

Organisational practices, work stress and employee experience in heavy-industry state-owned enterprises: The role of support and culture



Authors:

Mai T. Pham¹ 

Hung T. Phung² 

Ninh H. Nguyen³ 

Affiliations:

¹High Technology Innovation Center, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, Hanoi, Viet Nam

²Department of Human Resource Management, Vietnam Trade Union University, Hanoi, Viet Nam

³School of International Business and Economics, Foreign Trade University, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Corresponding author:

Ninh Nguyen,
nguyen.haininh@ftu.edu.vn

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Orientation: Employee experience (EX) has gained increasing attention in human resource management; however, limited research has explained how organisational practices and work stress shape EX within highly formalised heavy-industry state-owned enterprises (SOEs), particularly in emerging economies such as Vietnam.

Research purpose: This study examined how organisational practices and work stress influenced EX in heavy-industry SOEs, focusing on the mediating role of perceived organisational support (POS) and the moderating role of organisational culture.

Motivation for the study: Prior research has rarely integrated psychological mechanisms and contextual boundary conditions to explain how EX is formed in institutionalised industrial environments.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 403 employees in large Vietnamese heavy-industry SOEs. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling to assess measurement validity, direct and indirect relationships and interaction effects.

Main findings: Career development, communication and recognition, working conditions and welfare and work stress significantly influenced POS. Perceived organisational support positively affected EX and mediated the relationships between organisational practices, work stress and EX. Organisational culture strengthened the positive relationship between POS and EX.

Practical/managerial implications: Managers should strengthen development, communication and welfare systems, manage work stress proactively and cultivate supportive cultures to improve EX.

Contribution/value-add: The study offers a context-sensitive integration of EX and POS theory in heavy-industry SOEs, with relevance for Global South public-sector human resource management (HRM).

Keywords: employee experience; perceived organisational support; organisational culture; state-owned enterprises; heavy industry.

Introduction

Employee experience (EX) has attracted increasing scholarly and managerial attention as organisations confront structural transformations in labour markets, technological development and evolving employee expectations. As Morgan (2017) observes, this shift reflects a broader transformation in management thinking in which employees are no longer regarded merely as functional inputs in production systems but as central actors whose accumulated work experiences shape organisational sustainability and performance. Within the context of digital transformation and increasingly knowledge-intensive work environments, organisations are required to reconsider how managerial practices, organisational systems and working conditions influence employees' lived experiences over time (Plaskoff, 2017).

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Prior empirical research has consistently linked positive EX to a range of important organisational outcomes. Lee and Kim (2023) demonstrate that favourable EX contributes to stronger organisational commitment, while Pillutla (2025) highlights its role in enhancing engagement, performance and retention. Unlike traditional attitudinal indicators that capture perceptions at a single point in time, EX reflects cumulative evaluations formed through repeated interactions with organisational policies, leadership practices and work environments (Seo, 2025). As Başar (2024) argues, this cumulative and integrative nature positions EX as a strategic organisational concern closely associated with resilience and adaptability in turbulent environments.

Despite the growing volume of research in this domain, existing studies have largely focused on private sector organisations, service industries and Western institutional settings characterised by flexible management systems and market-oriented governance structures (Horváth & Kenesei, 2023; Plaskoff, 2017). Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to heavy-industry state-owned enterprises (SOEs). This imbalance is significant given the continued economic and social importance of SOEs in emerging economies such as Vietnam, where large segments of the workforce operate under highly formalised institutional arrangements marked by administrative regulation and hierarchical governance.

Heavy-industry SOEs are typically characterised by standardised human resource systems, strict safety regulations and formalised procedures. In such contexts, organisational practices including career development systems, communication and recognition processes and working conditions and welfare provisions are often implemented through administrative mechanisms rather than discretionary managerial initiatives. At the same time, employees frequently operate under high production pressure and safety demands that generate substantial work stress. As Saputra et al. (2023) emphasise, employees' reactions are shaped not only by objective organisational conditions, but also by how these conditions are interpreted through subjective perceptions. Seo (2025) similarly argues that EX is constructed through interpretive processes that accumulate over time. When organisational practices are perceived as symbolic or procedural rather than genuinely supportive, formally adequate policies may fail to generate positive experiences (Hassanein et al., 2025). In physically demanding industrial environments, working conditions may function primarily as baseline requirements, while unmanaged work stress may erode positive experiential evaluations (Başar, 2024).

Although previous research has acknowledged the importance of organisational practices for employee outcomes, limited attention has been paid to the psychological processes through which organisational practices and work stress are translated into EX in highly formalised heavy-industry SOEs. Perceived organisational support

(POS) offers a useful explanatory mechanism. Nugraha and Kharismasyah (2024) note that employees develop general beliefs regarding the extent to which their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being, and these beliefs shape work-related attitudes and experiences. In administrative environments where formal rules dominate, POS may therefore serve as a key mechanism linking organisational practices and work stress to EX (Hassanein et al., 2025). Furthermore, organisational culture may function as a contextual boundary condition that strengthens or weakens the extent to which POS translates into positive EX (Saputra et al., 2023; Seo, 2025).

