

Research Article

Explaining Organizational Pride Among Public Utility Employees

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Abstract

Organizational pride—the emotional and attitudinal attachment employees feel toward their organization—is an important yet understudied driver of job satisfaction, retention, and performance. In public utilities, where employees deliver essential services vital to community health, safety, and economic stability, organizational pride may be particularly valuable amid widespread workforce challenges, including large-scale Baby Boomer retirements and skilled-labor shortages. Drawing on social identity theory, social exchange theory, and ethical climate perspectives, this study develops and tests a model of six hypothesized antecedents of organizational pride. Using survey data from 406 employees (43% response rate) at one of the largest publicly owned utilities in the United States, the analysis uses OLS regression while controlling for supervisory status, tenure, and union membership. All six antecedents—perceived service quality, trust in top leadership, adequacy of resources and equipment, feeling valued at work, compensation satisfaction, and ethical climate—emerged as statistically significant predictors in the expected direction. The model explained 57% of the variance in organizational pride ($R^2 = .573$). Compensation satisfaction exerted the strongest influence, followed closely by perceived service quality. These findings provide strong support for the integrated theoretical framework and yield actionable implications for public utility leaders seeking to strengthen employee attachment, improve retention, and enhance organizational performance.

Keywords

Organizational Pride, Public Utilities, Social Identity Theory, Perceived Organizational Support, Ethical Climate, Employee Retention

1. Introduction

Organizational pride refers to the emotional and attitudinal-attachment employees develop toward their organization [28]. Although relatively little is known about its antecedents [13, 16, 26], research has documented several positive outcomes associated with organizational pride, including lower turnover intentions, stronger customer-service commitment, and higher

job satisfaction [1, 13, 14, 24, 34].

These benefits are especially valuable in public utilities, where employees deliver essential services critical to community health, safety, and economic vitality. Yet, utilities face substantial workforce challenges, including recruiting and retaining qualified employees amid large-scale Baby Boomer

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retirements, skilled-personnel shortages, and increasing infrastructure demands [5, 22]. In this environment, organizational pride can serve as a key psychological resource that bolsters employee attachment, fosters shared purpose, and improves retention and performance.

Despite its practical relevance, the determinants of organizational pride remain relatively unknown compared to other more established outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment [23, 27, 28]. This study addresses that gap by developing and testing a model of six potential determinants of organizational pride using survey data from more than 400 employees at one of the largest publicly owned utilities in the United States. Controlling for supervisory status, tenure, and union membership, the model explains 57% of the variance in organizational pride.

2. Theoretical Framework

Organizational pride reflects the positive attachment employees feel toward their organization and functions as a collective sentiment that fosters camaraderie, purpose, and belongingness [2]. Although the literature is still evolving, three complementary perspectives help explain why employees develop organizational pride.

First, social identity theory posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in valued groups and organizations [10, 14]. When employees perceive their organization positively—through its values, achievements, reputation, or external performance—they experience heightened self-esteem and are more likely to identify with and feel proud of the organization [13, 26, 28].

Second, an ethical organizational climate enhances pride by promoting internal legitimacy and value congruence. Employees are more likely to experience pride when they view the organization as principled, fair, and ethical in its treatment of employees [20, 33]. Ethical characteristics strengthen psychological bonds, support self-worth, and make identification with the organization morally rewarding [9, 17, 28].

Third, perceived organizational support (POS) and social exchange theory emphasize reciprocity. Employees develop stronger attachment when they believe the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being [4, 8, 18]. Fair compensation, recognition, and the provision of necessary tools and resources signal care and respect, thereby elevating identification and pride [7, 25, 30].

Collectively, these perspectives suggest that organizational pride will be higher among employees who (a) believe their organization delivers high-quality services, (b) trust top leadership, (c) have the equipment and resources needed to perform their job effectively, (d) feel valued and respected at work, (e) are satisfied with compensation and benefits, and (f) perceive a strong ethical climate.

3. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Perceived service quality (external performance)

Public utilities exist to deliver reliable, high-quality services to the community. Social identity theory predicts that employee pride is closely tied to perceptions of organizational performance. When employees view their organization as competent and positively regarded by customers and the public, pride increases because those perceptions enhance organizational status and employees experience greater self-esteem [13, 14].

Hypothesis 1. Employee ratings of the utility's overall service quality to external customers are positively related to organizational pride.

Trust in top leadership (leadership credibility)

Credible leadership signals organizational competence and direction, fostering security and stronger identification. In public organizations especially, leadership trust is intertwined with reputation and legitimacy [32]. Empirical research confirms that visionary and responsible leadership enhance pride, often through trust mechanisms [6, 15].

Hypothesis 2. Confidence and trust in top leadership are positively related to organizational pride.

Resources/equipment (work enablement)

Employees are more likely to feel proud of their organization when the organization equips them to do their jobs effectively and safely. In utilities, where performance and safety often hinge on proper tools, equipment, and adequate staffing, having the necessary resources conveys organizational capability and support—conditions that strengthen identification and pride [32].

