The Relationship Between Organizational Justice and Work Engagement : Trust as a Mediator

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Abstract

Purpose : The purpose of this paper was to test the mediating impact of trust in organizational justice - work engagement relationship and to examine the association between organizational justice and work engagement in life insurance companies of Haryana.

Design/Methodology/Approach : The study reported responses of 296 employees of public and private life insurance companies of Haryana. Data were collected on standardized questionnaire containing standard scales of distributive, procedural, interactional justice, trust, and work engagement. Mediation hypotheses were tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations.

Findings : The results indicated that there was a strong and positive relationship among organizational justice, trust, and work engagement. Further, there was a significant impact of organizational justice on work engagement, and trust partially mediated the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement.

Research Limitations/Implications : This paper used a cross - sectional research design in observing the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement with trust as a mediating variable. Data in the research paper were collected only from the insurance sector. Employees' perceptions regarding fairness not only aroused trust, but also influenced work engagement levels. The results have implications for ensuring equity.

Keywords : organizational justice, trust, work engagement, insurance sector

JEL Classification : C12, M10, M12

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Employees these days look for better organizations that offer a fair work environment, where everyone feels appreciated and cherished. The term 'organizational justice' was introduced by Greenberg (1990) and according to him, justice is connected with employees' perception of fairness in the organization. Organizational justice focuses on perceptions of fairness in organizations by categorizing employees' views and feelings about their treatment and that of others within an organization (Saunders & Thornhill, 2003). Organizational justice describes the role of fairness as directly connected to the organization (Hassan & Hashim, 2011). Organizational justice perceptions can improve employees' attitude and behavior regarding trust, and as a
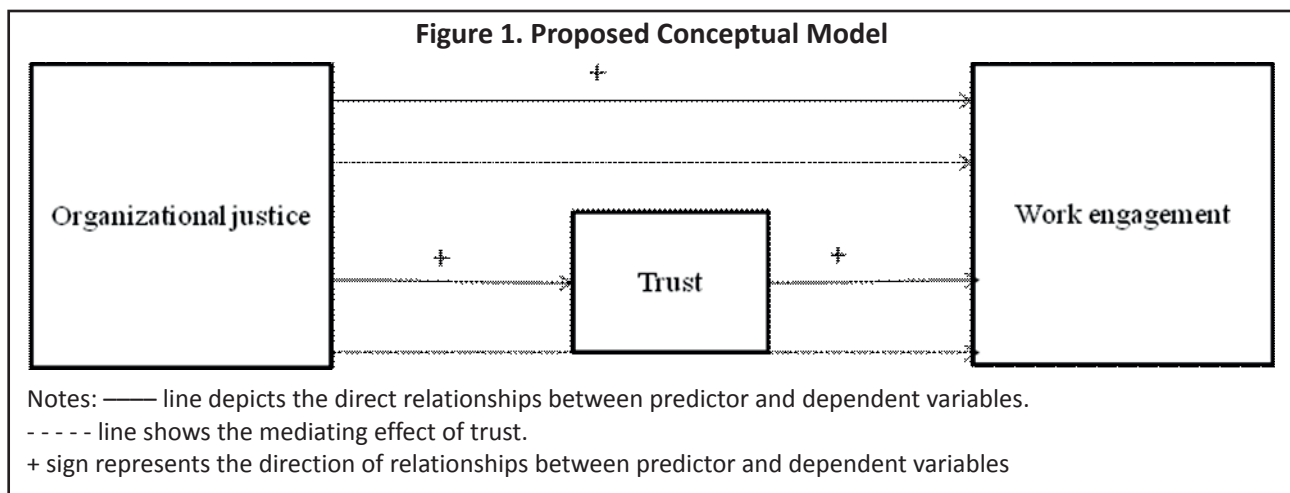
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result, employees become more engaged in their work (Nasurdin & Khuan, 2011). On the basis of research evidence, two or three types of justice have been discussed through scholars and researchers, that is, distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Distributive justice is concerned with fair distribution of outcomes ; whereas, procedural justice describes the fairness of the procedures and processes used to verify those outcomes (Abrrow, Ardakani, & Harooni, 2013 ; Greenberg, 1993 ; Greenberg, Roberge, Ho, & Rousseau, 2004) and interactional justice focuses on those employees who are treated by fair decision making in the organization with respect and dignity (Bies & Moag, 1986 ; Hassan & Jubari, 2010 ; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Interactional justice focuses on interpersonal behavior justice and informational justice. Interpersonal behavior describes those employees who treat others with respect and dignity ; whereas, informational justice involves sharing accurate information with employees (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001 ; Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007; Usmani & Jamal, 2013). Interactional justice refers to how employees are treated with respect and dignity by supervisors, and how frequently they are given rationales for decisions (Bies & Moag, 1986).

