The Impact of Organizational Justice Perceptions on Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions: The Role of Job Embeddedness

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ABSTRACT: In this study we examined suggestions that job embeddedness may either mediate or moderate the relationship between perceived organizational justice and outcomes such as intention to quit and job satisfaction. 560 managers completed an on-line survey, and the resulting data were analysed using structural equation modelling and hierarchical moderated multiple regression techniques. We found evidence to support the view that job embeddedness mediates the relationship between organizational justice perceptions and both turnover intentions and job satisfaction. We found no support for the *idea* that job embeddedness moderates the relationship between organizational justice perceptions and job satisfaction. The implications of these findings for managers and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: *Organizational justice, job embeddedness, turnover, employee retention.*

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, researchers have sought to explain voluntary turnover amongst employees in terms of two factors: perceived ease of movement, and perceived desirability of movement. The predominant underlying premise of such research, reflected in the content of the predictive models it has spawned, is that people generally leave if they are dissatisfied with their job and/or if job alternatives are available (Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton & Holtom, 2004). However, while job dissatisfaction and available employment alternatives are clearly potential contributors to an employee's decision to leave a given job, research indicates these two aspects seldom predict more than 10% of the variance in actual turnover behaviour (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000). This somewhat surprising, though consistent, finding has resulted in a number of new directions in turnover research. One of the most promising recent approaches to predicting employee turnover is the job embeddedness perspective developed by Mitchell & colleagues from the University of Washington (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski & Erez, 2001; Mitchell, Holtom & Lee, 2001). This approach focuses on identifying those factors that constrain people from leaving their present job, both within and outside the organizational space. It takes account of the fact that off-the-job events may have as much to do with turnover as things that happen within the organization itself, and also recognises that people stay with an organization for reasons other than how satisfied they are with the job that they do. Thus, the job embeddedness approach focuses more directly on the problem of retention, by asking the question "why do people decide to stay?", as opposed to "how do they leave?". Job embeddedness theory proposes that the organization and the community to which the employee belong generate 3 sets of forces that combine to make it more likely that they will stay on in their job: Links, Fit and Sacrifice.

Links refer to the discernable connections people have both on and off the job (Yao, Lee, Mitchell, Burton, & Sablynski, 2004) and are characterised in terms of formal or informal connections between a person, and institutions or other people (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). According to this aspect of the theory of job embeddedness, employees become linked in a number of social, psychological and financial networks that connect them and members of their family with work and non-work friends and groups, the community in which they are living, and the physical environment. The higher the number of links between the person and the web, the more an employee is likely to remain attached to the job and the organization (Maertz Jr & Campion, 1998; Maertz Jr & Griffeth, 2004).

Thus, people who have established strong or extensive linkages in their work and non-work lives are more likely to stay with a given employer due to the fact relocation for a new job and environment will often require severing existing links, with attendant financial, emotional or psychological costs. For example, moving to a job in another town may require a spouse to leave their current job, children to leave school friends behind, and an employee to leave behind good friends formed at work. *Fit* is defined as an employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to the fit element of job embeddedness theory, an employee's personal values, career goals and plans for the future must fit with the larger corporate culture and the demands of his immediate job. Employees also take into account how well they fit in the community and surrounding environment (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). The better the fit and the comfort with the community, the higher the likelihood that an employee will feel attached to his or her job. So, not only does the employee have to consider his/her fit with the community, but also with the job and organization. *Sacrifice* is defined as the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving one's job (Mitchell et al., 2001). The primary consideration is what the employee has to give up if they were to break the links on and off the job as a result of decision to leave (Yao et al., 2004). Sacrifices may include loss of benefits or, if moving to another area, the cost of buying a new house. Thus, the more sacrifice has to be made, the more difficult it is for an employee to break from the current links and job.