Hypothesis 3. Employee perceptions that they have the necessary equipment and resources to do their job well are positively related to organizational pride.

Feeling valued (internal respect)

Feeling valued is an internal-respect cue. When employees believe they are respected and appreciated, they experience greater belongingness and emotional attachment, which can strengthen pride in membership [12].

Hypothesis 4. Employees who feel valued at work will report higher organizational pride.

Compensation satisfaction (valued returns; POS/social exchange)

From a social exchange perspective, satisfaction with pay and benefits reflects perceived reciprocity. Fair, competitive compensation signals that the organization values employees' contributions and is willing to invest in their well-being, thereby strengthening organizational attachment and willingness to express pride [29]. This may be especially salient in public utilities, where employees can benchmark their compensation against private-sector opportunities.

Hypothesis 5. Employee satisfaction with the compensation package (pay and benefits) is positively related to organizational pride.

Ethical values and integrity (ethical climate)

Perceptions of organizational integrity enhance moral legitimacy and value congruence. Employees who see consistent ethical behavior in internal dealings are more likely to identify proudly with the organization [20, 33].

Hypothesis 6. Employee perceptions that the utility promotes and applies ethical values and integrity when dealing with employees are positively related to organizational pride.

Controls and group differences

To account for differences in work experience and organizational positioning, the model includes three controls: supervisory status (1 = non-supervisory; 2 = supervisory/management), tenure (1 = 0-10 years; 2 = 11+ years), and union status (1 = union member; 2 = non-union).

4. Data and Measures

To test the hypotheses, we used data from a November 2025 survey administered by an independent research firm to 955 employees of one of the largest publicly owned utilities in the United States, serving over 200,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers. Employees were assured of anonymity, and utility officials had no access to individual responses. The survey yielded 406 completed questionnaires (43% response rate). Sample demographics closely matched the workforce profile, with one exception: union members were underrepresented in the sample. To address this, the sample data

were statistically weighted to bring the proportions of union and nonunion employees into alignment with the utility's overall workforce profile. All analyses reported below use the weighted data.

Employees responded to survey questions using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree/very dissatisfied to 5 = strongly agree/very satisfied). Organizational pride was measured with the single item "I am proud to tell people I work for this utility." Compared to measures that use multiple items, single-item measures have been shown to demonstrate strong validity and reliability for attitudinal constructs [3, 11, 21, 31].

5. Results

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables appear in Table 2, and collinearity statistics are displayed in Table 3. Tests for multicollinearity showed that no pair of independent variables was correlated above .58, and the regression of each independent variable on all remaining independent variables revealed no coefficient of determination (R^2) above .51. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.205 to 2.022, and tolerance values varied between .494 to .830. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.978. According to Lewis-Beck and Lewis-Beck [19], these findings suggest that multicollinearity and autocorrelation are not significant concerns in this study.

Table 1. Definitions of Variables Used in the Study.

Variables	Survey Question/Statement Used to Define Variable
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Organizational pride	I am proud to tell people that I work for this utility.
<i>Independent Variables</i>	
Equipment and resources	I have the necessary equipment and resources to do my job well.
Valued at work	I feel I am valued at work.
Top leadership	I have confidence and trust in the President-CEO.
Ethical climate/integrity	The organization promotes & applies good ethical values and integrity when dealing with employees.
Service quality	How would you rate the overall quality of services the organization provides to its customers?
Compensation	Overall, how satisfied are you with your total compensation package (pay and benefits)?
<i>Control Variables</i>	
Supervisory status	(1 = non-supervisory; 2 = supervisory/management)
Tenure	(1 = 0-10 years; 2 = 11 or more years)
Union status	(1 = union member; 2 = non-union member)

Note: Variables were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 ("very dissatisfied") to 5 ("very satisfied") or 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") or 1 ("very poor") to (5 "very good"), depending on the question.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Study Variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Equipment and resources	4.00	.98	—									
2. Valued at work	3.79	1.22	.41	—								
3. Top leadership	3.61	1.09	.43	.49	—							
4. Ethical climate/integrity	3.65	1.07	.40	.58	.58	—						
5. Service quality	4.15	.77	.40	.54	.56	.50	—					
6. Compensation	3.61	1.10	.42	.51	.55	.46	.48	—				
7. Supervisory status	1.25	.44	.13	.15	.22	.15	.18	.25	—			
8. Tenure	1.43	.50	.01	-.14	-.13	-.17	-.17	-.07	.31	—		
9. Union status	1.50	.50	.24	.27	.37	.23	.28	.37	.42	.06	—	
10. Organizational pride	3.80	1.12	.45	.58	.59	.55	.54	.59	.23	-.17	.40	—

N = 406

Note: The absolute value of correlations >.13 are significant at <.05 level (two-tailed tests).

Table 3. Collinearity Statistics.

