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The Assessment of the Employment Relationship by Civil Servants. Theoretical and Empirical Insights from a Study in District Courts in Lower Saxony **

Civil servants in Germany are commonly considered to have special privileges particularly with regard to their employment conditions. This belief is based on the fact that German civil servants (“Beamte”) cannot be discharged, which is an aspect of their employment relationship that attracts attention especially in times when the state of the economy is weak. But does security of employment actually play such an important role in the consciousness of employees? Is security of employment really an outstanding determinant of work behaviour or only one factor amongst many others? And: compared to other employees and due to the security of employment civil servants enjoy, do they assess their work situation and their employment relationship differently? In this article we deal with these as well as some further questions. To explain the attitudes towards the employment relationship we present a general model and discuss how the attributes of different types of employment can be incorporated in this model. Theoretical considerations will play a major role in our article. We take this focus deliberately, because the analysis of empirical results demands theoretical interpretation, and because we want to make a contribution to theory development. Our empirical study is based on surveys in eight district courts in Lower Saxony, in twenty-six small and medium sized enterprises and on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel.

Key words: Employment Relationship, Civil Servants, Courts, Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction, Theory of Organizational Behaviour

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1. Introduction

There have been very few studies on the work attitudes of civil servants. A fact that is somewhat astonishing because the employment relationships of civil servants in Germany have some peculiarities that are often viewed as strongly affecting the attitudes and the behaviour of this distinct group of employees. Of special interest are, of course, the differences between German civil servants and employees working in the private sector of the economy. We present the results of two studies, which were conducted at eight district courts in Lower Saxony and at twenty-six small and medium sized enterprises in the region of Hamburg. To attain comparability we used identical methods of data collection. For the analysis and interpretation of the empirical results we employed an integrative theoretical approach that - despite the obvious differences in the employment conditions - allowed us to examine whether the fundamental causal relations between the work attitudes remain the same.

2. The civil service: attributes and reasons for a satisfying employment relationship

With the term “civil servants” we mean employees who in Germany are called “Beamte”. They are a special group of employees in the civil service in Germany, who should not be mistaken for those civil service employees, who principally have the same status as employees in the private sector of the economy. With regard to the labour law, the employment relationship of civil servants substantially differs from the employment relationship of other employees. So, for example, civil servants have to fulfil special duties and the state has special obligations towards their servants (Scheerbarth et al. 1992; Werres/Boewe 2006). The civil servants have to guarantee the governmental capacity to act, they are strictly bound by the law and they have to show special loyalty to the state. Furthermore, civil servants are not allowed to enter into industrial dispute with their employers, for example, by going on strike. The employment conditions are not determined by labour agreements, but by law. The state has to ensure the economic independence of its civil servants and give them adequate pension provisions. Civil servants are entitled to life-long employment, which is a distinctive feature in a world of volatile labour markets.

Considering the job security civil servants enjoy, it would be surprising if the civil servants did not evaluate their employment relationship very positively. In addition, civil servants normally have superior jobs with high motivational potential and therefore the evaluation should be significantly better than that of other employees. Furthermore, the special relationship between the state and its servants should induce an extraordinary work ethos giving the work experience a positive accentuation.

However, the legislatively regulated employment of civil servants also has its downside. The special duties of civil servants usually go along with special burdens (inconvenient work time, relocation, demanding clients etc.). The power of the employer to determine important elements of the employment conditions unidirectionally creates remarkable conflict lines (recent examples in Germany are the increased working time and the reduction of holiday pay and Christmas allowance). In addition, the salaries of civil servants are shown to be relatively low when compared to the

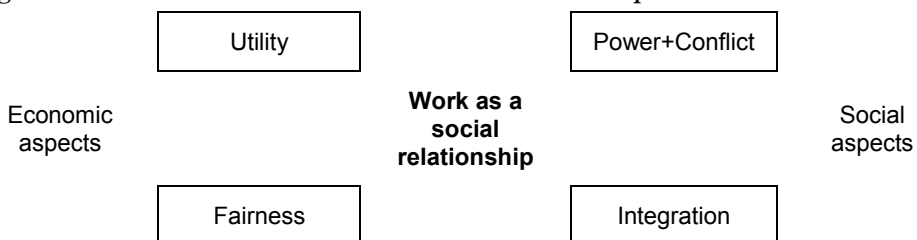
wages of employees with similar qualifications in the private sector. Furthermore, it is not easy to gain civil servant status because you have to pass particular examinations and probationary periods. Finally, the prestige of civil service is not always the best, which can also affect the morale of such employees.

These considerations refer only to some of the many variables that determine the assessment of the employment relationship by the civil servants. To get a more systematic view we should take a look at variables that constitute the quality of any employment relationship in a fundamental sense.

3. Work as a social relationship

Organizational behaviour research usually adopts the employer's point of view. This can be seen as a bias which becomes obvious in the choice of its themes (performance, motivation, leadership, success, commitment, job satisfaction, person-organisation-fit, coping with stress etc.). The insight that employment is invariably a reciprocal "social relationship" has only recently gained attention (Setton/Bennett/Liden 1996; Fulmer/Gerhart/Scott 2003; Shore et al. 2004). A promising starting point to analyse this relationship is to ask for preconditions which must be met in order to give the relationship resilience as well as viability, and to look for the forces which stabilize or destabilize social relationships (Martin 2001, 2002; Martin/Gade/Jochims 2007). Social theory gives manifold answers to these questions. Yet, by taking a closer look, two classes of determinants which are emphasised by almost all social theorists: economic forces on one side and social-integrative forces on the other, can be identified (Martin 1996; 2006). Each class of determinants has both selfish and selfless parts. So, economic thinking is not only egocentric profit-maximization, but also entails the idea of fairness. And the social-integrative forces, which encourage people to take altruistic actions, can also cause unpleasant dependencies, odd ideologies and power-induced coercion (figure 1).

Figure 1: Fundamental characteristics of social relationships



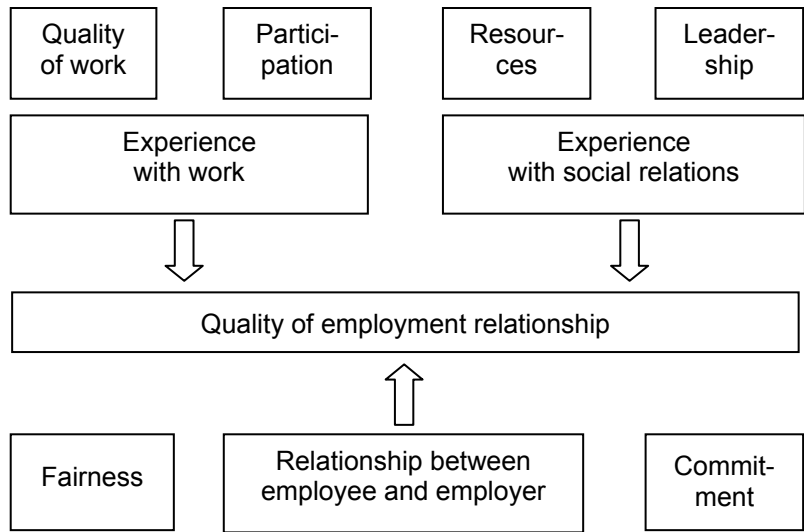
Every organization has to find its balance between these forces (Martin/Gade/Jochims 2007), whereby different situations demand different solutions. Yet, the fundamental problems remain the same. So, for example, members of economic organizations predominantly have an instrumentalistic attitude putting the focus on private goals; but this orientation is also prevalent in public organizations even though other values will have greater weight, for example goal commitment and conscientiousness.

