



THE SUPERVISORY EFFECT: THE MODERATION OF SUPERVISORY JUSTICE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POS AND WORK OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Perceptions of organizational support (POS) has been extensively researched and has dominated management & psychology journals over the last several decades. Despite this dominance, there exist some nebulous concepts and assumptions that warrant further investigation in order to better understand the variables and mechanisms that strengthen POS relationships. POS is based on employees' perceptions of how their organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. Naturally, variables and processes that strengthen POS relationships with various positive outcomes are vital. One such pivotal variable is supervisory procedural justice (SPJ) because supervisors and the processes through which they make decisions has a significant impact on employee's POS and fairness perceptions within the organization. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of supervisory procedural justice in the relationship between POS and work outcomes. Data was collected from 111 employees employed at an engineering firm from the southeastern region of the US. Results confirm the study's hypotheses and highlight the saliency of the supervisor in eliciting positive outcomes in POS relationships. Ironically, results also showed that even when perceptions of SPJ were low, they still had an increased effect on the work outcomes.

Keywords: POS, supervisory procedural justice, organizations support theory (OST), organizational commitment, supervisory trust, OCB

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, millions of U.S. employees voluntarily resigned from their jobs at unprecedented rates, also known as the “Great Resignation,” in part due to low wages, few advancement opportunities, and not feeling valued (Gittleman, 2022). Therefore, research has increasingly focused on better understanding the relationship between organizations and their connections to their employees, particularly since high turnover rates are detrimental to an organization’s stability and success (Serenko, 2022; Sull et al., 2022). One such research stream that has endeavored to better understand this relationship is POS. POS has been extensively researched (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2020), yet little is known about some important variables that moderate the relationship between POS and its resultant work outcomes. These moderators serve to proliferate and strengthen these relationships and enables organizations to better understand the processes through which positive employee outcomes can be elicited. This study examines the impact of SPJ as a moderator in POS relationships. Previous studies have examined organizational justice in these relationships (DeConinck, 2010; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), but to the author’s knowledge very few, if any studies have examined SPJ as a moderator in POS relationships. This supervisory level examination is warranted because supervisors are view dichotomously as an agent or proxy of the organizations in some contexts and as a separate and independent entity withing the organization in other contexts. Furthermore, employees engage frequently with their supervisors regarding various issues within the organization, so it is prudent to examine how much of an impact do supervisors play in proliferating positive employee outcomes and/or mitigating negative employee outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Extant literature highlights the importance of global exchanges or POS, which is based upon an employee’s perceptions that their organization values their contributions and their well-being, as a vital element to reducing turnover intentions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Since organizations convey the importance of their employees’ well-being through their policies and processes, employees who perceive that their organization provides them with resources and assistance when needed to complete their job duties are more likely to be productive. In fact, studies show that high levels of POS are linked to positive outcomes, such as increased levels of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), trust, organizational commitment, and job performance while low levels are POS are related to negative outcomes, such as counterproductive work behaviors and turnover intentions

(Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The types of outcomes associated with POS can be explained by the norm of reciprocity which reflects one's sense of obligation to reciprocate to another entity based upon what has been provided (Gouldner, 1960). As a result, employees' beliefs remain a driving force determining the extent to which they are vested in the organization's goals and success (Eisenberger et al., 2016).

Supervisory Procedural Justice (SPJ)

Although organizational policies and procedures often reflect how organizations view their employees, their implementation by supervisors also matter. SPJ is the employee's perceptions of their supervisor's ability to be fair in implementing policies and procedures and making decisions (Yang et al., 2009). Consequently, employees possessing increased levels of SPJ are more likely to accept and comply with decisions from their supervisor, in part because the employee feels respected and valued (Tyler & Lind, 1992). SPJ deviates from the previously held notion that procedural justice only comes from an organization, particularly since supervisors are also viewed as independent entities apart from their organization (Byrne, 1999; Liao & Rupp, 2005; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002). While standard policies and procedures may be established within an organization, supervisors have discretion in how they are applied, thus influencing the extent to which they are perceived as fair by employees (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Yang et al., 2009). Therefore, it is possible for employees to possess both low levels of procedural justice towards their organization and high levels of procedural justice towards their supervisor. In fact, Liao and Rupp's (2005) study clearly delineated procedural justice between organizations and supervisors among employees. Previous research indicates SPJ is beneficial to the organization, in which high levels of SPJ are associated with increased job performance, trust, and job satisfaction (Mushonga et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2009).

