Spillover effects of organizational justice: How perceptions of fair treatment at work influence organisational and community embeddedness, job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

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Abstract

This study tests the proposition that employees’ perceptions of organizational justice influence feelings of job embeddedness using a sample of 160 Malaysian university employees. Additionally, this study also investigate whether or not dimensions of job embeddedness mediate and/or moderate the relationship between perceived organizational justice with turnover intentions and job satisfaction. Contrary to expectations, both organizational and community embeddedness were related to perceptions of organizational justice. Results from the structural equation modeling indicate that organizational and community embeddedness mediates the relationship between organizational justice perceptions and both turnover intentions and job satisfaction. Organizational embeddedness also was found to moderate the relationship between interactional justice and job satisfaction. The implications of these findings for managers and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: Organizational justice, job embeddedness, turnover, employee retention

INTRODUCTION

Most of the current theories and research on voluntary turnover spring from the ideas of March and Simon (1958) on the perceived ease and desirability of leaving one's job (Maertz Jr & Campion, 1998). The perceived ease of movement is reflected by job alternatives, and the perceived desirability of movement is usually taken to mean job satisfaction. The traditional wisdom is that people become dissatisfied with their jobs, search for alternatives, compare those options with their current jobs using an expected-value-like decision process, and leave if any of the alternatives are judged to be better than their current situation (Mobley, 1977). Prior research has shown that employees’ experience in the organization, as reflected in attitudes such as job satisfaction and commitment, does predict voluntary turnover (Cohen, 1993; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellaro, 1984; Lee & Mowday, 1987; Mobley, 1977; Somers, 1996; Tett & Meyer, 1993). However, in terms of the actual magnitude of their impact, work and job-related attitudes have been found to play only a relatively small role in employee retention and leaving (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Consequently, factors other than job satisfaction and organizational commitment are being investigated as more direct antecedents of employee. One such approach is the theory of job embeddedness, developed by Mitchell and
This model identifies three aspects of a person’s relationship to an organisation and the surrounding community (fit, links, sacrifice) that act as more potent and direct influences on a person’s decision to stay in a job. In this study, we aim to test an extension of the job embeddedness model, where perceptions of organizational justice are specified as antecedents of job embeddedness and subsequent turnover intentions. In addition, we seek to explore the differential role of both organizational and community forms of embeddedness as mediators of perceived organizational justice – work behaviour relationships.

**JOB EMBEDDEDNESS**

The job embeddedness model (Mitchell, et. al., 2001) suggests that three factors play a central role in determining attachment and subsequent willingness to remain with an organization, over and above an employee’s feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their job. The critical aspects of job embeddedness are (1) “links,” or the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) “fit,” the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects of their lives, and (3) “sacrifice,” which denotes the ease with which links can be broken (i.e., the things employees would give up if they left the employer, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee et al., 2001).

A key feature of job embeddedness theory is the prediction that the sources of overall embeddedness within a job (links, fit, sacrifice) are within the organizational space (e.g. person-job fit, friendships with co-workers, pay and rewards) and outside, as properties of the physical, social and economic context within which the job is located (e.g. living in a pleasant location, having many family and friends nearby, having a partner who also has a job in the area). Thus, someone may decide to stay in a job because leaving it may mean that they also have to leave the area in which the organization is located and therefore would have to sell their house, move children to different schools, and find alternative work for their partner.

Research into the job embeddedness model has generally found support for its central propositions relating overall job embeddedness to voluntary turnover (Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton & Holtom (2004). However, several important gaps exist in the research literature relating to
this model. First, we know relatively little about the specific antecedents of job embeddedness. While some are implicit in the model itself (e.g. team membership), other direct and indirect influences on job embeddedness have been proposed by researchers. For example, Yao, Lee, Mitchell, Burton & Sablynski (2004) suggest that perceptions of organizational justice, how fairly someone feels they have been treated by the organisation may either directly influence job embeddedness or moderate its impact on employee behaviour. Second, we know relatively little about the relative effects of organizational and community aspects of embeddedness on work-related outcomes. Thus far, most research has tended to consider these aspects of embeddedness collectively, as overall job embeddedness. However, the sources of organizational and community embeddedness are logically distinct, with some likely to be able to be affected by things the organization does (e.g. helping with housing, providing social activities, providing work for a spouse) and others, not (e.g. family and friends nearby, the culture of the community, the climate). Furthermore, different outcomes may be predicted by different aspects of embeddedness. For example, Lee, et al. (2004) found that community embeddedness was a significant predictor of employee turnover and volitional absences. However, organisational embeddedness only predicted both in-role and extra-role performance. Another recent study by Mignonac (2008) found that community embeddedness is a strong predictor of relocation. Employees are less willing to relocate when they are embedded in their communities. The relative impact of both these elements of embeddedness on turnover and other behavioural outcomes is also likely to vary across time and context. Clearly much more research in this area is needed.

**ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE PERCEPTIONS**

Organisational justice research (Greenberg (1987, 1990) is concerned with how people perceive and react to fairness in work related contexts (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Ployhart & Ryan, 1977). Organisational justice has received much attention because many important organisational attitudes and behaviors can be directly linked to employees’ perception of fairness (Roch & Shanock, 2006). Even though various types of justice exist, two in particular have received the greatest attention from researchers (Greenberg, 1990) - employees’ response to the
outcomes that they receive, and the procedures (means) by which they acquire the outcomes (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Individual judgements of the fairness of outcomes are referred to as *distributive justice* (Leventhal, 1976), whilst individual perceptions of fairness of the procedure used to decide the outcomes are referred to as *procedural justice*. Both of these concepts are widely used to evaluate perceptions of fairness in the workplace and have been found to be associated with a wide variety of employee attitudes such as organisational commitment (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992), job and pay satisfaction (Clay-Warner, Reynolds, & Roman, 2005; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Yee Ng, 2001; Sweeney & McFarlin Dean, 1993), and organisational citizenship behavior (Moorman, 1991). A third, less well researched type of organizational justice, *interactional justice*, was proposed by Bies and Moag (1986) and defined as the fairness of the interpersonal treatment that one receives (Leung, Tong, & Ho, 2004). The theoretical distinction between these three dimensions of organizational justice has received empirical support in a number of meta-analytical studies (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al. (2001).

**PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AND JOB EMBEDDEDNESS**

Although job embeddedness was originally conceptualized simply to explain job stability or "why people stay" in their organizations, recent studies have shown that it may mediate and moderate a wide range of influences on employee attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. For example, one study found that job embeddedness moderated the strength of the relationship between (a) leader-member exchange (LMX) and task performance within a telecommunication sample, (b) LMX and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) in a sample of manufacturing employees, and (c) organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and OCBs in a manufacturing sample (Sekiguchi, Burton, & Sablynski, 2008). A recent study by Hom, at al. (2009) demonstrated how job embeddedness and social exchange mediate the effects of mutual-investment (whereby employers offer high inducements to employees for their high contributions) and over-investment (high inducements without corresponding high expected contributions) on quit propensity and organizational commitment.

In the context of organizational justice, a recent study by Gantor & Cordery (In press) examined Yao et al’s (2004)’s suggestion that job embeddedness may either mediate or moderate the
relationship between justice perceptions and outcomes. The mediating hypothesis is based on the suggestion that unfair treatment in respect of such aspects such as promotion and rewards may undermine the strength of on-the-job fits, links and sacrifice, thereby removing key impediments to leaving. For example, if I am treated without due respect by supervisors and coworkers in the course of my work (interactional justice), I may feel that I have fewer friendship ties at work, and so be less inclined to feel that I would like to stay in that job. The moderating hypothesis is based on the idea that instances of organizational injustice may act as ‘shocks’ to employees that may in turn stimulate them to seek further employment, and that job embeddedness may turn out to have a buffering effect for such ‘shocks’. In other words, employees who are highly embedded with an organisation may have a high tolerance or resistance and may not be easily affected by the perceived injustices in organisation. In contrast, they hypothesised that employees with low level of embeddedness may be prone to react more negatively to perceived injustice. Gantar & Cordery (In press)’s study of 560 managerial employees found strong support for overall job embeddedness as a mediator between perceptions of distributive, procedural and interactional justice and turnover intentions, but no evidence of the hypothesised moderating relationship.

