



Journal home page: <http://www.journalijar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF INNOVATIVE AND APPLIED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article DOI:10.58538/IJAR/2125

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.58538/IJAR/2125>

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE AS A PATHWAY TO ENGAGEMENT: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 15 February 2025

Final Accepted: 21 March 2025

Published: March 2025

Keywords:

Organisational Justice, Employee Engagement, Employee Empowerment

Abstract

Employee engagement has become crucial for organisations, considering a strong individual-organisational relationship is vital for a sustained workforce. This study examines the relationship between organisational justice, employee empowerment, and employee engagement in the context of Information Technology employees in Bangalore. Employing the quantitative correlation and mediation analysis approach grounded in the Social Exchange Theory, the study examines how the perception of justice and fairness in distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice impacts employee engagement levels. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation between organisational justice and engagement, with employee empowerment as a full mediator. The findings suggest that employees who experience fair treatment and equity at work are likelier to be engaged, thereby highlighting the need to foster a culture of justice within the organisation. The study also calls for organisations to implement workplace policies and practices that promote employee empowerment. The implications of the study's findings call for organisational leaders and managers to improve the employee's commitment and performance through an enhanced perception of justice and an increased sense of empowerment in the workplace.

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Introduction

Employee engagement has emerged as a key area of focus for organisations globally, with businesses seeking different methods and strategies to achieve the desired engagement levels and attain higher sustainable growth. It is the employees' willingness to invest in the development of an organisation. This suggests that the more engaged the employees become, the more likely they become loyal to the organisations and more passionate about their work. This has been further strengthened by the argument of [18], who reiterate the role of engagement in long-term growth and sustainability, in addition to driving stakeholder satisfaction and financial returns, to increase the competitive advantage of the firms.

[24] posits that with the rising competition in the work environment, employee engagement has become a crucial factor for organisations, considering a strong individual-organisational relationship is vital for a sustained workforce. [21] Further, the individual-organisation relationship reflects the employees' perception towards

organisational justice, which can influence the employees' engagement level. Employee empowerment has been inextricably linked with organisational effectiveness and employee work satisfaction. Employees feel devoted and committed to the organisation when they feel empowered, resulting in higher performance. This study examines employee empowerment's role in organisational justice and employee engagement.

Review of Literature

Organisational justice and its dimensions have been widely used to predict employee attitudes and behaviour in the form of employee job satisfaction, commitment, turnover intention, extra-role behaviour, and engagement levels. This review of the literature focuses on the key variables that have been used in this study for analysis.

Organisational Justice

Organisational justice is the study of employees' perceptions towards justice in the workplace [1]. [13] notes that organisational justice is based on the social exchange theory and requires a focus on the exchange of fair treatment to induce positive behaviour and subsequent work performance. It has been categorised into procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. From a critical perspective, organisational justice is a subjective experience and perception of the employees, which the employees, the managers, and the organisation evaluate. Organisational justice includes distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice [10].

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment “is a relational construct that describes how those with power in organisations share power and formal authority with those lacking it” [8]. Empowerment involves offering employees the autonomy to work, giving them a certain level of control over their work, and providing them access to information to aid decision-making. Researchers have identified that when employees feel empowered at work, it results in higher job performance, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment [7]. This results in increased focus from the leaders on delegating work and authority to the employees [15]. Empowering employees has been recognised as essential to organisational success through its direct impact on employee performance, commitment, and job satisfaction.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is highly critical for any organisation today. One of the most influential works in this domain of engagement was conducted by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s [20]. Work engagement is “the psychological state that accompanies the behavioural investment of personal energy” [23, p. 22]. While [14] defined it as “the physical, cognitive, and emotional dedication of employees to perform their job tasks”. Interestingly, [23] argued that employee and work engagement are used interchangeably; they are distinct constructs. While work engagement assesses the employees' relationship with their work only, employee engagement emphasizes the association between the employees, their work and their organisation.

Theoretical Framework

Social exchange theory is one of the organisational behaviour's most influential conceptual paradigms. Exchange is a phenomenon deeply ingrained in our lives and not limited to family, friends, and organisations. [6] defined it as “(i) an initiation by an actor toward the target, (ii) an attitudinal or behavioural response from the target in reciprocity, and (iii) the resulting relationship.” The theory suggests that employees tend to reciprocate the level of behaviour and treatment received from the organisation, especially when the treatment is fair and just.

Employee engagement is the exchange of benefits with the organisation in specific forms, and employees there generate different influencing outcomes to receive organisational rewards [27]. Social exchange theory is a connection based on cost-benefit analysis. The theory can be used for developing employee engagement as it says, “obligations are generated through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of reciprocal interdependence” [21].

