

Explaining How Organizational Justice Enhances Employee Engagement: The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust

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ABSTRAK

Pegawai lembaga pemasyarakatan menjalankan tanggung jawab yang kompleks dan menuntut, yang mencakup keamanan institusi, pelayanan publik, pengawasan narapidana, serta kegiatan rehabilitasi. Kesediaan mereka untuk mencurahkan perhatian dan usaha dalam melaksanakan berbagai tanggung jawab tersebut dapat dipengaruhi oleh persepsi terhadap keadilan dalam praktik organisasi dan tingkat kepercayaan terhadap institusi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara keadilan organisasi dan keterikatan kerja pegawai dengan menempatkan kepercayaan organisasi sebagai mekanisme mediasi. Penelitian ini dilakukan pada pegawai Lembaga Pemasyarakatan Kelas I Makassar. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan sampling jenuh atau sensus dengan melibatkan seluruh 60 pegawai sebagai responden. Hubungan langsung dan tidak langsung dalam model penelitian dianalisis menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan perangkat lunak SmartPLS 4. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa keadilan organisasi berpengaruh terhadap tingkat kepercayaan organisasi serta keterikatan kerja pegawai. Kepercayaan organisasi juga memiliki hubungan positif dengan keterikatan kerja pegawai. Selain itu, hubungan tidak langsung antara keadilan organisasi dan keterikatan kerja melalui kepercayaan organisasi terbukti positif dan signifikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kepercayaan organisasi menjadi mekanisme penting yang menghubungkan persepsi keadilan dengan keterikatan kerja pegawai. Lembaga pemasyarakatan perlu menerapkan praktik yang adil dan membangun kepercayaan pegawai untuk meningkatkan keterikatan kerja.

Kata Kunci: Keadilan Organisasi, Kepercayaan Organisasi, Keterikatan Kerja Pegawai, SEM-PLS, Lembaga Pemasyarakatan Kelas I Makassar

ABSTRACT

Correctional institution employees carry out complex and demanding responsibilities, including institutional security, public service, inmate supervision, and rehabilitation activities. Their willingness to devote attention and effort to fulfilling these various responsibilities may be influenced by their perceptions of organizational justice and their level of trust in the institution. This study aims to analyze the relationship between organizational justice and employee work engagement by positioning organizational trust as a mediating mechanism. The study was conducted among employees of the Class I Makassar Correctional Institution. A saturated sampling or census approach was employed, involving all 60 employees as respondents. The direct and indirect relationships in the research model were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4 software. The results indicate that organizational justice has a significant effect on organizational trust and employee work engagement. Organizational trust also has a positive relationship with employee work engagement. Furthermore, the indirect relationship between organizational justice and work engagement through organizational trust was found to be positive and significant. These findings indicate that organizational trust serves as an important mechanism linking employees' perceptions of justice to their work engagement. Correctional institutions should implement fair organizational practices and foster employee trust in order to enhance work engagement.

Keywords: Organizational Justice; Organizational Trust; Employee Engagement; SEM-PLS, Class I Makassar Correctional Institution

INTRODUCTION

Organizational plans and resources produce meaningful outcomes only when employees translate them into effective workplace actions. Human resource management therefore serves as a

mechanism for aligning employees' capabilities and contributions with institutional priorities. Effective management of employees can help organizations improve productivity, stimulate innovation, and sustain competitiveness in a dynamic environment (Hasan et al., 2021). Contemporary human resource management has consequently moved beyond an exclusive emphasis on technical competence by also considering the psychological conditions that determine employees' willingness and capacity to pursue organizational objectives (Jabeen & Rahim, 2021).

Employee engagement represents one of these psychological conditions. It concerns the extent to which employees invest their attention, enthusiasm, and commitment in their work roles and organization. Employees with stronger engagement tend to demonstrate greater focus on organizational goals, better work competence, and higher individual performance (Ngozi & Edwinah, 2022). Their active participation and commitment also facilitate the effective implementation of organizational activities (Hasan et al., 2021). At the organizational level, accumulated evidence indicates that employee engagement is closely associated with overall organizational performance (Kurniawati & Raharja, 2023).