In the present study, we seek to find further evidence in support of this mediating hypothesis for job embeddedness in relation to the impact of organizational justice. In addition to that, we also seek to extend existing theory by exploring relationships between organizational justice and the disaggregated job embeddedness factors (organizational embeddedness and community embeddedness). We take as our starting point the proposition that organizational justice perceptions will influence organisation-based embeddedness but not community-based embeddedness, and hence a mediating relationship will be observed for one form of embeddedness and not the other. The proposed relationships are represented in Figure 1.

Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

\[H1a: \text{Organizational justice perceptions (distributive, procedural, interpersonal and interactional) will correlate positively with organizational embeddedness but will be unrelated to community embeddedness.}\]
H1b: Organizational and community embeddedness will significantly correlate with turnover intention and job satisfaction.

H2: Organizational embeddedness will mediate the relationship between organizational justice perceptions with job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

H3: Organizational and community embeddedness will moderate the relationship between organizational justice perceptions and both turnover intentions and job satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants

The study used a random sample of 160 members of academic staff of Malaysian public universities. To reduce evaluation apprehension, social desirability bias and leniency, and acquiescence, respondents’ anonymity was completely guaranteed. Furthermore, an effort was made to reassure participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that they should answer questions as honestly as possible (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Of the 160 who responded to the survey, 36% were females and 68% were married. The average age of participants was 37 years and the average length of service was over 7 years. More than 85% of the respondents have tertiary educated to at least masters degree level, and 65% were in junior academic positions. Malays made up 68% of the ethnic composition of the sample, Chinese 11%, and Indians 14%.

Procedure

This study was administered as an online survey (Stanton, 1998; Zhang, 2006), which provides several advantages over traditional survey methods with regard to speed, convenience, flexibility, appearance, functionality and usability (Bandilla, Bosnjak, & Altdorfer, 2003; Dillman, 2000; Kwak & Radler, 2002). An email provided respondents with a link to the survey page along with information on how confidentiality and other participants’ rights were to be maintained. Participants were selected randomly based on the list of email made available from respective universities web site.

Measures

All items described below were measured on a 5-point Likert scale except for biographical information.
**Personal characteristics.** Basic information such as gender, age, marital status, education level and ethnic group were collected in the survey. Preliminary analyses indicated that only gender and age were significantly correlated with any other variables of interest in the study.

**Job embeddedness.** Job embeddedness was measured using the short version of the job embeddedness measure developed by Holtom et al. (2006) based on the original 48 items (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee et al., 2001). The short version of job embeddedness measure consists of 18 items, 9 each for organizational and community embeddedness subscales. Sample items include: *My job utilises my skills and talents well, I have a lot of freedom on this job to decide how to pursue my goals, and I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job.* For each item, participants were asked to score their response using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

**Organizational justice.** The perceptions of employee on dimension of organisational justice was measured using the four-dimensional scales developed by Colquitt (2001). Procedural justice was measured by seven items and distributive justice was measured by four items. Interactional justice was measured by four items. Sample items include: *Those procedures have consistently been applied; the rewards I have received reflected the effort I have put into my work, and I have been treated with dignity.* Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

**Turnover intention.** Intention to quit was measured using four items, based on the measure developed by Hom, Griffeth & Sellaro (1984). Sample items include: *In the next few months, I intend to leave this organisation and I occasionally think about leaving this organisation.* Each statement is rated with a five-point response, using Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured using a 3-item measure developed by Holtom & O’Neill (2004). The measure consists of three items to describe an employee’s satisfaction with a job and organisation. The items were: *All in all I am satisfied with my job, In general I don’t like my job, and In general I like working here.*
Analyses

The mediational hypothesis was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) through AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2007). In order to evaluate the overall mediated model, the maximum likelihood chi-square statistic ($\chi^2$) was used. However, because of the chi-square’s sensitivity to large sample sizes, other fit indices were also used, including the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Standard cut-off criteria for good fit consisted of CFI values greater than .95, RMSEA values of less than .06, and TLI values of .9 or higher (Hu & Bentler, 1999). To test individual parameter estimates, a cut-off criterion value for significance was set at $p=.05$. Tests of mediation included a comparison between the partially-mediated and fully mediated models (Kelloway, 2005).