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Equipment and resources	.723	1.384
Valued at work	.554	1.805
Top leadership	.514	1.945
Ethical climate/integrity	.494	2.022
Service quality	.525	1.905
Compensation	.605	1.653
Supervisory status	.714	1.400
Tenure	.830	1.205
Union status	.707	1.415

Durbin-Watson = 1.978

OLS regression tested the six predictors while controlling for supervisory status, tenure, and union membership. Both standardized (B) and unstandardized (b) coefficients are reported. The model explained 57% of the variance in organizational pride ($R^2 = .573$; adjusted $R^2 = .561$). Moreover, all six predictors were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction.

Table 4. Regression Results.

Variables	Standardized Coefficients (B)	Unstandardized Coefficients (b)	Probability*
Equipment and resources	.085	.094	.046
Valued at work	.141	.123	.004
Top leadership	.145	.146	.004
Ethical climate/integrity	.116	.115	.024
Service quality	.188	.261	.001

Variables	Standardized Coefficients (B)	Unstandardized Coefficients (b)	Probability*
Compensation	.196	.195	.001
Supervisory status	.066	.163	.121
Tenure	-.124	-.270	.002
Union status	.107	.229	.013
Intercept		.100	.710

N = 406 R² = .573 Adjusted R² = .561 F = 48.869 Probability = .001

*Two-tail probability

Dependent variable: Organizational pride

Control variables: Supervisory status, Tenure, Union status

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the primary drivers of organizational pride among public utility employees and to assess their relative strength within a single integrated model. Results strongly supported the social identity and social exchange perspectives: pride was highest when employees perceived valued returns (compensation), strong external performance (service quality), credible leadership, an ethical climate, and support cues (feeling valued and adequate resources).

Compensation satisfaction emerged as the strongest driver of organizational pride. Employees who expressed higher satisfaction with pay and benefits reported substantially higher pride. This pattern is consistent with perceived organizational support and social exchange logic: employees interpret compensation and benefits as tangible evidence that the organization values them and will uphold the employment relationship, thereby strengthening attachment and pride in membership. In the public utility context, where employees can compare compensation to private-sector alternatives, compensation appears to be a particularly salient indicator of organizational respect and support.

Perceived service quality also exerted a strong positive effect on organizational pride, underscoring that external perceptions of organizational performance can shape internal identity and pride. Consequently, utilities should consider assessing customer perceptions of utility performance through probability-based customer surveys and communicating those results internally, so employees have an accurate sense of community evaluations rather than relying on a limited number of customer encounters or hearsay.

Leadership trust and ethical climate were likewise significant, indicating that employees take pride in organizations they view as both well led and morally sound. For utility leaders, this implies that pride is built not only through leadership competence, but also through consistency, fairness, and transparency in decision-making—especially in matters that affect

employees. This finding underscores the importance of conducting employee surveys that include questions about organizational leadership performance, confidence and trust, competence, and ethical behavior on a regular basis and sharing the results with employees.

Finally, the day-to-day support variables—feeling valued and resource adequacy—were significant but smaller in magnitude. These findings suggest that employee recognition programs and targeted investments in equipment and resources can signal organizational appreciation and support, thereby elevating pride.

The control variables offered additional insight. Longer-tenured employees reported lower pride levels, which may reflect cohort differences (e.g., greater initial enthusiasm among newer employees), accumulated frustrations (e.g., limited upward mobility, perceived inequities, chronically poor leadership), or other unmeasured features of long-term employment. Union members also reported lower pride than non-union employees, suggesting that labor-management relations may be an important area for expanded study in future models.

Practical implications

Several practical implications follow directly from the model:

- 1) Compensation Strategy: Clearly Communicate the Rationale for Pay and Benefit Decisions and Address Internal Equity Concerns Transparently.
- 2) Service Quality Communication: Share Customer Satisfaction Survey Results Internally.
- 3) Leadership and Ethics: Invest in Leadership Communication and Procedural Transparency; Reinforce Integrity Norms and Ensure Policies Are Applied Consistently.
- 4) Respect and Enablement: Expand Recognition Practices and Eliminate Equipment and Resource Barriers That Hinder Employee Performance.

Limitations and future research

This study's design is cross-sectional, so causal inferences should be made cautiously. Moreover, the data come from a single public utility, which limits the generalizability of the findings to investor-owned or cooperative utilities and to other regions. While the single-item pride measure performed well,

future studies could consider using a multi-item scale.

7. Conclusion

Public utility employees feel proudest when they perceive valued returns (compensation), strong external performance (service quality), credible leadership, an ethical climate, and regular signals of respect and enablement (feeling valued and having adequate resources). These results demonstrate that organizational pride is shaped by both identity-relevant cues about status and legitimacy and exchange-based cues about support.

For utility leaders facing recruitment and retention challenges, the central takeaway from this study is that organizational pride is not a “soft” outcome; rather, it reflects concrete, manageable organizational conditions. Targeted improvements in compensation strategy, leadership credibility, ethical consistency, service quality visibility, and the provision of the tools and resources employees need can meaningfully strengthen organizational pride.

Abbreviations

POS Perceived Organizational Support

Author Contributions

Mark Ellickson: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft

Terry Stone: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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