Article

Effects of Organizational Justice on Social Loafing: The Mediating Role of Felt Obligation

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Abstract – Although there has been an increasing body of work on social loafing for over ten years, there are still gaps in our understanding that require further investigation. There is currently a lack of research on organizational justice and the sense of duty towards social loafing. This study examines how organizational fairness (procedural, distributive, interactional) affects social loafing to address a gap in the existing literature. According to social exchange theory, the study predicted that perceived obligation would act as a mediator in the relationship between organizational justice and social loafing. Information was collected from 272 private sector employees in Malaysia. The measurements were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. With the exception of distributive justice, most direct links have a considerable influence on social loafing, as indicated by the data. Statistical findings confirmed the mediating role of perceived obligation between procedural fairness, distributive justice, and social loafing. The findings did not show that felt obligation plays a mediating role in the link between interactional justice and social loafing behavior. The study advanced knowledge by establishing new connections between organizational fairness, felt obligation, and social loafing behavior. Distinct measures of employees' perceptions of organizational justice offer a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between negative outcomes and their views of the organization. Additionally, the reciprocation process explains the link between organizational justice and social loafing. This research demonstrates that organizational fairness is a crucial component in

predicting social loafing behavior, which would be advantageous for employers and human resource experts. Improvements can be made by establishing equitable and uniform workplace standards, encouraging employee input and involvement in decision-making, and demonstrating decency and respect for subordinates to prevent counterproductive actions like social loafing.

Keywords: "Social Loafing", "Organizational Justice", "Felt Obligation", "Social Exchange Theory"

1. Introduction

The importance of people working together in groups to achieve, overcome, and discover is highlighted in the storey of human life. Since our earliest roots first grouped to fulfil their basic objectives, achieving common goals through individuals running collectively has been critical to human survival (Delice et al., 2019). Furthermore, organisations rely more heavily on teams and organisations to complete a variety of tasks, ranging from product design to service creation. Teams and organisations are ubiquitous and ever-present, influencing nearly every aspect of our daily lives (Redhead et al., 2019). Nonetheless, there is mounting evidence that collaborative difficulties can lead to disappointments and can be hazardous to organisations. A growing number of people working on collaborative initiatives are developing misleading notions about the benefits of teamwork (Copeland, 2021). Working together, according to previous studies on groups, can alter people's motivation and effort, leading in substantial losses for groups and reduced productivity beneficial features for businesses (Morelan et al., 2018). Furthermore, social psychologists are discovering that group engagement might result in less effort being exerted when humans are used (Stouten & Liden, 2020). These findings are critical to organisational success and they take on a special significance during economic downturns when organisations are attempting to enhance efficiency and productivity. This has prompted group behaviour researchers to investigate the impact of character contributions coupled with those of others, particularly in terms of employee effort contributed when working in groups, as a crucial component that can improve individual, group, and organisational success. (Khan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, employees working in groups often exert less effort compared to when they work individually. Social loafing is a recognized phenomenon believed to significantly impact group performance. People who take part in group work are more likely to exhibit social loafing. Hence, the act of withholding effort should not be ignored. Karau & Wilhau (2020) assert that social loafing is a detrimental phenomenon that impacts employees, social institutions, and societies. It is referred to as "production deviance" and hinders group performance by affecting the quality and quantity of decisions and ideas.

This counterproductive practice, known as social loafing, can lead to low efficiency in organizations. Mihelič & Culiberg (2019) highlighted that if not addressed, social loafing can consistently result in negative effects for organizations. Furthermore, a detailed analysis indicates that social loafing may have significant repercussions in various common group environments (Parks, 2020). Previous research on social loafing focused on the detrimental impact it has on other group members and aimed to explore the reasons

behind individuals engaging in this behavior and strategies to prevent it (e.g., Gabelica, De Maeyer & Schippers (2022); Wilhau (2021); Awee, Mohsin, & Makhbul, 2020). Various researchers have examined the issue of social loafing antecedents such as task visibility, perceived contribution, and task attractiveness, with in-depth studies conducted by Himmetoğlu et al. (2022), Singh et al. (2017), and Purohit et al. (2021). The study primarily examined contextual characteristics such as group cohesiveness, team size, and task visibility, rather than situational issues like organizational fairness, trust, and leadership styles.