Empirical support for the job embeddedness construct as a multidimensional predictor of employee voluntary turnover and related outcomes has been emerging as consistent and positive over the past 5 years (Lee et al., 2004; Holtom et al., 2004; Wijayanto et al., 2004 ; Giosan, 2004; Heilmann, 2005; and Besich, 2005; Tanova, 2006; Crossley, Bennett, Jex and Bunnfield, (2007). What has been less well researched, however, is how job embeddedness relates to other features of the managed work environment and, in particular, how various organisational and managerial practices may impact on embeddedness (Yao et al., 2004). Suggesting that more work needs to be done in this area, Allen (2006) found that an organization's socialization tactics were positively related to on-the-job embeddedness. In an earlier study, Giosan (2004) found that embeddedness was predicted by factors that included organizational and supervisor support. In this study, we seek to add to knowledge in this area by investigating the relationship between a person's perceptions of how fairly they have been treated at work, their feelings of job embeddedness, and their affective and behavioural reactions to work.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS AND JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

Organisational justice research (Greenberg (1987, 1990) is concerned with how people perceive and react to fairness in work related contexts (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Ployhart & Ryan, 1997). Organisational justice has received much attention because many important organisational attitudes and behaviors can be directly linked to employees' perception of fairness (Roch & Shanock, 2006). Even though various types of justice exist, two in particular have received the greatest attention from researchers (Greenberg, 1990) - employees' response to the outcomes that they receive, and the procedure (means) by which they acquire the outcomes (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Individual judgements of the fairness of outcomes are referred to as *distributive justice* (Leventhal, 1976), whilst individual perceptions of fairness of the procedure used to decide the outcomes are referred to as *procedural justice*. Both of these concepts are widely used to evaluate perceptions of fairness in the workplace and have been found to be associated with a wide variety of employee attitudes such as organisational commitment (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), job and pay satisfaction (Clay-Warner, Clay-Warner, Reynolds, & Roman, 2005; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Yee Ng, 2001; Sweeney & McFarlin Dean, 1993), and organisational citizenship behavior (Moorman, 1991). A third, less well researched type of organizational justice, interactional justice, was proposed by Bies and Moag (1986) and defined as the fairness of the interpersonal treatment that one receives. The theoretical distinction between these three dimensions of

organizational justice has received empirical support in a number of meta-analytical studies (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al. (2001). Each concepts of organizational justice are now briefly discussed in brief as follows:

Research by Thibaut and Walker (1975) on disputant reactions to legal procedures lead to the development of procedural justice theory, which is concerned with judgements about the process or means by which allocation decision are made. Leventhal (1980) broadened the concept of procedural justice and defined it as an individual's perceptions of fairness of decision making procedures. Procedural justice has been widely investigated within workplace settings, especially as a predictor of employee organisational commitment and trust. According to McFarlin and Sweeny (1992) procedural justice concerns the subordinates perception of fairness of all the processes employed by their superiors to evaluate their performance, to communicate performance feedback and to determine their rewards. Employees generally consider procedures to be fair when they provide for consistency across individuals and time, unbiased, accurate representation of the opinions of affected individuals, information accuracy, mechanisms to correct bad decisions, and conformity with moral and ethical standards. Procedural justice is an important predictor of workplace attitudes and behaviors. It affects evaluations of organizations, authorities, and rules and is positively related to organizational citizenship behaviors and job satisfaction (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991; Sweeney & McFarlin Dean, 1993). Distributive justice is defined as employee perceptions of the fairness of the outcomes received (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1990). This source of organisational justice describes the allocation of resources and opportunities, such as pay. Distributive justice is said be to exist when one's expectations are congruent with the outcomes received. In the workplace, people generally follow the equity principle, judging as fair outcomes that are commensurate with inputs such as experience, ability, and effort (Adams, 1965). Thus, work organizations create distributive justice when the distribution of pay, benefits, etc. reflects varying levels of employee inputs.

