

Perceived Organizational Support as a Mediator of the Relationship between Effort-Reward Fairness, Affective Commitment, and Intention to Leave

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between perceived effort-reward fairness, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and intention to leave. Survey was used as a data collection method in this study. 176 junior and middle level managers working in service industries in the city of Istanbul in Turkey took the survey. Data obtained from surveys was analyzed through the SPSS statistical package software (v.18). Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses in this study. The results show that perceived organizational support fully mediates the positive relationship between effort-reward fairness, affective commitment, and perceived organizational support while fully mediating the negative relationship between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave.

Keywords: effort-reward fairness, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, intention to leave

1. Introduction

The concept of commitment in the workplace is still one of the most challenging and researched concepts in the fields of the management, organizational behavior and human resources because it has undertaken a key role in the relationship between organizations and individuals since 1970s (Commerias & Fournier, 2001). Many experimental studies in literature show the effect of organizational commitment on employees' behaviours and attitudes (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Moreover, employees staying in an organization is also an important issue. Employees quitting their jobs bring along serious results for an organization, so intention to leave is a research topic in many scientific disciplines. Since intention to leave also has an effect on organizational efficiency, these studies seek to find reasons that cause intention to leave. This enables employers to eliminate reasons that make employees want to leave their jobs (Hwang & Kuo, 2006).

Social exchange theory is used to describe the relationship between an organization and its employees in organizational support theory. Perceived organizational support was designed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) in an attempt to comprehend the course of this exchange. Perceived organizational support is concerned with employees' general opinions regarding how much their organization appreciates their contributions and takes their welfare seriously. (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006). Based on a social exchange framework, Eisenberger and his colleagues suggested that when employees receive a good deal of support from their organization, they tend to pay their organization back with their behavior at work (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006) and also by feeling and showing a high level of affective commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

There are studies in literature that are looking into the relationship between perceived justice and organizational commitment (Lowe & Vodanovich, 1995; Hendrix et al., 1998; Robert, Coulson, & Chonko, 1999), and between perceived justice and intention to leave (Hassan, 2002; Hendrix et al., 1998; Robert, Coulson, & Chonko, 1999). However, there is not a sufficient number of studies about the mechanism between these relationships. In a small number of studies made on this subject, perceived organizational support was taken as a mediator of the relationship between perceived justice and affective commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Moideenkutty et al., 2001; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006) and the relationship between perceived justice and

intention to leave (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006). This study aims to contribute to the limited amount of research made in this field, and contribute to the relevant literature by testing research findings in a different culture.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypothesis

2.1 Effort-Reward Fairness

According to equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965; Mowday, 1991, Janssen, 2001), viewpoints about fairness are associated with job motivation which may have an impact on employees' reactions and attitudes in an organization. Equity theory suggests that employees assess the relationship between them and their organization by considering their contributions to the organization and rewards they get in return. These contributions consist of comprehensive investments, such as training, intelligence, experience, skill, job status and certain job tasks. Additionally, rewards are benefits an employee gets from their company such as compensation, desirable duties at work, respect, and prominence (Adams, 1965; Janssen, 2001).

Difference between contributions to an organization and rewards may cause perceived inequity, which leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness at workplace. In order to reduce perceived inequity, an employee can change their contributions or rewards, rethink contributions and rewards, quit their job, or start having other comparison items (Adams, 1965, 1979; Mowday, 1991; Janssen, 2001). Employees usually tend to feel unfairness resulting from insufficient rewards rather than exaggerated rewards. As a result, discrepancies between effort and reward lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness, which makes it necessary for employees to diminish it. To have less perceived inequity, an employee can change their contributions or quit their job (Adams, 1965; Mowday, 1991; Janssen, 2001).

2.2 Effort-Reward Fairness and Affective Commitment

Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1979) defined organizational commitment as individuals' identifying themselves with an organization and the level of connection they feel towards their organization. A strong commitment like this consists of the following: *a*) accepting and internalizing an organization's determined goals and values, *b*) being willing to endeavor to work and reach the goals determined by the organization, *c*) having a strong desire to remain a member of the organization.

Meyer and Allen (1997), define organizational commitment as a concept which explains one's emotional identification with the organization, and a moral obligation which enables them to avoid extra costs if they have to leave the organization, and a moral obligation to remain a member of the organization.

Meyer and Allen (1990) looked into organizational commitment as a three component concept: affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Affective commitment is related to "an employee's emotional attachment to an organization, identification with it, and involvement in the organization". Continuance commitment is related to "awareness of costs associated with leaving an organization". Normative commitment is related to "a feeling of obligation to continue employment" (Meyer & Allen, 1990).

