

**THE ROLE OF
NONINSTRUMENTAL JUSTICE AND AGE
IN PREDICTING ORGANIZATIONAL
COMMITMENT
Evidence from Malaysia**

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The purpose of this paper is to determine the influence of the noninstrumental component of procedural justice on organizational commitment and whether this relationship is moderated by age. Regression analysis on a sample of 161 employees revealed that noninstrumental procedural justice had a significant effect on organizational commitment. The hypothesis concerning the role of age as a moderator was not supported. Implications for managerial practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: age; “group-value” model; Malaysia; moderator; noninstrumental justice; organizational commitment

Introduction

In today's competitive business climate, the ability to provide distinctive products and services has become the key proposition for an organization. Service organizations, in particular, can outperform their competitors by providing high quality services to their customers. To do so, many service businesses, which are labor-intensive in nature (Bowen et al. 1999), require capable, dedicated, and loyal employees, who are willing to make value-added contributions for the benefit of the firm. Furthermore, it has been suggested that since committed employees are believed to devote more of their time, energy, and talents to the organization, they are more likely to be better service-oriented performers (Pitt et al. 1995). Hence, understanding the determinants of employees' commitment to their organizations is important. Although there have been several studies on organizational commitment within the Malaysian context (for instance, Ismail 1990; Choo 1994; Mat-Zin 1996; Lian 1998; Guang 1998; Abd. Wahab 2001; Munthe 2001), none have focused on the role of noninstrumental procedural justice as its predictor. Additionally, age has not been examined as a moderator in the relationship between the predictor variables and commitment. Therefore, the two objectives of this study are: *first*, to examine the effect of noninstrumental procedural justice on organizational commitment, and *second*, to explore the

possible role of age in moderating the relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and commitment.

Review of Literature

Noninstrumental Procedural Justice and Organizational Commitment

Procedural justice refers to a person's evaluation about the fairness of the process of making outcome allocation decisions (Greenberg 1990). Specifically, procedural justice reflects the extent to which an individual perceives that outcome allocation decisions have been fairly made according to the organization's formal procedures and from the treatment given by the authorities in enacting those procedures (Moorman 1991). Lind and Tyler (1988) suggested that there are two distinct sets of concerns associated with procedural justice. *The first concern* is known as the instrumental component, which reflects the types of formal procedures used to make outcome allocation decisions. These procedures not only offer employees control over the outcomes they will receive but help ensure that the outcomes obtained are fair. Hence, in an organization, the use of fair decision-making procedures will reassure its members that their interests will be protected and advanced as long as they maintain their membership status. Over time, members are likely to feel proud of their institution, which in turn, may motivate them to adopt a

favorable attitude toward the organization that is responsible in mandating these procedures. *The second concern* is called the noninstrumental (relational) component, which relates to the interpersonal treatment given by organizational authorities. The “group-value” model developed by Lind and Tyler (1988) is associated with this particular aspect of procedural justice. According to the “group-value” model (Lind and Tyler 1988), fair treatment received from decision-makers implies that the individual is a respected, valued, and worthy member of the institution. These feelings of respect, worth, and favorable social standing experienced by organizational members may stimulate them to adopt a positive attitude toward the institution (Tyler 1989).

Explanations by earlier researchers seem to suggest that the noninstrumental component of procedural justice plays a major role in affecting employee attitudes. For instance, Konovsky and Pugh (1994) noted that treating employees fairly would affect their higher-level motives such as commitment to the organization because fair treatment indicates that the authority within the organization respect the rights and dignity of each employee. Given that employees are inclined to take the actions by agents of the organization as actions of the organization itself (Levinson 1965), employees that see themselves as having received fair treatment may reciprocate (Gouldner 1960) within the context of social

exchange (Blau 1964) by being more committed to the organization. Similarly Brewer and Kramer (1986) argued that fair treatment (non-instrumental procedural justice) by organizational authorities should lead employees to feel respected. In turn, they are more likely to be loyal to the organization and more willing to identify with, and internalize the values of the organization. Using Lind and Tyler’s (1988) “group-value” model of procedural justice, Tyler et al. (1996) argued that members who have been treated fairly by organizational authorities will feel respected, more proud of their membership, and experience higher self-esteem. As such, they are likely to be more committed to remain with the organization.