Accordingly, this study examined how organisational practices (career development, communication and recognition and working conditions and welfare) and work stress influenced EX in Vietnamese heavy-industry SOEs. Specifically, it investigated their effects on POS, analysed the mediating role of POS in shaping EX and explored the moderating role of organisational culture in the relationship between POS and EX. Through this integrated framework, the study aimed to provide a mechanism-based and context-sensitive explanation of EX formation in heavy-industry SOEs.

Literature review

Employee experience

Employee experience has increasingly been conceptualised as a cumulative and relational evaluation emerging from employees' ongoing interactions with organisational systems, managerial practices and work environments. Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) argue that the evolution of human resource management (HRM) towards a strategic orientation has shifted scholarly attention from discrete HR practices to the holistic quality of employees' lived experiences. Morgan (2017) and Plaskoff (2017) further conceptualise EX as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural, technological and cultural elements that collectively influence how employees interpret their relationship with the organisation over time. Unlike traditional attitudinal measures, EX integrates affective, cognitive and relational dimensions, capturing how employees interpret their employment relationship holistically (Başar, 2024; Seo, 2025).

Despite growing attention to its antecedents, less research has explained the psychological mechanism through which organisational practices and work stress are translated into experiential outcomes, particularly in highly formalised heavy-industry SOEs. In such contexts, institutionalised governance structures, formalised HR systems and hierarchical authority patterns may weaken relational signals embedded in everyday practices (Horváth & Kenesei, 2023; Saputra et al., 2023). Employees do not respond directly to structural arrangements; rather, they interpret organisational signals before forming evaluative judgements.

To explain this interpretive process, the present study adopts a hybrid framework integrating Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Social exchange theory posits that employment relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges in which organisational actions generate employee responses based on perceived obligations and relational expectations. Organisational support theory further suggests that employees personify the organisation and develop generalised beliefs regarding whether it values their contributions and cares about their well-being. These beliefs, captured as POS, emerge through repeated interpretation of organisational treatment and function as a psychological filter through which organisational practices and stress conditions are evaluated (Hassanein et al., 2025; Nugraha & Kharismasyah, 2024; Seo, 2025). Meta-analytic evidence confirms the central mediating role of POS between HR practices and employee outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Accordingly, organisational practices and work stress are conceptualised as key antecedents shaping EX through POS.

Working conditions and welfare

In heavy industry contexts characterised by safety risks and operational intensity, working conditions and welfare provisions constitute foundational organisational practices. Morgan (2017) and Plaskoff (2017) highlight the importance of the physical and material work environment in shaping EX. However, from a social exchange perspective, such provisions operate as exchange signals. When employees perceive safety investments and welfare benefits as discretionary organisational care rather than mere regulatory compliance, they infer supportive intent (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Conversely, when these provisions are interpreted as minimal compliance obligations, their relational value diminishes (Başar, 2024; Horváth & Kenesei, 2023). In highly institutionalised SOEs, this distinction becomes critical, as employees may attribute provisions either to genuine organisational concern or to bureaucratic necessity:

H1: Working conditions and welfare positively affect perceived organisational support.

Communication, feedback and recognition

Communication, feedback and recognition represent relational exchange mechanisms embedded in daily supervisory interactions. Relational practices such as communication and recognition shape employees' perceptions of respect and inclusion (Reis et al., 2021). Feedback carries symbolic meaning beyond informational content, and from a social exchange perspective, timely and constructive feedback signals appreciation, respect and relational investment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees evaluate not only the content of communication, but also its sincerity and fairness (Saputra et al., 2023). In hierarchical SOEs, communication may be procedural and

top-down, increasing the likelihood that managerial actions are perceived as impersonal (Saputra et al., 2023). Empirical research indicates that fair and transparent communication enhances POS (Qiu & Dooley, 2022), while recognition practices that reflect genuine appreciation rather than symbolic compliance reinforce social exchange norms (Başar, 2024; Kim & Beehr, 2020):

H2: Communication, feedback and recognition positively affect perceived organisational support.

Career development

Career development opportunities signal long-term relational commitment and indicate whether employees are viewed as valuable organisational assets. Transparent promotion systems and structured training initiatives communicate investment in employees' future contributions (Lee & Kim, 2023). Under Organisational Support Theory, discretionary developmental support enhances employees' belief that the organisation values their future potential (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), while Social Exchange Theory suggests that such investment strengthens reciprocity norms (Blau, 1964). Research shows that HR development practices enhance POS when attributed to genuine organisational care (Jehanzeb, 2020; Winarno et al., 2022). In state-owned heavy industry enterprises, where advancement pathways may be rigid (Horváth & Kenesei, 2023), accessible development opportunities reinforce POS (Başar, 2024; Saputra et al., 2023):

H3: Career development positively affects perceived organisational support.

