



The relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit: The mediating role of organisational trust

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Dates:

Received: 21 Oct. 2021

Accepted: 25 Apr. 2022

Published: 02 Nov. 2022

How to cite this article:

Williamson, M.K. & Perumal, K., 2022, 'The relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit: The mediating role of organisational trust', *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 25(1), a4412. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v25i1.4412>

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Background: The effects of person–organisation (P–O) fit on key work outcomes has been the subject of a plethora of research in the last few decades. However, scant attention has been given to exploring the antecedents of P–O fit in the workplace. This study addressed this gap in the literature.

Aim: The aims of the study were to determine if there was a relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit, and whether organisational trust could be considered a potential mediating variable in this relationship.

Setting: The research was conducted among permanent employees representing a range of businesses in KwaZulu-Natal.

Methods: In order to address the study objectives, a quantitative survey and cross-sectional design were used. Data were collected from a convenience sample of 118 permanent employees who were registered for degrees in commerce and business administration and attended part-time classes at a university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Results: The results of the statistical analysis revealed a significant and positive association between procedural justice and employees' perceived P–O fit. Organisational trust was found to partially mediate this relationship.

Conclusion: The results make a significant contribution to P–O fit theory and the management of P–O fit in the workplace.

Keywords: P–O fit; procedural justice; organisational trust; social exchange theory; relational models of procedural justice.

Introduction

The concept of person–organisation (P–O) fit generated considerable research interest in the past few decades (De Cooman et al. 2019:646–651; Hamstra, Van Vianen & Koen 2019:600; Oh et al. 2014:101; Treviño et al. 2020:287). Broadly, P–O fit refers to the compatibility, match, similarity or congruence between employee and the organisation (Cable & DeRue 2002:875; Kristof 1996:4–5). This similarity may occur in a single dimension, or a range of dimensions, such as values, goals, culture and beliefs. Past research demonstrated a link between P–O fit and a plethora of desirable or positive work outcomes (Hoffman & Woehr 2006:389–399; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson 2005:310; Park, Oh & Lee 2020:2089; Verquer, Beehr & Wagner 2003:473–489). For example, studies showed that when employees perceive high levels of fit with their organisations, they are generally satisfied with their jobs (Andela & Van der Doef 2019:567); are more committed to their organisations (Bahat 2021:1255); experience increased psychological well-being (Koburtay & Alzoubi 2021:103), higher work engagement (Rayton, Yalabik & Rapti 2019:401–414), and lower burnout (Andela & Van der Doef 2019:567); and are less inclined to leave and seek employment elsewhere (Abdalla et al. 2018:863). Previous studies also positively associated P–O fit with organisational citizenship behaviour (Ashfaq & Hamid 2021:19) and employee creativity (Seong & Choi 2019:129). Scholars also recognised the significance of P–O fit in the recruitment and selection processes of organisations (Vanderstukken, Proost & Van den Broeck 2019:602).

Although the extant literature revealed a sizeable body of research into P–O fit and its link to a variety of employee attitudes and behaviour, several gaps remain, particularly, in the area of the factors that influence employees' perceptions of P–O fit (Vleugels et al. 2018:1067). To date, studies examining the antecedents of P–O fit focused on constructs such as high performance work

practices (Uppal 2021:356), transformational leadership (Raja et al. 2018:913–930), workplace spirituality (Afsar & Badir 2017:95), workplace ostracism (Chung 2017:328) and organisational socialisation (Coldwell, Williamson & Talbot 2019:511–527; Oh 2018:360). Gabriel et al. (2014:390) noted that a large volume of work argued for ‘causal precedence of fit perceptions’. For example, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are assumed to be the consequence of an assessment of how well an employee fits in with the organisation. However, it has been suggested that the causal flow may be reversed to consider the impact of work-based affect and attitudes, such as job satisfaction on perceived fit (Gabriel et al. 2014:390; Yu 2009:1210–1226). This line of reasoning will usher in new avenues for research in our quest to uncover novel predictors of P–O fit and further deepen our understanding of the dynamic nature of the this important construct. Vleugels et al. (2018:1078) highlighted that employees’ work experiences could play a significant role in the development of person–environment fit perceptions and urged scholars to pursue this area of research.

