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Social Exchange Reduces Counterproductive Work Behavior through Employee Engagement: A Moderated-Mediation Model in the Public Sector

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Abstract

This study investigates Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) among Indonesian Civil Servants, where professionalism remains suboptimal despite improvements in formal performance evaluations, indicating a gap between assessed performance and actual behavior. Grounded in social exchange theory, this research aims to examine the effects of Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and organizational justice on CWB, with work engagement as a mediating variable and emotional intelligence as a moderating variable. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing survey data collected from 311 respondents through proportionate cluster random sampling within a regional government context. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results demonstrate that organizational justice significantly enhances work engagement and reduces CWB, while work engagement negatively affects CWB and mediates the relationship between organizational justice and CWB. Conversely, LMX and emotional intelligence do not exhibit significant direct or moderating effects. These findings suggest that fostering organizational justice and strengthening employee engagement are essential for mitigating counterproductive behaviors. In conclusion, enhancing fairness and promoting engagement constitute critical strategies for improving employee behavior in public sector organizations.

Keywords

Civil Servant, Counterproductive Work Behavior, Emotional Intelligence, Leader-Member Exchange, Organizational Justice, Work Engagement.

1. Introduction

The State Civil Apparatus (*Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN*) plays a strategic role in establishing a modern, performance-based government bureaucracy and ensuring effective public service delivery. However, the level of ASN professionalism in Indonesia remains suboptimal. Although the ASN Professionalism Index has increased since 2021, it was still classified as moderate in 2023, indicating persistent challenges in improving the quality of human resources in the public sector. Moreover, a gap exists between formal performance evaluations and actual employee behavior: most ASN employees receive “Good” ratings in e-performance assessments, yet disciplinary violations persist. The intention to report misconduct is also influenced by subjective norms, ethical sensitivity, and personal reporting costs (Suryono & Chariri, 2016; Hariyani & Putra, 2018; Dewi & Dewi, 2019). This phenomenon reflects the presence of Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), defined as intentional actions that harm organizational interests including non-compliance with regulations, inefficient use of working time, low responsibility, tardiness, and corruption practices, as well as interpersonal misconduct such as verbal aggression and harassment, which can undermine organizational well-being and hinder workplace collaboration (Tsai, 2021; Mehmood et al., 2022; Premru et al., 2023).

Previous studies indicate that both organizational and individual factors influence counterproductive work behavior. Commonly examined determinants include organizational justice, organizational climate, organizational culture, organizational politics, Leader Member Exchange (LMX), personality traits, self-esteem, and dark triad personality (Feel et al., 2018; Chinwuba, 2023). Within the framework of social exchange theory, the quality of exchange relationships between leaders, organizations, and employees plays a crucial role in shaping workplace behavior. High-quality LMX relationships contribute to organizational stability and effectiveness, whereas weaker relationships may increase the likelihood of deviant behavior (Zia et al., 2022; Kasih et al., 2025). Similarly, employees who perceive organizational fairness tend to reciprocate with positive behavior, while perceived injustice may trigger negative emotions that encourage counterproductive work behavior (Bahrami et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2016; Hayunintyas et al., 2018).

In addition to these situational factors, research indicates that work engagement plays an important psychological mechanism linking organizational factors to employee behavior. Work engagement is defined as a positive psychological state characterized by high levels of energy, dedication, and absorption in work (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Employees with higher levels of work engagement tend to demonstrate better performance and are less likely to engage in deviant workplace behaviors (Chen et al., 2020). Conversely, low levels of work engagement may increase the likelihood of behaviors that are detrimental to the organization.

Despite extensive research on these relationships, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Several studies have reported that LMX negatively influences counterproductive work behavior, whereas other findings indicate that LMX does not significantly affect such behavior (Amanda & Handoyo, 2020; Götz et al., 2020). Similarly, research examining the influence of organizational justice on deviant behavior has produced mixed results (Cohen & Diamant, 2019; Komari & Sulistiowati, 2020). These inconsistencies highlight the need for further investigation by considering additional factors that may strengthen or weaken the social exchange mechanism.

One individual factor that may influence this process is emotional intelligence. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are generally better able to manage emotions and understand social interactions, enabling them to respond more

adaptively to workplace situations (Reis et al., 2007). Emotional intelligence can also reduce interpersonal conflict and help maintain positive working relationships (Tesi, 2021). While mitigating the negative impact of environmental factors on work engagement (Lim et al., 2024). Therefore, emotional intelligence may function as a moderating factor in the relationship between social exchange, work engagement, and counterproductive work behavior.