In addition, there has been no focus on systematically combining social loafing studies with justice. Himmetoğlu, Ayduğ & Bayrak (2022) stated that the specific connections between conceptions of justice and social loafing are not well-defined. However, analyzing these factors is crucial for gaining a more profound insight into employee attitudes and behaviors. The focus on intrinsic elements may have broader effects on high-level policy rather than on individual levels, as shown by Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio & Guichard (2019). Prior research only examined the favorable features of employee attitudes and behavior, neglecting to address the negative outcomes. This study addresses the gap by examining the adverse impact of justice perceptions, namely social loafing. Organizational justice perceptions are recognized as a factor linked to social exchange interactions in the workplace. Social exchange theory (Blau 1964) posits that individuals feel compelled to reciprocate, which establishes mutual obligations in relationships. Social exchange in employment relationships may begin with an organization's equitable treatment of its employees. These efforts create an obligation for employees to return the organization's good deeds. Consequently, much study has explored the correlation between organizational justice and work attitudes and behaviors, such as social loafing.

Overall, despite the increasing amount of study on social loafing spanning over a decade, there are still gaps in our understanding of this phenomenon that require further investigation. Research on the relationship between justice and felt obligation towards social loafing is currently sparse. This research aims to investigate how organizational justice can predict social loafing. The study suggests that perceived obligation may mediate the relationship between organizational justice and social loafing, as viewed through the social exchange theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organizational Justice and Social Loafing

Perceived organizational justice refers to an employee's view of fairness inside a company (O'Connor & Crowley-Henry 2019). Research in the field of justice literature has shown a correlation between perceived justice and social loafing. The relationship is backed by social loafing research, which recognizes organizational fairness as a factor leading to social loafing (Thanh & Van Toan, 2018; Himmetoğlu, Ayduğ & Bayrak, 2022; Sabokro et al., 2018). Perceived organizational justice may be linked to social loafing for two reasons. The initial clarification is grounded in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). According to this view, an exchange process would require the participation of two parties. In the

organizational setting, the parties involved are employees and the organization. The trading process involves two norms: positive and negative reciprocity. Negative reciprocity is the inclination to exchange negative actions or items for other bad actions or items. The connection between perceived organizational fairness and social loafing behavior is influenced by negative reciprocity rules in the exchange process. When employees believe they are being treated unfairly by the organization, they interpret it as a bad experience and adjust their behavior appropriately. Employees may lack motivation to put full effort if they perceive unfair treatment from the organization, which can result in social loafing.

Empirical study shows that perceived organizational justice has an impact on both organizational and societal loafing. A study by Zhang & Wang (2017) discovered that social loafing is a response by individuals to perceived injustice from leaders and employees. The study confirmed that perceived organizational justice is crucial for the effective operation of the organization and the satisfaction of its employees. In the absence of justice, organizations struggle to lead and motivate their employees. Employees rely on their perception of fairness within the organization to assess the reliability, impartiality, and respectful treatment by management, as well as to determine their status as legitimate followers of the business. Furthermore, employees in the workplace are required to have a strong connection with persons who work on a fair basis. Scholars stress the need of examining justice or fairness, as they argue that favorable fairness views can improve organizational outcomes like organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and help in decreasing bad behavior (Pan et al. 2018). This could result in improved organizational efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of work life. The current investigation suggests the following hypothesis based on these arguments:

Hypothesis 1a: There is a direct negative relationship between perceived procedural justice and social loafing.
Hypothesis 1b: There is a direct negative relationship between perceived distributive justice and social loafing.
Hypothesis 1c: There is a direct negative relationship between perceived interactional justice and social loafing.

2.2. Organizational Justice and Felt Obligation
Employee assessments of the work environment heavily rely on perceptions of organizational justice. Various research on organizational justice demonstrates the importance of perceptions of justice in influencing an employee's work experience, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, burnout, stress, and turnover intentions. Colquitt, Hill & De Cremer (2023) conducted a thorough meta-analytic review of the justice literature and found that employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace are strongly linked to their affective commitment to the organization, trust and satisfaction with their supervisors, and work-related behaviors such as motivation and task performance.

Research in the justice sector generally relies on social exchange models, particularly Blau's (1964), to explain the connection between justice and important work-related factors. This

is done by highlighting how employees are likely to reciprocate fair treatment from a supervisor or other members of the institution. From a social exchange perspective, employees who receive fair treatment are more inclined to reciprocate by engaging in activities that improve the organizational environment and less likely to disrupt positive group and organizational functioning. Fair treatment of employees by supervisors and other members of the organization enhances the credibility of the supervisor and the organization as a whole (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). Legitimacy often leads employees to feel obligated to repay generosity. Workplaces that have fair processes and fair treatment by organizational leaders are less likely to cause stress among employees and less likely to lead to emotional disengagement from workgroups (Roch et al., 2019). This study presents hypotheses based on key principles in social exchange theory and supported by extensive empirical evidence. Hence, following hypotheses proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: There is a direct positive relationship between perceived procedural justice and felt obligation.