Hypotheses Development

This study's theoretical basis is the organizational support theory (OST) which postulates how employees formulate perceptions of how their organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The relationship between POS and procedural justice has been well established throughout literature (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Furthermore, these researchers noted that there was a more relevant and significant relationship between POS and procedural than any other justice type because organizations have more control over the policies and procedures in allocating desirable resources and rewards. Therefore, procedural justice has an enormous impact on the employee's POS and elements of procedural justice

such as giving employees voice, fairness and consistency in decision-making, transparency, and shared governance go a long way in compelling the employees to have positive perceptions of the organization. SPJ is a derivative of organizational justice and has been extensively established and utilized in literature (Mushonga et al., 2014; Park et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2009). It is predicated on the same principles as organizational justice and the two are distinguished from each other by referencing the source of justice (see Lavelle et al., 2007). In this context supervisors are considered to play a dual role within the organization. On one hand, they are viewed as an agent or proxy of the organization and their actions are attributed to the organization and on the other hand, they are viewed as a separate entity within the organization and their decisions and actions are attributed to them and not the organization. Supervisors play pivotal role in eliciting positive POS outcomes since they are the ones who implement and execute the organization's policies and procedures and engage with employee on a regular basis. For example, Shanock & Eisenberger's (2006) study examined the relationships of supervisors' POS with subordinates' perceived supervisor support (PSS), POS, and in-role and extra-role performance in a sample of retail employees. Their finding suggested that supervisors who felt supported by their organization reciprocated the support by creating a supportive environment for their subordinates in turn. This reciprocation process is similar to the trickle-down model (see Masterson, 2001), which suggests that the positive interactions between the organization and supervisors upstream is paid back by the supervisors by engaging in positive interactions with their subordinates downstream. When supervisors create a supportive environment for their subordinates as pay back for their own positive POS, they are likely to elicit higher levels of organizational commitment from their employees who view them as a proxy of the organization.

Hypothesis 1: SPJ will moderate the relationship between POS and organizational commitment such that a stronger relationship will result when SPJ is high.

The relationship between POS, procedural justice and trust has been established in previous research (Bobbio et al., 2012; Caesens et al., 2019; DeConick, 2010; Ristig, 2009; Stinglhamber et al., 2006). Bobbio et al. (2012) examined the link between POS, empowerment leadership, and trust in a sample of nurses from an Italian general hospital and found that trust in the organization was influenced by POS and the informing component of empowering leadership style. Therefore, when employees have positive POS and positive perceptions of SPJ, this combination will increase their trust in their supervisor and organization.

Hypothesis 2: SPJ will moderate the relationship between POS and supervisory trust such that a stronger relationship will result when SPJ is high.

The relationship between POS, procedural justice, and OCB has also been well established by previous research (Alshaabani et al., 2021; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Liu, 2009; Moorman et al., 1998; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995; Thompson et al., 2020). Thompson et al. (2020) examined how gender the relationship between POS and OCB and found that POS elicits OCB. Furthermore, the study findings illustrated that men were more likely than women to required POS in order to engage in OCB. Indeed when employees have positive POS and perceptions of SPJ they are more likely to feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate the organization and supervisor's valuing their contribution and showing concern. The employees reciprocate this kind gesture by the organization and supervisor by going above and beyond their job duties and helping their supervisors and co-workers accomplish various tasks.

