

Illuminating Fairness: A Comprehensive Review of Workplace Equity Sensitivity

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Abstract

The literature on equity sensitivity is fragmented and has numerous inconsistencies, with various conjoined fields being studied. Given the shortcomings that equity sensitivity fulfils in the workplace equity theory and the predictive power of the construct to explain the workplace attitudes and behaviours, this review aims to synthesise the highly fragmented studies, highlight the publication activity, propose a framework based on a content analysis and identify the research gaps in the area of equity sensitivity. This review also aims at suggesting future research avenues in the field of equity sensitivity. Using a systematic literature review approach, the present study reviews 74 articles published from 1987 to 2020 on equity sensitivity. The review provides a content analysis-based framework for future directions of research and reveals a lack of consensus around a theoretical framework and ambiguity in the conceptualisation of the equity sensitivity. Additionally, the lack of longitudinal qualitative research with limited sample selection are the methodological gaps hindering the field's progress. This work will help future researchers, interested in extending their contribution to this field.

Keywords

Equity sensitivity, systematic literature review, benevolent, entitled, workplace justice, organizational behavior

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Introduction

The theory of equity (Adams, 1963; Walster et al., 1973; Weick, 1966) has gained a lot of attention from researchers in psychology and human relations. The theory is based on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and postulates that an individual psychologically compares his/her job inputs and outcomes with their referent others (Adams, 1963). However, the equity theory has primarily been criticised on the grounds of homogenising individual response to the equity/inequity conditions thus ignoring the individual differences in shaping these responses. To overcome this shortcoming, Huseman et al. (1985, 1987) introduced the concept of 'equity sensitivity'.

Equity sensitivity categorises individuals into benevolent (individuals more inclined towards inputs rather than the output), equity sensitive (who like to maintain a balance between their level of inputs and the outcome they receive) and entitled (individuals who are focused on obtaining more output for the input they provide). These individuals react to equity/inequity conditions differently depending on demographic and psychological variables. Equity sensitivity is believed to enhance the equity theory's predictive power (King Jr et al., 1993). Equity sensitivity's superiority is proposed due to the following reasons. First, the equity sensitivity of an individual aids in establishing behavioural clarity in ambiguous workplace contexts (Otake-Ebede et al., 2016). Second, equity sensitivity offers a holistic apprehension of the equity process by incorporating the individual difference variable (King Jr et al., 1993). Third, Mudrack et al. (1999) highlight the importance of equity sensitivity in explaining the behaviour of individuals in an ethical dilemma situation in the workplace which augments its applications further.

Given the shortcomings that equity sensitivity fulfils in the workplace equity theory and the predictive power of the construct to explain the workplace attitudes and behaviour, a systematic literature review (SLR) was carried out to study the domain. The past literature has been confounding in terms of determining the nature of the domain (Huseman et al., 1987; Miller, 2009), conceptual underpinnings (Huseman et al., 1987; King Jr et al., 1993; Sauley & Bedeian, 2000) of the concept and its dimensionality (Davison & Bing, 2008; Huseman et al., 1985; Sauley & Bedeian, 2000). In response to this increased fragmentation of the findings and aforementioned inconsistencies prevalent in the literature, this SLR aims to provide an integrated view of the research, categorising and identifying the problems in the existing literature and proposing new avenues for future research. This review will serve as a relevant push for the future researchers to investigate the role of equity sensitivity in predicting the various outcomes by developing perceptions in a workplace.

To achieve these objectives, this research is guided by the following research questions:

- How has the domain of equity sensitivity developed over the years?
- What are the different theoretical underpinnings and constructs in the domain?

- What are the research gaps in equity sensitivity research?
- What are some productive future research areas for further development?

Recent years have seen a decline in the equity sensitivity research possibly due to the underdeveloped foundation of the concept. Thus, the authors propose a conceptual model of equity sensitivity, which will help broaden the understanding of the role of equity sensitivity as an individual difference variable in the workplace setting. Thus, the review is organised as follows: first, equity sensitivity is introduced, followed by the research methodology. Second, the description of the literature is provided along with an overview of the selected articles. Finally, the findings are highlighted, and future research avenues are suggested.

Methodology

Literature reviews are believed to lay the groundwork to advance a concept or theory and help in tracing the evolution of a phenomenon over time (Kumar, 2022; Kumar et al., 2023a). Therefore, the methodology for reviewing the literature must be systematic, scientific, comprehensive and explicitly report all the steps and procedure for conducting the review (Tuli et al., 2023c). Following Tranfield et al. (2003), the study has used SLR methodology to review the existing literature on equity sensitivity. The review process adopted to summarise the existing research and to identify the future research agenda has been categorised into 4 phases, as shown in Figure 1.