The importance of employee engagement becomes particularly evident in correctional institutions, where employees simultaneously perform custodial, service, supervisory, and rehabilitation functions. Combining these responsibilities produces distinctive work demands that may not be encountered in conventional organizational settings. Previous studies conducted in correctional environments indicate that employee performance is associated with workload, working conditions, and organizational commitment (Subiyantoro & Rahmatia, 2024). Competence, motivation, and commitment have also been identified as important contributors to the performance of correctional employees (Yosepha & Erwanti, 2024). Thus, the ability of correctional institutions to accomplish their mandates depends substantially on the capacity and psychological readiness of their employees to perform multiple responsibilities under demanding conditions.

Meeting the demands of correctional work requires more than technical competence. Employees also need psychological and relational support that enables them to manage challenging working conditions effectively. Consequently, HR management in correctional institutions should encompass not only employees' capabilities but also the development of workplace relationships and conditions that foster engagement. This issue is particularly important because employee engagement may affect how effectively correctional responsibilities are carried out. Employees who feel strongly connected to their organization are more likely to display dedication, responsibility, and a willingness to contribute beyond minimum job requirements (Marasabessy et al., 2022).

Organisational trust provides one possible explanation for the development of employees' attachment to their organization (Oguegbe & Edosomwan, 2021). It reflects employees' confidence in the organization's integrity, competence, responsibility, and commitment to treating employees appropriately. Such trust is important for establishing constructive employee-organization relationships because it can create a greater sense of psychological safety in the workplace (Lin & Shin, 2021). Employees who place greater trust in their organization tend to exhibit stronger loyalty, commitment, and engagement in their work (Mahfouz et al., 2022). Trust can also encourage desirable workplace behaviors when employees perceive that the organization supports them and recognizes the value of their contributions (Kurniawati & Ramli, 2024). Consistent with this perspective, organisational trust has been associated with higher employee engagement by strengthening employees' sense of belonging and connection to the organization (Ahmadian et al., 2023).

In addition to trust, organisational justice is another factor that may shape employees' attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Organisational justice concerns employees' evaluations of whether organizational outcomes, decision-making procedures, and interpersonal treatment are fair. Perceptions of fairness have been linked to employees' organizational commitment (Bhakuni & Saxena, 2023) and are also considered an important basis for developing trust in the organization (Chaudhary et al., 2022). When employees perceive that organizational decisions and interpersonal interactions are handled fairly, their confidence in the organization is more likely to increase (Sertel & Program, 2023). A fair organizational environment may further encourage employee engagement because employees are more likely to perceive their relationship with the organization as positive and reciprocal (David & Uen, 2025). From this perspective, organisational trust may represent an important mechanism through which organisational justice contributes to employee engagement. Taken together, the relationships among organisational justice, organisational trust, and employee engagement suggest that engagement may develop through a psychological process in which employees first evaluate the fairness of organizational treatment and subsequently develop trust toward the organization.

Previous research supports the possibility that organisational trust functions as an intervening mechanism linking perceptions of organisational justice with employees' workplace attitudes (Alshaabani & Hamza, 2022). Nevertheless, several research gaps remain. First, although the three variables have been examined in previous studies, their integrated relationship in the specific context of correctional institutions has received comparatively limited attention. Second, the present study applies measurement scales adapted to the cultural context of the Indonesian population (Mubashar et al., 2022). Third, previous research has not sufficiently examined the process through which organisational justice contributes to employee engagement by first strengthening organisational trust. Accordingly, this study investigates the influence of organisational justice on employee engagement and further examines the mediating role of organisational trust in this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement describes the degree to which employees connect psychologically with their roles and actively invest their energy in performing them. This condition is reflected in employees' willingness to direct sustained attention, effort, and personal capabilities toward fulfilling work responsibilities and advancing organizational goals (Hasan et al., 2021). Based on the conceptualization adopted in this study, employee engagement comprises two dimensions: alignment and affectiveness (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2020). Together, these dimensions capture employees' connection with organizational direction and their positive attachment to their work. Employees with higher engagement generally demonstrate greater productivity, stronger commitment, and a stronger willingness to contribute to organizational development (Sungmala & Verawat, 2021). Engagement is also associated with employee performance because active involvement can strengthen work motivation and facilitate the effective completion of assigned responsibilities (Kurniawati & Raharja, 2023). However, engagement does not arise solely

from individual characteristics. Organizational support, working conditions, and leadership practices can also determine whether employees remain psychologically connected to their work and organization (Faeq & Ismael, 2022).