In addition to empirical gaps, studies examining CWB within government bureaucracies remain relatively limited. The Indonesian government bureaucracy, characterized by hierarchical structures and vertical dyadic resource exchanges (patronage systems), may influence the dynamics of social exchange between leaders and employees (Turner et al., 2022). For instance, the discovery of attendance manipulation using fake GPS applications by 1,836 employees in one local government illustrates a form of bureaucratic pathology that can hinder the delivery of effective public services (Yunas, 2016). Such phenomena highlight the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to counterproductive work behavior in public sector organizations.

Based on these phenomena, this study aims to examine how social exchange factors, particularly LMX and organizational justice, influence counterproductive work behavior through the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of emotional intelligence among ASN employees. This study is expected to contribute theoretically by extending the application of social exchange theory in explaining deviant behaviors in the public sector. In addition, the findings may provide practical implications for government organizations in developing strategies to prevent counterproductive work behavior through strengthening leadership relationships, enhancing organizational justice, and promoting employees' emotional intelligence.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. The Effect on Counterproductive Work Behavior

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) encompasses a range of harmful actions in the workplace, such as bullying, emotional abuse, revenge, and aggression, which vary in frequency, intensity, and form (Beck-Krala, 2020). Leaders play a critical role in mitigating these behaviors by providing support, guidance, and supervision, thereby protecting coworkers and the organization from negative outcomes (Oliveira et al., 2020). High-quality Leader Member Exchange (LMX) reduces work fatigue and enhances employee adaptive performance, which can lower the inclination to engage in CWB (Azam et al., 2022; Zia et al., 2022). Empirical studies confirm that LMX negatively affects counterproductive behavior, as employees with stronger supervisor relationships are less likely to exhibit workplace deviance (Arif et al., 2018; Lee, 2020). Thus, maintaining positive leader-member relationships is crucial in minimizing workplace harm.

Organizational justice also significantly influences CWB. Employees who perceive unfair treatment may respond with negative behaviors targeting either the organization or colleagues (Lavelle et al., 2018). Without clear policies and sanctions, unchecked CWB can escalate, creating long-term organizational problems (Zaghini et al., 2016). Prior studies by Szostek et al. (2024) indicate that perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice directly reduce counterproductive actions. Additionally, work engagement serves as a protective factor, as highly engaged employees exhibit satisfaction and positive psychological states, reducing emotional exhaustion and deterring CWB (Özer et al., 2017; Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020). Together, LMX, organizational justice, and work engagement form a multidimensional approach to mitigating counterproductive behavior in the workplace.

H1: Leader member exchange has a negative effect on counterproductive work behavior.

H2: Organizational justice has a negative effect on counterproductive work behavior.

H3: Work engagement has a negative effect on counterproductive work behavior.

2.2. The Effect on Work Engagement

Leader Member Exchange (LMX) is a key predictor of employee work engagement, reflecting the quality of relationships characterized by trust, respect, and mutual support. Employees in high-quality LMX relationships experience increased vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work, fostering a sense of psychological safety (Mao & Tian, 2022; Tanskanen, 2025). Satisfaction with communication and support from leaders also enhances engagement levels, as employees feel recognized and valued (Santalla-Banderali & Alvarado, 2022). By promoting trust, loyalty, and open communication, leaders encourage employees to invest their physical, emotional, and cognitive resources, thereby strengthening work engagement.

Organizational justice further contributes to work engagement by ensuring fair treatment, transparent procedures, and respectful interactions (Karthick et al., 2024; Ho, 2025). Employees who perceive fairness in rewards, promotions, and interpersonal relations are more likely to feel committed and connected to the organization (Popović et al., 2024). Interactional justice, emphasizing respectful and informative communication, fosters a sense of belonging that reinforces engagement. These perceptions encourage employees to actively participate in their roles, increasing intrinsic motivation and aligning personal goals with organizational objectives. High organizational justice combined with strong LMX provides a supportive framework for sustained employee engagement.

H4: Leader member exchange has a positive effect on work engagement.

H5: Organizational justice has a positive effect on work engagement.

2.3. The Effect of Work Engagement as a Mediator

Work engagement mediates the relationship between LMX and counterproductive work behavior by channeling the positive effects of leader-member relationships into productive employee behaviors. High-quality LMX reduces role overload and enhances job security, fostering a psychologically safe environment that encourages engagement (Altinay et al., 2019). Ethical leadership, characterized by consistent verbal and nonverbal behaviors, strengthens perceptions of LMX, increasing motivation and engagement while reducing the likelihood of counterproductive behavior (Bormann, 2017; Lebrón et al., 2018; Xiong & Wen, 2020). Engaged employees are more committed to organizational goals and less prone to deviance, making work engagement a crucial mediator between LMX and CWB.

