

Article

Examining the Effect of Organizational Justice on Turnover Intention and the Moderating Role of Generational Differences: Evidence from Korean Public Employees

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Abstract: The government sector in South Korea is witnessing a significant increase in employee turnover rates, a phenomenon that challenges the notion of organizational sustainability. This trend is particularly influenced by the influx of Generation MZ public employees who possess professional values distinct from those of older generations, thereby eroding the longstanding view of public service as a lifelong commitment. This shift necessitates the implementation of human resource management strategies that prioritize organizational justice to effectively reduce turnover intention in public employees, especially among the MZ generation, whose members strongly demand fair compensation and treatment. This study delves into the impact of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on the turnover intentions of public employees while also exploring how these effects vary between Generation MZ and older generations. The study's findings indicate that all three dimensions of justice inversely affect turnover intention. Interestingly, while generational differences do not significantly moderate the effects of distributive justice and interactional justice on turnover intentions, the influence of procedural justice in mitigating turnover intention is more pronounced among Generation MZ employees compared to their older counterparts. These insights highlight the critical need for human resource practices that bolster organizational justice. In public organizations with a significant number of Generation MZ employees, enhancing procedural justice can effectively reduce their intentions to leave. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of devising generational management strategies, particularly those that focus on fair processes for compensation distribution and supervisor treatment, to curb turnover intention, especially within the Generation MZ cohort of public employees in South Korea.

Keywords: distributive justice; procedural justice; interactional justice; turnover intention; generation MZ; organizational sustainability



Citation: Moon, K.-K.; Lim, J.; Kim, J.-S. Examining the Effect of Organizational Justice on Turnover Intention and the Moderating Role of Generational Differences: Evidence from Korean Public Employees. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 2454. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16062454>

Academic Editor: Víctor Jesús García-Morales

Received: 22 January 2024

Revised: 25 February 2024

Accepted: 13 March 2024

Published: 15 March 2024



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1. Introduction

In the contemporary context of South Korea, the public sector is a highly coveted career path marked by rigorous competition among those looking to enter the field [1,2]. This phenomenon, widely recognized as the “civil service craze,” has prompted a considerable portion of the population to invest substantial time and effort in preparing for civil service examinations [3]. This trend plays a pivotal role in shaping the public sector’s landscape and enhances the probability of assimilating individuals endowed with specialized skills and proficiencies [4]. The allure of public service occupations is predominantly linked to the employment stability guaranteed by the civil service system [5]. Despite the sector’s appeal, there has been a discernible uptick in the number of public employees opting for voluntary turnover [6]. (Recently, scholars have pointed out that the significant increase in public employees’ intentions to leave their jobs can be attributed to two main factors:

the relocation of central government agencies to provincial areas, which has complicated employees' commutes, and public pension system reforms, which have increased the level of uncertainty regarding pension benefits for public employees [7,8]). Indeed, recent data released by the Government Employees Pension Service indicate that the number of voluntary turnovers significantly increased from about 38,000 in 2016 to 55,000 in 2022 (see Figure 1). (The Government Employees Pension Service is a fund-managed quasi-governmental organization under the Ministry of Personnel and Innovation established to stably manage and operate central and local government employees' pensions).

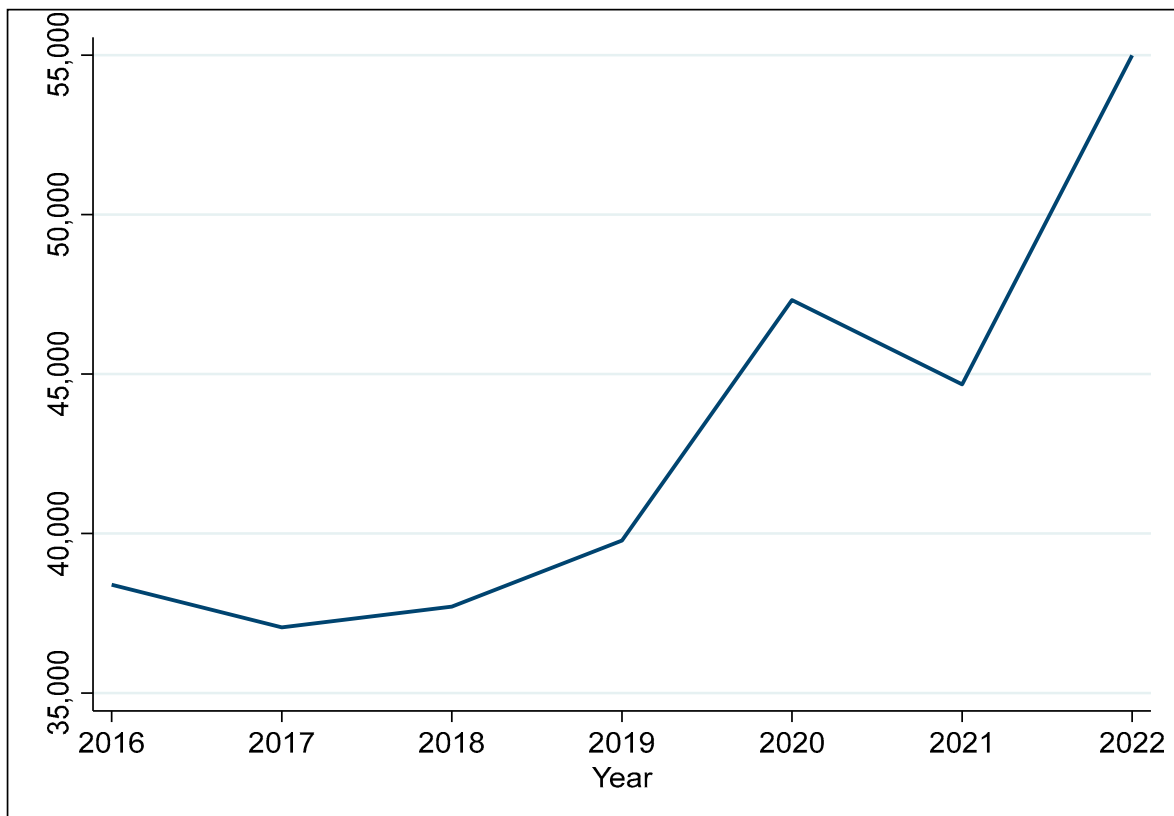


Figure 1. Voluntary turnover of public employees from 2016 to 2022 (Unit: Persons).

