ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE, JOB CHARACTERISTICS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AS PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

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Abstract: The main goal of this research was to examine the contribution of organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate in predicting work engagement among employees in the private sector. The instruments used in this study were the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), Organizational Justice Scale (OJS), Job Characteristics Questionnaire (JCQ), and Quality of Interpersonal Relationships in the Team Scale (QIRT-S). The sample consisted of 203 participants employed in the private sector of the Republic of Serbia, including 62 male and 141 female participants, with ages ranging from 20 to 64 years (M = 37.21; SD = 10.10). The main objective of the research was tested using hierarchical regression analysis, where in the first model the predictors were socio-demographic variables, in the second model the dimensions of organizational justice were added, in the third model the dimensions of job characteristics were added, and in the fourth model organizational climate was added. The results of this analysis showed that the final model was statistically significant (R^2 = 0.383; $F(18,184)$ = 6.33; p = 0.000), and that independent contributions to the prediction of work engagement were made by satisfaction with material rewards (β = 0.246), interpersonal justice (β = 0.251), informational justice (β = 0.269), cognitive job demands (β = 0.166), and organizational climate (β = 0.165). The findings reveal that satisfaction with material compensation significantly contributes to work engagement, with higher satisfaction linked to increased engagement. Cognitive job demands also play a crucial role, as more challenging tasks requiring higher cognitive resources lead to greater employee engagement. Perceived interactional justice, characterized by respectful treatment and timely, adequate communication from employers, is associated with higher work engagement. Additionally, a positive organizational climate is correlated with increased employee engagement. These results underscore the importance of material satisfaction, cognitive challenges, fair treatment, and a supportive work environment in enhancing employee engagement.
Keywords: work engagement, organizational justice, job characteristics, organizational climate.
Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a crucial driver of organizational success, especially in the private sector where competitiveness and efficiency are key. High levels of employee engagement correlate with increased productivity, reduced turnover, and improved overall organizational performance. To effectively enhance employee engagement, it is essential to understand the roles of organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate.

Organizational justice, encompassing distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, profoundly influences employee perceptions of fairness within the workplace. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcome distributions, procedural justice to the fairness of the processes that lead to outcomes, interpersonal justice to the fairness in treatment by supervisors, and informational justice to the fairness in the information provided (Colquitt et al., 2001). When employees perceive high levels of organizational justice, their trust in the organization increases, fostering greater commitment and engagement (Martins & Von der Ohe, 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Empirical studies have shown that procedural justice is linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, both of which are critical components of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Furthermore, interpersonal and informational justice contribute to the emotional well-being of employees, enhancing their overall engagement (Greenberg, 1993).Job characteristics, as conceptualized by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, are pivotal in shaping employee engagement. This model posits that job resources, such as autonomy, social support, skill variety, task significance, and feedback, are essential for mitigating job demands and fostering work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Enriched job roles that provide these resources lead to intrinsic motivation, resulting in higher engagement levels. Schaufeli et al. (2002) found that job resources

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not only help employees manage job demands but also play a motivational role by promoting personal growth, learning, and development. Additionally, jobs that offer autonomy and opportunities for skill development have been shown to enhance employee engagement by increasing their sense of control and competence (Sonnentag, 2003; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).The organizational climate, defined as the shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, also significantly impacts employee engagement. A positive organizational climate characterized by support, recognition, trust, and open communication enhances employees' emotional and psychological attachment to their work (Schaufeli, 2013; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Research indicates that a favorable organizational climate boosts engagement and leads to improved performance and reduced turnover intentions (Sonnentag, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 1997). For example, a supportive climate facilitates recovery from job stress and encourages proactive behavior, leading to higher engagement levels (Sonnentag, 2003). Similarly, Maslach and Leiter (1997) highlight that a positive organizational climate reduces burnout and fosters engagement by creating an environment where employees feel valued and recognized.Recent studies have continued to underscore these points. For example, the work by Bakker and Demerouti (2019) elaborates on the JD-R model, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between job demands and resources in predicting work engagement. Furthermore, a study by Lee and Ok (2021) shows how perceptions of organizational justice directly influence engagement and job satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of fair treatment in the workplace.The integration of organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate provides a comprehensive framework for understanding employee engagement. Implementing fair policies and procedures (organizational justice), designing enriching job roles (job characteristics), and fostering a supportive and positive work environment (organizational climate) collectively contribute to higher engagement levels. This holistic approach ensures that employees are not only satisfied with their jobs but also deeply engaged and committed to their organizational goals (Kahn, 1990; Bakker et al., 2008).