Prior studies on the relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment have looked at the combined effects of instrumental and noninstrumental components of procedural justice on commitment (for example, Folger and Konovsky 1989; McFarlin and Sweeney 1992; Sweeney and McFarlin 1993; Martin and Bennett 1996). These studies, however, have failed to differentiate the effects of the two components of procedural justice except for that carried out by Robbins et al. (2000). The findings from Robbins et al.’s (2002) investigation indicate that the noninstrumental component was able to explain a larger proportion of the variance in organizational commitment compared to the instrumental component. Furthermore, this posi-

tive noninstrumental procedural justice-commitment linkage is deemed highly plausible within the Malaysian setting based on the argument put forth by Lind et al. (1997). According to Lind et al. (1997), the relational aspect of procedural justice is important to people residing in cultures that have been ranked high on Hofstede's (1980) power distance dimension. Lind et al. (1997) argued that in such societies, people tend to worry more whether others (such as superiors) are benevolently disposed toward them. At the workplace, polite and kind treatment accorded by superiors toward their subordinates will have a positive influence on the work attitudes and behaviors of the latter. Given that respect for one's dignity, synonymous with the act of "preserving face" (Abdullah 1996), is a highly regarded value within the Malaysian culture (Sendut 1991; Abdullah 1992), it seems highly probable that perceptions of fair treatment by organizational authorities (noninstrumental procedural justice) will have a positive impact on employees' commitment to their organization.

Age as a Moderator between Noninstrumental Procedural Justice and Organizational Commitment

Age has been shown to be a predictor of organizational commitment for a number of reasons. *First*, as workers grow older, alternative employment options generally decrease, making their current jobs more attrac-

tive (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). *Second*, older employees may be more committed to their organization because they have a stronger investment in the organization and experience a longer history with the organization compared to the younger ones (Dunham et al. 1994). However, rather than expecting a main independent effect for age, it may be more reasonable to view age as a moderator in the relationship between the noninstrumental component of procedural justice and organizational commitment.

In order to explain why the effect of noninstrumental procedural justice on organizational commitment will be stronger among older workers than younger workers, one may need to observe how older and younger workers differ in their interpersonal orientations. According to Kegan (1958), older adults tend to operate more in terms of internal standards of meeting mutual and moral obligations and less likely to be concerned with instrumental issues compared to young adults. As people grow older, their competence in interacting with the environment and feelings of responsibility are likely to increase (Staub 1970). In organizational settings, older workers have higher needs for affiliation and lower needs for achievement (Doering et al. 1983). This behavioral pattern is consistent with the suggestion made by Maslow (1970) that middle age is devoted to the fulfillment of social needs. Past scholars (for instance, Stevens-Long 1979; Schulz and Ewen

1993) added that close friendship is highly valued by older adults because of its ability to provide the necessary psychological and emotional support for the latter to cope with various adverse life events. According to Balfour and Weschsler (1996), older employees who have been with the organization for a long time are likely to view the organization as a source of social satisfaction due to the strong social ties that have been established with other members. Respectful treatment provides evidence that the organization's authorities value subordinates and regard them as having high social standing (Tyler 1989). When older employees believe themselves to be accepted and valued members of the organization, they are more inclined to identify themselves with that institution, which in turn, lead to higher commitment. Hence, it can be posited that noninstrumental procedural justice may be stronger in influencing organizational commitment among older employees than younger ones.

Younger workers, on the other hand, are more inclined to place emphasis on instrumental concerns as opposed to older ones. This suggestion is in tandem with Maslow's (1970) argument that young adulthood is consumed by the need for economic security. Hall and Nougaim (1968) contended that the primary concern among young employees in the early stage of their career life is getting established with and accepted by the organization. Anxiety over their ability to live

up to job expectations is likely to prompt young recruits to attach themselves to significant others who can furnish them with guidance (Schacter 1959). Once their needs for guidance and security have been gratified, commitment among younger personnel is likely to increase (Etzioni 1961). Given that the social relationships at the workplace among younger employees may have an underlying instrumental motive, it can be conjectured that fair interpersonal treatment by managers may have a lesser impact on their commitment to the organization.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Conceptualization of Variables

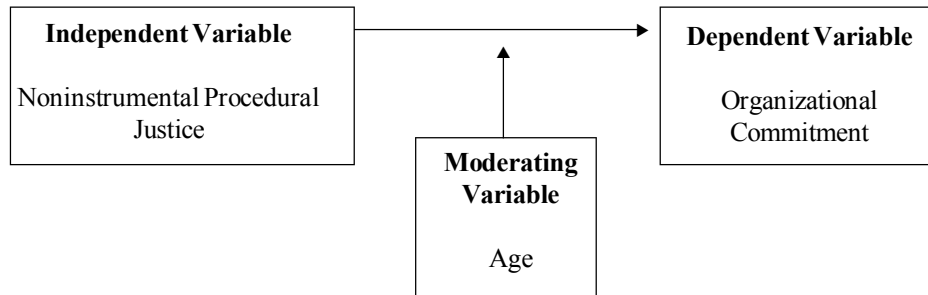
Based on the discussion made in the literature review section, the criterion variable for this study is organizational commitment. The predictor variable is noninstrumental procedural justice whilst age acts as a moderator. The relationships between the study variables are depicted in Figure 1.