The increasing turnover rate of employees at public organizations has underscored the need for efficacious organizational management strategies aimed at mitigating turnover intention. This concern stems from the recognition that actualized turnover intention can precipitate detrimental outcomes, including the loss of skilled personnel and institutional expertise, downturns in organizational morale, and the financial burdens associated with recruiting new staff [9,10]. Such outcomes invariably exert a negative impact on the overall performance of an organization and organizational sustainability [11]. In response to this issue, scholars in the field of organizational management have actively engaged in empirical research to identify the precursors of turnover intention within public sector organizations [12–14]. Their investigations have identified several influential factors affecting turnover intention, including leadership style, the implementation of performance-based remuneration systems, the degree of job-related stress, overall job satisfaction, and the extent of job autonomy.

The rising concern over the detrimental impact of turnover intentions on organizational effectiveness and sustainability has spurred a surge in empirical research and theoretical discourse among organizational management scholars [15,16], whose studies predominantly examined organizational justice as a key determinant influencing employee work-related outcomes [17–19]. While many existing studies center on the influence of elements such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship

behavior [20–23], there has been relatively less focus on the effect of employees' perceptions of organizational justice on their inclination to leave an organization [24].

Achieving organizational goals and enhancing sustainability necessitate not only the equitable treatment and management of personnel but also ensuring that such treatment is perceived by employees as fair. This concept is underpinned by social exchange theory, which emphasizes the role of fairness in cultivating mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its workforce, which consequently mitigates turnover intention [22,25]. Specifically, the extent to which employees perceive distributive (i.e., the fairness of reward distribution, including compensation and promotions), procedural (i.e., the fairness of decision-making processes), and interactional justice (i.e., the fairness of interactions with supervisors during compensation processes) significantly influences the formation of trust-based exchange relationships within an organization [26]. This, in turn, bolsters employees' attachment to and desire to remain in the organization, thereby potentially reducing turnover intentions.

The present study rigorously investigates the direct impacts of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on the intention to leave an organization and explores how these dynamics vary across different generational cohorts. This investigation is particularly relevant in the context of the entry of the MZ generation (individuals born between 1981 and 2005) into the Korean workforce. This generation, known for its acute sensitivity to fairness in the distribution of resources within organizations, now represents a significant segment of the labor market [27,28]. The Ministry of Personnel Management's 2021 data indicate that the MZ generation comprises 41.4% of the Korean workforce [29]. (As the central administrative agency of South Korea, The Ministry of Personnel Management oversees the personnel, ethics, service, and pensions of public servants). Their increasing presence in the public sector has introduced distinct communication styles and value systems to the workplace that diverge from those of previous generations [28,30]. This demographic evolution highlights the urgent need for public sector organizations to adapt to this shift in workforce composition by acknowledging the unique characteristics of the MZ generation and fostering enhanced intergenerational understanding [27]. Of particular interest in this study is the perception of MZ employees in public organizations that they experience unfair treatment compared to older generations [29]. This has led to these employees more vigorously asserting their rights as workers and showcasing a preference for immediate and fair evaluation and compensation as opposed to more traditional long-term compensation models. This research posits that the perceptions and effects of fairness—distributive, procedural, and interactional justice—distinctly differ for the MZ generation compared to those of older generations.

This study bridges a critical gap in the literature on organizational justice and turnover intentions by exploring generational differences within the public sector workforce. It goes beyond previous research, primarily focusing on the direct impact of organizational justice on turnover intentions, without considering the diverse values and perspectives that different generations bring to the workplace. By investigating how the relationship between organizational justice and turnover intentions varies across generations, this research not only expands the theoretical framework of organizational justice but also provides valuable insights for more effectively managing turnover intentions. It underscores the MZ generation's increased sensitivity to fairness in organizational practices and challenging traditional beliefs on organizational behavior and human resource management. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of existing theories to better capture these evolving workforce dynamics and the complex relationship between generational identities and perceptions of justice. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the need to develop human resource strategies that address the varied expectations and perceptions of fairness across generations. Public sector organizations are thus encouraged to adopt HR practices that are more transparent, equitable, and responsive, such as revising performance evaluation systems for timely and fair feedback, restructuring reward systems to better reflect the preferences of younger employees, and promoting organizational cultures that value

fairness. Implementing these strategic adjustments is crucial for attracting and retaining talent across generational divides, enhancing organizational attachment, and ensuring that employees remain with the organization over the long term.

Our research methodology is comprehensive and systematic. We begin by thoroughly reviewing existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that focus on organizational justice and the inclinations of employees to leave their organizations. Notably, this extensive review leads to our hypotheses on the distinctive role of the MZ generation as a moderating factor in the dynamics between the three types of organizational justice—distributive, procedural, and interactional—and the intention to leave an organization. We then utilize the data from the 2022 Korean Public Employee Perception Survey conducted by the Korea Institute of Public Administration. (The Korea Institute of Public Administration, a key research institution at the national level, receives support from the central government of Korea and conducts extensive research on various government-related subjects, including public management, regulatory affairs, performance assessments, and fiscal policies.) These data are critical for quantitatively assessing the variables under study and rigorously testing our hypotheses. The culmination of this research process is the derivation of significant theoretical and practical implications from our findings that are aimed at enhancing the current understanding of management strategies within public organizations amid shifting generational dynamics.

2. The Effect of Organizational Justice on Turnover Intention

In the field of organizational management, withdrawal phenomena, such as voluntary turnover, are recognized for their substantial financial and relational costs to organizations [9,10]. For example, from a human resource management perspective, the ramifications of employee turnover extend beyond merely fiscal implications; they negatively impact an organization's reputation, its relationships with clients, and its internal employee dynamics [15,16]. Furthermore, turnover necessitates additional financial outlays for the recruitment and training of new personnel [31]. Empirical research underscores the significance of fairness in the workplace as a potential mitigant of employee turnover [24,32,33]. Previous studies posited that equitable treatment and practices within an organization are instrumental in retaining staff, thereby alleviating the economic and interpersonal strains that are typically associated with high rates of turnover.

Organizational justice is a comprehensive concept that addresses how individuals and groups perceive the fairness of the treatment they receive from an organization, as well as their behavioral responses to these perceptions [18]. It is an area of study that has been extensively explored; thus, its multidimensional nature has been revealed [26]. This multidimensionality is articulated through the three distinct dimensions of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) that are each perceived and experienced differently within organizational contexts [34].

First, distributive justice, a crucial element of organizational justice, relates to how individuals perceive the fairness of their received outcomes, such as pay, rewards, and promotions [35]. This concept, based on Adams's [28] equity theory, posits that individuals determine fairness by comparing their contributions (or inputs) to the rewards (or outputs) they receive. The idea that employees who find outcome distribution unfair will attempt to rebalance it, possibly by adjusting their inputs to align with the perceived fairness of their outputs, is central to this theory [18]. Additionally, distributive justice involves comparing one's own outcome/input ratio with that of their peers, which is a vital process in assessing the perceived fairness of these outcomes [20,36]. As Colquitt et al. [37] noted, individuals evaluate distributive justice by comparing their rewards to those of others in comparable roles or situations, making this comparative aspect a key factor in understanding perceptions of fairness in an organizational context.

