


Organisational justice, support and cynicism: A moderated mediation model of organisational citizenship behaviour in South African workplaces

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Orientation: Organisational success not only demands effective employee performance but also requires discretionary contributions beyond formal job responsibilities.

Research purpose: This study uncovers the interplay between perceived organisational justice (POJ), support and cynicism in shaping organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

Motivation for the study: Understanding what motivates employees to exceed job expectations is vital for fostering an effective workforce. This study examines the psychological factors influencing OCB in South Africa, highlighting how justice perceptions and social exchange relationships affect discretionary behaviour.

Research approach/design and method: Rooted in social exchange theory, a moderated mediation model was tested using survey data from 740 South African employees.

Main findings: The findings empirically support an indirect relationship between POJ and organisational behaviour. This relationship is mediated by organisational cynicism and moderated by perceived organisational support. Employees who saw their employers as highly supportive reacted more cynically to perceived injustice, leading to a greater decrease in OCB. In contrast, fair treatment and perceived support enhanced OCB by reducing cynicism.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisations should foster perceptions of fairness and supportive leadership to build high-quality social exchange relationships, thereby enhancing OCB and overall organisational effectiveness.

Contribution/value-add: The study advances the literature on organisational behaviour by offering vital, context-specific insights for cultivating collaborative workplaces in developing countries such as South Africa. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate forces that shape employee behaviour and the achievement of organisational goals.

Keywords: organisational citizenship behaviour; organisational cynicism; perceived organisational justice; perceived organisational support; social exchange theory; South Africa.

Introduction

Organisational success is no longer defined solely by formal job performance. It is also heavily reliant on employees' willingness to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) to achieve strategic goals (Gogia et al., 2024). Since its conceptualisation by Organ (1988), OCB has been linked to enhanced organisational effectiveness and performance (Haass et al., 2023). Despite its acknowledged importance, a critical research void exists in our global understanding of this phenomenon. A systematic review by Worku and Debela (2024) highlighted a scarcity of OCB-related research conducted in the African context. This gap is not merely academic; it represents a major oversight that limits the development of culturally relevant management practices and interventions. Worku and Debela (2024) further identified a need to move beyond attitudinal factors such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which have dominated the organisational behaviour literature, to explore more refined and context-specific antecedents of OCB. Responding to these gaps, this study explores the relationship between employee perceptions of organisational justice (POJ) and OCB in South Africa. The country's history of profound socio-economic and workplace injustices (Silander, 2024) makes it a particularly compelling setting to explore how perceptions of justice, or the lack thereof, influence discretionary employee behaviour.

While employee POJ are widely acknowledged as an antecedent to OCB (Zayed et al., 2022), its effects are not universal. Research suggests that employees' behavioural responses to their

perceptions of human resource (HR) practices are shaped by cultural norms in terms of meaningfulness and acceptability (Lockhart et al., 2020). Cultural orientation affects employees' understanding of OCB and their willingness to engage in it (Baeza et al., 2023). For instance, studies have shown that collectivists are by nature more inclined to engage in OCB than individualists, irrespective of their perceptions about the fairness of organisational practices (Hassan et al., 2017). This highlights the need for indigenised OCB research that is tailored to specific cultural contexts (Deshmukh & Natu, 2023). Responding to calls for further research in underexplored cultural settings (Organ, 2018), this study leverages the South African workforce. This population offers a rich and novel context for investigation because of its significant collectivist characteristics, which are perhaps best embodied by the uniquely South African concept of ubuntu. Ubuntu represents a philosophy of humaneness and morality, emphasising interconnectedness and community (Williamson & Holmes, 2015). By exploring the dynamics between organisational justice and OCB through the lens of this specific cultural framework, this research seeks to not only fill a geographical gap but also to enrich the global understanding of OCB by grounding it in a context of historical significance and unique cultural values.

Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the complex relationship between employee POJ and OCB. This research extends existing literature by examining the mediating role of organisational cynicism (OC) and the moderating influence of perceptions of organisational support (POS) within this relationship. The study was grounded in the reasoning that while justice typically fosters positive outcomes, perceptions of injustice can induce cynicism, which in turn discourages OCB (Hamayoun et al., 2021; Hussain & Shahzad, 2022).

The first objective was to investigate the indirect relationship between POJ and OCB as mediated by OC. This addresses calls for further research on how POJ impacts employee outcomes (Ho, 2025). It was reasoned that fair treatment promotes OCB, whereas perceived injustice leads to cynicism, which diminishes OCB.

The second objective was to examine the moderating effect of POS on the POJ-OC-OCB relationship. We anticipated that a lack of perceived support (i.e. employers being seen as uncaring or unappreciative) would intensify employees' cynical responses to perceived injustice, leading to a more significant reduction in OCB (Ahmed et al., 2015; Biswas & Kapil, 2017). This responds to calls for research on factors that moderate the relationship between OC and its antecedents and outcomes (Naseer et al., 2020).

Finally, we explore the theoretical link between perceived justice and discretionary employee behaviour. Drawing on organisational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), we posited that the positive impact of fair practices on OCB is conditional. It is most effective when employees perceive these practices as a genuine reflection of their

employer's benevolent intent, rather than a response to external pressures (Lipponen et al., 2018). We theorised that a lack of perceived support would negate the positive effect of fair practices on OCB.

Literature review

Positive discretionary behaviour is vital to effective organisational functioning (Haass et al., 2023). However, its inherently subjective nature means that it cannot be mandated or enforced through employment contracts (O'Brien et al., 2025). Applying social exchange theory and the principle of reciprocity inherent to this theory, we posit that organisations can foster OCB by ensuring fair organisational practices and creating an environment where employees feel supported and valued.