This study deals with organizational commitment on its affective commitment dimension. Employees' connection to their organization namely affective commitment is accepted as a big element of devotion and allegiance. Employees with a high level of affective commitment are considered to feel as part of their organization, they are likely to engage in organizational activities and stay in the organization (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001, p. 825).

It is possible to find some research about the relationship between fairness perception and organizational commitment (Hendrix et al., 1998; Robert, Coulson, & Chonko, 1999). In these studies, it was concluded that perceived fairness has an impact on organizational commitment.

Cohen-Charash and Spector, (2001) has found a relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment in their meta-analysis study. Colquitt et al. (2001) carried out a meta-analysis examination on 183 justice studies, and concluded that there is a relationship between organizational commitment and perceived justice. Colquitt et al. (2001) reported that there are studies showing a stronger relationship between procedural justice and organizational commitment than distributive justice and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that there is a stronger relationship between distributive justice and organizational commitment.

2.3 Effort-Reward Fairness and Intention to Leave

Intention to leave can be defined as employees' thinking about leaving their job due to their dissatisfaction with current working conditions (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991). It is of utmost significance to determine reasons

that make people leave their jobs because it enables you to estimate intention to leave behaviors in advance and take measures against them (Kuean et al., 2010).

There are some studies that investigate the relationship between equity, justice and intention to leave. Hassan (2002) investigated how perception of equity and justice played an important role in employees' commitment to the organization and intention to leave. The results hypothesized that both internal and external equity perceptions are positively related to commitment and negatively related to intention to leave.

Hendrix et al. (1998) examined that the relationship between justice perceptions, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, attendance motivation, work-group performance, turnover intentions, and turnover. They found that distributive justice perceptions were negatively related to turnover intentions.

Robert, Coulson, and Chonko (1999) investigated the impact of perceptions of equity and justice on organizational commitment and intention to turnover. They reported that facets of both internal and external equity were significant factors in explaining organizational commitment and intention to turnover. In addition, distributive justice was more important to organizational commitment and intention to turnover than procedural justice.

2.4 Perceived Organizational Support as a Mediator

In different studies in literature, perceived organizational support is treated as a mediator variable. Moorman and Niehoff (1998) found that perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between procedural justice and organizational citizenship behavior. Allen, Shore, and Griffeth (2003) reported that perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between supportive human resources practices (participation in decision making, fairness in rewards, and growth opportunities) and organizational commitment. Masterson et al. (2000) found that procedural justice perceptions affect organization-related outcomes via the mediating variable of perceived organizational support. Özdemirci and Behram (2014) found that perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between human resources practices and corporate entrepreneurship.

According to organizational support theory, employees start having universal opinions about how much their efforts are valued, and how much the organization cares about their welfare in order to see their organization's readiness to honor employees' contributions and to answer their emotional and social needs. Perceived organizational support is treated as a guarantee that will help employees fulfill their tasks, do their job efficiently, and handle stress (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698).

Perceived organizational support is also a sign of the relationship between an organization and employees because it tests employees' beliefs about how much their organization rewards employees' efforts and well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organizational support is created by employees' evaluations of how they are treated by their organization, and employees use their interpretation of perceived organizational support to determine their effort-reward. Hence, when an employee is treated fairly and their contributions are valued, they tend to be more dedicated to their organization, and they help the organization succeed in meeting their goals (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

According to Meyer and Allen (1991), affective commitment is created by employees' satisfaction with being mentally and physically pleased with their organization. Some experiences result in a support approach from the organization. According to a social exchange viewpoint, when employees have a high level of support from their organization, they tend to feel an emotional connection to their organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Wayne, 1993). To illustrate, when employees receive appropriate training and a decent salary for their contributions, employees will feel a higher level of organizational commitment because employees will have a positive approach to their organization as they are well treated (DeConninck & Johnson, 2009).

One's interpretation of justice may be about an employee's assessment of the organization's voluntary actions because they are a sign of support from the organization (Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff 1998). There is experimental support for the relationship between justice perception and perceived organizational support (Fasolo, 1995; Ogilvie, 1986; Wayne et al., 2002; Moideenkutty et al., 2001).

It is suggested that employees feel they are treated fairly when an organization takes voluntary positive actions to improve perceived organizational support, and employees' perceived organizational support guarantees their organizational commitment (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006).