One such variable that could potentially influence employees’ P–O fit perceptions is procedural justice. The concept of procedural justice generated considerable interest in the past few decades and is an important antecedent variable in organisational behaviour and management research (Colquitt et al. 2013:199–236). In general, procedural justice refers to employees’ perceptions of fairness in the processes and procedures used to arrive at the outcomes of decisions taken by organisations and their leaders (Colquitt 2001:386). It represents a significant dimension of organisational justice and was found to have an impact on employees’ attitudes directed towards the organisation (Folger & Konovsky 1989:115–130). For example, employees who demonstrated high perceptions of procedural justice are more likely to display high levels of commitment to their organisations, engage in organisationally directed citizenship behaviour and have lower intentions to leave their organisations (Cohen-Charash & Spector 2001:278–321; Viswesvaran & Ones 2002:193–203). Procedural justice was also shown to positively influence employee engagement in the workplace (Biswas, Varma & Ramaswami 2013:1570; He, Zhu & Zheng 2014:681). A study linking procedural justice as an antecedent to P–O fit will broaden our knowledge of how P–O fit could be influenced in organisations. We propose that employees, who perceive that their organisations use fair procedures and processes when arriving at decision outcomes, will reciprocate by displaying trust and faith in their organisations. In turn, this could translate into positive attitudinal or behavioural outcomes, such as an increase in employees’ perceived P–O fit.

A critical factor to our understanding of how procedural justice could influence P–O fit, is shedding light on the intervening mechanism through which this relationship may occur. Organisational trust has been submitted as a potential mediating variable in this relationship. In broad terms, trust

has been described as ‘confident, positive expectations about the words, actions, and decisions of another in situations entailing risk’ (Colquitt et al. 2012:1). Prior research suggested that trust could be a useful intervening variable in explaining how organisational justice influences work outcomes (Aryee, Budhwar & Chen 2002:267–285; Jiang, Gollan & Brooks 2017:973–1004). According to Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis and Winograd (2000:35), organisational trust refers to ‘positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviours of multiple organisational members based on organisational roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies’. We considered organisational trust to be an apposite explanatory mechanism in the procedural justice and P–O fit relationship. This article, therefore, focuses on the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit, and the mediating role of organisational trust.

Aims and objectives of the study

The aims of the study were to determine if there was a relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit and whether organisational trust could be considered a potential mediating variable in this relationship. Linked to these aims, four research objectives were articulated. These included: (1) to examine the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit; (2) to examine the relationship between procedural justice and organisational trust; (3) to examine the relationship between organisational trust and P–O fit; and (4) to test the mediating role of organisational trust in the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit.

Literature review

Antecedents of person–organisation fit

Past research exploring the antecedents of P–O fit have done so in the context of P–O fit serving as a mediating variable in a number of predictor–outcome relationships. These studies suggested that P–O fit may be influenced by certain specific variables, and in turn, affect a number of work outcomes. One such variable is the quality of the relations that employees have with their organisational leaders. Badawy et al. (2019:86–98) found that employee P–O fit mediated the relationship between trust in leader and job performance, suggesting that high-quality employee–leader relations, exemplified in the high trust in leadership, may serve as a useful predictor of P–O fit. Zhang, Lam and Deng (2017:1017–1019) examined the influence of dyadic relationships such as leader–member exchange and supervisor–subordinate *guanxi* on employee fit perceptions, helping behaviour and turnover intentions. The findings suggest that leader–member exchange may have a stronger influence on employees’ P–O fit perceptions than supervisor–subordinate *guanxi*.