Hypothesis Development

Previous studies have identified a positive correlation between distributive justice and engagement, wherein distributive justice was associated with the perception of fairness of the rewards and outcomes [4]. Colquitt found that employees who perceive that they are being treated fairly by their organisations in terms of rewards, recognition, and resources are more likely to be engaged at work.

H1: There is a statistically significant impact of Distributive Justice on Employee Engagement

Procedural justice is the perceived fairness of the processes that individuals in positions of authority use. This has been shown to have a significant impact on employee engagement. Employees' perception of fair decision-making can result in a higher likelihood of engagement and commitment to the organisation [17]. A positive relationship was found between procedural justice and employee engagement, calling it a motivational force for the employees [12].

H2: There is a statistically significant impact of Procedural Justice on Employee Engagement

Interpersonal justice has been associated with the perceived fairness of treatment employees receive from their peers and supervisors, and has been linked with employee engagement in several studies [16]. Employees are more likely to be engaged in their work when treated fairly and respectfully. A similar finding was given by [25], suggesting varying impacts of interpersonal justice on employee engagement.

H3: There is a statistically significant impact of Interpersonal Justice on Employee Engagement

Informational justice has been defined in terms of the organisation's perceived fairness of discussion and communication, which significantly impacts employee engagement [4]. Employees who receive clear information from their organization are more likely to be engaged at work. A significant association was found between distributive and informational justice and employee engagement [9].

H4: There is a statistically significant impact of Informational Justice on Employee Engagement

As discussed above, organisational justice encompasses all four dimensions of justice and significantly impacts employee engagement. When employees perceive to be treated fairly in all aspects of their work, they are more likely to be engaged [5]. Organisational justice dimensions like “distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice” significantly impact job and organisational engagement [18].

H5: There is a statistically significant impact of Organisational Justice on Employee Engagement

Employee engagement reflects the level of commitment and involvement of the employees towards the organisation and its value. While there is a cordial relationship between employees and the management, there is a need for management and organisations to strengthen their strategies for empowering employees, which can drive employee engagement [3]. Employees require a lot of psychological empowerment, which requires a focus on structural empowerment to increase job engagement. The competitive business environment requires employees to be capable of using their full capabilities and potential [2]. As such, organisations must adopt innovative strategies to empower employees to make them highly motivated, proactive, involved, and responsible, thereby suggesting that empowerment drives employee engagement.

H6: There is a statistically significant impact of Employee Empowerment on Employee Engagement

Organisational justice and psychological empowerment of the employees within the organisation lead to increased job satisfaction and commitment, thereby improving their engagement levels and citizenship behaviour [19]. An engaged workforce results in employees being motivated and committed physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work roles. Employee empowerment can lead to higher work engagement [26]. Empowerment is critical in driving employee empowerment through employee engagement [28].

H7: Employee Empowerment mediates the relationship between Organisational Justice and Employee Engagement

Taking insight from the above, the research model of the present study is proposed in Figure 1.

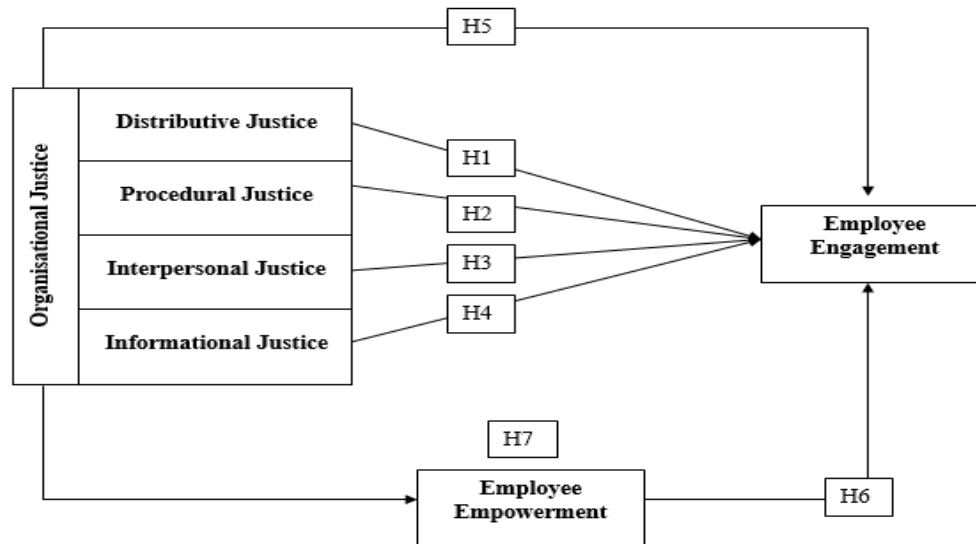


Figure 1: Conceptual Model for the study.