B. Organizational Trust

Organizational trust refers to employees' willingness to rely on their organization based on beliefs regarding its competence, integrity, reliability, and concern for employee interests. Such confidence is more likely to emerge when employees experience adequate organizational support and perceive genuine attention to their welfare (Lin & Shin, 2021). Trust therefore represents a relational foundation that shapes how employees interpret organizational decisions and workplace experiences. A trustworthy organizational environment can provide employees with psychological safety, enabling them to communicate more openly and establish stronger attachment to the organization (Mahfouz et al., 2022). This confidence may subsequently be reflected in greater loyalty, organizational commitment, and work engagement (Kurniawati & Ramli, 2024). Organizational trust can therefore serve as a psychological mechanism through which workplace practices are translated into employee attitudes and behaviors (Filiz et al., 2024). Its relevance becomes even more pronounced in occupations characterized by substantial work pressure because employees' confidence in the organization can help them maintain commitment and engagement when confronting demanding responsibilities (Islam et al., 2025).

C. Organizational Justice

Organizational justice concerns employees' judgments regarding fairness within their employment relationship. These judgments are not limited to the outcomes employees receive but also involve the procedures used to reach organizational decisions and the quality of interpersonal treatment accompanying their implementation. Accordingly, organizational justice encompasses distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice addresses the fairness of allocated outcomes, procedural justice concerns the processes through which decisions are made, and interactional justice reflects the respect and appropriateness demonstrated in interpersonal treatment (Chaudhary et al., 2022).

Fair organizational treatment can encourage employees to view their relationship with the organization as mutually beneficial, thereby generating a willingness to reciprocate through constructive work attitudes and behaviors (Channuwong et al., 2025). Empirical evidence associates organizational justice with important employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work performance (Mona et al., 2022). Fairness may also facilitate organizational trust because employees are more willing to rely on institutions that implement decisions transparently, consistently, and impartially (Sertel & Program, 2023). Organizational justice consequently provides an important basis

for developing a constructive employee-organization relationship and may create conditions that encourage stronger employee engagement (David & Uen, 2025).

D. Research Hypothesis

1. The Effect of Organisational Justice on Employee Engagement

From a social exchange perspective, employees interpret fair treatment as an indication that the organization recognizes their contributions and respects their interests. Fair allocation of organizational outcomes, transparent decision-making procedures, and respectful interpersonal treatment can therefore generate positive evaluations of the organization. Employees who feel valued may reciprocate by investing greater attention, dedication, and effort in their work (Bhakuni & Saxena, 2023). Previous findings indicate that favorable perceptions of organizational justice are associated with stronger employee engagement because fairness promotes a more constructive exchange relationship between employees and their organization (David & Uen, 2025). Employees experiencing equitable treatment are also more inclined to demonstrate commitment and participate actively in completing their organizational responsibilities (Chaudhary et al., 2022; David & Uen, 2025). Organizational justice is therefore expected to provide an important psychological basis for employee engagement.

H1: Organisational Justice has a positive effect on Employee Engagement

2. The Effect of Organisational Justice on Organisational Trust

Employees rely on organizational practices and experiences when assessing whether their organization can be trusted. Fairness provides important information for this assessment because transparent procedures, equitable outcomes, and respectful treatment signal consistency and organizational integrity. Conversely, decisions perceived as arbitrary or unfair may create uncertainty and weaken employees' confidence in the organization. Empirical evidence indicates that perceptions of organizational justice contribute to organizational trust by providing employees with a basis for evaluating institutional credibility and reliability (Sertel & Program, 2023). Respectful interactions between organizational representatives and employees can further reinforce positive psychological relationships and strengthen confidence in the organization (Chaudhary et al., 2022; Sertel & Program, 2023). Accordingly, the consistent application of fairness across organizational decisions and interactions is expected to produce stronger organizational trust.