Trust comes from the expectations of the individuals about all the relations and behaviours in the organization (Shockley, Ellis, & Wirogard, 2000). According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), trust as a willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of the other partner and having expectations from others will act in a way that is important for the trust. Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Vigour refers to high energy and mental resilience (Gonzalez - Roma, Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2006). Dedication refers to employees' sense of significance, inspiration, and pride associated with work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Absorption means deep concentration and engrossment in one's work, wherein time passes quickly and an individual faces difficulty coming off from his/her work (Gonzalez - Roma et al., 2006 ; Schaufeli et al., 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to test the mediating impact of trust in organizational justice-work engagement relationship and to examine the association between organizational justice and work engagement in life insurance companies of Haryana. To study this relationship, the conceptual model for this study has been proposed in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Notes: ——— line depicts the direct relationships between predictor and dependent variables.
- - - - - line shows the mediating effect of trust.
+ sign represents the direction of relationships between predictor and dependent variables

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

(1) Organizational Justice and Work Engagement : Lind, Kanfer, and Earley (1990) revealed a significant relationship between perception of organizational justice and engagement. When organizational employees show

a negative outlook with regards to distributive and procedural justice, they are more likely to perform low work (Cowherd & Levine, 1992; Elanain, 2009). Past studies have revealed a significant relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes in non-Western culture (Elanain, 2009 ; Lam, Schaubroeck, & Aryee 2002 ; Pillai, Scandura, & Williams, 1999). Saks (2006) found no relation between different dimensions of justice and work engagement. Previous studies also highlighted on the aspect that employees disengaged themselves from their work roles if their perception about fairness was low (Biswas, Varma, & Ramaswami, 2013). Employees are motivated to engage in their work when they are fairly treated with respect and honored by the organization (Engelbrecht, Heine, & Mahembe, 2014).

A very few studies found the link between perception of organizational justice and work engagement (Agarwal, 2014 ; Akram, Haider, & Feng, 2016). Organizational justice has a direct effect on work engagement (Khuong & Dung, 2015). When there is justice in the organization, employees are more satisfied and engaged in their work for achieving organizational goals (Jain & Mathur, 2015). When employees recognize that they are treated with fairness and respect, it increases their confidence and motivates them to focus their energy on their work (Park, Song, & Lim, 2016). When employees bring a high level of energy and inspiration to their work, they are said to be engaged in their work. When the employees are engaged in their work, they are likely to be passionate in their organization and are focused upon achieving their goals (Park et al., 2016). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis :

♲ **H1 :** Organizational justice has a positive effect on work engagement.

(2) Organizational Justice and Trust : Several studies found a positive and significant relationship between organizational justice and trust (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002 ; Colquitt & Rodell, 2011 ; Meshkati, Eskandari, & Mostahfezian, 2014 ; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998 ; Rezaiean, Givi, Givi, & Nasrabadi, 2010). Fairness perceptions regarding organizational justice were found to have a positive and significant association with trust (Ambrose & Schminke, 2003 ; Cohen - Charash & Spector, 2001). The dimensions of organizational justice were found to have a positive association with trust because when the employees feel/consider that they are fairly treated, that will increase the confidence level of the organization and their managers (Aryee et al., 2002; Bidarian & Jafari, 2012). According to Thornhill and Saunders (2003), if there is no justice, there is no possibility of trust. Employees' perceptions of distributive justice were positively linked with trust in organization, and interactional justice had a significant impact on trust in supervisor (Wong, 2006).

Prior studies found that organizational justice had a significant impact on trust (Kickul, Gundry, & Posig, 2005; Rezaiean et al., 2010). If there is justice in the organization, employees feel more safe and willing to build trust in the supervisor and co-workers (Farahbod, Azadehdel, & Jirdehi, 2013). According to Tahseen and Akhtar (2016), employee's perception of processes and procedures were positively and significantly linked with trust among the employees. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis :

♲ **H2 :** Organizational justice has a positive effect on trust.