Organisational citizenship behaviour

Organisational citizenship behaviour refers to a range of voluntary, discretionary employee actions that benefit the organisation or its people, extending beyond formal contractual arrangements (Organ, 1988, 2018). Such behaviour enhances task performance as it fosters a collaborative and supportive work environment, which, in turn, contributes to improved organisational performance (Haass et al., 2023). For this research, OCB was specifically regarded as discretionary organisationally directed employee behaviour that facilitates organisational functioning and enhances organisational effectiveness (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory posits that relationships are built on a series of transactions where individuals weigh the costs and rewards of interaction. These exchanges, which can involve both tangible and intangible resources, create a system of reciprocity and mutual obligation that shapes attitudes and behaviours over time (Yamao, 2024; Zhao et al., 2020). Both parties endeavour to maintain a fair balance of contributions, with employees continuously assessing the costs and benefits of employment relationships and adjusting their contributions accordingly (Jehanzeb & Mohanty, 2020). This theory is often relied upon to offer insights into how employee perceptions influence workplace discretionary behaviour (Kilroy et al., 2023). Employees seek relationships with their employers that are fair and balanced, leading to mutual trust, loyalty and commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Diehl, 2018). They often attribute perceived imbalances in the exchange relationship to unfair and unsupportive organisational practices (Collins, 2017) and endeavour to restore the balance by cultivating negative attitudes towards the organisation or modifying their behaviour (Eisenberger et al., 2020).

Perceived organisational justice as an antecedent of organisational citizenship behaviour

Organisational justice theory relates to employees' cognitive judgements of organisational actions and how these

judgements drive their subsequent attitudes and behaviours in the workplace (Ho, 2025). Drawing on social exchange theory, existing research suggests that employees who perceive that their employers treat them fairly and justly are more likely to reciprocate with positive discretionary behaviours (Colquitt et al., 2023). When employees perceive distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes), and interactional justice (fair and respectful treatment), they are more inclined to engage in OCB (Khaola & Rembe, 2021). Employees, therefore, continuously evaluate the fairness of outcomes received (e.g. pay, rewards and promotions), the procedures used to determine the outcomes and the way they are treated by the organisation or its representatives. Their judgements regarding the fairness of organisational actions give rise to reciprocating behaviour, which includes a willingness to engage in OCB (Jehanzeb & Mohanty, 2020).

The positive relationship between employees' justice perceptions and OCB as a behavioural response is well-established in the literature. However, reactions to justice perceptions have been shown to differ across cultures (Hassan et al., 2017). This study, therefore, set out to empirically confirm the theorised POJ-OCB relationship by testing the following hypothesis in a sample of South African employees:

H1: *Employee perceptions of organisational justice (POJ) are significantly and positively related to organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).*

While social exchange theory suggests that employees reciprocate fair treatment with positive behaviour, cynicism towards the organisation may interfere with or even prevent this reciprocal relationship from forming (Scott & Zweig, 2020). In South Africa, with its historical and systematic inequalities (Webster, 2020), employees' perceptions of inequality and unfairness in organisational practices significantly impact their experiences in the workplace (Sainz et al., 2023). Organisational practices are often perceived as driven by political agendas and profit maximisation, with managerial actions enriching a select few at the expense of the majority's well-being (Scott & Zweig, 2020). Consequently, employees view those in power as self-serving and uncompassionate, questioning the motives behind their decisions and actions (Platania et al., 2022). These perceptions may result in a self-protective mindset where employees focus on personal gain to avoid exploitation, leading to a reluctance to engage in activities that do not provide personal benefit (Pfrombeck et al., 2020; Stavrova et al., 2024). Therefore, OC plays a significant role in shaping workplace dynamics and the quality of the employer-employee social exchange relationship, highlighting the need for further research on its impact on employee behaviour. This study responds to previous calls for research on organisational practices that could help reduce employee cynicism and lessen its adverse effects (Chiaburu et al., 2015). We, therefore, investigated the mediating role of OC in the POJ-OCB relationship to determine the extent to which it explains employees' behavioural response to the perceived fairness of organisational practices.

Organisational cynicism as a cognitive outcome of perceived injustice

Organisational cynicism refers to an employee's negative, anticipatory attitude towards their employing organisation, which stems from a critical evaluation of its intentions, actions and values, often based on negative past experiences (Dean et al., 1998). Essentially, it reflects an employee's belief that their employer's conduct is consistently self-serving and untrustworthy (Brandes et al., 1999). While Dean et al. (1998) conceptualised OC as a multidimensional construct consisting of beliefs, affect and behavioural tendencies, this study focused on its cognitive dimension (i.e. the beliefs that employees hold about the organisation) only. Employees high in cognitive cynicism tend to question organisational intentions and believe that organisational leaders are self-serving, insincere and untrustworthy, which diminishes trust and loyalty (Scott & Zweig, 2020).

The empirically confirmed negative relationship between POJ and OC (Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Hussain & Shahzad, 2022) indicates that OC increases with perceived injustice but decreases when organisations and their leaders are perceived as fair and just (Chiaburu et al., 2015). Nevertheless, researchers such as Naseer et al. (2020) and Biswas and Kapil (2017) have advocated for more research to understand how employee POJ and support may lead to OC. This study, postulating that employees' beliefs about organisational intentions stem from their assessment of managerial actions and the perceived fairness thereof, therefore tested the following hypothesis:

H2: *Employee perceptions of organisational justice (POJ) are significantly and negatively related to organisational cynicism (OC).*

Research on OC has predominantly examined its effect on in-role performance and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) (e.g. Naseer et al., 2020; Pfrombeck et al., 2020). Addressing a recognised need for further research on OC's impact on discretionary employee behaviour (Chiaburu et al., 2015), this article examined how employees' beliefs and workplace experiences affect their willingness to engage in OCB.

