



## **THE ROLE OF INTERACTIONAL JUSTICE IN THE IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY PERCEPTION ON ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CYNICISM AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

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### **Abstract:**

*Enhancing business performance, which is a significant component of sustainable competition, is a crucial issue in the realm of business. In resolving this issue, identifying and optimizing elements that reduce job performance are considered to play a pivotal role. The perception of occupational safety is a precursor to many factors that affect employee performance. It is believed that reducing this perception, which is deemed to influence negative behaviors such as cynicism and unethical conduct, can positively impact employee performance. Interactional justice is considered to play a significant role in mitigating these adverse factors. In this context, a study was conducted on healthcare workers in Antalya province (n=160). This study evaluated the impact of occupational safety perception on cynicism and unethical behavior and the role of interactional justice in this relationship. The research conducted in private hospitals in the healthcare sector revealed that the perception of occupational safety has not significant effects on employees' cynicism but has negative effect on unethical behavior, and interactional justice plays a moderating role in these relationships.*

### **Keywords:**

Occupational safety, organizational change cynicism, unethical behavior, interactional justice, health sector

### **Jel Code:**

M14, M16, I12

### **1. Introduction**

One of the key components in achieving sustainable competitive advantage through enhanced business performance lies in optimizing the human factor, which is considered a vital critical success factor in management. Maximizing employee productivity and performance involves minimizing factors that adversely affect efficiency. Numerous factors influence employee behavior negatively, and in recent times, cynicism and unethical behavior have become pervasive issues in the workplace. Indeed, a substantial body of literature exists demonstrating the adverse effects of unethical behavior and cynicism on employee performance (Brandes and Das, 2006; Rodrigues and Carlos, 2010; Abraham, 2000; Goebel & Weißenberger, 2017; Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2008; Cropanzano and Stein 2009). Efforts aimed at reducing the impact of these negative variables comprise the central elements of this study. It is well-documented that occupational safety and interactional justice have a positive influence on employee attitudes and behaviors. Within this context, the perception of occupational safety and the perception of interactional justice within the organization are evaluated as factors that mitigate employee cynicism and unethical behavior, forming the foundation of our research model. Drawing from expectancy theory, organizational justice theories, equity theory, and social exchange theory, we have developed a research model. This model has been empirically applied in the healthcare sector, exploring the role of employee perceptions of occupational safety and interactional justice in influencing organizational cynicism and unethical behavior.

## 2. Background

The concept of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is defined as a systematic and scientific approach aimed at protecting employees from adverse conditions in the workplace and potential occupational hazards that may lead to occupational illnesses (ILO, 2019). The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines health as not only the absence of illness or injury in the context of work but also encompasses physical and mental factors directly related to health influenced by hygiene and safety during work (ILO, 2019). The primary objective of OHS initiatives is to safeguard employees, mitigating the adverse effects of work-related illnesses, and minimizing the negative impacts of workplace hazards and risks, thereby promoting healthier and more peaceful working environments (Kahveci, 2019). Establishing a healthier and safer work environment is considered a fundamental right for employees.

From the perspective of businesses, addressing safety concerns with modern safety measures warrants a proactive approach and offers solutions to management activities (Reiman and Pietikäinen, 2012). Safety management practices play a crucial role in reducing the likelihood of accidents, injuries, and near misses (Vinodkumar and Bhasi, 2010). According to Kirwan (1998), safety management practices entail the roles within an organization to ensure safety. Safety performance, as a concept, revolves around the maintenance of workplace safety through various interventions (Christian et al., 2009). These interventions predominantly involve safety behaviors exhibited by coworkers while performing job tasks (Huang et al., 2016).

In this context, enhancing employees' perception of occupational safety is believed to reduce negative attitudes and behaviors, including unethical conduct. Creating a trustworthy and healthy working environment not only aligns with ethical principles within the organization but also increases employees' trust and commitment to the company (Tonus and Oruç, 2012:17). In today's professional landscape, occupational safety ranks high among employee expectations, positively influencing their attitudes towards work.

