

Compensation and commitment: exploring the impact among early career staff in a University of Science & Engineering

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of compensation on organizational commitment among early career staff at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, China. Employing quantitative research methods using survey methods using non-probability sampling by purposive sampling. a survey method, 306 samples were conveniently drawn from a pool of 1,500 faculties. Through descriptive and inferential statistics using mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression analyses, the research reveals significant impacts of salary, bonuses, and perks on organizational commitment. The findings underscore the importance of compensation packages in fostering employee commitment within academic institutions. It shows that respondents were satisfied with the salary, neutral toward bonus payment, and satisfied with amount of perk received. It also indicates a generally positive sentiment among respondents towards their organizational commitment. The regression result reveals the relationship between employee compensation (salary, bonus, perks) and organizational commitment demonstrate a highly significant and positive association. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of employee engagement and retention in higher education settings.

Keywords: employee compensation; organizational commitment; early career staff

1. Introduction

In the realm of Chinese higher education, colleges and universities serve as crucial hubs for talent cultivation and aggregation, playing a pivotal role in advancing science, education, and workforce development—a priority underscored in this study. Despite university officials recognizing the pressing need to attract and retain academic staff, the persistent challenge of brain drain within Chinese institutions remains increasingly severe (Zhou, 2012).

Regarding to information-driven economy, attracting, managing, and retaining talent are critical concerns. However, the current compensation system for college professors has proven deficient, leading to a decline in their motivation and overall job satisfaction (Gan, 2022). Within higher education human resource management, compensation not only reflects institutional vitality but also plays a pivotal role in ensuring organizational effectiveness and cohesion (Malhotra and Mehta, 2021). This highlights the urgent need to reassess and improve compensation structures to better meet the evolving needs and aspirations of academic faculty, thereby creating an environment conducive to scholarly endeavors.

Research on compensation and commitment among early career staff in universities, particularly in science and engineering fields, has made significant strides, but several research gaps persist. One crucial research gap is the exploration of the nuanced relationship between compensation and different dimensions of commitment among early career staff. While existing literature often examines the direct impact of compensation on overall commitment, there is a need for studies that delve deeper into how compensation influences affective, continuance, and normative commitment separately. Furthermore, examining compensation and commitment dynamics across different types of universities, such as public versus private institutions or universities in different geographic regions, would offer valuable insights into the contextual factors influencing these relationships. Understanding how institutional characteristics interact with compensation practices to influence commitment can inform evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at enhancing employee retention in science and engineering universities. Thus, this research explores the impact of employee compensation on organizational commitment at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering.

2. Literature review

Numerous studies in the field of HRM have highlighted the significance of compensation in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors, particularly their level of organizational commitment. Organizational commitment refers to the degree to which employees identify with and are dedicated to their organization's goals and values. Research has consistently shown that fair and competitive compensation practices are positively

associated with higher levels of organizational commitment among employees (Malhotra and Mehta, 2021).

Early career staff members represent a critical segment of the workforce, characterized by their relatively recent entry into the workforce and ongoing career development. Understanding the factors that influence organizational commitment among early career staff is essential for organizations, as these employees often form the foundation of future talent pipelines and organizational success.

Within the specific context of universities, factors such as academic freedom, collegiality, and organizational culture interact with compensation practices to influence employees' commitment levels. Research in the field of higher education management has explored the unique dynamics of faculty and staff retention, highlighting the importance of competitive compensation packages in attracting and retaining top academic talent (Lu, et al., 2019).

In the context of China's rapidly evolving higher education landscape, universities face increasing competition to attract and retain qualified faculty and staff. The government's emphasis on innovation and talent development has heightened the importance of effective HRM practices within academic institutions (Mok and Han, 2017). Understanding how compensation impacts organizational commitment among early career staff at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering provides valuable insights for both academic institutions and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality of Chinese higher education.

The following section presents the literature utilized in this research, which was pivotal in constructing a research framework. Employee compensation was designated as the independent variable, while organizational commitment was considered the dependent variable. The Equity Theory was subsequently adopted to serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. Following this, the research methodology employed in this investigation will be delineated. Subsequently, the findings and conclusions will be presented in subsequent sections, offering insights into the relationship between employee compensation and organizational commitment within the framework of the Equity Theory.

2.1. Employee compensation

Employee compensation encompasses various forms of payment provided by employers to fulfil both the basic life needs and internal psychological needs of employees, as well as to incentivize and retain talent within organizations, as noted by Milkovich and Newman (2002); Zhang (2020) further delineate three primary types of compensation: basic pay, incentive pay, and other benefits.

