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WORKPLACE JUSTICE AND TURNOVER INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST IN MANAGEMENT AMONG EARLY-CAREER TALENT

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Abstract

Early-career employees change jobs frequently, yet little is known about how perceived organizational justice and trust in management relate to their intention to leave. This study examines the effects of distributive justice and procedural justice on turnover intention, and the mediating role of trust in management, among 200 early-career employees (aged 20–28 years, with up to five years of work experience) working in nine industries in South Tangerang, Indonesia. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Contrary to the expectations of social exchange theory, distributive justice (β = 0.398), procedural justice (β = 0.464), and trust in management (β = 0.395) were each positively associated with turnover intention, whereas neither justice dimension predicted trust in management (R^2 = 0.002) and no mediation was found. Because responses on trust in management and turnover intention were truncated (observed ranges 3–5 and 1–3, respectively), these positive associations are treated as exploratory and not as evidence that fairness causes turnover. The findings suggest that fairness and trust alone may not retain early-career employees; human resource managers are advised to combine fair procedures with visible career-development pathways. Replication with probability samples and longitudinal designs is needed.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources are a strategic asset for organizational sustainability, so organizations need to retain their workforce by providing a work environment and experiences that meet employees' expectations (Gravili et al., 2023). This concern is particularly pressing for early-career employees, that is, workers in the early stages of their careers who are still accumulating experience and exploring career directions (Zaharee et al., 2018), a period associated with the emerging adulthood phase (Arnett, 2015). Turnover intention is a recognized problem among Generation Z employees (Wahyudi & Saryatmo, 2024), including those in South Tangerang, where it has been linked to compensation, organizational culture, and job satisfaction (Amanda & Lailla, 2026). A survey by JakPat (2024) reported that 87% of Gen Z respondents preferred fair leaders, 77% expected responsible leaders, and 70% preferred leaders who were open to feedback, which suggests that perceptions of organizational treatment and of management are salient for early-career employees.

Turnover intention refers to an employee's propensity to leave an organization voluntarily and is the cognitive step that precedes actual turnover (Mobley, 1977); it includes thoughts of quitting and tendencies to search for alternative work (Tett & Meyer, 1993). In Indonesia, a survey by SEEK, Boston Consulting Group, and The Network (2023) found that 34% of respondents were actively seeking new jobs, mainly for higher positions or career advancement (49%) and because of limited career development opportunities (30%). Likewise, 69% of 295 Gen Z respondents in the JakPat (2024) survey planned to resign, citing dissatisfaction with salary (41%), better job offers (27%), the desire to explore other jobs (26%), feeling unappreciated (26%), excessive workload (26%), and unclear career paths (25%). These reasons indicate that decisions to stay or leave are tied to the outcomes, processes, and treatment employees experience at work, but also to career prospects outside the current employer.

Organizational justice is examined here through two dimensions. Distributive justice concerns the fairness of outcomes relative to the contributions made, based on comparisons of inputs and outcomes (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961), including the fairness of compensation and workload (Colquitt, 2001). It is commonly measured through work schedules, compensation, workload, rewards, and job responsibilities (Bassey & Echu, 2025; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993) and has been related to turnover intention (Mohamad et al., 2025). Procedural justice concerns the fairness of decision-making processes, such as voice, consistency, bias suppression, and accuracy of information (Colquitt, 2001; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and is measured through neutrality, voice, information accuracy, consistency in applying decisions, and clarity of decision explanations (Bassey & Echu, 2025; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993). Both dimensions are relevant to the work experiences of Gen Z employees (JakPat, 2024).

Social exchange theory (SET) views the employment relationship as a reciprocal exchange in which favorable treatment creates obligations that employees repay with positive attitudes and behaviors (Blau, 1964). In this logic, organizational justice is a primary signal of how an organization treats its members (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1990), and trust is the psychological state through which that treatment is converted into reciprocal commitment. Trust involves a willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations of another party's actions (Mayer et al., 1995) and, in employment, the belief that obligations will be fulfilled (Robinson, 1996). Managers build such trust through behavioral consistency, integrity, delegation, communication, and concern for employees (Liu et al., 2022; Poon, 2013; Whitener et al., 1998). Because fair outcomes and fair procedures are among the clearest managerial behaviors that employees can observe, justice is expected to raise trust in management (Alyahya et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2025; Mensah et al., 2024), and trust is in turn expected to shape employee work attitudes (Liu et al., 2022; Poon, 2013). This reasoning positions trust in management as the mediating mechanism that explains why justice should lower turnover intention, an argument that has empirical support (Alyahya et al., 2024) and is consistent with related work on organizational justice and turnover intention (Mensah et al., 2024).

