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Sustaining Interactional Justice Amid Work-Related Negative Emotions: A Moderated Mediation Model in Boundary-Spanning Bank Workers

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Abstract

Background: Boundary-spanning bank employees experience continuous customer interactions that can generate negative emotions and influence how they perceive interpersonal treatment at work. Although emotions are known to shape fairness judgments, little is understood about how negative emotions translate into lower interactional justice through self-related psychological mechanisms. This study examines whether organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), self-efficacy, and external workplace locus of control (EWLOC) jointly condition the association between negative emotions and interactional justice. **Method:** Survey data were obtained from 338 boundary-spanning bank workers in Istanbul, Türkiye. The proposed moderated mediation framework was examined using PROCESS Macro Model 21, testing OBSE as a mediator between negative emotions and interactional justice. Self-efficacy and EWLOC were included as moderators on the first- and second-stage paths. Bootstrapping with 5000 resamples provided confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effects. **Results:** Stronger negative emotions were associated with lower OBSE and lower interactional justice perceptions, and the pattern of results was consistent with an indirect association via OBSE. The negative emotion–OBSE association varied by self-efficacy, with the association being stronger among employees reporting lower self-efficacy. EWLOC conditioned the OBSE–justice association, such that this association was weaker at higher levels of external orientation. The conditional indirect association was significant for employees low in self-efficacy and low-to-moderate in EWLOC. **Conclusions:** The findings are consistent with a moderated mediation model in which negative emotions are indirectly linked to interactional justice through OBSE, with the magnitude of these associations depending on employees' personal resources and attributional tendencies. The results suggest that strengthening OBSE and related psychological resources may be useful for supporting justice perceptions in emotionally demanding service roles.

Keywords: interactional justice; negative emotions; OBSE; self-efficacy; WLOC; moderated mediation

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1. Introduction

Employees in boundary-spanning roles often engage in dozens of face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions each day, many of which are emotionally demanding. As Zapf (2002) reports, face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with clients are among the

most emotionally demanding aspects of service work. As Aldrich and Herker (1977) famously describe, boundary roles link the organization with its environment and often expose individuals to conflicting expectations from internal and external actors. Boundary-spanning jobs, especially in service settings, have historically garnered academic interest owing to their pivotal influence on customer experiences and organizational results. A thorough examination of forty years of research on frontline service employees illustrates the importance of employees' psychological conditions, interpersonal relationships, and work environments in service provision (Subramony et al., 2021). Boundary-spanning jobs inherently involve high stress because employees must simultaneously satisfy the expectations of the organization and those of customers (Singh et al., 1996). Furthermore, customer impatience, distress, and hostile behavior reliably trigger frustration, anger, and emotional strain among frontline employees, as demonstrated in research on customer mistreatment (Grandey et al., 2004; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). These competing pressures can heighten emotional strain and increase the likelihood of negative affective reactions.

Negative emotions, in turn, play a central role in shaping how employees interpret interpersonal treatment and fairness. Affective Events Theory posits that emotional experiences directly affect perceptions and evaluations in the workplace (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Justice scholars also point out that fairness perceptions are interpretive. Folger and Cropanzano (1998) assert that people's interpretations of organizational actions shape their perceptions of justice. Therefore, affect-driven interpretations especially weaken interactional justice, a measure of how employees perceive their treatment with dignity, politeness, and respect (Colquitt, 2001). When employees are frustrated or emotionally stressed, they may be more sensitive to social cues, which means they may see the same actions as more or less respectful depending on how they feel. In addition to influencing perceptions of fairness, negative emotions can subtly shape how employees view themselves in their organizational roles. Research on emotions suggests that negative feelings make people less aware of their surroundings, more likely to see threats, and more likely to read social cues in a way that is self-referential (Forgas, 1995). Over time, repeated exposure to emotionally demanding customer encounters may lead employees to question their competence, adequacy, or value. These affective undercurrents can gradually reshape how individuals evaluate their standing within the organization—a process closely related to organization-based self-esteem (Pierce et al., 1989).

Although emotional demands and role pressures influence employees' interpretations, individuals differ substantially in their responses to such experiences. Personal resources and attributional tendencies play an important role in regulating emotional reactions and shaping how social interactions are interpreted. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) or locus of control (Rotter, 1966) can buffer negative emotional spillover, enabling employees to navigate difficult customer encounters with greater confidence. In contrast, employees exhibiting diminished self-efficacy and a pronounced external locus of control may experience feelings of being overwhelmed, rendering their perceptions of fairness more vulnerable to emotional distortion.

Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE)—employees' sense of self-worth as organizational members—has been validated as a core self-evaluative resource (Pierce et al., 1989) and has increasingly been modeled as a key explanatory mechanism linking organizational experiences to downstream outcomes (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). However, OBSE has rarely been integrated into a research model that explains when and why negative emotions translate into diminished interactional justice perceptions, particularly in high-contact boundary-spanning contexts.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to examine how negative emotions influence interactional justice perceptions among boundary-spanning bank workers and to explore

the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem as well as the moderating roles of work self-efficacy and work locus of control (WLOC). Drawing on Justice Theory (Colquitt, 2001), Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), and Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985), the study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which emotional experiences and individual differences jointly shape employees' fairness perceptions in emotionally demanding work environments.

