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Marcin Wnuk

### Summary

The aim of the research was to verify the intermediary role of affective organizational commitment between organizational justice and the intention to leave an organization. In addition, it was decided to check whether taking care of the positive image of an organization mediates partly between organizational justice and affective organizational commitment. The study group comprised 802 employees. The following research tools were used: Organizational Justice Scale, Organizational Loyalty Scale, Organization Attachment Scale and Turnover Intention Scale. Affective organizational commitment fully mediated between procedural and interpersonal justice and the intention to leave, and partly between distributive justice and the desire to leave. Upholding a positive image of an organization partly mediated between all the three types of organizational justice and employees affective organizational commitment.

**Keywords:** organizational justice, organizational loyalty, affective organizational commitment, intention to leave, social exchange

# Organizational justice versus employees' attitude towards an organization

MARCIN WNUK

*Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań,  
Department of Work and Organizational Psychology,  
Institute of Psychology*

## Abstract

The aim of the research was to verify the intermediary role of affective organizational commitment between organizational justice and the intention to leave an organization. In addition, it was decided to check whether taking care of the positive image of an organization mediates partly between organizational justice and affective organizational commitment. The study group comprised 802 employees. The following research tools were used: Organizational Justice Scale, Organizational Loyalty Scale, Organization Attachment Scale and Turnover Intention Scale. Affective organizational commitment fully mediated between procedural and interpersonal justice and the intention to leave, and partly between distributive justice and the desire to leave. Upholding a positive image of an organization partly mediated between all the three types of organizational justice and employees affective organizational commitment.

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## Introduction

Previous studies have confirmed the importance of organizational justice perceived by employees for a positive organizational behaviour (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). In longitudinal studies, Hausknecht et al. (2011) confirmed the impact of organizational justice on affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction and

intention to leave. In the presented context, the assessment of an organization as the one that treats its employees fairly is the source of their positive attitude towards the organization manifesting itself in affective organizational commitment and a lack of motivation to leave. The purpose of the study was to verify and describe the mechanisms of employees' assessment of organizational justice impact on their affective organizational commitment and the intention to leave.

## Organizational justice dimensions

According to the results of Wnuk's research conducted in Poland, there are three types of organizational justice, namely distributive justice, procedural and interpersonal justice (Wnuk, 2017a). Distributive justice is related to the assessment of received remuneration in relation to knowledge and competences, work results, responsibility, stress and psychological burdens (Price, Mueller, 1986). Procedural manifestations of organizational justice revolve around the procedural fairness operating as part of the process leading to decision-making in an organization (Thibaut, Walker, 1975). Procedural fairness is assessed on the basis of the following criteria: consistent application to all employees at all times; lack of bias; guarantees that the right information is collected and used in the decision-making process; having a mechanism to correct faulty and wrong decisions; compliance with individual or universal ethical and moral standards, and guarantees that the opinions of various employee groups will be taken into account in the decision-making process (Leventhal, 1980). Interpersonal justice refers to the proper treatment of employees by representatives of an organization, reflecting the degree to which employees are treated with courtesy, respect, dignity when enforcing procedures and making decisions (Bies, Moag, 1986).

## Organizational justice and attitude to organization – the role of intermediate variables

Researchers are attempting to identify impact mechanisms of particular aspects of organizational justice on employee well-being and their motivation to remain in the organization. The results of these studies depend on what aspect of organizational justice was considered, what cultural context the study took place in, what research tools were used, and other conditions that could affect the relationships between these variables.

The following intermediate variables mediating between various forms of organizational justice and the intention to leave an organization were verified: perceived organizational support (POS), (Otto, Mamatoglu, 2015; Wayne et al., 2002; Purang, 2011; Rhee et al., 2011), trust in an organization (Hopkins, Weathington, 2006; Aryee et al., 2002), perceived supervisor support (PSS), emotional exhaustion (Tayfur et al., 2013), cynicism (Tayfur et al., 2013), satisfaction with rewards received from supervisors (De Gieter et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Bayarçelik, Findikli, 2016), affective organizational commitment or participatory motivation (Hendrix et al., 1998).