Within this framework, the hypothesis formulated for testing is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Occupational safety perception has a negative and significant effect on unethical behavior.

In the context of organizational safety, investments made in employee protection are considered indicative of genuine management commitment, thereby serving as benchmarks or reference points for employees' perceptions of safety climate. These investments essentially provide a measurable gauge for assessing the level of management dedication. Specifically, the greater the perceived allocation towards hazard control or risk management, the higher the perceived commitment to safety (Abraham, 2000).

A negative relationship exists between organizational commitment and organizational cynicism, with the latter diminishing the former (Abraham, 2000). While organizational cynicism and organizational commitment are distinct concepts, organizational cynicism conveys a stronger sentiment of skepticism than the absence of organizational commitment (Dean et al., 1998; Kalagan, 2009).

Organizational cynicism, as conceptualized by Dean and colleagues (1998) drawing from attribution theory, expectancy theory, social exchange theory, attitude theory, emotional events theory, and social motivation theory, is described as negative behaviors exhibited by an individual towards their organization. This construct is further segmented into three sub-dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Dean et al., 1998: 345).

According to Wanous and his colleagues (2000), individuals become cynical when they perceive that numerous change initiatives within their organization have not been successful. Wanous et al. (2000) define organizational change cynicism (OCC) as "a pessimistic outlook toward change efforts due to a perception that those responsible for implementing change are unwilling or incompetent." Researchers posit that when pervasive cynicism takes hold within an organization, even well-intentioned change efforts may be hindered. Indeed, Wanous et al. (1994) suggest that the failures of change initiatives in organizations are largely attributable to previous unsuccessful change attempts and the development of cynical attitudes among employees towards future change endeavors.

In light of the relationships between occupational safety, organizational commitment, and cynicism, Hypothesis 2 is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Occupational safety perception has a negative and significant effect on organizational change cynicism. The concept of organizational justice, first introduced to the literature by Greenberg (1987), is defined as employees' perception of the fairness of organizational events, practices, and rules in alignment with the principles of justice. It is shaped by individuals' beliefs in the fairness of their treatment, which is rooted in the explicit characteristics of their organizational tasks and roles. According to Greenberg, the perception of organizational justice is shaped

through employee selection, performance evaluations, rewards, salaries, and other forms of benefits (Greenberg, 1987). The concept of interactional justice, initially proposed by Bies and Moag (1986), pertains to the quality of interpersonal relationships required for employees to feel that they are being treated fairly. Interactional justice is expressed as managers' honesty, respect, appreciation, and provision of information while executing procedures (Bies and Moag, 1986).

Cynics harbor doubts about the veracity of managers' statements and the reality of their actions (Kanter and Mirvis, 1989). In such situations, managers should dispel cynicism by providing accurate, respectful, timely, and rational explanations and by establishing a sense of justice. Bernerth et al. (2007), in their study involving 117 employees, identified a negative relationship between interactional justice, distributive justice, and organizational cynicism. In light of these discussions, Hypothesis 3 is presented as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Interactional justice has a moderating role in the relationship between occupational safety perception and organizational change cynicism.

