

How organizational justice reduces turnover intention of Korean and non-Korean employees in South Korea: the mediating roles of organizational conflict and job satisfaction

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Executive Summary

This study examines how organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions) influences turnover intention among employees in foreign-invested enterprises in South Korea, using organizational conflict and job satisfaction as mediating variables. The authors argue that fairness perceptions reduce turnover intention both directly and indirectly through lower conflict and higher satisfaction. Using non-probability convenience sampling, 775 valid responses were collected from employees in the Seoul metropolitan area and analyzed via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). All three justice dimensions were significantly and negatively associated with organizational conflict and turnover intention, while positively associated with job satisfaction. Both mediators partially mediated the justice–turnover intention relationship. Multi-group analysis (MGA) comparing Korean and non-Korean employees found that most structural relationships were statistically equivalent across groups, with one notable exception: the negative effect of interactional justice on organizational conflict was significantly stronger among Korean employees than non-Korean employees. The authors conclude that fairness perceptions function as a critical lever for employee retention in multicultural organizational settings in South Korea, and that culturally differentiated HR strategies may be warranted for specific justice dimensions.

Key Insights

1. All three dimensions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interactional) negatively predicted turnover intention and organizational conflict while positively predicting job satisfaction, with distributive justice and interactional justice showing the strongest effects on turnover intention ($\beta = -0.230$ and $\beta = -0.332$, respectively).
2. Organizational conflict and job satisfaction each partially mediated the relationship between all three justice dimensions and turnover intention, indicating that fairness perceptions affect retention both directly and through employee attitudinal and relational outcomes.
3. Multi-group analysis revealed that Korean and non-Korean employees responded similarly to most justice–outcome relationships, but differed significantly on the interactional justice–organizational conflict path (Korean: $\beta = -0.338$; non-Korean: $\beta = -0.212$; $p = 0.028$), suggesting Korean employees may be more sensitive to interpersonal treatment quality in reducing workplace conflict.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations operating in multicultural South Korean workplaces may find that managing perceived fairness in outcomes (distributive justice) has the largest direct effect on reducing turnover intention, and that investing in respectful interpersonal communication (interactional justice) may be particularly effective for reducing conflict among Korean employees.
- The dual mediation through both organizational conflict and job satisfaction suggests that retention-focused HR interventions targeting fairness perceptions may be most effective when they simultaneously address conflict reduction mechanisms and satisfaction-enhancing conditions.

Frameworks Mentioned

Equity Theory — Adams' (1965) theoretical foundation underpinning organizational justice, positing that employees assess fairness by comparing their input-outcome ratios to those of others.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The study applies a rigorous PLS-SEM methodology with comprehensive psychometric validation including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, Fornell-Larcker criterion, and HTMT ratios. Measurement invariance is assessed using MICOM before conducting MGA, which is methodologically appropriate. The sample size ($n = 775$) is adequate for the complexity of the model, and common method bias is assessed through both Harman's single-factor test and the Common Latent Factor procedure. The cross-national comparison within the same organizational context adds analytical value. **Limitations:** The convenience sampling from the Seoul metropolitan area substantially restricts generalizability to rural regions, smaller domestic firms, and other national contexts. All data are self-reported by employees, raising social desirability concerns particularly noted by the authors in collectivist cultural settings. Cultural factors such as hierarchy, collectivism, and power distance are invoked interpretively but not operationalized or measured in the model, limiting explanatory depth. The study is cross-sectional, preventing causal inference about the direction or temporal dynamics of the relationships. The authors disclose use of generative AI for language editing, which, while disclosed, introduces a minor transparency consideration. The non-Korean group ($n = 442$) is treated as a single category despite likely comprising employees from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, which may mask meaningful within-group variation.

Organizational Practice

Foreign-invested multinational enterprises operating in South Korea administered structured surveys to employees across multiple departments (HR, marketing/sales, operations, accounting, PR) and organizational levels (intern through director). The study describes centralized and hierarchical decision-making structures common in Korean organizational settings, as well as multicultural workforce management practices in which Korean and non-Korean employees work within the same enterprises. HR practices related to compensation fairness, performance evaluation, promotion decisions, and managerial communication are identified as operationally relevant contexts for justice perceptions.

Strategic Implications

The finding that interactional justice has a stronger conflict-suppressing effect among Korean employees than non-Korean employees points to nationality-differentiated variation in how fairness dimensions translate into workplace relational outcomes, implying that uniform justice-focused HR policies may produce unequal effects across culturally diverse employee populations. The partial mediation through

both conflict and satisfaction suggests that performance management systems that address fairness in outcomes, processes, and interpersonal treatment may operate through multiple attitudinal pathways simultaneously. The R^2 for turnover intention (0.651) indicates that the model captures a substantial proportion of variance, positioning organizational justice as a high-leverage construct in employee retention frameworks within the foreign enterprise context in South Korea. The growing scale of the foreign workforce in Korea (exceeding 1.1 million in 2025) underscores the increasing practical relevance of cross-cultural differentiation in PMS design within this labor market.

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