This study makes several important contributions to the field of organizational behavior research. Theoretically, it integrates affective, cognitive, and individual-difference perspectives to explain how negative emotions are linked to interactional justice. Despite extensive research on emotions, self-esteem, and justice, little is known about how negative emotions are jointly associated with interactional justice through OBSE and how this process varies depending on work self-efficacy and workplace locus of control. Empirically, it examines boundary-spanning bank employees—a group frequently exposed to high emotional demands—providing evidence of a moderated mediation process in a real-world organizational context. Practically, the findings offer guidance for organizations seeking to strengthen employees' psychological resources and to select or develop individuals, thereby sustaining fairness perceptions and well-being in high-contact service roles.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Negative Emotions and Interactional Justice

Organizational justice theory explains how employees evaluate the fairness of workplace procedures, outcomes, and interpersonal treatment (Colquitt, 2001). The concept comprises four elements: distributive justice (Adams, 1965), relating to the perceived equity of rewards and contributions among individuals; procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), concerning the criteria employed in decision-making; interactional justice, which focuses on the relationships between superiors and subordinates; and informational justice, which pertains to the availability of information (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993).

Interactional justice is grounded in the work of Bies and Moag (1986), who emphasize that fairness is communicated through interpersonal qualities such as respect, politeness, honesty, and adequate explanations. Relational models of fairness further propose that interpersonal treatment signals one's social standing and relational value in the organization (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Recent meta-analytic analysis also demonstrates that interactional justice is highly shaped by relational behaviors and interpersonal signals (Qandeel & Kuráth, 2025), highlighting its sensitivity to employees' emotional experiences.

Prior research consistently shows that fairness violations elicit negative emotional responses, such as anger, frustration, and resentment (e.g., Barclay et al., 2005; Robbins et al., 2012; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Recent empirical studies conceptualize justice as an antecedent of emotional reactions rather than an outcome of them (e.g., Aggarwal & Mittal, 2021; Aisha et al., 2024). Conversely, a limited number of studies have investigated how employees' emotional states subsequently influence their perceptions of justice.

However, Fairness Theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) suggests that negative emotions frequently precede occurrences of injustice. Judge et al. (2006) revealed that daily fluctuations in negative emotions predict lower perceptions of respectful and fair supervisory treatment. Folger and Cropanzano (1998) similarly argue that fairness judgments are rooted in affective reactions to social exchanges. Meta-analytic findings by Barsky and Kaplan (2007) indicate that negative effects are associated with less favorable evaluations of fairness. A recent study by Mao et al. (2018) confirms that negative emotional states make individuals more sensitive to subtle signs of disrespect.

Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) posits that quotidian workplace occurrences elicit affective responses, which subsequently influence employees' attitudes, judgements, and behaviors. According to Affective Events Theory, emotions are not peripheral but central to how individuals interpret and evaluate their work environment, particularly in domains that rely on interpersonal treatment, such as interactional justice. Negative affective experiences heighten vigilance toward potentially disrespectful or insensitive behaviors, influence the cognitive processing of social information, and bias evaluative judgments toward less favorable interpretations. In boundary-spanning roles—where employees encounter frequent customer demands and emotionally charged interactions—affective events are especially salient, making justice perceptions more susceptible to momentary emotional states. Thus, Affective Events Theory provides a theoretical grounding for the expectation that negative emotions may erode interactional justice perceptions by altering how employees attend to and interpret interpersonal cues.

H1. *Negative emotions are negatively related to employees' perceptions of interactional justice.*

2.2. Negative Emotions and Organization-Based Self-Esteem

Self-esteem research is grounded on the assumption that self-esteem may influence the way individuals behave, think, and feel, as it holds a key role in the prediction of employee attitudes and behaviors (Brockner, 1988; Judge & Bono, 2001). A specialized aspect, organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), refers to an employee's assessment of their competency, self-worth, and adequacy as part of their organization (Pierce et al., 1989). Additionally, the concept of OBSE encapsulates how employees perceive their significance, effectiveness, and competence within their workplace (Chan et al., 2013). Research demonstrates that OBSE holds a stronger connection to employee behaviors, performances, and overall effectiveness in organizations compared to global self-esteem (Tang & Gilbert, 1994). Moreover, a meta-analysis by Bowling et al. (2010) found that OBSE correlates more strongly with work-related variables than general self-esteem.

Despite the rich literature on emotional labor and chronic emotional strain, the direct effect of momentary negative emotions on OBSE has received limited attention. Negative emotions can undermine OBSE by shaping how employees construe their value. Empirical research confirms that negative affect reduces perceived competence and self-worth (J. D. Brown & Marshall, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001) and heightens the salience of self-doubt (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Recent evidence shows that OBSE is strongly shaped by employees' ongoing emotional experiences and interpersonal treatment in service-intensive settings (H. Kim & Qu, 2023).

The Affect Infusion Model (AIM) advanced by Forgas (1995) explains how affective states systematically influence cognitive processing, especially when individuals engage in judgment, evaluation, or interpretation of social information. According to AIM, negative affect increases the likelihood that people rely on affect-laden, detail-oriented, and interpretive processing strategies, thereby infusing judgments with feelings of doubt, inadequacy, and threat. Rather than simply coloring mood, negative affect shapes the very cognitive mechanisms through which employees evaluate themselves and their interpersonal environment. In organizational contexts—particularly in emotionally demanding roles—these processes can make routine challenges appear more personally consequential, leading employees to view themselves as less competent or valued. Through this mechanism, AIM provides a strong theoretical basis for expecting that negative emotions may diminish organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) by biasing self-evaluative interpretations in a more critical direction.

H2. *Negative emotions are negatively associated with organization-based self-esteem.*

2.3. OBSE as Mediator

Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) represents employees' perceptions of their value, competence, and significance within the organization (Pierce et al., 1989). A strong relationship between OBSE and positive organizational behavior is highlighted in Pan et al. (2014) and by Van Dyne and Pierce (2004).