Work stress

Work stress is a salient feature of heavy industry environments characterised by production pressure, safety requirements and operational intensity (Redzuan et al., 2023). Sustained work stress depletes psychological resources and undermines employee well-being (Hobfoll & Hou, 2025), while cognitive appraisal theory suggests that employees interpret stressors before forming affective reactions (Jiang & Lavaysse, 2018). Unlike supportive resources, work stress may operate as a negative exchange signal. When excessive demands are experienced without adequate support, relational imbalance emerges, weakening reciprocity norms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). If work stress is attributed to organisational indifference rather than situational necessity, POS declines (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Empirical research links stress exposure to reduced attachment and experiential satisfaction (Pindek et al., 2024; Podsakoff et al., 2007). Beyond its indirect effect through POS, persistent work stress may consolidate into negative experiential appraisals over time (Başar, 2024; Lee & Kim, 2023; Saputra et al., 2023):

H4a: Work stress negatively affects perceived organisational support.

H4b: Work stress negatively affects employee experience.

Perceived organisational support

Perceived organisational support functions as the central mediating mechanism translating structural exchange signals into experiential outcomes. Perceived organisational support represents employees' generalised belief that the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Through repeated organisational interactions, employees consolidate interpretations of organisational intent into stable relational judgements (Hassanein et al., 2025; Nugraha & Kharismasyah, 2024). These beliefs shape long-term experiential evaluations of organisational life (Başar, 2024; Lee & Kim, 2023). Empirical evidence demonstrates that POS enhances engagement, satisfaction and experiential evaluation (Khliefat et al., 2025; Pan et al., 2025). When employees perceive strong organisational support, they interpret daily work events more positively and integrate them into favourable cumulative experiences. Conversely, low perceived support weakens relational attachment and contributes to negative experiential outcomes. In formalised SOEs, POS functions as a relational bridge translating procedural systems into meaningful experience (Hassanein et al., 2025):

H5: Perceived organisational support positively affects employee experience.

Within a resource interpretation and exchange framework, organisational practices and work stress are unlikely to influence EX directly without first being interpreted as supportive (Morgan, 2017; Saputra et al., 2023). Organisational practices, policies and structural provisions function as relational signals rather than neutral administrative arrangements. Employees cognitively evaluate whether these practices reflect genuine concern or procedural compliance before forming experiential judgements (Jehanzeb, 2020). Social Exchange Theory suggests that only when such practices are perceived as discretionary expressions of organisational care do they activate reciprocity norms and strengthen relational bonds (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). If resources are interpreted as routine obligations, their relational value diminishes and reciprocal responses weaken. Meta-analytic evidence confirms the mediating role of POS between HR practices and employee outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Furthermore, recent research highlights that POS operates as a sensemaking filter translating HR signals into attitudinal and experiential consequences (Winarno et al., 2022). In institutionalised SOEs, where bureaucratic formalisation may obscure relational intent, structural arrangements alone are insufficient to generate positive EX unless interpreted through supportive relational signals:

H6a: POS mediates the relationship between career development and employee experience.

H6b: POS mediates the relationship between communication and employee experience.

H6c: POS mediates the relationship between working conditions and welfare and employee experience.

H6d: POS mediates the relationship between work stress and employee experience.

Organisational culture

Organisational culture represents the broader normative environment within which exchange relationships unfold. It provides the interpretive climate-shaping of how POS is understood and translated into EX (Vu & Le, 2025). Shared norms of fairness, collaboration and psychological safety reinforce relational trust and stabilise expectations of reciprocity (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). In supportive cultures characterised by fairness and collaboration, the relational meaning attached to organisational support becomes stronger, thereby amplifying the positive effect of POS on EX (Horváth & Kenesei, 2023; Saputra et al., 2023). Research further indicates that strong organisational cultures enhance social exchange mechanisms by embedding consistent relational signals in everyday practices (Denison et al., 2014; Mossholder et al., 2011). Conversely, bureaucratic or compliance-driven cultures may weaken this translation process by reducing trust and diluting relational interpretations. Organisational culture therefore conditions the strength of the POS, EX relationship. Rather than directly influencing POS, organisational culture is conceptualised as a contextual boundary condition that shapes the extent to which supportive perceptions translate into experiential outcomes:

H7: Organisational culture positively moderates the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee experience.