Research Methodology

The current study employs a quantitative correlation study with a survey-based cross-sectional research design to examine the impact of organisational justice on employee engagement in Bangalore. This pilot study aims to extend complete research once the outcome has been validated. This study's target population involved employees working at information technology companies in Bengaluru. Bengaluru, the IT hub of India and the most employed city was an appropriate location for this study. Additionally, the employees working in the Information technology sectors have the required experience and skills to offer valuable insight into the research issue being investigated. The convenience sampling method was used to select the sample from the target population and various companies for this study. The sample size consists of 30 employees due to practical consideration and ease of data collection and analysis. The choice of sample size is based on the rule of thumb, wherein 30 data points or observations are said to be enough to make a statistically sound conclusion about the population. Data for the study is collected through a structured questionnaire with a Likert Scale to measure the employees' perceptions towards organisational justice, empowerment and engagement. The Likert Scale includes options ranging from Strongly Agree to Disagree (1-5) Strongly. The independent variable, organisational justice, assesses four types of justice and its impact on employee engagement as the dependent variable.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis begins with the descriptive and reliability analysis aimed at examining descriptive statistics and internal consistencies of identified variables for the study measures. Additionally, for data normality, skewness, and kurtosis were computed (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and reliability of variables.

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Distributive Justice	1.00	3.50	1.90	.519	.668	.899	1.765
Procedural Justice	1.25	4.00	2.41	.740	.814	.587	-.411
Interpersonal Justice	1.00	4.75	2.17	.801	.921	1.212	2.623
Informational Justice	1.25	4.50	2.13	.658	.806	1.746	4.666
Employee Empowerment	1.00	4.00	2.40	.615	.743	.035	.884
Employee Engagement	1.13	4.00	2.26	.600	.898	.532	1.108

Table 1 highlights that all the variables used in study have good internal consistency ranging between $\alpha = .92$ (interpersonal justice) to $\alpha = .74$ (Employee empowerment). Furthermore, the maximum and minimum values indicates that all the scales have received satisfactory response variability. Regarding the values obtained for skewness and kurtosis, most variables show positive skewness, indicating distributions with longer right tails. At the same time, Distributive, Informational Justice and Interpersonal Justice exhibit high kurtosis, reflecting more extreme values in their distributions. Employee empowerment is the closest to a normal distribution with minimal skewness and kurtosis.

Table 2: Correlation analysis of variables.

Variables		D_J	P_J	IP_J	IF_J	E_EM	E_E	O_J
D_J	r	1	.146	-.039	-.048	.126	.107	.300
	p		.443	.837	.802	.507	.574	.108
P_J	r	.146	1	.468**	.271	.277	.282	.728**
	p	.443		.009	.148	.138	.131	<.001
IP_J	r	-.039	.468**	1	.742**	.591**	.545**	.859**
	p	.837	.009		<.001	<.001	.002	<.001
IF_J	r	-.048	.271	.742**	1	.614**	.567**	.759**
	p	.802	.148	<.001		<.001	.001	<.001
E_EM	r	.126	.277	.591**	.614**	1	.897**	.610**
	p	.507	.138	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
E_E	r	.107	.282	.545**	.567**	.897**	1	.571**
	p	.574	.131	.002	.001	<.001		<.001
O_J	r	.300	.728**	.859**	.759**	.610**	.571**	1
	p	.108	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	

Another preliminary Pearson Correlation analysis was carried out based on the assumption that organisational justice will positively correlate with employee empowerment and engagement (Table 2). The results imply that organisational justice positively correlates with Employee engagement ($r=0.571$, $p <.001$). Organisational justice also positively correlates with employee empowerment ($r=0.610$, $p <.001$). Employee empowerment was to have a significant association with employee engagement ($r=0.897$, $p <.001$). Further analysis into the dimensions of organisational justice and engagement showed a positive association between interpersonal justice and engagement ($r=0.545$, $p <.002$) and informational justice and employee engagement ($r=0.567$, $p <.001$). Additionally, procedural justice was positively correlated with organisational justice ($r=0.728$, $p <.001$).

Considering the positive correlation between justice and empowerment, employee engagement and organisational justice, it was necessary to establish their distinction. For this, the Principal Component (PCA) model was used. The model included all the items associated with employee engagement, organisational justice and empowerment. The indicators of perceived organisational justice involved 4 constructs, including distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice, with a total of 16 items, whilst 5 items of the employee empowerment scale were used as the indicator of employee empowerment. Factor loading analysis was conducted to understand and uncover the structure of the underlying factors, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Component Matrix- Factor Loading.