In our study we concentrate on the variables in the lower part of figure 1. The fairness-variable very directly describes an important aspect of the quality of the

relationship between employees and employers. In regard to the integration-variable we distinguish between three social levels. At the highest level we have a global assessment in affective terms which is called “affective organizational commitment”. At the next level we take into account variables which describe more immediate social experience in the workplace. At that level, the relationship between an employee and his or her superior should be of outstanding relevance. The superior can be seen as a representative of management and therefore will have great impact on the assessment of the overall relationship with the organization. At the same social level, a further variable is the support the employees receive from their employer who gives or withholds resources they need to satisfactorily fulfil their duties at work. Finally, we consider two variables at the immediate work level: the degree of participation and the quality of the work’s content. The social character of participation is obvious. The social dimension of the quality of work derives from a constitutive attribute of high quality work, namely the degree of autonomy which determines the possibility to act in the interest of the organization in a self-determined way (see below).

The six variables in Figure 2 can be seen as a proposal to differentiate the social dimension of an employment relationship. Starting with two fundamental characteristics of the relationship between an employer and his or her employees, we have two variables to characterize more proximate social variables, and two variables which designate social aspects of the immediate work sphere.

Figure 2: Social dimensions of the Employment Relationship



In the next section we will discuss selected interrelations between these variables. Our theoretical considerations apply to all groups of employees. The hypotheses we derive will be tested on a sample of employees in the public sector and on a sample in the private sector. Using a unitary model we can compare the results of the two samples and find out which of the variables are of greater relevance for the respective samples.

4. Explanations

4.1 “Social” in a broader sense

An employment relationship is an exchange relationship. The question of the adequacy of give and take is a fundamental criterion that comes into play in every assessment of an exchange – besides the utility of the exchange itself. This applies in particular when the relationship is long-term, as employment relationships normally are. The perceived fairness is therefore of great importance when assessing the quality of an employment relationship. Yet, an employment relationship is not only an exchange relationship, it also constitutes a membership relationship. The entry into an organization always goes along with a status-assignment, which can more or less be accepted by the new employee. In the best case the employees will identify with the organization, i.e. they will accept the organizational goals as their own personal goals, but they can also keep distance and define their membership as a pure instrumental relationship without any closer (emotional) ties. Both fairness and affective commitment are fundamental categories for the definition of social relationships and therefore for the character of an employee-employer relationship. In the following, we will analyse these variables from a unitary theoretical perspective, but first we would like to introduce the empirical relations between fairness, commitment and organizational behaviour.

Fairness, Commitment und Organizational Behaviour

Organizations depend on the cooperation of their participants. An organization only can survive when there are advantages of cooperation, or in other words: without cooperation there is no reason to participate. Yet, cooperation is precarious, because giving performance in advance (which is necessary in cooperation) can egoistically be exploited by inappropriate behaviour of the partner. This problem can lead to previously cooperative employees becoming uncooperative. For Jon Elster however, this seems to be a minor problem, “Lack of ... fairness, not the free-rider problem, is often the main obstacle to social cooperation.” (Elster 1985: 248) Research within social psychology and in the organizational behaviour domain has made significant progress in our understanding of the fairness issue. Two forms of justice have received special attention: distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice refers to the relation of inputs and outputs, procedural justice means adequate participation of all parties affected by a decision. It also refers to the legitimacy of procedures. The classical article on distributive justice was written by Adams (Adams 1965). It deals with the question of the behavioural and mental reactions that may be induced by the perception of injustice (see also Walster/Walster/Berscheid 1978; Mikula 1986). Investigations of procedural justice were strongly influenced by the studies of Thibaut and Walker (1975) who put the emphasis on the tendency of participants to choose behaviours which enable them to control the results and the behavioural processes (see also Leventhal 1980; Bar-Hillel/Yaari 1993; Greenberg/Wiethoff 2001).¹

¹ For some years there have also been studies of the so-called interactional justice, which refers to the immediate interpersonal interaction (Bies 1987; Greenberg 1993; Stecher/Rosse 2005), and of retributive justice and their correlations with emotional and social reactions (Darley/Pittman 2003; Aquino/Tripp/Bies 2001; Bottom et al. 2002).

A controversial point lies in whether it makes sense to empirically distinguish between procedural and distributive justice. Elster, for example, supports the view that procedural justice is parasitic on distributive justice (Elster 1985: 242). Lind and Tyler on the other hand argue that people will even accept apparent unjust results as long as the procedure that generates the results is perceived as fair (Lind/Tyler 1988: 195). According to the so-called “Two Factor Theory”, deficits in distributive justice primarily cause negative assessments of person-related aspects, and deficits in procedural justice primarily result in negative evaluations of system-related aspects like commitment to the organization (Sweeney/McFarlin 1993). Actually, there are very high correlations between both kinds of justice (for an example see Paterson/Cary 2002), which makes it difficult to separate the effects statistically.

In justice research, the topics of the existence and the effects of norms of justice (Lind/Tyler 1988; Lerner 2003), differences in the individual sense of justice (Schmitt/Dörfel 1999) and the definition of comparison groups and standards for comparison (Deutsch 1975; Scholl/Cooper/McKenna 1987) are seen as being important. Recent studies have explored the circumstances that stimulate increased attention for violations of justice. Other research questions refer to how people think about justice problems and how contextual factors affect the perception of justice or injustice (Skitka/Crosby 2003).

From an empirical point of view, procedural as well as distributive justice perceptions are powerful determinants of job satisfaction and have remarkable effects on variables such as performance, extra-role behaviour and work related attitudes. The meta-analysis of Cohen-Charash and Spector which comprises 190 studies of fairness in organizations found a mean correlation of $r=0.47$ between procedural justice and job satisfaction in $n=23$ studies, and a mean correlation of $r=0.43$ between distributive justice and job satisfaction in $n=36$ studies (Cohen-Charash/Spector 2001: 299; even higher values have been reported by Colquitt et al. 2001: 434).

Many authors abstain from discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the empirical relations. The most popular explanation of the effects of distributive justice is that it ultimately leads to better performance of the employees, and that the thus produced better results induce higher satisfaction levels. Procedural justice is interpreted as showing how an employer respects his or her workforce, which in turn is positively appreciated by the employees (Tyler/Smith 1998: 612). To rephrase: distributive justice is related to material incentives, whereas procedural justice is related to symbolic incentives. But this argumentation is unsatisfactory simply because material injustice also has strong symbolic meaning and the refusal of participation also has material results.