The proposed conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

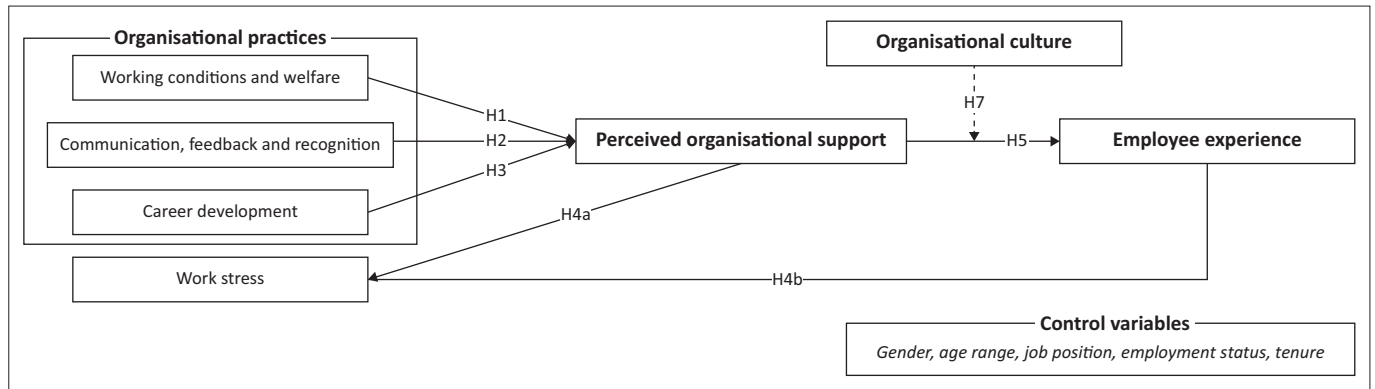
Research design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between organisational practices, work stress and EX in heavy-industry SOEs. Given the inclusion of mediation and moderation effects, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019).

Sampling strategy and data collection

The target population comprised employees working in large heavy-industry SOEs operating in Vietnam. Because no centralised employee database was available, purposive sampling was adopted. Respondents were required to have at least 6 months of tenure to ensure that their responses reflected accumulated work experience.

Data were collected between July 2025 and September 2025. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed using both paper-based and online formats. After screening for incomplete responses and response patterns indicating straight-lining, 403 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis, representing a response rate of 67.2%. This sample size satisfies the recommended threshold for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2019). The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.



Note: H6a–H6d indicate indirect effects via perceived organisational support.

FIGURE 1: Proposed research model.

TABLE 1: Sample characteristics of respondents ($N = 403$).

Criteria	Category	Frequency (n)	%
Gender	Male	287	71.22
	Female	116	28.78
Age (years)	< 30	61	15.14
	30–39	151	37.47
	40–49	126	31.27
	≥ 50	65	16.13
Job position	Production workers	244	60.55
	Office staff	88	21.84
	Line managers and/or Supervisors	50	12.41
	Middle-level managers and above	21	5.21
Employment status	Permanent staff	311	77.17
	Long-term contract	76	18.86
	Short-term contract	16	3.97
Tenure (years)	< 1	20	4.96
	1–3	92	22.83
	3–5	77	19.11
	> 5	214	53.10
Primary business sector	Steel and metallurgy	164	40.69
	Mining and mineral extraction	70	17.37
	Heavy mechanical engineering	61	15.14
	Industrial equipment manufacturing	45	11.17
	Energy and industrial utilities	35	8.68
	Industrial logistics and materials handling	28	6.95

Note: The sample reflects the demographic profile typical of heavy-industry SOEs, characterised by a predominantly male workforce and relatively long organisational tenure.

Measurement instruments

All constructs were measured using multi-item reflective scales adapted from established studies. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The full measurement items are provided in Appendix 1 Table 1-A1.

Organisational practices were operationalised through three dimensions: working conditions and welfare (Morgan, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017), communication and recognition (Albrecht et al., 2015; Plaskoff, 2017) and career development (De Vos et al., 2011; Morgan, 2017). Work stress was measured using items adapted from Başar

(2024) and Useche et al. (2021). Perceived organisational support was assessed using items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Nguyen et al. (2024). Employee experience was measured using items adapted from Morgan (2017), Plaskoff (2017) and Yang and Zhang (2025). Organisational culture was measured using items adapted from Morgan (2017), Plaskoff (2017) and Schein and Schein (2017).

Analytical methods

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 20 employees prior to the main survey. Data were analysed using SmartPLS 4 following a two-step procedure. The measurement model was assessed for reliability and validity, and the structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping (5000 resamples) to test direct, mediating and moderating effects.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from Vietnam Trade Union University (Reference number: VTUU-REC-2026-01). The research complied with the institutional guidelines governing social science research and internationally recognised ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the academic use of the data, and completion of the questionnaire was taken as informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were recorded anonymously. All data were securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

Results

Assessment of the measurement model

The measurement model was evaluated using PLS-SEM following recommended procedures (Hair et al., 2019). Indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity and collinearity were assessed prior to examining the structural relationships.

All outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708, ranging from 0.841 to 0.895, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. Internal consistency reliability was supported, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.873 and 0.908 and composite reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.913 to 0.936, all above the 0.70 criterion.

Convergent validity was confirmed as average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.724 to 0.784, exceeding the minimum requirement of 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, with the highest value (0.664) observed between POS and EX, indicating that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Collinearity diagnostics showed no multicollinearity concerns. All inner model variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below 3.3, and outer model VIF values were within acceptable limits. Model fit was satisfactory, with standardised root mean squared residual (SRMR) values of 0.040 (saturated model) and 0.051 (estimated model).