When employees are treated with respect and sensitivity and the rationale for decision explained clearly, interactional justice is said to have been fostered. Bies and Moag (1986) identified four criteria for fair interpersonal treatment. They proposed that the fairness of interpersonal treatment is evaluated on the basis of the extent to which decision-making authorities are truthful, respectful, and considerate in communicating decisions and the extent to which they justify or explain the rationale for decisions. Interactional justice perceptions may be understood as evaluations regarding the informational and interpersonal components of decision makers' behavior in communicating decisions (Greenberg, 1993). Thus, interactional justice is promoted by using clear rationales for decisions, the respectful treatment of individuals, integrity, and sensitivity to others (Colquitt, 2001). Interactional justice is important because fairer treatment may lead to an improved acceptance of unfavourable outcomes (Leung, Tong, & Ho, 2004). Greenberg (1990) argued that there are two specific types of interactional justice, that is interpersonal justice and informational justice. Interpersonal justice "refers to the degree of concerns and social sensitivity demonstrated about an individual" (Greenberg, Roberge, Ho, Rousseau, & Joseph, 2004, p. 8). In other word, interpersonal justice concerns with sincerity and respectfulness of authorities involved in implementing procedures or determining outcomes. Informational justice "refers to the quality of the information used to explain how decisions are made and thoroughness of the accounts provided about those outcomes" (Greenberg et al., 2004, p. 9). In short it concerns the use of honest and adequate explanations for decisions and outcomes (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993). Perception on which information that has been explained thoroughly and reasonably should be taken into account also (Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003). Basically, the two elements that are central to perceptions of interactional justice are whether the reasons underlying the resource allocation decision are clearly, truthfully, and adequately explained to the affected parties and whether those responsible for implementing the decision treat the affected individuals with dignity and respect (Bies & Moag, 1986; Folger & Bies, 1989).

Might perceptions on organizational justice affect employees' levels of job embeddedness? This suggestion was first made in a review of the nascent field of job embeddedness research by Yao et al. (2004). They observed that organizational justice perceptions have been found to be related to similar outcome variables as embeddedness (ie job satisfaction, organisational commitment, turnover and organisational citizenship). They further proposed that perceptions of fairness surrounding such human resource practices as promotion and rewards may well directly influence feelings of organization-related fit, links and sacrifice, so that, if an employee experiences an unfair outcome as a results of unfair procedure, this may contribute to lower level of job embeddedness and a higher likelihood of quitting. Combinations of unfair outcomes, procedures and treatments will also contribute to undermining level of job embeddedness and subsequently may generate the intention to leave. As an alternative to a possible mediated relationship, Yao et. al (2004) also raised the possibility that job embeddedness may act as a moderator of the relationship between organizational justice and outcomes. They opined that instances of perceived organizational injustice may act as 'shocks' to employees that may in turn stimulate them to seek further employment, and that job embeddedness may turn out to have a buffering effect for such 'shocks'. In other words, employees who are highly embedded with an organisation may have a high tolerance or resistance and may not easily affected by the perceived injustices in organisation. In contrast, they hypothesised, employees with low level of embeddedness may be prone to react more negatively to perceived injustice. The aims of this study are threefold. First, it aims to examine Yao et. al.'s (2004) hitherto untested proposition that employees' perceptions of organizational justice will influence feelings of job embeddedness. Second, the study sets out to investigate whether or not job embeddedness mediates the relationship perceived organizational justice has been found have with turnover intentions and work attitudes. Finally, we propose to examine whether or not job embeddedness potentially acts as a moderator of the relationship between organizational justice perceptions and both job satisfaction and turnover intentions. We propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Organizational justice perceptions (distributive, procedural, and interactional) will be positively correlated with job embeddedness.

H2a: Job embeddedness will mediate the observed relationship between organizational justice perceptions, job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

H2b: Job embeddedness will moderate the observed relationship between organizational justice perceptions, job satisfaction and turnover intentions