Below, we present a systematic way to explain the relation between perceived justice and the assessment of employees of the quality of their employment relationship. We thereby develop a theoretical scheme that can also be used to explain the effects of our second relationship variable, the attachment to the organization. The psychological attachment to an organization is normally defined as “organizational commitment” (Weller 2003). Meyer and Allen (1991) differentiate between affective, normative and calculative commitment. Porter et al. (1974) define (affective) commitment as the degree of identification with an organization and the extent of organizational involvement. Normative commitment refers to moral reasons (sense of duty, supporting

the vision of an organization etc.) to become a member of an organization. Calculative commitment is based on weighing up positives and negatives of participating or not participating in an organization. Theorists not only expect a strong relation between organizational commitment and low turnover, but also between commitment and performance-related engagement. Whereas correlations between commitment and turnover (and especially the intention to leave the organization) widely confirm theoretical predictions, correlations between commitment and performance are rather weak (Weller 2003). However, many studies document very high correlations between (affective) commitment and job satisfaction. In their meta-analysis Tett and Meyer (1993) find a mean correlation of $r=0.70$ (68 studies). Mathieu and Zajac (1990) show similar results.

Opinions about the relevant causal mechanisms that establish relationships are controversially discussed (Moser 1996). Many authors complain about the unsatisfactory theoretical foundation of commitment research and recommend tying the commitment concept with the self concept (Leonard/Beauvais/Scholl 1999; Weller 2003). In the following we present a proposal for such an integration by particularly accentuating the connection between personal and social spheres.

Relationship levels

A social relationship casually emerges from the actions of interactive partners. To develop informative propositions about the quality of a social relationship one therefore has to take into account the perspectives of the participants. A social relationship is not a static and passive entity. On one hand social relations are created by the activities of each participant. On the other hand the quality of the relationship changes the partners. Therefore, propositions about a social relationship should consider how the “social” shapes the “personal”. However, the interactive partners are not completely helpless victims of their circumstances. They can also mould their relationships. For this reason it is important to look at the things – few or many – they have collaboratively create in their relationship. Finally, one has to consider that a social relationship does not start from an institutional nirvana, but is embedded in sense-giving structures. These considerations show that the course of events in social relationships takes place at several behavioural levels: it is entangled with the self-concept of the actors, determines the experiences of concrete interactions, defines a common practice and – last but not least – derives its meaning from the given institutional context.

There are many theoretical approaches which deal with these questions more or less comprehensively (in social psychology, e.g. Lewin 1936; Festinger 1954; Tajfel 1982; in sociology, Simmel 1908; Parsons 1951; Schütz 1974; in motivation theory, Harvey 1963; Reykowski 1982; Green 1991; in personality psychology, Allport 1963; Ogilvie/Fleming/Pennell 1998; Pyzschinsky/Greenberg/Solomon 1997; in anthropology, Kardiner 1939; Kroeber/Kluckhohn 1952; Douglas 1986; and in philosophy, Theunissen 1965; Dybel 2004; Löhr 2006). Regrettably, these approaches are only partially comparable because they look at different realities, emphasize specific aspects and refer to different background knowledge and methodological positions. In spite of these complications we make an effort to obtain a theoretical integration. To do so, we use some classic approaches that deal with the behavioural levels we mentioned.

A famous approach to analyse the connection between the personal and the social level was created by George Mead (1934). In his conception, the self encompasses a subject-self (“I”) as well as an object-self (“Me”). The object-self crystallizes in a process of social interaction that constitutes interpersonal meaning (Joas 1985). It is this (“objective”) part of the self that is visible to the social environment. The actor also observes his or her behaviour, and has to identify him or herself with this public object-self. The subject-self is the personal part of the self. It is the originator of the personal side of the person’s acts and the creator of his or her individuality. Without elaborating Mead’s ideas in detail, it seems justified to say that his conception offers a plausible view to describe the relation between the personal and the social system (for discussions and controversies cf. Blumer 1969; Wenzel 1990; Wagner 1993).

“I” and “Me” constitute the personal levels in the development of social relationships. At the third level we have the communitarian aspect of collaboration and cooperation: the “We” of social relationships. The respective themes are especially discussed in group research under the term of social cohesion (Festinger 1950; Cartwright 1968; Smith/Murphy/Coats 1999; McPherson/Smith-Lovin 2002). Among others, homogeneity of the group members in respect of age and education, similarity of attitudes, attractiveness of the group members and frequency of interactions are determinants of cohesion.

To explain cohesion, Hogg (1992) emphasizes identification processes and strong tendencies to demarcate the boundaries of the group and the identity of the group against its environment. Friedkin (2004) stresses the importance of opportunities to interact as a precondition for developing a sense of affiliation. The two perspectives are complementary. Both emphasize concrete experiences in interaction processes, which are determined by the social infrastructure (communication opportunities, social networks) and by the availability of “offers for identification” (attractiveness of participants and activities). The arguments stay the same when we switch from group to organization level, because the social forces of socialization remain the same, while only the structural properties for mediating them change.

At the fourth behavioural level, structures are the basis of social integration. Of special relevance are the institutional arrangements that stabilize social processes. They define the “how” of social collaboration: “At bottom, institutionalization is a neutral idea, which can be defined as the emergence of orderly, stable, socially integrating patterns out of unstable, loosely organized, or narrowly technical activities” (Selznick 1996: 271). Studies of organizational institutions base their explanations primarily on the quest for legitimacy and on imitational learning (DiMaggio 1998; Scott 2005; Walgenbach 2006). Yet, to understand the process of inventing and establishing institutions one has to take some further variables into account, for example power relations, ideologies, the nature of the organizations task, the available knowledge, transaction costs, etc. Therefore, a good explanation has to consider that institutional arrangements occur as alternatives (there is no one best solution) and can only survive when they are able to meet the manifold demands in a complex social landscape.

The importance of social structure becomes clear when one looks, for example, at the very fundamental classification that contrasts organizations with a dominant social orientation to organizations with a dominant economic orientation (Udy 1970; Wil-

liamson 1984; Burns 1990; Tsui et al. 1995; Martin 1996). Essential characteristics of these types of relationships (or “social orders”) are the cooperation attitudes of the social partners and the medium of their cooperation. Whilst in “economic relationships” the principle of exchange governs, the basic cement of collaboration in “social relationships” is trust. These pure types of economic versus social relationship can only rarely be observed in real life, but the respective attitudes have sustainable effects for social life. The difference between a cold and instrumental attitude or an empathetic integrative attitude has great impact on the social climate and likewise on communication, values and norms.