The next important variable is the type of leadership and how this may influence P–O fit. Grobler and Holtzhausen (2018:8) found support for the mediating role of P–O fit perceptions in the relationship between ethical leadership and supervisory trust in a sample of South African employees

across a wide range of organisations. The concepts of morality and fairness revealed by leaders were one of the key dimensions assessed in this research and thus suggesting that employees being valued honestly and fairly by their leaders, could result in an increase in their levels of P-O fit. In a recent study among public sector employees, Lim, Lee and Bae (2019:144) investigated the mediating role of P-O fit in the relationship between two affect-based work variables (i.e. transformational leadership and role clarity) and job satisfaction. The findings provided substantial support for the mediating role of P-O fit in the transformational leadership and job satisfaction relationship.

Employee perceptions of human resource management (HRM) practices have also been demonstrated to influence P-O fit. For example, Boon et al. (2011:149–152) found support for the mediating role of P-O fit in the relationship between a set of high performance HRM practices and work outcomes such as organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour. In this large-scale study conducted in the Netherlands, employees were asked to what extent their organisations offer them a number of critical or strategic HRM practices in areas such as selection, training, participation, teamwork and rewards. Similarly, Mostafa (2016:1229) found that P-O fit perceptions mediated the relationships between high-performance HRM practices and outcomes, such as work stress and intentions to quit, among public health employees. In a study conducted on employees at a Dutch university, Kooij and Boon (2018:69) showed that high performance work practices increase the levels of perceived P-O fit over time. Moreover, perceived P-O fit mediated the relationship between high performance work practices and affective commitment. The impact of HRM practices on P-O fit was also examined by Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2013:2100) who reported that P-O fit mediated the relationship between perceived HRM practices and organisational commitment among employees in the Japanese healthcare industry. These HRM practices may reveal to employees a number of important factors about their organisations in terms of values, ethics and justice, which could have an influence on their perceptions of P-O fit. Such findings and theoretical expositions suggest that procedural justice could be a significant predictor of employees' perceived P-O fit. However, a rational explanatory mechanism in the form of a mediating variable will further cement this link.

In a study, examining the mediating role of P-O fit in the relationship between psychological contract breach and employee engagement, Lv and Xu (2018:1271) reported that psychological contract breach had a negative influence on P-O fit in a sample of Chinese workers. It was argued, using Blau's (1964) social exchange theory, that when employees experience a psychological contract breach, they would respond adversely by developing unfavourable views about their organisation. Consequently, these employees may adjust their perceived P-O fit downwards (Lv & Xu 2018:1263).

The extant literature alludes to the possibility of exploring the predictive capacity of other work-related variables on perceived P-O fit. We propose the examination of procedural justice as a potential antecedent variable. Procedural justice is an important variable in the South African workplace and has been the subject of increased scholarly inquiry in recent years (Mrwebi, Smith & Mazibuko 2018:495–524).

The relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit

To date, little is known about whether and how employee perceptions of procedural justice influences perceived P-O fit. Blader and Tyler (2015:351) aver that procedural justice 'conveys a positive message to justice recipients about their relationship with the entity enacting the justice'. Therefore, one would expect that employees who perceive high levels of procedural justice will tend to strengthen relationships with their organisations. According to the group-value model, employees could use procedural justice as an indicator of their social standing in organisations (Tyler 1989:830). Employees will feel valued and respected by their organisations when they perceive that they have been treated in a procedurally fair manner. This could result in employees developing increasing levels of trust in their organisations (De Cremer 2005:5). The group-engagement model highlights the importance of fair procedures in shaping employees' cooperation with their work groups, organisations and societies at large (Tyler & Blader 2003:349). Procedural justice plays a significant role in influencing employees' social identity within their work groups or organisations (Blader & Tyler 2009:454).

The mediating role of organisational trust in the relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit

Blau's (1964) social exchange theory is useful in understanding procedural justice and work outcome relationships. Social exchanges have been described as 'voluntary actions which may be initiated by an organisation's treatment of its employees, with the expectation that such treatment will eventually be reciprocated' (Gould-Williams & Davies 2005:3). An organisation's fair treatment of an employee in the form of procedural justice, may encourage this employee to respond accordingly in terms of positive attitudes and behaviours directed at the organisation. Trust has been regarded as a significant factor in understanding social exchange relationships and will be enhanced when social exchange relationships are favourable between organisations and its employees (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Grohmann & Kauffeld 2013:457). Consequently, trust could serve a critical role in various organisational justice and work outcome relationships by functioning as an intervening mechanism that could explain these organisational justice effects (Stinglhamber, De Cremer & Mercken 2006:443).