Empirical findings, however, are inconsistent. Distributive justice was found to affect turnover intention in one study (Gorda et al., 2025), and both distributive and procedural justice did in another (Bassey & Echu, 2025). One study found no significant effect of distributive justice but a significant negative effect of procedural justice (Lambert et al., 2023), and another showed that procedural justice relates to turnover intention through specific mediating mechanisms (O'Callaghan, 2024). Evidence on the

role of trust is also mixed: organizational trust was found to mediate the relationship between justice and turnover intention in one study (Alyahya et al., 2024), whereas another identified a social-influence mechanism linking procedural justice and turnover intention instead (Gharbi et al., 2022). Studies of managerial behavior, justice, trust, and employee attitudes (Liu et al., 2022; Mensah et al., 2024; Poon, 2013) and of mediation through work attitudes and organizational commitment (Chen et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024) further indicate that the mechanism depends on context and on the outcome examined. Moreover, the samples used so far include pension-industry employees (Bassey & Echu, 2025), correctional staff (Lambert et al., 2023), female employees (Alyahya et al., 2024), Korean public employees (Moon et al., 2024), and healthcare workers (Chen et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024), and none is defined by career stage.

These inconsistencies matter for early-career employees because SET itself carries a boundary condition: the value of staying is judged against the available alternatives (Blau, 1964), and employees in emerging adulthood are still exploring careers (Arnett, 2015). Research on talent also shows that being treated as a talent is not simply beneficial. Talents may suffer high levels of stress (Dries & Pepermans, 2008), pressure to meet high demands (Sumelius et al., 2020), negative attitudes among co-workers (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022), a sense of disempowerment (Daubner-Siva et al., 2018), and even self-alienation resulting from “subjugation to the dominant narrative” (Painter-Morland et al., 2019, p. 137). These experiences are said to generate “identity struggles” that talents handle through identity work, that is, attempts to build a coherent, stable, and valued sense of self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). These studies concern employees designated as talent in talent management settings, whereas the respondents of this study are early-career employees in general; the studies are therefore used as supporting context and not as evidence of a mechanism in this sample. Among Gen Z samples, better offers, exploration, and unclear career paths are frequently cited as reasons to leave (JakPat, 2024). For early-career employees, a fair and trusted workplace may therefore be valued without being sufficient to retain them, because decisions to stay may also depend on how the job fits an emerging sense of self. Whether justice and trust show the negative relationship with turnover intention that SET predicts, a null relationship, or an unexpected positive one is an empirical question that existing studies, drawn mostly from older or occupation-specific samples, cannot answer.

This study therefore asks whether the chain proposed by SET, from fair treatment through trust in management to lower turnover intention, holds for employees at the start of their careers. It contributes by testing distributive and procedural justice together with trust in management as a mediator in a population defined by career stage rather than by occupation, and by documenting a pattern that departs from the predictions of SET, which helps to locate where the boundary of the theory may lie for this group. Evidence from 200 early-career employees in an Indonesian urban area, analyzed with PLS-SEM, is used for this purpose.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quantitative, explanatory design to examine the effects of distributive justice (X1) and procedural justice (X2) on turnover intention (Y), both directly and indirectly through trust in management (Z) as a mediating variable, among early-career employees in South Tangerang, Indonesia.