Second, procedural justice is a vital aspect of organizational justice that focuses on the integrity and impartiality of the processes used in allocating outcomes among employees [35]. Leventhal [38] defined procedural justice as encompassing the perception of

consistency and accuracy in decision-making procedures, highlighting that the fairness of a process is as important as the process's outcomes. As noted by Landy et al. [39], key factors influencing this perception include opportunities for employees to express themselves during evaluations of and discussions about salaries, which profoundly affect their views on fairness and accuracy. Procedural justice also involves allowing employees to be heard during decision-making processes and ensuring that equitable evaluation methods are employed [38]. Emphasizing the importance of structural features in decision making, such as the allocation process, procedural justice advocates for employee participation, the use of proper criteria for performance achievement, and the reliance on reliable information to establish a just and transparent decision-making environment [18,20].

Finally, interactional justice, a significant aspect of justice research, focuses on the quality of interpersonal treatment and communication within organizations [34]. It examines the nature of interactions between management and individuals, particularly in terms of explaining procedures and outcomes. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of fairness in interpersonal communication [18]. Greenberg and McCarty [40] identified it as a key component of organizational justice, while Brockner and Wiesenfeld [41,42] emphasized its characterization by dignified treatment and clear, justified explanations from decision-makers. This form of justice significantly influences employee reactions to supervisors and their work environment, often more so than distributive or procedural justice, underscoring interactional justice's role in fostering a respectful and transparent workplace culture [34].

Social exchange theory is widely recognized in organizational behavior research and explains how perceptions of organizational justice influence work outcomes, particularly for voluntary actions based on expected and actual returns from others [17]. At its core, this theory operates on the norm of reciprocity, suggesting that individuals tend to return the assistance or benefits they receive [43]. In organizational settings, this translates into employees perceiving fair treatment from their organization or managers as a benefit, which subsequently influences their decisions to stay or leave the organization [19]. Research indicates that when employees perceive fairness in the distribution of outcomes, allocation procedures, and interpersonal interactions, they are likely to exhibit loyalty and a stronger commitment to remain with an organization [21]. Conversely, perceptions of unfairness may cause employees to reassess their relationships with an organization, often leading to increased turnover [18]. Furthermore, the quality of interpersonal and informational interactions between employees and managers is pivotal. If employees perceive their managers to be concerned, respectful, and transparent about decision-making procedures, they will be more inclined to develop an emotional attachment to the organization and show low turnover intention [44,45]. This comprehensive perspective underscores the multifaceted impact of perceived organizational justice on employee turnover, highlighting the interplay between fair treatment, quality interactions, and employee retention.

A recent study by Mengstie [32] focusing on Ethiopian healthcare workers demonstrated that employees' perceptions of fairness in terms of outcome distribution negatively influence their intentions to leave their jobs. Similarly, Choi [21] identified distributive and procedural justice as key internal factors that affect an employee's decision to stay or leave within U.S. federal agencies. Research by Campbell et al. [33] and Choi et al. [24] supported these findings and found that employees in Korean public organizations are more likely to remain with their current employers when they perceive fair treatment in terms of outcome distributions and administrative procedures. Additionally, Kang and Sung [44] discovered that interactional justice reduces turnover intention by improving the quality of employee–organization relationships. Building upon these studies and their empirical evidence, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Distributive justice is negatively related to employee turnover intention.*

Hypothesis 2: *Procedural justice is negatively related to employee turnover intention.*

Hypothesis 3: *Interactional justice is negatively related to employee turnover intention.*

3. The Moderating Role of Generational Differences

The classification and understanding of generations are often framed through the lens of the birth cohort concept. This concept relies on the collective social, cultural, and historical experiences that bind individuals born in a similar time period [46]. Essentially, a birth cohort represents a group of people who are born during the same time period and experience parallel societal and cultural developments, leading to a shared set of values and lifestyles [47]. This idea moves beyond the simplistic categorization of generations by age and instead considers groups shaped by a blend of common experiences and perspectives. This generational theory integrates the role of key biological events, such as birth and death, highlighting their influence on groups of people within specific historical and temporal contexts [48]. Therefore, generations are viewed as intricate social constructs that surpass strictly age-related classifications and embody a collective experience and consciousness shaped over time [49].

In the context of organizational dynamics, this concept reflects the evolving nature of society as being characterized by the continuous integration of individuals from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds [50]. As a result, organizations transform into diverse environments in which multiple generations interact and coexist [51]. This diversity of generations can sometimes result in conflict and disruption in the workplace. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize and understand the distinctive traits of each generational group to achieve an organization's goals and realize its aspirations in the future. This involves not only acknowledging the unique attributes of different generational cohorts within the workforce but also devising customized organizational settings and strategic human resource management approaches that align with these generational characteristics [52]. Such strategies are key to effectively managing generational diversity within organizations, ultimately cultivating an inclusive and efficient work culture.

Generational categories are typically defined in scholarly discourse using specific birth periods—for example, baby boomers, who were born between 1947 and 1964; Generation X, with birth years ranging from 1965 to 1980; millennials (also referred to as Generation M), born between the early 1980s and early 2000s; and Generation Z, whose members were born between the mid-1990s and early 2000s [30,53]. The term “Generation MZ” has emerged as a collective descriptor for individuals in their 20s and 30s and represents a blend of the latter parts of millennials and Generation Z, and it is often regarded as the post-millennial cohort [54]. As of 2022, within the context of South Korea's public service sector, approximately 530,000 out of a total of 1.28 million public were 20–39 years of age (see Figure 2). This demographic, which aligns with Generation MZ, comprises about 41% of the entire public service workforce. Notably, there has been a consistent increase in the number of Generation MZ public employees over the past decade (2013–2022). This trend suggests a foreseeable shift in which Generation MZ is set to become the predominant force in the South Korean public organization labor market.