Salary defines as the remuneration disbursed by an employer or legal entity in accordance with legal regulations, industry standards, or contractual agreements with employees, salary constitutes a fixed form of compensation for employees' labour contributions (Fulmer, et al., 2023; Zhou, 2012). It represents a regular payment made to employees for their services rendered within a specified time frame, forming a foundational component of employee compensation structures (Milkovich and Newman, 2002).

Bonus serves as additional compensation provided to employees for exceeding individual expectations and creation of organization wellbeing (Fulmer, et al., 2023). These add-on payments are typically awarded in recognition of either direct increases in productivity, such as through heightened production levels or cost savings, or for facilitating conditions conducive to social wealth generation, such as through technological innovations (Milkovich and Newman, 2002).

Perks encompass supplementary compensation elements beyond basic pay and bonuses, including insurance coverage, retirement plans, and other material benefits tailored to employees' needs and organizational circumstances (Fulmer, et al., 2023). These perks often lack a standardized form and may vary across organizations based on factors such as industry norms, organizational culture, and employee preferences (Milkovich and Newman, 2002).

The literature underscores the importance of comprehensive compensation strategies in meeting employees' diverse needs, fostering motivation, and enhancing organizational performance. Effective compensation practices not only ensure employees' financial security but also contribute to their overall job satisfaction, engagement, and retention within the organization (Milkovich and Newman, 2002). By understanding the nuanced components of employee compensation, organizations can design compensation packages that align with their strategic objectives and create a competitive advantage in attracting, motivating, and retaining top talent in the dynamic contemporary labor market.

2.2 Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment encompasses the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by members of an organization towards their respective institutions, as highlighted by Hedayat et al. (2018). This conceptualization goes beyond mere adherence to contractual obligations related to work tasks and professional roles, as elucidated by Hao and Zhong (2018). Instead, it delves into the psychological contract between individuals and their organizations, focusing on the strength of individuals' identification with and engagement in organizational objectives and values.

In the literature, organizational commitment is often depicted as a multifaceted construct, comprising affective, continuance, and normative dimensions (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment reflects employees' emotional attachment to their organization, continuance commitment pertains to the perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and normative commitment relates to a sense of obligation to remain with the organization due to moral or ethical reasons.

High levels of organizational commitment are associated with several positive outcomes for both employees and organizations. Research suggests that employees with strong organizational commitment exhibit higher job satisfaction, greater motivation, and increased willingness to exert discretionary effort in their roles (Meyer, et al., 2002). Moreover, organizations benefit from reduced turnover rates, enhanced employee performance, and improved organizational citizenship behaviors among committed employees (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Understanding the factors that influence organizational commitment is crucial for organizational leaders and HR practitioners seeking to foster a supportive and engaging work environment. Factors such as leadership effectiveness, organizational culture, job characteristics, and perceived fairness of organizational practices have been identified as significant predictors of organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002).

2.3 Equity theory

This research applied an application of Equity theory in understanding organizational commitment among early career university staff in the context of compensation incentives offers valuable insights into the dynamics of employee motivation and engagement in higher education institution (Li and Chen, 2018). Equity theory posits that the perceived fairness of compensation distribution plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' enthusiasm and productivity. It emphasizes that employees assess the fairness of their compensation not only based on absolute monetary gains but also through comparisons with their colleagues' remuneration (Khaliq Alvi, et al., 2019). This subjective judgment of fairness influences employees' sense of commitment to the organization and their willingness to exert effort in their work (Zhou and Ma, 2022).

In the context of early career university staff, Equity theory suggests that perceptions of fairness in compensation allocation can significantly impact their organizational commitment (Li and Chen, 2018). When employees perceive their compensation as fair and equitable relative to their peers, they are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment to the university and its goals. Conversely, perceived inequities in compensation distribution may lead to decreased motivation, job dissatisfaction, and reduced organizational commitment among early career staff (Sharma and Sharma, 2021).

By studying the rationality and fairness of compensation allocation through the lens of Equity theory, researchers can better understand the relationship between compensation distribution fairness and employees' levels of enthusiasm and work efficiency. Ultimately, by addressing concerns related to fairness in compensation management, university administrators can foster a positive organizational climate, enhance employee engagement, and promote greater organizational commitment among early career staff (Meyer et al., 2002).