Organisational cynicism as an impediment to organisational citizenship behaviour

Cynical employees question the honesty and integrity of organisational leaders and believe that they are being exploited (Ahmed et al., 2025). Employees become cynical when they observe that their employers prioritise organisational interests over their needs and expectations, resulting in animosity and hostility towards the organisation and its leaders and an unwillingness to engage in OCB (Atalay et al., 2022). From a social exchange perspective, when employees perceive employer actions as unfair and self-serving, they are unlikely to reciprocate by exceeding formal performance expectations to benefit the organisation (Hamayoun et al., 2021). While perceived injustice and dissatisfaction may lead to CWB (Naseer et al., 2020) or voluntary turnover (Ko & Campbell, 2021), South Africa's

high unemployment and low-skilled workforce (Statistics South Africa, 2025) may mitigate such adverse reactions because of fear of social and legal consequences (Searle, 2022). Consequently, drawing on social exchange theory, it was posited that cynical employees who remain in organisations, often out of necessity or fear of consequences, may express their dissatisfaction through reduced OCB. The following hypothesis was therefore tested:

H3: *Employees' cynicism towards their employing organisations (OC) are significantly and negatively related to organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).*

Based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, which suggests a sequential order of influence from beliefs or perceptions to attitudes, intentions and then behaviour, it was proposed in this study that OC is a more proximal outcome of POJ than OCB. Therefore, it was anticipated that POJ would be negatively related to OC, which, in turn, would be negatively related to OCB. Thus, the positive relationship between POJ and OCB would be indirect through OC. This was tested in the following hypothesis:

H4: *Organisational cynicism (OC) mediates the positive relationship between perceived organisational justice (POJ) and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).*

This study postulates that OC is a key cognitive response to perceived injustice. The negative emotions stemming from this cynicism are expected to manifest as an unwillingness to engage in constructive discretionary behaviours at work.

The influence of perceived organisational support

Eisenberger et al. (1986) conceptualised POS as employee beliefs about the value their organisations place on their contributions and the priority given to their well-being. Such support is often demonstrated through fair employer–employee interactions (Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Organisational support theory holds that favourable treatment by organisational agents enhances employees' overall well-being and cultivates positive employee perceptions (Eisenberger et al., 2020), leading employees to reciprocate POS with desirable work attitudes (e.g. commitment, engagement and trust) and behaviour (e.g. task performance and OCB) (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Employees thus respond to organisational support, viewed as a 'social currency' offered by the organisation (Biswas & Kapil, 2017), with loyalty to the organisation and actions aimed at advancing organisational interests (OCB) as equivalent 'currencies' to maintain a balanced exchange (Yu, 2022). However, organisational support theory emphasises that only voluntary (i.e. not enforced by cultural obligations, regulatory requirements or societal norms) organisational actions that are intended to enhance employee well-being are valued (Eisenberger et al., 2020). When support is perceived as insincere and malevolent, it fosters discontent and leads to feelings of unappreciation and betrayal, resulting in a deterioration of felt obligation towards the organisation and increased cynicism as organisational sincerity is questioned (Scott & Zweig, 2020).

The positive direct relationship between POS and OCB is well-established in the literature (e.g. Bizri & Hamieh, 2020; Kirsten, 2019). However, recent research suggests that this relationship is more complex, as POS may also indirectly influence OCB through its interaction with variables such as hope, ability, motivation, opportunity and organisational identification and commitment (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2024; Jun et al., 2025; Morales-Sánchez & Pasamar, 2020). Moreover, this relationship has been shown to vary across cultures (Chiaburu et al., 2015). Given these complexities, this study specifically examined the role of POS in predicting OCB within the underexplored South African context. We postulated that POS, as a proxy for high-quality social exchange relationships, intervenes in the relationship between employee POJ, their attitudes towards their employing organisations (OC) and their willingness to engage in OCB. We hypothesised that POS would moderate the indirect relationship between POJ, OC and OCB. The following hypothesis was tested:

H5: *The effect of perceived organisational justice (POJ) on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) through organisational cynicism (OC) is conditional upon employees' perceptions of organisational support (POS); the indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC is stronger when POS is high.*

Drawing on Kirsten's (2019) research, this study postulated that employees who hold cynical beliefs about their employers because they question their sincerity and intentions would be unlikely to believe that the organisation cares about their well-being and appreciates their efforts towards enhancing organisational success. Low levels of POS, accompanied by increased OC, weaken the social exchange relationship and diminish employees' willingness to extend extra effort to support the organisation. Cynical employees who experience their employers as unsupportive and malevolent will be less inclined to appreciate fair organisational actions at face value (Collins, 2017) and to reciprocate by engaging in OCB (Hamayoun et al., 2021). Employees' perceptions of the sincerity of organisational support, therefore, serve as a heuristic whereby they appraise the authenticity of their employers' benevolence as reflected in organisational practices and procedures.

In sum, we propose a moderated mediation model (Hayes, 2022) in which POS moderates the indirect relationship between POJ and OCB through OC. Specifically, the indirect association between POJ and OCB through OC will be stronger for high POS levels than for low POS levels. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for this study.

Research design

This study followed a deductive approach using empirical data to test the conceptual model (Figure 1) and the hypothesised relationships between identified variables (Saunders et al., 2023). A cross-sectional quantitative research design was applied, utilising an electronic survey. The unit of observation and analysis was individual employees in South African organisations. Although a cross-sectional design

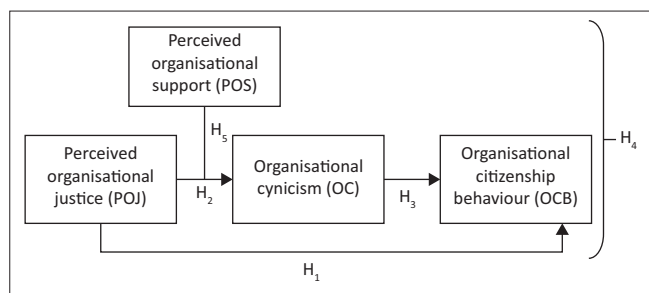


FIGURE 1: Hypothesised moderated mediation model.

limits causal inferences, it was considered suitable for this study because of its effectiveness in collecting extensive data from a broad target population, enabling objective analysis of relationships between variables (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, while causality is not claimed, the study investigates associations between variables to determine their alignment with the theoretical expectations presented.