Table 2 summarises the measurement model results. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability and validity, supporting further evaluation of the structural model.

Structural model assessment

The structural model was evaluated by examining path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect sizes (f^2), as well as mediation and moderation effects using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples. The descriptive statistics and correlation results are presented in Table 3.

Explanatory power and predictive relevance

The model explains 48.6% of the variance in POS ($R^2 = 0.486$) and 43.9% of the variance in EX ($R^2 = 0.439$), indicating moderate explanatory power. Predictive relevance was confirmed as Q^2 values were 0.345 for POS and 0.313 for EX, both exceeding zero.

Direct effects

Career development ($\beta = 0.382, p < 0.001$), communication and recognition ($\beta = 0.278, p < 0.001$) and working

conditions and welfare ($\beta = 0.227, p < 0.001$) positively influence POS. Work stress negatively affects POS ($\beta = -0.136, p < 0.001$). Perceived organisational support has a strong positive effect on EX ($\beta = 0.452, p < 0.001$), representing the largest direct effect in the model. Work stress also exerts a direct negative effect on EX ($\beta = -0.287, p < 0.001$), indicating that stress influences EX both directly and indirectly (Figure 2).

Mediating effects

Bootstrapping results confirm that POS mediates the relationships between organisational practices, work stress and EX. Significant indirect effects were observed for career development ($\beta = 0.173, p < 0.001$), communication ($\beta = 0.126, p < 0.001$), working conditions and welfare ($\beta = 0.103, p < 0.001$) and work stress ($\beta = -0.061, p < 0.001$). Because both the direct paths (e.g. work stress $\rightarrow$ EX) and indirect paths remain significant, the results indicate partial mediation rather than full mediation.

Moderating effect

The interaction term between POS and organisational culture (POS $\times$ OC $\rightarrow$ EX) is significant ($\beta = 0.109, p = 0.010$). This positive interaction coefficient indicates that organisational culture strengthens the positive relationship between POS and EX. In organisations characterised by stronger relational and fairness-oriented cultures, the beneficial impact of POS on EX becomes more pronounced.

TABLE 3: Structural model results.

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	f^2	Result
H1	CD $\rightarrow$ POS	0.382	10.155	< 0.001	0.233	Supported
H2	COM $\rightarrow$ POS	0.278	7.336	< 0.001	0.131	Supported
H3	WL $\rightarrow$ POS	0.227	5.615	< 0.001	0.081	Supported
H4a	WS $\rightarrow$ POS	-0.136	3.748	< 0.001	0.035	Supported
H4b	WS $\rightarrow$ EX	-0.287	7.154	< 0.001	0.137	Supported
H5	POS $\rightarrow$ EX	0.452	10.059	< 0.001	0.251	Supported
H6a	CD $\rightarrow$ POS $\rightarrow$ EX	0.173	6.939	< 0.001	-	Supported
H6b	COM $\rightarrow$ POS $\rightarrow$ EX	0.126	5.835	< 0.001	-	Supported
H6c	WL $\rightarrow$ POS $\rightarrow$ EX	0.103	4.984	< 0.001	-	Supported
H6d	WS $\rightarrow$ POS $\rightarrow$ EX	-0.061	3.509	< 0.001	-	Supported
H7	POS $\times$ OC $\rightarrow$ EX	0.109	2.571	0.010	0.020	Supported

Note: R^2 : POS = 0.486; EX = 0.439.

CD, career development; COM, communication feedback and recognition; EX, employee exchange; OC, organisational culture; POS, perceived organisational support; WL, working conditions and welfare; WS, work stress.

TABLE 2: Measurement model assessment.

Construct	Loading range	α	CR	AVE	VIF range
Career development	0.854–0.881	0.895	0.927	0.761	2.17–2.59
Communication	0.850–0.894	0.889	0.923	0.750	2.20–2.79
Working conditions & welfare	0.857–0.877	0.887	0.922	0.747	2.25–2.46
Work stress	0.845–0.886	0.890	0.924	0.752	2.26–2.62
Perceived organisational support	0.841–0.872	0.873	0.913	0.724	2.02–2.38
Organisational culture	0.875–0.895	0.908	0.936	0.784	2.50–2.97
Employee experience	0.842–0.866	0.876	0.915	0.729	2.05–2.27

Note: All HTMT values < 0.85; all inner VIF values < 3.3; SRMR (estimated model) = 0.051.

CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; VIF, variance inflation factor.