These proposed relationships are represented in Figures 1 and 2.
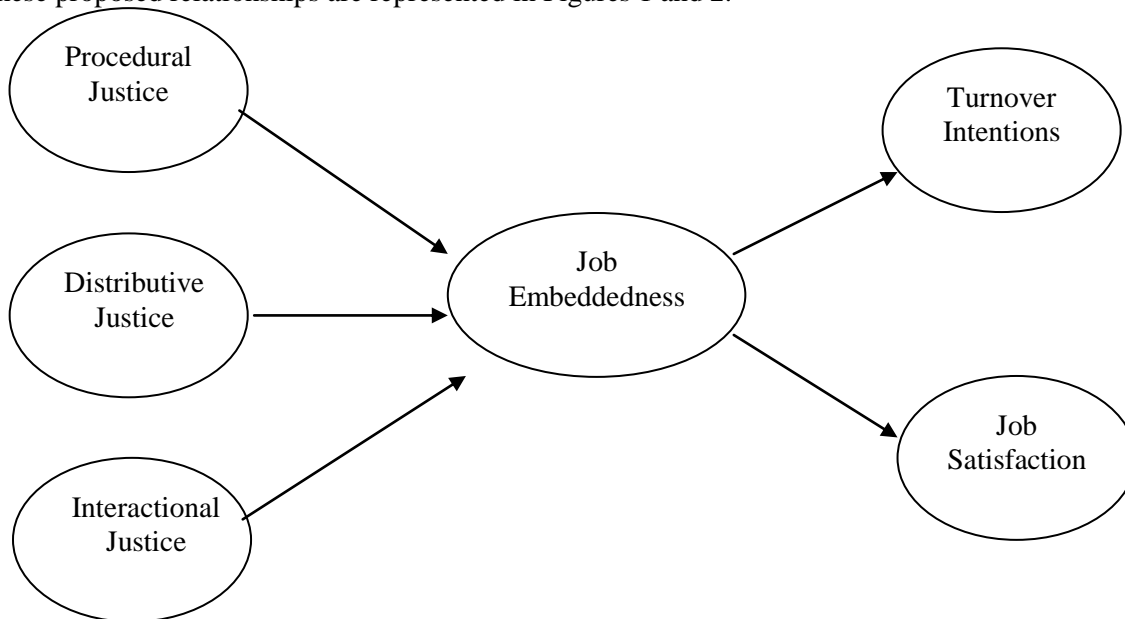
Figure 1: Hypothesised relationship between organizational justice and outcomes, mediated by job embeddedness

Figure 2. Hypothesised moderating effect of job embeddedness on relationship between organizational justice, turnover intentions and job satisfaction
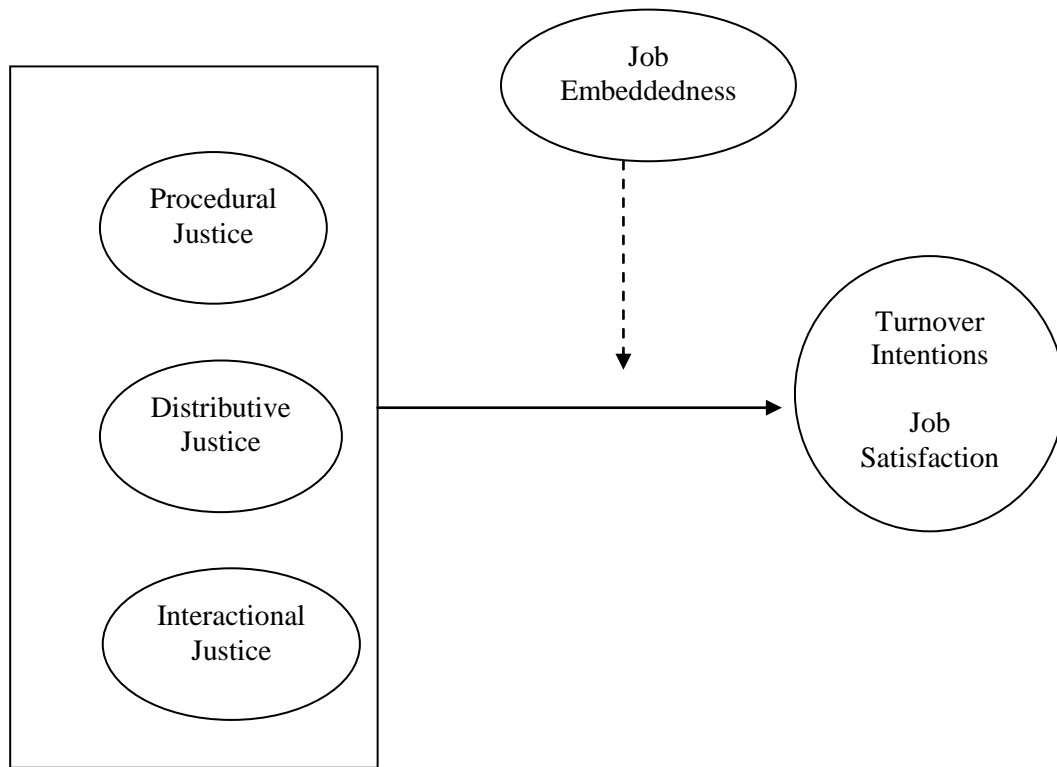
METHOD
Participants
The study used a convenience sample of 560 members of a state branch of the Australian Institute of Management. 51% of respondents were females and 67% were married. The average age of participants was 42 years and the average length of service was just over 5 years (6.15 Standard Deviation). Nearly three quarters of respondents were tertiary educated, and just fewer than 50% were in either middle or senior management positions. Respondents came from organizations in a variety of industries, with the most strongly represented being government (26%), services (23%) and mining (13%). The questionnaires were administered through an online survey, delivered by email to a membership list of the Australian Institute of Management (WA). This email provided respondents with a link to the survey page along with information on how confidentiality and other participants' rights were to be maintained. Respondents were also offered the opportunity to participate in a voluntary draw for one of three prizes on completion of the survey. A response rate of around 7% was obtained. Though considered low, the demographic characteristics of the sample were considered to be fairly representative of the membership as a whole.