Figure 3: Behavioural levels and the quality of social relationships

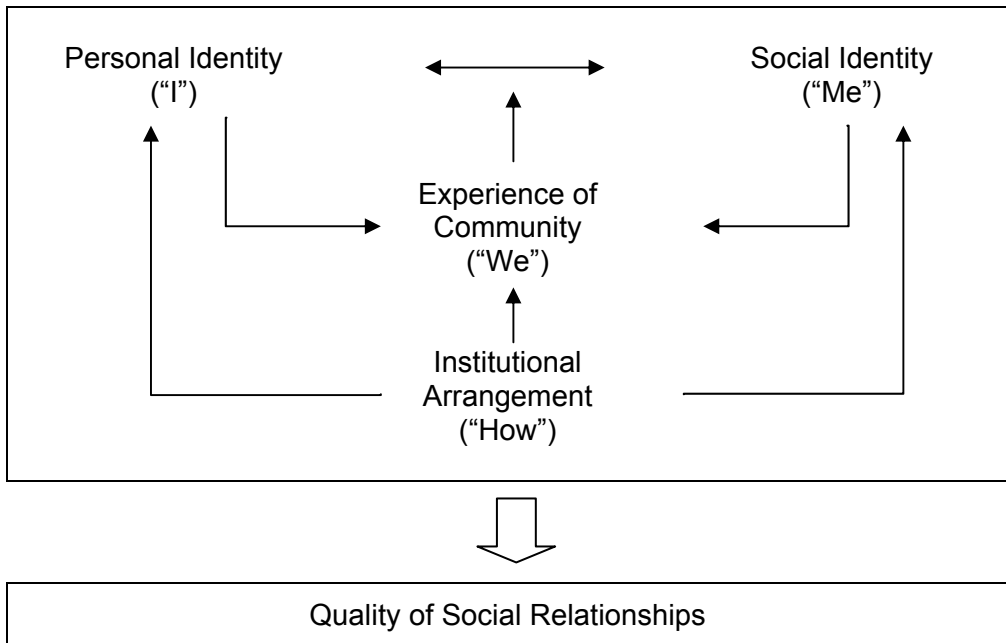


Figure 3 delineates our theoretical frame of reference. As described the (subjectively defined) quality of a social relationship is the resultant of processes at all four behavioural levels. Within and between these behavioural levels, robust, as well as, subtle dependencies exist, which we cannot elaborate in detail. In the next section we use our scheme to develop more concrete hypotheses.

Fairness, commitment and behaviour levels

The scheme illustrated in figure 3 can be used to examine the impact of important determinants on the (subjectively felt) quality of a social relationship. Regarding the effect of fairness and commitment, the manner in which these two variables are connected with our four behaviour levels would have to be analyzed.

In analyzing fairness, we concentrate on distributive justice. It makes sense to start with the institutional level of social relationships. In employment relationships questions of fairness take a central position, because they are primarily regarded as *ex-*

change relationships. For this reason all activities that could affect the inducement-contribution balance are given great attention. One voluntarily only starts a balanced exchange relationship. If it is permanently unbalanced, it is not only called an "unfair exchange", if one cannot give it up for lack of alternatives, the exchange relationship changes into a coercive relationship. A lack of fairness damages every exchange relationship and for that reason will also have negative effects on the assessment of the relationship. Furthermore, a lack of fairness does not only lead to a reassessment of the relationship, it also changes the kind of cooperation. In a "normal" exchange relationship (that has to be distinguished from singular exchange acts), one performs actions in advance without demanding immediate returns. Moreover, uncertainties in respect to performance requirements and outcomes are tolerated. In an exchange relationship which is experienced as unfair, these norms are no longer valid. On the contrary, everybody looks for opportunities to defeat the "exchange opponent". To comply counts as weakness, opportunism is regarded as normal behaviour and contributions are charged exactly against the rewards received (see, for example, Whyte's classic study [Whyte et al. 1958]). In summary: In an unfair relationship, a sense of community is not established. In unfair conditions one finds no strong community spirit. Both the creation of values as well as their distribution is problematic. And the assessment of the relationship will not be very positive.

An unfair relationship will also have negative consequences on the two other behavioural levels. Permanently unbalanced exchange conditions damage the social position of the weaker party. They can strengthen power differences, and they may be accompanied by serious status and prestige losses. All these aspects undermine the *social identity* and will also have negative effects at a more personal level. People who are not treated as equal, and who have low prestige will hardly develop a strong *self-esteem* and will also hardly find a reason to feel particularly comfortable in unfair social conditions.

Our considerations are summarized in table 1. Altogether, a lack of fairness will have strong negative effects on the quality of a social relationship. Perceived injustices do not accidentally belong to the main sources of social conflicts simply because fairness is an essential feature of any social relationship. This fact also explains why disputes about what has to be regarded as fair are often fought out so fiercely.

The medium of social relationships characterised primarily by emotional attachment is not exchange, but trust. Contributions in such relationships are not aimed at maximum returns; the guiding behavioural principle is the confidence that the partner will show goodwill even in difficult times. What counts are not individual goals but collective achievements. To make contributions to the latter is a given norm. Violations of this norm provoke negative feelings against the person who disregards the norm. The "misbehaving" is not felt as a violation of the rules of the game but as a defiance of *moral obligations*. High emotional attachment is closely related to inner consent or *identification*. Although positive feelings do not necessarily lead to identification, identification will stimulate positive feelings and a need for attachment to the identification object. Identification is part of the object-self, thus a juncture between the social and the personal. Identification not only is an inner experience, it also finds expression in symbolic acts, prosocial behaviour etc. Identification behaviour is also an object of personal reflection. Depending on the correspondence of the identification

object with the self-concept, dissonant or *consonant feelings* will result from this reflection process. The assessment of the social relationship will therefore only be positive if the person is in harmony with the social environment.

Table 1: Behavioural levels and the quality of social relationships

	Behavioural levels			
	“How”	“We”	“Me”	“I”
Fairness	Exchange	Social norms	Social identity	Self-esteem
Commitment	Trust	Moral norms	Identification	Consonance

In summary, emotional attachment (or commitment) to the employer in the same way as fairness will lead to a positive assessment of the employment relationship by the employees. Nevertheless, looking at the causal relations more closely, one has to notice a certain asymmetry of the effects. The fairness variable has primarily negative effects. In an exchange relationship, fairness is simply expected. In a sense, fairness works as a hygiene factor. As long as fairness is given, its importance often is not noticed and it will not cause any particular effect. The fairness norm gets attention only if it is violated, which leads to considerable effects because the exchange relationship itself is put into question. As for emotional attachment, the situation is different. Lack of emotional attachment is not the same as, for example, rejection or dissatisfaction. Very often it is only the expression of a distanced attitude. Moreover, conversely a close emotional relationship contributes to a stable positive assessment of the social relationship.

All in all, it can be said that fairness and attachment are very robust determinants of the assessment of the quality of an employment relationship. Therefore we postulate the following two hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: If employees assess their employment relationship as unfair, they will also assess the quality of their employment relationship negatively.
- Hypothesis 2: If employees feel positive commitment to their organization, they will also assess the quality of their employment relationship positively.

4.2 “Social” in the narrow sense

In a more narrow sense, the “social” is localized in the immediate work sphere. Here the superior as the direct contact person and representative of management is of a special significance. Also of great importance are the resources the employees receive to satisfactorily fulfil their job duties. (Wayne/Shore/Liden 1997; Martin/Gade/Jochims 2007).

The quality of the leadership relationship and its effect on the commitment to the organization

While leadership research traditionally rests on the assumption that leaders adopt an average leadership style (ALS) towards all subordinates, in our argumentation we follow leader-member exchange (LMX) research thinking and take as a basis a dyadic understanding of the relationship between leader and member (Dienesch/Liden 1986; Burns/Otte 1999). The leadership relationship is established by the exchange of dif-

ferent material and immaterial goods, such as financial incentives, training possibilities, information, involvement and support (Gouldner 1960). The quality of the relationship varies with the frequency of the exchange and the value of the exchanged goods. Subordinates whose leadership relationship is characterised by a high quality exchange belong to the “in-group”. Not all of the subordinates establish an intensive interaction with their superior and are thus not accepted as close interactional partners. Their leadership relationships are characterized by a low quality exchange and they belong to the “out-group”. (Dahnsereau/Graen/Haga 1975; Graen/Cashman 1975; Graen 1976; Liden/Graen 1980). Empirical results show that high-quality leadership relationships correlate with lower fluctuation, higher performance, positive work attitudes, and positive career development (Dienesch/Liden 1986; Graen/Scandura 1987; Graen/Uhl-Bien 1995; Schriesheim/Castro/Cogliser 1999; Van Breukelen/Konst/Van der Vlist 2002).