H2: Organisational Justice has a positive effect on Organisational Trust

3. The Effect of Organisational Trust on Employee Engagement

Organizational trust reduces employees' uncertainty regarding how the organization will respond to their interests and contributions. When employees perceive the organization as competent, reliable, and supportive, they are more likely to experience

psychological security and develop a stronger emotional connection with their workplace (Lin & Shin, 2021). This condition can encourage employees to concentrate their effort on work responsibilities instead of remaining concerned about potential organizational risks. Trust can also strengthen employees' sense of belonging and their willingness to contribute effort beyond minimum role requirements. Previous research has accordingly identified a positive relationship between organizational trust and employee engagement (Ahmadian et al., 2023). Employees who regard their relationship with the organization as mutually beneficial are also more likely to display commitment and constructive workplace behavior (Ol et al., 2021). Based on this reasoning, greater confidence in the organization should be followed by stronger employee engagement.

H3: Organisational Trust has a positive effect on Employee Engagement

4. The Mediating Role of Organisational Trust in the Relationship between Organisational Justice and Employee Engagement

The relationship between organizational justice and employee engagement may involve a psychological process rather than operating exclusively through a direct pathway. Fair procedures, equitable organizational outcomes, and respectful interactions provide employees with evidence that the organization is dependable and concerned about their interests. These perceptions can develop into organizational trust, which subsequently increases employees' willingness to invest themselves in their work. Prior studies suggest that organizational trust can transmit the influence of perceived justice to employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors (Alshaabani & Hamza, 2022; Mubashar et al., 2022). Organizational practices may therefore shape employee behavior indirectly by first influencing employees' psychological evaluations of the organization (Oh et al., 2023). This mechanism is particularly relevant in correctional institutions because employees perform demanding responsibilities that require confidence in organizational decisions and support. Organizational trust is thus expected to explain how perceptions of organizational justice are translated into stronger employee engagement.

H4: Organisational Trust mediates the effect of Organisational Justice on Employee Engagement

RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Design

A quantitative survey design was employed to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the constructs included in the research model (Randika et al., 2026). Organizational justice was specified as the exogenous construct, organizational trust as the mediating construct, and employee engagement as the endogenous construct. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected because it enables the measurement and structural components of a model involving several latent constructs to be estimated simultaneously. This analytical approach is also suitable for prediction-oriented research conducted with relatively modest sample

sizes (Nursyafaah et al., 2026). The model was estimated using SmartPLS 4. Data were collected electronically through a Google Forms questionnaire between 15 and 29 July 2026.

B. Population and Sample

The research population consisted of all 60 employees working at the Class I Correctional Institution in Makassar. Considering the relatively limited and accessible population, the study applied a census or total sampling approach in which every employee was included as a potential respondent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data analysis was consequently based on 60 completed questionnaires. Using the entire population allowed the study to represent employees from different demographic backgrounds, lengths of service, and organizational units within the institution.

C. Instrument

Primary data were obtained using a structured questionnaire administered online. Each statement was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, representing "strongly disagree," to 5, representing "strongly agree." The instrument measured three constructs through a total of 11 indicators. The organizational justice items were adapted from Colquitt (2001), the organizational trust measure was based on Dietz and Den Hartog (2006), and employee engagement was assessed using indicators adapted from Shrotryia and Dhanda (2020). The use of previously established measurement scales was intended to maintain consistency between the operational definitions and the theoretical meaning of each construct. Data analysis was conducted in SmartPLS 4 through two successive evaluations.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in SmartPLS 4 through two successive evaluations. The first stage assessed the adequacy of the measurement model, while the second stage examined the structural relationships and the proposed mediation mechanism. For the measurement model, indicator reliability and convergent validity were evaluated using outer loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). Outer loadings of at least 0.70 and AVE values of 0.50 or higher were used as the assessment criteria. Internal consistency reliability was examined through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (ρ_c), with values of at least 0.70 considered acceptable. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), for which values below 0.90 indicated satisfactory distinction among the constructs.