Research participants and sampling method

The target population comprised employed individuals working in South African organisations. However, because of the impracticality of reaching all South African employees, the functional target population was narrowed to employed students enrolled at an open-distance higher education institution in South Africa. To capture a diverse range of workplace perceptions and experiences, this study employed a purposive sampling strategy that included an element of self-selection. This method was crucial for ensuring that we received inputs from individuals who felt strongly about the research topic (Saunders et al., 2023; Zickar & Keith, 2023).

A total of 740 usable responses were collected, with respondents employed at both supervisory (45.7%) and staff (54.3%) levels across various industries. The majority of respondents were black African (60.9%) females (60.8%) between the ages of 26 and 45 years (79.2%), and 64.3% held tertiary qualifications (Kirsten, 2019).

While the findings of this research cannot be generalised to all South African employees, a heterogeneous sample provided valuable insights into aspects that may drive employees' willingness to voluntarily engage in positive discretionary workplace behaviour.

Measurement instruments

All variables were measured using established self-report measures aligned with the constructs' theoretical conceptualisation.

Organisational citizenship behaviour was measured using eight items from Lee and Allen's (2002) Organisational Citizenship Behaviour Scale. These items represent OCB directed at advancing the organisation. The frequency of respondents' engagement in the stated behaviour was indicated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 7 = all the time). A sample item is 'I take action to protect the organisation

from potential problems'. High internal consistency reliabilities for this scale were reported by Choi et al. (2025) ($\alpha = 0.91$) and Sulistiawan et al. (2025) ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Perceptions of organisational justice, OC and POS were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements.

Niehoff and Moorman's (1993) Justice Scale was used to measure *perceived organisational justice*. The 20-item scale was designed to assess three distinct dimensions: five items for distributive justice (e.g. 'I consider my workload to be quite fair'), six for procedural justice (e.g. 'My supervisor/manager makes sure that all employee concerns are heard before job decisions are made') and nine for interactional justice (e.g. 'When decisions are made about my job, my supervisor/manager treats me with respect and dignity'). The scale's factor structure is a subject of debate in the literature, with some researchers treating the three dimensions separately (e.g. Rehman et al., 2021) and others, like Khanam et al. (2024), measuring organisational justice as a single, overall construct. While a three-factor structure is commonly accepted (Hassan et al., 2017), Niehoff and Moorman (1993) originally proposed a two-factor model because of the strong correlation between procedural and interactional justice. In this study, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to determine the best fit for the scale's structure. The analysis revealed a two-factor model: one factor for distributive justice (3 items) and a second combined factor for both procedural and interactional justice (13 items).

Organisational cynicism was measured using five items of Brandes et al.'s (1999) Organisational Cynicism Scale that reflected cognitive cynicism. Each item reflects an individual's beliefs about their employing organisation. A sample item is 'I believe my organisation says one thing and does another'. Researchers such as Aydın Küçük (2022) and Adamska (2023) reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.86 and 0.85 for the cognitive cynicism scale.

The Survey of Perceived Organisational Support–Shortened Version (SPOS-SV) (Hochwarter et al., 2003) was used to measure *perceived organisational support*. The SPOS-SV contains eight items of Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) original scale and measures POS as a unidimensional construct consisting of eight items, for example, 'My organisation really cares about my well-being'. Hochwarter et al. (2003) reported a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92. Subsequent studies by researchers such as Andrić et al. (2025) ($\alpha = 0.90$) and Turek (2023) ($\alpha = 0.90$) confirmed the internal consistency reliability of the scale.

Data on participants' gender, age, population group, level of education, employment status, tenure, job level and union membership were collected. These individual and job-rated factors have been shown to influence an employee's POJ and support, their cynicism towards their employing organisations and their willingness to engage in OCB (Kirsten, 2019).

Research procedure and ethical considerations

Data were collected by means of an online survey administered via the LimeSurvey platform. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the University of South Africa (UNISA) Senate Research and Innovation and Postgraduate Degrees Committee (SRIPGDC). Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the UNISA RPSC of the UNISA SRIPGDC (REF: 2015_RPSC_003_AR). Participants were informed of the nature of the study, the procedure to be followed and the potential benefits of the research. They were also assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality (no personal identifying information was recorded) and informed that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage before submission of the survey. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Statistical analysis

Primary data were captured and analysed using IBM SPSS (Version 29). All cases were screened in terms of accuracy, missing data, outliers and unengaged responses to ensure data accuracy. Composite reliability (CR) was calculated for each measure to confirm internal consistency reliability, while convergent and discriminant validity for the overall five-factor measurement model was confirmed through CFA using AMOS (Version 29). The maximum likelihood method and fit indices (χ^2 , degrees of freedom [*df*], χ^2/df , Goodness-of-Fit Index [GFI], Comparative Fit Index [CFI] and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA]) were used to determine the best model fit. Goodness-of-Fit Index and CFI of 0.95 or more and an RMSEA of less than 0.06 were regarded as indicative of a good model fit (Hair et al., 2019).

Convergent validity was supported by acceptable standardised factor loadings. All factor loadings were significant (> 0.60). Although loadings above 0.70 are preferred, a less conservative threshold of 0.50 is also deemed acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, average variance extracted (AVE) values were calculated for each construct, demonstrating convergent validity (i.e. $AVE \geq 0.50$) (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was established where maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared squared variance (ASV) were lower than the AVE for all the constructs.

To address potential common method bias inherent in self-report measures, several preliminary precautions, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2012), were taken. These included informing respondents of the research objectives and relevance, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and using validated measuring instruments that included both attitudinal and frequency scales. The order of items on each scale was randomised to minimise biased response patterns. A CFA-based unmeasured latent variable technique using AMOS (Version 29) was applied to assess potential common method bias. The Common Latent Factor (CLF) model did not significantly improve the model fit, suggesting that common method bias was not a significant concern (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations [SDs], skewness and kurtosis) were relied upon to obtain a better understanding of the construct-level data and assess univariate normality.

