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Fairness: From the Viewpoint of Systems for Converting to  
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Orientation

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Discussion Paper Series

# Study on Determinants of Part-Time Workers' Sense of Fairness: From the Viewpoint of Systems for Converting to Regular Employees and Part-Time Workers' Career Orientation

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## **Abstract**

This paper examined the relationships between mechanisms for converting to regular employees and the sense of fairness while also considering non-regular workers' career-related awareness. The data utilized in this research is from a survey conducted in January 2015, which was contracted to an online survey company. This research is limited to the analysis of part-time workers employed at food supermarkets and systems for converting to regular employees(N=120).To verify the hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was performed with sense of fairness as the dependent variable. As a result, among the organizational variables that had no direct effects, it was confirmed that the three points of role models, conversion conditions, and enrichment of procedures had interacted with intention for converting to regular employees.

## 1. Introduction

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' 2014 Labour Force Survey, non-regular workers comprised 37.2% of all employed workers. Regular employees are being increasingly replaced with non-regular workers. The trend of non-regular workers becoming a core part of the labor force, substantively and qualitatively, is worsening problems of disparities between regular employees and non-regular workers, especially issues of equal treatment. Accordingly, steady legislative responses have been drafted to redress the disparities in wages, education, and training between regular employees and non-regular workers. For instance, parts of the Labor Contracts Act were revised in 2014, wherein legislation was created regarding the following: Conversion to a Labor Contract without a Fixed Term (Article 18), Legal Designation of Principles on Dismissal (Article 19), and Prohibition of Unreasonable Labor Conditions (Article 20). Going forward, when a corporation repeatedly renews a non-regular worker's labor contract with a fixed term for a total of five years, the corporation must convert the non-regular worker's labor contract to one without a fixed term (in other words, that of a regular employee).

These legal reforms aimed at redressing unfair treatment given to non-regular workers are a type of legal intervention inducing corporations to redesign their treatment structures. Specifically, it is likely that corporations will be required to create mechanisms for ensuring smooth movement of non-regular workers (employed with fixed terms) to regular employees (without fixed terms). This conversion to regular employment promises not only improved treatment but also guaranteed employment until retirement. Converting non-regular workers to regular employees may impose new costs on corporations, such as increased personnel expenses, more rigid personnel assignment, and more difficult employment adjustment. This has necessitated the creation of a new employment category called "limited regular employee." This employment category is for employment contracts without fixed terms. In exchange for reduced employment security, certain additional restrictions are placed on the characteristic working methods of the so-called "regular employees," who can do anything, go anywhere, and work at any time.

The various meetings of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) have been the driving force behind considering these limited regular employees (MHLW, 2012). It is likely that more corporations will create the new "limited regular employee" category—buffering the division between non-regular workers and regular employees—and put in place systems for converting from non-regular workers to limited regular employees.

However, establishing the new limited regular employee category, and introducing a mechanism for ensuring smooth movement conversion to regular employees might change the internal order of the organization and impact the employees' perception of fairness in various ways. In other words, this may make evident issues of balanced treatment from new conflict axes—for example, "limited regular employees vs. regular employees" in addition to the traditional division of "regular employees vs. non-regular workers."

However, almost no research has been conducted on mechanisms for converting to regular employees and non-regular workers' sense of fairness. The field of scholarly research on organizational justice has elucidated mechanisms by which people feel senses of acceptance and fairness. Still, research in the field of organizational justice theory has not necessarily reflected the aforementioned social problems in terms of awareness of the issues, and has no direct implications in the re-designing of corporate personnel systems. Based on this awareness of the issues, this paper will examine the relationships between mechanisms for converting to regular

employees and the sense of fairness while also considering non-regular workers' career-related awareness.