After the measurement requirements were established, the structural model was assessed to evaluate the hypothesized relationships. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was examined to determine how much variance in each endogenous construct was explained by its predictors. Statistical significance was evaluated through the bootstrapping procedure using a two-tailed criterion of a t-statistic greater than 1.96 and a p-value below 0.05. Finally, the specific indirect effect was examined to determine whether organizational trust transmitted the relationship between organizational justice and employee engagement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent Characteristics

The study included 60 employees of Class I Correctional Institution Makassar, whose characteristics were examined based on gender, age, educational attainment, length of service, and

work unit. With respect to gender, male respondents constituted the largest proportion, comprising 58 employees (96.7%), whereas female respondents accounted for only 2 employees (3.3%). This distribution shows that the workforce represented in this study is predominantly male, which is consistent with the nature of correctional work that involves considerable responsibilities related to security and supervision. Regarding age, respondents aged >35 years represented the largest group, consisting of 28 employees (46.7%). This was followed by respondents aged 30–34 years, with 18 employees (30%), and those aged 25–29 years, with 14 employees (23.3%). The age distribution suggests that most respondents are within the productive-age category and have sufficient experience to carry out their responsibilities within the organization. In terms of educational attainment, almost all respondents had completed a Diploma 3 (D3), accounting for 59 employees (98.3%), while only 1 respondent (1.7%) held a Bachelor's degree (S1).

Based on length of service, the largest proportion of respondents had worked for 1–4 years, comprising 53 employees (88.3%). Meanwhile, 6 respondents (10%) had more than 10 years of work experience, and 1 respondent (1.7%) had 8–10 years of service. With regard to work units, Correctional Officers constituted the largest group, with 42 employees (70%). They were followed by Staff and Administration with 10 employees (16.7%), Other Units with 6 employees (10%), while Duty Commander and other categories each consisted of 1 employee (1.7%). The high proportion of Correctional Officers indicates that most respondents are directly engaged in the organization's core correctional activities. Consequently, their perceptions of organisational justice, organisational trust, and employee engagement are particularly relevant to the objectives of this study. Overall, the respondent profile was predominantly characterized by male employees, respondents aged >35 years, D3 graduates, employees with 1–4 years of work experience, and Correctional Officers. These characteristics provide an overview of respondents who are directly involved in and have practical experience within the work environment of Class I Correctional Institution Makassar.

B. Convergent Validity

The measurement model was initially examined at the indicator level. Outer loadings were used to determine how strongly each indicator was associated with its intended construct. Following Hair et al. (2019), loadings of 0.70 or higher were regarded as evidence that an indicator captures an adequate proportion of variance from its corresponding construct.

Table 1. Outer Loading Test

Indicator variable	Organizational Justice	Organizational Trust	Employee Engagement
OJ1	0.829		
OJ2	0.783		
OJ3	0.751		
OJ4	0.830		
OT1		0.727	
OT2		0.767	
OT3		0.848	
EE1			0.778
EE2			0.901
EE3			0.719
EE4			0.835

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

As reported in Table 1, the loadings of the 11 indicators ranged from 0.719 to 0.901. For organizational justice, the values ranged between 0.751 and 0.830, while the organizational trust indicators produced loadings between 0.727 and 0.848. Employee engagement recorded values ranging from 0.719 to 0.901. Because every loading exceeded the specified criterion, none of the indicators was removed from the model. The results therefore support indicator reliability and convergent validity across the three constructs.

C. Discriminant Validity

The empirical distinctiveness of the constructs was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This assessment compares the square root of each construct's average variance extracted, presented on the diagonal of the correlation matrix, with its correlations with the remaining constructs. Discriminant validity is formally established when each diagonal value is greater than the corresponding interconstruct correlations (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Test

	Employee Engagement	Organizational Justice	Organizational Trust
Employee Engagement	0.811		
Organizational Justice	0.790	0.799	
Organizational Trust	0.765	0.777	0.782

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE for employee engagement was 0.811, exceeding its correlations with organizational justice (0.790) and organizational trust (0.765). For organizational justice, the diagonal value of 0.799 remained higher than its correlation of 0.777 with organizational trust. Similarly, the square root of AVE for organizational trust was 0.782, which was slightly above its correlations with employee engagement and organizational justice. Thus, all three constructs formally fulfilled the Fornell-Larcker requirement. Nevertheless, the difference between the organizational trust diagonal value of 0.782 and its correlation of 0.777 with organizational justice was relatively small. This proximity indicates that the two constructs are empirically closely related. Therefore, the Fornell-Larcker result should be supplemented with the heterotrait-monotrait ratio before a definitive conclusion regarding discriminant validity is reached.

