



## Exploring organizational justice in Vietnam universities: a study of effects on lecturers' work engagement

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**Abstract.** *Purpose.* The purpose of this study is to shed light on description the current situation of organizational justice, lecturers' work engagement and research of the effect of organizational justice on lecturers' work engagement and the role of gender in this relationship. *Study design.* The data were collected using questionnaire form among a convenience sample of 230 lecturers working in two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. This study used Schaufeli's measure of work engagement and Colquitt's measure of organizational justice. *Findings.* The results indicated that organizational justice was acknowledged as quite high and lecturers' work engagement was fairly strong. The correlations were significant and positive among organizational justice, distributive justice, interpersonal justice and lecturers' work engagement. Distributive justice has a stronger impact on lecturers' work engagement than interpersonal justice. Gender is not a moderating variable in the relations among distributive justice, interpersonal justice and work engagement. *Implications for research and practice* are discussed in order to enhance lecturers' work engagement through offering some solutions to enforce justice towards lectures from organization.

**Keywords:** gender, organizational justice, distributive justice, interpersonal justice, lecturer, work engagement.

### Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in work engagement and organizational justice in the industrial-organizational psychology and human resources to enhance the performances in enterprises as well as organizations. Many studies have shown various impacts of work engagement on employees and managers (Pitt-Catsoupes, Matz-Costa, 2008). At the individual level of analysis, work engagement has a positive correlation with awareness of oneself such as the self-efficacy in work, the quality of physical and mental health of employees (Schaufeli, Taris, 2014). Similarly, work engagement has been found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Lovakov, Agadullina, Schaufeli, 2017).

At the organizational level of analysis, employees who are more engaged are likely to be in higher work performance and less intention to quit (Pitt-Catsoupes, Matz-Costa, 2008). Work engagement can predict the changes in the organization (Mendes, Stander, 2011). W. A. Schaufeli and A. B. Bakker

found that employees who have a greater attachment to their organization intent to express their self-images better. Their presence not only affects satisfaction of customers and partners more strongly, but also impacts organization's benefits as well as important outcomes (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004). Work engagement is believed to be related to positive work attitudes, have an effect on satisfaction, increase organizational commitment and decrease turnover intentions (Bakker, Demerouti, 2008).

The studies to promote work engagement find out the significant role of organizational justice generally, but none have mentioned about the impact of component of organizational justice on lecturers' work engagement. In Vietnam, there is a gap of studies about work engagement, organizational justice and the effect of organizational justice on work engagement in general. Only a few previous research was conducted in teachers or lecturers. According to Decision 371, Vietnam would have totally 460 universities and colleges (224 universities and 236 colleges) by 2020. However, the number was surpassed by 12 in December 2018, creating tougher completion to attract learners. In this context, lecturers' work engagement is an advantage for universities to win as engaged employees are also proactive and keen to take initiative (Sonnentag, 2003) to promote brand, credibility and training quality. The Vietnamese traditionally pay great respect for teachers, who are considered as doing noble jobs. Does their organizational justice effect their work engagement? What are the roles of gender in relation between organizational justice and work engagement? This article will deal with these questions.

### **Lecturers' work engagement**

Various concepts of work engagement have been argued. Work engagement is defined "psychological state accompanying by an individual's energy investment for behavior" (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2010). According to D. L. Nelson and B. L. Simmons, this engagement is the state that employees have positive feelings towards their work (Nelson, Simmons, 2003). K. Shaw has noted that work engagement is emotional or intellectual commitment of employees to the organization (Shaw, 2005). In this study, work engagement of lecturers is positively psychological state of lecturers, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption at work.

Vigor is represented by level of the energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption refers the state of being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby one assumes that time passes quickly and has difficulties detaching oneself from work.