Measures
Personal characteristics. Basic information such as gender, age, marital status, education level, tenure in job and organization, and job level was collected in the survey. Preliminary analyses indicated that only gender and age were significantly correlated with any other variables of interest in the study.

Job embeddedness was measured using a 9-item version of job embeddedness measure developed by Holtom et al. (2006). Sample items include: *My job utilises my skills and talents well, I have a lot of freedom on this job to decide how to pursue my goals,* and *I*

would sacrifice a lot if I left this job. For each item, participants were asked to score their response using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Organizational justice. Employee perceptions of procedural, distributive and interactional justice was measured using scales developed by Colquitt (2001). The scales contained 5, 4 and 3 items respectively. Sample items include: *Those procedures have consistently been applied, The rewards I have received reflected the effort I have put into my work,* and *I have been treated with dignity.* Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

Turnover Intention was measured using 4 items, based on the measure developed by Hom, Griffeth and Sellaro (1984). Sample items include: *In the next few months I intend to leave this organisation* and *I occasionally think about leaving this organisation.* A five-point response with each statement using Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). *Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction was measured using a 3-item measure developed by Holtom and O'Neill (2004). Items were: *All in all I am satisfied with my job, In general I don't like my job,* and *In general I like working here.*

Analyses

After data cleaning and the removal of outliers, descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities (coefficient alphas) and scale inter-correlations were then produced. Structural equation modelling was then used to test the overall fit of the model outlined in Figure 1 using AMOS (Arbuckle 2006). In order to test the hypothesised moderating relationships, we then used a standard form of hierarchical moderated regression. All independent variables were centred prior to the regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). Age was entered as a covariate at Step 1, followed by the three organizational justice variables (Step 2). Then we entered job embeddedness (Step 3), followed by the interaction terms for the three justice variables and embeddedness (Step 4). A significant increase in R^2 at Step 4 would indicate the presence of a moderating relationship.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and variable inter-correlations are presented in Table 1. Reliability coefficients for all scales exceeded 0.8.

**Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

Variables	Alpha	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	--	.49	.50	1						
2. Age	--	42.13	10.7	.02	1					
3. Procedural Justice	.88	3.27	.75	.14**	.02	1				
4. Distributive Justice	.95	3.22	1.00	.11*	-.11*	.69**	1			
5. Interactional Justice	.98	3.96	.85	.07	-.08	.65**	.57**	1		
6. Job Satisfaction	.89	3.21	.36	-.03	-.09	.42**	.40**	.52**	1	
7. Turnover Intentions	.80	2.87	.92	-.08	-.01	-.44**	-.34**	-.42**	-.52**	1
8. Job Embeddedness	.88	2.38	.44	.08	-.02	.56**	.52**	.59**	.66**	-.69**

N=560. * p<.05; ** p<.01

These results show that overall job embeddedness is significantly positively correlated with measures of perceived procedural, distributive and interactional justice as proposed in hypothesis 1. Overall job embeddedness and the three organizational justice measures are also negatively correlated with turnover intentions and positively correlated with job satisfaction. This pattern of results is supportive of further analyses aimed at testing the model outlined in Figure 1.