In summary, organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate are crucial predictors of employee engagement. By fostering a fair and supportive work environment, designing motivating job roles, and cultivating a positive organizational climate, organizations can significantly enhance employee engagement, leading to improved performance, lower turnover, and greater organizational success (Colquitt et al., 2001; Martins & Von der Ohe, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli, 2013; Shuck & Wollard, 2010; Sonnentag, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Kahn, 1990; Bakker et al., 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2019; Lee & Ok, 2021). This integrated approach not only enhances individual employee outcomes but also drives overall organizational success and sustainability.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study explores the relationships between organizational climate, organizational justice, job characteristics, and work engagement among private sector employees in Republic of Serbia, which are underexplored locally despite extensive Western research. Theoretically, it aims to enhance understanding of how these organizational factors influence work engagement, while practically, it provides insights for HR professionals and managers to develop strategies to improve employee engagement and productivity. The research objectives include determining how organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate predict work engagement.The study utilized several validated instruments to measure key variables. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Popov, 2013) evaluates employee work engagement with nine statements on a 7-point Likert scale. The Organizational Justice Scale (OJS; Colquitt, 2001; Mirković, 2014) assesses perceptions of workplace fairness across four subdimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, using twenty statements on a 5-point Likert scale. The Job Characteristics Questionnaire (JCQ; Popov, 2017) measures job demands through cognitive, emotional, quantitative, and physical dimensions using forty-six statements on a 5-point Likert scale. The Quality of Interpersonal Relationships in the Team Scale (QIRT-S; Szostek, 2019) examines the work environment with twenty-seven statements on a 7-point Likert scale. Additionally, a custom-developed Sociodemographic Questionnaire collected data on participants' demographic and job-related characteristics.. The sample consisted of 203 private sector employees in Serbia, including 62 males and 141 females, aged 20-64 years (AM = 37.21; SD = 10.10) , with varied job tenures and roles.

Table 1. Degree of reliability of the instruments used

	Number of items	A
Work engagement	9	0,91
(OJS) Distributive Justice	5	0,93
(OJS) Procedural Justice	5	0,89
(OJS) Interpersonal Justice	5	0,93
(OJS) Informational Justice	5	0,85
(UKP) Cognitive demands	3	0,60
(UKP) Emotional demands	3	0,64,
(UKP) Quantitative demands	3	0,66
(UKP) Physical demands	3	0,86
Interpersonal Relationships in the team	58	0,98

Source: Popovic, Savic & Davidovic Rakic

3. RESULTS

In Table 2, the inter-variable correlations of the research variables are shown, and the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient indicate that the criterion variable, work engagement, significantly correlates with the predictor variables of distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, informational justice, and organizational climate, and these correlations are positively oriented. The relationship between work engagement and other predictors, i.e., job characteristics, is lacking.

Table 2. Inter-variable correlation in research

Inter-variable correlation in research

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Work Engagement	-								
2. Distributive Justice	,26**	-							
3. Procedural Justice	,20**	,79**	-						
4. Interpersonal Justice	,43**	,37**	,46**	-					
5. Informational Justice	,41**	,52**	,64**	,65**	-				
6. Cognitive Job Demands	,09	-,16*	-,26**	-,16*	-,24**	-			
7. Emotional Job Demands	,01	-,35**	-,39**	-,22**	-,26**	,19**	-		
8. Quantitative Job Demands	-,10	-,08	-,11	-,23**	-,12	,38**	-,03	-	
9. Physical Job Demands	-,12	-,11	-,12	-,36**	-,23*	-,15*	-,07	,17*	-
10.Organizational Climate	,41**	,30**	,37**	,59**	,55**	-,03	-,13	-,20**	-,26**

*p<0,05 **p<0,01

Source: Popovic, Savic & Davidovic Rakic

In Table 3, a hierarchical regression analysis is shown to verify the main objective of this research, which is to determine the contribution of organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate to the prediction of work engagement. The first model included sociodemographic variables (gender, age, tenure, satisfaction with material compensation, job type, and supervisory role), explaining 16.0% of the variance in work engagement, with age and satisfaction with material compensation positively contributing, while working with things negatively contributed. The second model added dimensions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, informational), explaining 33.4% of the variance, with a significant increase of 17.4% from the first model. Positive predictors were satisfaction with material compensation, interpersonal justice, and informational justice, while negative predictors included working with things, working with data, and procedural justice. The third model added job characteristics (cognitive, emotional, quantitative, and physical demands), explaining 36.7% of the variance; however, the contribution of job characteristics was not statistically significant. Positive predictors were satisfaction with material compensation, interpersonal justice, informational justice, and cognitive job demands. The fourth model added organizational climate, explaining 38.3% of the variance, with a significant 1.5% increase from the third model. Positive predictors were satisfaction with material compensation, interpersonal justice, informational justice, cognitive job demands, and organizational climate.