A positive correlation is observed between OBSE and job satisfaction (e.g., Gardner & Pierce, 1998; Pierce et al., 1989), as well as organizational commitment (Gardner & Pierce, 1998; Lee & Peccei, 2007), and a relationship between OBSE and team/coworker dynamics (Norman et al., 2015). Furthermore, OBSE acted as a mediator in the relationships between general self-esteem and other work-related characteristics, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement (Pierce & Gardner, 2009). OBSE can facilitate the establishment of a productive and healthy work environment (M. Kim & Beehr, 2018). A favorable mediation relationship exists between future-oriented management actions and a beneficial influence between work satisfaction and organizational commitment (Norman et al., 2015). M. Kim and Beehr (2018) demonstrated the relationship between organizational-based self-esteem (OBSE) and meaningful work, while Pierce et al. (2016) emphasized the robust correlation between OBSE and both psychological and subjective well-being.

Research demonstrates that organizational-based self-esteem (OBSE) mitigates adverse influences and work-related outcomes. Employees with high levels of OBSE are less likely to respond to perceived organizational uncertainty (Hui & Lee, 2000), and OBSE affects the link between abusive supervision and the desire to leave (Ahmad & Begum, 2023). OBSE serves as a crucial asset that employees derive from their organizations and convert into personal resources, mitigating the adverse correlation between job burnout and recovery experiences, as well as the mediating influence of recovery experiences on the relationship between job burnout and job crafting (Song et al., 2025).

OBSE also plays a central role in how individuals interpret fairness. Justice theory emphasizes that dignity, respect, and status recognition are foundational components of interpersonal justice (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Individuals with high OBSE tend to interpret interpersonal cues more favorably and show greater resilience to ambiguous or mildly negative treatment (De Cremer, 2003). In contrast, employees with lower OBSE are more vigilant toward potential disrespect and more likely to interpret interactions as unfair. These patterns position OBSE as an evaluative lens through which employees construct interactional justice perceptions. Prior research conceptualizes OBSE as a self-regulatory resource rather than a static self-evaluation. Gardner et al. (2015) demonstrated that OBSE supports employees' capacity to regulate behavior and persist in the face of challenges, suggesting that OBSE plays an active role in how individuals manage adverse work experiences. When OBSE is weakened, employees may have fewer psychological resources to regulate affective strain, which can shape subsequent evaluative processes.

Considering that (a) negative emotions diminish employees' perceived worth, (b) OBSE affects the interpretation of interpersonal treatment, and (c) OBSE functions as a psychological mechanism that converts affective experiences into evaluative assessments, we propose:

H3. *OBSE mediates the relationship between negative emotions and interactional justice.*

2.4. The Moderating Role of Work Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the evaluation individuals make of their abilities to plan and execute actions required to obtain particular performance results (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) delineated four categories of efficacy information: enactive mastery experience

(direct experience and performance feedback), vicarious experiences (observing models of desired behavior), verbal persuasion (feedback), and physiological and affective states. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to demonstrate strong self-efficacy, and those developing perceptions of their own efficacy can enhance significant self-esteem, and vice versa (Bandura, 1977).

Gardner and Pierce (1998) clearly distinguish organization-based self-esteem from self-efficacy, arguing that OBSE reflects employees' perceived value and worth within the organization, whereas self-efficacy captures beliefs about one's capability to perform work tasks successfully. While self-efficacy is primarily shaped by mastery experiences and emotion regulation, OBSE is more sensitive to relational and interpersonal signals conveyed in the work environment. This distinction supports modeling self-efficacy as a moderating personal resource, rather than as a substitute for OBSE in justice-related processes.

A substantial body of research shows that self-efficacy mitigates the harmful effects of emotional and interpersonal strain. High self-efficacy diminishes the effects of stressors on strain and burnout (Jex & Bliese, 1999; Grau et al., 2001; Makara-Studzińska et al., 2019), mitigates physiological and emotional reactivity (Siu et al., 2005), and attenuates the relationship between procedural justice and negative emotions (Minibas-Poussard et al., 2023). Self-efficacy also enhances emotional regulation processes (Caprara et al., 2008; Lightsey et al., 2011) and reduces the effects of negative affect on life satisfaction (Lightsey et al., 2013). Emotional self-efficacy seems to be a way to control your emotions and predict lower levels of burnout and higher levels of well-being when dealing with negative emotions (Tavolucci et al., 2025). Zhu et al. (2023) demonstrate that self-efficacy strengthens employees' capacity to handle emotionally demanding customer interactions.

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, we expect that self-efficacy will moderate the link between negative emotions and OBSE. In boundary-spanning roles—where employees must manage both internal demands and customer expectations—self-efficacy functions as a key personal resource that protects individuals from the destabilizing effects of emotionally aversive experiences.

H4. *Self-efficacy moderates the relationship between negative emotions and OBSE, such that the association is weaker when self-efficacy is higher.*

2.5. The Moderating Role of Workplace Locus of Control

The locus of control, a personality characteristic, indicates the extent to which individuals perceive their capacity to influence the outcomes of events in their lives (Rotter, 1966). Work Locus of Control (WLOC) refers to the degree to which individuals perceive they have control over the outcomes of their work environment, thereby influencing their coping strategies and emotional reactions (Spector, 1988).

Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985) establishes a basis for comprehending the moderating influence of WLOC. This theory argues that individuals interpret events through causal explanations that vary along the dimensions of locus (internal vs. external), stability, and controllability, and these attributions shape emotional reactions and subsequent judgments. External attributions tend to elicit stronger negative affect, heighten perceptions of threat, and amplify evaluative sensitivity to interpersonal treatment, whereas internal attributions are associated with greater emotional stability and more constructive social interpretations.

On the other hand, WLOC is considered more predictive of work behavior than general locus of control (Maram & Milner, 1998) and has been linked to core workplace outcomes, including satisfaction, commitment, burnout, and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001; Wang et al., 2010). Because it operates as an attributional lens through which employees interpret workplace events (Mapuranga et al., 2021). In addition, WLOC also moderates several workplace relationships, including stress–health (Muhonen & Torkelson, 2004) and

job satisfaction–turnover intention (Lu et al., 2000; Mulki & Lassk, 2019). Recent research emphasizes that external WLOC intensifies the negative emotional reactions to fairness violations (Minibas-Poussard et al., 2023). Interactional justice and WLOC have also been linked in studies showing that attributional tendencies shape relational evaluations (Nadi & Aghanouri, 2017).