### **Organizational justice**

Researchers discuss various concepts of organizational justice. J. Greenberg suggested that organizational justice represents employees' awareness of being treat fairly in work and how organization's decision impact on implementing the plans (Greenberg, 1987). Organizational justice is also believed that employees assess the conformity among things they are deserved to receive and things they are really get from their organization (Al-Zu'bi, 2010). Hence, lecturers' organizational justice is their assessment of the conformity among things they are deserved to receive and things they are really get from their organization.

Researchers' views are quite diverse when discussing the components of justice. Organizational justice is constituted by two categories: distributive justice and procedural justice (Greenberg,

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1 Decision 37 on adjustment of 2006-2020 plan for University and college networks issued by the government in 2013.

1990), or four components namely procedural justice, distributive justice, interpersonal justice and informational justice which are completely independent (Colquitt et al., 2001).

However, in universities, the procedures used to make decisions are often discussed, communicated openly. Lecturers are able to express their views and feelings based on accurate and reliable information. In addition, procedures are the basis of resource distribution to workers. The provision of information and the distribution of resources is the basis for the quality of the relationship in the organization, so such duo-concepts as procedural justice – distributive justice, interpersonal justice, informational justice have lots of similarities and are dependent components. Therefore, the two components that have relative independence in the organizational justice examined in this study are distributive justice and interpersonal justice.

Distributive justice has its roots in the equity theory suggested by J. S. Adams. It is said to be similar with fairness in outcomes division and distribution (Adams, 1965). Distributive justice is level, at which rewards are equally divided. It refers justice perception in managerial decision related to distribute outcomes such as compensation and promotion. Distributive justice only exists when outcomes division such as salary, benefits and rewards meets employees' expectation towards their contribution (Simpson, Kaminski, 2007; Chou, 2009).

Distributive justice of lecturers represents their assessment of manner or level of outcomes distribution based their effort and contribution to the organization. R. J. Bies and J. F. Moag suggested that interpersonal justice is one of the components of organizational justice (Bies, Moag, 1986). In an organization, besides considering outcomes, employees can also compare the manners how others (i.e. colleagues and supervisors) treat them with those how they behave the others (Crow et al., 2012). Thus, interpersonal justice refers quality of interpersonal interaction process and individual behaviours (i.e. they are talked with honesty and sensitivity). This component addresses the human aspect of organizational practice and involves communicative aspects (such as politeness, sincerity and respect) between provision and acquirement of fairness (Bies, Moag, 1986).

Interpersonal justice of lecturers expresses their assessment of others' attitudes to behave (i.e. colleagues and supervisors) towards them. Fair attitudes are characterized by polite, respective manners and the limitation of critical or improper comments about them.

## **Organizational justice and lecturers' work engagement**

The relationship between organizational justice and work engagement is also discussed. In the non-educational environment, low justice makes employees withdraw and not attached to their work (Biswas et al., 2013; Saks, 2006; Strom et al., 2014; Ghosh et al., 2014). Especially, positively organizational justice can improve work engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli, Leiter, 2001). That is also affirmed in the educational environment (Chughtai et al., 2006; Gupta, 2015). The interpretation of these issue can be based on the social exchange theory (SET). Social exchange theory may support them because it is one of the most influential conceptual models to understand workplace behavior (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). The primary contribution of this review was outlining the nature of reciprocity within exchange and distinguishing three different types of reciprocity: (a) reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges, (b) reciprocity as a folk belief, and (c) reciprocity as a moral norm. Reciprocal interdependence emphasizes contingent interpersonal transactions, whereby an action by one party leads to a response by another. When lecturers are aware of justice, they feel that they must play their roles by giving more through more work engagement (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocity as a "folk belief" involves the cultural expectation that people get what they deserve (Gouldner, 1960). According to R. Cropanzano and M. S. Mitchell, karma means that everything has its consequences (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005). When they receive fairness (or help),

they will take responsible for working hard, make an effort on the development of the organization or they will be punished, retribution. According to dimensions of standards, when employees perceive the fairness in the organization, they must have the responsibility to attach with their work unless they want to be judged as a standard deviator. The main premise of SET is the norm of reciprocity wherein employees who perceive the distribution of rewards and resources to be fair and equitable extend it to perceptions of organizational support and, in turn, return the favour by being cognitively, physically and emotionally engaged in their work and workplace (Biswas, Varma, Ramaswami, 2013).

