

The influence of organizational fairness on organizational identification: the regulatory role of moral identity and the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem

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Abstract. Based on the Group Engagement Model and Self-consistent Theory, this paper explores the mechanism of the influence of organizational fairness on organizational identification based on a moral fairness perspective, with organization-based self-esteem as the mediator and moral identity as the moderator, based on a moderated mediator model. Through 533 questionnaires, the findings show that: (1) organizational fairness positively influences organizational identification and organization-based self-esteem mediates between the two; (2) moral identity positively moderates the influence of organizational fairness on organizational identification, i.e. when employees' moral identity is stronger, the stronger the positive relationship between organizational fairness and organizational identification; (3) moral identity positively moderates the effect of organization-based self-esteem in the influence of organizational fairness on organizational identification, showing a mediating effect of being moderated in a mediating pattern, i.e. the stronger the employee's moral identity, the stronger the aforementioned mediating effect. These findings have important implications for enterprises to improve employees' organizational identification.

Keywords: organizational fairness; organizational identification; organization-based self-esteem; moral identity.

1. Introduction

As the trends towards information technology, globalization and economic integration intensify, modern organizations are faced with increasingly complex changes in uncertainty. Under the trend of Organizational complexity, companies need employees' organizational identification to provide cohesion for the organization. Studies have shown that employees with higher organizational identification are more likely to defend the organization as fully as they defend themselves and act to gain benefits for the organization (HoggM. A. et al., 2000)^[1]. The more the employees identify with the organization, the more likely they are to behave as if they were themselves (HoggM. A. et al. 2000)^[1]. In order to enhance employees' organizational identification, organizations must understand the factors that influence employees' organizational identification and their mechanisms of action. Research has shown that good leadership and Organizational climate promote higher organizational identification (Liu X., Zeng Q. 2021; Qu Q. et al. 2013).^[2] ; Quqing et al. 2013^[3] ; Epitropaki, 2013^[4]). organizational fairness, as one of the key factors in creating a good organizational climate, can also affect organizational identification. Employees who are treated unfairly in the organization have an increased probability of weakening their sense of coherence and belonging to the organization, and consequently neglecting to consider the development of the company in their daily work and acting in a way that is inconsistent with the organization's goals.

This paper therefore attempts to disentangle the mechanisms by which organizational fairness affects organizational identification.

In existing studies, most scholars have used organizational fairness as an independent variable to study its impact on employee behavior, including organizational citizenship behavior (Yan Dan et al. 2010^[5], Xie Zhitao et al. 2009^[6], Chen Xinglin et al. 2010^[7]), job performance (Deng Yimin and Shen Hong 2012)^[8], employee turnover (Yang, Chunjiang et al. 2014)^[9], knowledge sharing behavior (Fan, Meiyu et al., 2022)^[10]. However, the impact of organizational fairness on employees' psychology, especially the process of organizational fairness on organizational identification, has not received sufficient attention from academics.

In this paper, organization-based self-esteem is chosen as a mediating variable to explore the path of organizational fairness on organizational identification. According to the Group Engagement Model (GEM; Tyler & Blader, 2003)^[11] procedural fairness in organizational fairness further influences human psychology and behaviour by affecting individual perceptions of status (self-esteem).

In the process of influencing organizational fairness to organizational identification, moral identity may act as an important intrinsic motivator and intervene significantly in the process. Self-consistent Theory (SCT)^[12] suggests that individuals' motivations and behaviours depend on their sense of self-worth, i.e. when they internalise positive self-perceptions, they are more likely to engage in and seek out corresponding role behaviours, thereby maximizing their own perceptions of consistency.

This paper combines these two theories and takes a fresh theoretical perspective by innovatively selecting moral identity as a moderating variable and breaking the black box of the relationship between organizational fairness and organizational identification through further empirical testing.