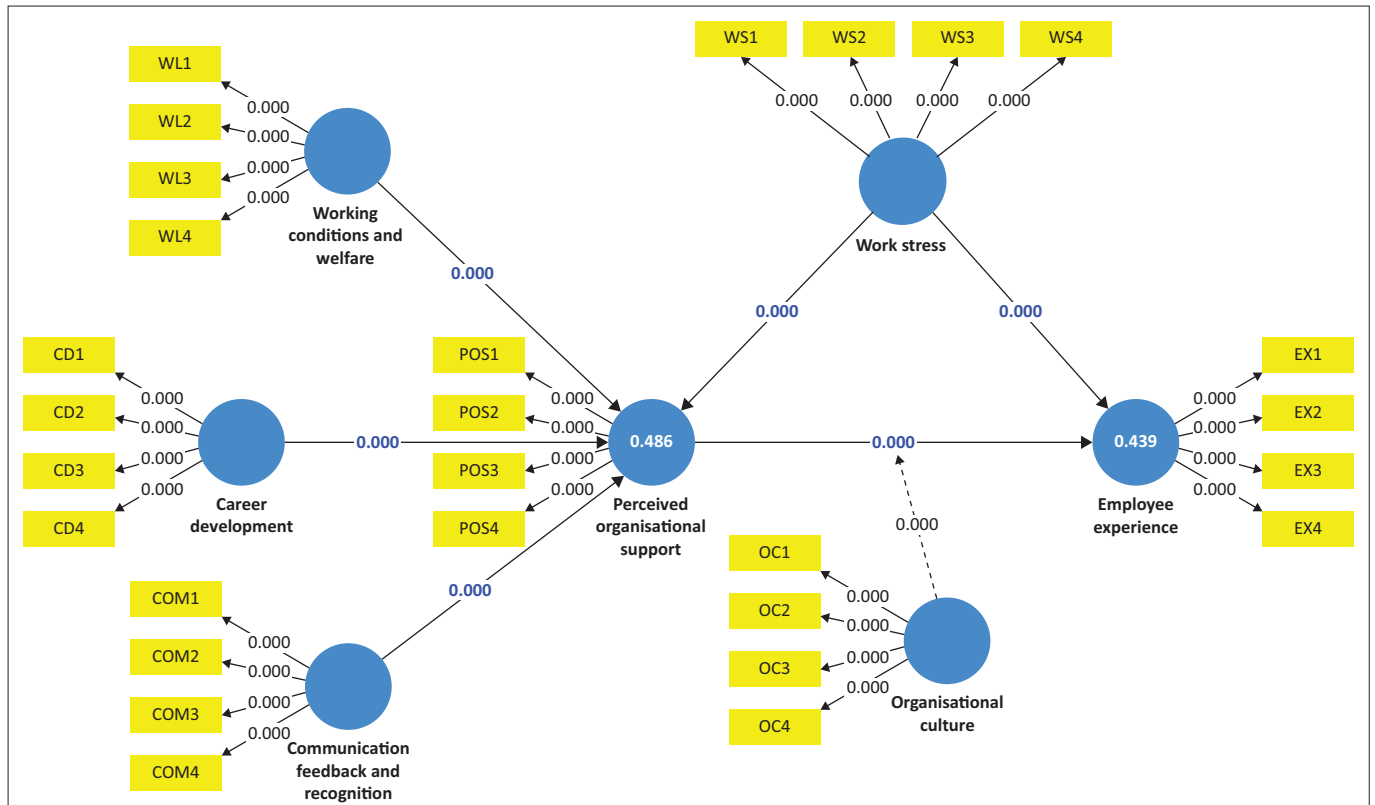


FIGURE 2: Structural model assessment result.

Discussion

This study examined how organisational practices and work stress shape EX in heavy-industry SOEs, with particular attention to the psychological mechanisms underlying this process. The findings provide strong support for an exchange-based and perception-driven explanation of EX formation.

Consistent with Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), POS emerges as the central mechanism linking organisational inputs to EX. Organisational practices do not exert direct mechanical effects; rather, they influence EX through employees' interpretations of whether the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This finding aligns with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which emphasises that employee responses are shaped by the relational meaning attributed to organisational actions rather than by objective provisions alone.

The strong relationship between POS and EX suggests that employee experience is better conceptualised as a cumulative relational evaluation than as a structural by-product of HR architecture. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary EX scholarship (Morgan, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017), which positions experience as an aggregated interpretation of organisational encounters over time. By empirically validating POS as a mediating mechanism, the study strengthens the theoretical integration between EX research and mainstream organisational behaviour

theory. The explanatory salience of POS appears particularly pronounced in heavy-industry SOEs, where formalisation and bureaucratic procedures may obscure discretionary intent. In such environments, relational signals embedded within organisational practices become decisive in shaping how institutional structures are interpreted.

Organisational practices as relational signals of support

Among organisational practices, career development emerged as the most influential predictor of POS. This result corroborates Organisational Support Theory's argument that discretionary investment in employees' long-term growth constitutes a strong signal of organisational valuation. It also aligns with empirical evidence linking developmental HR practices to enhanced support perceptions (Jehanzeb, 2020; Winarno et al., 2022). However, its magnitude requires contextual interpretation. In heavy-industry SOEs, career progression is often perceived as rigid or tenure-bound. Under such institutional constraints, visible developmental initiatives may acquire heightened symbolic importance, signalling organisational commitment beyond routine administrative processes. The findings therefore refine existing research by suggesting that the salience of career development as a support signal may be amplified where advancement opportunities are structurally limited.