The population comprised early-career employees working in South

Tangerang. Purposive sampling, a non-probability procedure, was applied with three eligibility criteria: age 20–28 years, a maximum of five years of work experience, and employment in a company located in South Tangerang. The 20–28 age range and the five-year tenure ceiling follow the criteria used to define early-career employees in earlier research (Fitri, 2024), and the range lies within the 18–29 years window associated with emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). Age was recorded in three-year bands (20–22, 23–25, and 26–28 years). The narrower window limits comparability with studies that use the full 18–29 range, and this is acknowledged as a limitation. Respondents from any industry were eligible. Sector was asked as an open-ended short-answer question rather than a multiple-choice item, so no sector was offered or targeted in advance, and the answers were grouped into industries afterwards. The constructs concern general managerial practices rather than industry-specific conditions, and the sector composition (nine industries, see Results) reflects the respondents who met the criteria and took part. To examine whether this heterogeneity affected the findings, we tested whether the structural relationships differed between sectors (see Supplementary Analyses), and sector heterogeneity is also acknowledged as a limitation. The sample size was determined by considering statistical power and model complexity rather than the 10-times rule alone. With a 5% significance level, 80% statistical power, a medium effect size (f^2 = 0.15), and three predictors for the main endogenous construct, the minimum sample was approximately 77 respondents, so the 200 respondents obtained were sufficient for model testing (Hair et al., 2019; Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Primary data were collected with an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms over approximately one month, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire opened with screening questions on age group, length of service, whether the current job was the first job, and whether the workplace was located in South Tangerang, followed by the 20 construct items, and it collected respondents' e-mail addresses. Secondary data came from the literature and relevant documents, such as survey reports (JakPat, 2024). Data quality was checked after collection. No e-mail address and no complete response pattern appeared more than once, so there were no duplicate submissions, and no respondent gave identical answers to all 20 items. Respondents who gave identical answers to all items within a single construct were few (24 to 40 per construct) and were retained, because a sensitivity analysis excluding the 31 respondents with identical answers in at least two constructs left the results unchanged (all path coefficients within 0.02 of the original estimates, with the same significance). Completing the questionnaire was estimated to take about 5–7 minutes. Common method bias was examined with Harman's single-factor test and full collinearity VIFs (see Results).

Variables were measured with established indicators, five for each construct, administered in Indonesian. Distributive justice (X1) was measured through the fairness of work schedules, compensation, workload, rewards, and job responsibilities (Bassey & Echu, 2025). Procedural justice (X2) was measured through neutrality, opportunities to express opinions (voice), accuracy of information, clarity of decision explanations, and consistency in decision implementation (Bassey & Echu, 2025). Trust in management (Z) was measured through consistency of behavior, integrity, delegation and sharing of control, communication, and concern for employees (Whitener et al., 1998). Turnover intention (Y) was measured through thoughts of

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quitting, searching for other jobs, willingness to accept other job offers, the desire to leave the organization, and plans to resign if a better job is obtained (Bassey & Echu, 2025). All items were positively worded, so that higher scores indicate more of the construct (for turnover intention, a stronger intention to leave), and no item was reverse-coded.

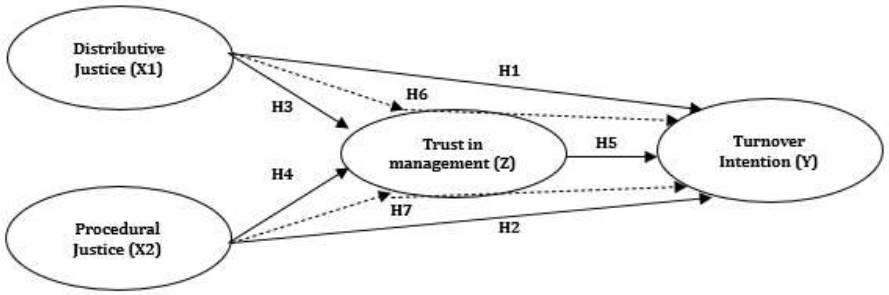


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study
Source: Adapted by the researcher, (2026)

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were formulated as two-tailed tests, because the review above shows that the direction of these relationships is not settled for early-career employees, although SET predicts negative effects of justice and trust on turnover intention (Blau, 1964). H1: Distributive justice influences turnover intention. H2: Procedural justice influences turnover intention. H3: Distributive justice influences trust in management. H4: Procedural justice influences trust in management. H5: Trust in management influences turnover intention. H6: Trust in management mediates the effect of distributive justice on turnover intention. H7: Trust in management mediates the effect of procedural justice on turnover intention.