Our conceptualization of leadership relationships follows a broad understanding of the exchange between leader and member. We understand the exchange to be not primarily task-oriented, as it is operationalized in unidimensional concepts (Graen/Scandura 1987; Graen/Uhl-Bien 1995; Schriesheim, Castro/Cogliser 1999). We rather follow the multi-dimensional understanding (LMX-MDM) of Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) who differentiate four dimensions of the leadership relationship: affect, loyalty, professional respect and contribution (Liden/Maslyn 1998; Martin/Gade/Jochims 2007).

The development of unique leadership relationships can be explained by the social exchange theory (Homans 1960; Blau 1964; Sahlins 1972). “Only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not.” (Blau 1964: 94) Since employees strive for balance in their exchange relationships, their perceived support from the superior results in a reciprocal obligation to support him or her. The development of *organizational* commitment can also be explained as an exchange result: The support received from the superior is exchanged for an obligation to support the organization. Commitment to the organization is developed through the relationship with the superior as a representative of the organization. If the superior as a concrete representative of the organization is appreciated, then positive attitudes towards the organization develop. A second effect is the symbolic transfer of the quality of the exchange with the superior to the quality of the exchange with the organization (Settoon/Bennett/Liden 1996; Sparrowe/Liden 1997; Schyns et al. 2005).

This relationship can also be explained with the role theory of Katz and Kahn (1966, 1978). Katz and Kahn (1978: 43) define roles as “standardized patterns of behavior required of all persons playing a part in a given functional relationship”. Leadership relationships are the result of negotiations of the respective roles. In the role process the superior is of special importance. Because of strong reciprocity norms, support and loyalty of the superior usually lead to loyalty also on the part of the employees (Graen 1976; Dienesch/Liden 1986; Burns/Otte 1999). Both from role theoretical considerations and from exchange theoretical considerations the following hypothesis can be deduced.

Hypothesis 3: A high-quality leader-member relationship has positive effects on the (emotional) commitment to the organization.

Perceived organizational support and its effect on satisfaction

Prerequisite for the attainment of satisfactorily work behaviour is the availability of resources such as personal competence, and social and technical support (Katzell/Thompson 1990). The concept “perceived organizational support” (POS) of Eisenberger and colleagues expresses this aspect (Eisenberger et al. 1986). POS is defined as “global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their [the employees] contributions and cares about their well-being.” (Eisenberger et al. 1986: 501) Empirical results show a strong relation between perceived organizational support and behaviour such as job performance, extra-role behaviour and organizational commitment along with absenteeism and fluctuation (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Settoon/Bennett/Liden 1996; Rhoades/Eisenberger 2002; Erdogan/Enders 2007).

Perceived organizational support is close to the employment relationship. It refers to the direct work sphere and thus plays a particularly notable role in the assessment of the employment relationship. Receiving support satisfies the need for relatedness, which is described by self-determination theory (Deci 1972; Ryan/Deci 2000). Furthermore, the need for competence (Deci/Ryan 1985) and the need for self-efficacy (Bandura 1982, 1986) are satisfied if the subordinate believes him or herself to be well able to work on tasks and that this work is carried out successfully. If these needs are not satisfied, the quality and the assessment of the employment relationship suffer.

The positive effect of perceived organizational support on the assessment of the employment relationship can also be explained with the help of the theoretical construct of the “psychological contract” (Rousseau 1995), which is defined as “individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization”. (Rousseau 1995: 9) In respect to this construct, employees feel a reciprocal obligation to the organization which arises from received contributions. If the expected contributions are not rendered, the psychological contract is violated (Rousseau 1995). Empirical studies show that employees, who receive fewer contributions than expected, i.e. a lower level of support, assess their employment relationship as being worse than employees who are satisfied with the received support (Aselage/Eisenberger 2003; Coyle-Shapiro/Conway 2005; Tekleab/Takeuchi/Taylor 2005).

Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational support has a positive effect on the assessment of the employment relationship.

4.3 The direct work experience

An important factor which should have significant influence on the quality of the employment relationship is the extent of participation. Participation is, in a sense, the expression of the employee’s position within the employment relationship. Moreover, participation gives the employees opportunities to act in a self-determining manner (for the organization) and to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Participation and its effects on the perception of fairness

In the empirical literature, participation is considered mainly with regard to its influence on job satisfaction and job performance (Locke/Schweiger 1979; Wagner 1994; Wagner et al. 1997). Furthermore the effects on absenteeism, fluctuation, motivation or commitment are also examined (Spector 1986). On the other hand, the connection between participation and fairness (or its perception) is given less attention. Against the background of mixed empirical results regarding the participation effect – in particular on satisfaction and performance – many studies have examined further variables for their mediating effects. So, for example, performance enhancement through participation will only occur if the employees have the necessary knowledge and capability to meet the requirements that come along with participation (Miller/Monge 1986; Locke et al. 1997). We also assume that participation does not have a direct influence on the satisfaction judgement directed towards the general employment relationship.² Instead we expect a direct influence on the fairness perception and thus, also an (indirect) influence on job satisfaction and on the assessment of the employment relationship.

This causality seems plausible because people perceive their need for justice as being injured if they are not included in (decision) processes – particularly if they have to take the consequences of these processes and their results. This will have profound effects on work attitudes such as job satisfaction or commitment (Korsgaard/Roberson 1995) but only insofar as the fairness perception is affected. That empirical studies frequently ignore this intermediate step may be due to – besides others reasons – the difficulty in clearly distinguishing the two constructs participation and fairness from each other and in measuring them accordingly. When talking about participation, the fairness aspect is frequently implicitly taken into account. Fairness is considered to be a major feature of participation, which seems to make a separate consideration dispensable. This becomes clear also when looking at the manner in which the fairness concept is usually operationalized. Alexander and Ruderman, for example, measure fairness by using items of participation and consider these as central fairness aspects (Alexander/Ruderman 1987).³ Fairness however is not the same as participation. Participation, for example, can also become manifest in a job enlargement without centrally addressing fairness aspects.

How exactly does participation influence the perception of fairness? The connection between fairness and the so-called procedural justice is very direct. Participation can be understood as the opportunity to play part in processes and to contribute to decision making.⁴ There are two forms, the instrumental and the non-instrumental

² Wagner (1994) holds that one reason for the unexpected weak correlations between participation and satisfaction/performance is to be seen in the fact that the studies often ignored the importance of situational and personal factors.

³ So the procedural justice already mentioned is defined as the opportunity to play a part in decision-making processes – particularly verbal – and therefore being able to participate (cf. e.g. the study of Korsgaard/Roberson 1995).

⁴ This definition however excludes authoritarian as well as delegational styles of leadership. For the different participation forms look at Yukl et al. (2002).

voice. The instrumental voice permits the employee to exert influence on decision-making processes and therefore, at least indirectly, also on its results. The resulting direct benefit is one of the most important motivating forces of human behaviour, it provides at the same time an essential criterion for the evaluation of the fairness of social processes (Lind/Tyler 1988). The non-instrumental voice means the opportunity to find attention for employee views – regardless of whether participation pays off. Whether the non-instrumental voice is able to positively influence the perception of fairness seems questionable however as employees react with rejection if they have the impression that their participation is just a sham (Lind/Kanfer/Earley 1990; Tyler/Rasinski/Spodick 1985).⁵ Nevertheless, empirically a positive relation can occur between non-instrumental participation and the perception of fairness, namely (as mentioned earlier) insofar as the opportunity to express an opinion may satisfy the need for perception and recognition. The opportunity to make a *contribution*⁶ and to express views frequently is seen as a value in itself and as a chance to prove oneself as a full member within a group (Lind/Kanfer/Earley 1990).