Bivariate correlational analyses, using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (*r*), assessed the strength and direction of the relationships between variables, ensuring that assumptions of multicollinearity and singularity were met. This was followed by inferential (multivariate) analyses (mediation and moderation analyses) to test the research hypotheses. All analyses controlled for job level. Bootstrapped mediation and moderation analyses were conducted using 5000 resamples at a 95% confidence interval using the PROCESS (v. 4.0) macro for IBM SPSS (Version 29).

Mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) (Hayes, 2022). Ordinary least squares regression-based analysis was used to estimate the effect in the mediation model. Evidence of mediation was established if the indirect effect (*ab*) was significantly different from zero (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017).

Moderation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro (Model 1) (Hayes, 2022) and following a three-step process (Hair et al., 2019). Firstly, the original (unmoderated) equation representing the extent to which X predicts Y was estimated. This was followed by the inclusion of the moderator variable in the equation. Finally, the change in R^2 was considered. A statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$) regression coefficient (XW) indicated a moderation effect (Hayes, 2022).

Moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS macro, Model 7) (Hayes, 2022) determined whether the effect of POJ on OC was contingent on the level of POS. Significant moderation effects were probed using a simple slope analysis and the Johnson-Neyman technique. Conditional indirect effects of POS were examined at three values (1 SD below the mean [low], mean [moderate] and 1 SD above the mean [high]).

Results

Construct validity and reliability statistics

The CR coefficients for the three measurement scales were 0.80 for OCB, 0.92 for POS and 0.92 for OC; with CR coefficients of 0.88 and 0.97 reported for the distributive justice and procedural and interactional justice subscales (see Table 1). All measures exceeded 0.70, which indicates adequate convergence (Hair et al., 2019).

To simplify the statistical model and account for potential confounding factors, a preliminary CFA was conducted, controlling for a range of biographical variables, including gender, age, education level and employment status. When these variables were collectively regressed on OCB, the overall model was statistically significant but explained only a small fraction of the variance in OCB ($R^2 = 0.04$). This indicates that, while these demographic factors, as a group, have some influence on OCB, their practical impact is

minimal. Further analysis revealed that only one variable, namely job level, made a unique and statistically significant contribution to the model. The positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.17$) suggests that individuals in higher-level, managerial positions reported greater levels of OCB than those in non-managerial roles. This finding is crucial because it indicates that an employee's position within the organisational hierarchy is a meaningful predictor of their willingness to engage in voluntary behaviours that benefit the organisation. Therefore, to ensure that subsequent analyses of OCB were not skewed by the effect of job level, this variable was retained as a control in all further statistical models. By controlling for job level, we could isolate the true relationships between other variables and OCB without the influence of an employee's job level.

The results of the CFA showed that the proposed five-factor measurement model was an acceptable fit for the data ($\chi^2 [n = 740] = 885.625$, $df = 450$, $\chi^2/df = 1.97$, GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04). The model fit was superior compared to alternative models, for example, a four-factor model where POJ was regarded as a unidimensional construct. This indicated that participants could distinguish between POJ (as a two-dimensional construct), POS, OC and OCB. The factor loading of each variable were 0.83 to 0.86 for distributive justice; 0.70 to 0.91 for procedural and interactional justice; 0.72 to 0.87 for POS; 0.79 to 0.89 for OC; and 0.63 to 0.76 for OCB.

The AVE for all constructs, except OCB, were larger than the construct's correlation with other constructs (i.e. $AVE \geq 0.50$), providing evidence of convergent validity. Despite the relatively low AVE value for the OCB construct, the item-to-total correlations ranging from 0.56 to 0.68 (i.e. $ITC \geq 0.50$) and an inter-item correlation of 0.46 (i.e. $IIC \geq 0.30$) lent support for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Maximum shared variance and ASV values lower than the AVE of the respective scales provided evidence of discriminant validity for all constructs.

Descriptive and correlation statistics

An overview of the descriptive statistics (means and SDs), composite reliabilities and intercorrelations among the study variables is presented in Table 1.

Mean scores above the midpoint were reported for all variables, suggesting a generally positive perception held by

participants about their working environments and a willingness to engage in OCB. The mean value of OC (3.85), which was slightly below the midpoint, suggests that participants were, on average, neutral or slightly cynical towards their employing organisations.

The reported correlations confirmed the existence of statistically significant relationships between the variables and were consistent with our expectations based on the stated hypotheses. These correlations were, however, not so high that they would suggest problems in terms of multicollinearity and singularity.

Direct and mediated effects

The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 2.

The results of the mediation analysis, controlling for job level, confirmed that POJ is a significant predictor of OCB ($B = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.38], $\beta = 0.34$), POJ is significantly and negatively related to OC ($B = -0.71$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.78, -0.64], $\beta = -0.60$) and OC is significantly and negatively related to OCB ($B = -0.25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.31, -0.19], $\beta = -0.32$). Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were therefore supported by the data.

The results furthermore indicated that POJ is indirectly related to OCB through its relationship with OC. The results estimated that 37.6% of the variance in OC is explained by variation in POJ ($R^2 = 0.38$; $F[2, 737] = 222.05$; $p < 0.001$; large practical effect). Lower levels of POJ were associated with higher levels of OC, and higher OC was subsequently related to lower OCB. A 95% bias-corrected confidence interval based on 5000 bootstrap samples indicated that the indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC ($ab = 0.18$), holding job level constant, was entirely above zero (0.13 to 0.23), providing evidence of a mediating effect.