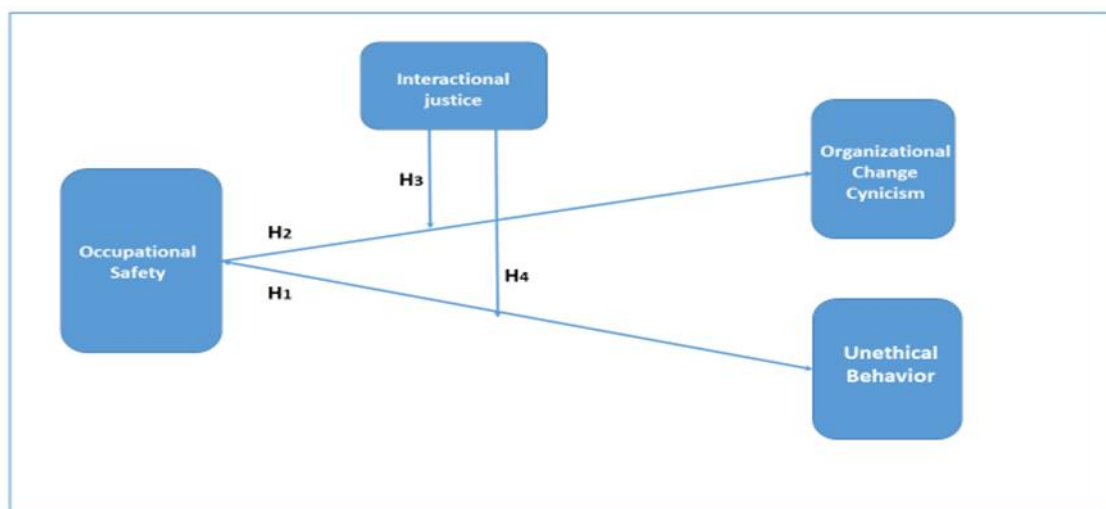
Recent research has shown positive relationships between ethical behavior, ethical climate, and organizational justice (Elçi et al., 2015: 587-597; Albejaidi, 2021: 8-96). According to the findings of Trevino and Weaver, there are strong connections between perceived organizational justice and ethical outcomes, assessed with the aim of evaluating the effects of monitoring the organizational justice-ethical relationship on employees' ethical and unethical behaviors. Thus, it has been observed that as employees' perceptions of organizational justice increase, instances of unethical behavior decrease (Trevino and Weaver, 2001: 665). Within this context, Hypothesis 4 suggests that interactional justice may play a moderating role in the relationship between employees' perception of occupational safety and unethical behavior:

Hypothesis 4: Interactional justice has a moderating role in the relationship between occupational safety perception and unethical behavior.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Study Design

This empirical study investigated the moderating role of interactional justice the relationships between occupational safety(OS) and organizational change cynicism(OCC) and between OS and unethical behavior (UB) in health sector in Antalya.The research model and the hypothesis are shown in Figure 1.



#### 3.2. Sampling and Participants

The research population (n=160) is the nurses working in a university operating in hospitals in Antalya, Türkiye. The sample size was calculated as 152 individuals considering a margin of error of 5% within a 95% confidence interval

(Sekaran & Bougie 2016).160 questionnaires were found suitable for analysis after removing incomplete participation. The demographic variables of participating nurses in the research are 61% of them are female (n =97), 62% (n = 88) are married, 42% and 38% (n = 60) are university. The average age of the sample is 29,2 (SD=7,60) and the mean working year is 8,6 (SD=6,2) years.

### 3.3. Instruments

The Occupational Safety Scale utilized in this study was derived from Hayes et al.'s (1998) 50-item scale, focusing on the Management's Safety Practices subscale, which consists of 9 items. The scale's validation for this research involved the use of the validation process conducted by Gyekye and Salminen (2005). Reliability analysis, as performed by Gyekye and Salminen (2005), yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.94.

To assess employees' levels of ethical behavior, the Ethical Behavior Scale developed by Ferrell and Skinner (1988) was employed, which has also been used by Fraedrich (1993) and Baker et al. (2006).

Cynicism about organizational change was gauged using eight items developed by Wanous, Reichers, and Austin (2000). Wanous et al. (2004) reported a full-scale alpha reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .75$  for this instrument.

For measuring employees' perceptions of interactional justice, the Interactional Justice Scale, developed by Moorman (1991) and validated by Niehoff and Moorman (1993), was employed. This scale consists of a total of nine statements, and Niehoff and Moorman (1993) determined a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .86 through reliability analysis.

