

# Effects of Perceived Justice and Workplace Fun on Executives' Work Engagement and Customer-Oriented Behavior in the Real Estate Sector in Hochiminh City

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**Abstract** – In today's competitive global market, businesses recognize that their success or failure significantly depends on their human resources. Work engagement is a vital factor in improving the performance, profitability, customer satisfaction, and revenue of any business. There are several factors that can contribute to heightened employee engagement. Based on the theory of equity and job demands-resources model, the authors analyzed the influences of perceived justice and workplace fun on work engagement and then customer-oriented behavior. The study focuses on salespeople from various real estate companies in Hochiminh City. A quantitative approach is used to assess the relevance of four factors. The researchers utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data collected through an online survey of participants' responses. The results confirmed the positive effects of perceived justice and workplace fun on work engagement and customer-oriented behavior.

In practice, organizations should carefully recognize employees' achievements to increase the perceived justice of employees. Moreover, building a positive and reliable working place is also another solution to improve staff's work engagement.

**Keywords** – Perceived justice, workplace fun, work engagement, customer-oriented behavior.

## 1. Introduction

The stable expansion of the Vietnamese economy, along with the strong growth of the middle class and the strong urbanization process has enabled the real estate market in Vietnam to take off. Hochiminh City, one of the most densely populated cities in Vietnam, a leading economic, political, cultural center has made a positive and dynamic development of its real estate market. Hochiminh City was ranked in the top three best real estate markets to Singapore and Japan's Tokyo in Asia-Pacific, and ahead of Australia's Sydney and Melbourne in fourth and fifth places, respectively in 2019 [1].

After five years of "burning" development, the real estate market, however, has seen low notes from the end of 2019. There was a warning of supply-over-demand situation and the outbreaks of Covid-19 pandemic with of the alarming increase of Covid cases. The city economy known as national locomotive economy was paralyzed by the Covid-19, which exerted a disastrous effect on every aspect of sectors. Obviously, the area of real estate business was no exception. Most of the real estate activities had to be canceled and the market came to a pitiful standstill. In addition, there were many more sellers than buyers and so many apartments and offices that used to occupied were left empty. As a result, the real estate market situation became worse and worse than ever before [2].

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On the way to economic recovery, attracting more and more clients is a thorny question which causes the real estate managers headaches. Apart from such factors as product quality and corporate business strategies, sales executives significantly contribute to real estate business success. Under pressure on turnover, as well as market difficulties, it is so vital that firms have the executives with work engagement and customer-oriented behavior. Work engagement is the state in which employees put their heart, effort, perseverance and passion into work even when employees are confronted with difficulties. This element helps workers increase efficiency at work and reduces the intention to quit their jobs [3]. Customer-oriented behavior is employees' ones that lead to satisfied customers, which benefits businesses such as higher revenue, more loyal customers [4].

Researchers have shown growing interest in exploring ways to enhance employees' work engagement and customer-oriented behavior. There are lots of antecedents that influence these two factors. In the economic crisis, it is not easy for organizations to use financial tools to improve work engagement and customer-oriented behavior of staff. When the economy slows down, labors' perception of justice at workplace is more important [5]. Creating fun at work is also a "free" tool to attract and retain staff [6].

In this research, authors would like to investigate the impacts of perceived justice and workplace fun on salespeople work engagement and then speed up customer-oriented behavior, the vital element to corporate success in the current tough time.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The significance of work engagement in the real estate industry, a critical part of Vietnam's economy, has been widely acknowledged. Many academic studies have been carried out to explore diverse factors contributing to work engagement. These determinants encompass perceived organizational justice, workplace fun, and customer-oriented behaviors, which are believed to play pivotal roles in shaping employee attitudes and performance. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research examining the connections among these variables, particularly in Vietnam's real estate sector. This literature review seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing existing scholarly studies on the subject. It focuses on the role of work engagement as a moderating factor and examines the association between perceived organizational justice, workplace fun, and customer-oriented behavior within the context of this dynamic and evolving industry.