Overall, this study uses the Group Engagement Model and Self-consistent Theory to integrate the perspective of organization-based self-esteem as a mediating variable and moral identity as a moderating variable to analyze the mechanism of organizational fairness on organizational identification. Firstly, it helps to reveal the influence path of organizational fairness on organizational identification; secondly, it helps to advance the theoretical development of the mediating effect of organizational fairness on organizational identification based on organization-based self-esteem; furthermore, it helps to remedy the deficiencies of theoretical studies on the moderating mechanism of moral identity. These theoretical contributions also have important practical implications for enhancing employees' organizational identification, thereby promoting cost reduction and sustainable development.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

2.1 The impact of organizational fairness on organizational identification

It was first introduced in 1965 by Smith^[13]. Fairness theory was proposed, employees were more concerned about the reasonableness of compensation distribution and fairness of treatment than the absolute value of compensation, which was later referred to as distributive fairness by scholars, and then the concept of organizational fairness (OF) was continuously systematized under the efforts of researchers, Thibaut & Walker (1975)^[14], Bies and Moag (1986)^[15], and the three-factor theory of distributive, procedural and interactional fairness is now widely used in academic circles. At the Organizational level, research has shown that employees' sense of organizational fairness affects

employees' attitudes towards the organization, such as trust in the organization (Fan Cultivation, 2014)^[16], commitment to the organization (Yan, Dan and Zhang, Lijun, 2010)^[17] etc. At the individual level, perceptions of fairness can change the psychology and behaviour of Organizational members, for example Smith^[13] For example, Smith argues that when employees feel unfair, they usually change their perceptions of inputs and rewards, or change their own inputs, or even leave the company; Li Shu-Min et al.(2010)^[18] showed that the interaction of the three dimensions of organizational fairness had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction; Yu, Haibo et al.(2009)^[19] found that organizational fairness was significantly and positively related to pay satisfaction; Ma Chao et al.(2014)^[20] proved that the dimensions of organizational fairness were significantly and negatively related to turnover intention; Liu Tao et al. (2019)^[21] found a significant positive effect of organizational fairness on employees' job performance; Fan Meiyu et al.(2022)^[22] found that organizational fairness had a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing behavior. Based on the above studies, it is clear that organizational fairness can change employees' attitudes towards the organization. Olkkonen and Lipponen (2006)^[23] suggest that distributive justice and procedural fairness significantly predict organizational identification. Group Engagement Model (GEM); Tyler & Blader, 2000^[24], 2003^[25]) suggests that organizational fairness affects members' organizational identification. The central "social identity mediating effect hypothesis" of the GEM states that when members are treated fairly by the organization, they will perceive themselves as having a place in the organization and will therefore identify with the organization. In summary, Hypothesis 1 is proposed in this study.

H1: organizational fairness acts positively on organizational identification.

2.2 The mediating role of organization-based self-esteem

When members of an organization are treated fairly within the organization, their perception of personal value and their status within the group is enhanced accordingly, i.e. organization-based self-esteem is enhanced. Pierce(1989)^[26] first introduced the concept of organization-based self-esteem, which reflects the perceived status and self-worth of individuals as members of an organization through their behaviour in the Organizational environment. organization-based self-esteem is an important variable in the field of organizations and human resources and has received much academic attention in recent years. Research findings indicate that organization-based self-esteem affects job satisfaction (Yang Yi et al., 2022)^[27], constructive behaviour (Jiangpei Xie et al., 2020)^[28], innovation behaviour (Wang, Hongfang, 2022)^[29] The study also verified the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem, such as mediating personalised contracts and knowledge sharing behaviour (Hu, Weiwei et al., 2018)^[30], workplace rejection and employee-suggested behavior (Liu, Juqin et al., 2019)^[31], managerial openness and employee constructs (Xie Jiangpei et al., 2020)^[28], Differential treatment and employee happiness at work (Yang Yi et al., 2022)^[27], total compensation and employees' innovative behavior (Wang Hongfang, 2022)^[29].