All responses in the scales were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

### 3.4. Data Collection:

Data were collected through self-report survey questionnaires administered in Antalya City, Turkey, during the period of May to June 2023. The study participants were registered nurses employed in governmental hospitals. A convenience sampling method was used to distribute survey questionnaires to 250 nurses, and a total of 160 valid questionnaires were included in the data analysis, resulting in a response rate of 64%. The nurses voluntarily participated in the study, and informed oral consent was obtained from each participant prior to completing the questionnaire.

### 3.5. Statistical Analysis:

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software, with a significance level set at a 95% confidence interval. Initially, the compatibility of the measurement model with the data was assessed. Confirmatory factor analysis, employing the maximum likelihood estimation method, was carried out to assess the structural validity of the research model. The reliability of the measurement scales was examined through Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize sociodemographic information, and Pearson correlation analyses were employed to examine the relationships among study variables. Following preliminary analyses, the mediation model was analyzed using SPSS.

The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses conducted for the scales in the study are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. DFA Findings**

Variables	X <sup>2</sup>	df	CMIN	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA
			/ DF						
			≤5	≥.85	≥.80	≥.90	≥.90	≥.90	≤.08
<b>1.Interactional justice</b>	81	35	2,31	0,95	0,90	0,98	0,95	0,95	0,06
<b>2.Occupational Safety</b>	169	37	4,5	0,93	0,91	0,96	0,94	0,94	0,07

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<b>3.CAOC</b>	152	38	4,1	0.92	0.91	0.96	0.94	0.94	0.08
<b>3.Unethicak Behavior</b>	225	88	2,55	0.94	0.92	0.91	0.92	0.91	0.08

The averages, standard deviations and correlation values determined as a result of the analyzes are given in Table 2. Due to the significant relationships observed, further analysis was carried out.

Table 2: Means, S. D. and Correlations

Variables	Means	S. D.	1	2	3	4
<b>1.CAOC</b>	2,88	0,79	(.87)			
<b>2.Unethicak Behavior</b>	3,05	0,81	-.57***	(.85)		
<b>3.Interactional justice</b>	3,43	1,02	.68***	-.52***	(.95)	
<b>4.Occupational Safety</b>	3,04	0,86	.03	-.02***	-.08	(.82)

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

In the first stage, hierarchical regression analyses were employed to determine the impact of occupational safety perception (OS) on cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) and to examine the moderating role of interactional justice (IJ) in this relationship, with the aim of testing the hypotheses. The results of the applied regression analyses are presented in Table 3.

In the initial stage of the analysis, controlling for age, it was observed that the relationship between OS and CAOC was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .06$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Thus, H2 hypothesis was not supported.

In the second stage, it was found that IJ had a positive and significant effect on CAOC ( $\beta = .66$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ).

In the final stage, to test H3, the analysis results are presented in Table 3, and the findings indicated that IJ played a moderating role in the relationship between OS and CAOC ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ). Therefore, H3 hypothesis was supported.

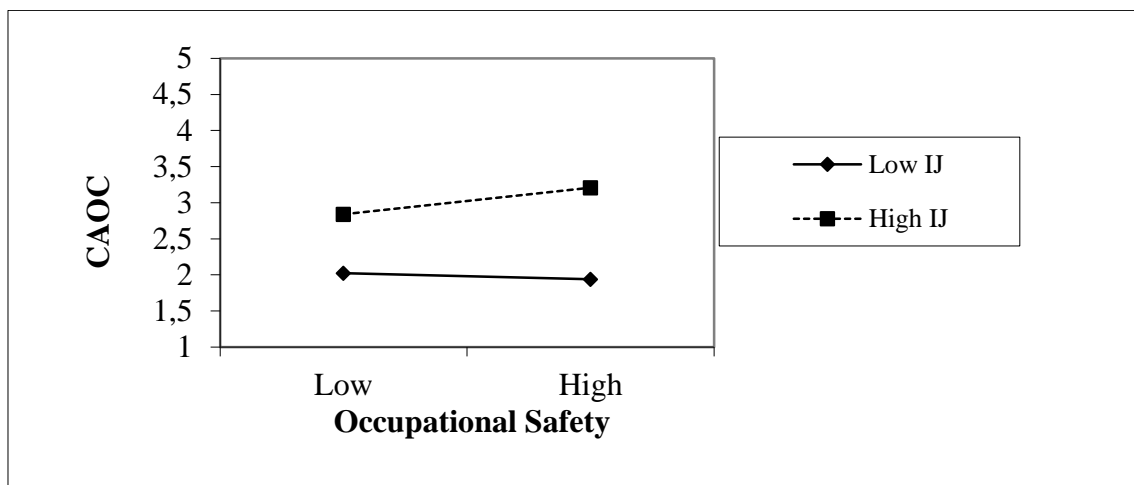
Table 3. Results Regarding the Regulatory Effect of IJ on the OS-CAOC Relationship