## **2. Review of prior research**

### **2.1 Issue of equal treatment to non-regular workers**

This paper will focus on the employment category of “limited regular employee” and mechanisms for converting to regular employees. How do so-called “regular employees” and “limited regular employees” differ? Sato (2012) names four standards that identify so-called “regular employees,” focusing on the comprehensive, unlimited aspects of their ways of working: 1) No limits on their duties, 2) No limits on the offices or work locations where they are assigned, 3) Overtime work, and 4) Full-time work. The regular employee category meets these four standards based on the presupposition of employment with no fixed term. The limited regular employee category does not meet one or more of these standards, and includes limitations placed on type of occupation, working hours (short-term or full-time work with no overtime), work location, etc.

Considering this focus on limited regular employees, research has been conducted on the relationships between the personnel affairs policy and non-regular workers' satisfaction with regard to issues of equal treatment. For example, according to Shimanuki (2007), it has been demonstrated that if non-regular workers are a qualitative core of the labor force to a large degree, the introduction of a system for converting to regular employees and equal treatment boosts the degree of satisfaction non-regular workers feel regarding their wages. In addition, Okunishi (2008) conducted an exploratory analysis on the determinants for the degree of acceptance that non-regular workers feel regarding the disparities between their wages and those of regular employees.

### **2-2. Research on organizational justice**

The organizational justice framework is the key concept in research on fairness of treatment. It is categorized into distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, etc. “Distributive justice” refers to whether or not distribution results are fair when rare resources are divided between employees. In other words, this is an issue of employees' perception of fairness—whether or not the results are fair when remuneration is divided among employees, such as wages, bonuses, and promotions. According to the equity theory of Adams (1963), the representative advocate of distributive justice, individuals first compare their own circumstances with those of other people—the subjects of comparison. At that time, if an individual perceives that his or her degree of contribution (input) and received remuneration (outcome) are in equilibrium with those of other people, he or she feels the distribution is fair. In contrast, if the individual feels that his or her remuneration is low and not in line with his or her efforts and results, the individual feels a sense of unfairness. In this way, a sense of fairness is formed by comparing and considering whether one is receiving suitable treatment as per the level of contribution and remuneration compared to others.

Meanwhile, “procedural justice” (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1980) refers to the sense of fairness regarding decision-making procedures. It signifies whether fair measures, methods, and decision-making processes are utilized for all sorts of decisions regarding personnel affairs and treatment, such as wage determination, employment, promotions, raising status, discipline, and resignation. According to Leventhal (1980), procedural justice is based on six standards:

consistence, bias suppression, accuracy, correctness, representativeness, and ethicality. It has been demonstrated that a higher perception of procedural justice means employees have a lower intention to leave their jobs or stay absent, etc., which also results in positive organizational actions such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Ogan & Ryan, 1995; Colquitt, et al., 2001; Conlon, Meyer, & Nowakowski, 2005).

Attempts are being made to apply procedural justice research to human resources management. For example, Morishima (1997) summarizes three personnel affairs policies for enhancing procedural justice: disclosure of information, handling of complaints, and statements. Morishima clarified that if these three procedures are suitably performed, employees feel less dissatisfaction when they are not promoted or their status is not raised. In addition, Shimanuki (2007) focused on the disparities between non-regular workers and regular employees, empirically showing that non-regular workers' wage-related satisfaction, under certain conditions, can be improved by having a system in place for converting them to regular employees and ensuring equal treatment.

### **2-3. Potential dysfunctions in having a system in place for converting to regular employees**

However, it is not always the case that the introduction of a system for converting to regular employees increases non-regular workers' sense of fairness. Yogo (2014) argues that the introduction of such a system can conversely decrease non-regular workers' sense of fairness. Similarly, Hirano (2015) demonstrates that the introduction of such a system actually decreases the sense of fairness for non-regular workers that accept the restrictive nature of organizational circumstances, such as job relocation.