### 2.1. Perceived Justice

The concept of "perceived justice" has been extensively explored in the literature. Organizational justice specifically refers to employees' perceptions of fairness within the workplace [7]. Many previous studies carried out have signified perceived justice as essential predictor of staffs' positive attitude and behavior [8], [9], [10]. In addition, a three-dimensional justice model was made by Moorman [11], and justice was defined as the perception of adhering to rules that reflect appropriateness in decision contexts. Firstly, procedural justice stresses appropriateness in decision-making procedures and includes voice, consistency, accuracy, bias suppression, and correctability. Second, interactional justice highlights the appropriateness in communication between managers and employees. Thirdly, distributive justice emphasizes appropriateness in decision outcomes and includes equity, equality, and need [11]. In some researchers' eyes, perceived justice is highly valued thanks to its usefulness for organizations in the long run because it can promote positive employee behaviors and work attitudes [10].

### 2.2. Workplace Fun

In recent decades, the term "workplace fun" has been paid much attention to and spent much time doing research by academics and practitioners because it plays a very crucial role in employee efficiency and work engagement in organizations. Many different definitions have been presented from various approaches as follows.

Workplace fun is defined as "any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment or pleasure" [12]. From a different aspect, workplace fun consists of three sub dimensions of fun activities, coworker socializing and manager support for fun [13]. Similarly, other researchers agree that fun activities mention various socializing and team activities held by organizations to enhance the enjoyment between employees [14], [15]. In addition, coworker socializing is characterized by kindness, amity and friendly relations [16], while manager support for fun refers to the extent to which management promotes and permits workers to enjoy themselves at work [13]. Moreover, customer interaction is also considered as another dimension of workplace fun [6].

### 2.3. Work Engagement

Work engagement was first conceptualized by Kahn and then operationalized by Maslach *et al.* [17], [18]. In general, work engagement is considered as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind" characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption [19], [20].

Firstly, vigor is featured by high levels of energy, mental resilience, willingness to make efforts at workplace and perseverance even when employees are confronted with difficulties. Secondly, dedication refers to a strong commitment to work that is meaningful, inspiring and challenging and evokes feelings of pride and enthusiasm. Lastly, absorption is the situation where employees deeply focus on their work without feeling stressed; on the contrary, they feel happy. When employees are fully immersed in their work, they perceive time goes by quickly and find it challenging to disengage from their tasks.

In addition, work engagement is characterized as a positive behavior or mental state at work that results in favorable work-related outcomes. As a result, staff with high levels of engagement are enthusiastic, devoted to, and deeply absorbed in their tasks [21]. From a different angle, work engagement is an affirmative emotion that employees have toward their work and their effort in its completion [22]. Sharing the same perspectives, Roozeboom and Schelvis assert that theoretically, work engagement is related to positive organizational results [23], [24]. To be more specific, an employee who is fully involved and is enthusiastic about his job is considered as fully engaged [23]. Engaged employees perform better than their non-engaged counterparts. Overall, employees who are engaged with their work not only demonstrate high job performance but also spread positive emotions to other members within the organization. They feel satisfied with their job and have no desire to leave it.

#### 2.4. Customer-Oriented Behaviour

Customer-oriented behavior (COB), one of the popular constructs, has drawn much attention from researchers in recent years, many of whom have pursued their studies for a couple of decades. As a result, many different terms have been used by various scholars in the marketing literature to reflect employees' behavior in delivering excellent customer service, including prosocial behavior, extra-role customer service, organizational citizenship behavior, and COB [25], [26] or to describe customer orientation such as customer mindset [27] or SOCO (sales orientation – customer orientation) [28]. Customer-oriented behavior is the way service providers act when dealing with customers that makes customers content [26].

#### 2.5. Developing Hypotheses

Building on insights from the literature review, hypotheses are developed to explore the relationships among perceived justice, workplace fun, work engagement, and customer-oriented behavior.