Moreover, higher levels of POJ were associated with an increase in OCB even when taking into account the indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC ($B = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.22], $\beta = 0.15$), while statistically controlling for job level. The results showed that approximately 21.2% of the variance in OCB was accounted for by variation in both POJ and OC ($R^2 = 0.21$; $F[3, 736] = 66.00$; $p < 0.001$; medium practical effect). Hypothesis 4 was thus supported.

TABLE 1: Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables ($N = 740$).

Variables	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Job level	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 POJ-DJ	4.75	1.60	0.88	0.72	0.28	0.07	-	-	-	-	-
3 POJ-PJ-IJ	4.52	1.60	0.97	0.74	0.48	0.11**	0.64**	-	-	-	-
4 POS	4.68	1.47	0.92	0.66	0.64	0.16**	0.56**	0.76**	-	-	-
5 OC	3.85	1.73	0.92	0.69	0.64	-0.16**	-0.48**	-0.62**	-0.62**	-	-
6 OCB	5.06	1.36	0.80	0.45	0.45	0.18**	0.30**	0.35**	0.44**	-0.43**	-

Note: Control variable: Job level with 1 = staff level, 2 = management level.

POJ, perceived organisational justice; DJ, distributive justice; PJ-IJ, procedural and interactional justice; POS, perceived organisational support; OC, organisational cynicism; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour; SD, standard deviation; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; MSV, maximum shared variance.

** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 2: Mediation analysis of POJ on OCB through OC, controlling for job level ($N = 740$).

Effect/Path	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> -value	95% CI	β
Mediator: OC ($R^2 = 0.38$)						
Direct effect of POJ on OC (path <i>a</i>)	-0.71	0.03	-20.39	< 0.001	[-0.78, -0.64]	-0.60
Outcome: OCB ($R^2 = 0.21$)						
Direct effect of OC on OCB (path <i>b</i>)	-0.25	0.03	-7.72	< 0.001	[-0.31, -0.19]	-0.32
Direct effect of POJ on OCB controlling for OC (path <i>c'</i>)	0.14	0.04	3.67	< 0.001	[0.07, 0.22]	0.15
Effects of POJ on OCB						
Total effect of POJ on OCB (path <i>c</i>)	0.32	0.03	9.99	< 0.001	[0.26, 0.38]	0.34
Indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC (path <i>ab</i>)	0.18	0.03	-	-	[0.13, 0.23] ^a	0.19

Note: R^2 : ≤ 0.12 = small practical effect; $\geq 0.13 \leq 0.25$ = medium practical effect; ≥ 0.26 = large practical effect; Analysis controlled for job level with 1 = staff level, 2 = management level.

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval; OC, organisational cynicism; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour; POJ, perceived organisational justice.

^aBootstrapped 95% CI (5000 samples); significant as CI excludes zero.

The results furthermore suggested that job level is a significant predictor of POJ, OC and OCB. Differences in the relationships between POJ, OC and OCB might thus exist between groups based on their job level.

Moderated mediation

The results of the moderation mediation analysis are provided in Table 3.

The results of the moderation analysis indicated a significant interaction between POJ and POS in predicting OC ($B = -0.08$; $SE = 0.02$; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI = -0.12 to -0.04; $f^2 = 0.01$), small practical effect size). While POJ and POS alone did not significantly predict OC, the moderation analyses confirmed that the interaction between POJ and POS explained 1.1% of the variance in OC beyond the main effects. Perceptions of organisational support was shown to be a moderator in the POJ-OC relationship.

The conditional indirect effects were also examined at three levels of POS (low, average and high). The results of a simple slopes analysis used to probe the moderating effect of POS between POJ and OC in predicting OCB are presented in Table 3. The mean value for POS and the values equal to one SD above and below the mean were used to probe the moderating effect detected. The indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC was statistically significant at lower ($B = 0.07$; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI = 0.04 to 0.11), average ($B = 0.10$; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI = 0.07 to 0.14 and higher ($B = 0.13$; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI = 0.09 to 0.18) levels of POS with a small to moderate practical effect size ($R^2 = 0.21$). As illustrated in Figure 2, the influence of POJ on OC increased at higher levels of POS.

The results thus showed that the indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC was significant at all three levels of POS. Figure 2 shows the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between POJ and OC at three levels of POS (mean \pm 1 SD). The negative conditional indirect effects of POJ on OC at different values of POS (see Table 3) suggest that as POS increases, the slope between POJ and OC strengthens. Therefore, the moderating effect of POS between POJ and OC is stronger at higher levels of POS. Hence, hypothesis 5 was supported. Consistent with our prediction, POS significantly moderated the indirect effect between POJ

and OCB through OC (index of moderated mediation = 0.02, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI = 0.01 to 0.03). The indirect effect was stronger for higher levels of POS.

The Johnson-Neyman test was conducted to further probe the significance of interactions (Hayes, 2022). The results suggested that, at levels of 1.48 (on a scale from 1 to 7) and more in terms of POS, the relationship between POJ and OCB through OC was significant ($B = -0.16$; $p = 0.05$; 95% CI = -0.31 to 0.00). Therefore, as the levels of POS increase beyond 1.48, POJ will have a stronger negative effect on OC, with the highest level of POS (7.00) associated with a -0.60 ($p < 0.001$) unit decrease in OC. Therefore, the moderating effect of POS is stronger at higher levels, confirming the importance of organisational support in reducing cynicism when employees experience injustice in the workplace.

Following Simmons et al.'s (2011) best practice recommendations for the use of control variables, we reran our analyses without controlling for job level to ensure that our findings were not reliant on the presence of a covariate. Our results remained significant and substantively similar without controlling for job level.

Our results confirm a statistically significant positive relationship between POJ and OCB, lending support to the reported positive effect of POJ on OCB in extant literature. We have also provided empirical evidence suggesting that the relationship between POJ and OCB is indirect through OC, lending support to the theorised mediating role of OC in the POJ-OCB relationship. We furthermore empirically confirmed the plausibility that the indirect relationship between POJ, OC and OCB may be moderated by POS. The alignment of these results with the theoretical expectations suggests that the strength of the relationship between POJ and OC may change depending on the level of POS, with higher POS potentially weakening the adverse effects of POJ on OC. While the cross-sectional nature of the study makes it impossible to establish the causal ordering of observed relationships, the results offer compelling evidence of the plausibility of the theorised notion that a stronger sense of organisational support mitigates OC in response to perceptions of injustice.

