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Organizational justice and trust in managers as factors of organizational commitment

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Abstract: Organizational commitment, or the psychological bond between the employee and the organization, has been highlighted by past research as very important for many organizational processes. The present study examines two potential factors of organizational commitment, namely organizational justice and trust in managers, and test the hypothesis that the two facets of organizational justice (i.e. procedural and distributive) influence the three dimensions of organizational commitment (i.e. affective, normative and continuance) through their effect on employees' trust in managers. A sample of 223 employees in various companies in Iasi, Romania participated in the research. Results provide partial support to our hypothesis, indicating the expected effect of organizational justice on organizational commitment, mediated by trust in managers, only in the case of two out of the three dimensions of commitment. Specifically, continuance commitment emerged as unrelated to the two factors hypothesized. Moreover, results also highlighted two direct effects of distributive and procedural justice, respectively, on the two dimensions of organizational commitment (i.e. affective and normative). Overall, these findings further highlight the importance of employees' perceptions of fairness of managerial decisions, as well as that of the relationships between management and employees, for the degree of commitment that the latter develop in relation to their organization.

Keywords: Organizational justice; trust in managers; organizational commitment; mediation; organizational psychology.

Introduction

Organizational commitment reflects employees' psychological involvement in their organization and their identification with the current workplace (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Over the past decades, this concept has attracted a consistent scientific interest from scholars interested in understanding employee relationships with organizations generally, and work dedication and

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stability within companies specifically. As empirical results have revealed, employee organizational commitment is significantly related to important organizational behaviors and attitudes, such as work performance, absenteeism, or turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Hence, an in-depth understanding of the factors that may generate fluctuations of organizational commitment is a valuable endeavor for organizational psychology research. This paper presents a study on a set of consecutive determinants of organizational commitment, namely organizational justice and trust in managers, conducted in a sample of Romanian employees.

The concept of organizational commitment is not uniformly conceptualized in the scientific literature, although all its definitions share the core idea of the intensity of the bond linking the individual to the organization. One of the most influential models of organizational commitment in terms of the empirical work that it has inspired is the one developed by Meyer and Allen (1991), which describes three facets of this psychological bond, labeled affective, continuance, and normative commitment, respectively. Affective commitment refers to the intensity of the emotional bond that employees feel towards their organization. Employees high in continuance commitment are those who perceive a certain externally-induced pressure to remain with their current organization, either because there are no comparable or better alternatives available, or due to their high investments so far in their current workplace that would be lost should he / she decide to leave. Normative commitment is based on the ethical principle of loyalty, specifically to one's employer, due to individual's feelings of obligation to reciprocate the benefits received so far from their organization by remaining its employee.

Several factors of these facets of organizational commitment have been pinpointed by previous research. For instance, Mathieu & Zajac's (1990) meta-analytical review on this topic highlights several socio-demographic and organizational variables as significantly associated to employee organizational commitment, such as age, marital status, education, position within the company and tenure. An important category of influences on organizational commitment revealed by this meta-analysis pertains to group – leader relations, which includes several distinct dimensions of leaders' behaviors and attitudes towards their subordinates, such as Leader communication, Participatory leadership or Leader consideration. The impact of leadership has been also highlighted by other studies that show, for instance, that the degree to which employees perceive their management as supportive significantly influences their emotional attachment to the organization, which is conceptually related to affective commitment (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Given the importance of leadership for employee commitment to their current organization, another specific dimension that might exert a considerable effect in this respect is employees' trust in their managers, a psychological dimension that could be

considered as a consequence of leaders' behaviors and of the group – leader relations generally.

The concept of trust entails positive expectations concerning the other's future behaviors (Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson, 2005). Employees' trust in their managers, or vertical trust, has been revealed by past studies as being an important factor for organizational processes generally (Krot & Lewicka, 2012), as well as for specific behavioral and attitudinal outputs essential for companies, such as cooperation, work performance or job satisfaction (Rich, 1997). In line with these findings, a previous investigation in the Romanian context found trust in managers to be negatively related to employee intention to quit the company (Urieşi, 2019).