As referred to by Shimanuki (2007) and Okunishi (2008), whether one feels a sense of justice is stipulated by the subject of comparison. According to Ambrose et al. (1991), people tend to use as subjects of comparison other persons who have similar attributes and persons with whom they frequently interact. According to the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), people do not merely accept responses from others in a passive way. Rather, they have the desire to appraise their own various aspects through comparisons with others. Relative deprivation (Merton & Rossi, 1957; Ishida, 2015)—that can be described as the theoretical basis for the equity theory—says that an individual's response to an experience cannot be predicted from the absolute properties of the experience itself (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Individuals make judgments about circumstances not from an absolute point of view, but through comparisons with surrounding conditions. They may be dissatisfied even with objectively desirable circumstances, or conversely may feel happy even in environments that seem inferior at first glance. This theory is particularly persuasive when explaining actions such as uprisings and political violence (Moore, 1978; Muller, 1979). It also holds great significance in terms of justice psychology (Lind & Tyler, 1988). According to Ishida (2015), male laborers in Japan decide on subjects of comparison based on work standards when determining if income is high or low. As this research suggests, if the subject of comparison is changed, a perspective of treatment that previously seemed fair can be completely changed into a sense of unfairness.

Judging from the above theories, non-regular workers will mainly use other non-regular workers as the subjects of comparison. However, with the introduction of a system of converting them to regular employees, non-regular workers' subjects of comparison are switched to regular employees, which may create an increased sense of unfairness (Hirano, 2015). This hypothesis says that the subject of comparison is changed. Yogo (2013) investigates the negative aspects of having a system for converting to regular systems from a viewpoint that differs from the changed

subject of comparison hypothesis—namely, the “frustration effect” hypothesis. It is discussed in organizational justice-related research that when remuneration is not suitably distributed, people’s sense of fairness actually decreases if procedural justice is enhanced. Folger (1977) calls this phenomenon the “frustration effect.” In other words, mechanisms to boost procedural justice—such as the disclosure of information and handling of complaints—are effective if remuneration is sufficiently high to begin with, or if it is expected that treatment will improve in the future. However, if this does not include fair distribution results, there are cases in which the procedural justice policy is perceived negatively by non-regular workers as simply deception or a way to release pressure.

Altogether, existing research has regarded systems for converting to regular employees as mechanisms for increasing non-regular workers’ sense of fairness, but there is no generality or universality. Under certain conditions, such systems may turn dysfunctional by conversely degrading non-regular workers’ sense of fairness. Therefore, it is necessary to first examine the real state of these systems in detail, and then analyze their impacts on non-regular workers’ sense of fairness.

### **3. Deriving an analysis framework and hypotheses**

This paper will conduct an exploratory analysis of the compatibility conditions by focusing on systems for converting to regular employees (organizational factors) and non-regular workers’ career-related awareness (individual factor) as determinants in employees’ sense of fairness, particularly distributive justice.

First, let us focus on three facts regarding systems for converting to regular employees (organizational factors): 1) Existence of role models, 2) Strictness of conversion conditions and perception of these conditions, and 3) Procedural enrichment of converting systems. In terms of non-regular workers’ individual aspects, let us also focus on whether or not non-regular workers have a career orientation wherein they hope to become regular employees. The rationale for deriving the hypothesis is as follows.

First, as existing research suggests, systems for converting to regular employees can turn dysfunctional. However, what are the specific conditions under which these dysfunctions are exposed? The first is whether employees perceive these systems as being substantially dysfunctional, as implied by the frustration effect. If there are few actual cases of non-regular workers converting to regular employees, or when there are actual cases but the conversion procedures are opaque, one cannot say that the system is functional. One also cannot say it is functional if, after conversion, the employee is subject to difficult labor conditions that are vastly different from the employee’s previous style of working. In such circumstances, it is possible that the system for converting to regular employees will actually increase the non-regular workers’ sense of unfairness. Accordingly, one must consider three aspects to perceive the true nature of such a system, rather than the simple dichotomization of whether or not a system exists.