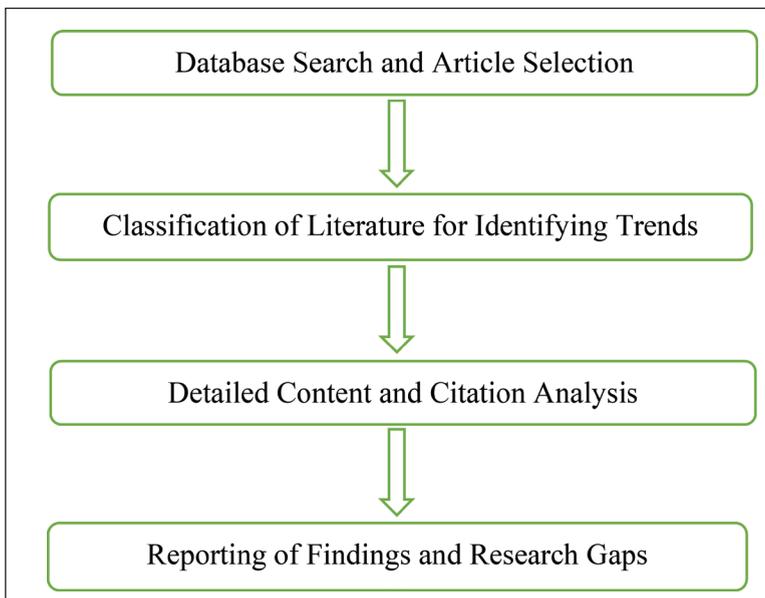


Figure 1. Summary of the Systematic Review Process.

To keep the review comprehensible, the study focuses on the literature of equity sensitivity and excludes the job equity theory, although closely related to the interest. This is due to two reasons: First, multiple reviews have been conducted on job equity (Carrell & Dittrich, 1978; Pritchard, 1969), whereas no such review has been done for equity sensitivity. Second, equity sensitivity categorises individuals, which facilitates the understanding of the behavioural and psychological effects of perceived equity/inequity (Huseman et al., 1985, 1987). Thus, a prolific amount of literature is out of the scope of the research area. To uphold the quality of the research, the authors have only included peer-reviewed scholarly articles published in academic journals, which ensure a high-grade inclusion.

Literature Collection and Boundary Identification

The PRISMA model was used to carry out the search to enhance the rigor and objectivity of the search procedure (Moher et al., 2009; Tuli et al., 2023a). The steps are discussed in detail below.

Step 1: Identification

Literature for this review has been identified with the help of keyword/phrase search. Subsequently, the authors delimited the selected literature using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. As input criteria initially, the use of keywords like ‘workplace equity’ or ‘equity sensitivity’ or ‘sensitivity model’ or ‘inequity’ was made. Several research databases have been used to ensure the inclusion is comprehensive and includes a diverse range of articles in the review. Emerald, ProQuest, EBSCO, JSTOR, SAGE and Elsevier have been used to search the articles. The first round of the database search was confined to keywords, title and abstract. This resulted in 923 articles depicted in Table 1. Additional delimiting boundaries for screening the literature were developed. These boundaries were given as:

Table 1. Details of Article Search in Database.

Database	Scope	Date of Search	Date Range	Number of Items	Cumulative Total
Elsevier	Title, keyword & abstract	14.01.2021	1987–2022	135	135
Emerald	Title, keyword & abstract	14.01.2021	1987–2022	199	334
ProQuest	Title, keyword & abstract	15.01.2021	1987–2022	266	600
EBSCO	Title, keyword & abstract	15.01.2021	1987–2022	180	780
JSTOR	Title, keyword & abstract	15.01.2021	1987–2022	86	866
SAGE	Title, keyword & abstract	16.01.2021	1987–2022	57	923

- Articles published only in peer-reviewed journals were considered.
- Articles written in English language were included.
- Articles in the field of business, management and accounting and psychology were considered.
- Papers with full-text available were considered.

This led to a total of 116 articles.

Step 2: Screening

To make the study impactful, abstracts were filtered to include the studies conducted in the workplace context. Additionally, 20 articles duplicated in more than one database were removed. Subsequently, 41 articles were excluded from the final sample which led to the inclusion of 75 articles for the final review.

Step 3: Eligibility

The full texts were then obtained for the articles. These articles were analysed for their contribution towards the application or refinement of the domain, development of a scale to measure the domain as well as building theories to enhance the knowledge of the concept. Consequently, only conceptual and empirical papers were included. Any review articles directly addressing the domain were decided to be excluded but apparently no such study was found. This led to the inclusion of 65 articles in the review.

Step 4: Inclusion

Further, to make the data set comprehensive and to include all the relevant articles, detailed scanning of references of all selected articles were done. Finally, 9 articles were included in the final sample, which took the final selection to 74. A proper worksheet was maintained to record the summary of the final included articles, which were reviewed to record various parameters including:

- Year of publication
- Journals of publication
- Prominent authors in the field
- Research approaches and methods
- Geographic region
- Citation analysis
- Content analysis

The synthesis of the literature review involves itemisation of selected articles, and it unearths the explicit and implicit relevant facts from the existing body of knowledge. A detailed process of article selection is presented in Figure 2.

Description of the Literature

This section provides a description of the existing literature in the equity sensitivity domain that will help provide insights into the current developments in the domain (Kumar et al., 2023a).