Research has associated internal control orientations with reduced emotional reactivity and more adaptive coping with workplace stressors (Spector, 1988; Ng et al., 2006). Studies show that internal tendencies can lessen the effects of problems with other people on evaluative outcomes (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994). Conversely, external orientations have been linked to heightened negative affect, stronger reactions to mistreatment, and lower justice perceptions (Harris et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2010). These findings suggest that external WLOC may amplify the emotional and cognitive consequences of diminished self-worth, whereas lower EWLOC may serve a protective function.

Thus, WLOC shapes how employees perceive interpersonal treatment. Employees with a more internal orientation tend to evaluate interactions more favorably (Abu Elanain, 2010), whereas external orientations are associated with heightened sensitivity to mistreatment, negative affect (Harris et al., 2009), and counterproductive responses (Sprung & Jex, 2012). In this context, external workplace locus of control (EWLOC) signifies employees' propensity to ascribe work-related outcomes to external factors beyond their personal control, rendering them more responsive to ambiguous or challenging social cues. As a result, employees high in EWLOC may be less likely to draw upon their organization-based self-esteem when evaluating interpersonal treatment, whereas those lower in externality may rely more consistently on internal self-related cues when forming interactional justice perceptions.

H5. *External workplace locus of control (EWLOC) moderates the relationship between OBSE and interactional justice.*

2.6. Moderated Mediation Model

The theoretical arguments presented above indicate that negative emotions may undermine interactional justice through a multi-layered psychological mechanism. Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) proposes that workplace events trigger emotional reactions, and these affective states subsequently shape employees' cognitive evaluations—including fairness perceptions. Consistent with this view, negative emotions can bias self-related judgments, reducing employees' organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), a core self-evaluative resource that influences how interpersonal treatment is interpreted.

However, AET also emphasizes that affective influences unfold within the context of individual differences, meaning the indirect pathway from negative emotions to justice perceptions is not uniform across employees. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997), self-efficacy represents a critical personal resource that determines the extent to which emotional experiences affect self-evaluations. Employees with higher self-efficacy exhibit stronger emotion-regulation capacity and greater confidence in their ability to manage demanding interactions, making their OBSE less susceptible to negative affect. In contrast, lower self-efficacy heightens employees' vulnerability to internalizing negative emotional states, thereby amplifying the adverse effect of negative emotions on OBSE.

At the same time, Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985) and research on work locus of control (Spector, 1988) indicate that EWLOC shapes whether OBSE translates into interactional justice perceptions. Employees with a stronger external orientation tend to attribute interpersonal treatment to external forces, reducing the extent to which their own feelings of worth and competence (OBSE) guide their fairness judgments. Conversely,

those with lower externality rely more on internal cues, strengthening the effect of OBSE on justice evaluations.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest a conditional indirect process:

- Affective states (AET) influence self-evaluations (OBSE),
- This emotional impact is shaped by employees' personal resources (self-efficacy),
- And the translation of OBSE into justice perceptions depends on attributional tendencies (EWLOC).

H6. *The indirect effect of negative emotions on interactional justice through OBSE is jointly moderated by self-efficacy and external workplace locus of control (see Figure 1).*

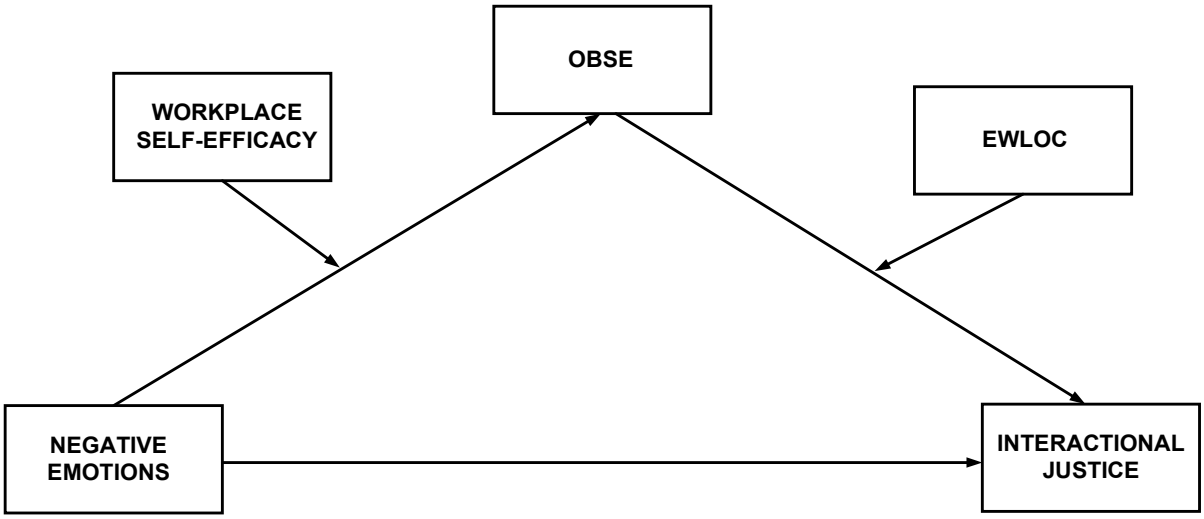

Figure 1. Conceptual moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 21).