Table 3. Prediction of work engagement

Prediction of work engagement

Predictor		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	β	,002	,032	,003	,016
Age	β	,358*	,180	,194	,202
Work experience	β	-,314	-,030	-,057	-,065
Period of employment within the organization	β	,116	,018	,038	,041
Satisfaction with monetary compensation	β	,401*	,277*	,239*	,246*
Working with objects	β	-,157*	-,140*	-,156	-,141
Working with data	β	-,110	-,139*	-,115	-,119
Working with ideas	β	,053	,070	,062	,061
Manager	β	-,046	-,034	-,027	-,025
Distributive Justice	β		,100	,103	,106
Procedural Justice	β		-,238*	-,198	-,202
Interpersonal Justice	β		,284*	,311*	,251*
Informational Justice	β		,284*	,325*	,269*
Cognitive Job Demands	β			,196*	,166*
Emotional Job Demands	β			,023	,024
Quantitative Job Demands	β			-,068	-,043
Physical Job Demands	β			,145	,136
Organizational Climate	β				,165*
Model summary		R^2=,160	R^2=,334	R^2=,367	R^2=,383
		$F_{(9,193)}$=4,08	$F_{(13,189)}$=7,30	$F_{(17,195)}$=6,31	$F_{(18,184)}$=6,33
		p =,000	p =,000	p =,000	p =,000
Changes in model		/	ΔR^2=,174	ΔR^2=,033	ΔR^2=,015
			$\Delta F_{(4,189)}$=12,38	$\Delta F_{(4,185)}$=2,40	$\Delta F_{(1,184)}$=4,60
			p=,000	p=,051	p=,033

Source: Popovic, Savic & Davidovic Rakić

* - p value of the beta coefficient less than 0.05; β – beta standardized regression coefficient; R – multiple correlation coefficient; R2 – coefficient of multiple determination; F – F ratio; ΔR2 - difference in the coefficient of multiple determination between models

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to investigate the contribution of organizational justice, job characteristics, and organizational climate in predicting employee engagement in the private sector. Results partially confirmed the initial hypotheses, indicating that interpersonal and informational justice, job cognitive demands, and organizational climate explain a significant portion of variability in employee engagement (Sarid & Fried, 2009). Additionally, job satisfaction with material status was found to have a significant impact on employee engagement (Ancarani et al., 2019). Socioeconomic status was also identified as a complex factor influencing employee engagement, with higher status individuals showing more motivation and positive attitudes towards work (Klehe & Gash, 2018).

Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of perceived organizational justice, job characteristics (specifically cognitive job demands), and organizational climate in explaining employee engagement. Positive organizational climate fosters autonomy, empowerment, and well-being, leading to increased job satisfaction, motivation, and engagement (Jyoti, 2013). Overall, these factors play crucial roles in predicting and enhancing employee engagement in the workplace.

When considering the obtained results, it is necessary to take into account the limitations of the study. Primarily, this research solely relied on self-assessment measures, raising concerns about potential biases in responses. Additionally, the limited demographic diversity of the participants, particularly fewer employees in managerial positions, reduces the generalizability of the findings.To enhance future research in this area, it is recommended to include a more diverse sample to improve result validity. Moreover, incorporating objective measures alongside self-assessments can provide a

more comprehensive understanding of employee engagement factors. Additionally, expanding the study to encompass a broader range of organizational settings and employee demographics would offer a more nuanced perspective on the topic.

Despite these limitations, the study suggests that organizational climate and justice can significantly impact employee engagement. By fostering a positive and inclusive environment, organizations can cultivate a sense of belonging and job satisfaction among employees. Ensuring fairness in decision-making processes and policies can further enhance trust and mutual respect within the organization. Employers can use incentives and rewards to encourage participation in activities that promote engagement, ultimately creating a more positive work environment. Organizations should focus on creating an environment that encourages engagement among all employees, regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics. Employers can also offer training programs, technical skills development, and flexible work options to enhance employee engagement and satisfaction.

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