Communication and recognition also positively predicted POS, reinforcing Social Exchange Theory's emphasis on daily interpersonal interactions as carriers of relational meaning. Because communication practices are enacted through

supervisors, they convey direct evidence of organisational concern. In hierarchical SOEs, where communication may be procedural or compliance-oriented, transparent and appreciative feedback assumes particular importance. The results indicate that employees infer organisational intent less from formal policy existence and more from enacted managerial behaviour.

Working conditions and welfare further contributed to POS, consistent with EX frameworks that recognise the importance of material and physical environments. However, the comparatively moderate magnitude of this effect suggests that such provisions may be interpreted as baseline obligations in heavily regulated industrial contexts. When safety standards and welfare systems are perceived as compliance-driven rather than discretionary, their relational impact weakens. The findings therefore nuance prior research by demonstrating that material provisions influence support perceptions most strongly when employees attribute them to genuine organisational care.

Work stress as exchange imbalance and experiential erosion

Work stress negatively affected both POS and EX, revealing a dual-path influence. The negative association with POS supports the argument that excessive demands signal relational imbalance when not matched by adequate resources. Under Social Exchange Theory, perceived inequity in exchange weakens supportive beliefs. At the same time, the direct negative impact of stress on EX indicates that chronic overload and operational strain accumulate into global experiential evaluations independently of relational interpretation. This pattern of partial mediation suggests that supportive perceptions may buffer, but cannot fully offset, the experiential consequences of sustained demands. In heavy-industry SOEs, where production pressures and safety compliance are structurally embedded, stress may be perceived as systemic, reinforcing its experiential impact.

Perceived organisational support as the central mediating mechanism

The mediation results confirm that POS serves as the principal mechanism through which organisational practices influence EX. This finding extends prior meta-analytic evidence on POS as a mediator between HR practices and attitudinal outcomes (Kurtessis et al., 2017) by demonstrating its explanatory relevance for EX, a broader and more cumulative construct. By establishing POS as the interpretive bridge between practices and experience, the study advances EX research beyond descriptive accounts of workplace design. Organisational inputs become experientially meaningful only when translated into supportive beliefs. This mechanism-based explanation provides theoretical precision and strengthens the integration of EX scholarship with established exchange frameworks.

The partial mediation observed for work stress further contributes to theory by illustrating that not all organisational influences are fully captured through relational interpretation. Certain experiential consequences, particularly those rooted in psychological strain, may operate independently of support beliefs.

Organisational culture as a boundary condition of support translation

The moderating effect of organisational culture on the POS and EX relationship introduces an important contextual dimension. The positive interaction indicates that in environments characterised by fairness and collaboration, the beneficial impact of perceived support on EX is amplified.

This finding aligns with cultural theories that conceptualise organisational culture as a climate-shaping mechanism influencing interpretation and behavioural translation (Denison et al., 2014; Mossholder et al., 2011). Culture provides consistency across organisational signals; when relational norms are embedded in routines, supportive perceptions gain credibility and stability. Consequently, perceived support more readily transforms into sustained experiential positivity. Notably, organisational culture did not exert a direct effect on EX. This absence refines cultural arguments by suggesting that culture operates less as an independent experiential driver and more as a boundary condition shaping the strength of exchange processes. In highly formalised SOEs, culture may not override structural constraints directly, but it influences how employees interpret and internalise supportive signals.

Theoretical implications

This study advances theoretical understanding of EX by articulating and empirically validating an exchange-based mechanism grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Organisational Support Theory. Rather than treating EX as a direct outcome of organisational practices, the findings demonstrate that it is constructed through employees' interpretive beliefs about organisational support. By positioning POS as the central mediating conduit linking organisational practices and work stress to EX, the study strengthens the integration between EX scholarship and established exchange frameworks in organisational behaviour.

The results also extend Organisational Support Theory by broadening the explanatory scope of POS beyond traditional outcomes such as commitment, engagement or performance. The evidence that POS shapes cumulative experiential evaluations suggests that support perceptions play a foundational role in structuring how employees globally appraise organisational life over time. In this sense, POS functions not merely as an attitudinal predictor but as a core determinant of holistic work experience.

Incorporating work stress alongside organisational practices further enriches theory by integrating demand-based and exchange-based explanations within a unified model. The identification of both direct and indirect stress effects indicates that EX deteriorates through weakened relational beliefs as well as sustained psychological strain. Moreover, the moderating role of organisational culture refines cultural perspectives by demonstrating that culture acts as a boundary condition that amplifies the translation of perceived support into experience, rather than as a standalone predictor. Finally, by focusing on heavy-industry SOEs in Vietnam, the study contributes context-sensitive evidence illustrating how institutional rigidity shapes the interpretation of organisational resources.

Accordingly, the contribution of the study lies less in proposing a new construct than in offering a coherent, contextually rich integration of EX, POS, work stress and organisational culture in a heavy-industry SOE setting.