Past research has recognised organisational trust as a promising mediating variable in procedural justice's influence on a range of employee outcomes. For example,

Aryee et al. (2002:267) found that organisational trust partially mediated the effects of procedural justice on employees' job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intentions. In a large-scale study across three different countries, Jiang et al. (2017:973) reported that organisational trust fully mediated the relationship between procedural justice and affective organisational commitment. Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2013:454) demonstrated that the procedural justice effects on organisational citizenship behaviour were mediated by organisational trust and organisational commitment. Chen et al. (2015:11–12) showed that the procedural justice, perceived by nurses at a medical centre in southern Taiwan, significantly and positively impacted their organisational trust and organisational identification. In turn, organisational trust demonstrated the strongest impact on affective commitment.

If procedural justice is related to organisational trust, then organisational trust could help explain the effects of procedural justice on P–O fit. However, for this to be realistic, it requires showing that organisational trust is also related to P–O fit. To date, not much is known about the effects of organisational trust on employees' P–O fit perceptions. According to Schneider's (1987:437–453) attraction-selection-attrition theory, individuals are attracted to organisations that reflect values similar to their own. Organisations, in turn, recruit and select employees who display values that are congruent or fit in with their values and culture. Over a period of time, employees who discover that their values diverge from or does not fit in with their organisations, leave. Employees' levels of organisational trust could influence their experiences of value similarity or P–O fit. For example, social exchange theory suggests that trust plays a significant role in enabling 'social exchange reciprocation' whereby employees will react in positive ways from developing high levels of organisational trust as a consequence of being treated procedurally fair (Jiang et al. 2017:978). Although not previously empirically examined, we propose that one such positive outcome in response to employees' high levels of organisational trust would be an increase in perceptions that their values are closely aligned or show high P–O fit.

Evidently, there is a paucity of research that examined the link between procedural justice and employees' perceptions of P–O fit. Moreover, the mediating role of organisational justice in this relationship has yet to be satisfactorily explored. This research sought to address this gap in the literature.

Method

Research design and approach

A positivist research philosophy was embraced. In line with this, a deductive approach using a quantitative survey and cross-sectional research design were employed. The approach was appropriate for a study of this nature wherein relationships between different variables were examined and inferences made to the wider population about the findings.

Selection and description of participants

The target population consisted of permanent, full-time employees who were registered for degrees in commerce and business administration and attended part-time classes at a university in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Due to the red-tape and challenges of selecting a sample in this context, a non-probability, convenience sampling approach was used. A convenience sample is a simple, efficient, speedy and cost-effective way to select a sample of participants (Cooper & Schindler 2014:359). This technique proved apposite in this study as the researchers, with the permission of the lecturers, approached the potential participants via email with a request to participate. Those who indicated a willingness to do so, formed part of the final sample which totalled 118 participants. It appears, in line with Krejcie and Morgan (1971:608), who indicated that for a population of 160, that the suggested sample size should be 113 participants. The sample was made up as follows:

There were 63% female and 37% male participants. These participants occupied various jobs ranging from non-managerial to senior management. Their organisational tenure ranged from under 2 years to over 21 years. A wide range of sectors were represented in the sample: public sector (29%), retail (21%), financial services (18%), health and welfare (16%), manufacturing (10%), and logistics (6%).

Data collection

The researchers obtained the email addresses of participants from the course administrators. Participants were then emailed the self-administered questionnaire to fill in and return. A number of reminders were conveyed to ensure prompt completion. Self-administered questionnaires are useful quantitative data collection tools and offer a number of advantages such as a reduction in researcher bias and providing a convenient and non-threatening way in which participants may respond to questions (Bryman & Bell 2011:232–233). The questionnaire comprised two sections. Firstly, the demographic section wherein participants were required to respond to questions concerning their gender, job level, organisational tenure and sector in which employed. Secondly, the independent, dependent and mediating variables section, consisting of multi-item scales.