The integration of Equity theory into research on organizational commitment among early career university staff provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between compensation incentives, fairness perceptions, and employee engagement (Li and Chen, 2018). This approach facilitates the development of effective strategies for talent management and retention within academic institutions, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and competitiveness in the higher education landscape.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This research explores the employee compensation (include: Salary, Bonus, Perk) and the organizational commitment. These following hypotheses serve as the foundation for examining the relationships between different components of employee compensation (salary, bonuses, perks) and organizational commitment among early career staff at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering.

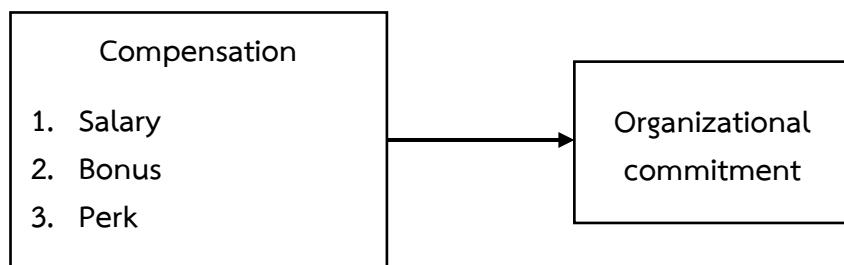


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

These research hypotheses consist of the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Salary has positive impact on organizational commitment in Sichuan University of Science & Engineering at statistical significant at 5%.

Hypothesis 2: Bonus has positive impact on organizational commitment in Sichuan University of Science & Engineering at statistical significant at 5%.

Hypothesis 3: Perks has positive impact on organizational commitment in Sichuan University of Science & Engineering at statistical significant at 5%

3. Research methodology

This section provides research methodology which covers research method, research instrument, population and sample, data collection, and data analysis, respectively.

3.1 Research method

This research conducts quantitative study using close-ended questionnaire survey. According to the actual situation, the specific situation of the employee compensation and organizational commitment of Sichuan University of Science & Engineering was understood through the questionnaire survey, then the impact of the salary on the resignation intention of the university employees was summarized through the data analysis.

3.2 Research instrument

This research utilized a questionnaire to gather data, structured around four key components. Firstly, demographic information was obtained through five checklist questions covering gender, age, marital status, education, and work experience. Secondly, compensation was explored with 18 checklist questions divided into salary, bonus, and perks categories. Thirdly, organization commitment was assessed with 12 checklist questions focusing on affective commitment and continuance commitment. Finally, turnover intention was investigated through 14 checklist questions.

A questionnaire through a systematic process has been developed as following steps. Firstly, a literature review on reward systems and employee performance guided the questionnaire's formation. Next, a preliminary draft was developed in alignment with the research objectives and conceptual framework, which critique by supervisor. Then, the second draft underwent scrutiny by three experts for language usage and theoretical coverage, leading to a third draft. Further refinement occurred through multiple rounds of review and revision with the supervisor, resulting in the fourth version. To ensure appropriateness, the questionnaire underwent a trial with 30 employees, followed by a reliability test utilizing the Alpha-coefficient method, meeting the criterion set by Hair et al. (2009). The reliability test produced scores ranging from 0.722 to 0.867, indicating satisfactory reliability. Finally, the questionnaire's quality was assessed by the supervisor for reliability and validity, culminating in the creation of the final version. This rigorous process ensured the questionnaire's robustness and suitability for data collection in the research study.

3.3 Population, and sample

Population of this study is 1500 academic staffs at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering. Sample size is calculated as 306 using Yamane's formula as $n = N / (1+Ne)^2$

Thus, $n = 1500 / (1 + (1500 * 0.05)2) = 306$. This research adopted non-probability sampling with a purposive method.

3.4 Data collection

This research delves into the analysis of teachers' basic data at Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, uncovering recent issues via the STAR questionnaire survey. The data collection process involved preparing the questionnaire, estimating a distribution of 414 questionnaires, and ultimately receiving 301 completed sets, yielding a response rate of 72.71%. This rate meets the minimum requirement suggested by Aaker et al. (2001). With a robust dataset in hand, the next step involves clearing the data for comprehensive analysis, facilitating insights into the identified challenges within the higher institution.

3.5 Data analysis

In Section 1, descriptive statistics are utilized to provide a comprehensive overview of the data collected in the survey. This includes the presentation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for each variable under examination. The data analysis focuses on assessing the attitudes of participants across Likert's five-point scale.