The results of previous studies confirm the key role of affective organizational commitment as a mediating variable between various aspects of distributive justice and the desire to leave an organization. Among Indian managers, affective organizational commitment mediated between procedural and distributive justice and the intention to quit (Biswas, 2015). Hendrix et al. (1998) research conducted among U.S. employees showed that distributive justice influenced the intention to leave an organization, both directly and indirectly through affective commitment. Procedural justice affected the desire to leave an organization only indirectly, through attachment to an organization. Among Israeli nurses, affective organizational commitment fully mediated between distributive justice and the desire to leave the organization (Shapira-Lishchinsky, Even-Zohar, 2011). Among members of the Australian Local Governing Council, male and female respondents, affective organizational commitment fully mediated between distributive justice and the desire to leave the organization (Jepsen, Rodwell, 2012). In the research of Bagdadla et al. (2006), managers' affective organizational commitment was a partial mediator between distributive justice and the desire to leave the organization. The effect of direct influence was minimal in relation to the indirect effect, which showed impact through organizational attachment.

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

*Affective organizational commitment mediates fully between individual manifestations of employees' organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interpersonal) and their willingness to leave the organization.*

In addition to the direct impact of individual aspects of organizational justice on affective organizational commitment, researchers are trying to identify variables that play an intermediary role in this relationship. The research results to date indicate that the variable that mediates between organizational justice and affective organizational commitment is employees' positive perception of the organization as supporting and trustworthy (Aryee et al., 2002; Hopkins, Weathington, 2006; Rhee et al., 2011). This mechanism can be explained on the basis of the theory of social exchange between an organization and an employee (Blau, 1964), in which the organization's fair approach to the employee is reflected through support and care for

employees' well-being, what, in accordance with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), prompts a desire in the employee to repay through motivation to take care of the organization's interests and a commitment to the achievement of its business goals, which is a manifestation of affective organizational commitment. The latest research confirms the existence of the above mechanism. Among employees from various organizations located in Germany, the perceived support received from organizations mediated between interpersonal justice and affective organizational commitment (Otto, Mamatoglu, 2015). Research conducted on 211 employees and their direct superiors in a production plant from the 500 POS mediated fully between distributive justice and organizational attachment of employees (Wayne et al., 2002). Also among mid-level managers from an organization dealing with consulting, maintenance and technological services outsourcing, POS mediated fully between distributive justice and employees affective organizational commitment (Purang, 2011).

It seems that there may be another mechanism of organizational justice impacting indirectly employees' affective organizational commitment through one of the dimensions of organizational loyalty expressed in the form of caring for its positive image (Chirkowska-Smolak, Wnuk, 2019). According to the research of Chirkowska and Wnuk (2019), caring for a positive image of an organization is a consequence of social exchange between the organization and an employee (Blau, 1964), which means that if the employees believe that they are treated well by the organization, then under the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) they will be motivated to repay with gratitude, which can be manifested by caring for organization's positive image, which in turn leads to the development of an emotional bond with the organization. In the Wnuk's research (in editorial preparation) conducted on employees of one organization from the IT industry, caring for the positive image of the organization partly mediated between POS and affective organizational commitment, and in general between PSS and affective organizational commitment, proving the validity of the social exchange rule in organization-employee relations. The key function of social exchange is to shape and strengthen the bond between the two sides of the exchange. In the context of the relationship between an organization and an employee, fair treatment by the organization may result in the employee's need to repay the organization through caring for its positive image, which may result in their increased affective organizational commitment.