The first condition is the existence of role models that have converted from non-regular workers to regular employees. Role models represent an individual’s ideal or potential self-based on the individual’s developmental desires and objectives (Gibson, 2003; Ibarra, 1999; Oikawa, Sakurai, 2006). For instance, in the context of promoting active participation by women, female employees demonstrate greater self-efficacy regarding promotion at workplaces with several female manager role models (Koizumi, Park, Hirano, 2013). It is expected that the same apply to

non-regular workers. Similarly, the existence of role models as examples of non-regular workers that have converted to regular employees increases the system's substantial qualities. The following hypothesis is accordingly derived.

Hypothesis 1. If there are role models as examples for converting to regular employees, the distributive sense of fairness is greater

The second organizational factor is the actual strictness of conversion conditions and non-regular workers' perception of these conditions. Hirano (2009), from the viewpoint of transaction cost, points out that rational employment categories differ according to the degree of restriction accepted by employees. If employees are placed under restrictions according to the organization's convenience—such as being asked to move for job transfers to suit the organization's convenience, or assignment conversion of a different occupation type—managers must treat the applicable employee as a regular employee and provide more employment security.

Here, the types of restraints imposed by organizations on regular employees can be categorized as follows: 1) Time, 2) Work locations, and 3) Type of occupation. A non-regular worker must accept such restraints when he or she is converted to a regular employee, and it is possible that these will become psychological barriers for the non-regular worker. The non-regular worker recognizes the conversion hurdles as higher according to the stricter conditions requested for the conversion, or the greater perception by the non-regular worker of these conditions as strict. Consequently, it is expected that non-regular workers will perceive the system for converting to regular employees as one that lacks substantial qualities, which will negatively impact their sense of fairness. Hypotheses 2-1 and 2-2 below are based on this.

Hypothesis 2-1. Stricter conversion conditions lower the distributive sense of fairness

Hypothesis 2-2. Greater perception of conversion difficulty lowers the distributive sense of fairness

The third organizational factor is the enrichment of procedures associated with the system of converting to regular employees. In general, procedural justice has positive effects on distributive justice as well. However, the distributive sense of fairness decreases if these procedures are opaque. Specifically, it is expected that the sense of fairness increases with the introduction of personnel affairs policies, such as the disclosure of information and provision of opportunities for formal objection. The following hypothesis is based on the prediction that the same applies to the system of converting to regular employees.

Hypothesis 3. Enriching procedures associated with the system of converting to regular employees increases the distributive sense of fairness

Lastly, this paper will focus on non-regular workers' career-related awareness as an individual factor. When discussing issues of equal treatment, it is particularly important to focus on non-regular workers called "reluctant non-regular workers." These laborers are employed as non-regular workers due to lack of regular employment. It is thought that reluctant non-regular workers have a strong desire for conversion to regular employees. Therefore, it is important to consider the strength of non-regular workers' personal intention for conversion to regular



employees.

Career aspirations can be divided into “will” and “can” (Hirano, 1999). Among these, “can” may be considered alternatively in Hypothesis 2-2 as a perception of the difficulty of conversion systems. Accordingly, the focus here is placed on non-regular workers’ intention to become regular employees. It seems likely that non-regular workers with a strong intention to become regular employees will frequently use regular employees as the subjects of comparison. However, these workers are still non-regular workers; therefore, they are treated differently from regular employees. Thus, it is expected that this will negatively affect the sense of fairness regarding the system. Hypothesis 4 below is based on this.

Hypothesis 4. A stronger intention by non-regular workers for conversion to regular employees will lower the distributive sense of fairness

Non-regular workers’ intention for conversion may impact the compatibility relationship between the organizational and individual factors as described above; considering the interrelationship between individuals and organizations is essential. For instance, non-regular workers that hope to become regular employees are greatly interested in the systems of converting to regular employees. However, these systems may not be particularly significant if they are satisfied with their current ways of working as non-regular workers. In this research, there are three organizational aspects: 1) Role models, 2) Strictness of conversion conditions (or perception of these conditions), and 3) Procedural enrichment. All of these depend on the non-regular worker’s intention for conversion, and they may impact his or her sense of fairness. Specifically, if the worker has a strong intention for conversion, it is expected that organizational factors will have more significant effects on his or her sense of fairness. The following hypothesis is based on this.