##### 2.5.1. Perceived Justice and Work Engagement

The terms “justice”, “fairness” and “equity” have been used interchangeably in literature [11], [29], [30]. Konovsky suggests that “fairness” is a core value in organizations [31]. Organizational justice has critical impacts on staff's attitudes and behaviors, and consequently their performance and the organization's success.

The Job Demands-Resources model highlights that a job consists of both positive and negative factors, and fairness is one of the positive factors within an organization [32]. Fairness is widely regarded as a crucial factor influencing employees' psychological well-being and behavior. A lack of fairness can exacerbate employee burnout. Moreover, unfairness from management can lead to employees feeling dissatisfied, angry, and less willing to contribute enthusiastically to the organization [33]. Conversely, when employees perceive fairness in the organization, they will gladly dedicate themselves to it. Furthermore, they feel the need to reciprocate the organization's care by contributing more to the organization [34]. From above-mentioned analysis, it can be concluded as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: Perceived justice has a significantly positive effect on work engagement.

##### 2.5.2. Workplace Fun and Work Engagement

Based on the literal meanings of fun and engagement, Plester and Hutchison [35] argue that engagement is linked to a positive psychological state and emotions. Similarly, fun is associated with positive perceptions and is connected to feelings of enjoyment, entertainment, lightheartedness, and smiles. Their study demonstrates that fun and engagement are closely tied to enjoyment. Demerouti *et al.* [36] suggest that workplace fun can be seen as a valuable work resource that aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. This model asserts that work resources, which include physical, social, psychological, or organizational factors, help reduce job demands and the associated physical and mental costs, foster personal growth and learning, facilitate the achievement of work goals, and enhance dedication [36]. Previous studies have shown that these resources can increase work engagement [37]. Additionally, Becker and Tews [38] emphasized that fun is a resource with social and interpersonal elements that can strengthen social relationships, offer social support to cope with the pressures at work, and lead to deeper immersion in one's tasks. From this description, a hypothesis is drawn as follows:

H<sub>2</sub>: Workplace fun has a significantly positive effect on work engagement.

### 2.5.3. Work Engagement and Customer-Oriented Behavior

The term “customer-oriented behavior” refers to specific behaviors displayed by service personnel when he or she serves customers – such behavior that leads to customer satisfaction [26]. Based on the study by Winsted [26], several common and different aspects of COB are found clearly. Once customer-oriented behavior is highly paid much attention to, its efficiency has a considerable effect on customer satisfaction and firm success.

On the foundations of work engagement and customer-oriented behavior literature, work engagement consists of an individual’s involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm at work. From Kahn’s viewpoint, employee work engagement refers to the psychological experiences related to work and the work environment that influence how individuals involve themselves or withdraw during task execution [17].

It is argued that COB takes on added importance because employees’ performance involves customizing and personalizing service delivery. Additionally, both practitioners and academics have identified an upbeat correlation between employee engagement and job execution across various employment contexts [34]. It can be said that when employees are much engaged in their work, they avoid such negative emotions as acting arrogantly and getting annoyed with or ignoring customers. On the contrary, they become happy, cheerful, and enthusiastic, dedicated to make customers satisfied and firms successful. With the above-mentioned presentation, another hypothesis is devised:

H<sub>3</sub>: Work engagement has a significant positive effect on customer-oriented behavior.