#### *Hypothesis 2.*

*Individual manifestations of organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interpersonal) have both a direct and indirect impact on affective organizational commitment, and a variable that partly mediates in this relationship is caring of the organization's positive image.*

## Substance and methods

### Study group description

The survey was anonymous. All respondents – 802 employees from various organizations – agreed to participate in the study. The average age of the respondents is 28.11 years (SD = 9.51). Their average working experience amounts to 7.36 years (SD = 9.02), the average employment period in their current workplace equals 4.13 years (SD = 6.67). Women constitute 60.4% of the study sample and men – 39.6%. Studied group comprises 0.03% respondents with primary education, 2.10% with vocational education, 50.80% with secondary education, and 46.80% with higher education. 38.6% of the respondents are employed on regular positions, 38.6% as specialists, 9.1% are lower-level managers, 9.2% constitute middle management, and senior managers represented 4.5% of all participants.

### Study tools

The Polish version of the Organizational Justice Scale (Wnuk, 2017a) was used to test organizational justice. It consists of three dimensions in the form of distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice. Questions about distributive justice were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 'Very unfair' to 'Very fair'. The reliability of this subscale measured with the Cronbach's Alpha equalled 0.93. Participants responded to statements about procedural and interpersonal justice on a five-point scale from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree." The reliability of the subscale regarding interpersonal justice was  $\alpha = 0.90$ , while procedural justice  $\alpha = 0.85$ .

Questions from the Polish adaptation of the Allen and Meyer's Organizational Commitment Scale (Wnuk, 2017b) were used to study commitment to an organization. This tool consists of three dimensions of organizational – affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. The study used four questions about affective organizational commitment. The reliability of the tool used, measured with Cronbach's Alpha was  $\alpha = 0.78$ .

Employees intention to leave was measured using a three-question tool (Yücel, 2012). Respondents answered questions on a 5-point Likert scale from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree". The reliability of this measure, verified by Cronbach's Alpha equalled 0.94.

To investigate caring for a positive image of an organization, questions from the Organizational Loyalty Scale (Chirkowska-Smolak, Wnuk, 2019) were used.

Respondents answered 7 questions on a 5-point Likert scale from “I strongly disagree” to “I strongly agree”. The reliability of this subscale, measured by Cronbach’s Alpha was  $\alpha = 0.85$ .

## Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables used in the study (n = 802)**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Distributive justice	802	0	25	15.84	4.90	-0.20	-0.37
Procedural justice	802	0	30	20.10	5.07	-0.54	0.23
Interpersonal justice	802	0	20	16.31	3.57	-1.20	1.72
Caring for an organization’s positive image	802	0	35	28.34	5.26	-1.32	3.54
Affective organizational commitment	802	0	20	12.21	3.68	-0.11	-0.34
Intention to leave an organization	802	0	15	8.19	3.67	-0.27	-0.74

Source: own study.

Pearson’s correlation coefficients for the studied variables are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Pearson’s correlation coefficients for the studied variables (n=802)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Distributive justice									
Procedural justice	0.45**								
Interpersonal justice	0.45**	0.66**							
Caring for an organization’s positive image	0.31**	0.44**	0.44**						
Affective organizational commitment	0.36**	0.44**	0.32**	0.58**					
Intention to leave an organization	-0.29**	-0.28**	-0.18**	-0.25**	-0.49**				
Age	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.10*	0.03	-0.07*			
Working experience	-0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.09*	0.05	-0.08*	0.94**		

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Length of employment in the organization	-0.02	-0.01	0.01	0.06	0.05	-0.08*	0.83**	0.84**	
Education	0.05	-0.02	0.07	0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.20**	0.13**	0.17**
Employment level	0.07	0.09*	0.08*	0.14**	0.14**	0.09*	0.38**	0.39**	0.33**