As well as explanation on the impact of organizational justice on work engagement from social exchange theory (SET), studies also see organizational justice as the highest quality of leader-member exchange or the support of an organization / supervisor. S. S. Masterson with colleagues determined that organizational justice is likely to improve the quality of leader-member exchange while leadership behavior, as well as leadership awareness, has a great effect on working attitude of employees (Alarcon, Lyons, Tartaglia, 2010; Masterson et al. 2000). Organizational justice also effects perceived organizational and supervisor support (DeConinck, 2010), especially, perception organizational support is effective impact on work engagement (Saks, 2006). Organization's decisions and the manager's unfair actions would provoke negative emotions from workers such as anger, outrage, and resentment. Interpersonal injustice's ability to act as an esteem threat (Richman, Leary, 2009), threaten a person's ego or lower his or her self-esteem (Leary, Twenge, Quinlivan, 2006). When one is treated in an interpersonally just manner — that is, politely and with dignity and respect — one perceives that his or her rights are respected and feels more positive about his or her standing in an organization (Bies, Moag, 1986; Tyler, DeGoey, Smith, 1996), so they are more engaged in their work. This research puts forward three following hypotheses basing the above-mentioned analysis.

*H1: Organizational justice is positively related to lecturers' work engagement.*

*H2: Perceived distributive justice is positively related to lecturers' work engagement.*

*H3: Interpersonal justice is positively related to lecturers' work engagement.*

Stemming from the idea that individuals are exceptionally sensitive to even the smallest degree of underpayment (Greenberg, 1990), another hypothesis is:

*H4: Perceived distributive justice has more powerful impact on lecturers' work engagement than interpersonal justice.*

From an organizational angle, males are generally supposed to be competent, assertive, independent, and achievement oriented while females are associated with being warm, sociable, interdependent, and relationship oriented from an interpersonal perspective (Langford, MacKinnon, 2000). Two genders also have different perceptions on success. Success in masculine societies is generally described in material terms whereas it is more often described in terms of nurturance and good human relationships in feminine societies (Carragher, Buchanan, Puia, 2010). This research assumes that gender is a moderating variable that regulates the relationship of distributive justice, interpersonal justice and lecturers' work engagement in the following trends.

*H5: Distributive justice has more powerful impact on male lecturers' work engagement than that of females.*

*H6: Interpersonal justice has more powerful impact on female lecturers' work engagement than that of males.*

## Method

### Samples

The data were collected using questionnaire form among a convenience sample of 230 lecturers working in two universities in Hanoi. In this study, the percent of female participants (74.3%) is

higher than the percent of male participants (23.9%). Based Conway's age classification (Conway, 2004), the age groups of lecturers consist of three groups: below 30 years (18.3%), from 31 to 40 years (42.2%) and above 40 years (3.9%). Participants' seniority in their schools is also composed of three groups: below two working years (9.6%), from three to eight working years (31.3%) and above nine working years (53.9%).

## Measures

### *Measure of work engagement*

There are two versions of Utrecht's work engagement scales, including full scale version with 17 items and short scale version with nine items. This study will use short scale version with nine items designed by W. Schaufeli (Schaufeli et al., 2010), because this version is considered to be reliability (Duc, Thai, 2017) to estimate three components of lecturers' work engagement consisting of vigor (three items,  $\alpha = .84$ ), dedication (three items,  $\alpha = .83$ ) and absorption (three items,  $\alpha = .86$ ). Internal consistency of the scale was sufficiently high ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

