspects of work and family life may contain uncertainty. According to the theory, fairness can remove trust-related uncertainty and mitigate the discomfort associated with other forms of uncertainty—even if they have nothing to do with authorities. The authors summarized this key tenet as follows (Colquitt et al. 2006, 113): "What appears to be happening is that people use fairness to manage their reactions to uncertainty, finding comfort in related or even unrelated fair experiences" (Lind-Van den Bos 2002, 216).

Table 1. An integrative model of organizational justice



Source: Cropanzano at al. 2001, 191.

From the early 2000s, an emphasized focus was placed on fairness among entities participating in *business transactions.* There were a number of studies in game theory and economics have investigated in how far different normative theories are applied by people in their subjective judgments (Fortin-Fellenz 2008). These studies were reviewed by Konow who clustered the different distributive fairness norms into three main theoretical streams (Konow 2003):

1. Equality and need,
2. Utilitarianism and welfare economics,
3. Equity and desert

"Fairness views are best explained by an integrated approach that acknowledges the influence of the three principles of justice, whereby the weight on each is determined by the context" (Konow 2003, 1190).

When looking at the *management application of fairness theories*, we find that many areas of management are impacted by the findings of Social Psychology. Areas of Human Resource Management have specifically built a number of practical applications in hiring, performance management, compensation and benefit management in order to build a genuine and adherent business culture (Brockner 2006). In management, there are further splits in the investigation. The first is the intra-organization application of fairness, which will not be detailed here. The second area focuses on examining and measuring fairness among business entities in the inter-organizational context. One of the first empirical studies on this topic was done to investigate reactions to perceived inequity in inter-organizational relationships in two countries, namely the US and the Netherlands. These studies were focusing on

automobile deals' perceived inequity and attitudes towards their automobile (OR: car producer) supplier partner (Kumar et al. 2003). Sheer's, Kumar's and Steenkamp's work also lead to set increasing statistical challenges to measure fairness in normative manner while researching it in an intercultural and cross-national comparison.

3. Measuring fairness in a cross-cultural context

One of the first findings from Sheer-Kumar-Steenkamp's article was that the cross cultural comparison requires a special attention before moving on to analysing any of the data collected from a cross national environment (Kumar et al. 2003). How can we make the data and the analysis free from cross-cultural effects? In the next paragraphs we are going to review scaling and invariance issues specifically applicable for cross-national research.

3.1. Scales

The scaling method requires additional attention. To measure social attitudes the Semantic Differential Scale (SDS) is the recommended method (Malhotra 2008). The SDS is a scaling tool first developed in the 1950s (Osgood et al. 1957). The scale is usually a seven-point, bipolar rating scale using opposites of adjectives. Some studies have used five or six-point scales as well. "The SDS has been used extensively in language attitude studies as a means of measuring subjects' attitudes towards various languages, dialects, accents, as well as the speakers of different varieties." (Al-Hindawe 1996, 1). A feature such as fairness, for example, would be represented by the semantic differential scale in the following form, which can be presented with or without the numeric scaling.

unfair 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 fair
unfair ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ fair

The advantage of the SDS is that it is relatively easy to implement it from the communication and the procedural point of view. One of the widely-used SDS is the Likert scale where the respondents evaluate a statement or situation based on pre-set subjective or objective criteria, which are called the Likert items. "A Likert item is composed of a stem (word, phrase, or sentence) followed by an endorsement scale running from strongly disagree to strongly agree" (Colton-Covert 2007, 159). The Likert scale is often used in cross-national researches.

3.2. Measuring Invariance - Multigroup Hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis

When collecting data in a cross-cultural environment, the data might not be directly comparable due to a number of potential variations and interpretation of the questions or the answers. Marketing research defines the following invariance requirements to address the variance issues in a cross-national research (Malhotra 2008):

- Definition invariance
- Concept invariance
- Functionality invariance
- Category invariance
- Invariance in operationalisation
- Metric invariance
- Language invariance

There are a number of ways addressing the requirement of invariance. Steenamp is among the leading statisticians developing the consumer research framework for cross-national research and comparison (Steenkamp-Baumgartner 1998). In the early 90s, the Multigroup Hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGHCFA) was advised to be used as the suitable method for testing model invariance (Steenkamp-Baumgartner 1998).