(3) Trust and Work Engagement : Employees go beyond their normal job duties when they have trust in the organization (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). High level of trust leads to more positive attitudes, cooperation, and superior levels of performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Meaningfulness of work leads to higher work engagement and organizational trust among employees (Morrison, Burke, & Greene, 2007). Employees demonstrate higher levels of work engagement when they feel that co-workers are sympathetic and concerned about their welfare (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). Work engagement is developed in an organization where trust is placed in the supervisor and the co-workers support each other and also respect   each other (Chugtai & Buckley, 2008). When the trust

increases among employees, they become more engaged in their work, which enhances their work outcomes (Anderson, 2014 ; Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). When the employees are treated with respect and valued in the organization, they will be more motivated to engage in their work (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). Wong, Spence - Laschinger, and Cummings (2010) found a positive and significant effect of trust on work engagement. According to Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013), a high level of employee engagement reflects a greater trust and loyal relationship between the individual and the organization. Employees feel engaged in their work, when the fair processes and procedures are perceived as trustworthy in the organization (Engelbrecht et al., 2014). Employees work with more concentration and inspiration when they perceive that their supervisors and co-workers are supportive and reliable (Bouckenooghe, Raja, & Abbas, 2014). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis :

✤ **H3 :** Trust has a significant effect on work engagement.

(4) Organizational Justice, Trust, and Work Engagement : Employee's perception of fairness makes organizations truthful, and influences those employees who are engaged in the organization (Blau, 1964). Some studies found a positive and significant association between all the dimensions of organizational justice and trust (Akpmar & Tas, 2013 ; Aryee et al., 2002 ; Colquitt & Rodell, 2011 ; Moorman, 1991; Moorman et al., 1998; Tan & Tan, 2000). Employees who believe that the organization is fair and more trustful, they are prepared to engage in work that is valuable for the organization (McCauley & Kuhnert, 1992). It is impossible to imagine organizational justice in the absence of trust. Over the last 15 years, theoretical and practical studies have found a strong relationship between justice and trust. Trust develops from interaction between two or more people that improves organizational consistency and work environment (Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson, 2005). When employees interact with the organization, their perception of fairness influences those employees who are engaged in their work and also increases the confidence level of the employees.

Abrrow et al. (2013) found a significant impact of distributive, procedural justice, and interactional justice on trust in supervisor. Organizational justice was positively and significantly related with trust, meaning thereby that employees believed that if the supervisor treated them well and in a fair manner, they will trust the organization ; conversely, if the supervisor did not treat them fairly, they did not place their trust in the organization (Mansour, 2014). According to Riasudeen and Narayanan (2014), distributive and procedural justice were found to significantly differ from the constructive deviant behavior, and interactional justice significantly differed from the innovative and interpersonal dimensions of construct deviant behavior. A very few studies found that trust mediated between organizational justice and work engagement (Agarwal, 2014; Khuong & Dung, 2015). When employees put in their time and energy, they want to be confident that they are investing more efforts in the organization, and they are making a fair decision. Trust in supervisor and co-workers encourage employees to improve their work performance. Several studies showed a positive and significant link between perceptions of organizational justice and work engagement (Agarwal, 2014 ; Akram et al., 2016). Kaur and Bedi (2017) observed a positive and significant relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment, but perceived that organizational support played a partial mediation between them. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

✤ **H4 :** Trust mediates the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement.

Research Methodology

(1) Sample and Data : Data for this study were collected from 296 employees working in public and private life

insurance sector of Haryana. The period of data collection was from September 2016 to March 2017. Out of 296 employees, 232 were men and 64 were women. About 43% of the respondents were between the age group of 30 - 40 years. Of these, 168 respondents belonged to private insurance companies and 128 respondents were from the public insurance companies. Highest experience of the respondents was above 10 years (136 respondents) ; 55% of the respondents were post graduates, 43% were graduates, and 2% were others. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire consisting of the scales on organizational justice, trust, and work engagement, besides some demographic details like age, qualification, and experience along with the type of organization.

(2) Measures : The questionnaire survey method was used for collecting data. All items were measured on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 5 *(strongly agree)*. In addition to general information about the respondents and the organizations, the following measures were used to complete the study :

(i) Organizational Justice (Independent Variable) : A 20 item measure of organizational justice (OJ) developed by Neihoff and Moorman (1993) was used. Employees were asked to rate their perceptions regarding organizational justice on a 5 - point Likert scale. The scale had three dimensions, that is, distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The distributive justice was described in terms of rewards and pay, it was assessed by using a five item scale. Procedural justice was measured through a six - item scale. Interactional justice consisted of a nine-item scale describing deliberation, respect, and adequate explanation made for job decisions.