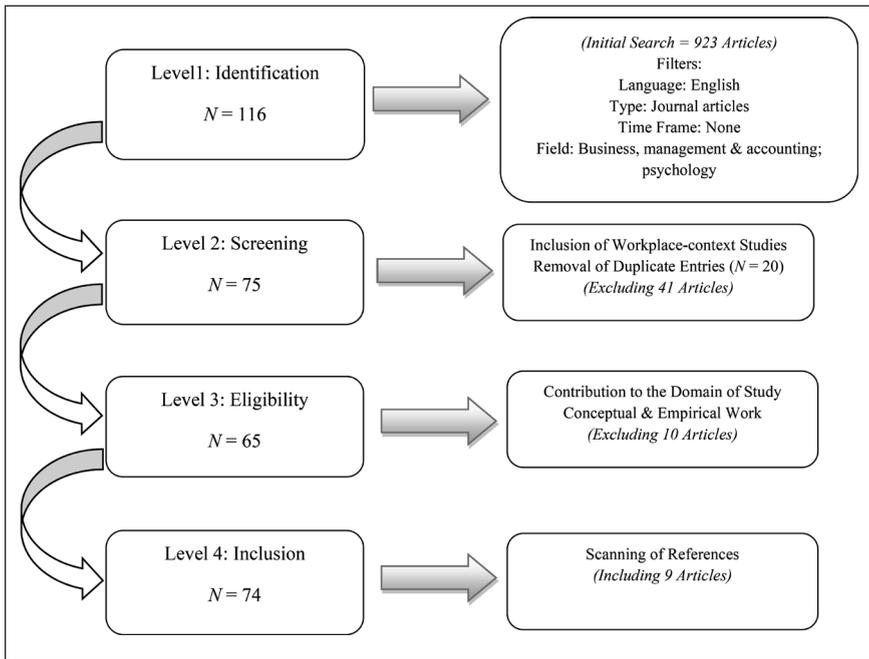


Figure 2. Article Selection Process.

Publication Activity

As evident by Figure 3, the equity sensitivity research has been following an increasing trend from 3 articles before 1990 to 10 during the 1990–1999 period and eventually to 59 articles distributed over the 2000–2022 span.

The 74 articles included in the review are published in 43 different journals, constituting fields such as psychology, management, ethics and behavioural sciences and marketing. A total of 32 journals (74%) of the 43, have published only single article and only four journals have published four or more articles. Figure 4 shows the journals with more than one publication in the field. Figure 5 depicts the authors who have contributed significantly to the field.

Research Approaches and Methods

The majority of the reviewed articles were empirical ($n = 67$), with a mere seven articles opting for a conceptual study. Table 2 depicts the different methodologies adopted by the studies included in the review. Surveys were observed to constitute a large number of studies followed by the conceptual method. Among the articles included in the review, no literature reviews were found, which strengthens the fact that equity sensitivity literature is still underdeveloped.

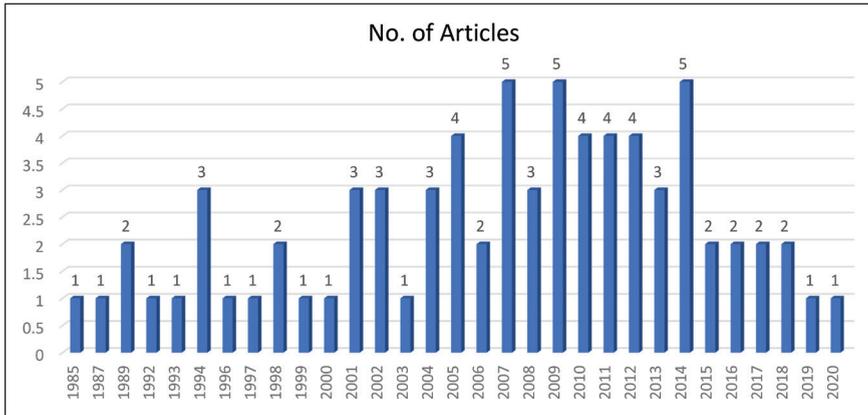


Figure 3. Year-Wise Publication.



Figure 4. Journal-Wise Publication.

Nature and Geographical Distribution of the Studies

Table 3 depicts the geographic distribution as well as the nature of the sample employed in the empirical articles reviewed. The majority of the articles were based on the sample from United States (44 studies) followed by Canada (3 studies) and Korea, Australia and the Philippines (2 studies each). The analysis also indicated five articles conducted in a cross-country setting and seven studies employing a mixed sample.

Three of the studies explored the impact of equity sensitivity under team setting. Political ideology/setting, gender influence, generation gap and negative effects of equity sensitivity found their place in two studies each. Additionally, all the articles included in the review used the cross-sectional method of data collection as no longitudinal study was found.

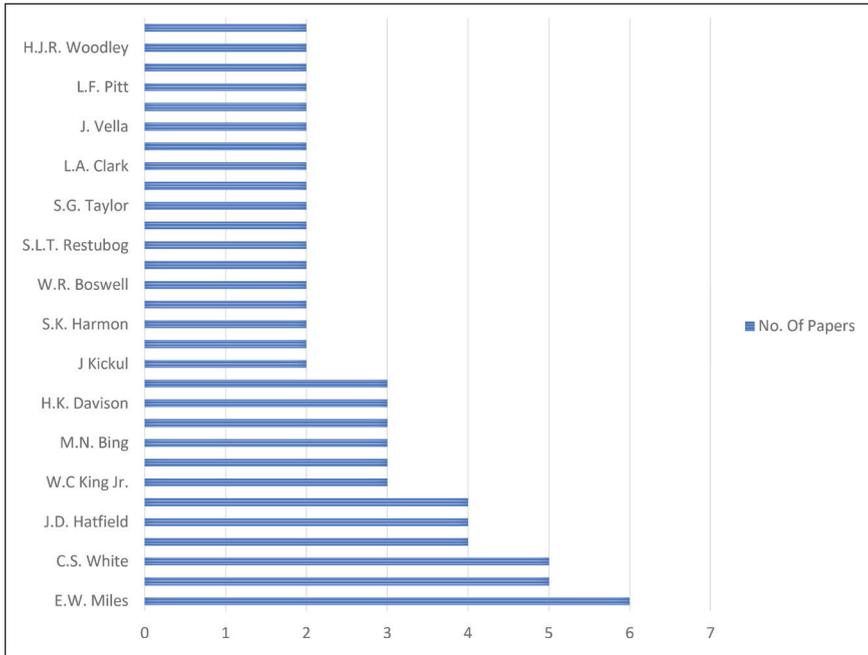


Figure 5. Author-Wise Publications.