Hypothesis 5. A strong intention by non-regular workers for conversion to regular employees will increase the effects of organizational factors on the distributive sense of fairness.

#### **4. Data and variables**

The data utilized in this research is from a survey conducted in January 2015, which was contracted to an online survey company. Information about the survey was sent to the company’s monitor members, asking them to respond by filling out the survey online. The respondents answered all survey questions only if they met specific conditions.

Here, “certain conditions” refers to the fact that this survey was only for respondents that met two conditions, in order to extract sample attributes that were in line with the objectives of this research: 1) He or she is a part-time worker, and 2) His or her workplace is a retail store. Among these, this research is limited to the analysis of part-time workers employed at food supermarkets and systems for converting to regular employees (N=120). It is thought that there is a relatively high ratio of non-regular workers in the food supermarket industry compared to other industries, and equal treatment issues are easily exposed. Some say that online questionnaire-type surveys are more biased in terms of respondents than a random sampling; however, this method was utilized because it was an exploratory survey based on the awareness of issues described above.

From distributive justice, “sense of fairness” based on the equity principle was chosen as the dependent variable. Specifically, this is the combined variable ( $\alpha=.898$ ) of three items: “There is

equilibrium in my work results and treatment,” “My pay and treatment are of a reasonable level compared to other companies in the same industry,” and “My pay and treatment are in line with my work efforts.” Deutsch (1975) points out the existence of three types of principles against the backdrop of forming a sense of fairness regarding distribution, mainly equity principle, equality principle, and need principle. This research focuses on the equity principle—the perception of fairness regarding whether one is receiving sufficient remuneration for one’s contributions, based on the presupposition of comparisons with other people.

The independent variables are role model dummy, conversion conditions, perception of conversion difficulty (reverse scale), and conversion procedural justice, which are determinants on the organization side; intention for conversion to regular employee is termed as an individual factor. The role model dummy is a dummy variable with a value of 1 if the respondent answered “Yes” to the question, “Have any of the non-regular workers in your surrounding environment converted to regular employees?” Conversion condition is a composite variable made with a simple calculation of six dummy variables (0, 1) for the question, “Are conditions such as those below currently required by the company to work as a regular employee?” 1) Full-time work, 2) Irregular working hours, 3) Consent to job transfers that involve moving at the time of conversion, 4) Consent to the possibility of job transfers that involve moving, 5) Consent to type of occupation change at the time of the conversion, and 6) Consent to the possibility of type of occupation change in the future.

The perception of degree of conversion difficulty is a composite variable ( $\alpha=.672$ ) consisting of three items: “I can become a regular employee at this company in the future,” “(R) I doubt I can become a regular employee no matter how hard I work,” and “(R) There is no work for regular employees as an extension of my current work.” The “(R)” at the beginning of the questions is the reverse scale, which will be corrected at the time of analysis. For this variable, the higher the score, the greater the perception that conversion is easy. This signifies that there is low perception of conversion difficulty. When interpreting the results, caution is necessary in judging whether influences of this variable are positive or negative.

Lastly, conversion procedural justice is a composite variable of the items ( $\alpha=.528$ ): “The selection process for promotion to regular employee is fully disclosed,” “(R) There is an atmosphere where I cannot express myself even if I am dissatisfied with whether promotion to regular employee is permitted,” “(R) The mechanisms of the converting to regular employees system are partial to certain employees,” “(R) The rules for determining promotion to regular employee are frequently changed, so they are inconsistent,” “Onsite employee comments are fully reflected in the promotion of non-regular workers to regular employees,” and “If there are issues with the rules for determining promotion to regular employee, they can be corrected.”