(ii) Trust (Mediating Variable) : Cook and Wall's (1980) 12 item scale was used to measure the level of trust among employees. The scale measured two dimensions of trust namely, trust in supervisor and trust in co-workers. Trust in supervisor was measured through a six-item scale, and it was assessed to attract a better supervisor or to make sensible decisions for the organization's future. Trust in co-worker was described in terms of helping nature of colleagues in an organization and consisted of a six-item scale. Higher scores indicated higher level of trust experienced by employees.

(iii) Work Engagement (Dependent Variable) : Scale of work engagement (WE) was measured through a 17 - item scale of Utrecht and Schaufeli (2007b). The scale had 17 items to measure the perception of employees regarding work engagement. Employees were asked to rate their perceptions regarding organizational justice on a 5 - point Likert scale. The three dimensions of work engagement are : vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour means high energy and mental resilience while working and it consisted of a six-item scale. Dedication was described in terms of sense of significance and inspiration and was assessed through a five-item scale. Absorption was measured through a six-item scale and was described in terms of full concentration in one's work.

(3) Statistical Tools Used : Correlation analysis has been used to check the interrelationships among the various study variables. The method used to test the formulated hypotheses is multiple regression analysis using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Cronbach's alpha values were also calculated to check the internal reliabilities of the measures.

Analysis and Results

A correlation analysis was done to understand the relationship between different dimensions of organizational justice, trust, and work engagement. All the dimensions of organizational justice were found to be positively related to different dimensions of trust and work engagement. The details of correlation analysis are given in the Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alpha, and Correlation Among the Variables

Dimensions	No. of Items	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Distributive Justice	5	3.92	.730								0.80
2. Procedural Justice	6	3.42	.674	.468**							0.75
3. Interactional Justice	9	3.74	.758	.505**	.696**						0.90
4. Trust in Co- worker	6	3.82	.703	.208**	.272**	.303**					0.82
5. Trust in Supervisor	6	3.63	.656	.245**	.467**	.499**	.349**				0.68
6. Vigour	6	3.73	.616	.401**	.325**	.389**	.308**	.321**			0.69
7. Dedication	5	3.98	.800	.292**	.278**	.325**	.517**	.258**	.428**		0.85
8. Absorption	6	3.89	.609	.313**	.232**	.311**	480**	.239**	.439**	.588**	0.79

Note : **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2. Summary Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

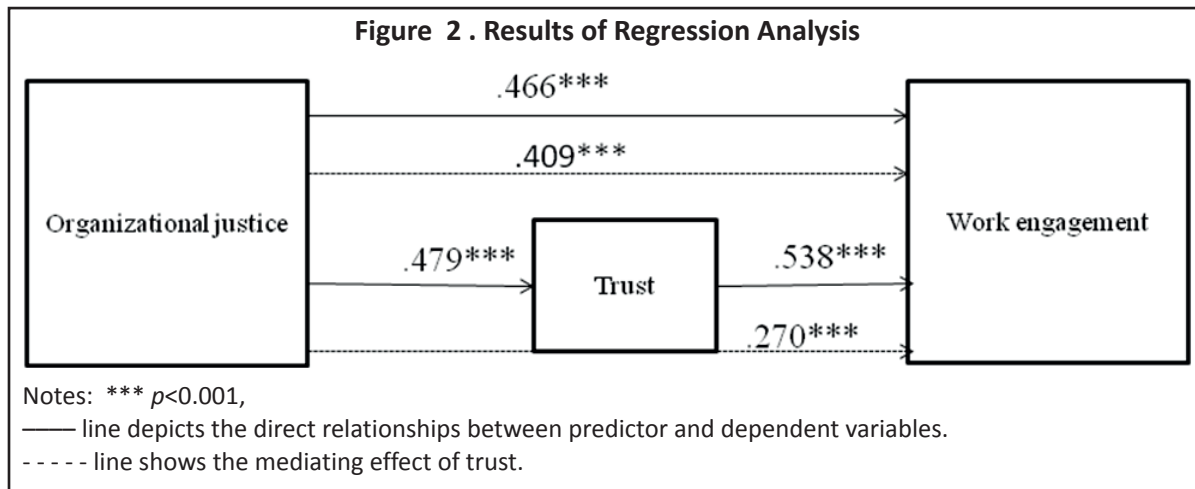|	Trust		Work Engagement	
Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Organizational Justice	0.479***	0.466***		0.270***
Trust			0.538***	0.409***
Adjusted R^2	.227	.214	.287	.341
F - Statistic	84.494	81.406	119.776	77.375

Note : ***$p < 0.001$

The Table 1 also shows the means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients of different dimensions of the variables.