Similarly, organizational justice influences CWB indirectly through work engagement. Employees perceiving unfair treatment may experience emotional exhaustion and reduced capacity to meet job demands (Moura et al., 2020). Conversely, fair treatment increases engagement, as employees reciprocate justice with commitment and responsibility (Srimulyani, 2022; Yin, 2017). Positive perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice foster engagement, which in turn deters counterproductive behaviors (Alghamsah et al., 2025). Therefore, work engagement acts as a psychological mechanism linking both LMX and organizational justice to reduced counterproductive work behavior.

H6: Work engagement mediates the effect of LMX on counterproductive work behavior.

H7: Work engagement mediates the effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior.

2.4. The Effect of Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator

Emotional Intelligence (EI) moderates the influence of LMX on work engagement by enhancing employees' ability to interpret, manage, and respond effectively to interpersonal dynamics (Lee et al., 2018; George et al., 2022). Employees with higher EI can better understand the intentions and emotions of their leaders, strengthening the positive impact of LMX on engagement. This moderation occurs because EI facilitates communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation, allowing employees to fully benefit from supportive leader-member relationships. As a result, high EI amplifies the positive effects of LMX on vigor, dedication, and absorption in work.

Likewise, EI shapes the relationship between organizational justice and work engagement. Employees with higher EI perceive fairness more accurately, manage emotional reactions to perceived injustice, and respond with increased engagement (Siddique & Rana, 2021; Pranitasari et al., 2022; Mustafa et al., 2023). Moreover, EI influences the mediated relationship between LMX or organizational justice and CWB via work engagement. Employees with strong emotional intelligence are more likely to internalize positive leadership and justice practices, translating them into engagement that suppresses counterproductive behaviors. Therefore, EI serves as a critical moderating factor that strengthens the protective effects of LMX and organizational justice against workplace deviance.

H8: Emotional intelligence strengthen the effect of LMX on work engagement.

H9: Emotional intelligence strengthen the effect of organizational justice on work engagement

H10: Emotional intelligence strengthen the effect of LMX on counterproductive work behavior mediated by work engagement.

H11: Emotional intelligence weaken the effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior mediated by work engagement.

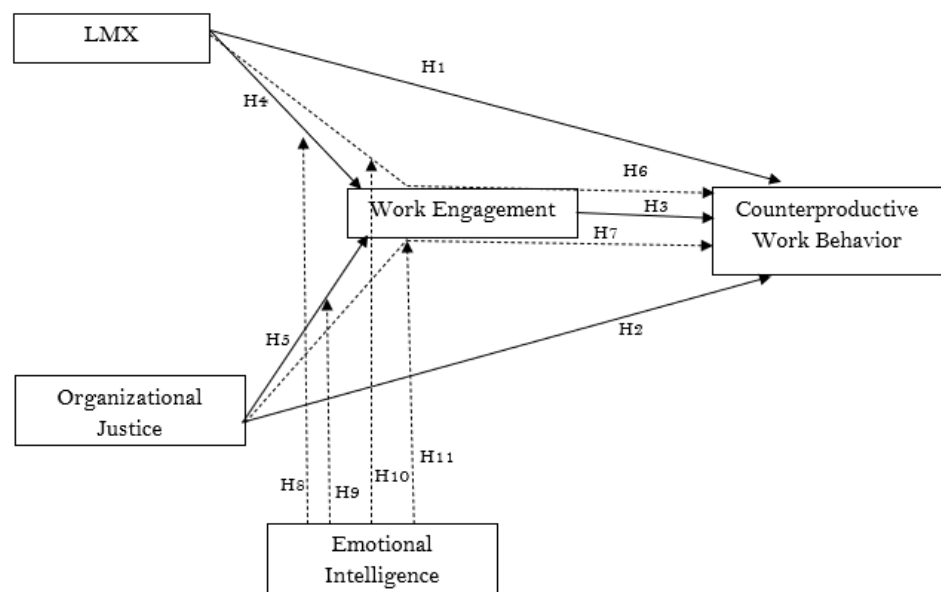


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework illustrating the relationships between Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and organizational justice on Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), both directly and indirectly through work engagement as a mediating variable. LMX and organizational justice are proposed to have direct effects on both work engagement and CWB. Furthermore, work engagement functions as a mediator linking these antecedents to CWB. In addition, emotional intelligence is positioned as a moderating variable that may strengthen or weaken the relationships between LMX and organizational justice with work engagement. Thus, the model simultaneously examines direct effects, indirect (mediating) effects, and interaction (moderating) effects in explaining counterproductive work behavior.

