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Nor Azima Ahmad, Umi Hamidaton Mohd Soffian Lee, Siti Salwa Salim

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Relationship between Distributive Justice and Organizational Commitment: Job Satisfaction As Mediator among Public Employees in Malaysia

Nor Azima Ahmad

Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Umi Hamidaton Mohd Soffian Lee

Fakulti Ekonomi dan Muamalat, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

Corresponding Author's Email: umihamidaton@usim.edu.my

Siti Salwa Salim

Institut Islam Hadhari, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Abstract

Distributive justice is often viewed as a key factor in the retention of an employee in an organization. Rapid economic development and aging population have considerably increased the demand of high-quality employees' performance to fulfill organizations' needs. Studies have revealed that dissatisfaction with the fairness of distribution such as pay scales, rewards and benefits provided by the organization causes employees to lose motivation to perform work with full commitment. Thus, this study was conducted to examine the role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable between distributive justice and organizational commitment. This study used a cross-sectional study method to collect data. Primary data were obtained through a questionnaire completed by 114 public servants of government agencies in Peninsular Malaysia. The data obtained were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.3 software to test the research hypotheses. The results of SmartPLS path model analysis showed three significant findings: first, distributive justice has a significant relationship with job satisfaction. Second, distributive justice has a significant relationship with organizational commitment. Third, job satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between organizational fairness and organizational commitment. The implications of the study and discussion are described further.

Keywords: Distributive Justice, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Public Employees, SmartPLS

Introduction

Government agencies around the world are under pressure to improve public sector performance and at the same time deal with organization structure and nature to fulfill the needs of employees. It is important to highlight on organizational justice system, specifically

distributive justice in organization, because it is an important element to determine employees' behavior or attitudes at the workplace (Colquitt, 2001). Distributive justice can be defined as the response or perception of employees toward implementations of fairness within organizations (Greenberg, 1990; Mukherjee, 2010). It reflects people's perception of the fairness of outcome or resource allocation, which largely depends on social comparisons or results of historical record. According to Joseph et al (2014), discrimination or bias against employees can be prevented through efficient organizational justice approach which is consequently able to evoke employees' positive perception toward the organization. Besides, employees' perceptions of fairness practiced in the organization can be enhanced through the ability of management in distributing of organizational resources in a proper manner by considering the criteria and contributions made by employees (Mahboob & Khan, 2017).

According to Yuan (2015); Yadav and Gupta (2017), fairness practices adopted by organizations are able to ensure stability within organizations such as being able to maintain harmony in the relationship between employers and employees and improve employee performance (Mukherjee 2010), loyalty as well as employees' commitment to the organization (Orchana, 2014; Ismail, 2014; Chen et al., 2022). Conversely, unfairness perception may lead to a lower employees' career satisfaction, trigger their turnover intention and cause absenteeism (Arif 2018; Krishnan 2020). Consequently, it may give a negative effect toward organizational productivities and efficiencies. Although satisfying every employee is impossible, making the aspect of justice as the main pillar in the management of the organization will be able to minimize the probability of conflict in every decision made in the organization (Abd. Azis, 2002).

Distributive justice is one of the most important components of organizational justice. Most scholars define distributive justice as an employee's perception regarding management's ability to distribute organizational resources fairly and impartially (Greenberg, 1987; Tam 1998; Mukherjee, 2010; Asyakireen & Azman, 2019). In addition, perception of distributive justice among employees is formed when they receive reward as per expected. According to Adam (1965), employees' fairness perception regarding reward or organizational resources can be related with the ability of managers to allocate commensurate and equitable reward with the input (knowledge, skills, energy, effort) that has been poured by employees.

Fairness in the distribution of organizational resources is not only focused on resources in the form of monetary reward alone (i.e., salary payments, incentives), but also includes rewards in non-financial forms such as awards, work schedules, authority, punishment, and performance appraisal (Safari et al., 2012). According to Pearce et al (2019), both types of monetary reward (e.g., medical benefit, fuel benefit, retirement benefit) and non-monetary reward (e.g., appreciation, job rotation, free to plan and work) which are distributed in reliable and equitable manners, have improved motivation among employees.