The complete research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

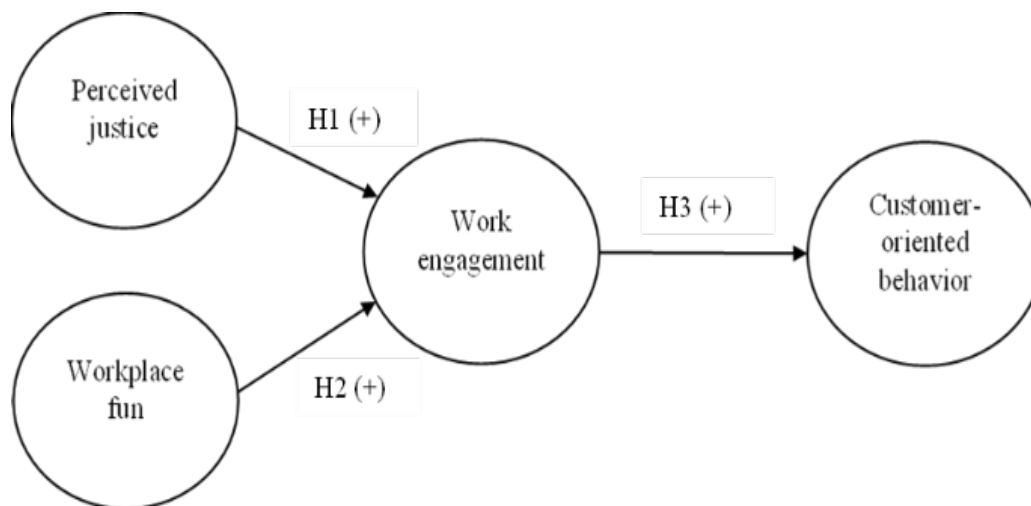


Figure 1. The proposed research model

### 3. Methodology

In the present research, the authors opted for a quantitative approach, namely PLS-SEM (Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling), to evaluate the significance of three principal variables in the research model. This technique was selected owing to its inherent benefits, which include: (1) Suitability for data sets with a limited number of samples; (2) Applicability to non-normally distributed data; and (3) Suitability for intricate research models. The analysis of research data includes two steps: (1) Assessing the measurement model; (2) Assessing the structural model. Smart PLS software 3.2.8 was utilized to analyze the collected data. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that PLS-SEM offers several advantages over co-variance-based SEM, particularly in cases where the research model is complex and exploratory in nature [39].

This research draws upon previous studies to identify valuable items related to the constructs. Specifically, with regards to “perceived justice”, Moorman’s study contributed 17 items for three dimensions (“procedural justice”, “interactive justice” and “distributive justice”) [11]. In relation to “workplace fun”, 17 items for four dimensions (“fun activities”, “coworker socializing”, “managerial support for fun” and “customer interaction”) were adopted from [6]. Additionally, the research adopted nine items of “work engagement” based on the study of Schaufeli *et al.* [40]. Furthermore, this research utilized seven items pertaining to “customer-oriented behavior”, which were selected from the study of Pimpakorn and Patterson [41].

To collect primary data, an online survey was built using Google Forms and distributed to sales employees in Hochiminh City real estate businesses.

The data collection process involved two stages, specifically the preliminary research and the official research. Initially, the authors pre-tested the questionnaire on 50 participants to assess its reliability and consistency, making necessary revisions where needed. All questionnaire items were found to achieve the required reliability and consistency. The authors then proceeded to conduct the official survey and collected a total of 129 responses from sales employees who work in real estate companies located in different parts of Hochiminh City. Cohen [42] suggests that an analysis of more than 129 respondents is sufficient, which was achieved in this study.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The research framework was implemented using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), a two-step analytical approach. The first step involves validating the measurement model by assessing the variables' convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. The second step focuses on calculating the structural model.

Once the structural model is validated, path coefficients are generated to align the model with the data [43].

For data analysis, this study utilized SmartPLS, a widely adopted Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) software that provides advanced features for evaluating large datasets [44]. Renowned for its user-friendly interface, SmartPLS accommodates researchers with varying levels of expertise in statistical analysis. By leveraging SmartPLS, this study ensures a high degree of precision and reliability in the analytical process, contributing to valid findings.