Hypothesis 2b: There is a direct positive relationship between perceived distributive justice and felt obligation.

Hypothesis 2c: There is a direct positive relationship between perceived interactional justice and felt obligation.

2.3. Felt Obligation and Social Loafing

Felt obligation is rooted in the norm of reciprocity as described by Gouldner (1960) in social exchange connections outlined by Blau (1964). When employees are provided with economic benefits that fulfill their financial requirements and socio-emotional benefits that satisfy their social and self-esteem needs, they feel compelled to reciprocate by looking after the goals and welfare of their organization.The reciprocity principle in social exchange connections has been extensively researched in management literature. Researchers utilizing this approach have discovered that employees apply several methods to reciprocate the compassionate treatment from organizations. For instance, they boost organizational commitment, improve in-role performance, participate in extra-role behaviors, exhibit high job satisfaction, show a desire to stay with the organization, and decrease withdrawal behaviors (e.g., Paillé, Boiral & Chen 2013; Ko & Hur 2014; Gong, Chang & Cheung 2010).

According to social exchange theory, reciprocating organizational favors can be achieved by improving work performance and decreasing withdrawal behaviors in the workplace. Reciprocity might lead to withdrawal behaviors. Receiving fair treatment from organizations and colleagues at work can enhance affective organizational commitment and reduce behaviors like social loafing. Therefore, it can be deduced that social loafing is a reaction to perceived duty. Felt duty could potentially prompt withdrawal behavior based on the underlying norm of reciprocity. Felt obligation is likely to decrease social loafing as a form of reciprocation. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Felt obligation will be negatively related to social loafing.

2.4. The mediating role of felt obligation

Felt obligation is suggested to act as a mediator in the connection between organizational justice and social loafing. This inference of mediation relies on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) and social exchange theory (Blau 1964). The norm of reciprocity is a global social convention where individuals assist those who have helped them, feeling obliged to reciprocate when they receive support from others (Gouldner 1960; Gervasi, Faldetta, Pellegrini & Maley 2022). Social exchange theory, rooted in the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960), posits that social interactions create duties and foster the formation of strong relationships between parties (Blau 1964). According to the hypothesis, one party provides benefits to the other, leading the recipient to feel obligated and reciprocate. Once a social exchange begins, the outcome of one exchange triggers the following exchange, resulting in a chain of interaction based on exchanges that aid in the formation of high-quality relationships marked by trust and support (e.g. Blau, 1964; Basit, 2017; Lu, 2017).

According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), antecedents providing economic and socioemotional rewards to employees create an obligation for them to reciprocate by performing well and avoiding counterproductive behavior (Basit, 2017). Organizations in the workplace are key providers of economic and socioemotional benefits for their employees (Samara & Paul, 2019). Managers help employees accomplish their personal goals by creating fair organizational goals and allocating resources, which in turn meets their economic and socio-emotional requirements. By engaging in such behaviors, employees are prone to view businesses as trustworthy and capable, leading to the establishment of trust and a feeling of duty. When applying social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), it is anticipated that organizational actions will encourage a sense of obligation, leading employees to fulfill their duties with improved performance and decreased negative behavior (e.g., Cohen & Diamant 2019; Roch et al. 2019). Thus, the following hypotheses proposed:

Hypothesis 4a: Felt obligation will mediate the relationship between procedural justice and social loafing.

Hypothesis 4b: Felt obligation will mediate the relationship between distributive justice and social loafing.

Hypothesis 4c: Felt obligation will mediate the relationship between interactional justice and social loafing.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below shows the independent variables of organizational justice (procedural, distributive and interactional), the dependent variable is social loafing and felt obligation as the mediator.
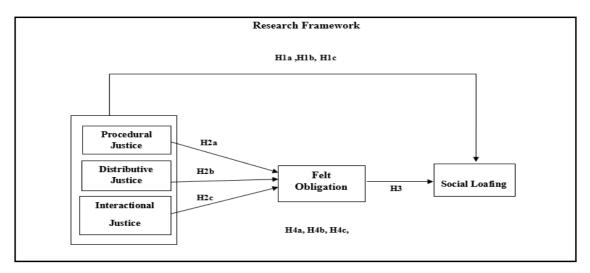
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Framework

H1a ,H1b, H1c

Procedural Justice

Distributive Justice

Interactional Justice

H2a
H2b
H2c

Felt Obligation

H3

Social Loafing

H4a, H4b, H4c,

3. Methodology of Study

3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study is conducted based on quantitative and cross-sectional research design. Data was collected among workers of Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) within the Klang Valley region of Malaysia. To prevent incomplete data, the online questionnaire required respondents to answer all questions before submission. A total of 377 employees were invited to participate in the study, employing a convenient sampling approach. Convenient sampling was chosen due to the larger percentage of workers in the Klang Valley region compared to other states. The choice of employing the convenient sampling method was based on the practicality and accessibility of the sampling pool within the Klang Valley region, facilitating easier data collection among the workforce of Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB). 272 respondents successfully returned the questionnaire, representing 72.1% of the total sample in Table 1.