The data were analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS (Hair et al., 2019). The outer model was evaluated using outer loadings, AVE, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha, with criteria of outer loadings > 0.70, AVE > 0.50, and reliability > 0.70, and discriminant validity was assessed with the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT), with values below 0.90 indicating adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). The inner model was evaluated using VIF, R^2, and f^2. Hypotheses were tested by bootstrapping, using path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values ($t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$), and mediation was tested through specific indirect effects. Common method bias was examined with Harman's single-factor test and full collinearity VIFs. Supplementary analyses, reported at the end of the Results, examined the sensitivity of the findings to the weakest trust indicator, the out-of-sample predictive power of the model, and differences between sectors and other respondent subgroups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The sample comprised 200 early-career employees working in South Tangerang. By age group, 70 respondents (35.0%) were aged 20–22 years, 60 (30.0%) were aged 23–25 years, and 70 (35.0%) were aged 26–28 years. Most respondents held a D4/S1 degree (105; 52.5%), followed by senior high school or equivalent (68; 34.0%) and a diploma (27; 13.5%). By industry, 37 respondents (18.5%) worked in retail, 32 (16.0%) in construction, 30 (15.0%) in logistics, 29 (14.5%) in education, 20 (10.0%) in food and

beverage, 19 (9.5%) in insurance, 17 (8.5%) in healthcare, 11 (5.5%) in real estate, and 5 (2.5%) in banking. Regarding length of service, 37 respondents (18.5%) had worked for less than one year, 33 (16.5%) for one year, 35 (17.5%) for two years, 32 (16.0%) for three years, 32 (16.0%) for four years, and 31 (15.5%) for five years. In total, 147 respondents (73.5%) were in their first job and 53 (26.5%) had previous work experience. All respondents worked in South Tangerang, which met the location criterion.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics. Trust in management had the highest mean (M = 4.127, SD = 0.606), followed by distributive justice (M = 3.884, SD = 1.136) and procedural justice (M = 3.804, SD = 1.154), while turnover intention had a mean of 1.878 (SD = 0.617). Item means ranged from 3.840 to 3.925 for distributive justice, from 3.745 to 3.855 for procedural justice, from 4.090 to 4.185 for trust in management, and from 1.860 to 1.900 for turnover intention. An important feature of the data is the range of responses: the two justice constructs used the full 1–5 scale, whereas on all five trust-in-management items the observed responses ranged only from 3 to 5, and on all five turnover-intention items only from 1 to 3. No respondent therefore chose the two lowest options for trust or the two highest options for turnover intention. This restricted range reduces variance in these two constructs and is taken into account in the interpretation of the results. To check the direction of coding, we confirmed that all items were worded in the same direction and that none was reverse-coded: all inter-item correlations within each construct were positive (minimum r = 0.71 for distributive justice, 0.74 for procedural justice, 0.36 for trust in management, and 0.39 for turnover intention). The combination of a high standard deviation for justice (about 1.1) with a mean of about 3.8 reflects negatively skewed responses spread across the whole scale (item skewness from −0.84 to −1.13), whereas the low mean and standard deviation of turnover intention reflect responses concentrated between 1 and 3 (item skewness from 0.19 to 0.27).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Response Range of the Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Observed item range	Full collinearity VIF
Distributive Justice (X1)	3.884	1.136	1–5	1.377
Procedural Justice (X2)	3.804	1.154	1–5	1.518
Trust in Management (Z)	4.127	0.606	3–5	1.359
Turnover Intention (Y)	1.878	0.617	1–3	2.319

Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

Note. Mean and SD are based on construct mean scores (n = 200); the full collinearity VIF was computed from the construct mean scores.

Because all variables were self-reported through a single questionnaire, common method bias was examined. Harman's single-factor test showed that the first unrotated factor accounted for 31.5% of the total variance (below the commonly used 50% threshold), and the full collinearity VIFs of all constructs ranged from 1.36 to 2.32, below the commonly used 3.3 threshold. These checks do not indicate a serious common method problem, although they cannot rule one out. Post-collection screening also found no duplicate respondents or response patterns and no respondent who gave identical answers to all 20 items.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

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Table 2. Outer Loading Values

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading
Distributive Justice (X1)	KD1	0.911
	KD2	0.885
	KD3	0.917
	KD4	0.891
	KD5	0.911
Procedural Justice (X2)	KP1	0.921
	KP2	0.910
	KP3	0.909
	KP4	0.896
	KP5	0.890
Trust in Management (Z)	TIM1	0.781
	TIM2	0.758
	TIM3	0.675
	TIM4	0.765
	TIM5	0.717
Turnover Intention (Y)	TO1	0.736
	TO2	0.782
	TO3	0.729
	TO4	0.767
	TO5	0.758