In turn, the degree of trust that individuals develop towards their managers greatly depends on the way the latter decide to allocate available resources and tasks among employees, who are in a vulnerable or dependent position towards their leaders. Managers are expected to make important decisions in terms of work assignments, financial compensations, promotions and the performance evaluations that support these decisions. Hence, any suspicions that employees might have towards these managerial processes and decisions impact their vertical trust (Knoll & Gill, 2011; Wells & Kipnis, 2001). The present paper analyses this issue of employee perceptions of managerial decisions through the concept of organizational justice.

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of the fairness of the decisions made within an organization (Leventhal, 1976), and its two most frequently invoked dimensions are distributive and procedural justice (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987). Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the procedures through which resources are allocated within employees, and distributive justice refers to the results or outputs of these decisions (Greenberg & Folger, 1983).When perceptions on these coordinates are negative, i.e. when one's ratio of efforts to rewards are perceived as negatively balanced compared to other employees and / or the procedures that led to these outputs are seen as biased, employees are motivated to restore justice through negative work behaviors. As such, previous research has shown that negative perceptions of organizational justice lead to turnover intentions (Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid, & Sirola, 1998) and work withdrawal behaviors (Pinder, 2008), and affect negatively affect work motivation (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2003) and performance (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Moreover, Kwon, Kim, Kang, and Kim (2008) found organizational justice to be associated to organizational identification, which further supports the influence of employees' justice perceptions on organizational commitment.

In sum, the past results reviewed above support the idea that organizational justice might affect employee organizational commitment, and

that this negative influence might be mediated by the effect on trust in managers. The present study aims to empirically examine this hypothesis in a sample of Romanian employees.

Method

Participants and procedure

We distributed 255 surveys to employees from 10 companies in the Iasi County, Romania. The surveys were anonymous, and confidentiality was ensured. 223 surveys were returned, and the composition of the final sample was as follows: 99men (44.4%) were men, mean age of35 years. 73 (32.7%) of participants were employed in the banking sector, 73 (32.7%) in the sales sector, 55 (24.7%) in the IT sector, 22 (10%) in private consulting.

Instruments

Trust in managers was measured with the 6-item scale developed by Cook & Wall (1980), which assesses employees' faith in the trustworthy intentions of their managers (e.g. "Our management would be quite prepared to gain advantage by deceiving the workers"), and employee confidence in the ability of their managers (e.g. "Our firm has a poor future unless it can attract better managers"). Responses are made by rating one's agreement with each item on a 7-point response scale with 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 7 = "Strongly Agree". Higher overall scores indicate higher trust in managers.

Procedural justice was assessed with the 2-item scale developed by Tekleab, Bartol, and Liu (2005) that addresses employees' perceptions of the correctness of the procedures used by their company in determining rewards for its employees. The response scale ranges from 1 – "not at all correct" to 6 = "absolutely correct". Higher overall scores indicate adequate procedural justice.

Distributive justice was measured with the 7-item scale developed by Brashear, Brooks, and Boles (2004) that addresses employees' perceptions of the distribution of rewards in their company in relationships to their various organizational contributions or inputs (effort, responsibilities, quality of work output, etc.). Higher overall scores indicate perceptions of adequate distributive justice.

Organizational commitment was measured with the 24-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1980) to address each of the three facets of this concept, namely Affective Commitment (8 items, e.g. "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization"), Continuance Commitment (8 items, e.g. "Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organization now"), and Normative Commitment (8 items, e.g. "One of the major reasons I continue to work in this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain"). The

response scale ranges from 1 – "not at all correct" to 7 = "absolutely correct". Higher overall scores indicate higher organizational commitment.