There is a limited number of studies about the mediator role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between perceived justice and organizational commitment. Moideenkutty et al. (2001) examined the role of perceived organizational support as a mediator of the relationship between perceived situational factors (procedural justice, distributive justice, communication satisfaction with supervisor, and labour-management

relationship climate). The results show that perceived organizational support fully mediates the relationship between each of these perceived situational variables and affective commitment to the organization. Loi, Hang-yue, and Foley (2006) examined the relationships between employees' justice perceptions, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and intention to leave. The results showed that both procedural and distributive justice contributed to the development of perceived organizational support, and perceived organizational support mediated their effects on organizational commitment and intention to leave. Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli (2001) examined the interrelationships between work experiences, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and employee turnover. They found that perceived organizational support mediated positive associations of organizational rewards, procedural justice, and supervisor support with affective commitment.

As a result of literature scan, the first hypothesis of the research is composed as given below:

H1: Perceived organizational support mediates the positive relationship between effort-reward fairness and organizational commitment.

Many studies (Randall, 1990; Shore et al., 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993) show that intention to leave is the most evident indicator of one's actually leaving their job. Chang et al. (2013) carried out studies to find out reasons for leaving one's job and concluded that the most referenced reasons for leaving one's job are work autonomy, fair reward, social support, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, tenure, and demographic features like age-gender. There are some studies about the relationship between perceived equity and justice, and intention to leave in the literature (Hassan, 2002; Hogan et al., 2010; Rober, Coulson, & Chonko, 1999; Nadiri & Tanova, 2010; Fields et al., 2000). These studies concluded that there is a negative relationship between equity, justice perception, and intention to leave. Among these relationships, social exchange model can be used to explain the relationship between distributive fairness and intention to leave (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006).

Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggests that employees' effort-reward expectation is improved by perceived organizational support. Moreover, employees' social and emotional demands such as self-esteem, affiliation, and approval are also met by perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006). Employees with a high level of perceived organizational support are inclined to show firmer affiliation and dedication to their organization, and they perceive the organization's progress and failure as their own. Employees' effort-reward expectation and being associated with an organization as a result of improved perceived organizational support lessen employees' intention to leave their organization (Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006; Masterson et al., 2000).

There is not a sufficient number of studies looking into the mediator role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between perceived justice and intention to leave in literature. Loi, Hang-yue, and Foley (2006) carried out a study and concluded that perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between perceived justice and intention to leave. However, when considering the relationship between perceived organizational support and intention to leave, it is logical to conclude that perceived organization support mediates the relationship between perceived justice and intention to leave.

As a result of literature scan, the second hypothesis of the research is composed as given below:

H2: Perceived organizational support mediates the negative relationship between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave.

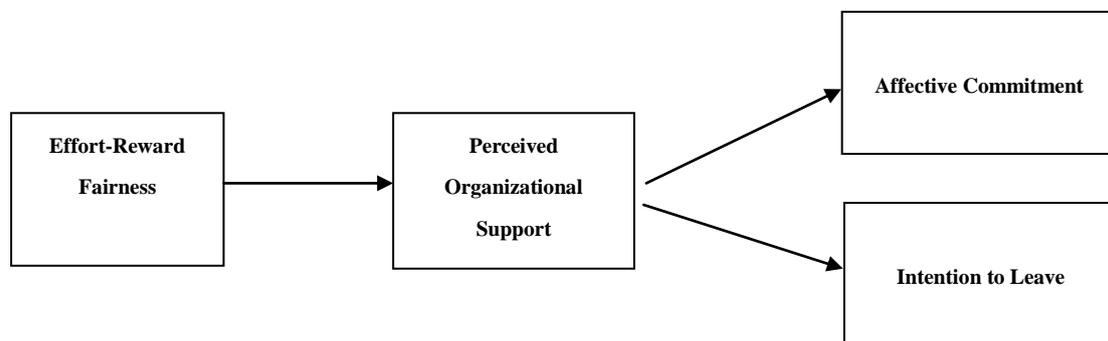


Figure 1. Research model

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and Procedure

The questionnaire was given to junior level managers and middle level managers working in service industry in Istanbul, Turkey. The questionnaire was given to 300 respondents. 194 of them completed their questionnaires and returned them. 18 of these were incorrectly completed, so they were not included in this study. 176 of them were evaluated. Therefore, the response rate of valid questionnaires was 58.6%. Data obtained from questionnaires was analyzed through the SPSS statistical package software (v.18), and proposed relations were tested through analyses.