Measuring instruments

Multi-item scales were used to measure P–O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust. All items were presented in statement form and participants were required to respond accordingly by marking their ratings on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', and 7 = 'strongly agree').

Person–organisation fit

Employees' perceived P–O fit was measured using Cable and DeRue's (2002:879) 3-item perceptions of P–O fit scale. These items included: 'My organisation's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life'; 'The

things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organisation values'; and 'My personal values match my organisation's values and culture'. Cable and DeRue (2002:879) achieved Chronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.91 and 0.92.

Procedural justice

Colquitt's (2001:389) procedural justice scale was used to measure employees' perceptions of procedural justice. This scale consists of seven items and addresses a number of principles that are considered necessary for fair processes such as voice, consistency, free of bias, accuracy, representation, ethicality and correctability. These items were: 'My organisation has procedures designed to generate standards so that decisions could be made and applied with consistency'; 'My organisation has procedures designed to ensure that information used by management for making decisions is accurate'; 'My organisation has procedures designed to provide employees with opportunities to appeal or challenge decisions taken by management'; 'My organisation has procedures designed to ensure that employees have an influence over decisions taken by management'; 'My organisation has procedures designed to ensure that decisions made by management are made in an unbiased manner'; 'My organisation has procedures designed to allow employees the opportunity to express their views, concerns and feelings about decisions made by management'; and 'My organisation has procedures designed to ensure that the highest ethical and moral standards are upheld by management when making decisions'. Colquitt and Rodell (2011:1191) reported Chronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.86 and 0.90.

Organisational trust

A 4-item scale adapted from Robinson's (1996:583) trust in employer scale was used to measure employees' perceptions of organisational trust. These items were: 'I believe my employer has high integrity'; 'I have utmost trust in my employer'; 'In general, I believe my employer's motives and intentions are good'; and 'My employer is open and upfront with me'. Robinson (1996:583) achieved Chronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.82 and 0.87.

Data analysis

All the statistical analysis was undertaken by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 27). Descriptive statistics, reflecting the percentage distribution of the demographic profiles of the participants, were computed, as well as the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis scores of the P-O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust variables.

To investigate the research objectives, inferential statistical tests were performed to determine the relationships among the different variables. The first test involved the calculation of the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which revealed the significant strength and direction of the

relationships among the three variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationships between procedural justice and P-O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust and, organisational trust and P-O fit.

Hierarchical regression was utilised to test the mediating influence of organisational trust in the procedural justice and P-O fit relationship. The researchers were guided by Baron and Kenny's (1986:1177) steps to examine mediation effects. Firstly, the independent variable (procedural justice) must show a significant association with the dependent variable (P-O fit). Secondly, the independent variable (procedural justice) must be significantly related to the proposed mediating variable (organisational trust). Thirdly, the proposed mediating variable (organisational trust) must have a significant influence on the dependent variable (P-O fit). If these conditions are satisfied, the direct influence of the independent variable (procedural justice) on the dependent variable (P-O fit) should show a significant reduction (partial mediation) or be eliminated (full mediation) when the proposed mediating variable (organisational trust) is included in the hierarchical regression test.

Psychometric properties of measuring instruments

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measuring instrument (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016:451). There were three measuring instruments used in this study and each consisted of multiple items. Thus, establishing internal reliability was deemed appropriate and this was assessed, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this regard, the average of the split-half reliability coefficients were computed for the three measuring instruments. A rule of thumb score of 0.80 is generally considered to be an adequate level of reliability (Bryman & Bell 2011:159). In the study, the P-O fit scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93), procedural justice scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92) and organisational trust scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.98) all displayed high reliability scores.