The social prominence of Generation MZ stems from its members' (MZers') distinct characteristics, which set them apart from older generations. First, Generation MZ stands out as the most digitally savvy generation to date, with MZers growing up during the rapid development of information and communication technologies [55]. This generation was sequentially introduced to computers, the internet, and smartphones, leading to a natural integration into digital culture. Accustomed to living in a digital world, MZers are well-versed in online shopping and digital commerce environments. Moreover, they are adept at quickly responding to new trends disseminated through social networking services [56]. This digital upbringing has significantly shaped their consumption patterns and the way they interact socially. Second, Generation MZ exhibits a more pronounced sense of personal values and prioritizes the importance of a self-centered life compared to previous generations. This is partly due to MZers' higher levels of education and increased societal emphasis on individualism and self-actualization, which has fostered a

stronger inclination among MZers to develop and cherish their unique set of values [57]. Additionally, their upbringing in an environment saturated with digital technology and social media has not only broadened their access to diverse information but also exposed them to various perspectives and ideas. This exposure has further reinforced their tendency to value their own personal expression and opinions [57]. Generation MZ, more so than the preceding generations, places a high premium on work–life balance. In contrast to baby boomers and Generation Xers, who often prioritized their careers, MZers operate under the belief that work is not the entirety of life and actively seek a balance between their professional and personal lives [58]. They prefer flexible working environments enabled by digital technology—particularly remote work options. Influenced by economic instability and high living costs, they prioritize short-term quality of life, leading to an attitude focused on enjoying the present. This perspective significantly influences their lifestyle and career choices, underpinning a strong emphasis on maintaining a healthy balance between work and life [59].

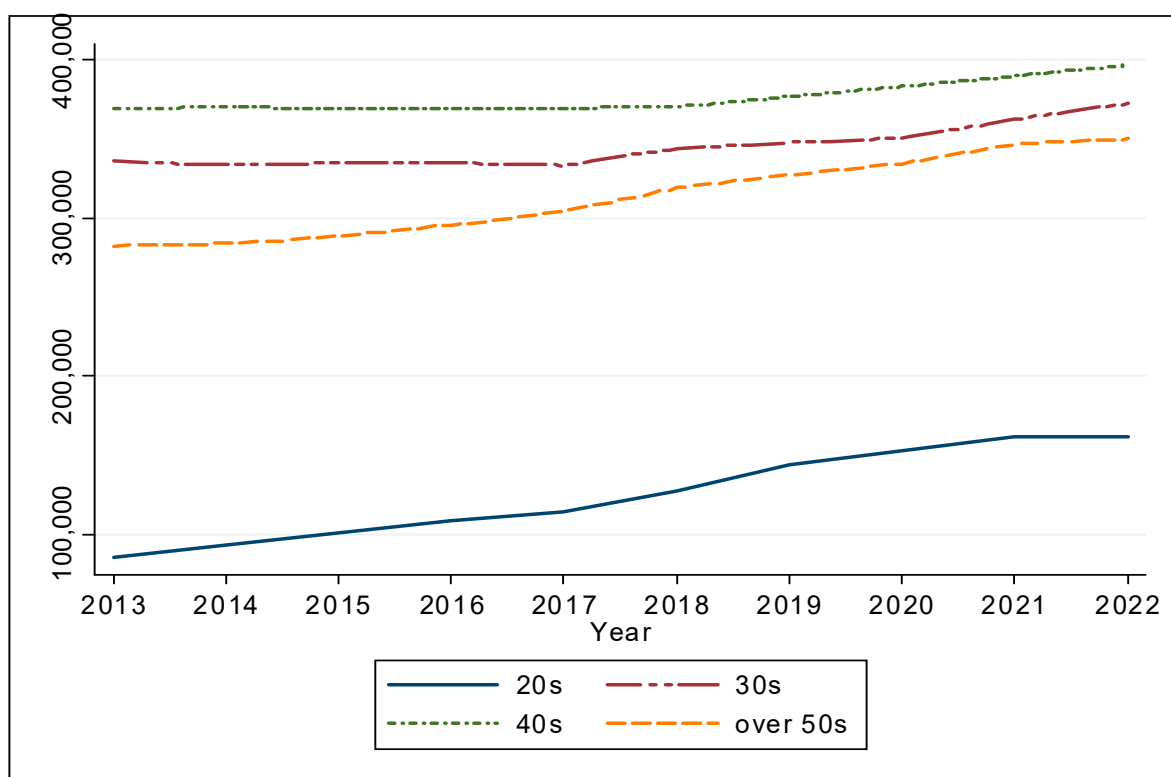


Figure 2. Number of public employees by age group from 2013 to 2022 (Unit: Persons).

In this study, we focus on a key characteristic of the MZ generation—namely, its heightened preferences for fairness, especially when compared to older generations [28]. The MZ generation has rigorous standards of justice within organizations, and MZers are particularly sensitive to distributive, procedural, and interactive fairness. First, in terms of distributive justice, members of the MZ generation strongly believe that resources should be distributed equally and fairly [60]. They expect to be rewarded commensurate with their individual contributions and efforts and may show disappointment or rebel against their employers if this principle is not upheld [61,62]. This stems from their desire to be fairly valued for their roles and contributions within an organization. Second, regarding procedural justice, Generation MZ prioritizes transparency and consistency in decision-making processes. MZers seek to have their opinions considered and expect all relevant information to be managed in an open and fair manner [27]. The absence of fair procedures can lead to distrust and frustration, potentially diminishing their loyalty to an organization. This highlights Generation MZ’s preference for democratic and transparent

decision-making within organizations. Finally, in terms of interactive fairness, Generation MZ places significant importance on respect and honesty in organizational communications [2]. MZers value receiving personal attention and empathy. Any perception of unfair or disrespectful behavior in interactions with their supervisors and organization is met with high sensitivity by members of Generation MZ. They desire comprehensive information regarding compensation-related decisions and expect prompt feedback on their performance, a finding that emphasizes their need for respectful and empathetic interactions in the workplace [62,63].

Although it is challenging to locate previous studies that directly examined the moderating effects of a public employee's generation on the relationships between the three dimensions of organizational justice and turnover intention in public sector organizations, some scholars have provided ancillary evidence showing that generational differences can significantly influence these dynamics. For example, Im and Joo [62] found that the positive impact of distributive justice in terms of reward and promotion on organizational commitment was much stronger for MZers than for older generations in public organizations. In addition, Kyeong and Kim [27] found that within the South Korean public sector, millennial employees are less inclined to leave their organizations compared to other generational groups, especially when high levels of procedural justice are perceived. Similarly, research conducted by George and Wallio [64] on U.S. public accounting organizations demonstrated a negative association between procedural justice and turnover intention among millennial employees.