##### 4.1. Demographic Information of Respondents

This section provides a detailed explanation of the statistical results for the sample. The analysis begins with a description of the respondents' demographic profile. Table 1 presents key information, including gender, age, education level, monthly income, and years of work experience. Most employees are under 35 years old and have bachelor or higher education. The majority of them earn less than 600 USD per month. Nearly 80% of those surveyed have worked in sales positions for less than 2 years.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents

Criteria	Item	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	61	47%
	Female	68	53%
Age band	Under 25	85	66%
	25 - 34	38	29%
	35 - 44	5	4%
	45 and above	1	1%
Education	Diploma and lower	6	5%
	Bachelor	115	89%
	Master and above	8	6%
Monthly income (USD)	Under 300	66	51%
	300 - 600	49	38%
	600 - 1200	9	7%
	1200 and above	5	4%
Years of experience	Under 1 year	64	50%
	1 - 2 years	38	29%
	2 - 3 years	10	8%
	3 years and above	17	13%

##### 4.2. Assessing the Measurement Model

In this stage, the authors evaluated the reliability and consistency of items, convergent and discriminant validity of constructs.

Table 2. Constructs and items

Constructs and items	Sources	Outer loading	CR	AVE	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>1A Procedural justice.</b> Procedures designed to ....	Moorman (1991)		0.875	0.540	
1A1		0.823			
1A2		0.744			
1A3		0.804			
1A4		0.604			
1A5		0.731			
1A6		0.682			
<b>1B Interactive justice</b>			0.869	0.527	
1B1		0.801			
1B2		0.621			
1B3		0.787			
1B4		0.740			
1B5		0.682			
1B6		0.710			
<b>1C Distributive justice</b>			0.905	0.660	
1C1		0.809			
1C2		0.644			
1C3		0.885			
1C4	0.905				
1C5	0.794				
<b>2A Fun activities</b>	Tsaur <i>et al.</i> (2019)		0.873	0.581	
2A1		0.636			
2A2		0.829			
2A3		0.848			
2A4		0.737			
2A5		0.743			
<b>2B Coworker socializing</b>			0.852	0.591	
2B1		0.824			
2B2		0.762			
2B3		0.677			
2B4		0.805			
<b>2C Manager support for fun</b>			0.903	0.654	
2C1		0.822			
2C2		0.853			
2C3		0.835			
2C4		0.879			
2C5		0.630			
<b>2D Customer interaction</b>			0.890	0.801	
2D1	0.921				
2D2	0.868				
2D3	*				
<b>3 Work engagement</b>	Schaufeli <i>et al.</i> (2006)		0.939	0.630	37%
31		0.825			
32		0.769			
33		0.785			
34		0.815			
35		0.842			
36		0.770			
37		0.723			
38		0.879			
39		0.721			
<b>4 Customer-oriented behavior</b>	Pimpakorn & Patterson (2010)		0.882	0.518	38%
41		0.763			
42		0.752			
43		0.609			
44		0.672			
45		0.738			
46		0.774			
47	0.715				

The item "2D3" was removed from the research model.

In evaluating indicators' reliability, the outer loading values are used as an important criterion. Previous studies suggested that indicators with outer loading values smaller than 0.4 should be removed from the research model [45]. On the other hand, indicators with outer loading values larger than 0.7 should be retained in the model. For indicators with outer loading values ranging from 0.4 to 0.7, their removal can be considered if it leads to an increase in composite reliability (CR) or average variance extracted (AVE).

The composite reliability is a significant criterion for assessing the internal consistency of the variables. If the composite reliability rate falls between 0.7 and 0.95, it can be considered that all dependent variables have internal consistency [39].

The AVE values are also used to examine the convergent validity of variables. Hair *et al.* [39], proposed that variables achieve convergence when the AVE value exceeds 0.5. As indicated in Table 2, the AVE values of constructs were found to be greater than 0.5, indicating a high level of convergent validity.

To assess the discriminant validity, the present study utilizes the HTMT ratio. According to Henseler *et al.* [46], discriminant validity is established when the HTMT ratio is less than 0.900 for all variables in the model (Table 3). The authors did not assess the discriminant issue of variables and their dimensions (two independents and their dimensions) [39].