Table 2. An example of the MGHCFA

MODEL COMPARISONS FOR ETHNOCENTRISM DATA

	χ^2 value	*df*	RMSEA	CAIC	CFI	TLI
Calibration data:						
Equality of Σ^g and μ^g	1,853.11	130	.0992	2,396.14	n.a.	n.a.
Equality of Σ^g	1,137.60	110	.0774	1,847.72	.922	.905
Equality of μ^g	643.80	20	.1410	2,105.81	n.a.	n.a.
Configural invariance	936.09	105	.0712	1,687.99	.937	.919
Full metric invariance	1,078.45	123	.0706	1,679.96	.928	.921
Final partial metric invariance	956.52	119	.0672	1,591.45	.937	.928
Initial partial scalar invariance	1,231.85	133	.0728	1,749.82	.918	.917
Final partial scalar invariance	1,024.36	130	.0664	1,567.40	.932	.930
Full factor variance invariance	1,050.42	132	.0668	1,576.75	.931	.929
Final partial factor variance invariance	1,025.18	131	.0661	1,559.86	.932	.930
Initial partial error variance invariance	1,551.86	147	.0783	1,942.29	.894	.903
Final partial error variance invariance	1,098.95	142	.0657	1,541.73	.928	.931
Validation data:						
Configural invariance	952.42	105	.0721	1,703.79	.934	.915
Full metric invariance	1,058.15	123	.0700	1,659.25	.927	.920
Final partial metric invariance	983.49	119	.0684	1,617.98	.932	.923
Initial partial scalar invariance	1,257.36	133	.0738	1,774.97	.912	.913
Final partial scalar invariance	1,035.03	130	.0670	1,577.69	.929	.926
Full factor variance invariance	1,091.51	132	.0685	1,624.02	.925	.923
Final partial factor variance invariance	1,046.15	131	.0671	1,580.46	.928	.926
Initial partial error variance invariance	1,498.81	147	.0770	1,899.55	.894	.903
Final partial error variance invariance	1,152.70	142	.0677	1,595.17	.921	.925

Source: Steenkamp, Baumgartner, 1998, p159

Comment: In this model Observed response variable ( ) for a respondent (i), in a country (g) for a specific item (k) composed by latent construct ( ) for i respondent in country g plus the slope of regression of on the value ( ) of latent construct of representative i in country g, used as factor loading plus the expected value of the observed response ( ) when latent construct for i respondent in country g equals 0 plus the error of the measurement ( ). By further following Steenkamp's and Baumgartner's method, the following invariance can be calculated for configural invariance, metric

invariance, scalar invariance, factor covariance invariance, factor variance invariance and error variance invariance.

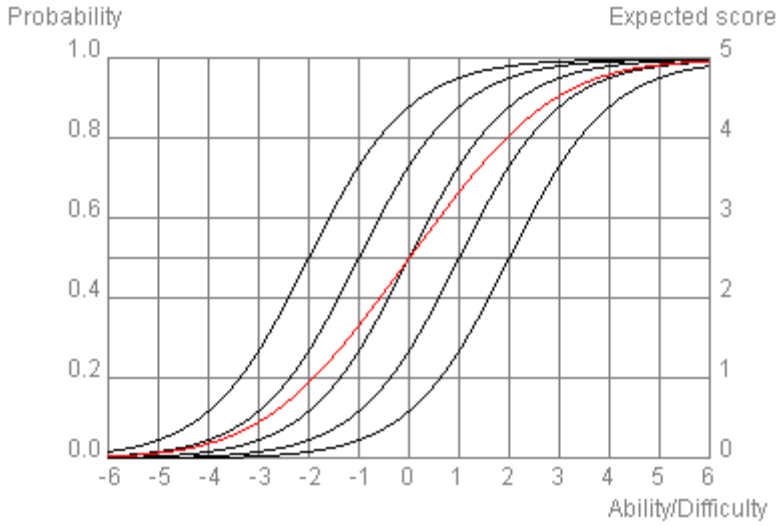
For the model fit, the following measures are recommended to use by Steenkamp and Baumgartner: RMSEA=root mean square error approximation, CAIC = consistent Akaike information criterion, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis fit index.

A number of critics were made on the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) applied. It requires at least partial invariance for a minimum of 2 items which is considered especially an issue when measurement construct consists of only a few items (Steenkamp-Baumgartner 1998). When measurement invariance is not satisfied, sub-groups of countries can be compared. However, that usually does not satisfy the researchers' objectives. In response to criticism and based on findings on the empirical application of the CFA, a new approach was proposed by the previously CFA supporter Jan-Benedict Steenkamp and his co-writer De Jong Martijn in 2007.

3.3. Relaxing Measurement Invariance – Item Response Theory

Steenkamp and Martijn recommended to relax measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research and proposed a hierarchical IRT Model instead. (Martijn-Steenkamp 2007). IRT stands for *Item Response Theory*, which is a relatively new model. IRT is a test of measurement equivalence across experimental groups, where groups are expected to show mean differences based on their latent trait or personal parameter on the attribute being measured (Partchev 2004). IRT originates the probability of each response as a function of the latent trait and some item parameters. The Item response function (IRF) describes the probability of a response to the item as a function of a person or ability parameter. It has two main families dependent on the number of traits examined. One is the *unidimensional*, which involves the analysis assuming a single trait. The *multidimensional* one includes multiple traits or multiple personal parameters. IRT model categories are based on the number of scored responses, which can be *dichotomous*, where scored only as correct/incorrect responses or *polytomous* outcomes, where each response has a different score value, for example a Likert-scale (Partchev 2004). The below chart shows the item response functions of the one-parameter logistic model for five items indicated by the black solid lines. In this example the probability of a test score is targeted to be estimated by the given ability of the responder examining five questions as items. The five item response functions estimates the probability that a person of a given ability will give a correct response to the corresponding item. The test response function in red shows very much the same, but for the test as a whole for any ability predicting predicts the expected test score.