Negative emotions predict OBSE, moderated by self-efficacy. OBSE predicts interactional justice, moderated by external workplace locus of control (EWLOC). The indirect effect of negative emotions on interactional justice is thus conditional on both moderators.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The data for this study were gathered from staff of 14 commercial banks in Istanbul, Türkiye, and were collected between October and December 2019 from boundary-spanning bank employees, using a purposive sampling method. This non-probability sampling was chosen because the research focuses on service-related aspects that require respondents to have direct and ongoing interactions with customers. Therefore, only employees who are in customer-facing or boundary-spanning roles. Owing to confidentiality, we are prohibited from revealing the identities of these institutions. The participants were informed that the study was conducted for academic purposes to further the understanding of specific human behaviors in the workplace. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured the confidentiality of their responses, which encouraged honest and uninhibited engagement. Explicit consent was acquired from participants.

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed, due to missing data, and listwise deletion resulted in a final analytical sample of 338 respondents (380 usable responses; 42 cases removed, 11.1%). The sample (N = 338) was composed of frontline office workers (31%), customer representatives (29%), and call center workers (40%). The average age was 31.5 (SD: 3.5). The female rate is 45%, and the male rate is 55%. 75% of the sample has

at least a university degree, while 24% holds a master's degree. Fifty-five percent of the sample has at least five years of experience.

3.2. Measure

All study instruments—except interactional justice scale—were administered using Turkish versions that had been developed and utilized in previous research through translation and back-translation procedures in accordance with Brislin's (1986) guidelines (Minibas-Poussard et al., 2017, 2023). Using the current dataset, we conducted exploratory factor analyses and reliability analyses, which indicated that all scales demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, as reported below.

(i) *Interactional justice*: Niehoff and Moorman (1993)'s scale is adapted. This 8-item scale, ranging between 1 and 5, measures the degree to which employees feel their needs are considered in, and adequate explanations are given for, job decisions. Exploratory factor analysis supported a unidimensional structure for the scale (KMO = 0.84; Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < 0.001$). All items loaded on a single factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.50 to 0.86. Internal consistency was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). Sample items: "When making decisions about my job, my manager offers explanations that make sense to me." "When making decisions about my job, my manager treats me with kindness and consideration."

(ii) *Negative emotions*: The Job-Related Affective Well-being Scale (Van Katwyk et al., 2000) was used, with 15 items for negative emotions, with Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5. Sample items: *My job made me feel angry; My job made me feel discouraged*. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed a unidimensional structure for the scale (KMO = 0.88; Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < 0.001$). All items were loaded onto a singular factor, exhibiting factor loadings between 0.65 and 0.85. The internal consistency was robust (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$).

(iii) *Organizational-based self-esteem* (OBSE): A ten item scale, ranging from 1 to 5, (Pierce et al., 1989) was implemented. Sample items: *In my workplace, I am trusted; In my workplace, I am important*. The scale showed satisfactory psychometric properties (KMO = 0.74; Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < 0.001$; factor loadings = 0.55–0.85; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).

(iv) *Work self-efficacy*: Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995)'s tool, composed of 10 items ranging from 1 to 5 and adapted to the workplace by Follenfant and Meyer (2003), was used. Sample items: *In my work I always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough*; *In my work I trust myself to face unexpected events efficiently*. The scale had adequate psychometric qualities (KMO = 0.89; Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < 0.001$; factor loadings = 0.60–0.85; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$).

(v) *Work locus of control*: The applied 16-item scale provides a score between 1 and 6, whereas the higher the score is, the more external the person is (Spector, 1988). Sample items: *Most employees have more influence on their supervisors than they think they do*; *Most people are capable of doing their jobs well if they make the effort*. Exploratory factor analysis indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis (KMO = 0.65; Bartlett's test of sphericity, $p < 0.001$). All items loaded on a single factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.30 to 0.77. Internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$), consistent with commonly accepted thresholds (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Gender, position, and tenure were included as control variables. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine potential group differences. No statistically significant differences were found; however, these variables were retained as covariates to avoid contextual bias.

Harman's single-factor test was conducted to evaluate the potential influence of common technique bias. An unrotated exploratory factor analysis encompassing all items indicated that the first factor represented 15.09% of the total variance, well below the

suggested 50% threshold. This finding suggests that common technique bias is improbable to pose a substantial risk to the validity of the results. In addition, we conducted a full collinearity VIF assessment; VIF values ranged from 1.23 to 1.63, indicating no evidence of problematic collinearity and alleviating concerns regarding common method bias.

4. Results

Data analysis was accomplished by using SPSS 22 and PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018). To test the moderated mediation model (Model 21), a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals was employed. Table 1 illustrates the examination of means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients among the variables, offering preliminary insights into their linkages.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Negative emotions	41.06	12.02				
2. Interactional justice	26.50	5.63	−0.15 *			
3. OBSE	40.95	4.17	−0.25 **	0.41 **		
4. Work self-efficacy	41.73	5.90	−0.36 **	0.20 **	0.54 **	
5. EWLOC	51.65	8.96	0.39 **	−0.47**	−0.40 **	−0.41 **

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

All variables showed significant correlations in the expected directions. Negative emotions were negatively correlated with OBSE (r = −0.25, $p < 0.001$) and interactional justice (r = −0.15, $p < 0.01$), while OBSE was positively correlated with interactional justice (r =0.41, $p < 0.001$). Self-efficacy correlated positively with OBSE (r = 0.54, $p < 0.001$) and negatively with negative emotions (r = −0.36, $p < 0.001$). External WLOC was positively correlated with negative emotions (r = 0.39, $p < 0.001$) and negatively correlated with OBSE (r = −0.40, $p < 0.001$) and interactional justice (r = −0.47, $p < 0.001$).

As expected in Hypothesis 1, negative emotions were related to low interactional justice (R = 0.15, R^2 = 0.02, F = 9.26, $p \leq 0.01$). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, negative emotions were related to low OBSE (R = 0.25, R^2 = 0.06, F = 24.39, $p \leq 0.001$).