From the model portrayed in Figure 1, two main hypotheses were postulated as follows:

H1: Noninstrumental procedural justice will be positively related to organizational commitment.

H2: The positive relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and organizational commitment will be stronger for older employees than younger employees.

Figure 1. Research Framework



Methodology

Subjects

Participants in the study consisted of nonsupervisory hotel employees working in the state of Penang, Malaysia. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed with the help of hotel officials. Respondents were given two weeks to answer the questionnaires. At the end of the stated period, 161 responses were obtained representing a response rate of about 64.4 percent. The sample consisted of 92 males (57.1%) and 69 (42.9%) females. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the sample were married. In terms of ethnicity, the sample consisted of Malays (59.6%), Indians (23.3%), and Chinese (17.4%). Almost all (96.3%) of the sample had MCE and below as their entry qualification. The mean age, organizational tenure, and job tenure for the sample were 32.74 years, 7.51 years, and 5.67 years respectively.

Measurement

The predictor variable consisted of the noninstrumental component of

procedural justice. An index was developed using 6 items adopted from Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Responses to the items were made on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree). All items were summed and divided by 6 to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's judgment about noninstrumental procedural justice. Higher mean scores were indicative of greater perceptions of this relational component of procedural justice. The criterion variable in this study is organizational commitment as measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al. 1979). Responses to the items were made on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Several items were negatively phrased and had to be reverse-coded. Results were subsequently summed and divided by 15 to arrive at a summary indicator of an employee's commitment to the organization. Higher mean scores were indicative of greater commitment. Age is the moderating variable. Although data for age is continuous in nature, this variable had to be further regrouped in the statistical

analysis into two categories (old and young employees). Younger workers are those whose age is less than 35 years whereas older ones are those whose age is 35 years or more. This categorization is consistent with earlier studies on life career stage models (such as Hall 1976; Wagner and Rush 2000).

Method of Analyzes

The two hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression (Cohen and Cohen 1975). Following previous researchers (Hrebiniak and Alutto 1972; Angle and Perry 1983; Mathieu and Zajac 1990; Steinhaus and Perry 1996; Balfour and Weschler 1996; Sweeney and McFarlin 1997), six personal variables (gender, marital status, race, educational level, job tenure, and organizational tenure) were statistically controlled to reduce the possibility of spurious relationships based on unmeasured variables. Since gender, marital status, race, educational level were categorical in nature, these variables were initially dummy-coded. In testing the *first hypothesis*, control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the main effects of noninstrumental procedural justice and age (as an independent variable) in the second step. The significance of the R^2 change was assessed using the F test and the betas were interpreted based on the significance of the t -values. To test the *second hypothesis*, an additional step was undertaken where the interaction term

(noninstrumental procedural justice \times age) was loaded into the equation. Age is said to moderate the relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and organizational commitment if the interaction term was found to be significant.

Results

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations of the study variables. As seen from Table 1, the coefficients of Pearson's correlations were wide-ranging (-0.005 to 0.818) across all variables for the sample involved. These coefficients indicate that significant associations exist between certain demographic factors (namely marital status, age, job tenure, and organizational tenure) and organizational commitment. Noninstrumental procedural justice was positively and significantly correlated with commitment. The reliability coefficients α for the noninstrumental procedural justice and organizational commitment instruments were 0.80 and 0.89 respectively, which exceeded Nunally's (1978) minimum level of 0.70.

The means and standard deviations of the study variables are depicted in Table 2. From Table 2, it can be observed that the mean value for noninstrumental procedural justice was 5.08 with a standard deviation of 0.88. The mean score for organizational commitment was 5.39 with a standard deviation of 0.66.