Variables	CAOC		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
<b>Age</b>	.28***	.15**	.11
<b>OS</b>	.06 (H2)	.10	.09
<b>IJ</b>		.66***	.65***
<b>OSxIJ</b>			.15*** (H3)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.08	.50	.52

<b>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></b>	.07	.49	.51
<b>F</b>	7,05***	53,1***	43,1***

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

Subsequently, to determine the direction and strength of the identified moderating effect, regression lines were plotted to test the relationships. As shown in Figure 2, it was observed that when IJ was high, the perception of OS unexpectedly increased CAOC. However, at low levels of IJ, the perception of OS had no significant effect on CAOC.



**Figure 2. Regression Lines for the Moderating Relationship of IJ in the OS-CAOC Relationship**

In the second phase of the analysis, hierarchical regression analyses were employed initially to determine the impact of occupational safety perception (OS) on unethical behavior (UB) and to examine the moderating role of interactional justice (IJ) in this relationship, with the aim of testing the hypotheses. The results of the applied regression analyses are presented in Table 3.

In the initial stage of the analysis, controlling for age, it was observed that the relationship between OS and UB was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .06$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Thus, H2 hypothesis was not supported.

In the second stage, it was found that IJ had a positive and significant effect on UB ( $\beta = .66$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ).

In the final stage, to test H3, the analysis results are presented in Table 3, and the findings indicated that IJ played a moderating role in the relationship between OS and UB ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ). Therefore, H3 hypothesis was supported.

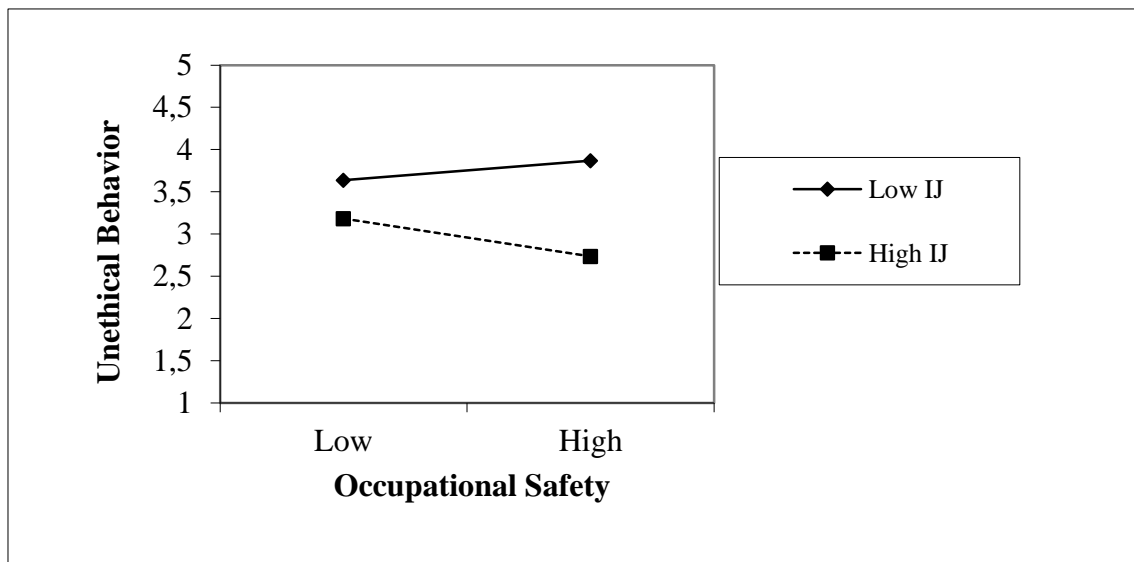
**Table 3. Results Regarding the Regulatory Effect of IJ on the OS-UB Relationship**