Studies conducted by scholars recently in the field of organizational justice found that the ability of managers to distribute organizational resources or reward based on employees' contributions may significantly enhance their work outcomes, especially job satisfaction (Ismail et al., 2021; Krishnan, 2020; Purnama et al., 2020; Ghran et al., 2020; Laith et al., 2019) and organizational commitment (Jang et al., 2019; Salam, 2020; Kareem et al., 2019; Friday & Ugwu, 2019; Jameel et al., 2020). From the perspective of organizational behavior, job

satisfaction is defined as employees' feeling of pleasure and contentedness with their job and this positive emotion arises when they were comfortable and satisfied with the working environment and the aspects of the job itself (Sia & Tan, 2016; Ridhwan & Enah, 2020). Employees who have a high level of job satisfaction are able to show excellent performance in the tasks given and may contribute to the development of the organization. Several surveys such as Fadlallah (2015); Bakotic (2016); Okeke (2018) discovered that satisfied employees tend to improve their performance which may contribute toward organizational development.

Meanwhile organizational commitment refers to an emotional bond that exists among employees toward the organization and those emotions will influence the decision whether to continue as a member in the organization or vice versa (Lambert et al., 2019; Kareem et al., 2019). Besides that, organizational commitment is also associated with the willingness of employees to contribute extra effort such as time, skill and knowledge to achieve organizational goals. Additionally, a number of researchers such as Song and Yang (2020); Meyer and Herscovitch (2001); Akpan (2013) agreed that organizational commitment consists of three elements. The first element is affective commitment that is associated with the readiness of employees psychologically and emotionally to keep working and committing to the organization. Employees with better affective commitment have great emotional attachment to their organization. Secondly, normative commitment which is associated with the willingness of employees to remain a member of the organization based on the sense of obligation to do so (Luthans, 2011). For example, an employee with normative commitment tends to feel guilty to leave their organizations. The third element is continuous commitment which deals with the sense of employees staying in their organization due to fear of losing profits or advantages if they leave the organization (Jameel et al., 2019). Employees with great sense of continuous commitment tend to prioritize their necessity compared to desire. Otherwise, employees who have a low level of organizational commitment will cause negative effects such as the desire to quit and poor work performance. This in turn will have a detrimental effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization.

Recently, a literature pertaining to the effect of organizational justice in outcomes of employees shows that the impact of organizational justice practices on organizational commitment is indirectly influenced by job satisfaction (Suifan, 2019; Safdar & Liu, 2019). Although the nature of this relationship is quite interesting, the role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable has been neglected. Most scholars agree this is due to several factors. The first factor is that most previous studies have often conducted discussions that are conceptual in nature such as definitions, types, purposes as well as importance in practicing organizational justice. Second, previous studies have used more simple correlation methods to describe employees' perceptions of organizational justice practices and their impact on employees' behaviors and attitudes (Asyakireen et al., 2019; Ajala, 2017). As such, this prompts researchers to explore in more depth the nature of this relationship as well as the role of job satisfaction as a mediating enabler.

Literature Review

Relationship between Distributive Justice and Organizational Commitment

The role of distributive justice as an important predictor of organizational commitment gains great support from (Blau's Social Exchange Theory, 1964). This theory which is based on

'reciprocal' posits that individual behavior is resulted based on how they are treated. For example, an employee who receives a fair treatment from their manager will act positively as an exchange for the positive treatment received. Conversely, if managers are unable to implement fairness especially regarding distribution of employee's outcome, then it could trigger a negative response from employees. Further, previous literature pertaining to justice within organizations have supported the main idea of this theory. Recent studies with participations from different samples of respondents have affirmed that distributive justice may act as a salient predictor of organizational commitment. For instance, Jang et al (2019) used a sample of 3117 public servants, Salam (2020) employed 139 nurses in general hospitals as a sample, Kareem et al (2019) used 117 staff from state banks to fill up the questionnaires, Friday and Ugwu (2019) distributed questionnaires among 183 teachers at private secondary schools, and Jameel et al (2020) used 96 teachers at public secondary school as respondents. In addition, research done by Chang et al (2022) indicated that a high level of perception of distributive justice could improve the organizational commitment among employees. As a result, outcomes from these studies indicated that organizational commitment of employees would increase if managers were able to distribute outcomes (i.e., reward and/or performance evaluation) equitable with employees' contributions (i.e., knowledge and/or performance). Thus, this perception of justice could lead to higher organizational commitment within organizations. Hence, based on the literature, it is hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between distributive justice and organizational commitment