3.2 Research Instrument

Participants completed a survey consisting of demographic characteristics and three validating measures.

Social loafing refers to the notion that some group members are not contributing as much as they could to the group. George (1992) developed the current instrument. The Perceived Social Loafing Questionnaire (PSLQ) is a 7-item tool that measures participants' agreement over the presence of social loafing in their groups. Participants will be required to express their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. Procedural Justice: Perceived procedural justice among employees will be measure through Neihoff and Moorman (1993) six-item perceived procedural justice (POJ) measurement scale. This measurement developed in order to measure people's justice judgements about a particular entity; in this

case, the organisation or manager. A sample item is "*Job decisions are made by the manager in a biased manner*".

Distributive Justice: The study assessed perceptions of distributive justice using a 5-item scale created by Neihoff and Moorman in 1993. Participants expressed their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale in Western Studies was 0.90.

Interactional Justice: was assessed using a 9-item scale that gauged employees' impressions of whether their needs were taken into account and if sufficient explanations were provided for job-related decisions. The scale created by Neihoff and Moorman in 1993.

Felt Obligation: Felt obligation will be measured through the measurement scale developed of Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades (2001). This measurement scale is one of the best and frequently used by researchers in organisational behaviour area. This scale has seven items, including one reverse item. A sample item from the felt obligation scale is: "*I feel a personal obligation to do whatever I can to help my organization achieve its goals.*" Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Number of Participant (272)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	211	77.6
Female	61	22.4
Race		
Malay	253	93.0
Chinese	4	1.5
Indians	13	4.8
Others	2	0.7
Marital Status		
Single	62	22.8
Married	203	74.6
Divorced	4	1.5
Widow	3	1.1
Education		
SPM	60	22.1
STPM/Certificate	81	29.8
Diploma	77	28.3
Bachelor's degree	51	18.8
Master's degree	2	0.7
Others	1	0.4
Tenure		
< 2years	18	6.6
2-4 years	31	11.4
4-6 years	47	17.3

6-8 years	32	11.8
> 8 years	144	52.9

3.3 Data Analysis

Following the data collection, the results were analyzed and interpreted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Smart PLS software. Descriptive statistics were first undertaken to give an overview of the demographic profile of the respondents. Additionally, the hypotheses were tested using partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS4.0 (Hair et al., 2019). The data analysis involved two phases: measurement and structural model stages. The Partial Least Squares (PLS) algorithm and bootstrapping procedure were used in the second stage. Composite Reliability, discriminant validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and loadings were analyzed in the main survey data to assess the validity and reliability of the measuring scales in the initial stage. The goal is to produce estimates that help address the hypotheses. The structural model assessment involves testing the moderation hypothesis.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive and Correlation Results

Table 2 displays the average, standard deviation, and Pearson correlations of the variables examined in the study. All two-variable connections among the research variables show statistical significance. The strongest link is between distributive justice and perceived obligation (r = 0.845, p < 0.01), while the weakest correlation is between social loafing and interactional justice (r = -0.464, p < 0.01).

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson correlations

	Mean	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.SL	3.60	0.675	-				
2.DJ	3.41	0.833	.533**	-			
3.PJ	3.28	0.855	-.560**	.661**	-		
4.IJ	3.26	0.805	-.464**	.447**	.603**	-	
5.FO	3.40	0.839	-.542**	.845**	.685**	.504**	-

Note: N= 272; Correlation is significant at the 0.01(2 tailed)

4.2. Model Assessment Results

The measurement model demonstrated great internal consistency dependability, as indicated in Table 3. The composite dependability scores were strong, ranging from .869 for social loafing to .899 for procedural fairness. The AVE values for each construct in Table 3 exceeded the .50 criterion, signifying that the latent variable accounted for over half of the variance in the relevant indicators.

Table 3. Reflective measurement model results.