Table 3 portrays the results of the

Table 1. Intercorrelations of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender											
2. M/Status	.030										
3. Race 1	-.022	.226 **									
4. Race 2	-.066	-.236 **	-.558 **								
5. Qual.1	.068	.238 **	.043	-.101							
6. Qual.2	-.007	-.217 **	-.029	.037	-.928 **						
7. Age	.170 *	.605 **	.125	-.105	.439 **	-.399 **					
8. Job Tenure	-.005	.346 **	.051	.014	.166 *	-.149	.538 **				
9. Org. Tenure	.090	.409 **	.086	.050	.209 **	-.186 *	.622 **	.818 **			
10. Noninstru.P.J.	.064	-.098	.019	.076	-.052	.045	-.115	-.008	.051	(0.80)	
11. Organizational Commitment	.112	.183 *	.060	.074	.047	-.001	.268 **	.290 **	.387 **	.397 **	(0.89)

Figure in parentheses represents the reliability coefficients.
 **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Noninstrumental Procedural Justice	5.08	0.88
Organizational Commitment	5.39	0.66

Table 3. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Variables	Organizational Commitment			
	Beta	R ²	Change in R ²	F change
Step 1				
Control Variables		0.182	0.182	4.22 **
Gender	0.029			
Organizational Tenure	0.281 *			
Job Tenure	-0.035			
Marital Status	0.034			
Race 1	0.059			
Race 2	0.096			
Qualification 1	0.203			
Qualification 2	0.314			
Step 2				
Main Variables		0.354	0.172	19.96 **
Noninstrumental Procedural Justice	0.614 **			
Age (young=0,old=1)	1.218 **			
Step 3				
Interaction		0.380	0.026	6.34 *
Age X Noninstrumental Procedural Justice	-0.995 *			

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05 (two-tailed)

three-step hierarchical regression analysis with commitment as the dependent variable. As shown in Table 3, the personal variables was able to explain 18.2 percent ($R^2 = 0.182$) of the variance in organizational commitment. All the control variables did not have any influence on organizational commitment except for organizational tenure ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.05$). On adding the main effects of noninstrumental procedural justice and age, the change in R^2 increased to 0.354. The change in R^2 was found to be significant indicating that both noninstrumental procedural justice and age (as an independent variable) contributed uniquely to the variance in organizational commitment. The value of the beta coefficient for the noninstrumental component ($\beta = 0.614$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that this variable had a significant and positive effect on commitment. This result provided support for the first hypothesis.

When the interaction term was entered, the R^2 value rose to 0.380. The change in R^2 (0.026) was significant suggesting that the inclusion of the interaction term did explain an additional 2.6 percent of the variance in organizational commitment. The beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.995$, $p < 0.05$) was found to be significant. Hence, age did moderate the relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and commitment. Surprisingly, based on the age coding stated earlier, the pattern of this interaction indicated that the relationship between noninstrumental procedural

justice and commitment was stronger among younger employees as opposed to older ones. This finding did not support the second hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results obtained in this study showed that noninstrumental procedural justice is an important determinant of employees' commitment in Malaysia. This result is consistent with those discovered by Robbins et al. (2000). Fair treatment by organizational authorities indicates that the employing organization respect the rights and dignity of its employees. Since relationships are highly personalized in Malaysia, and the preservation of "face" or dignity is regarded as one of the most central cultural value (Sendut 1991), fair treatment by superiors would induce employees to reciprocate by being more committed to the organization. This is in tandem with the "group-value" interpretation of procedural justice (Lind and Tyler 1988), social exchange (Blau 1964), and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960).

The findings obtained, however, demonstrated that the relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and organizational commitment was found to be stronger among younger employees instead of the older ones. This lack of support for a stronger relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and commitment for older workers may be related to the sample. *First*, the pro-

portion of older employees in this sample was much smaller (41.0%) than younger employees (59.0%). Therefore, the strength of the relationship between noninstrumental procedural justice and commitment among older employees may have been attenuated. *Second*, older workers sampled in this research are those who have been in the organization for a long period of time. Thus, it is highly likely that their commitment to the organization may be attributed to their strong investment in the organization (Mathieu and Zajac 1990). Hence, the effect of fair interpersonal treatment by organizational authorities on the commitment of older employees may no longer be salient. From the practical viewpoint, managers responsible in supervising employees particularly the younger ones need to focus their attention on the relational aspect of procedural justice. To promote younger employees' commitment to the organization, managers must treat them with politeness, respect, kindness, and consideration. To do so, managers need to be trained in the use of interpersonal or "human" skills.

The results of the present study are tempered with certain limitations. *First*, the use of cross-sectional data in the present study limits inferences with regards to causality between components of procedural justice and organizational commitment. The use of a longitudinal approach would improve the ability to make causal statements. *Second*, given that social exchange (Blau 1964) is one of the motivational bases for organizational commitment, reciprocal causation should be acknowledged. It is possible that the level of organizational commitment experienced by employees could affect their judgments about fair procedures (instrumental procedural justice), fair treatment (noninstrumental procedural justice), or both, instead of the other way around. Future research may need to focus on the causal direction of the link between these variables. *Third*, there may a number of individual, occupational, organizational, and cultural elements that are likely to affect workers' concerns with procedural justice. Future researchers interested in this area should try to

explore these factors.

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