Results

The mean inter-item correlations of the scales, presented in Table 1, indicate that all the instruments have satisfactory internal consistency. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlations between variables are also presented in Table 1. Most of the three dimensions of organizational commitment emerged as significantly and positively related, with the exception on normative and continuance commitment, as expected from the theoretical model underpinning the instrument. Similarly, the two facets of organizational justice and trust in managers were significantly and positively related among them, and also further related to affective and normative commitment. The third dimension of organizational commitment, i.e. continuance commitment, was found to be significantly associated only to distributive justice.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, internal consistency
and Pearson correlations between variables

	Mean inter-item correlation	Mean (SD)	2	3	4	5	6
1. Procedural justice	.26	3.67 (1.29)	.49**	.44**	.30**	.47**	.09
2. Distributive justice	.29	5.38 (1.17)	1.0	.36**	.31**	.25**	.23**
3. Trust in managers	.40	5.32 (1.23)		1.0	.28**	.43**	.09
4. Affective commitment	.27	5.28 (.70)			1.0	.25**	.14*
5. Normative commitment	.33	5.80 (1.02)				1.0	.02
6. Continuance commitment	.31	3.00 (1.20)					1.0

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

In the second data analysis, we checked the hypothesized pattern of associations between these variables through path analysis, performed through structural equation modelling in Amos v. 18.0. This statistical approach considers simultaneously all the relationships presumed, as well as the hypothesized directional influence between them, thus offering a more comprehensive test of the influences between organizational justice, trust in managers and organizational commitment.

Results revealed the following indexes of model fit: $\chi^2_9 = 58.86$, p $<.001$; CFI = .78, AGFI = .81, GFI = .92; RMSEA = .16 (with a 90% confidence interval .12 – .20). The values of these parameters indicate a poor fit of the model to the data, according to the values defined in the literature and intervals of these fit indexes (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

We analyzed the results in order to identify the changes in the model that could increase its statistical fit, and we found that the effect of trust in managers on continuance commitment is not statistically significant (b=.10; p = .20), and we eliminated this effect from the model to be tested in the next stage. The modification indexes also indicated that there are two supplementary relationships that would significantly increase model fit, namely the direct effect of procedural justice on normative commitment, and the direct effect of distributive justice on affective commitment, besides the effects mediated by trust in managers. We re-analyzed model of this modified structure of associations, and we found the following fit indexes: $\chi^2_3 = 5.53$, p =.14> .05; CFI = .99, AGFI = .95, GFI = .99; RMSEA = .06 (with a 90% confidence interval .00 – .14). They indicate an excellent level of fit of this model to the data. Moreover, all regression weights in the model were significant at the .05 level, and there were no additional modifications that would increase model fit. The final model with the standardized regression weights indicating the strength of the influences between variables is presented in Figure 1.
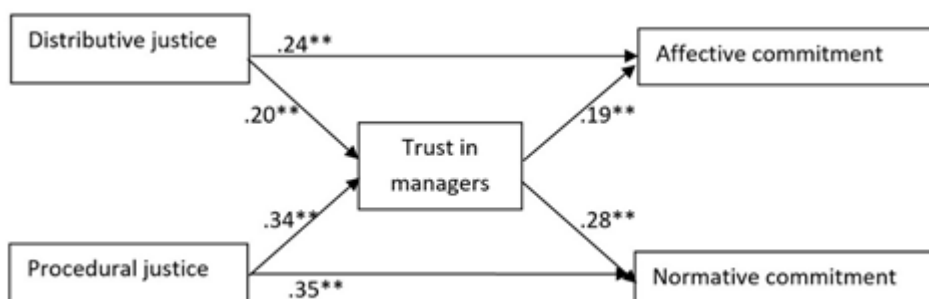
Figure 1. The standardized regression weights of the effects in the final model (Note: ** p<0.001)

Discussion

Due to the accumulating evidence concerning the impact of organizational commitment on organizational processes and outputs, gaining a greater understanding of the factors of this psychological dimension is a research objective of consistent importance. The present study examined whether organizational commitment depends on employee trust in managers and on their perceptions of organizational justice, respectively, and tested the hypothesis of a

mediational model combining these three dimensions. Results supported most of the relationships in this mediational model, indicating that the two facets of organizational justice are indeed associated to trust in managers, and that the latter exerts a significant effect on two out of the three dimensions of organizational commitment, namely affective and normative commitment.