Table 2. Research Approaches and Methods Used in the Articles.

Research Approach	Research Method	No. of Articles
Empirical papers	Quantitative	65
	1. Survey	61
	2. Experiment	3
	3. Multiple methods	1
	Mixed method	2
Conceptual papers		7
	Total	74

Table 3. Nature and Geographic Distribution of the Sample.

Continent	Sample	Number of Studies	Total no. of Studies
North America	Students/university settings	20	47
	Working professionals	18	
	General public	2	
	Mixed	7	
Europe	Working professionals	2	2
Asia	Students	2	10
	Working professionals	8	
Australia	Students	1	2
	Working professionals	1	
Africa	Working professionals	1	1

Findings

Citation Analysis

Citation analysis refers to the analysis of the number of times an article has been referred to in other studies to identify the most influential works in the field. This will also help in identifying the articles that are most impactful in deepening the knowledge of the field. For this purpose, the citation information provided by Google Scholar as of March 26, 2022 was used. The 74 articles were found to have 8,829 citations making the average citation as 119 per article. The articles with more than 100 citations are shown in Table 4. It was found that Huseman et al. (1987) is the most-cited article with 1,489 citations. This might be due to it being a seminal study. Other top-cited articles were Konovsky and Organ (1996), Kickul and Lester (2001) and Blakely et al. (2005).

Content Analysis

The articles were then analysed for their content. The authors independently reviewed the papers to identify the constructs and perspectives being studied in

Table 4. Citations of the Reviewed Articles.

S. No.	Article	Number of Citations
1.	Huseman et al. (1987)	1,489
2.	Konovsky and Organ (1996)	1,156
3.	Kickul and Lester (2001)	534
4.	Blakely et al. (2005)	429
5.	King Jr et al. (1993)	300
6.	Huseman et al. (1985)	293
7.	O'Neill and Mone (1998)	265
8.	King Jr and Miles (1994)	251
9.	Miles et al. (1989)	222
10.	Miles et al. (1994)	219
11.	Restubog et al. (2007)	216
12.	Sauley and Bedeian (2000)	205
13.	Scott and Colquitt (2007)	193
14.	Kickul et al. (2005)	182
15.	Naumann et al. (2002)	145
16.	Allen and White (2002)	136
17.	King Jr and Hinson (1994)	134
18.	Wheeler (2002)	119
19.	Bing and Burroughs (2001)	112
20.	Mudrack et al. (1999)	110
21.	Restubog et al. (2009)	109
22.	Mueller and Clarke (1998)	107
23.	Shore et al. (2006)	102

Table 5. Theoretical Perspectives in Reviewed Articles.

Theoretical Perspective	Number of Articles	Original Sources (Examples)
Equity Sensitivity (Application & Refinement)	59	Huseman et al. (1985); King Jr et al. (1993)
Measure of Equity Sensitivity	10	Sauley and Bedeian (2000); Davison and Bing (2008)
Entitlement	5	Naumann et al. (2002); Allen et al. (2015)

the domain. Each author provided codes to their analysis that were then compared and contrasted to reach a consensus. A thorough content analysis helped the authors identify the various theoretical perspectives that the articles adopted in the field. These perspectives are highlighted in Table 5.

Further analysis helped in highlighting the constructs predominantly studied in the equity sensitivity field. This was done to single out the concepts or processes being studied the most. Table 6 presents the list of these constructs. As evident by the table, both the organisation-specific and the non-organisational constructs were found to be significantly focused on by the studies. Among the organisational constructs, job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour are the most studied. Individual dispositions are prominently studied among the non-organisational constructs.

Based on the content analysis of the literature, a framework is collated which can be taken as the basis of future research in the field. Figure 6 presents the model. Being a typical individual difference variable, equity sensitivity has its grounding in the post-positivist paradigm due to its psychological nature and individual differences pertaining to contextual and demographic variables. Hence, the literature proposes that the sensitivity to equity that is, benevolence and entitlement will moderate the relationship between various reward systems, certain personal characteristics and social exchange variables which will then drive various positive or negative workplace attitudes and behaviour (Kumar & Agarwal, 2023). Equity sensitivity is affected by various demographic as well as individual disposition factors. These variables have been found to have an effect and interaction with equity sensitivity (Bourdage et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2013; O'Neill & Mone, 1998).

The moderating effects (Kumar et al., 2023b) of the differing equity sensitivity can be summarised as follows. Unlike the entitled individuals, the tolerant and 'giving' nature of the benevolent inclines them to display positive attitudes and behaviours in the work environment irrespective of the reward conditions (under reward or over reward) (King Jr et al., 1993). They are found to prefer intrinsic outcomes (Wheeler, 2007) and generally perceive distributive justice to exist in the reward distribution (Blakely et al., 2005). Additionally, due to their giving ideology (King Jr & Miles, 1994) and their ability to work in teams (teamwork orientation) (Bing & Burroughs, 2001); they are more likely to depict positive perceptions towards organisational outcomes. Lastly, their benevolence forms tolerance towards contract breach (Roehling & Boswell, 2004) and leadership

Table 6. Constructs Studied in the Equity Sensitivity Research.