Building on the previous discussion [65–67], this study suggests that Generation MZ members, known for valuing fair and transparent practices, respond differently to distributive, procedural, and interactional justice in terms of turnover intention compared to older generations. Unlike their predecessors, who may acknowledge fairness yet typically align their values with their respective organizations or families, MZers are empowered by digital technologies and a culture of individualism and are thus more likely to openly express their views [68,69]. Consequently, Generation MZ public employees are expected to exhibit a heightened response to organizational justice relative to older generations. In accordance with social exchange theory, which associates fairness in reward distribution and decision making with improved work attitudes and quality social exchanges within an organization, this study hypothesizes the existence of a more significant effect of organizational justice dimensions on the turnover intention of Generation MZ employees. Their acute sensitivity to fairness, especially in evaluating the equity of their effort–reward balance and decision-making criteria, as well as the amount of information they receive from supervisors, is predicted to enhance their commitment to an organization. This heightened perception of fairness is likely to increase MZers' propensity to remain employed at their current organizations. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 4: *The negative relationship between distributive justice and turnover intentions is stronger for MZs than it is for older generations.*

Hypothesis 5: *The negative relationship between procedural justice and turnover intentions is stronger for MZs than it is for older generations.*

Hypothesis 6: *The negative relationship between interactional justice and turnover intentions is stronger for MZs than it is for older generations.*

4. Model Specification

4.1. Sample and Procedure

The hypothesis testing in this study utilized survey data from the 2022 Korean Public Employee Perception Survey conducted by the Korea Institute of Public Administration, a national policy research institution. This survey targeted civil servants from central government agencies and metropolitan local governments in South Korea to understand

perceptions of the government's personnel administration and organizational operations and better develop effective human and organizational management strategies. The survey covered 47 central government agencies and 17 metropolitan local governments, and data were collected through probability sampling and a web survey distributed via email. The main content of the survey was divided into five areas: work environment, personnel system, organizational management, motivation, attitude, and behavior of organizational members. The analysis was based on a total of 6170 valid responses, including 2428 from civil servants employed at central government agencies and 3742 officials from local governments. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents.

Table 1. Demographic information of the sampled respondents.

Background	Category	Number of Cases	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	2638	42.76
	Male	3532	57.24
Age	≤29	707	11.46
	30–39	2116	34.29
	40–49	1993	32.30
	≥50	1354	21.94
Tenure	≤5	1905	21.76
	6–10	1227	18.69
	11–15	748	17.70
	16–20	959	13.83
	21–25	343	9.86
	≥26	988	18.16
Job grade	Grades 1–4	243	5.85
	Grade 5	1002	21.06
	Grades 6–7	3380	61.56
	Grades 8–9	1545	11.52
Education	High school	318	5.15
	Community college	343	5.56
	Bachelor's degree	4687	75.96
	Master's degree	711	11.52
	Doctorate	111	1.80
Government level	Central	2428	39.35
	Local	3742	60.65

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study was turnover intention, which refers to the psychological state in which an organizational member voluntarily desires to exit the organization under certain circumstances [12,14]. To measure intention to leave, the following single item was used: "I intend to leave my current organization if the opportunity arises". The items were assessed on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

4.2.2. Independent Variables

The independent variables used in the study included distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the extent to which the ratio of one's contributions to an organization and the rewards received matches the ratio of contributions and rewards of a reference other (e.g., colleagues). [26]. To measure distributive justice, the following four survey items were used: (1) "The compensation I receive is appropriate for my job performance"; (2) "The compensation I receive is at a fair level compared to employees in private companies performing similar tasks"; (3) "I am fairly compensated considering the difficulty of my tasks"; and (4) "I am fairly compensated considering the level of responsibility in my tasks". Procedural justice refers to the perception of how fair a decision-making process is in terms of the allocation of rewards and resources [35].

To measure procedural justice, the following four survey items were used: (1) "In our organization, decisions are made through a fair process"; (2) "Our organization considers the opinions of all employees when making any decision"; (3) "In our organization, it is possible to request clear explanations or additional information about the decisions being made"; and (4) "In our organization, employees can raise objections to the decisions being made". Interactional justice concerns the fairness and respect shown in communication and treatment by authority figures during interpersonal interactions [34]. The following three items were employed to measure interactional justice: (1) "My supervisor clearly explains the rewards/benefits I will receive if goals are achieved"; (2) "My supervisor specifically informs me what I need to do to obtain rewards/benefits based on work performance"; and (3) "My superiors show personal respect toward subordinates or employees who are younger than themselves". All items were measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

4.2.3. Moderating Variable

In this study, generations were categorized as either the MZ generation or the older generation and coded as dummy variables. Specifically, public employees aged 40 and above were classified as the established generation and coded as "0", while those aged 30 and below were categorized as the MZ generation and measured as "1".

4.2.4. Controls

The current study accounted for various personal attributes of respondents that might influence their turnover intentions. These attributes included gender (coded as 1 for female and 0 for male), educational attainment (with 1 representing a high school diploma, 2 representing community college education, 3 representing a bachelor's degree, 4 representing a master's degree, and 5 representing a doctorate), and job grade (with levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 corresponding to Grades 1–4, Grade 5, Grades 6–7, and Grades 8–9, respectively). Additionally, the study considered the length of service (tenure), which ranges from 1 for less than 5 years to 6 for more than 26 years, as well as the level of government employment (local = 1 and central = 0).

4.3. Measurement Reliability and Validity

We estimated the validity of the scale measures and the latent variables they represented in several ways. First, confirmatory factor analysis procedures were conducted to determine convergent and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, the hypothesized three-factor model (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) fits the data well. The results show that the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which should be lower than 0.08, were 0.03, while the comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) were recorded at 0.98 and 0.97, respectively, exceeding the typical standard of 0.90 [70]. This supported the discriminant validity of the latent variables (see Table 2). In addition, the factor loadings of all items exceeded 0.50 (ranging from 0.50 to 0.92) and were significant. Second, the overall reliability of the latent constructs was verified using Cronbach's alpha, with composite reliabilities ranging from 0.78 to 0.92, surpassing the recommended 0.70 threshold [71]. Finally, Harman's single-factor test was employed to examine the presence of common method variance (CMV), a potential issue that may arise when variables are derived from a singular source, potentially exaggerating variable interrelations. The findings show that the primary factor accounted for merely 47% of the total covariance among the measurements, staying below the usual 50% threshold, suggesting that CMV is unlikely to be a major issue in this study [72].

Table 2. Results of confirmatory factor analyses.

Model	χ^2	<i>d.f.</i>	$\chi^2/d.f.$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Three-factor model	4018.80 ***	55	73.07	0.60	0.98	0.97	0.03
Two-factor model	45018.80 ***	55	818.52	0.23	0.70	0.61	0.20
One-factor model	45018.80 ***	55	818.52	0.27	0.55	0.44	0.21

Note. *** $p < 0.01$.; *d.f.* = degree of freedom.