Table 3. HTMT ratio

	1A	1B	1C	2A	2B	2C	2D	1D	2E	3	4
1A Procedural justice											
1B Interactive justice	0.614										
1C Distributive justice	0.727	0.741									
1D Perceived justice											
2A Fun activities											
2B Coworker socializing				0.502							
2C Manager support for fun				0.810	0.596						
2D Customer interaction				0.508	0.288	0.500					
2E Workplace fun											
3 Work engagement								0.634	0.586		
4 Customer-oriented behavior								0.536	0.574	0.666	

4.3. Assessing the Structural Model

The stage includes examining collinearity concerns, accepting or rejecting the hypothesis, assessing the R<sup>2</sup> level, and measuring the effect size f<sup>2</sup>.

The assessment of the structural model is shown in Figure 2.

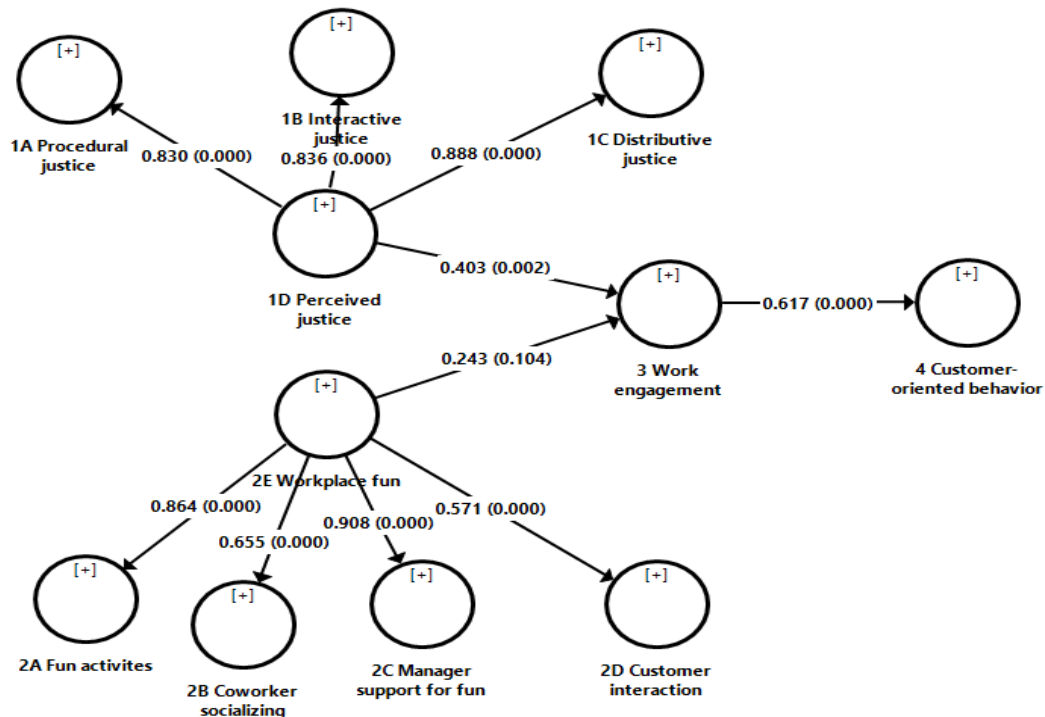


Figure 2. The assessment of the structural model

To investigate the issue of collinearity, it is necessary to rely on the VIF values. All constructs have VIF values that are less than 5 (Table 4).

Therefore, in the model, there are no collinearity issues between constructs [39].