Validity

The validity of a measuring instrument relates to whether it actually measures the construct or concept it claims to measure (Saunders et al. 2016:202). The researchers focused on establishing two forms of validity:

Content validity: The content validity of a measuring instrument relates to the extent to which its items give proper coverage of the research question it endeavours to address (Cooper & Schindler 2014:256). Measuring instruments for P-O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust were adapted from well-established measuring instruments that were used by scholars in the field. The various items were reflected upon by the researchers to ensure relevance.

Construct validity: Construct validity refers to the extent to which an operationally defined construct is reflected in the theory underpinning the concept to be investigated (Cooper & Schindler 2014:259). In evaluating construct

validity, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the items representing the measuring instruments on the questionnaire. The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.88 (> 0.6 minimum value) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at 0.00 p value.

The Principal Component Analysis was used to extract the factors. Three factors had Eigen values of greater than one and explained a cumulated variance of 81.09%. After rotating the factors, using Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation, a total of three factors finally emerged, representing the variables in the study. The factor loadings were all above 0.50, which could be considered practically significant (Hair et al. 1998:111).

Common method bias

Common method bias is frequent in attitudinal and behavioural research, particularly when there are self-reported measuring instruments used. Guided by Podsakoff et al. (2003:879–903), a number of steps were taken to reduce the level of common method bias in this study. Firstly, the question order of the measuring scale items were mixed to reduce the inclination of each participant to respond in a preconceived manner. Secondly, careful attention was paid to ensure that the wording of the measuring scale items were clearly written and understood. Thirdly, by safeguarding their anonymity, participants were more disposed to responding in a candid way without fear of victimisation by their organisations.

The application of Harman's (1967) single-factor test to all the study variables revealed that there was no one factor that accounted for most of the variance. Moreover, as highlighted above, the results of the EFA showed there were three factors, and not one factor, that accounted for 81.09% of the cumulative variance. More specifically, these factors generated an explained variance of 33.67%, 27.57% and 19.85% respectively, with the first factor not surpassing the explained variance of 50%. These tests show that common method bias may not have had a significant impact on the results of this study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical standards as prescribed by the researchers' affiliated institution were adhered to throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to commencement of data collection. The researchers endeavoured to act with integrity and transparency when dealing with participants. All participants were assured anonymity by not disclosing their names in the study findings. The confidentiality of their responses was also preserved. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC/ 00002231/2020).

Results

Statistical tests

The mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were computed for P–O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust. These are reflected in Table 1. The mean scores on a 7-point Likert scale were comparatively high for the P–O fit (5.07), procedural justice (4.65) and organisational trust (4.84). The skewness values were negative for all the variables (procedural justice = -0.40 , organisational trust = -0.74 , P–O fit = -1.02) and the kurtosis values were negative for procedural justice (-0.75), organisational trust (-0.74) and positive for P–O fit (0.36). These values represented no major deviation from range of normal distribution.

A correlation analysis was performed to show the relationships among the three variables of P–O fit, procedural justice and organisational trust. The correlation matrix is shown in Table 2. There is a positive and significant correlation between procedural justice and P–O fit ($r = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.01$). In addition, procedural justice and organisational trust show a positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.57$, $p \leq 0.01$). Organisational trust and P–O fit also demonstrated a positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.47$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Research objective 1: To examine the relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with procedural justice as the independent variable and P–O fit, the dependent variable. The results reflected in Table 3 show that procedural justice is significantly and positively associated with P–O fit ($b = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Research objective 2: To examine the relationship between procedural justice and organisational trust

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with procedural justice as the independent variable and

TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
P–O fit	118	5.07	1.51	-1.02	0.36
PJ	118	4.65	1.49	-0.40	-0.75
OT	118	4.84	2.01	-0.74	-0.74

Source: Calculated from survey results

P–O fit, person–organisation fit; PJ, procedural justice; OT, organisational trust.

TABLE 2: Correlation matrix of the variables.

Variables	P–O fit	PJ	OT
P–O fit	1.00	0.44**	0.47**
PJ	0.44**	1.00	0.57**
OT	0.47**	0.57**	1.00

P–O fit, person–organisation fit; PJ, procedural justice; OT, organisational trust.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed.