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

Most outer loadings exceeded 0.70, meeting the criterion for indicator reliability (Table 2). TIM3 had a loading of 0.675, slightly below the threshold. Following Hair et al. (2019), indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 can be retained when the AVE and composite reliability meet their criteria. TIM3 was retained because its loading is close to 0.70, it is conceptually relevant to trust in management (delegation of responsibility), and the AVE and composite reliability of the construct remained above the thresholds.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Distributive Justice (X1)	0.943	0.949	0.957	0.815
Procedural Justice (X2)	0.945	0.947	0.958	0.819
Trust in Management (Z)	0.794	0.804	0.858	0.548
Turnover Intention (Y)	0.811	0.811	0.869	0.569

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

All constructs had Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability above 0.70 and AVE above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019), so reliability and convergent validity were satisfactory (Table 3). Trust in management (AVE = 0.548) and turnover intention (AVE = 0.569) met the criterion despite the lower loading of TIM3.

Table 4. Results of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Test

Construct	Distributive Justice (X1)	Procedural Justice (X2)	Trust in Management (Z)	Turnover Intention (Y)
Distributive Justice (X1)	—	0.116	0.074	0.528
Procedural Justice (X2)	0.116	—	0.099	0.569
Trust in Management (Z)	0.074	0.099	—	0.490

Turnover Intention (Y)	0.528	0.569	0.490	—

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

All HTMT values in Table 4 were below 0.90, indicating adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). The table also shows that distributive justice, procedural justice, and trust in management were almost unrelated to one another (HTMT between 0.074 and 0.116), whereas each was moderately related to turnover intention (0.490–0.569). The first pattern is unusual for justice and trust and is revisited in the Discussion.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Table 5. Inner VIF Values

Construct Relationship	VIF
Distributive Justice (X1) → Trust in Management (Z)	1.013
Distributive Justice (X1) → Turnover Intention (Y)	1.015
Procedural Justice (X2) → Trust in Management (Z)	1.013
Procedural Justice (X2) → Turnover Intention (Y)	1.014
Trust in Management (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)	1.002

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

All inner VIF values were close to 1 (1.002–1.015) and well below 5.00, so multicollinearity is not a concern in the structural model (Table 5).

Table 6. R-Square Values

Endogenous Construct	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Trust in Management (Z)	0.002	-0.008
Turnover Intention (Y)	0.575	0.569

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

The R^2 of trust in management was 0.002 (adjusted R^2 = −0.008), meaning that distributive and procedural justice together explained virtually none of its variance (Table 6). The R^2 of turnover intention was 0.575, meaning that distributive justice, procedural justice, and trust in management together explained 57.5% of its variance, with the remaining 42.5% attributable to factors outside the model.

Table 7. F-Square Values (f^2)

Construct Relationship	f^2
Distributive Justice (X1) → Trust in Management (Z)	0.002
Distributive Justice (X1) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.366
Procedural Justice (X2) → Trust in Management (Z)	0.001
Procedural Justice (X2) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.500
Trust in Management (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.367

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

The f^2 values indicate negligible effects of distributive justice (0.002) and procedural justice (0.001) on trust in management (Table 7). By contrast, the effects of distributive justice (0.366), procedural justice (0.500), and trust in management (0.367) on turnover intention were large ($f^2 \geq 0.35$).

Table 8. Results of the Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

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Hypothesis	Construct Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Notes
H1	Distributive Justice (X1) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.398	9.222	<0.001	Supported
H2	Procedural Justice (X2) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.464	10.928	<0.001	Supported
H3	Distributive Justice (X1) → Trust in Management (Z)	0.042	0.495	0.621	Not supported
H4	Procedural Justice (X2) → Trust in Management (Z)	-0.030	0.377	0.706	Not supported
H5	Trust in Management (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.395	8.358	<0.001	Supported

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

Hypotheses were tested using t-statistics > 1.96 and p-values < 0.05 (Table 8). H1, H2, and H5 were supported, whereas H3 and H4 were not. Distributive justice (β = 0.398, p < 0.001), procedural justice (β = 0.464, p < 0.001), and trust in management (β = 0.395, p < 0.001) each had a positive effect on turnover intention. Neither distributive justice (β = 0.042, p = 0.621) nor procedural justice (β = −0.030, p = 0.706) had a significant effect on trust in management.