The connection of participation with fairness gains in importance if the employees consider participation appropriate on the basis of their qualifications. This can be the case, for example, if an employee is consulted in the context of the selection of personnel since he or she can judge the requirements of the job to be filled better than those who are responsible for the selection procedure. Furthermore, participation may give access to information that an employee needs for the fulfilment of job-related tasks. In both cases a certain entitlement on the part of the employee is satisfied by inclusion in decision-making processes with the accompanied effect on the assessment of procedural justice (Lind/Kanfer/Earley 1990). The equality that results from participation can be quoted as a further effect to promote the perception of fairness. Participation can attenuate (inappropriate) status differences.

The main effect of participation surely lies in providing the opportunity to influence the results of decision-making processes, hence to receive distributive justice. We examined this effect in our study. Our empirical investigation did not include the procedural justice variable. As the previous considerations show, it plays a large role as an intervening variable. Participation facilitates justice in procedures, just procedures more often than not also lead to just results. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Participation has a positive influence on the perception of distributive justice.

The quality of work and its effect on satisfaction

Autonomy is a human right. Heteronomy means oppression of the own will, curtailment of creativity and restriction of a self-determined behaviour. The principle of self-determination is so central for the humanistic idea of man that it claims validity also in

⁵ From a normative point of view, restricting or withholding participation is also unfair and a vote without effect is a vote without value.

⁶ This concept can be seen in differentiation to the concept “influence” (cf. also Korsgaard and Roberson 1995).

the work sphere; a sphere characterised by dependence and authority. Numerous studies illustrate that the demand for autonomy can be justified not only ethically but also economically.

In their “Job Characteristic Model” Hackman and Oldham (1976) emphasise autonomy as one of five central dimensions of work. The importance of autonomy was already posited in similar form by Frederick Herzberg, who considered the sense of responsibility as a psychological state promoting job satisfaction (Herzberg 1965).⁷ This connection is qualified by Hackman and Oldham. Whereas Herzberg assumed in principle this causality for all individuals, Hackman and Oldham require certain characteristics of human personality for the effect of autonomy and responsibility on satisfaction.⁸ They argue that individuals who strive for personal development and self-realisation are more able to experience the psychological state of responsibility (induced by self-determination) and react to it than people who do not feel this need. Furthermore according to Hackman and Oldham, the capabilities of the employee are a crucial moderating factor in whether the motivating potential inherent in the job dimensions can develop its effects beyond the psychological states and influence the job satisfaction positively. Insufficient professional qualification can lead to the motivating potential falling flat, or even being perceived as a threat (Hackman/Oldham 1980). Operational freedom does not only have to be facilitated by the organization, but it also has to be used by the employee – this in turn requires certain competencies (Ryan/Kuhl/Deci 1997; Ryan/Deci 2006; Sichler 2006).

Deci and Ryan combined the concepts of self-determination and perception of competence in their “cognitive evaluation theory”, which starts out from the basic assumption that people have an innate need for self-determination and competence. If by tackling a challenging task one comes to experience one’s own effectiveness and independence, one’s job is felt as rewarding and motivating (Deci/Ryan 1985).

In sum one can say, that the importance of autonomy has been proven by numerous studies (Dunnette/Campbell/Hakel 1967; Hackman/Oldham 1976; Sims/Szilagyi 1976; Carroll 1978). We therefore formulate for our study:

Hypothesis 6: A high degree of autonomy has a positive effect on the assessment of the employment relationship.

5. Empirical results

In the following, the results of different empirical studies are presented. At first, we show on the basis of the data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) that civil servants are to a greater extent satisfied with their jobs than other employees. These differences can be explained simply by socio-graphic differences. But this result does not really deliver a deeper understanding of the factors that determine the as-

⁷ Further variables which influence the satisfaction according to Herzberg’s “Two Factor Theory” are (among others) task achievement, occupational growth and intrinsic interest in the task (Herzberg 1965). Lipmann (1932) already points to the significance of autonomy for work redesign from an employee perspective.

⁸ For critical discussions on the “Two Factor Theory” see Hackman and Oldham (1976), Dunnette, Campbell and Hakel (1967).

assessment of the quality of a job. In our own study we therefore analyse the data in accordance with the model introduced in sections three and four. To be sure: the data indeed show some characteristic differences between civil servants and other employees, but these differences only have to do with the absolute values of the variables, the structure of our model remains the same, regardless of whether one looks at civil servants or at other employees.

5.1 Methodology

The data for the empirical analysis come from an employee survey of eight district courts in Lower Saxony. We used a standardized questionnaire. 255 of the 484 respondents are civil servants (Beamte), 229 other employees. For comparison purposes, we analysed data from a panel survey of small and medium sized enterprises in the region of North-East Lower Saxony and Hamburg. Altogether, 803 people were interviewed in this study from 26 medium-sized enterprises from different branches. In our study we used methodically tested and empirically approved indices and seven point scales. The *quality of employment relationship* was investigated by items of the Work Description Sheet (“Arbeitsbeschreibungsbogen”) of Neuberger and Allerbeck (1978). We investigated levels of satisfaction with the organization of work, the working conditions, the work contents, the payment and the possibilities for development offered by the employer. In order to avoid an overlapping with other constructs used in our study (see below), assessments of the direct work sphere (colleagues, superior) were omitted. The items used in our study are formulated as “appraisals” and thus signify in which way the conditions of a good employment relationship – in the perception of the respondent – are fulfilled. Concerning the group of the civil servants, the scale has a Cronbach’s alpha reliability of $\alpha=0.80$ (a reliability of $\alpha=0.79$ results for the parallel sample). *Fairness* in the sense of distributive justice was measured with Janssen’s fairness scale (2001). The reliability for our sample is $\alpha=0.94$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.95$). *Organizational commitment* was operationalized with the help of three items which are frequently used in social economic research: a direct question about the feeling of identification, a question about the desire for a lasting relationship, and a question about the turnover tendency. The reliability is $\alpha=0.81$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.83$). For the recording of the *quality of leadership relationship* we used the German version of the LMX-MDM (Paul/Schyns 2002; based on Liden/Maslyn 1998). The scale refers to the dimensions affect, loyalty and professional respect which have three items each. The reliability for the group of the civil servants is $\alpha=0.94$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.92$).⁹

⁹ We have not taken into account the fourth dimension (“contribution”) of the LMX-MDM, because it focuses on resources the superior provides, and for that reason involves a potential overlap with *organizational support*. In addition, instead of the first two items of the scale by Paul and Schyns (2002) concerning the aspects “liking” (“mögen”) and “have as a friend” (“zum Freund haben”), we asked for “being friendly” (“sympathisches Auftreten”) (affect dimension). The item which refers to the behaviour of the superior as a reaction to “serious faults” of an employee was also removed (loyalty dimension). These changes were made due to considerations of the independence of the judiciary.