A simple mediation analysis tested whether organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) mediated the relationship between negative emotions and interactional justice. Negative emotions significantly reduced OBSE (b = −0.094, SE = 0.019, t = −4.87, $p < 0.001$), and OBSE positively predicted interactional justice (b = 0.456, SE = 0.057, t = 7.99, $p < 0.001$). The direct effect of negative emotions on interactional justice was not significant (effect = −0.025, SE = 0.022, t = −1.17, $p = 0.243$). However, the indirect effect was significant (effect = −0.043, BootSE = 0.010, 95% CI [−0.0628, −0.0219]). These findings indicate that hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

A moderation analysis examined whether self-efficacy moderated the effect of negative emotions on OBSE. Negative emotions significantly predicted lower OBSE (b = −0.387, SE = 0.095, t = –4.07, $p < 0.001$), and the interaction between negative emotions and self-efficacy was significant (b = 0.008, SE = 0.002, t = 3.87, $p < 0.001$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.028$, F= 15, $p < 0.001$. Conditional effects showed that negative emotions were associated with lower OBSE at low self-efficacy (effect = −0.089, SE = 0.024, t = -3.70, $p < 0.001$),but not at high self-efficacy (effect = 0.026, SE = 0.022, t = 1.20, $p = 0.229$). These results support Hypothesis 4 (See Figure 2).

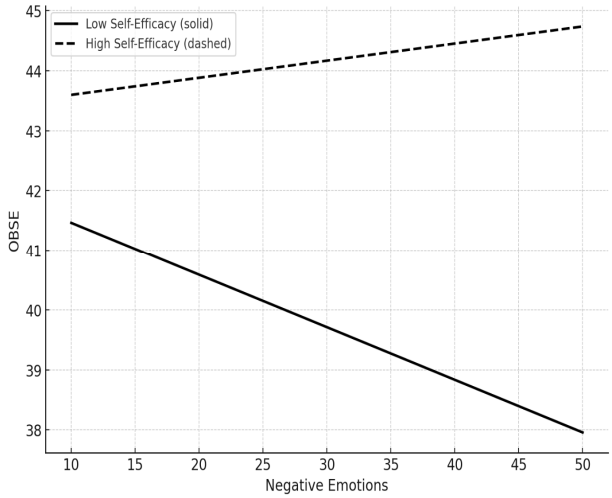

Figure 2. Slope analysis: moderating role of self-efficacy.

A moderation analysis examined whether work locus of control (externality) moderated the association between OBSE and interactional justice. OBSE had a significant positive effect on interactional justice (b = 1.481, SE = 0.330, t = 4.49, $p < 0.001$), and external WLOC also showed a significant main effect (b = 0.634, SE = 0.236, t = 2.69, $p = 0.008$). Importantly, the interaction between OBSE and external WLOC was significant (b = −0.021, SE = 0.006, t = −3.57, $p < 0.001$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.026$, F= 13, $p < 0.001$. Conditional effects showed that OBSE strongly predicted interactional justice at low external WLOC (effect = 0.557, SE = 0.087, t = 6.40, $p < 0.001$) but the effect became nonsignificant at high external WLOC (effect = 0.142, SE = 0.076, t = 1.87, $p = 0.063$. Thus, these results support Hypothesis 5 (see Figure 3).

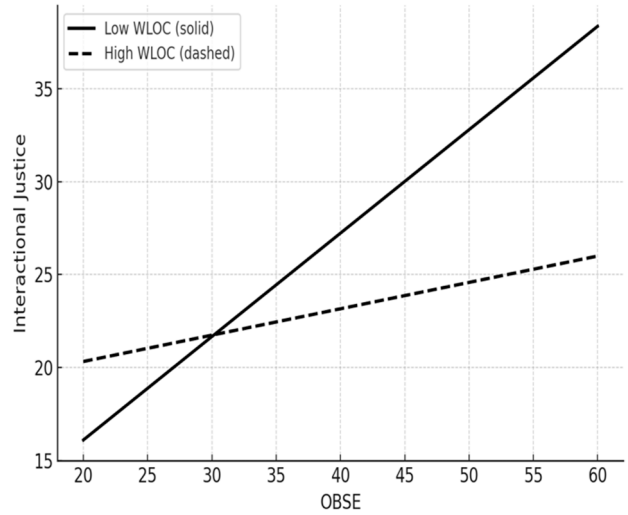

Figure 3. Slope analysis: moderating role of EWLOC.

A moderated mediation analysis (Model 21; Hayes, 2018) was conducted to examine whether the relationship between negative emotions and interactional justice via OBSE was moderated by self-efficacy and external WLOC. Negative emotions negatively predicted lower OBSE (b = −0.267, SE = 0.103, t = −2.60, $p < 0.01$), and this effect was moderated by self-efficacy (b = 0.005, SE = 0.002, t = 2.13, $p < 0.05$). Conditional effects indicated that negative emotions reduced OBSE at low self-efficacy (effect = −0.085, SE = 0.025, t = −3.39, $p < 0.001$) but were nonsignificant at high self-efficacy (effect = −0.014, SE = 0.026, t = −0.539, $p = 0.590$). OBSE positively predicted interactional justice (b = 1.535, SE = 0.332,

t = 4.63, $p < 0.001$), and this effect was moderated by external WLOC (b = −0.022, SE = 0.006, t = −3.75, $p < 0.001$). Conditional effects showed that OBSE increased interactional justice at low external WLOC (effect = 0.552, SE = 0.086, t = 6.35, $p < 0.001$) but was nonsignificant at high external WLOC (effect = 0.110, SE = 0.078, t = 1.40, $p = 0.162$).