Table 9. Results of Indirect Effect Testing

Hypothesis	Indirect Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Notes
H6	Distributive Justice (X1) → Trust in Management (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)	0.016	0.493	0.622	Not supported
H7	Procedural Justice (X2) → Trust in Management (Z) → Turnover Intention (Y)	-0.012	0.373	0.710	Not supported

Source: Primary data processed using SmartPLS, 2026

The specific indirect effects (Table 9) showed that trust in management did not mediate the effect of distributive justice on turnover intention (β = 0.016, p = 0.622) or the effect of procedural justice on turnover intention (β = −0.012, p = 0.710); H6 and H7 were therefore not supported. Both indirect paths had t-statistics below 1.96 and p-values above 0.05.

Supplementary Analyses

Trust measurement. Trust in management had the lowest convergent validity (AVE = 0.548) and one indicator below 0.70 (TIM3 = 0.675). To test whether this weakness explains the near-zero R^2, the model was re-estimated without TIM3. Trust in management then had AVE = 0.593 and composite reliability = 0.853, but the structural results were practically unchanged: all path coefficients differed by 0.01 or less from the original estimates (the justice–trust paths were 0.040 and −0.020, and the trust–turnover path was 0.390), the R^2 of trust in management remained 0.002, and the conclusions for H1 to H7 did not change. The weakness of TIM3 therefore does not explain the lack of association between justice and trust. As a further check, excluding the 31 respondents with identical answers in at least two constructs produced the same pattern (β = 0.408, 0.449, and 0.394 for the three effects on turnover intention).

Predictive power. Out-of-sample prediction was assessed with 10-fold cross-validation repeated ten times, following the logic of PLSpredict (Hair et al., 2019) and

comparing the PLS predictions with a linear regression benchmark (Table 10). For turnover intention, Q^2predict was positive for all five items (0.28 to 0.33) and the PLS model had lower prediction error than the benchmark for all five, which indicates good predictive power. For trust in management, Q^2predict was zero or slightly negative for all items (−0.02 to 0.00), which indicates no predictive relevance and is consistent with its R^2 of 0.002. The weak part of the model is therefore the link from justice to trust, not the prediction of turnover intention. These supplementary analyses were run with an implementation of the PLS algorithm that reproduced all SmartPLS estimates in Tables 2 to 9.

Table 10. Cross-Validated Predictive Power (10-Fold, 10 Repetitions)

Item	Q^2predict	RMSE (PLS)	RMSE (LM)
TO1	0.282	0.717	0.737
TO2	0.314	0.693	0.727
TO3	0.336	0.658	0.694
TO4	0.309	0.672	0.683
TO5	0.331	0.655	0.683
TIM1	-0.010	0.821	0.848
TIM2	-0.018	0.837	0.868
TIM3	-0.009	0.816	0.835
TIM4	-0.018	0.825	0.848
TIM5	-0.004	0.829	0.846

Note. RMSE = root mean squared error; LM = linear regression benchmark.
Source: Primary data processed by the authors, 2026

Sectors and subgroups. Because respondents came from nine sectors, we tested whether the structural relationships differed between sectors. Real estate and banking (fewer than 17 respondents each) were pooled into one group (n = 16), giving eight sector groups. Interaction tests between sector and the predictors, based on construct scores, showed no significant differences for turnover intention ($F(21, 168) = 0.98$, $p = .50$) or for trust in management ($F(14, 176) = 1.24$, $p = .25$). The positive effects of distributive justice, procedural justice, and trust on turnover intention appeared in every sector group (standardized coefficients of 0.24 to 0.59, 0.26 to 0.59, and 0.20 to 0.76, respectively), whereas the justice–trust coefficients varied in sign (−0.44 to 0.39). Estimates with sector fixed effects (0.39, 0.47, and 0.39) matched the main model. For turnover intention, interactions were also non-significant across age groups ($p = .39$), tenure groups ($p = .55$), and first-job status ($p = .44$); only the justice–trust relationships showed a borderline age difference ($p = .06$). These tests are exploratory because several sector groups are small, and they do not replace a formal multi-group analysis in a larger sample.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results support the direct paths from distributive justice, procedural justice, and trust in management to turnover intention (H1, H2, and H5) but not the paths from the two justice dimensions to trust in management (H3 and H4) or the mediation hypotheses (H6 and H7). The pattern is unexpected in two respects. First, the supported effects are positive, whereas SET predicts that fair treatment and trust reduce the intention to leave (Blau, 1964). Second, the justice and trust constructs are

almost uncorrelated, although justice is normally expected to be a principal antecedent of trust (Alyahya et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2025). Before interpreting these results theoretically, two features of the data should be kept in view: responses on trust in management and turnover intention were truncated (3–5 and 1–3), and all constructs were self-reported at a single point in time. The explanations offered below are therefore treated as hypotheses for future testing and not as conclusions.