Practical implications

The findings suggest that improving EX in heavy-industry SOEs requires attention to relational meaning rather than structural design alone. Formal HR systems and welfare provisions do not automatically generate positive experience; their impact depends on whether employees interpret them as genuine expressions of organisational care. Managerial emphasis should therefore shift from policy existence to policy enactment, ensuring that organisational practices consistently communicate credible relational intent.

Career development emerges as a particularly powerful lever in rigid institutional contexts. Visible investment in skill development and transparent progression pathways signal long-term organisational commitment, thereby strengthening supportive beliefs. Similarly, communication and recognition practices require strong managerial capability, as supervisors function as key interpreters of organisational intent in hierarchical environments.

The findings also underscore the importance of proactive stress management. Because work stress directly and indirectly undermines EX, workload regulation, adequate staffing and supportive coping resources are essential. Finally, cultivating a fairness-oriented and collaborative culture can amplify the experiential benefits of perceived support by reinforcing relational consistency across organisational levels. When supportive practices are embedded within a credible cultural climate, employees are more likely to translate perceived care into a sustained positive experience.

For HRM in African, South African and broader Global South public-sector contexts, the findings suggest that formally available HR practices need to be enacted as credible support signals rather than treated merely as

compliance routines. Public sector and SOE managers can therefore use career development, fair communication and stress management as practical levers for converting institutionalised HR systems into more positive EX.

Limitations and future research

Several considerations delimit the scope of this study. The cross-sectional design prevents strong causal inference and does not capture how EX evolves through organisational change or career progression. Future longitudinal research could examine whether support perceptions fluctuate in response to policy reform, restructuring, or economic cycles in SOEs.

The reliance on perceptual measures may also constrain the objectivity of the findings. Although statistical diagnostics indicated acceptable model validity, future studies could integrate supervisor ratings, archival HR data or multi-wave designs to strengthen causal interpretation.

In addition, the institutional specificity of heavy-industry SOEs in Vietnam may shape the salience of developmental signals and the buffering role of culture. Comparative investigations across private firms, service sectors or different national governance systems would help clarify the contextual boundaries of the proposed mechanism.

Future research may further explore alternative moderators or mediators such as leadership style, psychological safety, or perceived procedural justice to deepen understanding of how organisational signals are interpreted and consolidated into enduring EX.

Conclusion

This study sought to advance understanding of how EX is constructed within highly formalised, heavy-industry SOEs. Rather than conceptualising EX as a direct reflection of organisational systems, the findings demonstrate that it emerges through employees' interpretive judgements about organisational support.

The results highlight POS as the pivotal explanatory link between organisational conditions and cumulative work experience. Organisational practices, including career development, communication and recognition and working conditions, contribute to EX primarily when they are interpreted as signals of organisational valuation. Conversely, work stress erodes EX both by weakening support perceptions and by generating direct experiential strain. Organisational culture does not independently determine experience but strengthens the extent to which supportive perceptions translate into positive evaluations.

Taken together, these findings reposition EX as a relational construct grounded in exchange dynamics rather than as a by-product of HR architecture. In institutional settings characterised by bureaucratic rigidity and operational pressure, the credibility of supportive signals becomes

central to shaping how employees evaluate their organisational lives over time.

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In developing this manuscript, generative AI (OpenAI – ChatGPT5.2) was used in a limited capacity to refine sentence structure and enhance overall readability. All conceptual reasoning, methodological decisions, data analysis, interpretation and intellectual contributions were made by the authors, who remain responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the article.

Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Mai T. Pham: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft. Hung T. Phung: Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing. Ninh H. Nguyen: Conceptualisation, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Ninh H. Nguyen, upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations.

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Appendix 1 starts on the next page →

Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: Measurement items and construct definitions.

Items code	Measurement statements
CD1	The organisation offers clear career development opportunities
CD2	Employees receive training to enhance professional skills
CD3	Career advancement paths are transparent within organisation
CD4	The organisation supports long-term employee career growth
COM1	Management communicates work information clearly and timely
COM2	Employees receive constructive feedback on job performance
COM3	Employee contributions are recognised by supervisors
COM4	The organisation values employee opinions and suggestions
WL1	Working conditions ensure employee safety
WL2	Welfare policies meet employees' basic needs
WL3	Work environment supports effective job performance
WL4	Employees receive adequate welfare benefits
WS1	My job requires working under high pressure
WS2	I often feel overloaded with work tasks
WS3	Time pressure frequently affects my work
WS4	My job causes significant work-related stress
OC1	The organisation promotes fairness in work practices
OC2	Collaboration is encouraged throughout the organisation
OC3	Employees are treated with respect at work
OC4	The organisation emphasises people-oriented values
POS1	The organisation values my contributions
POS2	The organisation cares about my well-being
POS3	Help is available when I face work difficulties
POS4	The organisation supports employees when needed
EX1	I have positive overall experiences at this organisation
EX2	My work experience meets my expectations
EX3	I feel satisfied with my cumulative work experience
EX4	Overall, this organisation provides a good work experience