3. Methods

This study was conducted in Regional Government “X,” where a significant level of attendance manipulation was identified. The population consisted of 1,389 civil servants, excluding those in the smallest work units such as teachers, health workers, and agricultural extension officers. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula, resulting in 311 respondents drawn from 29 regional government units. A proportionate cluster random sampling technique was employed, in which the number of respondents in each cluster was allocated proportionally based on the size of each work unit.

Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire administered through the online survey platform SurveyMars to minimize potential bias arising from direct interaction between the researcher and respondents. The questionnaire link was distributed to personnel administrators in each work unit, who then disseminated it to civil servants within their respective units. All responses were collected anonymously, including demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational background, tenure, prior experience as honorary employees (if any), job position, and work unit.

The variables were measured using established instruments. CWB was assessed using the Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale by Na-Nan et al. (2020), work engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli et al. (2006), LMX using the Leader–Member Exchange Multidimensional Scale (LMX-MDM) by Liden and Maslyn (1998), organizational justice using the Organizational Justice Scale by Colquitt (2001), and emotional intelligence using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) by Wong and Law (2017), all of which had been translated into Indonesian. From the 23 items in the counterproductive work behavior scale, one item (“I use the telephone for personal business”) was removed due to its lack of relevance to the respondents’ context. Furthermore, the counterproductive work behavior construct was adapted using an indirect questioning approach to reduce response bias associated with the sensitive nature of the construct (Dalal & Hakel, 2016).

4. Results

Prior to presenting the data analysis, it is essential to describe the respondent profile of this study. This information provides context regarding the demographic characteristics, educational background, work experience, and job positions of the participants, allowing readers to understand the representativeness of the sample. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents based on gender, age, education level, years of service as civil servants and contract staff, as well as the types of positions held.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Profile	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	170	57
	Female	130	43
Age	21–30 years	87	29
	31–40 years	109	36
	41–50 years	68	23
	51–60 years	36	12
Education Level	High School	30	10
	Diploma (D-III)	28	9
	Bachelor’s Degree (S1/D-IV)	212	71
	Master’s Degree (S2)	30	10
Years of Service (Civil Servants)	Less than 1 year	48	16
	1–2 years	49	16
	More than 2–5 years	97	32
	More than 5–10 years	22	7
	More than 10 years	84	28
Years of Service (Contract Staff)	Less than 1 year	4	2
	1–2 years	13	7
	More than 2–5 years	30	17
	More than 5–10 years	58	32
	More than 10 years	75	42
Job Position	Implementing Officer	94	31
	Functional Position (Expert/Skilled – not from structural transfer)	169	56
	Functional Position (Transferred from Structural Position)	18	6
	Administrative/Supervisory Position	19	6

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents in this study. The sample consisted of 57% male and 43% female participants. The majority of respondents were aged 31–40 years (36%), followed by 21–30 years (29%), 41–50 years (23%), and 51–60 years (12%). In terms of education, most respondents held a Bachelor’s degree (S1/D-IV) at 71%, while 10% had a Master’s degree (S2), 10% completed Senior High School or its equivalent, and 9% held a Diploma (D-III).

Regarding years of service, among civil servants, 32% had served for 2–5 years, 28% for more than 10 years, 16% for 1–2 years, 16% for less than 1 year, and 7% for 5–10 years. For contract staff, 42% had more than 10 years of service, 32% for 5–10 years, 17% for 2–5 years, 7% for 1–2 years, and 2% for less than 1 year. With respect to job positions, the majority were functional officers in expert or skilled roles not transferred from structural positions (56%), followed by implementing officers (31%), administrative or supervisory positions (6%), and functional officers transferred from structural positions (6%). The respondents reflect a diverse profile in terms of gender, age, education, tenure, and job positions within the regional government.