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	Convergent Validity
Social Loafing (SL)	SL_1	0.779	0.869	0.531
	SL_2	0.764		
	SL_3	0.776		
	SL_4	0.769		
	SL_5	0.761		
	SL_6	0.471		
Distributive Justice (DJ)	DJ_1	0.825	0.871	0.692
	DJ_2	0.874		
	DJ_3	0.794		
Procedural Justice (PJ)	PJ_1	0.795	0.899	0.599
	PJ_2	0.831		
	PJ_3	0.774		
	PJ_4	0.724		
	PJ_5	0.782		
	PJ_6	0.733		
Interactional Justice (IJ)	IJ_1	0.774	0.897	0.528
	IJ_2	0.817		
	IJ_3	0.794		
	IJ_4	0.823		
	IJ_5	0.745		
	IJ_6	0.761		
	IJ_7	0.506		
	IJ_9	0.509		
Felt Obligation (FO)	FO_1	0.824	0.894	0.627
	FO_2	0.821		
	FO_4	0.771		
	FO_5	0.795		
	FO_6	0.745		

The indicator loadings results indicate that most loadings exceed the .70 threshold value, indicating the reliability of the indicators. As per Hair et al. (2017), each indicator with a loading below .70 should only be eliminated if it increases the composite reliability beyond its threshold. The decreased outside loadings did not impact the composite reliability of the constructs in the investigation. The convergent validity for social loafing was determined to be below the acceptable threshold of .50. Thus, the problematic indications were eliminated from the constructs individually to ensure that convergent validity would reach the required threshold. The convergent validity of social loafing reached a value of .531 after two rounds of elimination.

Discriminant validity is weakened if the HTMT value is above 0.85 (Hair et al., 2021) or 0.90 (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Table 4 clearly shows that all constructs were below 0.90. This

study shows that there is discriminant validity among all constructs, and most constructs were not evaluated. Table 4 shows that the heterotrait-monotrait correlations were below 0.90. The results offer proof of discriminant validity.

Table 4. Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio

	DJ	FO	IJ	PJ	IJ	PJ	SL
DJ	0.859	0.821					
FO	0.896	0.833	0.900				
IJ	0.539	0.450	0.523	0.591			
PJ	0.729	0.608	0.753	0.785	0.711		
SL	0.32	0.634	0.632	0.681	0.574	0.705	

After assessment of the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed. Results of the coefficient of determination (R^2) show that the research model explains 43.8% variation in the social loafing construct and 70.1% variation for felt obligation construct. Therefore, the model explained the endogenous latent variables moderately well. (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5 shows that the effect sizes (f^2) of the predictor range from .014 to .328, indicating the presence of small to large effects (Henseler et.al 2019). Specifically, procedural justice has a large effect ($f^2 = .328$) on felt obligation and interactional justice has a small effect ($f^2 = 0.078$) on social loafing and felt obligation has a medium effect on social loafing ($f^2 = 0.179$).Table 5 displays the results of bootstrapping operations (272 cases, 5,000 resamples) examining the significance of path coefficients, indicating that most direct and indirect paths were statistically significant. Two different methods were employed to further evaluate the model's predictive capacity. The traditional method involved blindfolding with an omission distance of D = 7 to calculate the cross-validated redundancy values (Stone-Geisser's Q^2). The cross-validated redundancy index was utilized to assess the predictive significance of the structural model (Chin et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2017).

The cross-validated redundancy values for affect-based trust, perceived obligation, and social loafing are 0.432 and 0.230, respectively. The structural model has predictive importance as the values are greater than zero (Hair et al., 2019). The hypothesis testing results indicated that eight out of ten paths were statistically significant at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. This study first analyzed the direct association between procedural, distributive, and interactional justice features and social loafing behavior before investigating the mediation influence of perceived obligation. Table 5 displays that distributive justice ($\beta = 0.051$) has a significant impact on social loafing behavior. The results confirm hypotheses H1a, H1c, and H3, while rejecting hypothesis H1b. This study analyzed the direct influence of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, and interactional) on social loafing, and then assessed the mediation effect of perceived obligation using a mediation approach. A two-tailed bootstrap routine with 5000 bootstrap

samples was conducted to examine the significance of the path coefficient in the model at a significance level of 0.05. Table 5 displays how the perceived obligation acts as a mediator between the antecedent variables and the dependent variable. The study showed a substantial indirect relationship between procedural and distributive fairness with social loafing through felt obligation, with beta coefficients of 0.036 (p < .005) and 0.058 (p < .005), respectively. Therefore, Hypothesis 4a and 4b were confirmed. The mediation analysis approach was employed to identify the mediation type by computing the product of the major direct and indirect channels (Hair et al., 2017). Hypothesis 4c proposes that felt obligation will operate as a mediator in the connection between interactional justice and social loafing. The analysis indicated that the path coefficient was not statistically significant with a beta value of 0.014 and a p-value of 0.089. Hypothesis 4c was not confirmed.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing results.