Justice and Turnover Intention (H1 and H2)

The positive associations of both distributive justice and procedural justice with turnover intention contradict the equity and procedural-justice traditions, which expect fair outcomes and fair processes to produce favorable evaluations of the employment relationship (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001; Homans, 1961; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). They are consistent with studies in which justice significantly affected turnover intention (Bassey & Echu, 2025; Gorda et al., 2025) in the sense that justice matters for leaving decisions, but they do not match the null effect of distributive justice and the negative effect of procedural justice reported in another study (Lambert et al., 2023). The difference suggests that the sign of the relationship depends on the sample and its context. The positive associations appeared in every sector and age group and did not differ significantly between them (see Supplementary Analyses), so they do not arise from the sector mix of the sample.

Three explanations deserve testing. First, SET holds that exchange is evaluated against alternatives (Blau, 1964). Early-career employees in the exploration stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015) may regard a fair employer as a source of experience and credentials that raise their market value, so that perceived fairness coexists with a readiness to move to a better offer, a leading reason for resigning among Gen Z respondents (JakPat, 2024). Under this account, perceived employability or career-growth expectations would carry the effect, but neither was measured here. Second, the main reasons for leaving among young workers, namely career advancement and unclear career paths (JakPat, 2024; SEEK et al., 2023), concern the future and not the fairness of present schedules, pay, and procedures. In addition, to the extent that early-career employees are treated as talent, the talent literature suggests they may face stress, high demands, disempowerment, and identity struggles (Daubner-Siva et al., 2018; Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Painter-Morland et al., 2019; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), which fair procedures do not remove and which may push them toward a better-fitting job (these sources study designated talent and serve here only as supporting context); justice may therefore be a weak and unstable predictor in this group. Third, a methodological explanation cannot be excluded. All five turnover items were answered only with 1–3, and the model explained 57.5% of the variance in turnover intention, which is high for a model whose predictors are almost unrelated to one another. Restricted response ranges, a shared self-report method, and single-period data collection can distort the size of associations.

Justice and Trust in Management (H3 and H4)

Neither distributive justice nor procedural justice predicted trust in management, and together they explained 0.2% of its variance. This departs from SET, in which justice is a cue to managerial trustworthiness and hence a precursor of trust (Blau, 1964; Mayer et al., 1995), and from studies linking justice to trust (Alyahya et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2025; Gharbi et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). A first reading concerns the

target of the two constructs. Nearly all justice items refer to the workplace or the organization as a whole (the fairness of schedules, pay, and decision rules), with only one procedural item referring to the supervisor, whereas the trust items refer to management and to managerial behaviors, namely consistency, integrity, delegation, communication, and concern (Whitener et al., 1998). Fairness attributed to the organization need not carry over to trust in management, particularly among employees with at most five years of tenure, 18.5% of whom had served less than one year. A second reading concerns what was not measured: interactional justice, the interpersonal and informational treatment received from managers (Colquitt, 2001), was not included, although it is conceptually closer to trust in management than the outcomes and rules captured by our items. A third reading is statistical: trust responses were confined to 3–5, which compresses variance and mechanically limits covariance with any predictor.

The very low associations among all three predictors (HTMT ≤ 0.116) are a further reason for caution. Justice dimensions and trust are usually expected to be related to one another (Alyahya et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2025), so near-independence of this degree is unusual and may reflect sample or measurement features. Two checks argue against simple measurement explanations: removing the weakest trust indicator (TIM3) left every path coefficient within 0.01 of its original value, and no item was reverse-coded. The truncated range of trust remains a plausible contributor, and replication with the full response range, ideally with multi-source or time-separated data, is needed before concluding that justice is unrelated to trust among early-career employees.