Nature of the Construct	Construct	Finding	Sources
Organisational	Job satisfaction	Benevolent are found to be more satisfied with their jobs than entitled.	Huseman et al. (1985); King Jr et al. (1993); King Jr and Miles (1994); O'Neill and Mone (1998); Sauley and Bedeian (2000); Kickul and Lester (2001); Ananvoranich and Tsang (2004); Shore et al. (2006); DeConinck and Bachmann (2007); Taylor et al. (2009); Byrne et al. (2010)
	Organisational citizenship behaviour	Benevolent were found to display organisational citizenship behaviours in various contexts than entitled.	Konovsky and Organ (1996); Chhokar et al. (2001); Kickul and Lester (2001); Blakely et al. (2005); Shore et al. (2006); Restubog et al. (2007); Scott and Colquitt (2007); Akan et al. (2009); Restubog et al. (2009); Taylor et al. (2009); Allen et al. (2011); Bynum et al. (2012); Bourdage et al. (2018); Han et al. (2018)
	Turnover intentions	Benevolent had lower intention to leave their jobs as compared to entitled	O'Neill and Mone (1998); Shore (2004); Ananvoranich and Tsang (2004); Shore et al. (2006); DeConinck and Bachmann (2007); Kim et al. (2019); Rai et al. (2020)
	Organisational commitment	The giving nature of benevolent makes them more committed to their organisations than the entitled.	King Jr and Miles (1994); O'Neill and Mone (1998); Shore et al. (2006); DeConinck and Bachmann (2007); Restubog et al. (2009); Clark et al. (2010); Allen et al. (2011); Vella et al. (2012); Vella et al. (2014)
	Job performance	The job performance of the benevolent is superior to that of Entitled.	Bing and Burroughs (2001); Shore et al. (2006); Restubog et al. (2007); Scott and Colquitt (2007); Taylor et al. (2009)
	Psychological contract	Both benevolent and entitled react to psychological contract breaches, though benevolent tend to be more tolerant.	Kickul and Lester (2001); Roehling and Boswell (2004); Restubog et al. (2007); Restubog et al. (2009); Aggarwal and Bhargava (2010); Bynum et al. (2012)

Justice/fairness perceptions	Equity sensitivity found to have a positive (no impact in some contexts) on justice perceptions.	King Jr et al. (1993); King Jr and Miles (1994); Konovsky and Organ (1996); Harmon and Foote (2004); Shore (2004); Blakely et al. (2005); Kickul et al. (2005); DeConinck and Bachmann (2007); Scott and Colquitt (2007); Jeon and Newman (2016); Hayibor (2017)
Non-organisational	Individual dispositions The effect of various personality traits, attitudes, values and ideology were found to be associated with equity sensitivity.	King Jr and Miles (1994); Mudrack et al. (1999); Sauley and Bedeian (2000); Bing and Burroughs (2001); Yamaguchi (2003); Foote and Harmon (2006); Scott and Colquitt (2007); Walker et al. (2007); Adams et al. (2008); Shore and Strauss (2008); Miller (2009); Taylor et al. (2009); Conner (2011); Woodley and Allen (2014); Miller (2015); Woodley et al. (2016); Bourdage et al. (2018)
Demographic variables	Effects of gender, age, national origin and occupation on equity sensitivity were tested.	King Jr and Hinson (1994); Mueller and Clarke (1998); Wheeler (2002); Allen et al. (2005); Foote and Harmon (2006); Shore and Strauss (2008); Roehling et al. (2010); Kim et al. (2013); Allen et al. (2015)
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy was found to be associated and interact with equity sensitivity to predict various outcomes.	O'Neill and Mone (1998); O'Neill and Mone (2005); Walker et al. (2007); Adams et al. (2008)

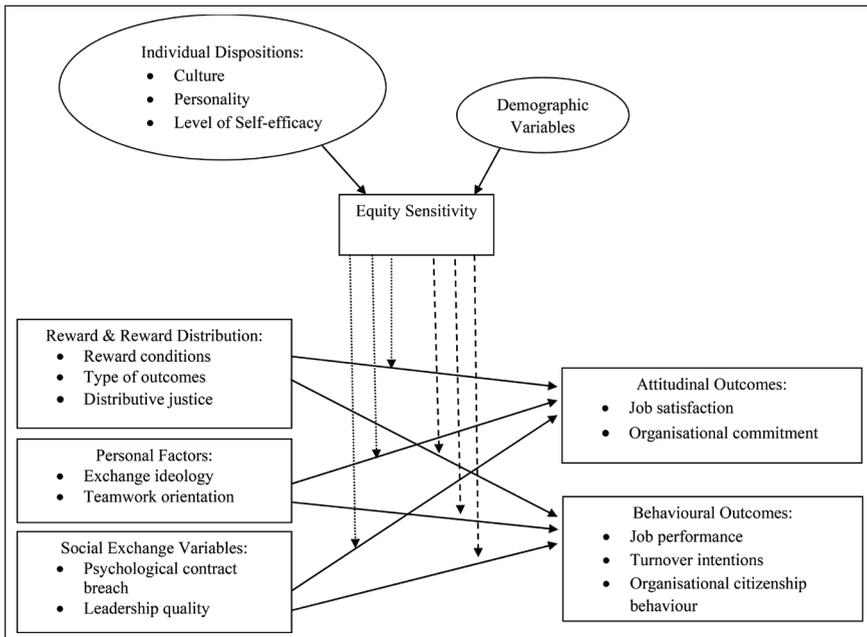


Figure 6. Proposed Conceptual Framework.