Hypothesized Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	*p*-value	Confidence intervals (95%)	Effect size f^2	Decision
1. Procedural Justice → Social Loafing	-0.292	3.302	0.000	[-0.140, -0.426]	0.328	**Supported**
2. Procedural Justice → Felt Obligation	0.200	3.856	0.000	[0.117,0.289]	0.200	**Supported**
3. Interactional Justice → Social Loafing	-0.159	2.151	0.016	[-0.029-,0.275]	0.173	**Supported**
4. Interactional Justice → Felt Obligation	0.078	1.902	0.029	[0.008,0.143]	0.078	**Supported**
5. Distributive Justice → Social Loafing	0.051	0.647	0.259	[-0.077,-0.182]	0.109	**Not Supported**
6. Distributive Justice → Felt Obligation	0.325	5.001	0.000	[0.222,0.435]	0.325	**Supported**
7.Felt Obligation → Social Loafing	-0.179	2.138	0.016	[-0.045,-0.319]	0.179	**Supported**
8. Procedural Justice → Felt Obligation → Social Loafing	0.036	1.736	0.041	[0.010,0.079]	0.036	**Supported**
9.Interactional Justice → Felt Obligation→ Social Loafing	0.014	1.348	0.089	[0.002,0.038]	0.014	**Not Supported**
10. Distributive Justice → Felt Obligation → Social Loafing	0.058	1.855	0.032	[0.015,0.090]	0.162	**Supported**

5. Discussions

This study's results showed that procedural fairness negatively affects social loafing behavior. Procedural justice involves making fair judgments in personnel decision-making procedures, such as determining how rewards are distributed, as outlined by Outlaw et al. (2019). People's perceptions of procedural fairness might influence their expectations of performance outcomes and subsequently affect the level of effort they put into task-related behaviors (Swalhi et al., 2017). The results of this study align with previous research (Byun et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2013; Collquit et al., 2012) indicating that the fairness of method utilization impacts employees' effort in job completion. Contributions-based awards are seen as fair, but punishments not linked to work are viewed as unfair. The study's results suggest a connection between interactional fairness and social loafing behavior. Several studies have found a strong negative correlation between interactional fairness and social loafing behavior, supporting this result (e.g: Zhang & Wang, 2017; Alam, Ali, Ali & Zaman, 2016; Luo et al., 2013). Interactional justice refers to the way employees are treated with decency, politeness, respect, and honesty, as well as how information is transmitted inside the organization, as stated in the literature by He et al. (2017). The social exchange process and interactional justice are closely connected as they both rely on sufficient information sharing and the prevention of harmful observations, as stated by Cropanzano et al. (2017).

The study findings align with the concept of social exchange, which posits that an exchange transaction requires two individuals. In the organizational context, the parties are the employees and the corporation. Positive and negative reciprocity are the two exchange norms that regulate the trading process. Negative reciprocity refers to the tendency to swap undesirable items for other undesirable items. The trade process is driven by negative reciprocity rules, which connect perceived organizational fairness with social loafing. Employees perceiving unfair treatment from the company may interpret it as a negative action and subsequently modify their behavior accordingly. If employees perceive unjust treatment from the organization, they may lack motivation to exert their best effort, perhaps resulting in social loafing.

The results showed that distributive justice is positively correlated with social loafing behavior, aligning with previous studies by Himmetoğlu et al. (2022) and Zhang & Wang (2017) indicating that reward systems are not the primary motivator for task completion. Implementing reward schemes initially can help incentivize individuals to excel in group settings. The incentive system established for positive reinforcement is often underappreciated over time. When incentives are commonplace, the system can unintentionally have a punitive effect, where individuals may see a lack of a significant reward as the reverse of a reward, or even as the ultimate punishment (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018). When a reward system transitions from being rewarding to punitive, it loses its effectiveness in deterring social loafing in the workplace.

The current study established a correlation between organizational fairness (procedural, distributive, and interactional) and felt obligation in support of Hypothesis 2. The study's