TABLE 3: Regression analysis (dependent variable: person–organisation fit; predictor: procedural justice).

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.013	0.414	-	7.284	0.000
	PJ	0.443	0.085	0.437	5.236	0.000

PJ, procedural justice.

organisational trust, the dependent variable. The results reflected in Table 4 show that procedural justice is significantly and positively associated with organisational trust ($b = 0.57$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Research objective 3: To examine the relationship between organisational trust and person–organisation fit

A multiple regression analysis was conducted with organisational trust as the independent variable and P–O fit, the dependent variable. The results reflected in Table 5 show that procedural justice is significantly and positively associated with organisational trust ($b = 0.47$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Research objective 4: To test the mediating role of organisational trust in the relationship between procedural justice and person–organisation fit

The findings of the first three research objectives fulfilled the first three requirements of Baron and Kenny's (1986:1177) test for mediation. To satisfy the final requirement, a hierarchical regression was undertaken with procedural justice inserted in step 1 and organisational trust in step 2. The findings are shown in Table 6.

In step 1, procedural justice demonstrated a positive and significant relationship with P–O fit ($b = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.01$). In step 2, with the inclusion of organisational trust in the regression model, there was a resulting decrease in the beta coefficient for procedural justice (from $b = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.01$ to $b = 0.26$, $p \leq 0.01$). Thus, this finding shows that organisational trust partially mediates the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit.

TABLE 4: Regression analysis (dependent variable: organisational trust; predictor: procedural justice).

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		Beta	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.275	0.503	-	2.533	0.013
	PJ	0.767	0.103	0.569	7.446	0.000

PJ, procedural justice.

TABLE 5: Regression analysis (dependent variable: person–organisation fit; predictor: organisational trust).

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		Beta	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.382	0.324	-	10.440	0.000
	OT	0.350	0.062	0.465	5.659	0.000

OT, organisational trust.

TABLE 6: Hierarchical regression analysis (dependent variable: person–organisation fit; predictors: procedural justice, organisational trust).

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		Beta	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.013	0.414	-	7.284	0.000
	PJ	0.443	0.085	0.437	5.236	0.000
2	(Constant)	2.707	0.408	-	6.632	0.000
	PJ	0.259	0.099	0.255	2.618	0.010
	OT	0.241	0.073	0.320	3.282	0.001

PJ, procedural justice; OT, organisational trust.

Discussion

As highlighted in the beginning, there is voluminous research that investigates the effects of P–O fit on a range of work outcomes. However, scant attention has been given to the antecedents of P–O fit. To date, not much is known about whether and how procedural justice influences employees' P–O fit perceptions. We sought to address this gap in the literature by articulating and accomplishing four key objectives.

The first objective was to examine the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit. The results revealed that procedural justice was significantly and positively related to employees' perceived P–O fit. This finding places in the foreground the importance of procedurally fair treatment received by employees from their organisations and the significant role it plays in influencing their levels of P–O fit perceptions. The relational models of procedural justice, namely, the group-value model (Tyler 1989:830–838), the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind 1992:115–191) and the group-engagement model (Tyler & Blader 2003:349–361) all advocate the notion that 'procedural justice matters' to individuals (Blader & Tyler 2015:356). Organisations that treat their employees in a procedurally fair manner convey an affirmative message to them that they are valued and belong to their organisations. Consequently, this may strengthen relationships between the two parties (Blader & Tyler 2015:351–356). Employees in this position may appraise their fit with their organisations and conclude that they have high levels value similarity or P–O fit.

The second objective was to examine the relationship between procedural justice and organisational trust. The results demonstrated a significant and positive link between procedural justice and organisational trust indicating that employees who were procedurally fairly treated by their organisations responded favourably by increasing their levels of trust in their organisations. This finding is consistent with past empirical research reporting that procedural justice had a positive impact on organisational trust when organisational trust was examined as a mediating variable in a number of procedural justice and work outcome studies (Aryee et al. 2002:267; Chen et al. 2015:11–12; Jiang et al. 2017:973; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2013:454). Procedural justice has been accredited with initiating favourable social exchange relationships between organisations and its employees (Jiang et al. 2017:974). Moreover, trust is intrinsically associated with social exchange theory, meaning that when social exchange relationships are favourable between organisations and its employees, organisational trust will be heightened (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2013:457).

