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Exploring the Relationship Between Pay Fairness and Employee Commitment in Poland

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Abstract

Employee behavior in the workplace is influenced not only by relatively stable personal traits and environmental conditions but also by how employees perceive the functioning of their organization and its internal processes. These perceptions are subjective and encompass various factors, with a fundamental emphasis on fairness. Research indicates that a sense of fairness is a crucial factor shaping organizational attitudes and directly impacts employee performance. Given that employees' views on the organization's pay policies often form the basis of their overall evaluation of the organization, it is valuable to analyze these perceptions across different dimensions. By exploring specific elements of fairness, it becomes possible to predict how employees might respond to increased work demands and their willingness to remain with the organization. This study aims to demonstrate that a sense of fairness serves as a key motivator for positive employee attitudes and behaviors that lead to stronger organizational commitment. Data gathered from full-time employed extramural college students revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between perceptions of pay fairness and employee commitment.

Keywords: Organizational commitment, Pay fairness, Pay communication, Pay understanding, Pay satisfaction

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Introduction

Employee commitment continues to be a major focus for both scholars and business leaders, as it directly influences organizational success. Recognizing the strong link between commitment and positive organizational outcomes, efforts have been made to explore how to effectively enhance employee engagement and dedication.

The factors influencing commitment can be broadly divided into individual traits—including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components—and organizational aspects [1]. Among organizational influences are the perceived importance of the work itself, rewards and recognition, and notably, a sense of fairness [2].

Research over time has demonstrated that employees' views on fairness within their workplace strongly impact their behavior, which in turn affects organizational performance. Areas influenced by fairness perceptions include employee loyalty, productivity, trust in leadership, cooperation, knowledge sharing, job satisfaction, and overall attachment to the organization [3, 4].

Fairness can be described as how well employees' expectations align with their perceptions of organizational procedures and outcomes [5]. Scholars have categorized fairness into four main types [4]:

1. Distributive fairness, which relates to how employees perceive the balance between their contributions and received rewards, especially compared to others;



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2. Procedural fairness, focusing on the transparency and equity of the processes behind organizational decisions, especially regarding compensation;
3. Interpersonal fairness, which concerns the respect and treatment employees receive from supervisors and peers;
4. Informational fairness, referring to the clarity and honesty in how decisions and resource allocations are communicated.

The reward system plays a central role in shaping perceptions of fairness within organizations [6]. When employees feel organizational processes are just, they are more likely to remain committed and behave in ways that support organizational goals [7].

Commitment in relation to perceptions of pay fairness – research hypotheses

Questions regarding fair treatment in terms of compensation primarily relate to employees' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice [8]. This is especially true for individuals newly entering the workforce, who often consider salary as the most fundamental criterion for evaluating any employer [9]. What makes salary such a reliable benchmark is its ability to allow employees to compare their own efforts and outcomes against those of their peers, despite the often complex nature of pay policies [10]. In contexts such as Poland, where salary transparency is limited by law, the procedural fairness aspect — including honest, respectful, and ethical handling of pay-related processes — becomes increasingly important for shaping employee perceptions of their workplace.

This study aims to establish a connection between employee commitment and perceptions of pay fairness. These perceptions are closely linked with organizational traits such as accessibility of pay-related information, transparency in company policies, and overall satisfaction with remuneration. This serves as the foundation for the first research hypothesis:

H1: There exists a statistically significant relationship between employees' commitment and their sense of fairness regarding pay.

Exploring perceptions of fairness inevitably involves examining communication about pay, transparency in salary practices, and the rules governing rewards. Many practitioners argue that effective communication about salary-related policies and structures motivates employees to enhance their performance, enabling them to earn higher compensation and advance their careers more quickly [11]. Consequently, clear pay communication can improve satisfaction with compensation and reduce turnover intentions [12].

Pay transparency is understood here as employees' perceived access to salary information. When this information is openly shareable among colleagues, it facilitates a more positive experience in comparing inputs and rewards. The judgments formed through transparent work evaluation systems, paired with tangible benefits, contribute to a stronger sense of organizational fairness [13]. Another advantage of transparency is its role in reducing wage disparities based on gender, age, or ethnicity [14, 15].