results show a correlation between organizational justice (procedural, distributive, and interactional) and perceived obligation, aligning with existing theory and prior research. The discovery of this relationship aligns with the culturally universal social norm of reciprocity. This norm suggests that when employees observe fair treatment, they are inclined to reciprocate by engaging in activities that enhance the organizational environment and avoiding behaviors that hinder positive group and organizational functioning (Roch et al., 2019). Fair treatment of employees by supervisors and other members of the organization fosters a sense of legitimacy for both the supervisor and the organization (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). Due to this legitimacy, employees often feel obligated to reciprocate charity. Hypothesis 3 suggests that employees who receive both economic benefits meeting their financial needs and socio-emotional benefits fulfilling their social and self-esteem needs from their employers are likely to feel obligated to contribute to the organization's goals and well-being in return (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory, as proposed by Blau in 1964, explains the relationship between perceived obligation and social loafing behavior based on the reciprocity norm. This relationship is discussed by Dai et al. (2020) and Wilhau (2021). When managers meet employees' financial, social, and self-esteem needs through economic and socioemotional advantages, employees are inclined to reciprocate with positive attitudes and actions. The management literature has thoroughly explored the reciprocity principle and its use in social exchange relationships. Employees react to organizations' compassionate treatment by enhancing organizational commitment, engaging in extra-role behaviors, displaying high job satisfaction, and expressing a desire to stay.

The study proposed that the perceived duty acts as a mediator between organizational fairness (procedural, distributive, and interactional) and social loafing behavior in hypotheses 4a, 4b, and 4c. However, the outcome indicated that only H4a and H4b confirmed the proposed connection, whereas H4c did not. Employee commitment towards organizations and their representatives, as per social exchange theory, is a crucial connection between perceived organizational justice and tangible results (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Samara & Paul (2019) suggest that healthy social exchange connections are maintained through perceptions of fairness, leading employees to feel obligated to reciprocate with behaviors that benefit the organization. This discovery contributes to the few empirical data regarding the importance of feelings of obligation in justice outcomes and social exchange theory (SET). Shannon et al. (2014) found that perceived felt obligation played a crucial role as a mediator in the relationship between organizational justice and work performance. Felt responsibility is the mechanism by which high levels of justice lead to positive outcomes for people and organizations, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and withdrawal behaviors (Basit, 2017).

The current study expands on Shannon et al. (2014)'s research by demonstrating that felt obligation serves as a mediator for justice-outcome relationship, including justice-job satisfaction and justice-turnover linkages, in addition to the previously examined justice-performance relationship. The results showed that H4c was not supported, indicating that felt obligation did not operate as a mediator in the relationship between interactional justice and social loafing, as expected. Folger and Cropanzano (2001) found that the quality of

interpersonal connections inside firms is influenced by how decision-makers treat individuals impacted by their actions, specifically how their superiors treat them. Previous studies have shown that a person's sense of justice is significantly impacted by the level of interpersonal treatment they receive. This can lead employees to adjust their efforts in response to how they are treated by the organization. Employees may perceive poor interactional justice at work if the interpersonal treatment they receive falls short of their expectations, leading to a notable influence on their perception of justice. Employees will feel poor interactional justice when they are not treated with respect, there is a lack of candor, appropriateness, and justification for any treatment delivered, as stated by Tsai (2012). Subordinates are less inclined to reciprocate behaviors that benefit the business or superiors when injustice occurs.

6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study's theoretical contribution and implications are now examined. First and foremost, this study adds to the current body of knowledge in terms of theoretical contributions to organizational behaviour by proposing relatively new and additional correlations involving organizational justice and felt obligation towards social loafing behaviour. Prior study has mostly focused on how employees see organisational justice in terms of positive characteristics of their attitudes and behaviours, such as organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment, as well as job satisfaction (e.g. Crow, Lee and Joo, 2012; Lothfi and Pour, 2013). This study fills that need by concentrating on some of the negative effects of justice perceptions, such as social loafing. Separate measures of employees' perceptions of organizational justice provide a better and clearer understanding of the relationship between negative consequences and, as a result, the patterns of their predictive effects on outcome variables such as social loafing behaviour. Second, based on social exchange theory and reciprocity norms, this study pulls together studies on organizational justice, felt obligation and social loafing behaviour. Even while previous studies (for example, Gabelica et al., 2022; Liden et al. 2003) used complicated models to describe social loafing based on numerous antecedents, the ideas that underlie those studies were significantly different. Using studies on justice and social exchange, this study looked at the relationship between organisational justice, felt obligation and social loafing through the lens of social exchange theory. It has been proposed that charitable acts committed by one party toward another cause the other party to feel required to return in kind, driving the other party to exhibit attitudes and behaviours sufficient to fulfil those duties (Blau 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005). The felt obligation measure was utilised to tap into the reciprocation phenomena based on social exchange, and it was investigated as a mediating variable in the relationship between organisational justice and social loafing. The findings confirmed the hypothesis that felt obligation would buffer the relationship between organisational justice and social loafing.