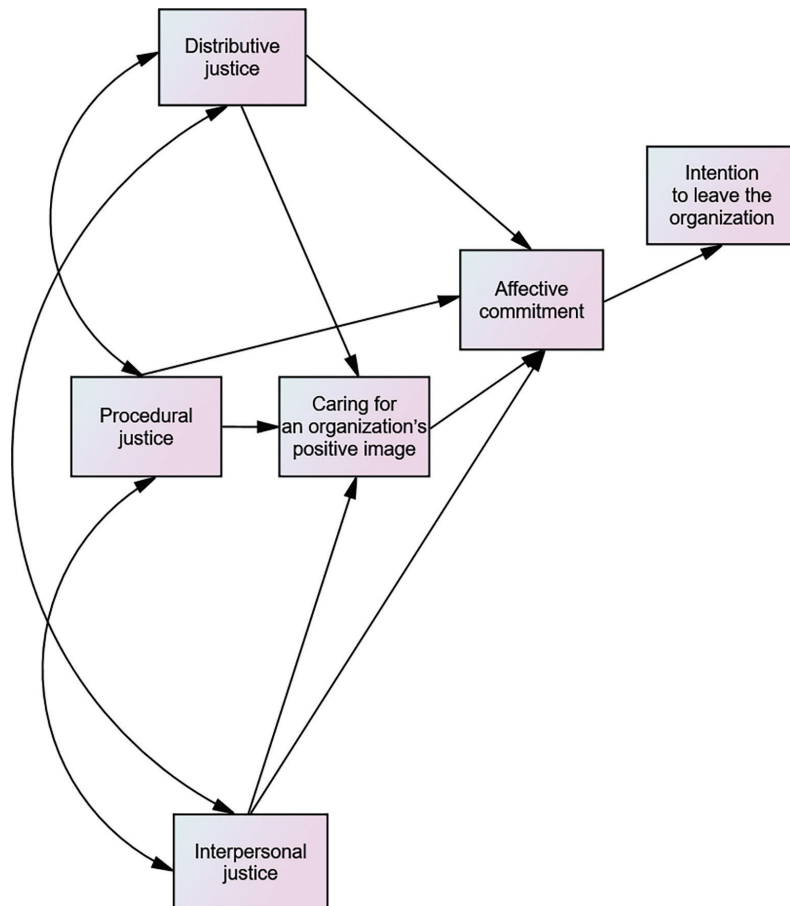
\* p ≤ 0.05

\*\* p ≤ 0.01

Source: own study.

The degree of model fit was verified with AMOS programme using the structural equation model – maximum likelihood. Preliminary model is shown in Figure 1, while the model after verification is shown in Figure 2.

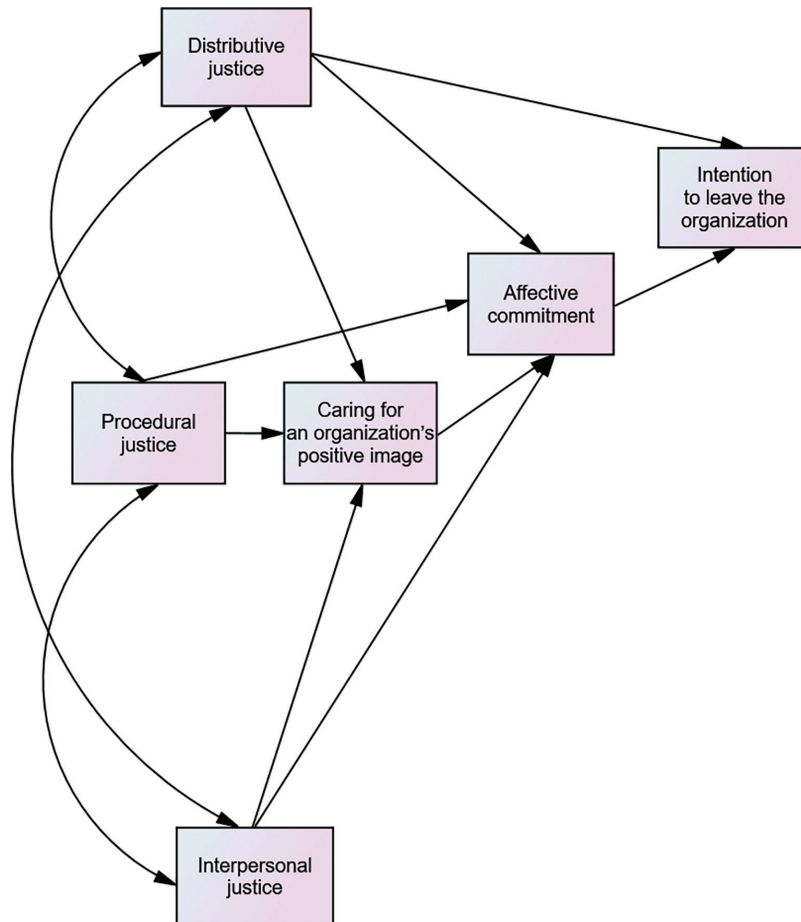
Figure 1. Preliminary model based on research hypotheses



Source: own study.