(exchange relationship and responsiveness) (Han et al., 2018; McLoughlin & Carr, 1997; Shore et al., 2006); leading to positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation.

Research Gaps

This section addresses the following research question: What are the research gaps in the equity sensitivity research? The reviewed articles were analysed to identify the research gaps and find the limitations in methodology, theoretical framework as well as study settings and samples. The authors identified two prominent conceptual gaps and three vital methodological gaps in effective equity sensitivity research.

Conceptual Limitations Lack of Consensus Around a Framework

The review pointed out the lack of a consensus around the framework and role of equity sensitivity. The reason behind this is twofold. First, a relatively small amount of equity sensitivity research is foundational in the sound theoretical framework, and most of this work focuses on either the behavioural impact of the sensitivity (Allen & White 2002; Parnell & Sullivan, 1992), psychological effects (Conner, 2011; King Jr et al., 1993; Naumann et al., 2002) or the refinement of the equity sensitivity instrument (Davison & Bing, 2008; King Jr & Miles, 1994; Sauley & Bedeian, 2000). While integrating a theory from conjoining fields may

be the approach to model development (Bynum et al., 2012), the sensitivity model is perceived to be more complex than this. This complexity arises from the fact that the theory has its base in the perceptual psychology of an individual, which itself is a separate and relevant sub-field in the branch of cognitive psychology.

Second, a relatively large number of studies focus on solving problems (instead of building theory), inducing a variety of theories, many of which are not dominant in the equity sensitivity theory. Although this contributes significantly to the theory, its contribution towards the building of a sound model is limited. The extant literature proposes a moderating role of equity sensitivity, but the work has produced mixed results so far. Some studies established it as a moderator (O'Neill & Mone, 1998) whereas several others found little or no moderation effects (Bing & Burroughs, 2001; Scott & Colquitt, 2007). This has created more confusion than clarity around the role of the construct.

Ambiguity in the Conceptualisation

Our review has identified three prominent ambiguities in the conceptualisation of the equity sensitivity construct. First, ambiguity exists among the measurement scales of the equity sensitivity concept. Studies have continuously claimed one measure as superior to the others (Foote & Harmon, 2006; Shore & Strauss, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). While the sample selection was initially identified as the reason behind one scale being superior to the other, further studies used the same sample and proved otherwise. Such findings cast doubt not only on the effectiveness of the instruments but also the concept as a whole. Another issue identified is the response pattern of the respondents in the study. The plausible reason behind the unclear conceptualisation of equity sensitivity could be the social desirability bias in the response of the respondents. A total of eight articles (Davison & Bing, 2008; Miller, 2009; Scott & Colquitt, 2007) have highlighted this issue. Social desirability bias is the tendency of the respondents in the study to respond in a manner that they perceive to be acceptable in a social setting, and the response they think will put them in a favourable light. Respondents can manipulate the results due to desirability bias by giving benevolent responses when in reality, they adopt an entitled approach.

Second, the conceptualisation of the basic nature of equity sensitivity has still not found its place in the existent literature. The confusion of equity sensitivity being a trait or a state (Huseman et al., 1987), a situation-activated trait (Konovsky & Organ, 1996), attitude (Shore, 2004) as well as the intrinsic (vs extrinsic) nature (Wheeler, 2002) still persists. This is evident by the confounding interactions equity sensitivity has had with various constructs. When equity sensitivity was studied in different cultural settings, no definite relationship was established between the two constructs. Additionally, when other factors, say gender, were considered, the findings were sample-specific (Kim et al., 2013; King Jr & Hinson, 1994; Wheeler, 2002). Some of these findings were in contradiction with the generally established cultural-induced behaviours (Allen et al., 2005; Chhokar et al., 2001; Mueller & Clarke, 1998).

Third, while researchers have hinted at equity sensitivity being a multi-dimensional concept as opposed to the established uni-dimensional understanding

(Bing et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2009), this aspect was left unattended and has not been acknowledged in the recent research carried out in the field. A lack of clarity in these conceptualisations rob the managers to mould and predict the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes/organisational behaviour of the employees (Naumann et al., 2002).

Methodological Limitations Absence of Longitudinal Research

As mentioned above, all articles included in the review adopt a static point of view, creating a dearth of longitudinal research. It is believed that longitudinal research is necessary to analyse the stability and trends of the theory (Mueller & Clarke, 1998). With equity sensitivity being perception oriented, its dynamic nature needs to be analysed over a period of time. The dearth of longitudinal studies explicitly indicates that not much attention has been given to such dynamic changes. A significant number of researchers also find it difficult to establish a causal relationship between variables and equity sensitivity in a cross-sectional setting (Aggarwal & Bhargava, 2010; Kickul et al., 2005; Oren & Littman-Ovadia, 2013). The causal inferences drawn using cross-sectional study design do not implicate causality but imply inferences (Kickul & Lester, 2001). With researchers worried about the problem of common method variance due to the cross-sectional survey design (Kim et al., 2019), it brings us to our next barrier.