Relationship between Distributive Justice and Job Satisfaction

The effect of distributive justice in influencing job satisfaction is consistent with the principle of (Adam's Equity Theory, 1965). It suggests that individuals perceive fairly distribution of outcomes when they are compensated reasonably and equitably based on their contribution (e.g., skill, knowledge, experience, performance). An application of this theory in this relationship shows that the capability of superior or managers to distribute employees' outcomes by considering employees contribution pertaining task accomplishment may evoke their satisfaction in their jobs. Besides, the notion of these theory is in line with organizational justice research literature that were employed using direct effect model and from different organization backgrounds. For example, some of the studies involved the manufacturing sector in Small and Medium Industry (Krishnan, 2020), the banking sector (Purnama et al., 2020), a government agency (Ismail et al., 2021), the educational sector (Laith et al., 2019) and the transportation industry (Zakaria, 2020). Based on the findings from these studies, it can be concluded that employees feeling of satisfaction pertaining to their jobs can be stimulated through the ability of managers to distribute employees' reward by taking into account their performance, skill, working experience and knowledge. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between distributive justice and job satisfaction

Relationship between Distributive Justice, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

Mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationship between distributive justice and organizational commitment is in line with the main idea of (Hezberg's Two-Factor Theory, 1959). This theory states that there are two factors that give an impact toward job

satisfaction, namely hygiene factor and motivational factor. Motivation factors arise from individuals themselves and they are related to the job such as recognition and award received for their performance. Meanwhile, hygiene factors are related to external factors that may contribute to enhance job satisfaction such as workplace environment and commensurate payment received by manager. According to Herzberg (1964); Abd. Azis (2010), the presence of motivational factors is able to increase job satisfaction, but if these factors are not present, it will not cause of dissatisfaction. Conversely, hygiene factors are more important because when they are not present, it may trigger employees to be unsatisfied with their job. The application of this theory in organizational justice practice shows that a fair reward received among employees is one of the hygiene factors and organizations should give more attention regarding fairness in reward distribution in order to maintain the level of job satisfaction. Employees with higher level of job satisfaction tend to act with positive behavior such as higher commitment and loyalty toward organizations.

This main principal for this theory gains great support from previous literature. For example, findings from studies by Zulkifli et al (2020); Suifan (2019); Bagis (2018); Safdar and Liu (2019) described that the ability of managers to fairly distribute employees' outcomes (e.g., monthly income, health benefit and promotions) based on their contributions (e.g., skill, time and knowledge) had significantly enhanced the level of job satisfaction among employees. Therefore, these employees with job satisfaction could lead to greater commitment toward their organizations. Hence, it is hypothesized that

H3: The relationship between distributive justice and organizational commitment is mediated by job satisfaction.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional research design which enabled the researchers to integrate distributive justice literature and the actual survey as the main procedure for data collection. The method of survey was applied as a strategy of research design since it allows the researchers to utilize a cross-sectional research design to ensure the accuracy and quality of data collection (Creswell, 2012; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This study was conducted on employees at one major government agency in Peninsular Malaysia. This study aims to provide empirical evidence of distributive justice practice toward employees' attitudes as public service providers by measuring the influence on organizational commitment and job satisfaction as mediator. For confidential reasons and policies, all respondents' anonymity are maintained. At an early stage of research, the questionnaires were drafted based on organizational justice literature. A back-to-back-translation technique was employed to translate the survey questionnaire into English and Malay language to increase the validity and ensure the reliability of research findings (Creswell, 2012; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Measures

The survey questionnaire designed consisted of three sections meant for three constructs included in this study. The first section intended to measure supportive justice. It consisted of nine items, drafted from organizational justice literature (Cropanzo et al., 2007; Neihoff & Moorman, 1993). These constructs were rated based on four criteria: pay criteria, promotion, job assessments and incentive. Some of the items are *"the reward received compensates for*

my job responsibilities”, *“job performance is the major condition for promotion”*, *“the best service award criterion is based on the job performance assessment report”* and *“most productive staff receive higher incentive”*. Then, the job satisfaction is measured using seven items adapted from job satisfaction scale developed by (Warr et al., 1979). All of the items were rated using two main criteria namely, intrinsic job satisfaction and extrinsic job satisfaction. Example of questions are *“my job is challenging and exciting”*, *“my achievement is recognized”*, *“I have a good, clean, modern workplace and equipment”* and *“I feel satisfied with the amount of support and guidance I receive from my supervisor”*. Finally, the organizational commitment was measured by nine items adapted from (Colakoglu et al., 2010). These constructs were assessed using three main criteria such as affective commitment, continuous commitment and normative commitment. Example of questions are *“I feel like part of the family at my organization”*, *“right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity”* and *“this organization deserves my loyalty”*. All items are rated using 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree/dissatisfied” to “strongly agree/satisfied”. Demographic variables were used as controlling variables because this study has also focused on employees’ attitude. According to Finstad (2010); Chang (1994), using 7-point scale may provide more accurate evaluation to determine respondents’ true evaluation and greater extent of reliability measurement.