The third objective was to examine the relationship between organisational trust and P–O fit. Organisational trust was found to be significantly and positively associated with P–O fit. This result suggests that when employees show increasing trust towards their organisations, they will react by perceiving higher levels of P–O fit. Previous research

has given scarce attention to examining this link. However, social exchange theory may offer a plausible explanation as to why organisational trust was found to be positively related to P–O fit. According to this theory, employees who developed high levels of organisational trust from being treated procedurally fair, will return this benevolence by reacting in a variety of positive ways (Jiang et al. 2017:978). One such could be in increasing their levels of perceived P–O fit.

The fourth objective was to test the mediating role of organisational trust in the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit. Organisational trust was found to partially mediate the procedural justice and P–O fit relationship. This result is significant as it sheds light on the previously untested procedural justice and P–O fit relationship. Accordingly, by including organisational trust as a mediating variable, we offer a plausible explanatory mechanism of how procedural justice could act as an antecedent variable to employees' perceived P–O fit. In the past, organisational trust was shown to be a useful mediator in procedural justice and work outcome relationships (Aryee et al. 2002:267; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2013:454). The results of this study reinforce the notion that the procedurally fair treatment received by employees from their organisations sends positive signals to these employees that they are valued members of their organisations. In turn, these employees increase their levels of trust in their organisations. This increased level of trust may propel these employees to perceive high value congruence or P–O fit.

Managerial implications

The results have a few practical implications. This study shows that employees' perceived P–O fit levels may be increased by ensuring that they are treated in a procedurally fair manner by their organisations. Therefore, this finding raises the prominence of procedural justice as an antecedent of employees' perceived P–O fit in the workplace. This finding could prompt managers to ensure that fair treatment in terms of procedural justice is consistently applied when making decisions that affect employees. By doing so, employee P–O fit levels will be enhanced resulting in a number of positive attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. This study has also highlighted the importance of organisational trust as a mediating variable in the procedural justice and P–O fit relationship. Therefore, it is imperative that management take cognisance of this and seek ways to ensure that employees increase their levels of trust in the organisations they are employed in.

Conclusion

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has some limitations that should be highlighted. Firstly, the convenience sampling method and the

relatively small sample size limit the generalisability of the results across a wider population of employees. Secondly, the use of a cross-sectional design may have concealed the extent of the relationships among the different variables in the study.

This study offers a few suggestions for future research. Future research could replicate a study of this nature, using probability sampling techniques and across a more diverse and larger sample. This could improve the generalisability of the results. Future research should also examine the relationship between procedural justice and P–O fit using other mediating variables such as social identity. This could shed more light on the nature and dynamics of the relationship. Further research could also broaden the number of organisational justice dimensions as predictor variables, such as distributive and interactional justice. In addition, a more comprehensive operationalisation of the fit construct could be used as criterion variables that includes dimensions such as person–job fit and person–group fit. This could provide a more comprehensive picture of the link between organisational justice and person–environment fit. In order to establish a more accurate understanding of the nature and strength of the relationships among procedural justice, organisational trust and P–O fit, future studies should examine these relationships using a longitudinal design.

This study addressed the dearth of research investigating the antecedents of P–O fit by empirically examining the relationship between procedural justice and employees' P–O fit perceptions. The results confirmed a significant and positive association between these two variables and thus elevating the prominence of procedural justice in the workplace and the impact it has on employees' perceptions of P–O fit. This study also shed light on organisational trust, the potential intervening mechanism through which these two variables may interact. Besides reflecting links with procedural justice and P–O fit, the results showed organisational trust to partially mediate the procedural justice and employee perceived P–O fit relationship.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

All authors have contributed equally to this work.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, M.K.W., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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