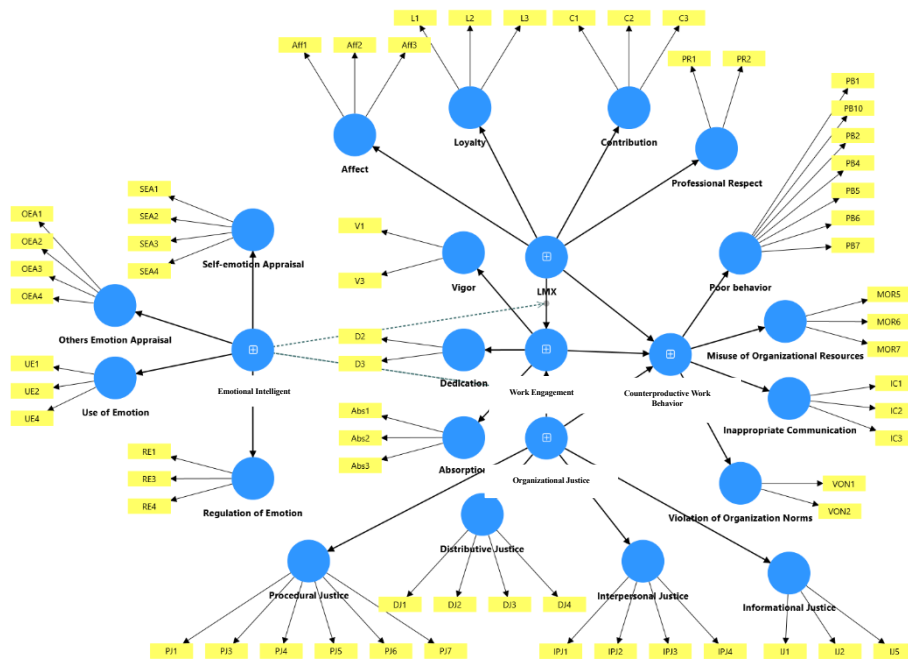


Figure 2. Measurement Model after indicator removal

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual model of this study, depicting the relationships among emotional intelligence, Leader Member Exchange (LMX), organizational justice, work engagement, and counterproductive work behavior. Emotional intelligence is operationalized through self-emotion appraisal, others’ emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion, influencing LMX and work engagement dimensions such as vigor, dedication, and absorption. LMX, in turn, impacts organizational commitment, contribution, and professional respect, which subsequently affects counterproductive work behavior, including poor behavior, misuse of organizational resources, inappropriate communication, and violation of organizational norms. Organizational justice is represented through distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, contributing to work engagement and reducing counterproductive behavior. The figure presents a comprehensive model linking individual and organizational factors to workplace outcomes.

Table 2. Outer Loading After Indicator Removal

Variable	Dimension	Item	Outer loadings	CR	AVE	
Counterproductive Work Behavior	Inappropriate Communication	IC1	0.893	0.896	0.741	
		IC2	0.820			
		IC3	0.868			
	Misuse of Organizational Resources	MOR5	0.819	0.884	0.717	
		MOR6	0.856			
		MOR7	0.865			
	Poor Behavior	Poor Behavior	PB1	0.734	0.886	0.528
			PB2	0.758		
			PB4	0.748		
			PB5	0.706		
PB6			0.683			
PB7			0.783			
PB10			0.670			
Violation of Organization Norms	Violation of Organization Norms	VON1	0.951	0.949	0.903	
		VON2	0.950			

Variable	Dimension	Item	Outer loadings	CR	AVE
Work Engagement	Absorption	Abs1	0.758	0.851	0.656
		Abs2	0.864		
		Abs3	0.805		
	Dedication	D2	0.912		
		D3	0.899		
	Vigor	V1	0.888		
		V3	0.909		
Emotional Intelligence	Others Emotion Appraisal	OEA1	0.817	0.917	0.733
		OEA2	0.874		
		OEA3	0.872		
		OEA4	0.860		
	Regulation of Emotion	RE1	0.890	0.931	0.818
		RE3	0.911		
		RE4	0.912		
	Self-emotion Appraisal	SEA1	0.778	0.907	0.709
		SEA2	0.880		
		SEA3	0.889		
		SEA4	0.815		
	Use of Emotion	UE1	0.850	0.873	0.697
		UE3	0.859		
		UE4	0.795		
Leader Member Exchange (LMX)	Affect	Aff1	0.909	0.922	0.797
		Aff2	0.866		
		Aff3	0.902		
	Contribution	C1	0.821	0.850	0.655
		C2	0.857		
		C3	0.746		
	Loyalty	L1	0.772	0.868	0.687
		L2	0.869		
		L3	0.843		
	Professional Respect	PR1	0.941	0.937	0.882
PR2		0.937			
Organizational Justice	Distributive Justice	DJ1	0.912	0.956	0.845
		DJ2	0.942		
		DJ3	0.917		
		DJ4	0.905		
	Informational Justice	IJ1	0.916	0.930	0.816
		IJ2	0.948		
		IJ5	0.844		
	Interpersonal Justice	IPJ1	0.940	0.962	0.863
		IPJ2	0.947		
		IPJ3	0.938		
		IPJ4	0.890		
	Procedural Justice	PJ1	0.683	0.929	0.688
		PJ3	0.858		
		PJ4	0.849		
PJ5		0.909			
PJ6		0.793			
PJ7		0.864			