Sample

A purposive sampling plan was used to distribute 180 survey questionnaires to employees in the organization. This sampling technique was selected because the list of registered employees was not given to the researchers due to confidentiality and privacy reason. This condition did not allow the researchers to randomly choose participants in this study. From the total number of survey questionnaires distributed, 114 (63%) usable questionnaires were returned to the researchers. Participation in this study was voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

Data Analysis

The SmartPLS 3.3 as employed to analyze the survey questionnaire data because it has the capability to deliver latent variable scores, avoid small sample size problem and estimate complex model (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2009).

Findings

Respondents’ Profiles

Table 1 displays that the majority of respondents were female (64%), aged from 34-39 years (41%), from supporting group (64%), had monthly income between RM1000 – RM2499 (40%) and were married (77%).

Table 1

Profile of Respondents

Respondents' Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Female	64
Male	36
Age	
27 years and below	9
28 – 33 years	29
34 – 39 years	41
40 – 45 years	12
46 years and above	9
Position	
Professional group	36
Supporting group	64
Monthly income	
< RM 1000	-
RM1000 – RM2499	40
RM2500 – RM3999	27
RM4000 – RM5499	18
RM5500 – RM6999	8
RM7000 and above	7
Marital status	
Married	77
Single	21
Widow	2

Validity and Reliability Analysis

Table 2 shows the result for validity and reliability analysis for each construct. The value of outer loading for each construct was greater than 0.7, indicating that all constructs meet the standard of validity and reliability analysis (Hair et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the value of composite reliability for each construct was greater than 0.8 signifying that the construct had high internal consistency within the research instrument. Furthermore, for convergent analysis, each construct achieved the acceptable value for convergent validity analysis since the values of AVE were all greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2

Validity and Reliability Analysis for Each Construct

Variable/ Constructs	Outer Loading			Composite Reliability	AVE Values
	Distributive justice	Job satisfaction	Organizational commitment		
Distributive justice					
D1	0.852				
D10	0.832				
D11	0.730				

D13	0.815			0.947	0.667
D18	0.715				
D2	0.875				
D20	0.792				
D3	0.880				
D4	0.841				
Job satisfaction				0.934	0.668
E1		0.818			
E10		0.820			
E12		0.830			
E13		0.840			
E3		0.838			
E8		0.768			
E9		0.806			
Organizational commitment				0.943	0.648
F1			0.832		
F11			0.840		
F12			0.821		
F2			0.814		
F4			0.826		
F5			0.820		
F6			0.793		
F7			0.791		
F8			0.704		

Table 3 shows the result for discriminant validity analysis. The value of Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) for each construct was less than 0.85 indicating that all constructs have fulfilled the discriminant validity criteria (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009; Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3

Discriminant Validity Analysis

Constructs/ Variables	Distributive Justice	Job Satisfaction	Organizational Commitment
Distributive Justice			
Job Satisfaction	0.821		
Organizational Commitment	0.723	0.765	

Table 4 shows the values of VIF analysis. The correlation coefficient between independent variable (distributive justice), mediating variable (job satisfaction) and dependent variable (organizational commitment) were free from serious collinearity problem since the values of variance inflation factors among them were all less than 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Analysis

Constructs/ Variables	Distributive Justice	Job Satisfaction	Organizational Commitment
Distributive Justice		1.000	2.415
Job Satisfaction			2.415
Organizational Commitment			

Table 5 shows the result for hypothesis testing for direct relationships. First, distributive justice has positive and significant effect toward job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.765$; $t = 17.720$), hence H1 is supported. Besides, based on the value of R^2 , it can be explained that the presence of distributive justice has contributed 58 percent in the variance of job satisfaction. Second, distributive justice has positive and significant effect toward organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.325$; $t = 4.441$) and the inclusion of distributive justice has affected 57 percent of the organizational commitment variance, based on its R^2 value. Thus, H2 is supported.

