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Relationship Between Distributive Justice and Employees' Affective Commitment: The Moderating Effects of LMX

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Abstract

The current study explores the effect of LMX and DJ on employees' affective commitment. Significant research has been conducted on the relationship between distributive justice and workplace outcomes. However, limited research has delved into potential moderators of this relationship, specifically in the context of the telecom sector of Pakistan. This study fills this gap by investigating how LMX might influence the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment as a moderator. Two hundred fifty employed individuals from the telecom sector of Sahiwal, Pakistan, participated in this survey. Data was analyzed using SPSS-24. The results from the analysis supported the study's hypotheses. The results regarding the direct relationship between DJ and AC are in line with existing literature. Additionally, LMX significantly moderated the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Based on these findings, theoretical and practical implications are proposed. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Organizational Justice Perceptions; Distributive Justice; Affective Commitment; Leader-Member Exchange; LMX; Telecom Sector

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The current study explores the effect of LMX and DJ on employees' affective commitment. Significant research has been conducted on the relationship between distributive justice and workplace outcomes. However, limited research has delved into potential moderators of this relationship, specifically in the context of the telecom sector of Pakistan. This study fills this gap by investigating how LMX might influence the relationship between distributive justice and affective commitment as a moderator. Two hundred fifty employed individuals from the telecom sector of Sahiwal, Pakistan, participated in this survey. Data was analyzed using SPSS-24. The results from the analysis supported the study's hypotheses. The results regarding the direct relationship between DJ and AC are in line with existing literature. Additionally, LMX significantly moderated the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Based on these findings, theoretical and practical implications are proposed. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

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Introduction

In the present day, the significance of justice in organizations has amplified, especially due to the persistent role of multilateral organizations in our daily lives (Sareshkeh et al., 2012). One crucial component of this organizational justice is distributive justice (DJ), which pertains to employees' perceived fairness of outcomes like benefits or punishments. Essentially, it revolves around their judgments regarding the finality of the distribution process (Greenberg, 1990). Employee perceptions of

fair treatment, often termed organizational justice perceptions, are anticipated to mold their attitude toward their jobs and workplace (Choi, 2010). Such perceptions significantly influence behaviors and attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). In the face of these challenges, especially in the dynamic Telecom sector of Pakistan, understanding and implementing distributive justice is important to retain skilled employees and maintain their commitment (Suifan, 2019).



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Organizations with diverse beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors work cohesively towards mutual goals. Employees' perceptions of fair treatment play a pivotal role in how they engage with their organization (Wayne et al., 2002). One significant dimension of these perceptions is distributive justice, which deals with the fairness of outcomes, such as employee benefits or punishments (Greenberg, 1990). Such perceptions directly shape employees' affective commitment and their emotional bond to the organization.

This affective commitment becomes crucial for retention in competitive markets like the Telecom sector. As employees continuously evaluate their professional landscape, their allegiance to their organization often hinges on their perception of fair distribution of outcomes. The relationship between supervisors and subordinates, characterized by the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, further underlines the importance of distributive justice in fostering commitment (Liden et al., 1997). When the distribution of resources in these relationships is perceived as fair, it fosters a stronger organizational bond, driving overall success.

In the contemporary organizational landscape, the importance of fairness perceptions, rooted in distributive justice, cannot be overstated. Specifically, in the dynamic Telecom sector of Pakistan, where competition is strong and employee retention is a consistent challenge, understanding and addressing organizational justice becomes crucial. While numerous studies have explored the direct relationship between justice perceptions and affective commitment, the moderating role of LMX in this relationship remains underexplored, especially in Pakistan's Telecom sector. The existing literature highlights the need to investigate how different dimensions of fairness perceptions influence employees' affective commitment, where LMX might moderate this relationship. Addressing this will provide valuable insights for organizational leaders, helping them foster a more committed, satisfied, and stable workforce.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions:

1. Is there any association between distributive justice, the affective commitment of employees towards the organization, and LMX?
2. Does LMX influence the AC of employees toward the organization?
3. Does LMX moderate the relationship between DJ and AC of employees towards the organization?