According to the Group Engagement Model, the mechanism by which procedural fairness in organizational fairness affects identity is the individual's perception of status. The individual's need for self-esteem is the member's perception of his or her position in the group, i.e. the sense of respect experienced, which is closely linked to the status perception. (Tyler & Lind, 1992)^[32] When self-esteem needs are met, individuals feel that they have status and therefore identify with the group. The central idea of the Group Engagement Model, the "social identity mediating effect hypothesis" (Blader & Tyler, 2009)^[33] also emphasizes that the interpersonal dimension of

procedural fairness (respect) influences organizational identification, and that people determine the extent to which they identify with the group by judging their status in the group and thus integrating their sense of self with the group.

Organizational Identification is the perception that an individual is aligned with or belongs to an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1992)^[34]. The Group Engagement Model complements this definition by suggesting that identity also derives from the status and value of an individual's personal identity within the organization (TYLER T R, BLADER S L, 2003)^[35] Bergami & Bagozzi (2000)^[36] Research has shown that organization-based self-esteem has a significant positive impact on organizational identification. Li Yanping et al. (2016)^[37] believe that organizational identification and organization-based self-esteem interact with each other. When individuals have positive perceptions of their self-worth within the organization, they develop positive attitudes, i.e., enhanced organization-based self-esteem, individual psychological needs are met, and employees whose psychological needs are met by the organization are more inclined to integrate into the organization and enhance their sense of coherence and belonging to the organization. Therefore, hypotheses 2-4 are proposed in this study.

H2: organizational fairness acts positively on organization-based self-esteem.

H3: organization-based self-esteem acts positively on organizational identification.

H4: organization-based self-esteem has a mediating role in the effect of organizational fairness on organizational identification.

2.3 The moderating role of moral identity

Aquino and Reed (2002)^[38] state that moral identity is a moral cognitive schema that individuals organize and build up about their self-concept under a set of moral characteristics, a stable moral trait of how individuals perceive themselves. If an individual perceives himself or herself to be a moral person, there is a strong motivation to follow a moral code. According to Self-consistent Theory, individuals will be cognitively consistent in their attitudes and behaviours, i.e. individuals behave in a way that is consistent with their self-expectations and self-concept (Korman, 1970)^[39]. Within the framework of Self-consistent Theory, individuals engage in behaviours that are consistent with their self-concept, e.g. individuals with high self-esteem traits show more positive work attitudes and higher production performance as well as less deviant behaviour at work (Ferris, 2009^[40]; Lin, 2018^[41]). The level of moral identity can largely influence individuals' motivation and behaviour (Hardy & Carlo, 2011)^[42], e.g. May, Chang and Shao (2015)^[43] showed that the relationship between CSR perceptions and Organizational citizenship behaviour was more significant among employees with high moral identity, and Liu, Fengjun et al. (2017)^[44] study also confirmed this; May, Chang and Shao (2015)^[43] suggest that moral identity negatively affects employees' willingness to leave; O'Reilly and Aquino (2011)^[45] suggest that moral identity influences people's gut reactions to unfair events. This paper argues that when an employee has a higher moral identity with the organization, he will have a stronger perception of organizational fairness and will also associate himself more closely with the organization, and have a stronger sense of alignment and belonging to the organization. Based on this, this paper proposes hypothesis 5.

H5: Moral identity positively moderates the effect of organizational fairness on organizational identification.

Rupp (2013)^[46] found that individuals with a high moral identity are more sensitive to moral or ethical related issues. Whereas organizational fairness affects an individual's perception of their

status identity in the organization is also a moral and ethical issue, this paper argues that in scenarios where moral identity is higher, employees have a higher level of perception of organizational fairness, which in turn enhances their sense of status in the organization. Based on this, this paper proposes hypothesis 6.

H6: Moral identity positively moderates the effect of organizational fairness on organization-based self-esteem.

In summary, this paper proposes an integrated model to capture the impact of organizational fairness and organizational identification, as shown in Figure 1.