Hypothesis 3: SPJ will moderate the relationship between POS and OCB such that a stronger relationship will result when SPJ is high.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

After obtaining approval from the institutional review board for this study, employees were recruited from an engineering firm in the southeastern part of the United States. This quantitative study used a convenience sample to examine the moderating role of supervisory procedural justice in the relationship between POS and work outcomes. Employees were provided details about the study, on-site location, date, and time of the study via an email distributed through human resources. Informed consent was obtained prior to participants completing the self-administered questionnaire. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary; therefore, they reserved the right to quit at any time. Once participants completed the questionnaire, they placed it inside a sealed envelope and into a locked box located near the exit of the on-site study location monitored by the researcher.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 111 employees. Participants were mostly African American (70%), male (60%), and ranged in age from 21 to 57 years old ($M=33$). Approximately 85% of participants possessed a bachelor's degree and had an average tenure of 4.7 years with the organization. Most participants had been supervised by their current supervisor an average of 2.5 years.

Measures

The survey was comprised of a demographic questionnaire, which included items about their race, gender, age, education level, length of tenure with the organization, and length of time under current supervisor. Several instruments were used to measure the variables of interest for this study. This survey used a 7-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Perceptions of organizational support (POS). A 9-item revised scale was used to assess perceptions of care and support from the participants' organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Sample items include "My working conditions support the results I am expected to achieve," and "In my organization, I am allowed to participate in decisions regarding my workload and performance standards." In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .92.

Supervisory procedural justice (SPJ). A 4-item revised scale by Rupp & Cropanzano (2002) that was adapted from Byrne's (1999) scale was used to assess participants' perceptions of their supervisor's ability to be fair when implementing policies and making decisions. A sample item includes "I can count on my supervisor to have fair policies." In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .90.

Organizational commitment. An 8-item scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) was used to assess participants' commitment to their organization. Sample items include, "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization," and "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .83.

Supervisory Trust. A 5-item scale developed by Yang and Mossholder (2006) was used to assess cognitive and affect levels of trust in their supervisory. Sample items for cognitive trust include, "I can depend on my supervisor to meet his/her responsibilities," and "Given my supervisor's track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence." Sample items for affective trust include, "I'm confident that my supervisor will always care about my personal needs at work," and "If I shared my problems with my supervisor, I know he/she would respond with care." In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .88.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). A 7-item scale adopted from Williams & Anderson's (1991) OCB scale was used to assess participants' positive voluntary contributions to their organization. Sample items include, "I go out of my way to help new employees," and "I help others who have a heavy load." In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was .89.

Data Analysis

This study obtained descriptive statistics and correlational analyses using SPSS version 28.0. Study variables were examined for possible multicollinearity prior to testing hypotheses. This study also used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS Macro to test the hypothesized moderating role of SPJ on the relationship between POS and work outcomes. PROCESS Macro provides estimates of regression coefficients from 5,000 bootstrap samples, assuming the data are normally distributed. Model 1 of PROCESS Macro was used to test each hypothesis.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables. Consistent with prior research, POS was significantly and positively associated with SPJ ($r = 0.414$, $p < .01$), OGC ($r = 0.645$, $p < .01$), TRU ($r = 0.471$, $p < .01$), and OCB ($r = 0.314$, $p < .01$).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Means	s. d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. POS	4.45	1.27					
2. SPJ	5.60	1.37	.414**				
3. OGC	4.48	0.99	.645**	.334**			
4. TRU	5.56	1.40	.471**	.821**	.334**		
5. OCB	5.46	0.91	.314**	.201*	.487**	.208*	