Table 2 illustrates the measurement model’s reliability and convergent validity for the constructs of counterproductive work behavior, work engagement, emotional intelligence, LMX, and organizational justice. All constructs exhibit satisfactory internal consistency, with Composite Reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.851 to 0.962 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values from 0.528 to 0.903, indicating acceptable convergent validity. The outer loadings of the indicators are

predominantly above the threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that each item adequately represents its respective dimension. Collectively, these results confirm that the measurement model possesses sufficient reliability and validity for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 3. Results of the Second Stage Outer Loading, CR, AVE

Variable	Dimension <- Variable	Outer Loadings	CR	AVE
Counterproductive Work Behavior	Inappropriate Communication	0.870	0.878	0.644
	Misuse of Organizational Resources	0.706		
	Poor Behavior	0.854		
	Violation of Organization Norms	0.770		
Work Engagement	Absorption	0.778	0.879	0.708
	Dedication	0.874		
	Vigor	0.869		
LMX	Affect	0.860	0.854	0.595
	Contribution	0.695		
	Loyalty	0.698		
	Professional Respect	0.819		
Organizational Justice	Distributive Justice	0.817	0.919	0.740
	Informational Justice	0.887		
	Interpersonal Justice	0.869		
	Procedural Justice	0.866		
Emotional Intelligence	Regulation of Emotion	0.857	0.893	0.676
	Self-emotion Appraisal	0.863		
	Others Emotion Appraisal	0.751		
	Use of Emotion	0.814		

Table 3 presents the second-stage assessment of the measurement model, reporting the outer loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. All constructs exhibit satisfactory reliability, with CR values ranging from 0.854 to 0.919, and adequate convergent validity, as indicated by AVE values between 0.595 and 0.740. The outer loadings of the indicators are predominantly above 0.70, demonstrating that each item appropriately reflects its respective dimension. These results confirm that the constructs are both reliable and valid for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistics	p-value	Hypothesis
LMX → Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.122	1.377	0.084	H1 (rejected)
Organizational Justice → Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.317	3.152	0.001	H2 (accepted)
Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.401	6.226	0.000	H3 (accepted)
LMX → Work Engagement	0.028	0.318	0.375	H4 (rejected)
Organizational Justice → Work Engagement	0.279	4.328	0.000	H5 (accepted)
LMX → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.011	0.308	0.379	H6 (rejected)

Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistics	p-value	Hypothesis
Organizational Justice → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.130	3.259	0.001	H7 (accepted)
Emotional Intelligence × LMX → Work Engagement	0.048	0.690	0.245	H8 (rejected)
Emotional Intelligence × Organizational Justice → Work Engagement	-0.128	1.827	0.034	H9 (rejected)
Emotional Intelligence × LMX → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	-0.019	0.665	0.253	H10 (rejected)
Emotional Intelligence × Organizational Justice → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.051	1.667	0.048	H11 (rejected)

Table 4 presents the results of the structural model hypothesis testing. The findings indicate that organizational justice significantly enhances work engagement (H5 accepted) and reduces counterproductive work behavior (H2 accepted), while work engagement also has a significant negative effect on counterproductive work behavior (H3 accepted). LMX does not show significant direct or indirect effects (H1, H4, H6 rejected), and the moderating effects of emotional intelligence on work engagement and counterproductive work behavior are largely non-significant (H8–H11 rejected). These results underscore the critical role of organizational justice and work engagement in mitigating counterproductive work behavior.

Table 5. Conditional Direct Effect and Indirect Effect

Model	Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistics	p-value
Direct Effect	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement (Emotional Intelligence at -1 SD)	0.451	3.431	0.000
	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement (Emotional Intelligence at Mean)	0.323	3.734	0.000
	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement (Emotional Intelligence at +1 SD)	0.196	2.262	0.012
Indirect Effect	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior (Emotional Intelligence at -1 SD)	-0.181	2.937	0.002
	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior (Emotional Intelligence at Mean)	-0.130	3.259	0.001
	Organizational Justice → Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior (Emotional Intelligence at +1 SD)	-0.079	2.210	0.014

Table 5 presents the conditional direct and indirect effects of organizational justice on work engagement and counterproductive work behavior across varying levels of emotional intelligence. The findings indicate that organizational justice exerts a positive and significant effect on work engagement at all levels of emotional intelligence, with the strongest effect observed at low emotional intelligence (-1 SD) and the weakest at high emotional intelligence (+1 SD). Additionally, the indirect effect of organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior through work engagement is negative and significant across all levels, suggesting that higher organizational justice reduces counterproductive work behavior via enhanced work engagement. These results underscore the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between organizational justice and counterproductive work behavior, conditional on the level of emotional intelligence.