D. Construct Reliability Test

Internal consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (rho_c), whereas average variance extracted was used to assess convergent validity at the construct level. Reliability coefficients of at least 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 were applied as the evaluation criteria (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Employee Engagement	0.824	0.884	0.658
Organizational Justice	0.811	0.876	0.638
Organizational Trust	0.692	0.825	0.612

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

Based on table 3. employee engagement demonstrated satisfactory measurement quality, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.824, composite reliability of 0.884, and AVE of 0.658. Organizational justice produced comparable results, recording a Cronbach's alpha of 0.811, composite reliability of 0.876, and AVE of 0.638. These coefficients indicate adequate internal consistency and convergent validity for both constructs. Organizational trust obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.692, which was marginally below the conventional threshold. However, its composite reliability reached 0.825, and its AVE was 0.612. The combined evidence therefore supports the construct's internal consistency, although the slightly lower alpha coefficient should be reported transparently and interpreted with caution. Because the AVE values of all constructs exceeded 0.50, each construct explained more than half of the variance in its respective indicators. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated acceptable indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity.

E. Coefficient of Determination

The explanatory capacity of the structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2). This coefficient represents the proportion of variance in an endogenous construct explained by its specified predictors. The benchmarks of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 were used to indicate weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). The R^2 and adjusted R^2 estimates are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. R-Square Test

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Employee Engagement	0.682	0.671
Organizational Trust	0.604	0.597

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

Organizational trust obtained an R^2 of 0.604 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.597. Thus, organizational justice accounted for 60.4% of the observed variation in organizational trust, while 39.6% remained unexplained by the predictor included in the model. These results indicate that the model possesses moderate explanatory power for organizational trust. Employee engagement recorded an R^2 of 0.682 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.671. Organizational justice and organizational trust collectively explained 68.2% of the variance in employee engagement, leaving 31.8% unexplained by the current model. The relatively small differences between the R^2 and adjusted R^2 values for both endogenous constructs also indicate that the estimated explanatory capacity was not substantially reduced after accounting for the number of predictors. Overall, the model demonstrated moderate explanatory power for both endogenous constructs.

F. Path Coefficient

The structural relationships were evaluated through bootstrapping in SmartPLS 4. This procedure generated the path coefficients, standard errors, t-statistics, and p-values required to assess the proposed hypotheses. The bootstrapped structural model is displayed in Figure 1.

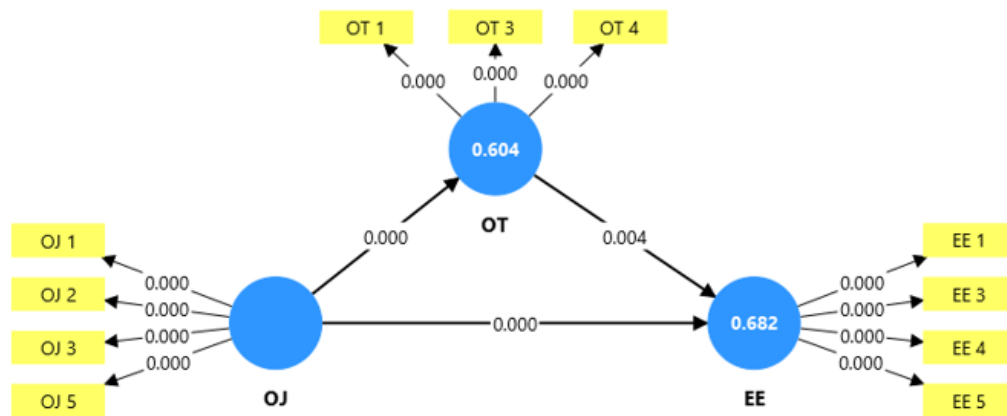


Figure 1. Bootstrapping Test Result

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

A relationship was considered statistically supported when its t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and its p-value was below 0.05. Table 5 presents the estimated coefficients and bootstrapping results for the four hypotheses.