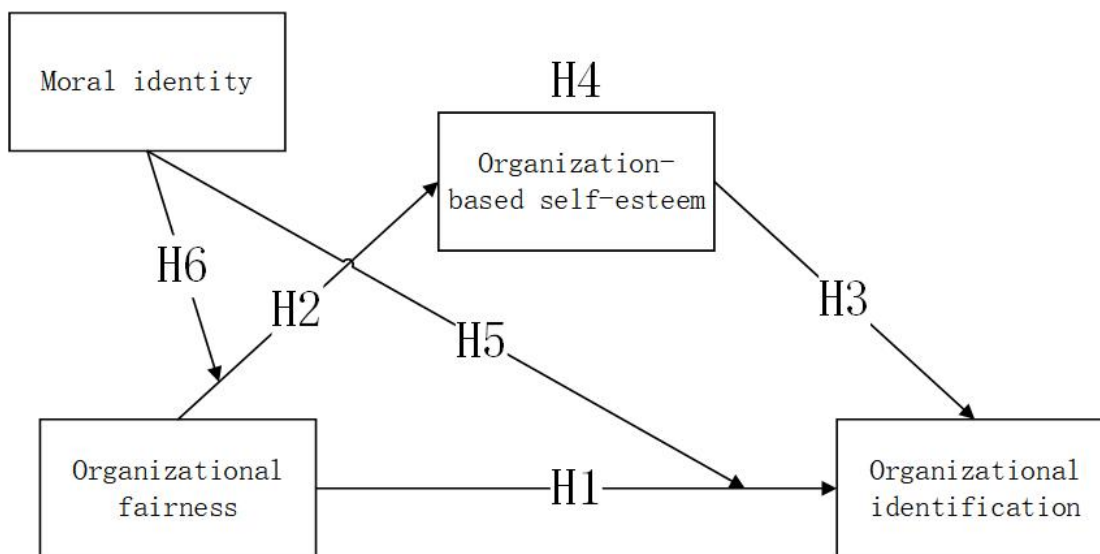


Figure 1 Conceptual model.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Study sample and procedures

The questionnaires for this study were sampled in the UK, US and France in a number of sectors including healthcare, science and technology, and education services. 612 questionnaires were obtained, and after excluding invalid data, 533 questionnaires were finally obtained for this study. Of the valid sample, 47.2% were male and 52.7% were female, the average age was 40.49 years, most were no longer students (91.9%), the average length of service in the sector was 6.96 years, the average length of service in the organization was 9.93 years and the average length of service in the current position was 6.01 years. The above information reflects a good representation of the respondents to this study.

3.2 Measuring tools

The conceptual measurement scales for this study were drawn from the research literature of Western scholars.

First, organizational fairness was measured using Maureen L. Ambrose and Marshall Schminke's Perceived Overall Justice (POJ) scale. The scale consists of 2 dimensions, personal experience of justice (3 items) and organizational fairness (3 items), with a total of 6 items and a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.966 for the whole scale. A Likert scale of 1-6 was used, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 6 indicating strongly agree. The example entry for personal experience of justice is

"Over all, I'm treated fairly by my organization" and the example entry for organizational fairness is "Usually, the way things work in this organization are not fair".

Secondly, the questionnaire for moral identity used a five-entry scale developed by Karl Aquino and Americus Reed. The questionnaire has a Cronhach' α coefficient of 0.824 on a 1-6 Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. The example entry is "It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics".

Thirdly, the questionnaire for organization-based self-esteem was based on a 10-item scale developed by Pierce et al. The questionnaire has a Cronhach' α coefficient of 0.928 and uses a Likert scale of 1-6, with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. The example entry is 'I count around here'.

Fourth, organizational identification was measured using a five-entry scale adapted by Blader & Tyler from Ashforth & Mael's scale. The Cronhach' α coefficient for this questionnaire was 0.888. The questionnaire uses a 1-6 Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree. The example entry is "When someone praises the accomplishments of my organization, it feels like a personal compliment to me".

4. Data analysis and hypothesis testing

4.1 Reliability analysis

Construct validity is the ability to make inferences about the content of a measurement instrument or to measure abstract concepts and can be measured by principal component analysis. The magnitude of the variance contribution of the first principal component reflects the closeness of the measurable item to the problem domain under study and is generally considered to be better than 50%. Regarding the reliability test, a measure is considered reliable only when Cronhach' α is greater than 0.7. In this study, the Cronhach' α values were all greater than 0.7, so the questionnaire's measures were considered to be reliable.