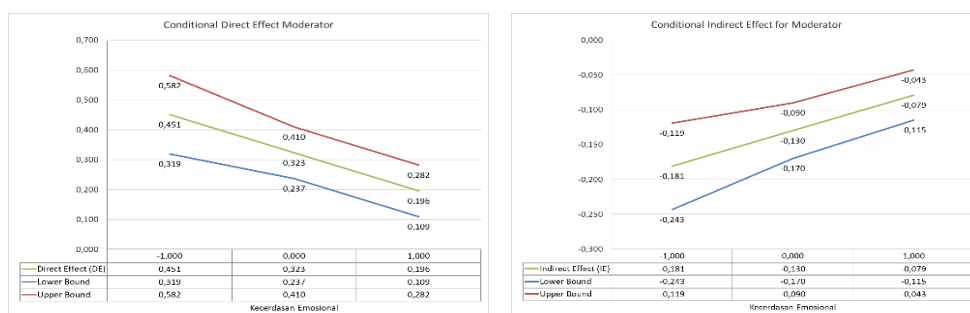


Figure 3. Slope Analysis Conditional Direct Effect and Indirect Effect

Figure 3 presents the slope analysis of both conditional direct and indirect effects across varying levels of emotional intelligence (low, moderate, and high). The findings reveal that the conditional direct effect decreases as emotional intelligence increases. Specifically, the strength of the direct relationship is highest at low levels of emotional intelligence and gradually diminishes at moderate and high levels, indicating that emotional intelligence acts as a moderating variable that weakens the direct influence between the independent and dependent variables. This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are less susceptible to direct effects from the predictor variable.

Similarly, the conditional indirect effect remains negative across all levels of emotional intelligence; however, its magnitude becomes progressively weaker (closer to zero) as emotional intelligence increases. This pattern indicates that emotional intelligence also moderates the indirect pathway by reducing the strength of the mediating effect. In other words, higher levels of emotional intelligence mitigate the negative indirect influence transmitted through the mediator. These results suggest that emotional intelligence serves as a buffering mechanism, attenuating both direct and indirect effects and contributing to greater psychological resilience in responding to external influences.

Table 6. R-square Value

Dependent Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Work Engagement	0.327	0.315
Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.304	0.297

Table 6 presents the R-square values for the dependent variables in the model. Work engagement has an R-square of 0.327 (adjusted 0.315), indicating that approximately 32.7% of its variance is explained by the predictor variables. Similarly, counterproductive work behavior has an R-square of 0.304 (adjusted 0.297), suggesting that 30.4% of its variance is accounted for by the independent variables.

These values demonstrate a moderate level of explanatory power for the model in predicting work engagement and counterproductive work behavior.

Table 7. F- square Value

Path	F-Square
Organizational Justice → Work Engagement	0.045
Organizational Justice → Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.047
Emotional Intelligence × Organizational Justice → Work Engagement	0.010
Emotional Intelligence × LMX → Work Engagement	0.001
Work Engagement → Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.168
LMX → Work Engagement	0.000
LMX → Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.008

Table 7 presents the F-square values for the structural paths in the model, indicating the effect size of each predictor on the dependent variables. Work engagement exhibits a moderate effect from work engagement on counterproductive work behavior ($F^2 = 0.168$), while other paths, such as organizational justice on work engagement ($F^2 = 0.045$) and organizational justice on counterproductive work behavior ($F^2 = 0.047$), show small effect sizes. The moderating interactions of emotional intelligence with organizational justice ($F^2 = 0.010$) and with LMX ($F^2 = 0.001$) on work engagement, as well as the effects of LMX on work engagement ($F^2 = 0.000$) and counterproductive work behavior ($F^2 = 0.008$), indicate negligible effects. The results highlight that work engagement has the most substantial impact on counterproductive work behavior, whereas other predictors and interactions contribute relatively smaller effects.

Table 8. PLS Predict Results

Construct	Q ² predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	PLS-SEM_MAE	LM_RMSE	LM_MAE
Absorption	0.167	0.916	0.722	0.931	0.717
Dedication	0.210	0.892	0.698	0.910	0.707
Vigor	0.240	0.875	0.690	0.889	0.697
Inappropriate Communication	0.130	0.935	0.665	0.956	0.687
Misuse of Organizational Resources	0.089	0.958	0.532	0.979	0.565
Poor Behavior	0.144	0.928	0.735	0.950	0.746
Violation of Organization Norms	0.097	0.954	0.785	0.963	0.783