Variables	UB		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Age	-.24**	.15**	-.09
OS	-.14 *(H1)	-.07	-.06

<b>IJ</b>		-.50***	-.49***
<b>OSxIJ</b>			-.20** (H4)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.05	.29	.33
<b>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></b>	.04	.28	.31
<b>F</b>	4,8***	22,1***	19,1***

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

To determine the direction and strength of the identified moderating effect, regression lines were drawn to test the relationships. As shown in Figure 3, it was observed that when IJ was low, the perception of OS did not significantly influence UB, but at high IJ levels, the perception of OS significantly reduced UB.



#### 4. Results And Discussion

It is well-established that occupational safety (OS) and interactional justice (IJ) have a positive impact on employee attitudes and behaviors. In this context, the perception of employee occupational safety and interactional justice in the workplace has been considered as factors that reduce employee cynicism and unethical behavior, and a research model has been constructed. Utilizing expectancy theory, organizational justice, equity theory, and social exchange theory as the theoretical basis, an empirical study was conducted in the healthcare sector to investigate the moderating role of interactional justice in the relationship between employee occupational safety perception and organizational change cynicism (CAOC) and unethical behavior (UB). The findings of this study pertain to the variables mentioned in the healthcare sector.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine the moderating role of interactional justice in the relationship between employee occupational safety perception and organizational change cynicism (CAOC). According to the analysis results, it was observed that there was no significant relationship between OS and CAOC. This finding was unexpected, as OS is generally considered a positive variable that can reduce CAOC. There is no similar study in the literature regarding this relationship. It is suggested that this unexpected result might be due to

the fact that nurses already perceive OS practices as ongoing in their workplace. Additionally, since changes are infrequent, the average CAOC score was already around 2.8. Unexpectedly, the analyzed results indicated that interactional justice, the moderating variable under investigation, positively and significantly increased CAOC. This might be attributed to the high workload of nurses. Indeed, similar studies have suggested a negative relationship (Atılgan and Geçikli, 2020)(Etk\_S1). Furthermore, it was observed that interactional justice played a moderating role in the OS-CAOC relationship. Specifically, when IJ was high, the perception of OS unexpectedly increased CAOC; however, at low levels of IJ, the perception of OS had no significant effect on CAOC.

The analysis results indicated a significant relationship between OS and UB, with OS reducing UB, which was an expected finding. OS is generally considered a positive variable that can reduce employee UB. There is no similar study in the literature regarding this relationship. Additionally, the analyzed results showed that interactional justice, the moderating variable, significantly and negatively increased UB in this relationship, as expected. Moreover, interactional justice played a moderating role in the OS-UB relationship. Specifically, when IJ was low, the perception of OS did not significantly affect UB; however, at high levels of IJ, the perception of OS significantly reduced UB, which was an expected and significant finding. High IJ positively moderating the OS-UB relationship was expected. Despite these findings, there are some limitations to this research. One of the most significant limitations is that the study was conducted in only one sector. Therefore, different results can be expected from similar studies conducted in other sectors. Additionally, the data collected in this study were obtained from employees operating in a specific geographical region within the healthcare sector. Obtaining a larger dataset from different geographical regions could lead to more comprehensive and explanatory results.

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