Table 1 Reliability analysis

Variable name	Title item	CITC	Cronhach' after deletion of item α	Overall Cronhach' α
organizational fairness	OF01	0.909	0.946	0.966
	OF02	0.895	0.947	
	OF03	0.899	0.947	
	OF04	0.896	0.947	
	OF05	0.754	0.963	
	OF06	0.869	0.950	
Moral identity	MII01	0.719	0.773	0.824
	MII02	0.712	0.760	
	MII03	0.729	0.758	
	MII04	0.501	0.823	
	MII05	0.572	0.823	
Organization-based self-esteem	OBSE01	0.818	0.916	0.928
	OBSE02	0.817	0.916	
	OBSE03	0.762	0.920	

	OBSE04	0.818	0.916	
	OBSE05	0.734	0.920	
	OBSE06	0.837	0.915	
	OBSE07	0.764	0.919	
	OBSE08	0.664	0.924	
	OBSE09	0.537	0.927	
	OBSE10	0.502	0.926	
Organizational identification	OI01	0.789	0.850	0.888
	OI02	0.679	0.878	
	OI03	0.827	0.841	
	OI04	0.753	0.859	
	OI05	0.609	0.886	

4.2 Homogeneous variance test

As each questionnaire was completed by the same person, the questionnaire was prone to the problem of homogeneous bias. In this study, Harman's single factor test was adopted and all questionnaire items were factor analysed together. The first principal component obtained at unrotated explained 40.527% of the variance, which did not exceed 50% of the recommended value, and the phenomenon of homoscedasticity among the variables measured did not affect the reliability of the findings.

4.3 Related analysis

The table below shows that organizational fairness is significantly and positively related to organizational identification ($r=0.495$, $p<0.01$), organizational fairness is significantly and positively related to organization-based self-esteem ($r=0.567$, $p<0.01$), and organization-based self-esteem is significantly and positively related to organizational identification ($r=0.529$, $p<0.01$), which is consistent with the theoretical hypothesis and therefore can be further analysed using regression methods. analysis.

Table 2 Related analysis

Variables	Average value	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4
1. organizational fairness	4.808	1.209	1			
2. Moral identity	5.451	0.717	0.124**	1		
3. Organization-based self-esteem	5.014	0.836	0.567**	0.238**	1	
4. Organizational identification	3.858	1.269	0.495**	0.187**	0.529**	1

Note: *** denotes $p<0.001$, ** denotes $p<0.01$, * denotes $p<0.05$, same below

4.4 Hypothesis testing

Mediating role of knowledge sharing. Model 4 regression results in the table below indicate that organizational fairness has a significant effect on organizational identification ($\beta=0.480, p<0.01$), so hypothesis 1 of this paper is supported. Model 2 indicates that organizational fairness has a significant positive effect on organization-based self-esteem ($\beta=0.549, p<0.001$), and this result supports hypothesis 2 of this paper. Model 5 indicates that organization-based self-esteem also has a significant positive effect on organizational identification ($\beta=0.528, p<0.001$), so this empirical result validates hypothesis 3. Finally, examining the effect of organization-based self-esteem and Organizational Fairness on organizational identification was examined, and as shown in model 6, organization-based self-esteem had a significant positive influence ($\beta =0.371, p<0.001$), while the influence of organizational fairness decreased from 0.549 to 0.276 ($p<0.001$). The above empirical results suggest that organization-based self-esteem plays a partially mediating role between organizational fairness and organizational identification, thus hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 3 Mediating role of knowledge sharing

Variable type		organization-based self-esteem		organizational identification				
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	
Control variables	birth country	-0.034	0.011		-0.050	-0.010	-0.032	-0.014
	residence country	0.198***	0.132**		0.136**	0.076	0.031	0.028
	first language	0.025	0.011		0.069	0.057	0.056	0.053
	nationality	-0.072	-0.041		-0.116	-0.089	-0.078	-0.073
	sex	0.014	0.005		-0.052	-0.060	-0.059	-0.062*
	student status	0.111*	0.072**		0.088**	0.054	0.029	0.027
	age	0.134***	0.090**		0.060	0.021	-0.010	-0.012
Independent variable	organizational fairness		0.543***			0.485***		0.285** *
Intermediate variables	organization-based self-esteem					0.529**		0.369** *
	F	4.946	34.917		2.038	22.402	26.625	30.438
	R ²	0.062	0.348		0.026	0.255	0.289	0.344
	ΔR^2	0.062	0.286		0.026	0.228	0.263	0.089