The intention of part-time workers to become regular employees is a composite variable consisting of three items: ( $\alpha=.886$ ): “I would like to be more active in the future as a regular employee,” “I want to do a good job and become a regular employee,” and “(R) I want to work at my current pace without becoming a regular employee.”

The control variables are age, female (dummy), and “has children” (dummy) to control for these impacts. Interactions corresponding to Hypothesis 5 are created by centering them and then multiplying them with each variable.

## 5. Results

To verify the hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was performed with sense of fairness

as the dependent variable. First, regarding organizational factors for sense of fairness from hypotheses 1 to 3, a positively significant relationship was obtained only for conversion procedural justice. Hypothesis 3 was supported, while hypotheses 1 and 2 were rejected. For Hypothesis 4, which focused on individual intention regarding conversion, the coefficient was significant in a negative way. This supported the hypothesis. For Hypothesis 5, which focused on interactions, three of the four interactions were significant. Therefore, the hypothesis was generally supported.

**Table 1. Multiple regression analysis regarding sense of fairness determinants**

independent variable	dependent variable	distributive justice_ equity
Age		-.103
Female dummy		.008
Child dummy		.006
●Role model dummy		.073
●Conversion condision		-.128
●Perception of conversion difficulty (R)		-.052
●Conversion procedural justice		.345 ***
○Intension for conversion		-.285 *
Interaction_ Role model*Intension		.216 †
Interaction_ condision*Intension		-.254 **
Interaction_ difficulty*Intension		-.022
Interaction_ procedural*Intension		.206 *
R <sup>2</sup>		.230
Adj R <sup>2</sup>		.143
F value		2.660 **

†; p <.10, \*; p <.05, \*\*; p<.01, \*\*\*; p<.001

## 6. Discussion

First, regarding hypotheses 1 and 2, no impacts were observed on the sense of fairness regarding the existence of role models, difficulty of conversion, or perception of this difficulty. In other words, the existence of role models is not a direct factor in boosting non-regular workers' sense of fairness. According to the supported Hypothesis 3, with the enrichment of procedures regarding conversion, the sense of fairness increases. These results once again verified the results of procedural justice pointed out by Leventhal (1980) and Morishima (1997)—the disclosure of information and bias suppression—from the system for converting to regular employees context. These procedures must be fully ensured in the operation of conversion systems as well.

Hypothesis 4 was supported as an individual factor. It was confirmed that the sense of fairness decreases more for non-regular workers who want to use conversion systems to become regular employees. For non-regular workers who wish to be converted to regular employees, the subject of comparison is easily changed and frustration is evident. Yet, this is said to indicate dissatisfaction regarding the distribution results, in which one has not successfully converted to a regular employee. These results also conform to the theory of relative deprivation. In other words, when there are mechanisms for promotion to regular employees, non-regular workers with a strong intention for conversion to regular employees are actually not having their hopes fulfilled,

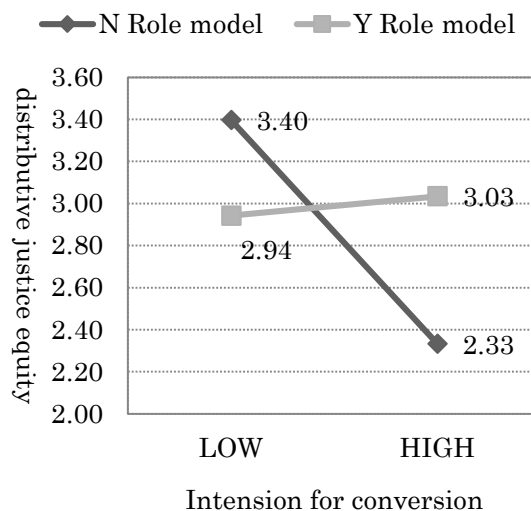
frequently leading to a sense of unfairness.