Finally, the conditional indirect effect of negative emotions on interactional justice via OBSE was significant when both self-efficacy and external WLOC were low (effect = −0.047, BootSE = 0.014, 95% bootstrap CI [−0.0745, −0.0190]) but not significant when both moderators were high (effect = −0.002, BootSE = 0.003, 95% bootstrap CI [−0.0072, 0.0063]). The index of moderated mediation was significant at low external WLOC (index = 0.0028, BootSE = 0.0013, 95% bootstrap CI [0.0004, 0.0056]) but not at high external WLOC (index = 0.0006, BootSE = 0.0006, 95% bootstrap CI [−0.0001, 0.0020]).

Overall, these results support Hypothesis 6. Although low self-efficacy amplifies the detrimental effect of negative emotions on OBSE, low externality attenuates the weakening of interactional justice by strengthening the OBSE–justice link. When these two conditions coincide, the indirect effect becomes observable because each moderator operates at a different stage of the process.

5. Discussion

This study examined how negative emotions are associated with interactional justice through organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and clarified when this process unfolds among boundary-spanning bank employees. By positioning negative emotions as antecedents of fairness perceptions, the model extends organizational justice theory and complements Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and the Affect-Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995). OBSE emerged as a meaningful psychological mechanism linking emotions to justice, addressing a gap in prior work that has rarely integrated self-related resources into justice formation processes (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Gardner & Pierce, 1998). By incorporating self-efficacy and WLOC as moderators operating at different stages of the pathway, the study bridges Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985). This multi-layered framework clarifies why employees vary in their reactions to emotionally demanding work and provides a more textured understanding of fairness formation in service contexts. The findings indicate that negative emotions undermine employees' OBSE, which in turn shapes their perceptions of interactional justice. However, this indirect effect is conditional: it emerges primarily when employees report lower work self-efficacy and lower levels of external work locus of control (EWLOC).

Consistent with affect-based perspectives, the results support the notion that emotional experiences play a formative role in shaping fairness perceptions. Affective Events Theory posits that workplace emotions affect employees' interpretation and assessment of social information (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In line with this view, the present findings add to prior justice research—largely focused on justice as an antecedent of emotions—by suggesting that negative emotional states may also be associated with interactional justice perceptions. This reverse pathway highlights the interpretive nature of justice judgments, particularly in emotionally demanding work contexts.

OBSE emerged as a key psychological mechanism linking negative emotions to interactional justice. When employees experience negative emotions, their sense of organizational worth may be diminished, making them more sensitive to interpersonal cues and less resilient in fairness evaluations. This finding aligns with self-concept perspectives suggesting that affective states influence self-evaluations (J. D. Brown & Marshall, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). By integrating OBSE into the justice formation process, the study contributes to organizational justice literature by foregrounding self-related resources as an explanatory mechanism through which emotions shape fairness perceptions. In a recent

study, Dimitri et al. (2025)'s systematical review underlines self-esteem's central role while predicting well-being, performance, justice perceptions, and engagement in many different cultural or organizational contexts.

The moderating role of work self-efficacy further clarifies individual differences in emotional vulnerability. Consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy functioned as an emotion-regulation resource that buffered the detrimental impact of negative emotions on OBSE (Bandura, 1986). Employees with higher self-efficacy appeared better able to preserve their sense of organizational worth despite emotional strain, whereas those with lower self-efficacy were more susceptible to declines in OBSE. This finding reinforces the importance of personal resources in emotionally demanding roles. Recently, Tavolucci et al. (2025)'s work demonstrated stronger regulatory capacities of self-efficacy softening the harmful effects of negative emotions at work.

Importantly, the results indicate that OBSE is more strongly associated with interactional justice only among employees low in EWLOC. From an attributional perspective, employees with stronger external control beliefs may be less likely to rely on internal self-related cues when interpreting interpersonal treatment (Weiner, 1985; Spector, 1988). As a result, OBSE becomes less influential for justice evaluations when outcomes are attributed to external forces. This finding underscores the role of attributional orientations in determining whether self-evaluations translate into fairness perceptions.

The boundary-spanning context of the study highlights the practical relevance of these processes. Employees in customer-facing positions frequently navigate intense interpersonal interactions and emotional labor (Grandey, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Prior research shows that justice perceptions can spill over into customer-directed behavior, influencing service quality and emotional displays (Rupp & Spencer, 2006).

Finally, the present findings suggest that when negative emotions are associated with lower employee self-worth and fairness perceptions, the implications may extend beyond internal attitudes to be reflected in external service interactions. This study contributes to broader justice scholarship by emphasizing that interactional justice is not only linked to managerial behavior but also related to employees' emotional and psychological states. Conceptually, this perspective suggests that interactional justice can be sustained by managerial conduct but also by employees' affective and self-evaluative states, thereby extending justice theory beyond explanations focused solely on managers' behavior. The proposed model may be most relevant in high-contact service settings characterized by strong emotional labor demands and constrained discretion and warrants examination across other contexts.

A strong body of organizational research shows that employees' justice perceptions are central to how organizations function. High levels of perceived fairness consistently predict greater job satisfaction, stronger affective commitment, and higher organizational citizenship behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Recently, Aggarwal and Mittal (2021) underlined that organizational justice influences employee attitudes and organizational outcomes via employee engagement, revealing that self-evaluative mechanisms impact the connection between emotional antecedents and organizational outcomes. Conversely, low justice perceptions reliably predict counterproductive work behaviors, withdrawal, presenteeism, turnover intention, and stress-related strain (Fox et al., 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Tepper, 2000). Interactional injustice, in particular, has been linked with emotional exhaustion, retaliation tendencies, and deterioration in interpersonal functioning (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Rupp & Spencer, 2006). These studies demonstrate that justice is not only an ethical principle but also a strategic organizational resource that shapes employees' motivation, well-being, and cooperative behavior.