Moderating role of moral identity. Further combined with the table below, it was found that both organization-based self-esteem and organizational fairness had significant positive effects on

organizational identification (see model 10), with regression coefficients of ($\beta = 0.286, p < 0.001$) and ($\beta = 0.353, p < 0.001$) respectively. After adding the interaction term to model 11, the coefficient of the interaction term was significant ($\beta = 0.076, p < 0.05$). Therefore, the moderating effect of moral identity on organizational fairness and organizational identification holds, i.e. hypothesis 5 of this paper is supported. Both organizational fairness and moral identity have a significant positive effect on organization-based self-esteem (see model 7), with regression coefficients of ($\beta = 0.519, p < 0.001$) and ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.001$) respectively. After adding the interaction term to model 8, the coefficient of the interaction term was significant ($\beta = 0.110, p < 0.001$). Therefore, the moderating effect of moral identity on organizational fairness and organization-based self-esteem is valid, i.e. hypothesis 6 of this paper is supported. In order to illustrate the above moderating effect more graphically, this paper groups moral identity by the mean of moral identity plus or minus one standard deviation, with the mean plus one standard deviation being the high moral identity group and the mean minus one standard deviation being the low moral identity group. The figure below shows that organizational fairness has a significant effect on both organization-based self-esteem and organizational identification in both high and low moral identity situations.

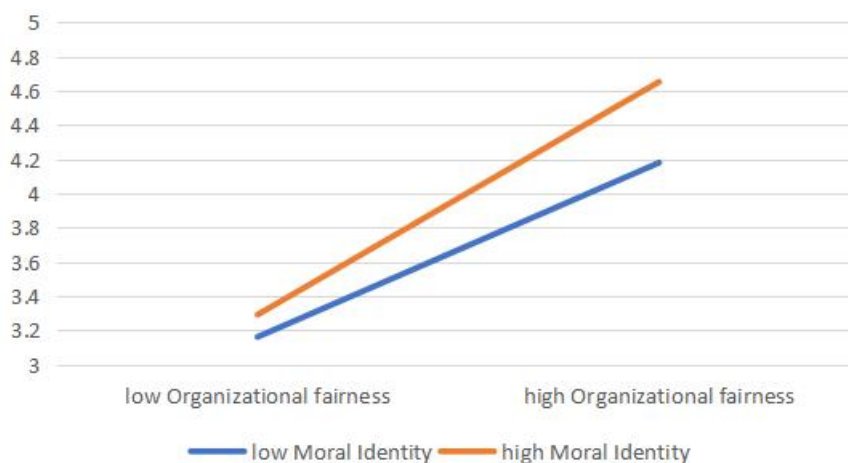


Figure 2 Simple Slopes for Managerial Attributions of organizational fairness

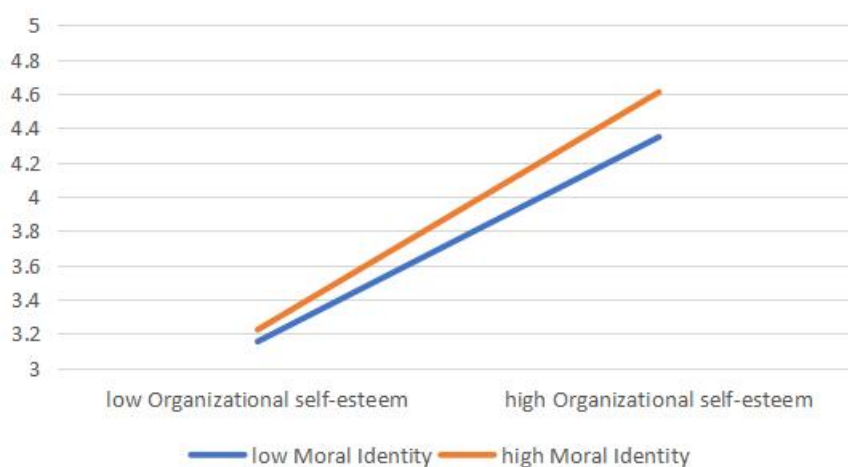


Figure 3 Simple Slopes for Managerial Attributions of organization-based self-esteem