The Dominance of Quantitative Research

The review has identified various research methodologies used to examine equity sensitivity, and a significant number of studies have used quantitative tools. As discussed above, applying quantitative research to study a field that lacks a proper framework to explain its underlying mechanism generally provides ambiguous results (Shore & Strauss, 2008; Wheeler, 2007). It is beneficial to use qualitative methods concomitantly with the quantitative tools to understand the phenomenon (Shah & Corley, 2006). A limited number of articles extend the theory (King Jr & Hinson, 1994), and others refine its applications (Bynum et al., 2012; Conner, 2011; Hayibor, 2017; O'Neill & Mone, 2005). While a substantial number of articles used the survey method as a tool to collect data, one problem underlying the survey method is that it is solely used for theory testing, which is the essence of scientific methodology, overlooking the significance that theory building and refinement holds (Shah & Corley, 2006). The cross-sectional survey method of data collection also carries the problem of common method variance/common method bias. Common method variance/bias refers to the variance attributable to the measurement method and not to the constructs that are being measured. A significant number of articles, a total of 20 (28%) studies, reported this problem.

Qualitative research approach could have significantly added value as it has immense potential to compliment quantitative approach by rendering depth and perspective to statistics (Kumar & Tuli, 2021). Having stemmed from human experiences, it could have thrown better light at the rationale for perceptual differences towards equity sensitivity. Qualitative research helps unfold the how and why (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Tuli et al., 2023b) of a behaviour, thus rendering

better understanding that could have been utilised by organisations to create more equitable environment.

Limitations as to Sample Selection

The final limitation in the equity sensitivity research is the sample selection in the studies. Owing to the geographical bias where majority of the studies emanate from the USA and significant employment of the student sample, it becomes difficult to generalise the findings to the complete universe of research. The measurement scales for equity sensitivity have a wording that limits the equity sensitivity concept to an employer-employee relationship (Foote & Harmon, 2006). Thus, using a student sample for such purposes might not give effective results. Although a few studies used part-time working student samples, the selection still does not represent any individual's perceptions and attitudes in a work environment.

As the literature indicates, the total distribution of studies reviewed are skewed, thus indicating the geographical sampling bias. It also highlights that the sampling effort is 'spatially biased', rather than equally distributed over the study area (Ross & Bibler-Zaidi 2019). Since, the geographical distribution was not a delimitation that the authors consciously made during the exclusionary and inclusionary decisions, neither did the authors have any intention to narrow the scope of the review, it represents a systematic bias introduced into the study design or instrument by the researcher (Price & Murnan, 2004). One reason of high number of studies in the USA could be credited to it being a high-income country with right consciousness among employees. Studies have also shown less accessibility of researches from other parts of the world causes limitation leading to geographical sampling bias (Zizka et al., 2021).

The significant variation in cultural aspects of the westernised developed economies and the Eastern emerging nations (Hofstede, 1984) clearly indicates that generalising the finding of one to another will be like comparing an apple with an orange. Besides this, the generalisability of management theories developed in one culture to other cultures has been seriously questioned in recent years. The literature has recommended the further testing of equity sensitivity in non-Western cultures (Ananvoranich & Tsang, 2004). This is because equity perceptions, by their very nature, are likely to be subject to cultural influences (Chhokar et al., 2001). Such geographical bias has also been found to affect the knowledge production and diffusion process, with the developed high-income countries being the producers and the middle- and low-income countries being mere receivers of such knowledge (Skopec et al., 2020).

Discussion

The current review aimed to revive the equity sensitivity theory by highlighting the developments in the field, collating a conceptual framework largely missing from the existing literature and identifying the research gaps in the existing body of literature on equity sensitivity. This article used the SLR method and reviewed

a total of 74 published articles to highlight the gaps in the theoretical base, research settings and sample selection in equity sensitivity research. In this regard, this review identified two conceptual and three methodological limitations in the existent literature. The lack of consensus around the theoretical framework and role of the construct accompanied by the ambiguous conceptualisation poses gaps in the theory's conceptual base. The findings indicate that, theoretically, equity sensitivity is underdeveloped and stark ambiguity exists in the existing research. While a significant number of studies induced a variety of theories secondary to the idea of equity sensitivity, hinting at broadening the interest of researchers from different fields, this does not contribute towards the development of the core theory. After all, theory building and refinement has equal importance as theory testing (Shah & Corley, 2006).

This theory witnessed many quantitative studies that contribute to the idea but lay no foundation to the theory development. Thus, an increase in the exploratory research practices to build a solid and stable theoretical understanding will be beneficial before performing any confirmatory analysis. To induce stability in the theory, longitudinal studies, which are currently missing from the existing literature body, need to be stressed upon. By identifying the research gaps, this review aims to direct all future studies towards overcoming the shortcomings in this field to aid in the development of the theory.

This review focused on providing a specific number of studies in one place due to the highly fragmented nature of the existing research. This will create awareness of the available research and help future researchers access the relevant literature. Another aim was to highlight the existing problems and inconsistencies that exist in the current research and raise questions around them. The collated framework depicting equity sensitivity's relationship with other constructs will help in reviving the concept and guiding the future research in the field. To keep the scope limited, this review succeeded in including variant studies but can only act as an abridgement to the various gaps in the literature. Future research should aim at going deeper into the gaps identified.