The demographic questions were related to the participants' gender, age, educational level, and work experiences. Table 1 shows 44.3% of the participants are male, and 55.7% of the participants are female. It is found that 2.8% of the participants are aged between 18-25, 38.6% of the participants are aged between 26-35, 46.6% of the participants are aged between 36-45, 11.9% of the participants are aged 46 or above. In terms of education of the participants, 13.6% of the participants are high school graduates, 59% of the participants have a bachelor's degree, and 27.2% of the participants hold a master's degree. The table further shows that 6.8 % of the participants have less than 1 year of work experience, 44.3% of the participants have 1-5 years of work experience, 35.7% of the participants have 6-10 years of work experience, 11.9% of them have 11-15 years of work experience, 1.1% of the participants have been working for more than 16 years.

Table 1. Summary of demographic variables

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-25	5	2.8
26-35	68	38.6
36-45	82	46.6
46 or above	21	11.9
Gender		
Male	78	44.3
Female	98	55.7
Education Level		
High School	24	13.6
Bachelor's Degree	104	59
Master's Degree	48	27.2
Work Experiences		
Less Than 1 Year	12	6.8
1-5 Years	78	44.3
6-10 Years	63	35.7
11-15 Years	21	11.9
16 Years or more	2	1.1

Note. N= 176.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Effort-Reward Fairness

Perceived Effort-Reward Fairness measured on 6-item scale was adapted from Van Yperen (1996). Sample items on the scale are given as (1) I work too hard considering my outcomes, (2) I give a great deal of time and attention to the organization, but do not feel appreciated. These six items were represented on one factor and explained 57.59% of the variance. Cronbach's α value was 0.84.

3.2.2 Perceived Organizational Support

In order to measure perceived organizational support, a shorter scale consisting of 8 items was used, and this version was an outcome of Rhoades & Eisenberger's suggestion (2002). These 8 items were composed by utilizing the items with a high factor-load from Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa's (1986) research. Sample items are (1) My organization really cares about my well-being, (2) My organization strongly considers my goals and values. These eight items were loaded on one factor and explained 56.91 % of the variance. In this study, Cronbach's α value for this short scale was 0.85.

3.2.3 Affective Commitment

The 8-item affective commitment scale developed by Allen & Meyer (1990) was used. Sample items are (1) I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization, (2) I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside of my organization. These eight items were loaded on one factor and explained 53.07 % of the variance. Cronbach's α value was 0.70 for this scale.

3.2.4 Intention to Leave

The 3-item intention to leave scale developed by Konovsky & Cropanzano (1991) was used. Sample item is "I intend to look for a job outside of [company name] within the next year". Three items were loaded on one factor and explained 71.06% of the variance. Cronbach's α value was 0.79 for this scale.

All the items in the questionnaire were accompanied by a 5-point rating scale (from 1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree).

4. Analysis and Results

The factor and reliability analysis of data collection tools has been made in the research. All factors have passed the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Barlett Test of Sphericity, which means that our data set is appropriate for factor analyses. Principal component and varimax methods are used in analysis. The construct validity of effort-reward fairness, affective commitment, intention to leave, and organizational support were tested by a factor analysis. As a result of the analysis, it has been found out that effort-reward fairness, affective commitment, intention to leave, and organizational support consist of one dimension.

Table 1 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. As a result of the correlation analysis, it has been found out that the organizational support was significantly positively correlated with effort-reward fairness ($r = .631$), affective commitment ($r = .476$), and negatively correlated with intention to leave ($r = -.670$). Effort-reward fairness was positively correlated with affective commitment ($r = .231$) and negatively correlated with intention to leave ($r = -.430$). Affective commitment was negatively correlated with intention to leave ($r = -.667$).

Table 2. Means, deviations, and correlations among the variables

Variables	Mean.	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Organizational Support	3.34	.73	-			
2 Effort-reward Fairness	2.75	.99	.631**	-		
3 Affective Commitment	3.19	.80	.476**	.231**	-	
4 Intention to Leave	3.28	1.10	-.670**	-.430**	-.667**	-

Note. N= 176, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Within the framework of Baron and Kenny's (1986) four step approach, hierarchical regression analysis was applied to test the mediating effect of perceived organizational support in the study. In order to refer to this mediating effect, four requirements have to be met. First of all, independent variable is required to have an effect on dependent variable. Second, independent variable is required to have an effect on mediator variable. Third, mediator variable is required to have an effect on dependent variable. Finally, when independent variable and mediator variable are added to the model, mediator variable is required to have a significant effect on dependent variable, and independent variable's effect on dependent variable has to lessen or totally disappear. Table 3 shows the results of mediated regression analyses.