Table 4 Moderating role of moral identity

Variable type		organization-based self-esteem		organizational identification			
		Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	
Control variables	birth country	-0.002	0.002		-0.019	-0.018	-0.016
	residence country	0.125**	0.129*		0.072	0.028	0.075
	first language	0.027	0.032		0.068	0.058	0.072
	nationality	-0.035	-0.037		-0.084	-0.072	-0.086
	sex	0.038	0.038		-0.037	-0.051	-0.037
	student status	0.081**	0.069*		0.060	0.031	0.051
	age	0.086**	0.089*		0.018	-0.012	0.021
Independent variable	organizational fairness	0.519***	0.523***		0.469***	0.286***	0.472***
Adjustment variables	Moral Identity	0.182***	0.192***		0.127***	0.062*	0.134***
Interaction items	OFMI		0.110***				0.076**
Intermediate variables	organization-based self-esteem					0.353***	
	F	35.463	33.487		21.492	27.769	19.858
	R ²	0.379	0.391		0.270	0.347	0.276
	ΔR ²	0.317	0.012		0.244	0.321	0.006

5. Study results

5.1 Conclusions and management practice insights

The following findings were obtained: organizational fairness is positively related to organizational identification. organization-based self-esteem mediates the relationship between organizational fairness and organizational identification. Moral identity positively moderates the relationship between organizational fairness and organizational identification, and positively moderates the effect of organizational fairness on organization-based self-esteem.

Based on the above findings, the following management practice insights emerge from this study:

(1)It helps companies to give importance to employees' sense of organizational fairness. Organizational managers need to recognise that enhancing organizational fairness can positively contribute to organizational identification and thus improve Organizational effectiveness. This requires companies to attach importance to organizational fairness in all aspects of human resource management, ensure fairness, openness and impartiality in decisions on performance, pay and promotion, and enhance the sense of fairness felt by employees within the organization, thus improving their sense of identity with the organization.

(2) Increase the importance of organization-based self-esteem. According to the findings of this paper, organization-based self-esteem is a key mediating variable in enhancing employees' organizational identification. Companies should set up corresponding management systems and measures to effectively improve employees' organization-based self-esteem, such as establishing a fair, open and transparent performance appraisal system, bonus distribution system and promotion system. In addition, leaders can also motivate employees by meeting their high-level psychological needs, adopting various methods such as increasing compensation, providing training opportunities, encouraging participation in decision-making and creating a good Organizational atmosphere and reputation, so as to enhance employees' organization-based self-esteem.

(3) Companies should stimulate the different effects of organizational fairness on organizational identification according to the degree of moral identity of their employees. This requires organizations to be adept at perceiving the degree of moral identity of their employees in the course of their operations, judging the degree of organizational fairness required and selecting a fairness system that meets the development needs of the organization.

5.2 Research gaps and outlook

(1) Limitations of the research methodology, this study conducted a cross-sectional design and thus does not really infer a causal relationship between the variables. Although this paper theoretically constructs a model of the relationship between organizational fairness and organizational identification, and collects data from multiple sources to improve the reliability of the study's findings. However, the more complex relationships involved need further validation.

(2) Limitations of the research context and scales. When designing the research questionnaire, China and the West have different characteristics and perceptions; organizational fairness, organization-based self-esteem, moral identity and organizational identification should have different concepts in the Chinese cultural context. Therefore the researcher cannot simply apply the scale in the West. Subsequent research can take into account the specificities of Chinese culture and context and contribute to the development of local Organizational behaviour.

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