### *Measure of organizational justice*

This study will use two subscales of organizational justice scale (Colquitt, 2001) to examine lecturers' distributive justice (four items,  $\alpha = .90$ ) and interpersonal justice (four items,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Internal consistency of the scale was sufficiently high ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

A five-point Likert-type scale is used in this study with anchors (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The scale score is calculated as the average of the component items. Thus, the scale has a maximum score of 5, a minimum of 1, the closer the average score is to the degree of agreement, the organizational justice of the corresponding level is high and work engagement is strong. Specifically, the average score is close to 5, organizational justice is rated to be high and work engagement is said to be strong; the average score close to 4, organizational justice is rated to be is quite high, work engagement is said to be quite strong; the average score is close to 3, organizational justice is rated to be is moderate high, work engagement is said to be moderate strong; the average score is close to 2, organizational justice is rated to be is quite low, work engagement is said to be quite weak and the average score is close to 1, organizational justice is rated to be is low, work engagement is said to be weak.

We coded male as 1 and female as 0 in the analysis of the data. The collected data was processed by SPSS software version 22. To test H1, H2, H3, H4 the study used Pearson correlation coefficient and linear regression. To examine the potential moderating effect of gender on the relationship between distributive justice, interpersonal justice and lecturers' work engagement (H5 and H6), we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses following recommendations by L. S. Aiken et al. (1991). If this moderating effect is statistically significant, the study will continue to use the select case by gender to determine the predictive ability of distributive justice, interpersonal justice towards the variation of lecturers' work engagement.

## Results

Mean of organizational justice scale as well as lecturers' work engagement was represented in Table 1 showed that lecturers' work engagement was quite strong and strong with Mean of vigor, dedication and absorption 3.80, 4.01 and 3.78 respectively, especially, dedication had the highest mean and was significant (paired-sample *T*-test show that  $t(229) = 8.54$ ,  $p < .01$  when compare between dedication and vigor and  $t(229) = 8.67$ ,  $p < .01$  when compare between dedication and absorption). The results demonstrated that almost lecturers have a high assessment of their work

importance. It means that they feel powerful, enthusiastic and inspired by their own job. So, they consider their work as their life, their purpose and their pride when they work in educational environment. For any occupation, the love and engagement to work helps individuals to be motivated to contribute to work, organization and self-develop. The quite strong work engagement of lecturers is a main key for them to meet the requirement of this occupation such as transmitting knowledge as well as providing lifelong self-study methods for students. The career love is the motivation for lecturers to constantly improve their professional capacity and innovate teaching methods. This is also an important factor to encourage students to study and research. The results partly reflect the positive and optimistic view of the majority of lecturers about their chosen work, which has been still considered a noble profession so far.

Above table also indicates that distributive and interpersonal justice as well as organizational justice was approaching the quite high level ( $M = 3.93, 3.97$  and  $3.95$ ) and this shows that lecturers have received behaviors and other benefits quite commensurate with what they contribute and invest. Most lecturers feel to be treated with respect, courtesy and sincerity. Fair distribution based on many different criteria fully reflects their efforts, achievements and so on to the contribution, the level of completion of the lecturers' work. Thus, it could be concluded that although lecturers still have certain concerns in the behavior of incomplete standards and the really non-objective outcomes distribution, they still respect, believe in their working environment.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and intercorelations among study variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Vigor	3.80	.60	-						
(2) Dedication	4.01	.63	.81**	-					
(3) Absorption	3.78	.63	.75**	.79**	-				
(4) Work engagement	3.86	.57	.92**	.94**	.92**	-			
(5) Distributive justice	3.93	.60	.30**	.34*	.31**	.35**	-		
(6) Interpersonal justice	3.97	.61	.29**	.32**	.29**	.32**	.70**	-	
(7) Organizational justice	3.95	.56	.32**	.36**	.32**	.36**	.92**	.92**	-

\*\* — Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed)

Table 1 reflects the positive and significant relationships among two components of organizational justice and three components of work engagement, in particular, distributive justice was correlated with vigor ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ), dedication ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) and absorption ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ); interpersonal justice was correlated with vigor ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ), dedication ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ) and absorption ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ). The results showed the positive and statistical significant relationship between organizational justice and lecturers' work engagement ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ).