Recent justice scholarship further emphasizes that fairness dynamics have implications extending beyond individual reactions. Brockner and Bobocel (2024) argue that justice principles shape how people evaluate the legitimacy and intentions of authorities, forming the psychological basis for trust in institutions. In their companion introduction to the same special issue, Bobocel and Brockner (2024) highlight that fair treatment communicates dignity and social value, thereby promoting cooperation, cohesion, and constructive engagement. These perspectives suggest that sustaining interactional justice in organizational settings is essential not only for employee well-being but also for maintaining the broader relational foundations that depend on respectful interpersonal treatment.

5.1. Practical Implications

While justice dynamics carry broad organizational and societal implications, the present study offers concrete micro-level insights for improving everyday fairness in emotionally demanding boundary-spanning roles. These implications are especially relevant for bank employees whose work requires constant interpersonal regulation and rapid emotional adaptation.

First, recruitment and early socialization practices can help shape how employees handle the emotional demands of boundary-spanning work. Although psychological characteristics such as self-efficacy and attributional tendencies should not be used as exclusionary selection criteria, research shows that they shape how employees cope with interpersonal strain and interpret social cues (Bandura, 1997; Ng et al., 2006). During hiring, organizations can provide realistic job previews to set accurate expectations about the emotional intensity of customer-facing settings and identify areas where targeted developmental support may be needed.

Second, newcomers often have not yet developed strong work self-efficacy, making them more vulnerable to negative emotional experiences. Structured onboarding programs are therefore essential for building confidence and stabilizing early fairness perceptions. Niven (2025)'s work on interactional emotion regulation underscores that boundary-spanning employees must simultaneously regulate their own emotions and those of customers—an inherently demanding task that newcomers are not yet fully equipped to manage. Early emotion-regulation training, supervisor coaching, and confidence-building interventions can help prevent negative affect from undermining organization-based self-esteem during the initial months of adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007). In this regard, onboarding and socialization practices represent a concrete organizational lever for strengthening OBSE. Recent research shows that organizational socialization enhances employees' adjustment and contributes to the growth of organization-based self-esteem not only among newcomers but also across later career stages (Gardner et al., 2022).

Third, leadership development is critical for sustaining daily interactional justice. Supervisors are the primary source of interpersonal fairness experiences, and interactional justice is grounded in how leaders communicate—whether they provide explanations, show respect, and treat employees with dignity (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2001). Prior research suggests that leaders play a central role in shaping employees' organization-based self-esteem by conveying signals of value, inclusion, and role significance through everyday interactions (Norman et al., 2015). Ethical and respectful leader behaviors enhance fairness perceptions and reduce strain responses (M. E. Brown et al., 2005; Carmeli et al., 2010). An inclusive leadership style enhanced career adaptability (Shabeer et al., 2023) and reduced turnover intention (Du et al., 2024) via OBSE and interactional justice. Because leaders strongly shape newcomers' early interpretations of organizational norms and their own standing, leadership training should prioritize respectful communica-

tion, recognition practices, and dignified treatment as everyday competencies rather than situational responses.

5.2. Limitations and Future Directions

Before noting limitations, we emphasize that the proposed mechanism is most likely to apply to emotionally demanding, boundary-spanning roles in the banking industry and limits generalizability.

First, this study relies on cross-sectional survey data, which limits causal inference and the ability to confirm temporal ordering among negative emotions, OBSE, and interactional justice. Future research could extend this line of inquiry through computational and multi-method designs (e.g., combining surveys with diary texts or interactional communication and applying sentiment/emotion analysis), which would offer a promising avenue to triangulate affective mechanisms beyond self-report.

Second, the sample is confined to a single sector (banking) and a specific location (Istanbul). The findings may not be applicable to different cultural or professional contexts. Cross-cultural and multi-sector analyses would enhance the validity of the model.

The third limitation is that the model was tested only for interactional justice; future research could examine whether similar mechanisms operate for other justice dimensions (e.g., procedural and distributive justice).

Finally, the study did not differentiate between newcomers and experienced employees, despite evidence that newcomers often may perceive lower control and rely more on external cues. Future research could explicitly examine whether tenure shapes the moderating roles of self-efficacy and locus of control. Additionally, further research may explore the justice-to-service spillover mechanism more directly by linking employee perceptions to customer outcomes (Grandey, 2000; Lam & Chen, 2012).

6. Conclusions

This study suggests that negative emotions are associated with lower employees' perceptions of interactional justice, primarily by lowering their organization-based self-esteem. The results further indicate that this process is conditioned by key individual differences: low self-efficacy exacerbates the association of negative emotions with OBSE, while low external workplace locus of control mitigates the extent to which OBSE translates into justice perceptions. Together, these findings depict a psychologically layered indirect pathway through which emotions, self-evaluations, and attributional tendencies jointly relate to fairness judgments.

Theoretically, the study integrates Affective Events Theory, Affect Infusion Model, Social Cognitive Theory, Attribution Theory, and Justice Theory to provide a multidimensional explanation of how boundary-spanning employees interpret interpersonal treatment. This research identifies OBSE as a fundamental psychological mechanism, with self-efficacy and WLOC serving as the condition, thereby enhancing existing theories of justice construction in emotionally demanding work environments.

Practically, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening employees' psychological resources. Organizations may support newcomers and emotionally exposed employees through early interventions that build self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and confidence in dealing with demanding interpersonal interactions. In addition, employees with a predominantly external locus of control may benefit from targeted coaching to develop more constructive attributional styles in the workplace.

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T.S., A.T.T. and H.B.B.; writing—review and editing, J.M.-P., T.S., A.T.T. and H.B.B.; supervision, J.M.-P.; project administration, J.M.-P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement: The goal of the study was explained to the participants, who were also given the assurance that their personal information would be kept private. Explicit consent was required for participation in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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