However, it is important to emphasize that merely having access to pay information is not sufficient for employees to evaluate the pay system positively. Understanding this information—meaning having knowledge about pay policies, salary structures, and decision-making processes—is essential. Research indicates that without a clear understanding of how remuneration is governed, employees cannot effectively assess the fairness of the pay system [16].

Pay satisfaction and its relationship to commitment – research hypotheses

Pay satisfaction, although long studied, was initially examined mostly in isolation from its organizational context [17–19]. It was only in later studies that researchers linked pay satisfaction with organizational outcomes and performance [20, 21]. This concept can be evaluated across three dimensions: the actual level of pay, increases in pay, and the overall structure or administration of compensation. Since younger employees tend to have elevated expectations regarding their salaries, their perception of pay fairness within an organization is best understood by connecting their satisfaction ratings with other related factors. Based on a thorough evaluation of employees and their commitment levels, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: A statistically significant relationship exists between employee commitment and each factor influencing the perception of pay fairness.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that employees who view the distribution of resources and the governing procedures positively demonstrate higher emotional attachment to their organization [22]. This insight led to the formulation of another hypothesis:

H3: The strongest positive correlation will be found between employee commitment and their perception of pay fairness.

An additional benefit for organizations derived from employee commitment is a reduced intention to leave, which in turn lowers turnover rates and results in cost savings. Assuming this holds true, we propose:

H4: There is a statistically significant negative correlation between employees' sense of pay fairness and their willingness to resign.

Research methodology

The study utilized a questionnaire designed to capture relevant statements aligned with the research focus. To ensure the instrument's reliability, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The sample consisted of professionally employed extramural students from various organizational sectors. A total of 82 individuals participated, with 80 valid responses included after excluding incomplete or incorrectly filled forms. Female respondents constituted a slight majority (54%). Participants were nearly evenly split between two age groups: under 24 years (49%) and 25 to 40 years (51%). Educational backgrounds varied, with 69% holding undergraduate degrees, 24% with graduate degrees, and 7% having completed secondary education.

Employee commitment was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, yielding a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.922. The eight statements presented addressed both job performance motivation (e.g., "I am willing to exert considerable effort beyond what is normally expected for my employer's success" and "This organization inspires the best in me regarding job performance") and the emotional connection with the organization (e.g., "I am proud to tell others I work here" and "I am very glad I chose to work for this organization").

The perception of pay fairness—defined as receiving equal pay for equal work—was measured using an 8-item scale adapted from Shields *et al.* (2012)[16]. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of this scale was very high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.950. The statements focused on respondents' views about the relationship between their own work effort and pay (e.g., "My pay reflects the effort that I have put into my work," "My pay is appropriate for the work I do," "My pay is justified by my performance") as well as comparisons with others' pay for similar roles (e.g., "I am fairly paid compared to other employees," "I am fairly paid compared to similar positions in other organizations").

In addition, the evaluation of pay fairness included factors such as pay communication, pay transparency, and pay understanding. Pay communication refers to how openly employers share information regarding salaries, including the rules, procedures, and criteria for pay raises. Sample statements assessing this aspect included: "My employer communicates pay policies and procedures," and "At my employer, employees are told what they must do to increase their pay." Pay transparency involves the extent to which salary information is shared within the organization, both in terms of formal regulations and informal sharing among employees. An example statement was: "I will be disciplined or fired if my employer learns that I told other employees how much I am paid."

Pay understanding measures how well employees comprehend the principles and procedures governing their compensation and the possibility of influencing their salary. This was assessed with statements such as: "I understand how my base salary or wage is determined," and "I understand how my pay raises are determined." These items were also drawn from Shields *et al.* (2012), with reliability coefficients exceeding 0.8 across the measures[16].

To measure pay satisfaction, the Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire (PSQ) developed by Heneman and Schwab (1979, 1985) was employed[23, 24]. This instrument assesses overall employee satisfaction with pay, including evaluations of pay policy and structure. The 14-item questionnaire includes statements like: "My most recent raise," "My current salary," "My overall level of pay," and "How my raises are determined." Respondents rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Dissatisfied to Very Satisfied. The PSQ demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906, confirming its validity for the study.