Component Matrix- Factor Loading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
DJ1			0.587			
DJ2			0.58			
DJ3			0.536			
PJ3					0.573	
PJ4	0.535				0.548	0.535
IPJ1	0.767					0.767
IPJ2	0.741					0.741
IPJ3	0.816					0.816
IPJ4	0.628					0.628
IFJ1	0.585					0.585

Component Matrix- Factor Loading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
IFJ2	0.714					0.714
IFJ3	0.551					0.551
IFJ5	0.577					0.577
EEM1	0.801					0.801
EEM2	0.713					0.713
EEM3	0.593	0.514				0.593
EEM4	0.628					0.628
EEM5		0.595				
V1						0.801
V2						0.713
V3		0.514				0.593
V4						0.628
D1						0.631
D2						0.767
D3						0.773
D4						0.677
A1						0.614
A2						0.537
A3						0.712
A4						0.655

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 3 provides the extraction of PCA in the form of a rotated component matrix, an outcome of factor analysis. The matrix displays potential correlations between the key variables (DJ1, DJ2... etc) and the extracted components (1,2,3 etc). The higher the correlation, the more substantial the correlation between the variables and the extracted components. From Table 3, using the Varimax rotation method, it is evident that the variables are primarily grouped into distinct components, suggesting the presence of underlying latent constructs. For instance, IPJ1, IPJ3, and IFJ2 have high loadings on component 1, indicating the sharing of a common underlying factor. Likewise, EMM1-EEM4, V1-V4, and D1-D4 have high loadings on Component 1, indicating another distinct factor. Based on the factor analysis variables, DJ4 was removed due to cross-loading, PJ4 due to multiple cross-loadings across three factors and EEM3 due to its borderline cross-loading.

Table 4: OLS Regression.

Variable	R Square	Coefficient (β)	P-Value
Distributive Justice- Employee Engagement	0.011	0.124	0.574
Procedural Justice- Employee Engagement	0.079	0.228	0.131
Interpersonal Justice- Employee Engagement	0.279	0.408	0.002
Informational Justice- Employee Engagement	0.321	0.516	0.001
Organisational Justice- Employee Engagement	0.326	0.727	<.001
Employee Empowerment- Employee Engagement	0.804	0.874	<0.001

Table 4 presents the outcome of the OLS regression analysis of the variables in Figure 1. The study reveals that organisational justice ($r=0.326$, $p=0.001$), interpersonal justice ($r=0.279$, $p=0.002$), and informational justice ($r=0.321$, $p=0.001$) are significantly associated with employee engagement. Among these, organisational justice emerges as the most influential, explaining 72.7% of the variance in employee engagement. Additionally, employee empowerment was significantly associated with employee engagement ($r=0.804$, $p=0.001$), predicting 87.4% variance in employee engagement. This suggests that employee's perception of fairness towards the organisational policies, practices, policies and decision-making are critical drivers of their job involvement and organisational commitment. Interpersonal and informational justice also demonstrate significant relationships with employee engagement, explaining 40.8% and 51.6% of the variance, respectively. These results emphasize the importance of fair treatment from supervisors and peers and clear and transparent communication in fostering employee engagement. In contrast, procedural and distributive justice display weaker and less significant relationships with employee engagement, explaining 22.8% and 12.4% of the variance, which are not statistically significant. This

indicates that while these factors have a role in organisational justice, they appear to be less influential in driving employee engagement when compared to interpersonal, and informational justice.

Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

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*****
Model   : 4
Y       : E_E
X       : O_J
M       : E_EMP
Sample
Size    : 30
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE: E_EMP
Model Summary
R        R-sq      MSE        F        df1        df2        p
.6103    .3724     .2465     16.6168   1.0000     28.0000    .0003
Model
          coeff      se        t        p        LLCI      ULCI
constant  .6853     .4319     1.5868    .1238    -.1994     1.5700
O_J       .7983     .1958     4.0764    .0003    .3971     1.1995
*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE: E_E
Model Summary
R        R-sq      MSE        F        df1        df2        p
.8974    .8054     .0753     55.8556   2.0000     27.0000    .0000
Model
          coeff      se        t        p        LLCI      ULCI
constant  .1144     .2492     .4592    .6497    -.3969     .6258
O_J       .0471     .1366     .3449    .7329    -.2332     .3275
E_EMP     .8521     .1044     8.1580    .0000    .6378     1.0664
*****
TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****
OUTCOME VARIABLE: E_E
Model Summary
R        R-sq      MSE        F        df1        df2        p
.5706    .3256     .2516     13.5154   1.0000     28.0000    .0010
Model
          coeff      se        t        p        LLCI      ULCI
constant  .6984     .4363     1.6007    .1207    -.1954     1.5921
O_J       .7273     .1978     3.6763    .0010    .3221     1.1326
*****
TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****
Total effect of X on Y
          Effect      se        t        p        LLCI      ULCI
          .7273     .1978     3.6763    .0010    .3221     1.1326
Direct effect of X on Y
          Effect      se        t        p        LLCI      ULCI
          .0471     .1366     .3449    .7329    -.2332     .3275
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
          Effect      BootSE    BootLLCI    BootULCI
E_EMP     .6802     .1778     .2915     1.0208
*****
ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****
Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output: 95.0000
Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000
----- END MATRIX -----

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Figure 2: Mediation Analysis- Process Macro.

The indirect effects of employee empowerment have been analysed using PROCESS Macro in SPSS, using bootstrap of 5000 samples with a 95% confidence interval. Table 4, offers the results of the indirect effects analysis conducted between organisational justice, employee empowerment, and employee engagement.

The analysis output above (Figure 2) shows that the independent variable (OJ) has a significant total effect on the dependent variable (EE) with a coefficient effect of 0.727 ($p=0.001$). This reaffirms the earlier findings that OJ significantly explains considerable variance in EE. However, the results also offer evidence of mediation effects by the mediating variable (EEM). In terms of direct effects, OJ does not have a significant direct effect on EE ($\beta=0.737$, $p=0.003$), suggesting OJ does not directly influence EE after accounting for the mediator. The indirect effect of OJ on EE with a mediator as EEM (employee empowerment) was significant (Effect = 0.6802, 95% BootCI [0.2915, 1.0208]). This indicates that EEM significantly mediates the relationship between organisational justice and employee engagement. Additionally, 68% of the variances in the impact of OJ on EE can be explained by EEM.

Overall, the findings establish that in the context of the data collected from the sample of employees in Bangalore, Organizational Justice influences Employee Engagement, primarily through Employee Empowerment as a mediator. The direct effect of OJ on EE is not significant. Still, the indirect path through Employee Empowerment is significant, therefore calling for increased emphasis on fostering employee empowerment to improve the sense of perceived justice and engagement.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces organisational justice literature by empirically validating its dimensions' impact on employee engagement. This adds to the depth of understanding of the influence of perceived fairness on employee behaviour and attitude in the context of Distributive Justice, Procedural Justice, Informational Justice, and Interpersonal Justice. The full mediation of employee empowerment indicates a complex interplay between organisational justice and employee engagement, suggesting that empowerment is a critical factor in the employer-employee relationship; its role is decisive being the strong determinant of engagement levels. This requires further studies to explore additional moderating or mediating variables that influence this relationship.

In terms of practical application, the study suggests that organisations need to develop and implement policies and practices that drive fairness, justice and transparency in the workplace. This can be achieved through clear communication and establishing clear communication channels between the management and the employees. The study also suggests that managers and employees need to develop skills for fostering positive relationships at work and ensuring a fair and supportive work environment that drives employee empowerment and engagement.

Conclusion and Scope for Future Research

The study highlights the complex relationship between organizational justice, empowerment, and employee engagement, emphasizing their critical role in fostering a productive, committed, engaged workforce. The findings indicate that employees' perception of fairness and justice- encompassing distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice- can have varying impacts on employee engagement levels (encompassing Vigor, dedication and absorption). Employees who perceive the organisation and management to have treated them justly are more likely to exhibit higher commitment and engagement levels, which contributes towards organisational success and sustainability. This study also reveals that employee empowerment serves as a critical mediator in the relationship between organisational justice and employee engagement. Employee empowerment contributes significantly towards engagement levels; this study offers evidence to suggest that justice perceptions alone need to be supported by a sense of empowerment and control among the employees to drive higher levels of engagement. This underscores the need for organisations to cultivate a culture of fairness and transparency and actively build supportive practices that promote employee's sense of empowerment.

Future research could explore other potential variables as mediators and moderators, such as organisational culture and leadership style, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee engagement. Additionally, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how perceptions of justice and empowerment evolve and their long-term effects on employee engagement. This could provide insights into the sustainability of engagement strategies. Additionally, cross-industry comparisons can be conducted to examine the impact of justice and empowerment across industries to reveal industry specific dynamics and best practices.

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