Table 3. Results for hierarchical regression analysis

Predictors	Criterion Variables	
	Perceived Organizational Support	
<i>Step1</i>		
Effort-reward fairness	.631**	
Adjusted R ²	.394	
F Statistic	114,910**	
	Affective Commitment	Intention to Leave
<i>Step2</i>		
Effort-reward fairness	.231**	-.430**
Adjusted R ²	.048	.181
F Statistic	9.847**	39.545
<i>Step3</i>		
Effort-reward fairness	-.114	-.013
Perceived organizational support	.548**	-.662**
Adjusted R ²	.225	.443
F Statistic	26.464**	70.567

Note. N= 176, *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

As it can be seen on the table, in the first step of the hierarchical regression analysis carried out to test the first hypothesis, relationship between effort-reward fairness and mediator perceived organizational support was tested. According to the result of this analysis, there is a strong positive relationship between effort-reward fairness and perceived organizational support ($\beta = .631$; $p < 0.001$). In the second step, relationship between effort-reward fairness and affective commitment was tested. According to the result of this analysis, there is a strong positive relationship between effort-reward fairness and affective commitment ($\beta = .231$; $p < 0.001$). In the third step, mediator variable was included in the perceived organizational support analysis to test whether or not the effect of effort-reward fairness on affective commitment lessened or totally disappeared. According to the analysis results, when perceived organizational support is added to the equation, the effect of effort-reward fairness on affective commitment becomes insignificant ($\beta = -.114$; $p > 0.05$), but the effect of mediator organizational support becomes significant ($\beta = .548$; $p < 0.001$). According to these results, perceived organizational support fully mediates the positive relationship between effort-reward fairness and affective commitment. Based on these results, H1 hypothesis is accepted.

Same steps were taken in hierarchical regression analysis to test the second hypothesis. In the second step here, the relationship between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave was tested. According to the results of the analysis, a strong negative relationship was found between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave ($\beta = -.430$; $p < 0.001$). In the third step, mediator variable was added to perceived organizational support analysis in order to find out whether the effect of effort-reward fairness on intention to leave lessened or totally disappeared. According to the results of the analysis, when the mediator variable (perceived organizational support) is added to the equation, the effect of effort-reward fairness on intention to leave becomes insignificant ($\beta = -.013$; $p > 0.05$) (becomes non-significant), but the effect of mediator perceived organizational support becomes significant ($\beta = -.662$; $p < 0.001$). According to these results, perceived organizational support fully mediates the positive relationship between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave. Based on these results, H2 hypothesis is accepted.

5. Discussion

This study aims at testing the mediator role of perceived organizational support regarding the effect of effort-reward fairness on affective commitment and intention to leave. In the study, it was concluded that perceived organizational support fully mediates the relationship between effort-reward fairness and affective commitment. This conclusion supports other studies carried out in this field in the literature (Moideenkutty et al.,

2001; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Studies carried out about this subject matter took procedural justice as an independent variable. This study is of significance because it determines the effect of effort-reward fairness on the variables that make up the subject of its study.

Another finding shows that perceived organizational support fully mediates the relationship between effort-reward fairness and intention to leave. There is only one study about this in literature. Conclusions from this study support the findings of the study by Loi, Hang-yue, and Foley (2006). Findings from this research are expected to contribute to the limited number of studies carried out in this field.

The study also offers some suggestions for the practitioners. First of all, the effect of effort-reward fairness on affective commitment occurs through perceived organizational support. Thus, managers who want to increase the affective commitment of the employees should focus on increasing the perceived organizational support. Secondly, considering the importance of resigns on the sustainability of the organization, managers might need to increase perceived organizational support to contain employee's continuity in the organization. Because, according to the research results; the perception of the organization supporting the employees' effort-reward fairness also influences the intention to leave.

Besides contributions, this study has some constraints. First, it was carried out in one city in a country. In order to generalize the findings of this study, this research must be carried out with people from various cultures in future research. Second constraint is with variables. There can be a great number of demographic or behavioral variables effecting effort-reward fairness, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and intention to leave. Since these variables were not considered in this study, various variables can be taken into account in future research.

Moreover, there are various studies aiming to determine the relationships between the variables that make up the subject of this study and procedural justice in literature, so interactional justice, a sub-dimension of perceived justice, can be included in future research. In this study, organizational commitment was approached with its affective commitment dimension. Continuation dimension and normative dimension, which are sub-dimensions of organizational commitment, can be included in future research.

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