TABLE 3: Moderated mediation results for the conditional indirect effect of POJ on OCB via OC at levels of POS ($N = 740$).

Predictor	B	SE	95% CI
Outcome: OC			
Constant	6.44	0.40	[5.65, 7.22]*
Job level	-0.22	0.10	[-0.41, -0.03]*
POJ	-0.04	0.11	[-0.25, 0.17]
POS	-0.09	0.10	[-0.29, 0.10]
POJ x POS	-0.08	0.02	[-0.12, -0.04]*
Outcome: OCB			
Constant	5.23	0.28	[4.68, 5.78]*
Job level	0.32	0.09	[0.14, 0.50]*
POJ	0.14	0.04	[0.07, 0.22]*
OC	-0.25	0.03	[-0.31, -0.19]*
Conditional direct effect of POJ → OC → OCB			
Lower POS (-1 SD)	0.07	0.02	[0.04, 0.11]*
Moderate POS (mean)	0.10	0.02	[0.07, 0.14]*
High POS (+1 SD)	0.13	0.02	[0.09, 0.18]*

Note: Unstandardised regression coefficients are reported; Bootstrap sample size = 5000. SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval; SD, standard deviation; OC, organisational cynicism; POS, perceived organisational support; POJ, perceived organisational justice; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour.

*95% bootstrap confidence interval does not include zero.

Discussion

Outline of the results

This study confirmed our hypotheses that employees' POJ are positively related to their discretionary behaviour in the workplace (OCB) and negatively related to their beliefs about their employers' intentions and integrity (OC). These findings support reciprocity within social exchange relationships, where positive POJ are reciprocated through employee behaviours that benefit the organisation (Colquitt et al., 2023). These results also corroborate employees' sense-making response to negative work experiences, supporting Hussain and Shahzad's (2022) notion that OC is a critical consequence of perceived workplace injustice.

Two key findings emerged from this study. Firstly, the results supported the hypothesis that OC mediates the relationship between POJ and OCB. When employees perceive organisational practices as unfair, they are more likely to become cynical towards their organisation and its leadership, which in turn reduces their willingness to engage in OCB. This finding corroborates Chiaburu et al.'s (2015) observation that perceived injustice fosters OC and diminishes voluntary contributions to the organisation. It also supports recent evidence that high levels of OC are associated with suspicion of organisational leaders' motives (Ahmed et al., 2025). Cynical employees regard their employing organisations and their leaders as self-serving and malevolent, and will refrain from engaging in OCB to guard themselves against apparent exploitation (Stavrova et al., 2024).

Secondly, confirmation of the moderated mediation model suggests that POS may moderate the mediating effect of OC in the POJ-OCB relationship, extending research on the relationships between these variables. While a perceived

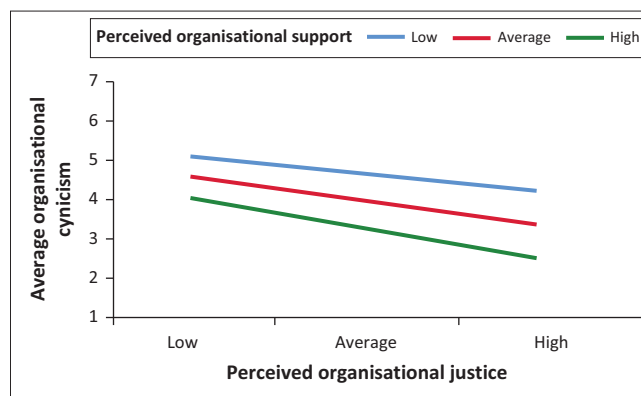


FIGURE 2: Visual representation of the direct conditional effects of perceived organisational justice on organisational cynicism among those with lower ($b = 3.216$), average ($b = 4.681$) and higher ($b = 6.146$) values of perceived organisational support.

lack of justice was associated with higher levels of OC at all three POS levels, POJ's effect on OCB through OC was stronger at higher levels of POS. This provided empirical evidence that employees' cynical response to negative POJ was contingent on the quality of their social exchange relationships with their employing organisations, as epitomised by their POS (Kirsten, 2019). In line with our hypotheses, results revealed that POS may influence how employees react to positive or negative POJ. Employees who experienced poor-quality social exchange relationships with their employees, represented by low levels of POS, reacted less severely to a perceived lack of justice in the workplace than those who reported high-quality exchange relationships (i.e. high POS). In a high-quality social exchange relationship, a perceived lack of justice in the workplace was met with a more severe cynical reaction. At a high level of POS, employees tend to display a greater sense of betrayal when they perceive organisational practices as unjust. This may be ascribed to the greater disillusionment experienced by employees who enjoy high-quality social exchange relationships with their employers and, therefore, have greater expectations regarding the integrity of managerial actions (Pfrombeck et al., 2020).

The results confirm that when organisational practices are regarded as fair, employees are less likely to question the motives of their employing organisations and more willing to engage in OCB (Kirsten, 2019). In contrast, when they perceive organisational practices as unfair, they are more likely to question the intentions, sincerity and trustworthiness of their employing organisations and managers (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022). Moreover, employee POJ and support interact to shape their workplace attitudes (cynicism) and behaviour (OCB) (Kirsten, 2019). The results showed that the extent to which employees' beliefs about their employing organisations and subsequent behaviour are influenced by their POJ depends on their POS. The extent to which perceived unfairness in organisational practices results in cynical beliefs is mitigated by positive perceptions of management intentions as considerate, compassionate and appreciative of employee efforts.