The moderating hypothesis was tested using moderated hierarchical linear regression, with the cross product of the relevant predictors being entered as the interaction term. Prior to carrying out the regression analyses, all predictor variables were centred (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and variable inter-correlations are presented in Table 1. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1955). All the reliability coefficients for all scales ranged from 0.74 to .97 are satisfactory and above the generally agreed threshold of .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Therefore all constructs were considered acceptable and reliable.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The results depicted in Table 1 show that both organizational and community embeddedness are significantly correlated with measures of perceived procedural, distributive and interactional justice, providing partial support for Hypothesis 1a. Whilst we did not predict the finding that community embeddedness and organizational justice perceptions are significantly correlated, it is perhaps worth noting that the size of the correlations are smaller than those obtained for
organizational embeddedness. The two dimensions of job embeddedness and the three organizational justice measures are also negatively correlated with turnover intentions and positively correlated with job satisfaction, as proposed in Hypothesis 1b.

To examine the hypothesized meditational relationship outlined in Figure 1, a mediated structural model was tested. The results of testing this fully-mediated model is presented in Figure 2. This model shows an acceptable fit to the data $\chi^2(9) = 10.895$, $p = .208$; RMSEA = .048; CFI = .994; TLI = .983. In addition, the Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) is .033 that is below the threshold of .05, which is also indicative of a good fit (Byrne, 2001).

[Insert Figure 2 here]

This model was then contrasted with an alternative partially mediated model in which direct pathways between the organizational justice variables and the dependent variables were also specified. This model, displayed in Figure 3, also provided a good fit to the data $\chi^2(2) = 3.608$, $p = .165$; RMR = .0232; RMSEA = .071; TLI = .963, and CFI = .996. The difference between the two models is not statistically significant, $\Delta \chi^2(6) = 7.287$, $p = .295$. However, the only direct path for which the coefficient was significant was that between interactional justice and job satisfaction, suggesting partial mediation for this relationship alone. In the interests of parsimony, the fully-mediated model is preferred and therefore Hypothesis 2 is supported. However, it should be noted that we had not predicted that community embeddedness would also mediate between organizational justice perceptions and the dependent variables.

The results of the tests of Hypothesis 3 were carried out separately for each dependent variable. First, as depicted in Table 2, the inclusion of the six interaction terms (e.g Distributive justices X Community embeddedness) failed to identify any significant moderation of the organizational justice – turnover intentions relationship. These results are not supportive of Hypothesis 3.

[Insert Table 2 here]
The results of the same set of analyses with job satisfaction as the dependent variable are presented in Table 3. The interaction between interactional justice and organizational embeddedness is the only statistically significant moderating effect to be observed. This interaction is plotted in Figure 4.

[Insert Table 3 and Figure 4 here]

These data indicate that for those people experiencing low interactional justice, organizational embeddedness buffers the negative impact of being treated like this on job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has produced several valuable findings that extend our knowledge with regard to job embeddedness theory. First, our research adds to the growing body of empirical evidence that job embeddedness (both community and organization) is an important driver of work attitudes and behaviour. Second, we have confirmed earlier research findings (Gantor & Cordery, 2009) indicating that fair treatment at the hands of the organization and its members plays a significant role in determining the person-organization fit, the strength of interpersonal ties at work, and perceptions of what would be sacrificed if a decision to leave were made. The replication of these findings provides additional support for the notion that job embeddedness mediates between a number of features of the work environment and important behavioural outcomes.

Our study also produced the unexpected finding that community embeddedness was correlated with perceived organizational justice. If one assumes that any causal relationship that exists between these two sets of variables is in the direction specified in our theoretical model, then this implies that how fairly one is treated in the organisation has a spillover effect into how embedded one feels within the community. Several possible explanations may be forwarded for this interesting finding. One of them relates to the cultural context within which this study took place. Malaysia is a very hierarchical society with an acute consciousness of rank and status (Hofstede, 1994), and it may be that how one is treated by one’s superiors in the workplace affects one status and standing in the broader community. This is consistent with other research findings that the outcomes of justice perceptions may depend on the cultural orientations of individuals (Erdogan & Liden, 2006).
Finally, we only found evidence for organizational embeddedness buffering the effects of unfair treatment in respect of interactional justice and job satisfaction. This suggests that job embeddedness may only buffer certain kinds of shocks, in this case where someone is directly unpleasant and unfair in their treatment of someone.