For the conceptualization of *organizational support* we have adopted the concept of “Resource Adequacy” by Quinn and Staines (1979), describing the extent to which employees assess the resources they need for the fulfilment of their work to be adequate. For our analysis we have used the first three items of the Resource Adequacy Scale (Quinn/Staines 1979; Cook et al. 1981), which ask whether employees receive enough information, whether they receive enough help and equipment, and whether they have enough authority to do their job.¹⁰ The reliability is $\alpha=0.76$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.75$). The assessment of the *quality of work* was carried out with the help of the Job Description Survey by Hackman and Oldham (1980). Five items were used for the concrete calculation, namely questions on autonomy, meaningfulness (completeness of the workflows, variability of the work, significance of the work for third parties), and on the feedback supplied by task fulfilment. The reliability for the group of the civil servants is $\alpha=0.83$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.74$).

Finally, for the conceptualization of *participation* we used the scale developed by Taylor and Bowers (1974). The items focus on the extent to which the people affected take part in decisions, whether the superiors use information from employees at all levels, whether the different departments plan their work activities together, and whether decisions are made at the adequate organization level. The reliability is $\alpha=0.79$ (parallel sample $\alpha=0.81$).

5.2 Descriptive results

Civil servants are more content than other employee groups. This is reflected in the analysis of the data of the Socio-Economic Panel (figure 4).

The graph shows, levels of satisfaction to have been relatively constant over the last 20 years: Although declining somewhat, the levels of satisfaction of German civil servants are generally the highest among employees. These results can be “explained” very simply from a statistical point of view. A first starting-point therefore is the qualification level. Civil servants are – compared with other employees – highly qualified. An academy degree is the entry requirement for the higher service, for entering into the senior service a university degree is required.¹¹ From the job satisfaction empirical research it is known that qualification and job satisfaction correlate significantly with each other. The difference in job satisfaction between civil servants and the other employees might therefore be simply caused by differences in qualification. If one contrasts similar qualification levels in the Socio-Economic Panel, the difference in the job satisfaction between civil servants and the other employees then disappears.

¹⁰ We decided to apply the construct „resource adequacy“ and not the construct “perceived organizational support” (POS), because the latter focuses on an appraisal removed from the concrete task, whereas “resource adequacy” focuses on the task related support of the organization in a narrower sense. For this reason, the construct can easily be associated with the social perspective (cf. Eisenberger et al. 1986; Quinn and Staines 1979).

¹¹ The terms “higher service” and “senior service” (in German “gehobener” and “höherer Dienst”) denote two careers which can be entered by a civil servant.

Figure 4: Job satisfaction for different employee groups
(Socio-Economic Panel, own calculation)



A second “direct” approach follows the assumption that civil servants benefit from job security. Actually the data show a clear connection between job satisfaction and job security. The data of the Socio-Economic Panel deliver correlations in the range from $r=0.20$ (unskilled workers) to $r=0.44$ (executives) between job satisfaction and the perception of job security (cf. table A1 in the appendix). The assessment of job security was investigated with the following question: “What are your expectations for your occupational future? How probable is it that you will lose your job within the next two years?”¹² Unfortunately the cited wording of the question on the assessment of job security does not address the reasons for the future jobs status, a clear interpretation with regard to the employer behaviour therefore is not possible for the context of the analysis of the Socio-Economic Panel. In our study of work attitudes of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs-study) we therefore used the two following items:

- (a) “How do you personally judge your security from redundancy; is your workplace at risk or secure in the future?” (judgement on a seven-point scale)
- (b) “The management tries very hard to maintain jobs also in economically difficult times.” (seven-point consent/rejection)

The correlation of the item mentioned first with job satisfaction¹³ is $r=0.28$, the correlation of the second item with job satisfaction however $r=0.40$. The difference be-

¹² In the Socio-Economic Panel, job satisfaction is recorded by the following question: “How content are you with the following areas of your life today?” (Work)

¹³ The item for measuring satisfaction is: „If you think now of everything that is important at work (e.g. the working conditions, the payment, the working time etc.) how content are you with your work altogether?” (judgement on seven-point scale).

tween the two correlations makes clear that job security indeed has considerable effects on job satisfaction, but the efforts of the employer for employment stability are of still greater importance.

Therefore one can say that the higher satisfaction of the civil servants can be explained very well in a statistical sense. The differences in job satisfaction disappear if one takes into account the qualification of the employees and the security of jobs. Nevertheless this simple and very direct explanation is not particularly satisfactory. The fact that employees with a higher qualification level are more satisfied explains nothing, rather it is an empirical result which awaits explanation. The meaning of job security as *one* possible determining factor can only be judged if one looks simultaneously at further important determinants of job satisfaction respectively of the assessment of the employee-employer relationship. In order to do this we used the data of our survey on work attitudes of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises. In this study the same variables as in our civil servants study were used and thus it was possible to carry out the same analyses for both samples. Particularly the effect of the perceived workplace risk could be checked in the SMEs sample.¹⁴ Looking at our data, multivariate analyses actually showed that job security is a variable which has only a small impact on job satisfaction (cf. footnote 16) – at least if it is compared with other empirically more decisive and theoretically more funded variables. We want to turn to these now.

5.3 Empirical model

The considerations in the theoretical part were brought together to formulate an empirically testable path model. The results in figure 5 refer to the results for the n=255 civil servants, i.e. for those employees in the courts which have the formal status of a “Beamter” without the other n=229 employees in the district courts we analysed (for the correlation matrix see the appendix).

The data analysis shows that all the relations discussed above are of high significance.

- Fairness proves to be one of the central determinants of the quality of the employment relationship – at least regarding the subjective assessment of the employees.
- Commitment, understood here as an affective attachment to the employer, also has the expected consequences.
- Opportunities to participate in decisions which concern their work sphere very strongly influence perceptions of fairness of the civil servants.
- People with challenging work tasks assess their employment relationship much better than people in jobs with poor work content.
- The relationship of the civil servants to their superiors has no direct effect on the assessment of the employment relationship, but fairness and commitment are directly influenced by the quality of the leader-member relationship.

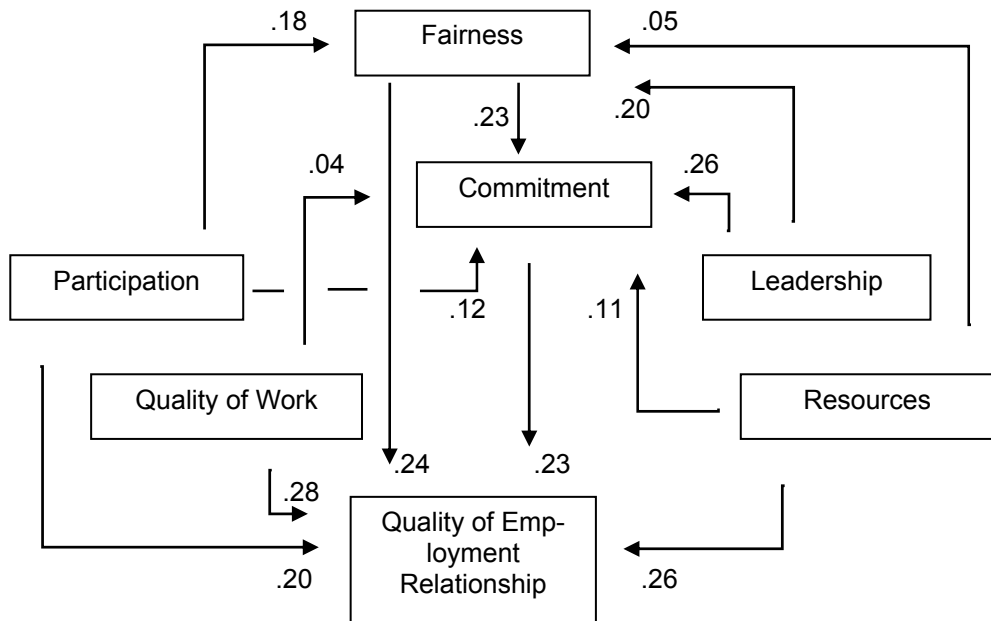
¹⁴ Which does not make sense for the civil servant sample since job security applies here.