Research Objectives

Research objectives are given below:

1. To explore the correlation among DJ, LMX, and employees AC towards the organization.
2. To explore the influence of DJ on the AC of employees towards the organization.
3. To explore the moderating influence of LMX on the relationship between DJ and AC of employees towards the organization.

Literature Review

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice has been a focal point of research, especially within the realm of psychology for many years (Moorman, 1991). Defined as an overall perception of what is fair in the workplace, it encompasses employees' perceptions of fairness within an organization (S. P. Robbins & T. A. Judge, 2013). These perceptions significantly influence an employee's attitude, commitment, and behavior (Box, 1999). Employees who perceive fair treatment often display higher job performance, reduced turnover intentions, and increased commitment to the organization (Harris et al., 2018). Historically, the concept of organizational justice was centered on distributive justice, as highlighted by Adams's (1965) "Equity Theory." This perspective focused on the perceived fairness of outcomes. A comprehensive meta-analysis by Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) recognized three core dimensions of organizational justice: distributive, procedural, and interactional.

Distributive Justice

"The perceived fairness of the amount and allocation of rewards among individuals is distributive justice" (S. P. Robbins & T. Judge, 2013, p. 223). DJ was recognized as the only dimension of organizational justice before 1975. Organizational justice is closely linked with the employees' attitudes and behaviors, such as the appraisal of authority, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and trust (H. R. Arab & T. J. M. D. Atan, 2018). Many authors (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989; Greenberg, 1990) have explained the importance and consequences of DJ in the research of OJ. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) examined the cost of organizational injustice as job dissatisfaction and any violation of DJ may have harmful consequences. So, decisions taking place in an organization significantly impact the employees' socio-emotional and economic lives (Colquitt, 2001). Many organizational behavior studies have used Distributive justice as an independent variable (Primawidi & Mangundjaya, 2020; Suifan, 2019). The main outcomes of distributive justice are

JS, OCB, job performance & organizational commitment (Greenberg, 1990). Moreover, DJ is the antecedent of trust (Folger & Konovsky, 1989).

Affective Commitment

Organizational justice, particularly distributive justice (DJ), is integral to understanding employees' commitment. OC is the emotional tie employees have with their organization, and there are two dimensions: affective commitment (AC) and continuance commitment (CC). AC focuses on employees' emotional attachment and involvement with the organization, while CC revolves around the costs of leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment emerges from positive work experiences, including job satisfaction and organizational justice perceptions. It is associated with outcomes like reduced absenteeism and increased organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Loi et al., 2006). Affective commitment signifies an employee's aspiration to achieve organizational goals, driven by their emotional bond with the organization (Fatt et al., 2010).

Organizational justice perceptions, especially DJ, have a pronounced relationship with AC (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). Past research suggests that a high level of AC in employees tends to perform OCB and pursue organizational goals (Moorman & Byrne, 2013). The relationship between DJ and AC has been explored significantly (Ohana & Meyer, 2016). DJ and AC's relationship is often seen through reciprocity and social exchange (Till & Karren, 2011). Fair treatment by the organization often triggers an exchange relationship, where employees offer loyalty and commitment in return for just rewards and recognition (Rehman et al., 2021).

We can propose the following:

H1: There is an association between DJ, AC, and LMX

H2: DJ impacts AC positively

LMX as a Moderator

According to Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe (2003), employees' emotional attachments, or AC, to their leaders are connected to the perception of support from these leaders. This affective commitment arises

from satisfying intrinsic job conditions. AC amplifies employees' feelings of respect and care towards their leaders, reciprocated with feeling valued. While leaders can influence intrinsic job conditions, extrinsic conditions typically fall under the purview of HR departments. Nevertheless, leaders can still shape the organizational environment to promote motivation and affective commitment (Long et al., 2016).