Kirsten (2019) states that employees who experience high-quality social exchange relationships with their employing organisations, as reflected in high levels of POS, tend to react more severely to perceived injustice. The results confirmed the quality of the social exchange relationship, as reflected in the level of POS, as an essential boundary condition when examining the attitudinal and behavioural consequences of organisational justice. However, it is crucial to observe that the findings do not imply that lower levels of POS are desirable. The significance of continued organisational support in establishing and maintaining high-quality employment relationships has been well-established in the literature. The results of the study align with Harris and Kacmar's (2018) research, which suggests that, notwithstanding the undisputed advantages of POS, more support does not always lead to better outcomes. This implies that the relationships between POS and employee attitudes and behaviour are complex and that the desired results may not be obtained by simply improving support.

The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed next.

Theoretical implications

This study makes significant contributions to OCB literature by examining the interactive predictive effect of POJ, POS and OC on OCB, thereby expanding the content domain of OCB. It provides preliminary empirical evidence supporting the role of OC as a mediator in the POJ-OCB relationship. The OC is presented as an outcome of justice perceptions and a precursor of workplace behaviour (Naseer et al., 2020).

The findings furthermore support the notion derived from the literature that POS moderates the relationship between POJ and OCB, mitigating the adverse effects of perceived injustice and strengthening the positive impact of fair organisational practices. While POS is often considered a direct predictor of OCB, our study suggests that it plays a crucial role in shaping employees' attitudinal (OC) and behavioural response (OCB) to organisational justice, paving the way for further empirical research aimed at better understanding the role of organisational support in achieving desirable organisational outcomes. The results suggest that, at high levels of POS, employees may be more sensitive towards organisational injustices and thus more likely to question the organisation's integrity. This study, therefore, extends previous organisational justice research by identifying POS as a boundary condition when examining the attitudinal and behavioural consequences of justice perceptions. In addition, our finding that POS may significantly moderate the indirect effect of POJ on OCB through OC contributes to a better understanding of the antecedents of OCB. By showing that the indirect effect is stronger for employees with high POS, the necessity of establishing and maintaining high-quality social exchange relationships by ensuring fairness and support in organisational practices is highlighted.

Finally, our findings extend social exchange theory by confirming the theorised interrelations between employee POJ and support in determining the quality of the employment relationship. Our study contributes to the literature by suggesting that employees' willingness to engage in OCB should be regarded as the result of the interaction between their perceptions of the quality of their social exchange relationships with their employing organisations and their cognitive evaluation of the intent and sincerity of organisational practices.

Practical implications

Organisational citizenship behaviour is a critical enabler of organisational efficiency (Haass et al., 2023). The results of this study suggest that managers can promote OCB by recognising the predictive role of employee POJ and support and resulting attitudes on the quality of the employment relationship.

While upholding justice is widely accepted as best practice and a means of encouraging positive discretionary employee behaviour in the workplace, the results of this study suggest that managers should recognise that perceived sincerity and benevolence are equally important (Collins, 2017). Even when management actions are perceived as fair, they may not have the desired behavioural consequences if employees doubt the organisation's intentions or believe their efforts are not valued (Scott & Zweig, 2020). A supportive organisational climate, reflected in compassion and benevolent intent (Lipponen et al., 2018), is essential to maximise the positive impact of fair practices on employee behaviour.

Managers should be mindful of employees' perceptions of justice and support and the beliefs about the organisation that may stem from such perceptions. Fair organisational practices should not be seen as a tool to manipulate employees into reciprocating by exceeding performance expectations. Instead, they must be accompanied by sincere and caring managerial actions that reflect managerial integrity and foster trusting relationships (Hussain & Shahzad, 2022).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The main limitation of this research is its cross-sectional design, which limits the possibility of testing causal relationships. In this article, it was reported that POJ and OC act as antecedents to OCB. Although this is in line with what has been reported in extant literature (e.g. Chiaburu et al., 2015), it is possible, for instance, that OC could be an antecedent to POJ. Research on the interaction between POJ, POS and OC has also suggested that OC may be regarded as a moderator in the POJ-POS relationship (Collins, 2017). Following the critique raised by Stone-Romero and Rosopa (2008), we acknowledge the implications of using cross-sectional data in mediation analysis and, therefore, position our findings as preliminary insights rather than definitive causal claims. Future research using longitudinal or experimental designs is needed to test the causal relationships between constructs.

Another limitation is that all constructs rested on the respondents' self-reported perceptions. Individual response bias could have resulted in artificial correlations in response patterns (Organ, 2018). Although Podsakoff et al.'s (2012) recommendations were followed to reduce the possibility of method and reporting bias, future research is needed to test the moderated mediation model using multisource data, for example, OCB might be evaluated by peers or a supervisor (Naseer et al., 2020).

Finally, the findings of this study are limited by its exclusive focus on a South African sample. Consequently, the generalisability of these results to other national contexts is restricted. Future research could employ cross-cultural designs, encompassing diverse countries and cultural dimensions, to identify potential similarities or differences and to assess the broader applicability of the findings.

Conclusion

By integrating organisational justice and support theory within a context of social exchange, our findings highlight that just organisational practices, while essential, may not necessarily enhance employees' willingness to engage in OCB. Employees who regard organisational actions as self-serving and uncaring are more likely to harbour cynical attitudes towards their employers and may, as a result, be unwilling to engage in workplace behaviour beyond their formal job requirements. Organisational citizenship behaviour may only be enhanced if employers are perceived as caring and supportive, and organisational actions display benevolent intent. The findings provide valuable insights into employees' attitudinal and behavioural reactions in an underexplored societal context. We hope that our research findings will sensitise managers and HR practitioners to the notion that their actions in the workplace are judged in terms of their perceived intent and that these subjective perceptions influence employees' attitudinal and behavioural reactions.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not openly available, as permission to conduct further research by a third party was not included in the ethics application, and consent for use of the data was not given by participants.

Disclaimer

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