Regression analysis was conducted to test the predictive level of organizational justice to the variation of lecturers' work engagement. According to the table 2, organizational justice could predict 12% of the variation in work engagement. Thus, the higher the organizational justice, the more lecturers attempt, love their occupation and contribute their careers. At the same time, they have more positive emotions and actions towards the work they are undertaking. Distributive justice and interpersonal justice can explain the work engagement at 11% and 9% respectively. Table 2 also proves that distributive justice boosts stronger lecturers' work engagement than interpersonal justice.

Multivariate regression analysis was conducted in order to examine the effect of distributive and interpersonal justice on work engagement and its components (Table 3). The results were represented distributive justice independently predicted vigor, absorption and work engagement with regression coefficients  $\beta_0 = .20, .24$  and  $.24, p < .05$ . Particularly for dedication, both components

participated in explaining its variation with regression coefficients of  $\beta_o = .22$  and  $.17$ . It can be seen that distributive justice has affirmed its role in the educational environment, that is, it has a stronger impact on lecturers' work engagement and all its components. Table 2 and 3 can help confirm *H1*, *H2*, *H3*, *H4*.

Table 2: Regression results to test the impact of organizational justice on lecturers' work engagement

Measurements of organizational justice	$R^2$	$F$	$\beta_o$	$p$
Distributive justice	.11	31.25	.34	.00
Interpersonal justice	.09	25.95	.32	.00
Organizational justice	.12	34.26	.36	.00

Table 3. Multivariate regression of impacts of distributive justice and interpersonal justice on lecturers' work engagement

Measurements of work engagement	$R^2$	$F$	Distributive justice		Interpersonal justice	
			$\beta_o$	$p$	$\beta_o$	$p$
Vigor	.09	23.86	.20	.02	.15	.08
Dedication	.11	3.27	.22	.01	.17	.04
Absorption	.09	13.04	.24	.00	.09	.29
Work engagement	.12	17.27	.24	.00	.15	.04

Results presented in Table 4 demonstrate that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between distributive justice and lecturers' work engagement ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .66 > .05$ ). Neither does gender significantly moderate the relationship between interpersonal justice and lecturers' work engagement ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .65 > .05$ ). Therefore, two hypotheses *H5* and *H6* were not supported.

Table 4: Hierarchical regression results for the moderating effect of distributive justice, interpersonal justice on lecturers' work engagement

Variables					Variables				
	$R^2$	$F$	$\beta$	$p$		$R^2$	$F$	$\beta$	$p$
Work engagement					Work engagement				
Step 1	.008	1.72	.08	.19	Step 1	.008	1.72		
Gender					Gender			.08	.19
Step 2	.12	15.39			Step 2	.104	12.90		
Gender			.08	.16	Gender			.08	.21
Distributive justice			.03	.00	Interpersonal justice			.31	.00
Step 3	.12	1.28			Step 3	.105	8.63	.08	
Gender			.08	.16	Gender			.08	.21
Distributive justice			.35	.00	Interpersonal justice			.32	.00
Gender* distributive justice			.03	.66	Gender*interpersonal justice			.03	.65

## Discussion

This study promotes the results of previous research about the effects of organizational justice on lecturers' work engagement. In the educational or non-educational environment, organizational justice has certain effects on employees' work engagement.

In our opinions, the phenomenon distributive justice having a stronger impact on work engagement than interpersonal justice can be explain by the impartial and respectful attitude of the manager, which is a necessary aspect of interpersonal justice. It lead to higher perception social support at work (Fujishiro, Heaney, 2009). This allows employees to better control their work. In the educational environment, however, the polite and respectful behaviors of the manager has almost

become a standard and culture of the organization, hence, it is not a prominent issue that strongly effects on lecturers' work engagement. On the contrary, high distributive justice means that lecturers feel that they receive rewards corresponding with their own efforts and contributions.