Part of these influences have been anticipated by previous research results. Firstly, the impact of employee trust in managers on affective commitment, emerged in our results, is consistent with the influence of employee perceptions of their managers as supportive on their emotional attachment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Hence, this route of influence of trust in managers on commitment revolves around the quality of the interpersonal relationships that managers are able to develop with their employee, especially in terms of the support that they offer to the latter, their availability and openness. We also found a second route of influence of trust in managers on commitment, specifically that on normative commitment, which suggests that employee's trust in their leaders also induce normative beliefs in terms of loyalty and the tendency to reciprocate managers' positive behaviors through their commitment to the organization.

There are also two direct influences of organizational justice on organizational commitment that were not anticipated in our full mediational model. The first is the direct effect of distributive justice on affective commitment, indicating that employees who perceive the distribution of rewards and tasks among personnel as unfair tend, because of the emotional reactions of frustration to this unequitable state of affairs, to lose their emotional attachment to the organization. The second is the influence of procedural justice on normative commitment, which suggests that the suspicions concerning the procedures and criteria underlying managerial decisions affect employees' ethical beliefs about the degree to which the organization deserves their loyalty. In other words, unfair processes of allocation of rewards and tasks within employees also undermine or even deny, in their perceptions, the reasons for being committed to the organization. Both these direct routes of influence are in line with previous findings concerning the importance of justice, generally, for the degree to which employees identify themselves with their organization (Kwon et al., 2008), and for the employee behaviors that greatly depend on their psychological commitment, such as work effort or turnover (Lum et al., 2008; Colquitt et al., 2001).

Results also support the mediation hypothesis, indicating that the effect of organizational justice on organizational commitment is partly mediated by employee trust in managers. Thus, employees who perceive their managers as making unfair decisions and the distribution of rewards and tasks as unequitable are more prone to develop lower levels of trust in these leaders, which further

affect their affective and normative commitment to the organization as a whole. The distinct position of the third facet of commitment, i.e. continuance commitment, in this set of relationships, specifically the fact that it did not emerge as related to the other variables in the model, highlights its different psychological foundation. As the theoretical model of organizational commitment describes this facet, continuance commitment is mostly dependent on employees' perceptions of the job alternatives that they might have and of the investments that they have made so far in their current organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Hence, this type of commitment is less related to employees' appreciation of the internal organizational processes, including managerial decisions and allocation of rewards, which are paramount for the other two facets of commitment.

Further studies should examine the organizational factors which could be targeted in order to increase also employees' continuance commitment, besides those already revealed as important for their affective and normative commitment to their current organization. Future research should also provide a more extensive examination of the actual ways in which employees' perceptions of injustice, both in terms of distribution and of procedures, undermine their trust in managers. The psychological dimensions that might mediate the effect of organizational justice on commitment, especially on its affective and normative facets, also deserve a more in-depth analysis. Also, the pattern of relationships that emerged in this study should be tested in samples of employees from other work sectors and other cultures.

Among the limitations of this study, its cross-sectional approach should be noted first; as data were collected at a single point in time results are unable to provide any information concerning the fluctuations of organizational commitment as a function of the variations in organizational justice and / or trust in managers, which would offer a more definite test of the causal relationships under scrutiny. Secondly, sample size limitations rendered impossible more in-depth data analyses that would examine the importance of the social and work-related variables, such as age, gender or work sector.

In sum, employee perceptions of both distributive and procedural justice in their companies emerged as having a significant positive impact on their affective and normative commitment, which was partly mediated by trust in managers. This indicates the importance of justice perceptions concerning the procedures and the outcomes of rewards and task allocation within employees for their trust in leadership and consequently for their commitment to the organization.

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