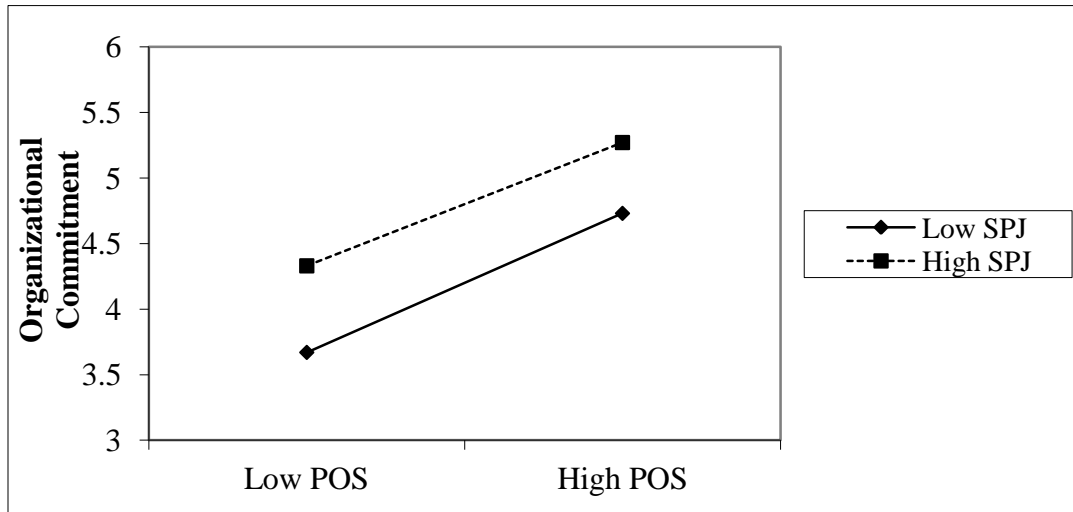
Note: POS = Perception of Organizational Support; SPJ = Supervisory Justice;

OGC = Organizational Commitment; TRU = Supervisory Trust;

OCB = Organizational Citizenship Behavior $n = 111$ ** $p < .01$

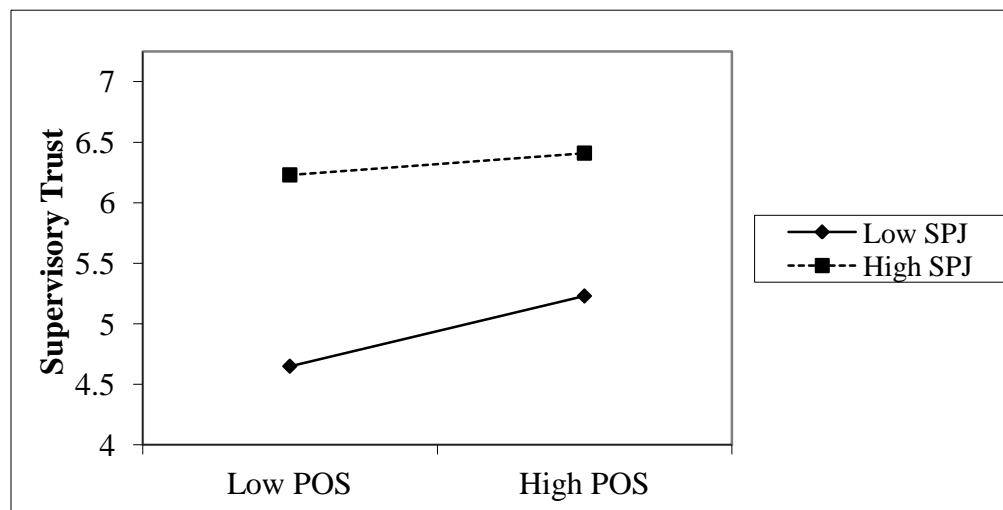
For H1, results showed a significant main effect between POS and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .01$) and a significant main effect of SPJ on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.03$, $p < .03$). There was a significant interaction found by SPJ on POS and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.04$, $p < .01$). Figure 1 illustrates how participants with higher-than-average levels of SPJ experienced an increased effect of POS on organizational commitment, when compared to participants with average to lower-than-average levels of SPJ. However, participants with lower-than-average levels of SPJ also experienced an increase in their levels of organizational commitment which highlights the saliency of SPJ in strengthening POS effects on organization commitment. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the effect of POS on organizational commitment is moderated by SPJ, thus providing support for H1.