Multiple regressions were conducted to measure the effects of independent variables on dependent variables. To assess the mediation effect of trust between organizational justice and work engagement, we followed the model of Baron and Kenny (1986). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), existence of mediation depends on three conditions. First, the predictor variable (i.e. organizational justice) must have an effect on the proposed mediating variable (i.e. trust). Second, the proposed mediating variable (i.e. trust) must have an effect on the dependent variable (i.e. work engagement). And third, the predictor variable must exercise an effect on the dependent variable when the mediating variable is not included in the regression equation. For the full mediating effect, when the mediating variable is added in the regression equation, the effect size of the independent variable on the dependent variable must reduce to be non - significant. For partial mediating effect, the effect size of the independent variable on the dependent variable must reduce, but it should not be zero after the inclusion of the mediator variable in the regression equation.

The results of regression analysis are shown in the Table 2. Four models are developed to measure the relationship between the variables. The *F*-values confirm that all the models are statistically significant. The Model 1 shows that organizational justice has a positive significant impact on trust ($\beta = 0.479, p \leq 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis H1 is supported. It is observed from the Model 2 that organizational justice has a positive effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.466, p \leq 0.001$), which explains 21.4% of the variance. Thus, hypothesis H2 is also supported. The Model 3 shows that trust has a significant positive effect on work engagement ($\beta = 0.538, p \leq 0.001$), which explains 28.7% of the variance in work engagement. Thus, hypothesis H3 is also supported.

After satisfying all the three conditions proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), when organizational justice and trust were entered simultaneously in regression Model 4, organizational justice still shows a positive impact on

Figure 2 . Results of Regression Analysis

Notes: *** *p<0.001*,
—— line depicts the direct relationships between predictor and dependent variables.
- - - - - line shows the mediating effect of trust.

work engagement (β = 0.409, *p* ≤ 0.001), but its value is reduced to a large extent (from β = 0.466*** to β = 0.409***). Thus, trust partially mediates the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement. Thus, hypothesis H4 is also supported by the results. The standardized β coefficients are presented in the Figure 2.

Discussion

The results of the study support the claim of past studies (Agarwal, 2014 ; Katou, 2013) that trust mediates the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement. The findings of this paper emphasize on how employee perceptions of justice influence trust, which motivates employees to engage in their work. For the first time in the insurance sector, this study has found that employee perception of organizational justice influences trust and work engagement. The findings prove a positive and significant correlation between organizational justice, trust, and work engagement (Agarwal, 2014 ; Khuong & Dung, 2015). Perception of justice among employees has a significant influence on trust and work engagement. This paper also tests the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement. In particular, no research has been done to evaluate how organizational justice influences the perception of employees regarding trust and work engagement in the insurance sector.

The majority of existing research in this area has examined the relationship between justice and work engagement without trust as a mediator. However, one can easily understand the importance of all the three dimensions of organizational justice to strengthen work engagement (Alvi & Abbasi, 2012). The insurance sector is becoming more conscious of the need to recognize their employees' perceptions about organizational justice and trust. When the employees are treated in a rude and shameful manner in the organization, they may feel dissatisfied, which finally affects their work environment. This paper significantly expands knowledge about organizational justice that can encourage employees' motivation to contribute their efforts and abilities to their work. As managers communicate clearly and make fair decisions and follow procedures, employees trust them more, and they will be more dedicated towards their work.

Managerial Implications

Fairness in an organization plays a vital role in framing employees' perception towards trust and their engagement

levels. When employees are treated equally and fairly, their attitudes and behaviours are positively shaped. The results of the study indicate that trust acts as a partial mediator between organizational justice and work engagement. Fair policies and procedures enhance employees' level of trust and work engagement and resultantly, their involvement in the respective organization improves significantly. The findings of the study will be highly beneficial for service organizations. Organizations should conduct training programmes for their employees to treat each other fairly. Not only should they make fair policies and procedures, but the same should also be reflected in their behaviour.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

This paper used a cross-sectional research design in observing the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement with trust as a mediating variable. Future research should focus on longitudinal data to establish cause and effect relationship among the study variables. Second, the data in this research were collected only from the insurance sector. Future research should collect data from multiple kinds of companies to attain a broader perspective. Third, the sample size was small. Future research should work on a big sample. Fourth, we have taken trust as a mediator between justice and work engagement. Future research studies can take other organizational variables as a mediator between justice and engagement such as leader member exchange, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, etc. Future research should develop dimensions which can accurately reflect the perception of fairness and employee trust so that employees become more dedicated towards their work.

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