**Figure 2. Final model (after verification)**



Source: own study.

The only difference between the preliminary and the final model is related to the direct relationship between distributive justice and the intention to leave an organization. Hypothesis 1 states that distributive justice is only indirectly affected by the intention to leave an organization. It turned out that this variable also directly affects the motivation to leave an organization. Tables 3, 4 and 5 present the total, direct and indirect effects influencing individual variables studied.

The following Fit Indices were applied: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), chi-square statistic (CMIN). The obtained result of RMSEA indicator (0.038), which should be characterized with as low values as possible was both lower than reference value limit of Browne, Cudeck (1993) which amounts to 0.08, as well

as level 0.05 considered perfect (Steiger, 1990). NFI, GFI and CFI generated values of 0.99, 0.99 and 0.99 respectively, thus obtained highest possible values exceeding reference values of 0.90, 0.90 and 0.93 respectively (Byrne, 1994). Also the value for CMIN/DF statistics based on the chi-square, which equalled  $-2.147$  ( $p=0.092$ ) was lower than the adopted standard, which is less than 3 (Kline, 1998; Ullman, 2001).

**Table 3. Standardized total effect ( $n=802$ ).**

	Interpersonal justice	Procedural justice	Distributive justice	Caring for positive image	Affective commitment
Caring for positive image	0.24	0.25	0.08	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	-0.01	0.35	0.20	0.49	0.00
Intention to leave	-0.07	-0.16	-0.22	-0.22	-0.44

Source: own study.

**Table 4. Standardized direct effect ( $n=802$ ).**

	Interpersonal justice	Procedural justice	Distributive justice	Caring for positive image	Affective commitment
Caring for positive image	0.24	0.25	0.08	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	-0.13	0.23	0.16	0.49	0.00
Intention to leave	0.00	0.00	-0.13	0.00	-0.44

Source: own study.

**Table 5. Standardized indirect effect ( $n=802$ ).**

	Interpersonal justice	Procedural justice	Distributive justice	Caring for positive image	Affective commitment
Caring for positive image	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	0.12	0.12	0.04	0.00	0.00
Intention to leave	0.01	-0.16	-0.09	-0.22	0.00

Source: own study.

## Discussion

The first hypothesis regarding employees' affective organizational commitment functioning as a full mediator between particular manifestations of organizational justice and the intention to leave an organization has been mostly confirmed. Employees' assessment of procedural and interpersonal justice turned out to have only indirect effect on the intention to quit, where affective organizational commitment was a mediating variable in the relation. Contrary to the assumptions, distributive justice proved to have a direct and indirect influence on employees' motivation to leave an organization. The results of this study are congruent with the results obtained by Bagdadli et al. (2006), where distributive justice had an indirect and direct impact on employees' intention to leave and inconsistent with Jepsen and Rodwell (2012) and Shapira-Lishchinsky and Even-Zohar (2011) studies where the intention to leave an organization was only indirectly influenced by distributive justice assessment. The difference in the research of Bagdadli et al. (2006) concerned the strength of the direct effect and indirect impact of this variable on the intention to leave an organization. According to the results of the above mentioned authors, the direct effect was minimal when compared to the indirect effect, while in discussed study the strength of direct impact was slightly greater than that of an indirect impact. The obtained results confirm that employees who think their remuneration is fair, i.e., adequate to their knowledge, competences, work results, responsibility, stress or mental burden are more emotionally attached to the organization, and therefore, they do not want to change their workplace. No motivation to change workplace is also a direct effect of perceiving their remuneration as fair.