There are several practical implications of these findings for organizations. First, job embeddedness (which can be established through building community, developing a sense of belonging, establishing deep ties among employees, and deepening social capital) may increase retention, attendance, citizenship, and job performance. Furthermore, organizations can be proactive about job embeddedness: links can be increased through teams and long-term projects; sacrifice can be increased by connecting job and organizational rewards to longevity; and fit can be increased by matching employees' knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes with a job's requirements. Equally important, managers can increase off-the-job embeddedness by providing people with information about the community surrounding their workplace and by providing social support for local activities and events (Holton, Mitchell, & Lee, 2006; Mitchell, Holton, & Lee, 2001). As Lee et al., (2004) suggest, increasing job embeddedness is important not only for retaining employees but also for employee performance. This was supported by Sekiguchi et al., (2008) that job embeddedness not only predict job stability but also has important implications on employee performance.

Though not without its limitations (e.g. the reliance on self-report survey data obtained at a single point in time raises issues to do with common method variance), this study lays some promising groundwork for future research and theorising. In particular, further research is needed to examine whether or not the specific elements of job embeddedness (links, fit, sacrifice) are differentially related to the various forms of organizational justice. For example, it may be that distributive justice (fairness of outcomes) impacts most strongly on sacrifice-organization, whilst interactional justice impacts most strongly on links-organization. It is also possible that each of the various elements of embeddedness will interact differently with procedural, distributive and interactional justice perceptions to affect work behaviours and attitudes. Further research might also examine the impact of specific injustice ‘shocks’ (ie events that are seen as being particularly unfair, either procedurally, distributively, or interactionally) and their possible buffering by high job
embeddedness. Finally, this study suggests that further research is needed in order to understand the role of cultural values in influencing not only perceptions of organizational justice, but also the forces that tie a person to a job.
REFERENCES


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### Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3. Distributive Justice</td>
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<td>-.09</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<td>4. Interactional Justice</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Turnover Intentions</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Job Satisfactions</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>-.65**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>7. Community Embeddedness</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>8. Organizational Embeddedness</td>
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<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
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<td>.55**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
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<td>9. Overall Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.45</td>
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<td>.53**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>-.50**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.84**</td>
<td>.88**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: N = 160.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
Table 2

Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression with Turnover Intentions as Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<td>Interactional justice X Organizational embeddedness</td>
<td>.15</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ∆R²                             | .03     |
| ∆F                              | 1.2     |
| df                              | 6.147   |
| Total R²                        | .56     | .59     |
| F                               | 11.66***| 6.47*** |
| df                              | 6.153   | 12,147  |

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
Table 3

Results of Hierarchical Moderated Regression with Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
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<td>Interactional justice X Organizational embeddedness</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td></td>
<td>.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total R²</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>21.05***</td>
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<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>6,153</td>
<td>12,147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001
Figure 1

Hypothesised model of relationship between organizational justice and outcomes, mediated by organizational and community embeddedness
Figure 2
Mediated Model Results

Procedural Justice

Distributive Justice

Interactional Justice

Organizational embeddedness

Community embeddedness

Turnover Intentions

Job Satisfaction

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Figure 3

Partially-mediated Model Results

Procedural Justice → Turnover Intentions

Distributive Justice → Organizational embeddedness

Interactional Justice → Community embeddedness

Organizational embeddedness → Job Satisfaction

Community embeddedness → Job Satisfaction

Turnover Intentions

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Figure 4

Interactional Justice by Organizational Embeddedness Predicting Job Satisfaction

![Graph showing the relationship between interactional justice and job satisfaction for low and high organizational embeddedness. The graph illustrates that job satisfaction increases with increased interactional justice for both low and high levels of organizational embeddedness.](Image)