The outcomes of the study demonstrate that organizational justice is connected to lower social loafing among employees. To foster fairness and a sense of obligation, the study suggests several practical consequences for businesses as managers should allow subordinates to voice their opinions and concerns, respect their ideas and foster a sense of

fairness, employees should have the opportunity to participate in important decisions that affect them, promoting a sense of responsibility and fairness, organizations should maintain consistent, unbiased, ethical, and accurate policies and choices, ensuring fairness in their decision-making processes and also treating employees with dignity and respect and distributing organizational outcomes equitably according to defined norms, enhances perceptions of fairness. In fact, organizational training programs can enhance managers' trustworthiness by focusing on developing competencies related to competence, dependability, and compassionate treatment of staff. Lastly, selecting team members based on their orientation toward teamwork can contribute to task completion and collaboration, reducing social loafing. In summary, organizations can prevent social loafing and cultivate a sense of obligation by promoting fairness, providing training for trustworthiness and considering team composition. Additionally, providing employment stability, competitive salaries, development opportunities, and improved working conditions directly contribute to enhancing employees' felt obligation.

7. Limitations and Further Research

Even though the current study provides significant theoretical advances and has practical implications, it has several shortcomings that may have influenced the study's results and that could be addressed in future research. To begin, rather than using longitudinal data, this study used cross-sectional data collected from working people over a period. Longitudinal studies could be used in future research to gain a better understanding of the interaction between study components. Second, the study variables were investigated using self-reported items in a single survey that was given to all participants. This could raise issues about common procedure variance and possible response distortion due to social desirability bias in the response data set. To limit the impact of common method variance and social desirability bias, many efforts were taken, including assuring respondent anonymity, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong responses in the survey, and ensuring that the scale's components are basic, clear, and intelligible.

Third, in the future, research should be performed to duplicate this study on employees from a variety of industries, including education, manufacturing, healthcare, tourism, and others by collecting data in numerous waves over several months. The external validity of the current study will be improved by taking a broad view of the study's results. In order to provide additional proof of the generalizability of the findings of this study, it would be fascinating to learn more about organizational justice, felt obligation, and social loafing interactions in different institutions. Fourth, the study gathered information on the phenomena of social loafing from a single source: the employees themselves. Future studies should use sources other than the same participants to measure social loafing. Social loafing, for example, might be assessed through the eyes of co-workers or team members with whom the respondents have a close working relationship (Rich et al. 2012). When compared to the data from the self-report, the mean value of the responses from colleagues will provide a more objective view of the respondents' level of collaboration in teamwork because the mean value will be less biased. A typical method of measurement, such as the one used here,

reduces the possibility of data carrying various biases (e.g the social desirability bias) (Kwak et al. 2019).

Moreover, future research should explore additional mediating mechanisms, such as perceived organizational politics, to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between organizational justice and social loafing. Perceived injustice regarding awards and promotions can contribute to dissatisfaction among employees and potentially fuel organizational politics, which has negative consequences for job satisfaction. Organizational politics has been associated with negative outcomes, including negative attitudes, loss of credibility, impaired job performance, increased work stress, and reduced organizational commitment. Therefore, it is essential for leaders to create a fair and healthy workplace that addresses employees' needs and expectations, aligning with the principles of equity theory. A fair and balanced relationship between leaders and employees can minimize organizational politics and have a positive long-term impact on job satisfaction. Future research can further investigate the role of perceived organizational politics as a mediating factor in the relationship between organizational justice and social loafing behaviour. Finally, it would be fascinating to investigate the role of gender in the relationship between organisational justice and social loafing. According to research on social loafing, around 20% of men and 60% of women do not engage in social loafing (Ofole, 2020). Hofstede et al., (1993) found that women's values differ less from men's, providing empirical support for the evolutionary theory. Overall, this research, which found statistically significant differences between men and women, provides preliminary support for an evolutionary and social explanation for gender-based group behavior disparities.

8. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine how different aspects of organizational justice (procedural, distributive, and interactional) influence social loafing behaviour through the mediating factor of felt obligation. The results indicated that, except for distributive justice, most direct relationships had a significant impact on social loafing. The statistical analysis also supported the mediating role of felt obligation between procedural justice, distributive justice, and social loafing. However, the data did not support the notion that felt obligation mediates the relationship between interactional justice and social loafing. To enhance fairness in the workplace, it is important to implement fair and consistent policies, provide opportunities for employee input and involvement in decision-making, and ensure respectful treatment of subordinates. Additionally, future research should employ more rigorous methodologies and gather data from diverse sources to overcome limitations such as the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported measures, and a predominantly male sample. Furthermore, future studies should explore additional mediators, such as perceived organizational politics, within the justice system and investigate the role of gender in predicting social loafing behaviour.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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