In the light of the obtained results, the second hypothesis regarding partly mediating role of caring for a positive image of the organisation between the examined aspects of organisational justice and affective organizational commitment has been fully confirmed. These results can be interpreted on the basis of the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964). Employees, who in their opinion are treated fairly by the organization, under the reciprocity rule (Gouldner, 1960) repay with the attitude of concern for its positive image, which results in a higher level of affective organizational commitment. The conducted research confirmed that, apart from the mechanism of direct impact of organisational justice on affective organizational commitment and the mechanism of indirect influence based on POS (Otto, Mamatoglu 2015; Wayne et al., 2002; Purang, 2011). Another mediator in the relationship between these variables is one of the aspects of organisational loyalty, in the form of caring for its positive image. This regularity applied to all three dimensions of organisational justice (procedural, distributive and interpersonal). It is worth noting that while

in the case of procedural and distributive justice, both the direct effect of these variables on affective organizational commitment and the indirect effect were positive, interpersonal justice directly affects this variable negatively and indirectly positively.

Completed studies have numerous theoretical and practical implications. They prove the key role of perceived organisational justice in shaping employees' attitude towards the organisation. In addition to the direct impact of all three manifestations of organisational justice on affective organizational commitment, it turned out that the mediator in the relationship between these variables is taking care of the positive image of the organisation. Also, of the three aspects of organisational justice, only one, i.e., distributive justice, had a direct impact on the intention to leave the organisation, while the other two, in the form of procedural and interpersonal justice, had only an indirect impact on this variable through affective organizational commitment.

On the basis of the obtained results, it is possible to propose the use of certain good practices that could contribute to improving the attitude of employees towards the organisation, increasing their affective organizational commitment and reducing their intention to leave. One of them is the diagnosis and monitoring of the assessment of organisational justice carried out by employees as part of surveys, which can be repeated annually to verify changes.

Another proposal is to design the remuneration system in such a way that its principles would be transparent and based on easily verifiable objective indicators, such as employee competences, scope of responsibility or achieved results at work. Based on it, employees will be able to easily and transparently assess the fairness of remuneration distribution in the organisation.

In its recruitment policy, organisation should be focused on attracting managers who, in addition to managerial and substantive competences, have a high level of personal culture and are highly likely to treat their subordinates subjectively, showing kindness, respect and recognition, while stopping from inappropriate comments about them. In its training strategy, organisation could include guidelines for managers on the development of interpersonal skills related to relationships with subordinates, while periodic assessment system, apart from indicators related to the efficiency should have indicators that would allow to assess how supervisors treat their employees. All three above elements could significantly contribute to improving the assessment of interpersonal justice by employees.

In order to improve procedural justice perceived by employees, organisation's managers should ensure that implemented procedures were consistently applied to all employees, based on correct and appropriate information, had a mechanism to correct faulty and wrong decisions, were in line with common ethical standards and gave guarantees that the opinions of various employee groups will be taken into account (Leventhal, 1980).

Improvement on all dimensions of organisational justice based on the proposed solutions will increase employees' affective organizational commitment and reduce their willingness to leave the organization, becoming an element of competitive advantage on the labour market in which recruitment and retention of employees is currently a key goal of the personnel strategy of most enterprises.

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### **Marcin Wnuk, Ph.D**

is a business practitioner. For 12 years he has been associated with the Komputronik Capital Group, where he is the Director of the Human Resource and Logistics Management Department and the company's Proxy. His scientific interests include mainly psychology of work and organisation, existential psychology and addiction psychology, and in particular psychological and social predictors of intention to leave the organization. He is the author of almost 90 peer-reviewed scientific articles, as well as the creator of several research tools for the diagnosis of organisations, such as the Scale of Gratitude to the Organization, the Scale of Loyalty to the Organization and the Scale of Spirituality in the Organization. In business practice, he also deals with the psychosocial conditions of organisational innovativeness through conducting a diagnosis and intervention in organisations using tools of his own authorship.

e-mail: marwnuk@wp.pl