In addition, among the organizational variables that had no direct effects, it was confirmed that the three points of role models, conversion conditions, and enrichment of procedures had interacted with intention for conversion. There is a 10% level of significance regarding interactions between role models and conversion-related intentions, showing a positive relationship. According to Figure 1—in which each independent variable was divided into average value  $\pm$  standard deviation and applied to a regression equation (the same is true for Figures 2 and 3)—conversion-related intention has a negative impact only when there are no conversion role models. In other words, having conversion role models can mitigate the negative effects of conversion-related intention. This explains the mechanisms of influence on sense of fairness involving changed subjects of comparison. If there are employees in the surrounding environment who have been converted, they become the subjects of comparison for non-regular workers. This suggests that non-regular workers perceive the system as fair compared to the case in which regular employees have always been the subjects of comparison.

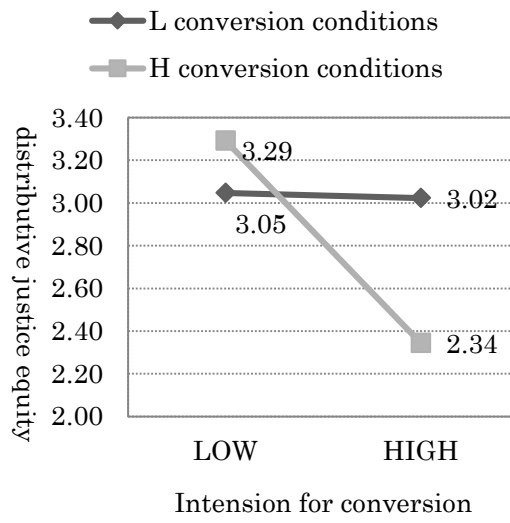
Regarding the strictness of conversion conditions as well, conversion-related intention can relieve the sense of unfairness if the conditions are not strict. The relaxation of conversion conditions directly contributes to an improved sense of fairness, which indicates the significance of limited regular-employee systems with limited restrictions. Compatibility with legislation has been the main driving force for limited regular-employee systems up until now. However, considering the career orientation of employees, these systems proactively contribute to the sense of fairness held by non-regular workers. In other words, if non-regular workers are subjected to conversion conditions with high hurdles, there is the risk that the system for converting to regular employees will become a dead shell and frustration will grow.

Finally, interactions were also confirmed regarding procedural justice. Procedural enrichment has a main effect (Hypothesis 3) and significant impacts. It should not be merely intended as deception or a method of releasing complaints. If a system for converting to regular employees exists to enhance non-regular workers' sense of fairness according to a plan, there must be past results from the usage of this system (cultivation of role models), as well as substantial and pragmatic procedural enrichment to relax the conversion conditions.

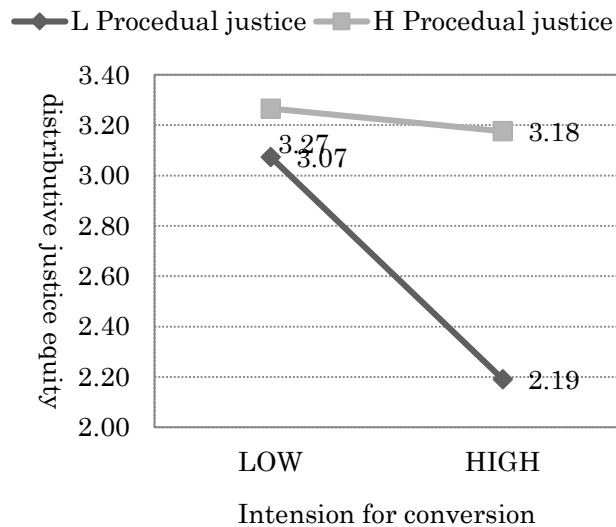
**Figure 1. Interactions between conversion-related intention and role models**



**Figure 2. Interactions between conversion-related intention and conversion conditions**



**Figure 3. Interactions between conversion-related intention and procedural justice**



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