Figure 1: Interactive effect of POS and SPJ on organizational commitment



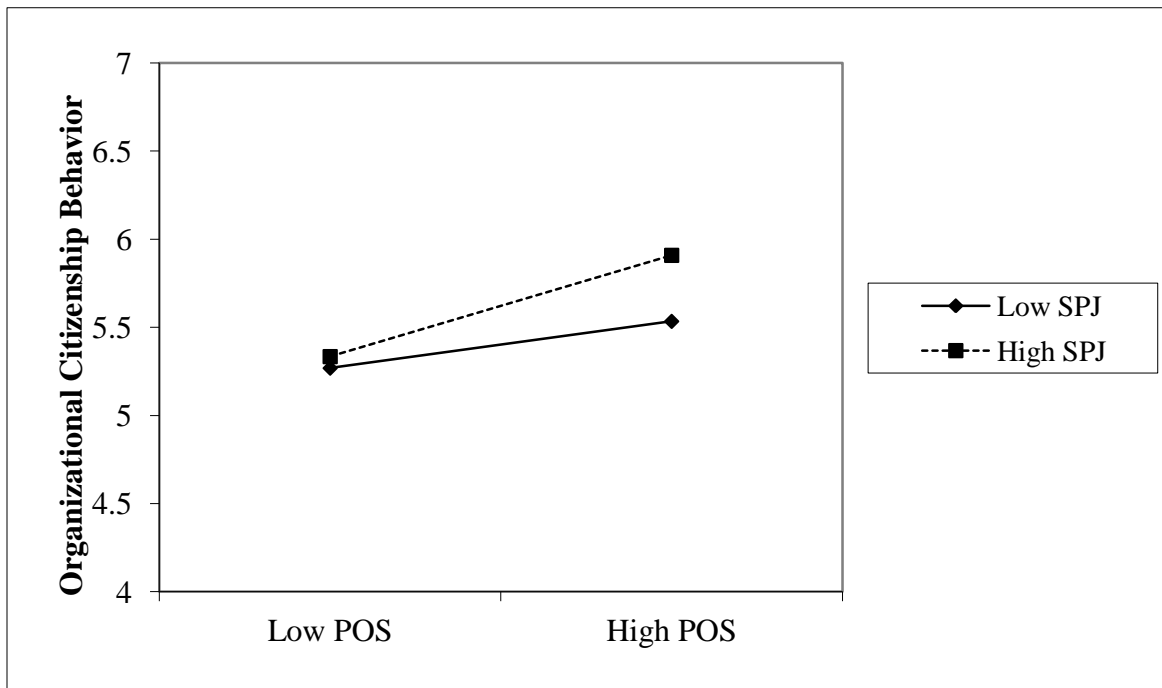
For H2, results showed a significant main effect between POS and supervisory trust ($\beta = 0.19, p < .01$) and a significant main effect of SPJ on supervisory trust ($\beta = 0.69, p < .01$). There was a significant interaction found by SPJ on POS and supervisory trust ($\beta = 0.10, p < .01$). Figure 2 illustrates how participants with higher-than-average levels of SPJ experienced an increased effect of POS on supervisory trust, when compared to participants with average to lower-than-average levels of SPJ). However, participants with lower-than-average levels of SPJ also experienced an increase in their trust levels in their supervisor which highlights the saliency of SPJ in strengthening POS effects on supervisory trust. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the effect of POS on supervisory trust is moderated by SPJ, thus providing support for H2.

Figure 2: Interactive effect of POS and supervisory procedural justice on supervisory trust



For H3, results showed a significant main effect between POS and OCB ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < .01$) and a significant main effect of SPJ on OCB ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .04$). There was a significant interaction found by SPJ on POS and OCB ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < .01$). Figure 3 illustrates how participants with higher-than-average levels of SPJ experienced an increased effect of POS on OCB when compared to participants with average to lower-than-average levels of SPJ. Interestingly, participants with lower-than-average levels of SPJ engaged in similar levels of OCB as participants with above average levels of SPJ. Additionally, participants with average to lower-than-average levels of SPJ also experienced a slight increase in their OCB levels, which highlights the saliency of SPJ in strengthening POS effects on OCB. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the effect of POS on OCB is moderated by SPJ, thus providing support for H3.