According to the social exchange perspective, organizations maintain relationships when they provide value to employees (Blau, 1968). Many studies indicate a positive relationship between justice perceptions and AC (Ohana & Meyer, 2016). Fairness perceptions the organization provides lead to higher levels of affective commitment (Cooper, 2020). LMX delves into the quality of relationships between leaders and subordinates, reflecting the social exchange dynamic (Uhl-Bien, 2006). A high-quality LMX, involving a richer exchange of resources, often results in employees perceiving decisions as fair and, thus, increases their affective commitment. On the contrary, a low-quality LMX might not offer the same benefits (Liden et al., 1997).

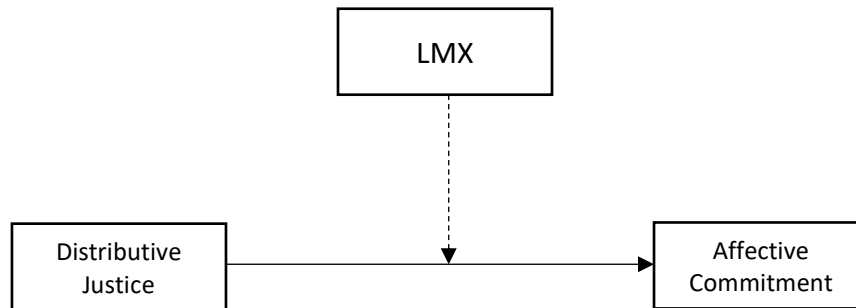
Organizational decisions significantly impact employees' socio-emotional and economic lives (Colquitt, 2001). Positive perceptions of these decisions, stemming from a sense of fairness, can foster OC and job satisfaction. When employees perceive fair treatment, their commitment, job satisfaction, and trust in the organization increase (Arab & Atan, 2018). LMX plays a crucial role in this dynamic as it deals with the mutual exchange of resources, and the quality of this exchange can influence the degree of commitment and satisfaction employees feel.

The link between OJ perceptions and AC has been researched extensively. Distributive justice (DJ), has shown significant associations with affective commitment (Moorman & Byrne, 2013). Moreover, high-quality LMX relationships involve substantial exchange of resources, leading to enhanced job satisfaction and commitment (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Given this, LMX can be considered a potential moderator between DJ and employee AC.

H3: LMX moderates the relationship between DJ and AC

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Research Methodology and Design

This research was particularly motivated by the scarce data available on the relationship between DJ and AC within the Telecom sector of Pakistan. Furthermore, the study attempted to determine the impact of these variables, especially in the presence of LMX as a moderating factor. The research type is quantitative, with data being sourced through a questionnaire. The cross-sectional approach of this research focuses on a specific period for data collection. This methodology helps understand the link between DJ, AC, and LMX within the defined time.

The target population comprises employees from the Telecom sector of Pakistan. These include PTCL, Zong, Warid, Mobilink, Jazz, Telenor, and Ufone franchises and their respective regional offices in Sahiwal. For data collection, a convenient sampling technique was adopted. Initially, 350 questionnaires were distributed among potential respondents. Of these, 291 were returned, and after a screening process, 250 were found fit for further analysis, giving an effective response rate of 71%.

DJ was measured using a 4-item scale developed by Colquitt (2001) and included items like "Does your outcome reflect the efforts you have put into your work?" There were 8-items used for measuring affective commitment consisting of reverse-scored items revalidated by Allen and Meyer (1996), including statements like "I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization." There were 15 items in the scale used to measure LMX from Linden and

Maslyn (1998), and the items included "I am impressed with my leader/supervisor's knowledge of his/her job."