5. Results

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables. Distributive, procedural, and interactional justice exhibited negative correlations at the 95% confidence interval, aligning with the anticipated direction. Generation, the moderating variable, was also found to be significantly related to turnover intention. Among the control variables, gender, age, tenure, job grade, and education demonstrated a significant relationship with turnover intention. These correlation coefficients provide initial evidence in favor of our research hypotheses.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Turnover intention	1									
(2) Distributive justice	−0.35	1								
(3) Procedural justice	−0.25	0.39	1							
(4) Interactional justice	−0.20	0.31	0.59	1						
(5) Gender (female = 1)	0.06	−0.07	−0.12	−0.12	1					
(6) Education	0.05	−0.03	−0.05	−0.02 ^a	0.03	1				
(6) Job grade	0.15	−0.19	−0.03	−0.04	0.14	−0.26	1			
(7) Tenure	−0.29	0.32	0.11	0.08	−0.09 ^a	0.03	−0.56	1		
(8) Governmental level (central = 1)	−0.00 ^a	0.04	−0.04	−0.01 ^a	−0.09 ^a	0.22	−0.44	0.17	1	
(9) Generation (MZ = 1)	0.24	−0.27	−0.07	−0.05	0.13	−0.12	0.47	−0.74	−0.15	1
Mean	3.29	2.30	3.03	3.13	0.43	2.99	3.00	2.93	0.61	0.46
S.D.	1.13	0.88	0.79	0.84	0.49	0.67	0.76	1.80	0.49	0.50

Note. ^a = Not significant at 95% confidence interval; S.D. = standard deviation.

This study utilized hierarchical-moderated stereotype logistic models (SLMs) to test the proposed hypotheses and employed STATA 17 for the analysis. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, applying linear regression could lead to skewed coefficients. However, using an ordered logistic regression approach requires adherence to the parallel regression assumption, which posits that the slope coefficients for each binary regression remain constant, irrespective of the outcome category's value [73]. The likelihood ratio test of proportionality of odds indicated a violation of the parallel regression assumption ($\chi^2 = 131.41$, *d.f.* = 27, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that the assumption does not hold for these data. Under these conditions, SLMs provide a means to evaluate employee turnover intention while maintaining their order without needing to fulfill the parallel regression assumption [73]. Moreover, the analysis unfolded in a three-step process. Initially, a baseline model was established that incorporated all control variables along with the moderating variable. Subsequently, we detailed the primary impacts of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on the inclination for turnover. In the final step, we demonstrated how generational differences moderate the relationships between the three aspects of organizational justice and the intention to leave an organization.

Table 4 displays the statistical results of the models. First, the results of Model 1 report that certain control variables and moderating variables were significantly related to the dependent variable. Specifically, employees with higher-level degrees had higher turnover intentions than those with lower educational attainment. This could perhaps be caused by employees with higher levels of education having more opportunities to find suitable or better jobs outside the organization than those with lower levels of education.

Employees with longer tenures tend to stay in their current organizations because they generally receive higher annual salaries and additional economic rewards than those with shorter tenures. Employees who work in the central government are likely to leave their current organizations because they have more work to do and have higher work intensity than in local governments. Generation MZ employees are likely to have higher turnover intentions than older generations of public employees because they have less job security and preferences granted by the government and are willing to leave an organization at any time for self-development [74].

Table 4. Moderated hierarchical SLMs for the hypothesized relationships.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Gender (female = 1)	0.13	0.05	−0.11	0.10	−0.10	0.10
Education	0.32	***	0.04	0.28	***	0.08
Job grade	0.11		0.05	0.11		0.09
Tenure	−0.50	***	0.02	−0.41	***	0.05
Government level (central = 1)	0.37	***	0.05	0.26	**	0.11
Generation (MZ = 1)	0.48	***	0.21	0.41	***	0.49
Distributive justice (DJ)			−1.19	***	0.08	−1.24
Procedural justice (PJ)			−0.68	***	0.08	−0.50
Interactional justice (IJ)			−0.22	***	0.07	−0.14
DJ × Generation (MZ = 1)					−0.13	0.14
PJ × Generation (MZ = 1)					−0.34	**
IJ × Generation (MZ = 1)					−0.15	0.15
ϕ_1	1		1		1	
ϕ_2	0.87	0.04	0.85	0.03	0.85	0.03
ϕ_3	0.55	0.04	0.64	0.02	0.63	0.03
ϕ_4	0.37	0.04	0.46	0.02	0.45	0.02
θ_1	−0.66	0.47	−6.03	0.60	−5.38	0.64
θ_2	0.62	0.40	−3.80	0.48	−3.26	0.52
θ_3	0.87	0.26	−2.36	0.37	−1.91	0.40
θ_4	0.96	0.18	−1.28	0.28	−0.92	0.30
Log likelihood	−8936.17		−8588.07		−8582.77	
Wald χ^2 test	285.60	***	639.63	***	625.26	***

Note. ** $p = 0.05$; *** $p = 0.01$; $N = 6170$.

Model 2 confirmed that distributive justice ($\beta = -1.19$; $p < 0.01$), procedural justice ($\beta = -0.68$; $p < 0.01$), and interactional justice ($\beta = -0.22$; $p < 0.01$) were significantly and negatively associated with employee turnover intention, a finding that lends support to Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. These findings suggest that the three dimensions of organizational justice are strong sources of employee motivation that lead employees to stay longer at their respective organizations. Based on social exchange theory, employees who develop high-quality social exchange relationships with their organizations are more likely to exhibit positive work outcomes. These relationships are based on mutual trust, respect, and obligation. When employees perceive that their organization treats them fairly and values their contribution, they tend to reciprocate with increased commitment and greater organizational attachment. Conversely, employees perceiving their treatment as unfair or inequitable often leads to amplified negative work outcomes. This dissatisfaction may manifest in various forms, such as reduced work efficiency, lower engagement levels, and a decrease in overall job performance. Moreover, these employees are more likely to consider leaving their current organization in search of alternative employment in which they anticipate fairer treatment and recognition.

Finally, we included three interaction terms (distributive justice × generation, procedural justice × generation, and interaction justice × generation) in Model 3 to test the moderating effect of the generation variable. Our results indicate that the interaction terms of both distributive justice and generation MZ on turnover intention, and interactional justice and generation MZ on turnover intention, were statistically insignificant. Therefore, Hypotheses 4 and 5 are rejected. On the other hand, Hypotheses 4 and 5 are supported since the MZ generation demonstrated a moderating effect that statistically significantly strength-

ened the negative impact of procedural justice ($\beta = -0.34; p < 0.05$) on turnover intention. In other words, a higher perception of procedural justice reduces the turnover intention of MZ generation public employees more than public employees from older generations.

Figure 3 illustrates the moderating effect of generational differences on the relationship between procedural justice and turnover intention. The graph indicates that the impact of procedural justice on turnover intention (rated as 5 = very likely) varied between the older generation and the MZ generation. Specifically, procedural justice had a larger marginal effect on reducing turnover intention among the MZ generation compared to the older generation. This suggests that the negative effect (i.e., reducing turnover intention) of procedural justice is more pronounced for MZ employees than for employees belonging to older generations.