Limitations

While identifying the limitations in the existing literature, the authors do not fail to acknowledge their review's limitations. To uphold the quality of the reviewed articles and make the review comprehensive, academic articles from six distinct databases covering a variety of journals were included. The inclusion of published articles, though, ignores the latest research, which adds to the cumulative knowledge of the field. To eradicate any unpremeditated biases, transparency and evidence-based analysis were stressed upon.

Future Research Directions

Addressing the shortcomings in the existing body of literature as identified by the review provides a direction for future research. First, the influence of external

factors (Ananvoranich & Tsang, 2004; Conner, 2011) as well as the work environment (Kim et al., 2019; Roehling et al., 2010) on the equity sensitivity of an individual can enhance the conceptualisation of the equity domain, and hence can be a direction for future research. Second, the future researchers must undertake cross-cultural research with equity sensitivity to solidify the relationship between the two constructs and increase the generalisation of the findings (Allen et al., 2005; Wheeler, 2002). Third, the 'dark side' of the equity sensitivity of an individual must be studied more to develop a holistic conceptual understanding of the construct and enhance the role of individual differences in guiding specific behaviours and/or traits (Woodley & Allen, 2014). Fourth, the intensity of the impact of equity sensitivity on the attitudinal and behavioural work-related outcomes, and how such an impact differs between the benevolent and the entitled (Kickul & Lester, 2001) can be another avenue for future research. Last, equity sensitivity is a psychological phenomenon influenced by context and demography (Huseman et al., 1987; Mudrack et al., 1999), having its roots in the post-positivist paradigm. The existing research in this domain complements the paradigmatic approach. Currently, the concept has a production-based orientation (input/output ratio), but it has to be looked at from other perspectives and lenses. For instance, the studies focusing on the sex-related differences in equity orientation in the workplace, have evolved with the findings showing the changing orientations towards workplace equity among the females (Kim et al., 2013; Major et al., 1989). Thus, looking at the domain from a feminist paradigm will facilitate in understanding this evolution in the equity sensitivity. Additionally, an interpretivist approach would enable an understanding of the 'why' part of the process as opposed to the existing 'what' and 'how' of the equity sensitivity. Since, it is an individual difference, it is affected by the social environment. Thus, an interpretivist lens might also develop an understanding on whether these equity orientations in the workplace transfer to the other contexts in which an individual operates or vice-versa.

In addition to the aforementioned future research directions, the authors propose further avenues to address the existing gaps in the body of literature on equity sensitivity. These are elaborated below.

Enhancing the Conceptual Foundation

The theory suffers from the limitation to classify equity sensitivity as a state or a trait (Huseman et al., 1987). With no empirical evidence addressing this issue, the theoretical underpinning of equity sensitivity still remains ambiguous. This calls for a deeper investigation to determine its nature wherein a longitudinal study might fulfil the said purpose. Additionally, qualitative research will thereby enhance the building of a framework (Shah & Corley, 2006). Further, it is imperative to address the contradictions that exist in theory to conceptualise the construct. For instance, Foote and Harmon (2006) failed to establish convergent validity between the two widely used measures of equity sensitivity. Thus, future

researchers need to solidify such instruments' effectiveness to cater to the shortcomings in the field.

Since equity sensitivity research is primarily conducted in the work environment, the prevalence of socially desirable responses is preeminent. Future research must make provisions to control for this aspect while analysing the data collected. Another area that future research needs to address includes the multi-dimensional nature of equity sensitivity which is proven by the changing relationship of the construct with various individual dispositions and demographic variables (Wheeler, 2002; Woodley et al., 2016). Thus, the construct must be studied in various situational contexts to clearly establish its multi-dimensionality, which is currently lacking in the literature.

Addressing the Methodological Shortcomings

Future research must reduce its dependence on the survey method of data collection and adopt more qualitative tools to understand whether the variance is a result of the constructs being studied or the measurement scale being used. This will aid in better understanding of the relationships between the construct and other behavioural and psychological variables. Future researchers must focus on the sample outside of the USA to increase the generalisation of their findings. Further, since the instruments to measure equity sensitivity are designed to study work relationships (Foote & Harmon, 2006), the use of a non-student sample must be undertaken unless a new dynamic measurement scale is developed.

Managerial Implications

Equity theory has been known to understand the perceptions of individuals regarding equitable treatment in their respective workplaces (Adams, 1965). Thus, the research on this theory has been prolific. On the other hand, equity sensitivity theory, which has enhanced the equity theory's predictive power (Huseman et al., 1987), has been underdeveloped despite its practical value. But it is essential to emphasise the workforce's equity sensitivity perceptions for the effective and efficient working of the organisation. Globalisation and high diversity among the workforce are some of the contemporary issues in today's labour management, which marks the necessity of equity perceptions to be understood in depth (Kim et al., 2013; Yamaguchi, 2003). The comprehension of how the equity perceptions affect and formulate attitudes towards the workplace stimuli will aid in designing conducive compensation policies (Parnell & Sullivan, 1992). Additionally, the importance of equity sensitivity as an individual difference variable persists due to the dynamic social system that an organisation is and the value that such variables provide in comprehending the workplace attitudes and outcomes (Bourdage et al., 2018; Miller, 2015) as corroborated by the existing literature. Thus, the review can provide insights to the managers on what has been found till now and where they need to focus. It also highlights what is missing and where do they need to go.

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