Table 5. Path Coefficient and Indirect Effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
OJ -> EE	0.493	0.496	0.136	3.617	0.000
OJ -> OT	0.777	0.782	0.057	13.737	0.000
OT -> EE	0.382	0.381	0.133	2.866	0.004
OJ -> OT -> EE	0.297	0.297	0.106	2.795	0.005

Source: Primary Data Processed, 2026

The direct relationship between organizational justice and employee engagement was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.493$, $t = 3.617$, $p < 0.001$). Employees who reported stronger perceptions of fairness also tended to demonstrate higher engagement. This evidence provides support for H1. Organizational justice was also positively related to organizational trust ($\beta = 0.777$, $t = 13.737$, $p < 0.001$). This relationship produced the largest coefficient in the structural model, indicating that fairness perceptions were strongly associated with employees' confidence in the institution. H2 was therefore supported. The relationship between organizational trust and employee engagement was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.382$, $t = 2.866$, $p = 0.004$). Greater confidence in the organization was associated with stronger employee engagement, thereby supporting H3. The indirect pathway from organizational justice to employee engagement through organizational trust was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.297$, $t = 2.795$, $p = 0.005$).

Organizational justice was therefore related to employee engagement not only directly but also indirectly through the development of organizational trust. Accordingly, H4 was supported. Because the direct and indirect relationships were both positive and statistically significant, the findings indicate complementary partial mediation rather than full mediation.

Discussion

A. Organizational Justice and Employee Engagement

The support obtained for H1 indicates that employee engagement is partly rooted in how employees evaluate their treatment within the institution. Engagement is therefore not determined exclusively by employees' individual motivation or the characteristics of their duties. Employees may become more willing to devote attention and effort to their work when organizational decisions are regarded as equitable and consistently implemented. This relationship is particularly relevant in a correctional institution, where employees work within a hierarchical structure and perform demanding security, supervisory, service, and rehabilitation duties. In this context, perceptions of justice may be formed through the allocation of responsibilities, work schedules, performance evaluations, access to organizational resources, and daily interactions with supervisors. When these practices are perceived as fair, employees receive a signal that their roles and contributions are recognized by the institution.

Social Exchange Theory helps explain why these fairness perceptions are associated with engagement. Fair organizational treatment represents a favorable resource provided by the organization. Employees may reciprocate by demonstrating greater dedication, participation, and psychological investment in their work. This interpretation is consistent with Bhakuni and Saxena (2023), who associate perceptions of justice with constructive employee attitudes. It also supports David and Uen (2025), who argue that fairness can strengthen the psychological connection between employees and their organization. The present findings extend this reasoning to correctional employees, whose engagement must be sustained while they perform institutionally demanding responsibilities.

B. Organizational Justice and Organizational Trust

The support for H2 positions organizational justice as an important foundation of employees' confidence in the institution. Among the relationships examined, the path from organizational justice to organizational trust was the strongest. This pattern suggests that employees rely heavily on their experiences of fairness when determining whether the institution is dependable, credible, and concerned about their interests. Each component of organizational justice may provide different information for forming this judgment. Equitable outcomes signal that employee contributions are appropriately recognized, consistent procedures demonstrate institutional predictability, and respectful interpersonal treatment reflects organizational goodwill. Collectively, these experiences reduce uncertainty regarding how the institution will exercise its authority. This consideration is especially important in correctional institutions because formal rules, hierarchical decisions, and supervisory authority directly shape employees' daily working experiences.

The result is consistent with Sertel and Program (2023), who demonstrate that transparent and equitable organizational practices contribute to stronger employee trust. It also corresponds with Channuwong et al. (2025), who emphasize that employees form judgments about the organization through their interactions with leaders and other organizational representatives. Accordingly, trust in a correctional institution is not produced merely through formal statements or policies. It is developed through repeated experiences showing that decisions are consistent, explanations are transparent, and employees are treated with respect.