This is even more factual in the context of Vietnamese culture where public image is highly valued (Them, 1999), stemming from over-exaggerating the ego. For this reason, external rewards (e.g. compensations, bonuses, privileges, benefits) and other internal rewards (e.g. pride of their occupation, affirming personal capability, feeling of being useful) help individuals realize their ego in higher levels, thereby make lecturers more engaged in work.

There is not statistically significant difference on effect of distributive justice and interpersonal justice on male and female lecturers' work engagement shows that SET applies similarly within these two groups. In a working environment with diverse social relationships, when being rewarded with the hard work and being treated like other people, positive professional attitudes like enthusiasm, endeavour and the dedication to the job are natural responses of a social person. Accordingly, it can be further deduced that the causal relationship of organizational justice and work engagement may be true in many other cases, for example, when there are other relevant variables such as age, seniority, training level, academic title, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The article affirms the effect of organizational justice on lecturers' work engagement. This poses an issue for school leaders who need specific measures, policies, and regulations to support and further enhance fairness in the organization, thereby promoting work engagement. Justice is a core value in organizations (Konovsky, 2000), no matter what problems it involves: an promotion decision, task assignment, reward allocation or any kinds of social exchange. Therefore, establishing justice in the organization as well as raising employees' organizational justice is really important in the management strategies of leaders.

However, it must be clearly acknowledged that organizational justice is only the viewpoint of lecturers, but not necessarily the reality of the schools. So universities need to propagate widely on the measures and policies that have been applied in the distribution of compensations, bonuses, benefits and other resources to lecturers, also educating the civilized behavior of managers with lecturers. The stronger effect of distributive justice than interpersonal justice is the concern of organizations when considering lecturers' work engagement because it combines both their external demands and their internal needs.

## **Financial support**

This research is funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 501.01-2018.300.

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our deep gratitude to reviews for all dedicated and constructive comment of our scientific research. Those reviews and recommendations would serve as a valuable basis for us to further develop and elaborate on our article.



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Received 10.01.2020

# Вклад организационной справедливости в увлечённость работой у преподавателей в университетах Вьетнама

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**Аннотация.** *Цель.* В статье описывается взаимосвязь организационной справедливости и увлечённости работой у преподавателей вузов. Цель исследования — изучить вклад организационной справедливости в увлечённость работой у вьетнамских преподавателей и роль пола в этом отношении. *Дизайн исследования.* Данные были собраны с помощью опроса 230 лекторов, работающих в двух институтах в Ханое, Вьетнам. Для исследования были использованы две шкалы — шкала увлечённости работой В. Шауфели (Schaufeli et al., 2010) и шкала организационной справедливости Дж. Колкитта (Colquitt, 2001). *Результаты.* Организационная справедливость имеет довольно высокий уровень выраженности, увлечённость работой также выражена достаточно сильно. Организационная справедливость, дистрибутивная справедливость, межличностная справедливость имеют позитивную и статистически значимую корреляцию с увлечённостью работой у преподавателей. Дистрибутивная справедливость вносит больший вклад в увлечённость работой, чем межличностная справедливость. Пол преподавателя не имеет эффекта модерации в отношениях между дистрибутивной справедливостью, межличностной справедливостью и увлечённостью работой у преподавателей. Практические следствия. Полученные результаты позволяют предложить некоторые рекомендации для повышения организационной справедливости, с помощью которого можно усилить увлечённость работой преподавателей в вузе. *Ценность результатов.* Проанализирована величина вкладов компонентов организационной справедливости в увлечённость работой лекторов и выяснена роль пола в этих отношениях.

**Ключевые слова:** организационная справедливость; дистрибутивная справедливость; межличностная справедливость; увлечённость работой.

Поступила 10.01.2020.