Structural equation modelling indicated that the mediated model was a good fit to the data (see Figure 3 below). However, a significant direct pathway remained between interactional justice and turnover intentions. Whilst χ^2 was significant (χ^2 =96.1, df=51, p<.05), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) values were .98 and .96 respectively, exceeding the minimum recommended level of .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In addition, the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values were both below .05 (.019 and .031 respectively), which is also indicative of a good fit (Byrne, 2001). Hypothesis 2a is therefore supported.

To examine the alternative moderating hypotheses, we also performed a series of hierarchical moderated regressions, and the results are depicted in Tables 2 and 3. It should be noted that, despite the relatively high scale inter-correlations, collinearity statistics indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem for any of the variables under investigation.
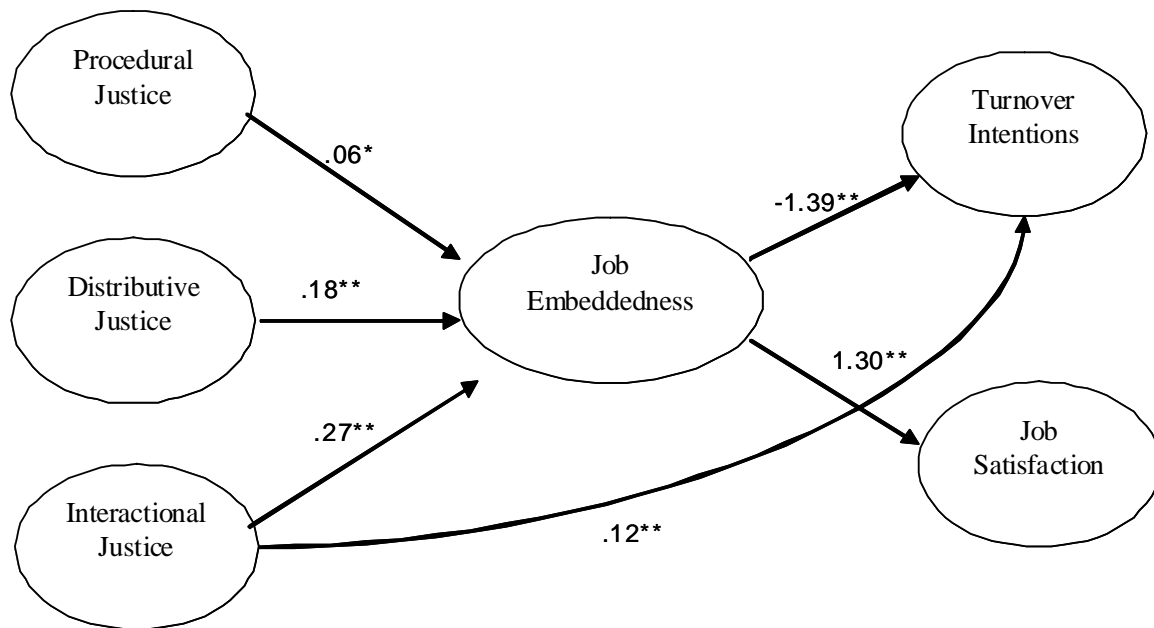
* p<.01, ** p<.001
Figure 3: Results of model testing showing significant path coefficients

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Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression with Turnover Intentions as Dependent Variable

Predictor	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Age	-.12**	-.11**	-.04	-.04
Distributive justice		-.14**	-.04	-.04
Procedural justice		.-.23***	-.09	-.09
Interactional justice		-.18***	.02	.04
Job embeddedness			-.60***	-.60***
Distributive justice x Job embeddedness				-.03
Procedural justice x Job embeddedness				-.01
Interactional justice x Job embeddedness				.05
ΔR^2		.22	.21	.00
ΔF		54.03***	209.08***	.28
df		3,551	1, 550	3, 547
Total R^2	.01	.23	.44	.44
F	8.09**	43.13***	89.35***	55.73***
df	1, 554	4, 551	5, 550	8, 547

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Table 3: Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression with Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable

Predictor	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Age	.10*	.09**	.02	.02
Distributive justice		.15**	.05	.06
Procedural justice		.17***	.02	.04
Interactional justice		.40***	.18***	.15***
Job embeddedness			.64***	.62***
Distributive justice x Job embeddedness				-.08
Procedural justice x Job embeddedness				-.01
Interactional justice x Job embeddedness				-.04
ΔR^2		.39	.24	.01
ΔF		120.6***	369.1***	7.19***
df		3, 551	1, 550	3, 547
Total R^2	.01	.40	.64	.65
F	5.13*	92.6***	197.3***	130.2***
df	1, 554	4, 551	5, 550	8, 547

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Consistent with our argument of mediation, the results at Step 2 indicated that all three organizational justice variables were significant predictors of intention to quit. However, once job embeddednesss was entered into the regression equation at Step 3, none of the three remained as significant predictors. Step 4 produced no significant increase in prediction, and the results show that none of the interaction terms were significant. Similar results emerged for job satisfaction, with the interaction terms not making a significant contribution to the prediction equation. We therefore conclude that there is no empirical support for hypothesis 2b.

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DISCUSSION

Our study generates empirical support for Yao et al. (2004)'s conceptual argument that how fairly people are treated at work will directly impact on their job embeddedness, thereby influencing the likelihood that they will remain with their current employer. These findings help increase our store of knowledge regarding the antecedents of this important predictor of employee voluntary turnover, as well as highlighting a further mechanism (improved promotion and rewards decision-making) that managers can use to improve employee retention. Earlier research has already suggested that the use of certain organisational socialisation tactics may help foster job embeddedness (Allen, 2006), and our study suggests that careful management of equity and fairness issues surrounding rewards and promotion decision can also result in employees developing a greater sense of embeddedness. The failure to support job embeddedness as a moderator suggests that 'shocks' relating to perceived injustice at work will diminish, rather than have their impact diminished by, job embeddedness.

The findings also serve to integrate two previously separate bodies of research and theorising (organizational justice and job embeddedness) that both have relevance for withdrawal behaviours at work. Organizational justice theory, with its foundation in social exchange theory, suggests that judgements of fairness are made using social referents – e.g. how fairly am I treated relative to others in similar positions. Leaving a job is one potential response to perceived inequity. Another potential consequence, demonstrated by this research, is that social networks and bonds are undermined, thereby affecting job embeddedness. If an employee perceives that they are being treated similarly (or fairly) relative to others in the organization, however, this is likely to reinforce social bonds with other workers (links) and to support identification with organisational or occupational groups (fit).

These findings have some important practical implications. First, our failure to find moderator effects suggest that a person's overall embeddedness within their job will not act as an effective buffer against the 'shock' of perceiving unfair treatment in respect of reward allocation and promotions. The results suggest that people are likely to become dissatisfied and consider other employment opportunities in such circumstances, regardless of how good a fit they are to the requirements of the job and how strong their ties to colleagues and coworkers. This underscores how important it is for organizations to design and administer fairly remuneration and advancement systems. Second, the study indicates how managers can act to increase the likelihood of employees making a long-term decision to stay with them. By focusing greater attention on improving the way rewards (both monetary and career-related) are administered, managers can contribute to employees' feelings of being bonded to their job and thereby improve employee retention rates.

Though not without its limitations (e.g. the reliance on self-report survey data obtained at a single point in time raises issues to do with common method variance), this study lays some promising groundwork for future research and theorising. In particular, further research is needed to examine whether or not the specific elements of job embeddedness (links, fit, sacrifice) are differentially related to the various forms of organizational justice. For example, it may be that distributive justice (fairness of outcomes) impacts most strongly on sacrifice-organization, whilst interactional justice impacts most strongly on links-organization. It is also possible that each of the various elements of embeddedness will interact differently with procedural, distributive and interactional justice perceptions to affect work behaviours and attitudes. Further research might also examine the impact of specific injustice 'shocks' (ie events that are seen as being particularly unfair, either procedurally, distributively, or interactionally) and their possible buffering by high job embeddedness. Finally, research needs to examine whether or not community embeddedness can buffer the effects of perceived organizational injustice on turnover intentions.

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