Trust in Management and Turnover Intention (H5)

Trust in management was positively associated with turnover intention, the reverse of the direction expected from SET, in which trust signals reliable reciprocity and therefore lowers withdrawal (Robinson, 1996). Trust is a willingness to be vulnerable to another party's actions (Mayer et al., 1995); it describes the relationship with management and not the attractiveness of the job or career. Employees who trust their managers may feel safe to consider, or to act on, their career plans, including looking for other work, and trusted managers may also be the ones who develop their people and thereby raise their employability. Because the turnover items include accepting better offers and exploring other jobs (Bassey & Echu, 2025), such intentions need not signal distrust; they may signal ambition.

Early-career status provides a plausible context: employees who are still shaping their career orientations and choices (Arnett, 2015; Fitri, 2024; Zaharee et al., 2018) may treat trust in management as a reason to stay only when it is accompanied by visible career progression, and employees who feel disempowered or caught in identity struggles (Daubner-Siva et al., 2018; Kamoche & Leigh, 2022; Sumelius et al., 2020) may find trust in management an insufficient reason to stay. Whether the positive association reflects this boundary condition, a statistical artifact of the truncated ranges, or an omitted variable such as perceived employability, career-growth opportunity, or job satisfaction cannot be determined from these data and is a priority for future work.

The Mediating Role of Trust in Management (H6 and H7)

Trust in management did not mediate the effect of either justice dimension on turnover intention. The explanation is largely structural: an indirect effect requires a

justice–trust path and a trust–turnover path, and the first was statistically indistinguishable from zero, so the product could not differ from zero regardless of the strength of the second. The mediation model is therefore weak but not refuted. It leaves open that trust transmits justice effects in samples with a full range of trust scores and stronger justice–trust links (Alyahya et al., 2024; O'Callaghan, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). Out-of-sample prediction points the same way: Q^2predict for trust in management was zero or negative, whereas turnover intention was predicted well (see Supplementary Analyses).

Three theoretical reasons may explain why trust in management did not function as a mediator here. First, SET treats trust as the product of accumulated exchange experience (Blau, 1964; Whitener et al., 1998), which early-career employees have had little time to accumulate. Second, the fairness judgments measured here mostly concern the organization (schedules, pay, and decision rules), whereas trust is directed at management as a party, and evaluations with different targets may not transmit to each other; interactional justice, which is closest to trust in managers, was not measured (Colquitt, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995). Third, even when trust forms, the decision to stay depends on alternatives and career prospects (JakPat, 2024), which weakens trust as a conduit through which justice affects intention. These accounts are conceptual and were not tested in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether distributive and procedural justice relate to turnover intention directly and through trust in management among 200 early-career employees in South Tangerang, Indonesia. Both justice dimensions and trust in management were positively associated with turnover intention, justice did not predict trust, and trust did not mediate, so the reciprocity chain of SET broke at its first link and fair treatment did not automatically reduce the intention to leave. This is consistent with the view that fairness is an evaluation of the current exchange whereas leaving is a comparison with alternatives (Blau, 1964), and it held after removing the weakest trust indicator, after controlling for sector, and across age, tenure, and first-job subgroups, although the truncated response ranges for trust (3–5) and turnover intention (1–3), the self-reported single-source data, and the cross-sectional design call for caution. Theoretically, the findings suggest that the justice–trust–retention chain is conditional for early-career employees and that fairness judged at the organizational level need not build trust directed at management. For human resource managers, the findings imply four actions: monitor turnover intention periodically instead of inferring retention risk from fairness or trust scores, because these were not negatively related to it; measure justice, trust, and turnover intention separately and track them over time; keep fair practices as a baseline but do not expect them alone to reduce turnover intention; and pilot any retention program with a before-and-after measure of turnover intention before scaling it. The study is limited by purposive non-probability sampling, a single city, a narrow age and tenure band, mixed industries, one online survey in one period, restricted response ranges, and the omission of interactional justice. Future research should use probability or multi-site samples, time-separated or multi-source measures, a fuller justice model that includes interactional justice with targets matched to those of trust (organization versus management), and longitudinal or experimental designs, and should test mechanisms such as perceived employability or job satisfaction that were not measured here.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors used generative AI (Claude, Anthropic) to assist with language editing, consistency of terminology, and reference formatting during the preparation and revision of this manuscript. The authors designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and verified all content, citations, and references, and they take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: D.F.D. and S.H.S.; Methodology: D.F.D. and S.H.S.; Data collection: D.F.D.; Formal analysis: D.F.D.; Writing – original draft: D.F.D.; Writing – review and editing: D.F.D. and S.H.S.; Supervision: S.H.S. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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