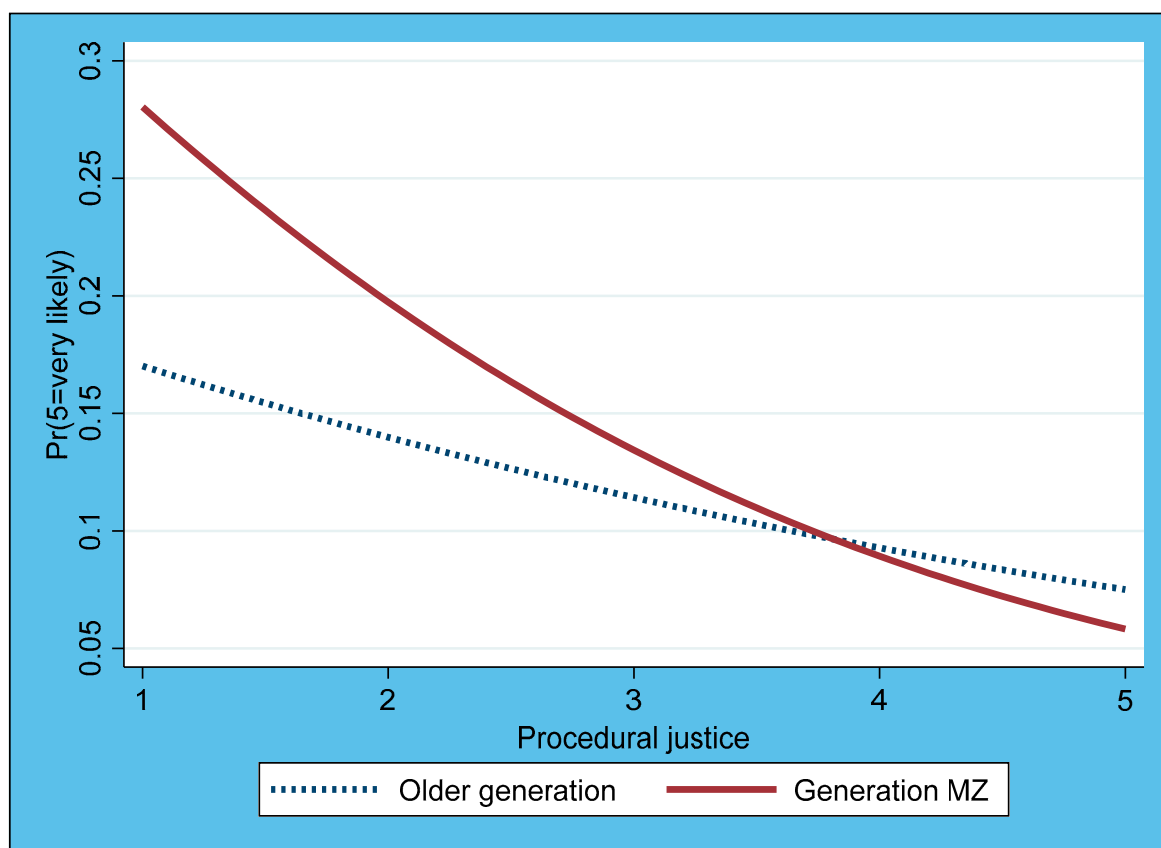


Figure 3. Predicted probability of “Very Likely” with turnover intention by levels of procedural justice and generations.

6. Discussion

This study employed the social exchange theory framework to empirically analyze the impact of organizational justice on the turnover intentions of public employees in the Korean public sector. It specifically focused on the moderating effects of generational differences, particularly between older generations and Generation MZ. By examining the differential impacts of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on these groups, the research aimed to address a gap in the existing literature. The study’s findings offer insights into both the theoretical aspects and the practical implications of organizational justice for effectively managing generational variances in organizations within the Korean public sector.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study makes several significant contributions to the field of organizational behavior and management. First, consistent with previous studies, distributive justice was

identified as a critical factor influencing turnover intention. Distributive justice determines the level of satisfaction organizational members have regarding the outcomes of material reward distributions within an organization. When individuals feel that the rewards they receive are not commensurate with their contributions, their perception of distributive justice is low [18]. Conversely, when they believe that they are adequately rewarded for their efforts, their perception of distributive justice is high. Public employees who have a high level of distributive justice are inclined to develop stronger social relationships with an organization. In response to the equitable treatment they experience, they are more likely to exhibit positive work attitudes. This includes a deepened commitment to an organization, enhanced loyalty, and a propensity to remain with the organization over time, thereby contributing to overall employee retention.

Second, procedural justice has been shown to negatively influence employee turnover intention, which can be seen as a finding that supports social exchange theory [27]. Accordingly, if organizational members receive something positive, whether tangible or intangible, from their organization, they will likely attempt to reciprocate with something positive in return, based on the principle of reciprocity [17]. Public employees experience procedural justice when they can freely express their opinions in decision-making processes and request accurate information and additional explanations about the outcomes of these decisions. Applying the perception of procedural justice to social exchange theory, the legitimacy of the procedures and processes that lead to rewards solidifies the reciprocity between an organization and its employees, thereby inducing employees to stay with their current organizations.

Finally, interactional justice refers to perceived fairness in terms of how members are treated by their superiors during decision-making and information dissemination processes [34]. Essentially, factors such as honesty, respect, and timely feedback play a significant role in employees' perceptions of interactional justice. If a superior provides ample feedback and information about performance evaluations and organizational decision-making processes and treats their subordinates with respect and consideration, the subordinates are likely to develop a psychological sense of obligation to reciprocate this fair treatment [17]. Such reciprocation is evident in, for example, a reduction in one's intention to leave and an increase in their willingness to remain with their organization for a longer period.

Another contribution of this study is that it improves our knowledge of the moderating effects of generational differences on the procedural justice–turnover relationship. In South Korea, MZ-generation public employees perceive procedural justice more strongly than the older generation, further strengthening their social exchange relationships with their organizations and leading to significant decreases in their intention to leave. As discussed previously, procedural justice refers to the perception of members regarding how just and rational the decision-making processes are in determining outcomes or compensation within an organization. MZ generation public employees value transparent procedures and fairness, and they consider distribution processes unfair if their opinions are not reflected. They tend to actively participate in these processes and seek the necessary information to ensure fair outcomes. This attitude indicates that the MZ generation places more importance on fairness in organizational decision-making compared to the older generation and that they form greater trust with and increased satisfaction toward an organization based on this [27,64]. Therefore, when procedural justice is highly perceived, it can be interpreted that MZ public employees are more likely to exhibit a notable decrease in their intention to leave compared to the older generation.