Results

Out of the 350 questionnaires distributed to Telecom sector employees, 291 were returned. After screening the data, 250 were used for the study, leading to a 71% response rate. The data was analyzed via SPSS. The study considered demographics such as gender, age, qualification, job type, organization type, experience, and tenure. Males constituted 86.80% of the sample, while females comprised 13.20%. Most participants were in the age groups of 20-25 (38.40%), 31-35 (26.40%), and 26-30 (22.40%). Fewer participants were aged 36-40 (8.85%), 41-45 (2.40%), with only 1.20% above 45 years. Regarding education, graduates comprised 49.20%, followed by master's degree holders at 44.40%. A smaller percentage had an M.Phil (4.80%), and only 1.60% had Ph.D. degrees. Regarding job nature, 81.20% were permanent employees, with the remaining 18.80% on contract. For experience, the majority (74%) had 1-5 years, 18.80% had 6-10 years, 3.60% had 11-15 years, 2% had 16-20 years, and 1.60% had over 21 years. Similarly, for job tenure, 78.80% had worked 1-5 years, 17.20% had 6-10 years, 3.20% had 11-15 years, and smaller percentages had 16-20 years (0.40%) and 21-25 years (0.40%). Detailed statistics for each demographic are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	217	86.80%
	Female	33	13.20%
Age Group	20-25 years	96	38.40%
	26-30 years	57	22.80%
	31-35 years	66	26.40%
	36-40 years	22	8.85%

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification	41-45 years	6	2.40%
	Above 45 years	3	1.20%
	Graduation	123	49.20%
	Masters	111	44.40%
Nature of Job	M.phil.	12	4.80%
	Ph.D.	4	1.60%
	Permanent	203	81.20%
Experience	Contract	44	17.60%
	Internee	3	1.20%
	1-5 years	185	74%
	6-10 years	47	18.80%
	11-15 years	9	3.60%
Job Tenure	16-20 years	5	2%
	21 & above years	4	1.60%
	1-5 years	197	78.80%
	6-10 years	43	17.20%
	11-15 years	8	3.20%
	16-20 years	1	0.40%
	21-25 years	1	0.40%

N=250

Descriptive Statistics of current data are calculated by using SPSS version 24. The most commonly used correlation coefficient measures the linear association between two normally distributed variables (Schober et al., 2018). It ranges from -1 to +1; whereas 0

correlation score means no association between the variables. The correlation analysis calculates the association between the current study variables. Table 2 displays the results of the correlation analysis.

Table 2

Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
DJ	3.59	1.17	1				
AC	3.44	1.08	.260**	.221**	.203**	1	
LMX	3.33	1.19	.550**	.439**	.426**	.381**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As perhypothesis3, LMX moderates the relationship between DJ and AC. The results reveal that LMX interacted significantly with DJ ($\beta = .226, p < .001$) to predict AC. 4% variance in AC ($\Delta R^2 = .041, F = 19.167, p < .001$) is explained by the combined effect of DJ and

LMX that supports the third hypothesis. All the findings are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2. DJ has a strong positive relationship with the AC of employees when the level of LMX is high. The relationship between DJ and AC is weak when the level of LMX is low.

Table 3

*Moderating Effect of DJ*LMX on AC*

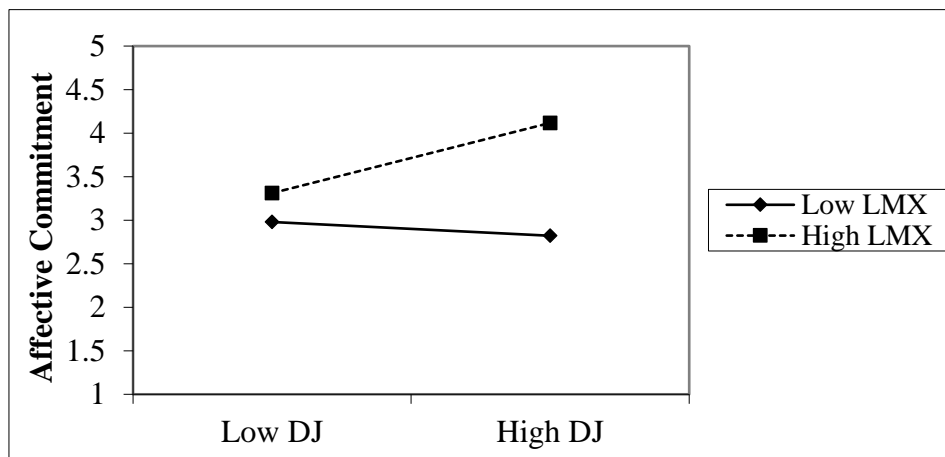
Predictors	β	R ²	ΔR^2	Sig
(Constant)				
Step 1				
DJ	.072			
LMX	.341	.149	.149	.000
Step 2				
DJ*LMX	.226***	.189	.040	.000