Table 1 Score and interpretation

Attitude	Score	Range	Interpretation
Strongly agree	5	4.21-5.00	strongly agree
Agree	4	3.41-4.20	agree
Neutral	3	2.61-3.40	neutral
Disagree	2	1.81-2.60	disagree
Strongly disagree	1	1.00-1.80	strongly disagree

Descriptive analysis offers valuable insights into the participants' attitudes, enabling researchers to identify prevailing trends, dominant perspectives, and areas of variation within the dataset. This foundational understanding serves as a basis for further investigation and interpretation in subsequent sections.

Inferential statistics are employed to explore the relationships between variables through correlation and multiple regression analyses. Correlation analysis examines the strength and direction of linear associations between pairs of variables, providing insights into the degree of relationship between them. Multiple regression analysis extends this inquiry by identifying the combined influence of multiple predictor variables on a single outcome variable.

By utilizing inferential statistics, researchers can move beyond mere description to uncover underlying patterns, associations, and causal relationships within the data. Section 2's

inferential analysis thus builds upon the descriptive findings of Section 1, offering deeper insights into the factors influencing attitudes and behaviors among the survey participants.

4. Results

This section provides research findings. It begins with descriptive analysis on employee compensation and organization commitment. Then, correlation among independent variables and dependent variable are tested using Pair t-test. Last section provides correlation analysis on the impact of employee compensation on organizational commitments.

Table 2 Descriptive analysis on employee compensation and organization commitment

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of perception
Salary	3.54	0.77	Agree
Bonus	3.30	0.92	Neutral
Perk	3.51	0.81	Agree
Organizational commitment	3.54	0.71	agree

Table 2 presents the results of descriptive analysis regarding respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of compensation and organizational commitment. The mean scores indicate the average level of satisfaction, while the standard deviations reflect the dispersion of responses around the mean.

For salary satisfaction, the mean score of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 0.77 suggest that respondents, on average, were satisfied with their salary. Similarly, for perk satisfaction, the mean score of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.81 indicate overall satisfaction with perks. However, regarding bonus satisfaction, the mean score of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 0.92 suggest a more neutral stance among respondents. This indicates that satisfaction with bonuses varied more widely among respondents compared to salary and perks. Finally, regarding organizational commitment, the mean score of 3.54 with a standard deviation of 0.71 suggests that respondents, on average, demonstrated satisfactory levels of commitment to the organization. This indicates a generally positive sentiment among respondents towards their organizational commitment.

Table 3 Correlation analysis results

Variable	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	Y
X ₁ Salary	1			
X ₂ Bonus	0.88	1		
X ₃ Perk	0.81	0.87	1	
Y Organizational commitment	0.93	0.94	0.93	1

Table 3 provides highly correlated values between salary and bonus, perks, and organizational commitment (0.88, 0.81, and 0.93 respectively), it suggests strong interdependencies among these factors. Hair et al. (2009) indicated that if the correlation > 0.8 then severe multicollinearity may be present. Such high correlations may lead to multicollinearity issues in regression analysis, making it challenging to isolate the unique effects of each compensation component on organizational commitment. Thus, VIF test should be performed. This multicollinearity could obscure the true relationships between variables, potentially inflating standard errors and hindering the accuracy of predictive models. Addressing this challenge requires careful consideration and possibly revaluation of the measurement and interpretation of compensation components to mitigate the effects of multicollinearity.

Table 4 Impact of employee compensation on organizational commitments

Variable	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	0.44	0.04	10.06	0.00**
Salary	0.31	0.02	13.10	0.00**
Bonus	0.22	0.02	9.37	0.00**
Perks	0.36	0.02	16.57	0.00**
Affective commitment	0.44	0.04	10.06	0.00**

$R^2 = 0.965$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.965$, $F = 2256.29^{**}$, Significance $F = 0.000$

** denotes significance level at 0.01, respectively

The results of the regression analysis examining the relationship between employee compensation (salary, bonus, perks) and organizational commitment demonstrate a highly significant and positive association. The multiple linear regression model exhibited an adjusted R-squared value of 0.965, indicating a strong overall goodness of fit. This suggests that approximately 96.5% of the variance in organizational commitment can be explained by the predictor variables in the model. Moreover, the F-test value of 2256.29 yielded a probability of significance exceeding 99%, further confirming the robustness of the regression model. This indicates that the relationship between employee compensation and organizational commitment is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Specifically, the analysis reveals that salary, bonus, and perks all have a significant positive impact on organizational commitment at 0.31, 0.22, and 0.36, respectively. This suggests that higher levels of compensation, including base salary, bonuses, and additional perks or benefits, are associated with increased levels of commitment among employees as magnitude were mentioned. Employees who perceive that they are fairly compensated for their work are more likely to demonstrate greater dedication, loyalty, and engagement with the organization.