Table 4. VIF, path coefficient, p-value, and f<sup>2</sup>

Hypothesis	VIF	Coefficient	P Values	Conclusion	f-square	Level of impact
H <sub>1</sub> : 1D Perceived justice -> 3 Work engagement	2.334	0.403	0%	Supported	0.110	Moderate
H <sub>2</sub> : 2E Workplace fun -> 3 Work engagement	2.334	0.243	10%	Supported	0.040	Low
H <sub>3</sub> : 3 Work engagement -> 4 Customer-oriented behavior	1.000	0.617	0%	Supported	0.616	High

The statistical significance and importance of path coefficients were analyzed to verify the hypotheses. Based on this analysis, the authors were able to confirm or reject each hypothesis and determine the relationship between the variables. With the P-values were less than 10%, all three hypotheses are supported. Additionally, coefficients with values greater than 0 indicated that independent variables had critical positive influences on dependent variables. “Perceived justice” has a greater impact on “work engagement” than “workplace fun” (Table 4).

A higher R<sup>2</sup> value indicates greater accuracy in prediction.

However, the level of predictive accuracy can depend on various factors, including the number of exogenous factors in the research, model complexity, and research approach. The research model consists of two independent constructs, “perceived justice” and “workplace fun” which together explain approximately 37% of the variance in the construct “work engagement”. Additionally, three independent constructs explain 38% of the variance in “customer-oriented behavior”.

The R<sup>2</sup> information is used to measure the model’s predictive power, with a range of 0 to 1.



Based on this information, it can be concluded that the research achieves conciseness, meaning that it demonstrates the efficiency in the use of independent constructs to explain a significant proportion of variance of dependent variables.

The effect size  $f^2$  is utilized to analyze the contribution of an independent variable.

Cohen [47] elaborated that, effect sizes of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered the small, medium, and large impact, respectively, of an independent variable on a dependent variable. The information presented in Table 4 shows a clear indication that “perceived justice” is a critical construct that influences “work engagement”, and “work engagement”, in turn, is a significant factor that influences “customer-oriented behavior”.

The accepted hypothesis  $H_1$  supports the previous studies of Ahamed *et al.* [48]. In both studies, the coefficients are similar (0.403 and 0.389, respectively). Ahamed *et al.* [48] also analyzed the perceived justice with three dimensions. In 2017, Özer *et al.* [49]. studied the impacts of perceived justice on work engagement in the health care sector and the result is parallel with this research. The supported hypothesis  $H_2$  consolidates the previous study about the impacts of workplace fun on work engagement [6]. Tsaur *et al.* [6] performed research in tourism and hospitality with three groups of respondents with the coefficients of 0.340; 0.280; 0.240. The coefficient of 0.240 is similar to this research (0.243). The influence of work engagement on customer-oriented behavior was analyzed by Mostafa in the restaurant sector in the UK. The accepted hypothesis  $H_3$  supported the work of Mostafa [50]. However, the coefficient in this research is double higher than the figure in Mostafa's research (0.617 compared with 0.315).

## 5. Conclusion

The research findings have reinforced two theories (Equity Theory and Job Demands-Resources Model) and three hypotheses. Firstly, the research model has supported the hypotheses that workplace fun and perceived justice contribute to increasing work engagement among salespeople in the real estate sector. Secondly, work engagement will lead to more customer-oriented behavior, which helps salespeople succeed in a highly competitive market.

This research offers recommendations for managers in the real estate business. The perception of justice by employees strongly results in their engagement to work. Consequently, managers should ensure that employees are treated fairly, have their achievements recognized, and are appropriately rewarded.

Organizing fun activities can also increase communication and positive emotions in the workplace. Engagement to work can help sales employees overcome the difficult period of the real estate market and increase their customer-oriented behaviors.

However, the research has some limitations that suggest areas for future research, in addition to its strengths. The study was only conducted in Hochiminh City real estate market. Future studies can be conducted in other service industries such as hotels, restaurants, hospitals, or educational institutions, and in different locations to improve the generalizability of the research results. It is important to compare the perceptions of participants from different regions of the country; therefore, diverse subjects are necessary. Moreover, future research might increase the sample size to better illustrate the effects of perceived justice and workplace fun on work engagement. Another limitation is that the research model examines two independent variables related to work engagement. Further research should analyze the influences of other factors such as organization-related, work-related, or personal-related resources on work engagement as well as customer-oriented behaviors.

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