Notes: N=250, † P < .1, * P < .05, ** P < .01, *** P < .001

DJ = Distributive Justice, LMX = Leader-Member Exchange

Figure 2

Interaction Plot for Moderation (DJ*LMX on AC)



Discussion

Existing literature has explored the study variables individually, with a gap noted in the research concerning the moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between dimensions of OJ perception of DJ and AC. The current study bridges this gap by using LMX as a composite variable and collecting data from the telecom sector in Sahiwal, Punjab, Pakistan. Findings confirmed a significant positive association among all study variables, with significantly related to AC. This aligns with prior research suggesting that perceptions of fairness positively correlate with AC (Andrews et al., 2008; Piccolo et al., 2008). Moreover, LMX was positively related to AC, confirming findings from Leow and Khong (2009).

The study concluded that DJ significantly predicts AC, with employees perceiving fair rewards demonstrating higher affective commitment consistent with previous research (Rashid et al., 2018). The study establishes the moderation of LMX, indicating that the relationship between DJ & AC is stronger when LMX levels are high. The current research has contributed to understanding the relationship between DJ, LMX, and AC in the context of the telecom sector in Sahiwal and shed light on areas for further exploration in future studies.

Implications of the Study

The study focuses on the vital role of DJ in shaping an employee's affective commitment, especially within the telecom sector. It emphasizes that to foster loyalty and maximize performance among employees, organizations need to prioritize a culture deeply rooted in fairness. Furthermore, the significance of the LMX in this research underscores the value of encouraging strong supervisor-subordinate

relationships. Such relationships enhance team unity and drive overall productivity within an organization. While increasing salaries might seem like an immediate solution to retention challenges, the study suggests that a more sustainable approach might be integrating strategies emphasizing fair practices. Reinforcing strong bonds between supervisors and subordinates can have lasting results in employee commitment. Regular feedback mechanisms can be beneficial here, keeping managers aware of employees' perceptions and enabling more informed, effective decision-making. By promoting a positive, fair work environment, companies can enhance employee dedication and improve overall growth and performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

Like all empirical research, this study comes with its own set of limitations. Recognizing and addressing these limitations provides transparency and guides future research endeavors. The following are the limitations of the study:

1. The study used a cross-sectional design, but future studies should use a longitudinal design.
2. The research utilized quantitative techniques, but qualitative or mixed-method approaches in future studies could provide more understanding.
3. The data was collected only from the telecom sector in Sahiwal, Pakistan, limiting the wider applicability of the findings. Different results might be obtained from larger samples.
4. The research was focused on affective commitment as the primary outcome of DJ. Considering other outcomes concerning LMX could provide a broader understanding in future research.

Conclusion

This research aimed to understand the effects of fairness perceptions, particularly DJ and LMX, on AC in the telecom sector of Sahiwal, Pakistan. The findings confirmed that DJ and LMX significantly boost employees' affective commitment. LMX was used as a moderator in the relationship between DJ and AC. In the dynamic telecom sector context, retaining employees is crucial for organizational success, and the present study offers valuable insights

in this regard. The study underlines the potential of DJ perception, especially when combined with LMX, to enhance affective commitment and employee performance (Leow & Khong, 2009). The research emphasizes the relationship between DJ and AC, emphasizing the moderation of LMX and offering valuable insights for future research and practical applications in organizational behavior.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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