Table 3. Item response and test functions of the one parameter logistic model



Source: Partchev, I. 2004: A visual guide to Item Response Theory.

In the IRT model, in a more complex model than above can provide sets of items for different ability or personal traits that can be linked to the observed nations or countries in a cross-cultural comparison. By that different response profiles can be developed to each responder group. The IRT model will not set the need for invariance but provides a base set or profile of the responders.

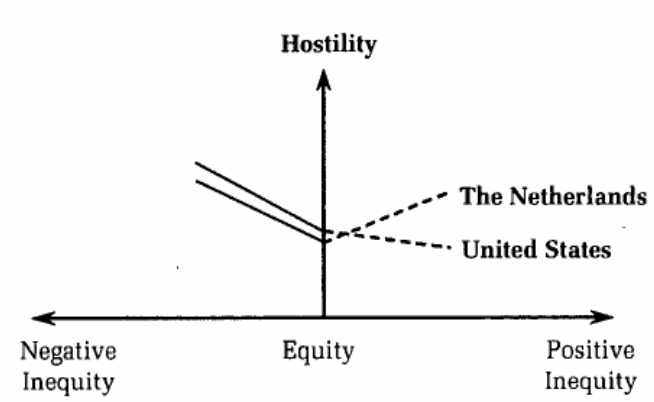
4. Fairness and Equity Spline Regression

The third part focused on the data calibration from the cross-cultural comparison point of view. In the fourth part, a special type of regression analysis will be reviewed, namely the Spline regression which is suitable to display bipolar attributes. At first, the Spline Regression will be reviewed from the methodology point of view, after which an example will be presented. "Spline regression is a type of regression in which different linear slopes are estimated for different ranges of the independent variables. The ranges have endpoints. They are called knots. Splines are lines or curves. They are usually required to be continuous and smooth. Uni-variate polynomial splines are piecewise polynomials. They show one variable of some degree d with function values and first d-1 derivatives that agree at the points where they join." (Hurley et al. 2006, 2). The joining points transitioning from one to the next, are called break points, interior- or simple knots. Knots give the curve freedom to bend and more closely follow the data. Splines with few knots are usually smoother

than splines with many knots. The increasing the number of knots usually increases the fit of the spline's function to the data (Hansen-Kooperberg 2002). There are many types of splines such as the Polynomial Spline, Periodic Spline, Spline on the sphere.

Sheer, Kumar, Steenkamp used spline regression to compare perceived inequity in US and Dutch inter-organizational relationships by measuring responses to positive and negative inequities between car deals and their suppliers in the two countries (Kumar et al. 2003). Positive and negative equity was defined as independent variables. Hostility, trust, relationship continuity and guilt were the dependent variables. The spline regression analysis provided a well interpretable outcome, of which a sample is provided below. The finding was that when experiencing negative inequity (referring back to Adam's equity theory, when the dealer's output/input ratio was smaller than the supplier's), auto dealers both in the US and the Netherlands responded by increasing hostility.

*Table 4.*Graphical Depiction of Effects of Negative and Positive Inequity-Hostility



Source: Reactions to perceived inequity in US and Dutch inter-organizational relationships, Sheer, Kumar, Steenkamp, Academy of Management Journal. 2003.

However, when experiencing positive inequity (when the dealer's output/input ratio was greater than the supplier's), the impact on the dealer's hostility toward the suppliers were different. US dealers showed decreasing hostility. On the contrary, Dutch dealers showed increasing hostility while their net gain increased. The referred article further analyzed the similarities and differences of responses impacting other attributes of the relationship using spline regression analysis.

5. Conclusion

Fairness, Equity, in some disciplines referred to as Justice Studies is a subjective matter. A number of different disciplines intended and continue to build simple and complex models to explain fairness among people or groups in a society, in a country within or among business entities. In the first part of the paper the base approach of fairness from different disciplines' point of view was reviewed. The second part focused on measuring fairness in an inter-cultural and inter-organizational setting. Within consumer behaviour research methodology, statistics plays a key role in putting quantitative measures behind the research settings. The most frequently used scaling methods were reviewed which are advised when comparing cross-cultural data. Two methods, CFA and IRT were reviewed as a tool to test the data to be free from cross-cultural effects. In the last part, spline regression was reviewed as a tool to analyze and graphically display bipolar data sets.

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