Finding

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software to address the research questions and evaluate the proposed hypotheses. The initial step involved assessing the distribution of the quantitative variables. This was done by applying basic descriptive statistics along with the Shapiro-Wilk test to examine normality. The results indicated that most variables significantly deviated from a normal distribution. Nonetheless, based on the guideline that the absolute value of skewness should not exceed 1, it was considered reasonable to treat the distributions of nearly all variables as sufficiently symmetrical for the use of parametric tests. The specific coefficients calculated during this analysis are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Basic descriptive statistics together with the test of normal distribution.

Poland	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk.</i>	<i>Kurt.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Maks.</i>	<i>S-W</i>	<i>p</i>
Pay Communications	2.96	2.86	0.98	0.26	-0.77	1.29	5.00	0.97	0.047
Pay Transparency	2.98	3.00	0.96	0.02	-0.29	1.00	5.00	0.98	0.127
Pay Understanding	3.45	3.50	0.92	-0.28	-0.25	1.33	5.00	0.97	0.033
Pay Fairness	2.86	2.75	1.04	0.37	-0.57	1.00	5.00	0.97	0.044
Organizational Commitment	2.79	2.60	1.09	0.38	-0.80	1.00	5.00	0.96	0.008
Intent to Quit	3.63	4.00	1.23	-0.63	-0.60	1.00	5.00	0.90	<0.001
Pay Satisfaction	2.77	2.86	0.73	0.25	-0.29	1.43	4.71	0.98	0.284

M – Mean; *Mdn* – median; *SD* – standard deviation; *Sk.* – skewness; *Kurt.* – kurtosis; *Min.* and *Max.*; *S-W* – Shapiro- Wilk test; *p* – weight

The subsequent phase of the research involved identifying the relationships among the variables included in the study model. For this purpose, correlation coefficients were calculated, with the results displayed in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Pay Communications	-						
2. Pay Transparency	.59**	-					
3. Pay Understanding	.67**	.55**	-				
4. PayFairness	.48**	.39**	.66**	-			
5. Organizational Commitment	.46**	.37**	.65**	.98**	-		
6. Intent to Quit	-.45**	-.34**	-.41**	-.39**	-.40**	-	
7. Pay Satisfaction	.43**	.26*	.51**	.76**	.74**	-.53**	-

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

Results and Discussion

The findings enabled us to verify the initial hypotheses. All correlation coefficients were found to be statistically significant. Consistent with the hypotheses, a clear relationship emerged between the factors influencing employees' perceptions of pay fairness and their level of organizational commitment. Moreover, it was confirmed that the strongest predictor of commitment among these factors is the sense of pay fairness itself. In the present study, this correlation was very high ($r = 0.98$, $p < 0.05$). The result matrix shown in **Table 2** supports the proposed hypotheses. Additionally, the expected negative correlation between perceived pay fairness and employees' intention to leave the organization was also confirmed. No significant differences were observed between male and female respondents.

Summary

This research aimed to explore the connection between organizational pay fairness and employee commitment, focusing on how perceptions of pay fairness influence workplace attitudes and behaviors. The results indicate that fairness perceptions serve as a crucial motivator for employees' organizational commitment, fostering behaviors that benefit the organization's growth. From a managerial standpoint, it is essential not only that employees are satisfied with their salary and advancement opportunities but also that they have transparent access to information and clear understanding of pay-related policies and procedures. Notably, comprehension of these procedures plays a key role in shaping fairness perceptions [25].

It is important to highlight that the sample primarily consisted of young employees (Millennials), who generally show higher organizational commitment than older cohorts [26], yet simultaneously exhibit greater openness to job changes. The data confirm that employees with favorable attitudes toward pay policies and higher job satisfaction are less likely to consider quitting [27]. This underscores the practical value of our findings. While perceptions of pay fairness varied among respondents, most recognized the importance of understanding procedures and having transparent access to pay-related information.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study both confirms existing knowledge in the field and highlights the need for further research into organizational fairness. Since fairness is subjective and shaped by individual opinions, it is worthwhile to explore broader topics such as employee relations and organizational climate. A promising direction for future research would be a comparative analysis accounting for cultural differences and varying development levels across countries.

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