These findings underscore the importance of effectively managing employee compensation as a means of fostering organizational commitment within the context of the studied university. By offering competitive and equitable compensation packages, the university can enhance employee satisfaction, motivation, and retention, ultimately contributing to a more committed and productive workforce. These results provide valuable insights for human resource management practices aimed at optimizing organizational performance and employee well-being. In the regression analysis, the coefficients of employee compensation (salary, bonus, perks) have a positive effect on organizational commitment, so Hypothesis 1-3 are accepted.

5. Discussion

The data from academic professionals in China reveal notable patterns in their satisfaction levels regarding various aspects of compensation and organizational commitment. With a mean of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 0.77 for salary satisfaction, respondents generally express contentment with their pay. Conversely, the mean of 3.30 and standard deviation of 0.92 for bonus satisfaction indicate a more neutral sentiment. However, satisfaction with perks is generally high, as evidenced by a mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.81. Overall, the satisfactory mean of 3.54 and a standard deviation of 0.71 for organizational commitment underscore a positive disposition towards their commitment to their respective institutions. The table 2 provide insights into the levels of satisfaction with different aspects of compensation and organizational commitment among the respondents, highlighting areas of strength as well as potential areas for improvement. It shows when measuring respondents' satisfaction with their salary, the mean was 3.54 and the standard deviation was 0.77, showing that respondents were satisfied with the salary. When measuring the respondents' satisfaction with their bonuses, the mean was 3.30 and the standard deviation was 0.92, showing that the respondents were neutral toward bonus payment. When measuring respondents' satisfaction with their perk, the mean was 3.51 and a standard deviation was 0.81, showing that respondents were satisfied with amount of perk received.

Thus, this research posits that individuals compare their own input (such as effort, skills, and dedication) and outcomes (such as pay, recognition, and job satisfaction) to those of others in similar positions. If they perceive an imbalance between their input and outcomes compared to their peers, they may experience feelings of inequity. In the context of the described data from academic professionals in China, Equity Theory suggests that individuals may evaluate their compensation (input) relative to their colleagues and their organizational commitment (outcome) based on perceived fairness. The satisfaction levels observed in salary, bonus, and perks may reflect this comparison process, influencing perceptions of equity and organizational commitment.

Base on regression findings the Equity Theory provides a lens through which individuals assess the fairness of their compensation relative to their inputs and outcomes compared to others. The highly significant and positive association found in the regression analysis suggests that employees perceive their compensation as fair and equitable, leading to increased organizational commitment. This perception of fairness likely fosters a sense of trust and reciprocity between employees and the organization, reinforcing their commitment and dedication. The findings support the idea that a well-managed compensation system can align with the principles of Equity Theory, promoting employee satisfaction, motivation, and ultimately, organizational success.

6. Research implication

The research findings outlined above carry significant implications for both theory and practice in the field of human resource management and organizational behavior.

The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the relationship between employee compensation and organizational commitment. This reinforces the importance of compensation as a key determinant of employee attitudes and behaviors within organizations. The acceptance of Hypotheses 1-3 corroborates the theoretical underpinnings of the study, affirming the positive impact of salary, bonus, and perks on organizational commitment. This supports the relevance of equity theory in explaining the link between compensation fairness and employee engagement.

The findings emphasize the critical role of effectively managing employee compensation in fostering organizational commitment. Organizations, including the studied university, can leverage these insights to design and implement competitive and equitable compensation packages tailored to the needs and preferences of employees. This, in turn, contributes to a more committed and productive workforce, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and success.

The results provide valuable guidance for HR practitioners in developing and implementing compensation strategies aimed at optimizing organizational performance and employee well-being. Emphasizing fairness and transparency in compensation practices can toughen employees' perceptions of organizational commitment.

Based on the research findings and the application of Equity Theory to understand employee satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic professionals in China, there are several future research recommendations such as conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in satisfaction levels and organizational commitment over time. Investigate potential mediating or moderating variables that may influence the relationship between perceptions of fairness and organizational commitment. Factors such as organizational culture, leadership styles, or individual characteristics could play significant roles in shaping these dynamics. By addressing these research avenues, scholars can further

advance our understanding of the relationship between compensation, perceptions of fairness, and organizational commitment among academic professionals in China and beyond. Such insights can inform evidence- based practices aimed at fostering a supportive and conducive work environment for employees, ultimately contributing to organizational success and employee satisfaction.

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