Table 8 presents the results of the PLS Predict analysis for the study constructs. The Q²predict values for all constructs are positive, ranging from 0.089 to 0.240, indicating that the model has predictive relevance for both work engagement dimensions (absorption, dedication, vigor) and counterproductive work behavior dimensions (inappropriate communication, misuse of organizational resources, poor behavior, violation of organization norms). The PLS-SEM RMSE and MAE values are generally lower than those of the Linear Model (LM), suggesting that the PLS-SEM model provides better predictive accuracy. These results demonstrate that the model possesses adequate out-of-sample predictive power and can reliably forecast the observed indicators.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the factors influencing Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) and the role of work engagement within the framework of social exchange theory. The results indicate that Leader Member Exchange (LMX) does not significantly predict CWB or work engagement, nor does it exhibit a significant indirect effect on CWB through work engagement. This suggests that employees perceive negative behaviors as impacting the organization as a whole rather than affecting their leader personally. Questionnaire analysis showed that employees rated contribution and loyalty dimensions lower than affect and professional respect, indicating that personal relationships with leaders, such as friendship (affect) and reputation (professional respect), are valued more than supporting the leader's goals (loyalty) or exerting extra effort to maintain the relationship (contribution). This dynamic implies that exchanges in these social relationships are more personal than task- or reciprocity-based, highlighting the need for transformational leadership to enhance employee performance and for leaders to communicate clear expectations to increase employee commitment to organizational goals (Khan et al., 2022; Dolok, 2025). These findings align with Amanda and Handoyo (2020) and Jawahar et al. (2018), yet contrast with prior research emphasizing the predictive role of LMX.

In contrast, organizational justice emerges as a critical predictor of reduced CWB. The study demonstrates that organizational justice significantly decreases CWB and enhances work engagement, while work engagement mediates the relationship between organizational justice and CWB. These results are consistent with prior studies suggesting that fair organizational practices distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal, encourage employees to undertake additional roles, increase commitment, and engage in positive behaviors (Wu et al., 2016; Zaghini et al., 2016; Destriana & Dewi, 2021; Mahadiputra & Piartrini, 2021; Adamovic, 2023; Musdalifa et al., 2024). Employees perceive a fair organization as offering tangible and intangible benefits, motivating reciprocation through enhanced engagement and reduced CWB. Procedural justice demonstrated the strongest correlation with work engagement, aligning with Ho (2025), who argued that fair procedures foster trust and commitment, thereby strengthening engagement.

Work engagement itself plays a central role in regulating CWB. Engaged employees exhibit proactive behaviors, positive interactions, and strong emotional involvement, while disengaged employees experience fatigue and demonstrate negative behaviors (Yin, 2018). Among the dimensions of work engagement, vigor is the most influential, highlighting that mental resilience, willingness to exert effort, and persistence under challenging circumstances act as emotional mechanisms preventing CWB, corroborating Yin (2017) and Chen et al. (2020).

The moderating effects of emotional intelligence were largely non-significant. However, conditional analysis revealed that the positive effect of organizational justice on work engagement was strongest for employees with low emotional intelligence and weakest for those with high emotional intelligence, whereas the indirect effect on CWB via engagement remained negative across all levels. This suggests that high emotional intelligence can mitigate the perceived influence of organizational justice, as individuals with high emotional intelligence can manage their own and others' emotions to maintain positive behavior even under conditions of low justice (Carter & Loh, 2017; Balogun, 2018; Tziner et al., 2020; Roy, 2023).

The findings emphasize the crucial role of organizational justice and work engagement in mitigating CWB, while LMX and emotional intelligence primarily influence interpersonal dynamics rather than directly affecting engagement or negative behavior. These results extend social exchange theory by highlighting the interaction of internal factors (work engagement, emotional intelligence) and external factors (organizational justice), underscoring the importance of fair

organizational interventions and enhanced engagement to prevent CWB, particularly within bureaucratic contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that organizational justice and work engagement play central roles in shaping employee behavior in the workplace. Organizational justice positively influences work engagement and reduces counterproductive work behavior, while work engagement itself serves as a mediator in mitigating negative behaviors. In contrast, Leader–Member Exchange and emotional intelligence do not directly affect counterproductive behavior or engagement in a significant manner, although emotional intelligence can moderate the influence of organizational justice on engagement under certain conditions. Employees perceive fairness within the organization as a key driver for commitment, proactive participation, and adherence to organizational norms, emphasizing the importance of transparent procedures, fair resource distribution, and respectful interpersonal interactions.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that organizations should prioritize establishing fair practices and fostering an engaging work environment to prevent negative behaviors and promote employee commitment. Human resource policies should focus on enhancing procedural and distributive fairness while creating opportunities for employees to connect meaningfully with their work. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported measures, which may not capture causal relationships or account for contextual variables. Future research should explore longitudinal approaches, include diverse organizational settings, and examine additional moderators or mediators such as psychological safety, job security, or team climate. Investigating the role of leader characteristics and employee perceptions across multiple levels may further clarify the mechanisms through which social exchange processes influence workplace behavior.

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Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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