- Perceived organisational support is an important determinant of the assessment of employment relationships.

Figure 5: The assessment of the employment relationships of civil servants.

Results of the path analysis

(Adjusted Goodness of Fit AGFI=0.85, Root Mean Square Residual RMR=0.014.)



In our theoretical considerations we could not discuss all the relationships specified in our model. Some of these relationships that we did not comment on are highly plausible (e.g. the relation between participation and the assessment of the employment relationship). We also have not explained those relationships which are, from a theoretical viewpoint, of subordinate interest (e.g. the relationship between participation and affective commitment). We instead concentrated on those relationships which have major significance in our theoretical approach. As described above, our hypotheses were confirmed quite well by the data. All three behavioural levels which we examined have considerable relevance for the question of how employees assess their employment relationship.

Some more results should be mentioned. In our parallel study of small and medium sized enterprises we used the same variables as in our study of the civil servants. So it was possible to examine whether our model proves itself also in employment relationships in the private sector. Here a very high correspondence resulted.¹⁵ The

¹⁵ This also applies to the employees in our sample of the district courts who are not civil servants in the narrower sense, i.e. who are not “Beamte”.

structure of the model is identical for the two data sets, or to say it another way: the assessment of the employment relationship follows essentially the same pattern. However there are also some peculiarities (cf. figure A1 in the appendix¹⁶):

In the case of the civil servants, the quality of the work content has a direct effect on the assessment of the employment relationship, while in the case of the employees in the private sector there is only an indirect effect (via the commitment variable). We explain this result with a *professionalism effect*. The tasks in courts require a special professional understanding which develops in the course of a demanding education and the corresponding socialization process. Accordingly the intrinsic rewards of the task have great importance.

Interestingly the challenging work in the courts has no particular effect on the organizational commitment of the civil servants. This is different in the private sector. We interpret this result as a *loyalty effect*. The commitment of the civil servants in courts is not directed to the concrete court where their workplace is located, but to the law and the democratic order. The jurisdiction requires loyalty of its servants, and compared with this, commitment to a concrete office has to come second. In addition the development of an affective commitment to the respective court is restrained because the civil servants frequently work in a specific location only for a relatively short time period.

The perceived organizational support has a strong influence on the fairness perception of the employees in the private sector. This is comprehensible because the withholding of resources (tools, information, authorities) hinders the employee in performing well and makes it difficult to satisfy the expectations of the employer. This effect cannot be observed in the sample of the civil servants, which can be explained possibly by an *autonomy effect*: the civil servants perform their challenging tasks with a high degree of independence whose quality makes a direct performance evaluation difficult. Thus the considerations of fairness which are difficult to operationalize are given less attention.

In order to interpret the results, the limits of our study have to be taken into account. So the employees in courts are only *one* (although in a certain way a prototypical) group of civil servants. Generalisations on the civil servants therefore have to be taken with provision. In addition our comparisons of the civil servants with the other employees do not take into account differences within these occupation groups. Actually civil servants with minor qualifications (e.g. clerks and bailiffs) assess their working conditions as being worse than civil servants with higher qualifications (judges and judicial officers).¹⁷ Another limitation of our analysis results from the abandonment of a detailed look at the concrete incentive structures of the occupation groups. Although it is plausible that the monetary aspect plays a minor role for civil servants, however financial disadvantages might not be completely without importance. Any-way this question deserves a more detailed analysis.

¹⁶ In adding to the model, a causal relationship between “perception of job security” and “quality of employment relationship”, the corresponding path coefficient only amounts to $p = 0.12$. This is almost irrelevant in a statistical sense.

¹⁷ However, the basic structure of our model remains stable.

Finally it should be taken into account that our explanations are based on middle-range theoretical considerations. We could not show the more fundamental behaviour mechanisms which are responsible for the assessment of an employment relationship, such as, for example, how employees cope with perceived injustices, or in what way a great social distance really affects the emotional attachment to the job. Such questions deserve a considerably greater attention than they have received so far.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the characteristics of a special employee group, starting from general considerations is a worthwhile undertaking. Therefore in this article we have presented our theoretical standpoint at some length. In addition, the work situation of a special employee group can be understood only if it is contrasted with the work situation of other employee groups. For this reason we made parallel surveys of employees in the public and the private sectors. Our empirical results show that the assessment of the quality of an employment relationship results from the interplay of experiences on all three investigated behavioural levels. Work is primarily a social relationship. From the perspective of the employees it is strongly determined by the immediate working conditions (for which the employer has to take responsibility), by the interactions in the immediate work sphere and by the personnel policies of the organization which foster or impair fairness and commitment.

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Appendix

Table A1: Job security and job satisfaction with different employee groups
(Source: Socio-Economic Panel 2005, own calculation)

Correlations job satisfaction – probability of job loss within the next 2 years			
Unskilled workers, n = 438	- 0.20	Employee without graduation, n = 424	- 0.28
Semi-skilled workers, n = 978	- 0.26	Employee with graduation, n = 897	- 0.28
Skilled workers, n = 1337	- 0.31	Employee qualified, n = 2,482	- 0.27
Foremen, n = 188	- 0.38	Employee highly qualified, n = 1,508	- 0.32
Master craftsman, n = 105	- 0.32	Executive, n = 209	- 0.44

Table A2: Correlations between the variables of the explanatory model.

\bar{x} = arithmetic mean, s_x = standard deviation. The scales can take values between 1 and 7. Number of Cases, $N = 251$ (cases vary slightly due to missing values), the items were frequently filled out incompletely for the superior relationship, the number of cases for this is only $N = 152$.

	\bar{x}	s_x	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Fairness	3.64	1.40	1.0						
2 Commitment	5.19	1.26	0.38	1.0					
3 Participation	4.03	1.04	0.31	0.39	1.0				
4 Work content	5.22	1.08	0.23	0.30	0.55	1.0			
5 Relationship with superior	5.02	1.13	0.31	0.45	0.51	0.46	1.0		
6 Support	5.46	0.92	0.20	0.32	0.47	0.40	0.41	1.0	
7 Assessment of employment relationship	4.60	1.11	0.50	0.57	0.63	0.59	0.58	0.57	1.0

Figure A1: The assessment of employment relationship by employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (Martin/Gade and Jochims 2007). Results of the path analysis

(Adjusted Goodness of Fit AGFI=0.95, Root Mean Square Residual RMR=0.015.)