C. Organizational Trust and Employee Engagement

The evidence supporting H3 demonstrates that trust constitutes an important relational resource for employee engagement. Employees who regard the institution as reliable and supportive

can perform their duties with greater confidence that their effort will be recognized and that the organization will respond appropriately to workplace concerns. This confidence may reduce psychological uncertainty and allow employees to direct more personal resources toward their responsibilities. From the perspective of the Job Demands-Resources framework, organizational trust can be interpreted as a social and psychological resource that helps employees respond to demanding working conditions. Correctional employees encounter responsibilities involving security risks, inmate supervision, service provision, and rehabilitation. Under these conditions, confidence in the institution may provide psychological reassurance and reinforce employees' willingness to remain involved in their work.

This explanation corresponds with Kurniawati and Ramli (2024), who associate organizational trust with psychological safety and positive employee attitudes. It is also consistent with Ahmadian et al. (2023), whose findings connect trust with employees' emotional attachment and engagement. The present study therefore suggests that trust is valuable not only because it improves employees' general perceptions of the organization but also because it helps preserve their work engagement within an operationally demanding environment.

D. The Mediating Role of Organizational Trust

The support obtained for H4 clarifies the psychological mechanism linking organizational justice with employee engagement. Organizational justice maintained a significant direct relationship with engagement, while its indirect relationship through organizational trust was also significant. Because both relationships were significant and operated in the same direction, the findings indicate complementary partial mediation. Organizational trust therefore transmits part, but not all, of the relationship between fairness perceptions and employee engagement. This distinction is theoretically important. Fair treatment can directly encourage employees to become more engaged because it generates recognition and a sense of reciprocal obligation. At the same time, repeated experiences of fairness can build confidence in the institution. That confidence provides an additional pathway through which employees become more willing to invest themselves in their work. Organizational trust is therefore not merely an accompanying employee attitude but an intermediary psychological condition that converts fairness experiences into stronger engagement.

This mechanism is consistent with Alshaabani and Hamza (2022), who position organizational trust as a channel through which organizational practices shape employee attitudes and behaviors. It also supports Oh et al. (2023), who demonstrate that organizational practices may influence engagement through employees' psychological evaluations of their organization. Within the correctional setting, these findings imply that isolated fairness initiatives may be insufficient when they do not produce enduring confidence in institutional decisions and actions. Taken together, the findings describe a sequential process in which fair organizational practices provide the initial institutional signal, organizational trust represents employees' psychological interpretation of that signal, and engagement emerges as a constructive work response. The study therefore contributes to the organizational justice literature by demonstrating that the relationship between fairness and engagement involves both direct reciprocity and an indirect trust-building mechanism within a correctional institution.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from employees of the Class I Correctional Institution in Makassar demonstrates that employee engagement is closely connected to employees' perceptions of institutional fairness and trustworthiness. Organizational justice was positively associated with both employee engagement and organizational trust, while organizational trust was also positively related to engagement. More importantly, trust transmitted part of the relationship between justice and engagement. Because the direct and indirect pathways were simultaneously supported and operated in the same direction, organizational trust functions as a complementary partial mediator. Fair organizational practices can therefore promote engagement directly while also strengthening the institutional confidence through which employees become more willing to invest themselves in their work.

These findings carry practical implications for the management of correctional institutions. Fairness should be translated into transparent criteria for allocating duties, determining work schedules, evaluating performance, providing recognition, and enforcing organizational rules. Procedural consistency should be accompanied by clear explanations and respectful communication from supervisors because employees evaluate institutional trustworthiness through both formal decisions and everyday interpersonal experiences. Accessible mechanisms for expressing concerns and obtaining clarification may further reinforce confidence in institutional decisions. Such practices can help create a work environment in which correctional employees feel recognized, treated predictably, and psychologically prepared to maintain their engagement under demanding working conditions.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. Although the census approach provided coverage of the employee population within the institution, the study involved only 60 employees from a single correctional institution; therefore, the results should not be generalized automatically to other institutions or public-sector settings. The cross-sectional and self-reported data also limit causal and temporal interpretations and may be susceptible to common method bias. Future research should include multiple correctional institutions, employ longitudinal or time-lagged designs, and combine employee responses with supervisory assessments or administrative information. Further studies could also examine whether leadership support, psychological safety, workload, or other job resources strengthen or weaken the mechanism connecting organizational justice, organizational trust, and employee engagement.

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