Further, effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were tested for both hypotheses. The value of f^2 for H1 (relationship between distributive and job satisfaction) is 1.415 indicating that it has a large effect size. Meanwhile the value of Q^2 is 0.380 revealing that this model has predictive relevance since the value of Q^2 has exceeded 0. The value of f^2 for H2 (relationship between distributive and organizational commitment) is 0.102 showing that this relationship has a small effect size. For the predictive relevance, this relationship has relevance prediction since the value of Q^2 is 0.348 which is greater than 0 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5

Hypothesis testing Result H1 and H2

Hypothesis	Relationship	β value	t value	R^2	f^2	Q^2	Result
H1	Distributive justice---job satisfaction	0.765	17.720	0.586	1.415	0.380	Supported
H2	Distributive justice---organizational commitment	0.325	4.441	0.573	0.102	0.348	Supported

Note: Significant level $t > 1.65$

Table 6

Result for Effect Size (f^2) and Predictive Relevant (Q^2) Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β value	t value	R^2	Result
H3	Distributive justice---job satisfaction—organizational commitment	0.367	6.427	0.586	Supported

Discussion and Implication

The outcomes of this study confirmed that job satisfaction acts as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between distributive justice and organizational commitment. In the context of this study, the management of the organization have given great attention in implementation of justice in terms of employees' outcomes distribution. The ability of managers to fairly distribute fair outcomes (e.g., salary, daily task and promotion opportunities) may evoke employees' satisfaction in their job. Consequently, a satisfied employee will show positive behavior especially a higher commitment toward their organization. When employees feel that the distribution is fair, they are more attracted to stay in the organization and have a tolerant attitude. Thus, improving distributive justice in organizations is vital in organizations' human resources management.

Besides that, this study has three important implications, which are theoretical contribution, robustness of research methodology and practical contribution. Theoretically, the outcomes of this study are consistent with the principal meaning of two factor theories by (Herzberg, 1959). This theory explains that if motivational and hygiene factors are present in an organization, the employees would eventually increase their positive behavior, commitment and performance in their jobs. The principal meaning of this theory has gained strong support from the research articles in organizational justice literature. Results from studies by Yuwono et al (2020); Suifan (2019); Safdar and Liu (2019) disclosed that the ability of managers to distribute employees' outcome fairly may evoke their satisfaction toward job, and thus may result in increasing employees' commitment toward organizations. Regarding the robustness of research methodology, the survey questionnaires used in this study had fulfilled the standard of analysis for validity and reliability testing. SmartPLS software that was used to analyze the hypotheses in this study has also allowed the researcher to analyze the hypotheses simultaneously. This condition may assist researchers to produce more accurate and reliable research findings. Practically, the findings of this study may be used as a guideline by managers to improve distribution system of employee outcomes. Management of organizations should be more concerned in outcomes distribution for employees to ensure that they receive adequate and reasonable income that commensurate with their contribution. With the situation of economic and outbreak problem right now, employees should receive their income adequately to ensure that they can support their family and fulfill basic needs of life. Besides, it may constantly refresh and retain employees' commitment in their tasks given within the organization. If this suggestion is given more attention, this may lead to organizational goals and strategies being achieved more effectively. Nevertheless, this study also has some constraints, methodologically and conceptually. This study was conducted on one institution only, hence the findings cannot be generalized to apply to other organizations with a different background. Besides, this study has used the method of cross-sectional research design in data collection at one-point period. In addition, the relationships of other elements of variables used in this study were not measured and this may restrain other possible exploration on the issues being studied. Lastly, a purposive sampling technique was used in this study, hence the response bias in the sample data was not controlled.

Despite the limitations above, this study intends to provide some guidelines to improve these constraints for further research in future. Firstly, this conceptual framework may be tested on organizations in other sectors or with different background to compare the effectiveness and increase our knowledge about the role of job satisfaction as an important mediating

variable in justice implementations. Secondly, regarding sample size, a bigger sample size may be utilized to represent the population of study. Thirdly, other types of justice (e.g., procedural justice and interactional justice) should be considered in future research because they are found to be important antecedents of employee behavior and attitude. Lastly, other variables of employees' outcomes such as workers' performance, motivation in job and organizational citizenship behavior should be employed in the research model since these constructs are found to be effective outcomes of the mediating relationship between organizational justice and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The results of hypothesis testing using SmartPLS software disclosed three main results. First, distributive justice is significantly related to job satisfaction; second, distributive justice is significantly related to organizational commitment; and third, job satisfaction plays a vital role as a mediator between distributive justice and organizational commitment. This finding has supported and broadened organizational justice-employee attitude and behavior literature published in Western and Asian countries. Furthermore, this finding may expand and provide detailed knowledge on the role of organizational justice in organizational management.

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