6.2. Practical Implications

This study also provides practical implications for improving the perception of organizational justice among the growing number of MZ public employees in Korean public sector organizations, thereby reducing their turnover intentions. First, despite generational differences lacking a significant mediating effect in the relationship between distributive

justice and turnover intentions, this study found that distributive justice consistently acted as a key factor in reducing turnover intentions among public employees across generations, highlighting that human resource strategies in the public sector should focus on expanding distributive justice. Equitable and transparent decision making in terms of employee performance, effort, and compensation—especially decisions based on objective and reliable criteria—further the perception that public employees are adequately compensated. This not only imbues employees with a sense of pride in their work but also increases their commitment and attachment to an organization, which in turn helps reduce turnover intention. To foster an environment of distributive justice, it is essential to implement an institutional framework that ensures that reward systems are aligned with individual performance levels and provides preferential treatment to high performers across a range of reward models, including promotions, job security, and performance-related bonuses. Ensuring the sufficiency and quality of rewards so that public employees perceive that they receive fair compensation commensurate with their work contributions is of paramount importance in this approach. In summary, effective human resource management practices to enhance distributive justice should incorporate fair and thorough performance appraisals and the introduction of performance-based compensation structures and maintain the transparency and adequacy of compensation. These measures play an important role in civil service workforce retention and the improvement of the overall functioning and performance of an organization.

Second, to increase the fairness of interactions among public employees, it is essential for public managers to establish and maintain clear, honest, and open communication channels. The literature highlights that managers' regular updates and transparent sharing of information about decision-making processes, policy revisions, and organizational developments significantly contribute to employees' perceptions of trust and fairness in an organization [21,33,44]. Implementing systems that enable public employees to provide feedback on their supervisors and organizational practices is also recommended. This may include methods such as anonymous surveys or routine performance discussions, which are critical for helping organizations acknowledge and value employee input and provide consistent and constructive feedback on job performance. Managers should not only identify areas for improvement but also proactively provide support and resources to help employees achieve their goals. This approach, which is in line with the principles of positive reinforcement and developmental support, aims to enhance the motivation and satisfaction of public employees. Finally, public managers and supervisors should be provided with training on interpersonal skills. This training should focus on promoting respectful and empathetic communication. All interactions should be approached respectfully, and managers should be encouraged to practice active listening and provide constructive responses to employee concerns. These skills are essential for building and maintaining a positive work environment in which the dynamics of superiors and their subordinates are harmonious and conducive to organizational success.

Finally, to enhance employees' perceptions of procedural justice, public organizations and their managers must apply rules and policies uniformly. This approach is essential for eliminating favoritism and bias in decision making, thereby boosting fairness and credibility. Engaging Generation MZ employees in decision-making processes is crucial, as it directly affects their roles and the organization. Implementing a comprehensive strategy to improve procedural justice for Generation MZ employees in government settings is necessary. The integration of digital platforms designed for enhanced engagement and feedback tailored to the technological preferences of Generation MZ, which should ensure that they feel valued, is central to this strategy. Promoting transparent and inclusive decision-making processes is equally important. This includes involving Generation MZ employees in town hall meetings, committee participation, and collaborative tools to enhance their organizational commitment. Establishing a straightforward and accessible appeals process allows employees to contest decisions they deem unfair, bolstering their trust in the organization's justice mechanisms. Objective performance evaluations are

foundational to procedural justice and require clear, measurable criteria that minimize personal bias. Supporting these initiatives and providing managers with regular training on fairness, bias, and communication is imperative for fostering an environment in which procedural justice thrives. Encouraging a culture of continuous improvement through feedback that leads to policy revisions reflects a commitment to fairness and adaptability in the face of evolving workplace and societal norms. Collectively, these strategies form a comprehensive approach to bolstering procedural justice that aligns with Generation MZ's expectations and fosters a culture of trust, satisfaction, and reduced turnover intention within government organizations.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study presents several avenues for future research to address its inherent limitations. First, the reliance on secondary data from the Korea Institute of Public Administration, rather than specifically crafted survey instruments tailored for this study, introduced constraints on the precision of variable measurement. Notably, the three nuanced dimensions of organizational justice were not adequately captured. Consequently, future studies should endeavor to construct a comprehensive questionnaire that can more accurately gauge these variables and encompass all relevant constructs. Second, the cross-sectional nature of this study captures data at a single point in time and inherently limits the generalizability of the findings. To overcome this limitation, future research should adopt a longitudinal approach by collecting data from the same subjects over multiple time points, which would provide a more dynamic understanding of the variables in question. Third, it is crucial for future research to consider potential confounding factors that may exert direct influences on turnover intentions or interact with generational differences in affecting these intentions. These factors could include, but are not limited to, organizational culture, leadership styles, and work–life balance policies. Incorporating these multifaceted confounding variables, particularly those related to organizational characteristics, would significantly enhance our comprehension of managing generational differences in public sector organizations. Finally, the scope of this study was limited to public employees in central and local governments in South Korea, constraining the external validity of the findings. Future research should broaden its scope to include a diverse array of public sector organizations, such as police, firefighters, and teachers, and should consider conducting similar studies in different national contexts. This expansion would not only enhance the external validity of the findings but also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in various public sector environments across different countries. Such comparative studies could yield valuable insights into the universality or specificity of the observed phenomena, contributing significantly to the global discourse on public administration and human resource management.

7. Conclusions

This study meticulously analyzes the influence of organizational justice on turnover intentions within South Korea's public sector, highlighting the crucial moderating role of generational differences. It emphasizes that equitable reward systems (distributive justice), transparent decision-making processes (procedural justice), and respectful interpersonal treatment by supervisors (interactional justice) are essential for retaining a diverse and multigenerational workforce. Significantly, it reveals that the MZ generation's expectations for fairness and engagement in organizational practices necessitate a shift in HR strategies to cater to their distinct needs. By advocating for the implementation of fair, transparent, and inclusive policies and fostering a communicative and respectful organizational culture, this study provides a blueprint for public sector organizations to reduce turnover intention, enhance employee satisfaction, and ensure organizational sustainability. This approach underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the varied expectations of different generational cohorts to maintain a cohesive, motivated, and committed workforce, thereby bolstering public service delivery and organizational efficacy.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: K.-K.M., J.L. and J.-S.K.; data curation: K.-K.M., J.L. and J.-S.K.; analysis: K.-K.M., J.L. and J.-S.K.; methodology: K.-K.M., J.L. and J.-S.K.; writing, reviewing, and editing: K.-K.M., J.L. and J.-S.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This study was supported by research fund from Chosun University 2023.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The survey used in this study obtained an IRB review exemption from the Korea Institute of Public Administration (KIPA).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data used for this study are available at <https://www.kipa.re.kr/site/kipa/stadb/selectBaseDBFList.do> (accessed on 9 December 2023). Permission to use data must be obtained from KIPA.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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