Figure 3: Interactive effect of POS and supervisory procedural justice on OCB



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While there is a plethora of POS research in literature, there still exists some research streams that warrant further exploration in an effort to better illuminate how POS stimulates positive work outcomes, especially when research considers the mediators and moderators of POS. This study examined one of these streams by examining the moderating effects of supervisory justice in the relationship between POS and work outcomes (i.e., organizational commitment, supervisory trust, & OCB). The study's findings support previous research that

have examined the relationship between POS and various work outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Patnaik et al., 2023; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Thompson et al., 2020). All three study hypotheses were supported illustrating the importance of SPJ as a moderator in the relationship between POS and work outcomes. Furthermore, the findings suggest that SPJ proliferates POS work outcomes, thus increasing employee levels of organizational commitment, supervisory trust in the organization, and OCB. Furthermore, the findings suggest that reciprocity is vital to POS relationships, as employees reciprocate perceived POS demonstrating positive work outcomes. As employees feel that the organization values and cares for them, they develop a sense of obligation to reciprocate and pay back the organization by being committed to the organization, trusting their supervisor and exhibiting behaviors that go the extra mile by helping their co-workers and the organization (e.g., going above and beyond their prescribed job duties). This phenomenon was also noted by Eisenberger et al., 2001 in their study that examined the role of reciprocation in the relationship between postal employees' affective organizational commitment and job performance. Their findings confirmed that POS strengthened affective commitment and job satisfaction via the norms of reciprocation. However, this study's findings suggest that the employee's perceptions of SPJ further strengthen and increase their work outcomes partly due to the fact that they view the supervisor as a proxy and an agent of the organization. Therefore, any actions by the supervisor can be attributed to the organization, especially when the decisions and action of both the organization and supervisor are aligned. In fact, the supervisor's implementation of fair policies and procedures serves to reinforce the POS among the employees which further proliferates their work outcomes. This finding is profound because it refutes the assumption of the dichotomous nature of POS and SPJ. In fact, the findings suggest the opposite by clearly illustrating how POS and SPJ work in tandem in increasing the employees' levels of reciprocation and work outcomes. This phenomenon is further supported findings that revealed that even when perceptions of SPJ were low, they still had an increased effect on the work outcomes. In essence, when employees perceive that the organization values and cares for them and in addition, they perceive and observe their supervisors implement fair policy and procedures, this invokes the obligation to reciprocate by increasing organizational commitment, supervisory trust and OCB.

Despite the salient contributions of this study, some inherent limitations need to be considered. First, data for this study was collected via cross sectionally at one point in time, therefore no casual inference can be irrefutably determined. Future research should collect longitudinal data so that causal inferences can be decisively established. Second, data was collected via self-reported survey and participants may have likely exaggerated their responses

in order to be viewed favorably and/or to avoid perceived retaliation from the organization. Therefore, future research should collect data from multiple sources within the organization in an effort to reduce common method bias. Third, the study utilized SPJ as moderator, which only focuses on fairness in implementing policies and procedures. This might not have captured the full extent of supervisory justice, which also includes supervisory interactional justice. However, some research has noted that procedural justice is more aptly associated with POS than any other types of justice (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Therefore, future research should include both supervisory procedural and interactional justice in order to fully capture employee fairness perceptions in decision-making, dissemination of relevant information and interpersonal treatment.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings of this study have some vital implications. First, the study findings highlight the centrality of the norm of reciprocity in POS research. Indeed, the positive outcomes are predicated on the employees paying back the organization when they perceive it to value and care for them. Therefore, organizations need to make a conscientious effort to recognize their employees via awards, promotions, etc. and showing concern for them by addressing various issues that affect them. These issues include fair wages, advancement opportunities and feelings of being valued, etc. (Gittleman, 2022). Furthermore, the finding highlight the need for organizations and supervisors to work in tandem in an effort to elicit employees feeling of reciprocity and positive work outcomes, especially when they perceive and observe the two entities (organization and supervisor) in congruence regarding valuing and showing concern for employees. Therefore, supervisory trainings in cultural competency; diversity, equity, and inclusion; empathetic leadership, etc. becomes especially important in proliferating positive work outcomes, which ultimately mitigates negative outcomes like turnover intentions, workplace deviance, job burnout, etc. In fact, investing in these supervisory trainings may help mitigate the negative work outcomes in situations in which the organization might be viewed as unfavorable. In such situations, supervisors who have received these trainings and who are perceived as being fair may also be viewed as separate and independent from the organization which may lessen the negative work outcomes.

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