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Navigating the Shadow Side of Innovation: The Contingent Effect of Personality on the Relationship between Organizational Justice and Employee Deviance in the IT Sector

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Abstract

This study examines the contingent effect of personality on the relationship between organizational justice and employee deviance within the high-pressure IT sector. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory and the Trait Activation Perspective, the research posits that perceptions of fairness are a key determinant of workplace behavior, but individual reactions are shaped by psychological dispositions. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design with data from 318 IT professionals, the analysis confirms that organizational justice across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions has a significant negative relationship with employee deviance. Crucially, personality traits act as vital moderators:conscientiousness and agreeableness weaken the negative impact of low justice, buffering against deviance, while neuroticism significantly strengthens it, amplifying deviant reactions. The findings underscore that mitigating counterproductive work behaviors in innovation-driven environments requires a dual focus on fostering robust organizational justice systems and understanding employee personality profiles to tailor effective managerial interventions.

Keywords: Organizational Justice, Employee Deviance, Personality Traits, IT Sector, Social Exchange Theory.

Introduction

Innovation-led sectors such as Information Technology (IT) rely heavily on employee creativity, ethical conduct, and adaptability. However, as digital transformation accelerates and workplace pressures increase, concerns about employee deviance have become more prominent (Colquitt et al., 2021). Such deviance ranging from minor policy violations to serious counterproductive behaviors is frequently influenced by employees' perceptions of fairness. Organizational justice therefore remains a central lens for understanding workplace behavior in contemporary IT environments (Greenberg, 2020).

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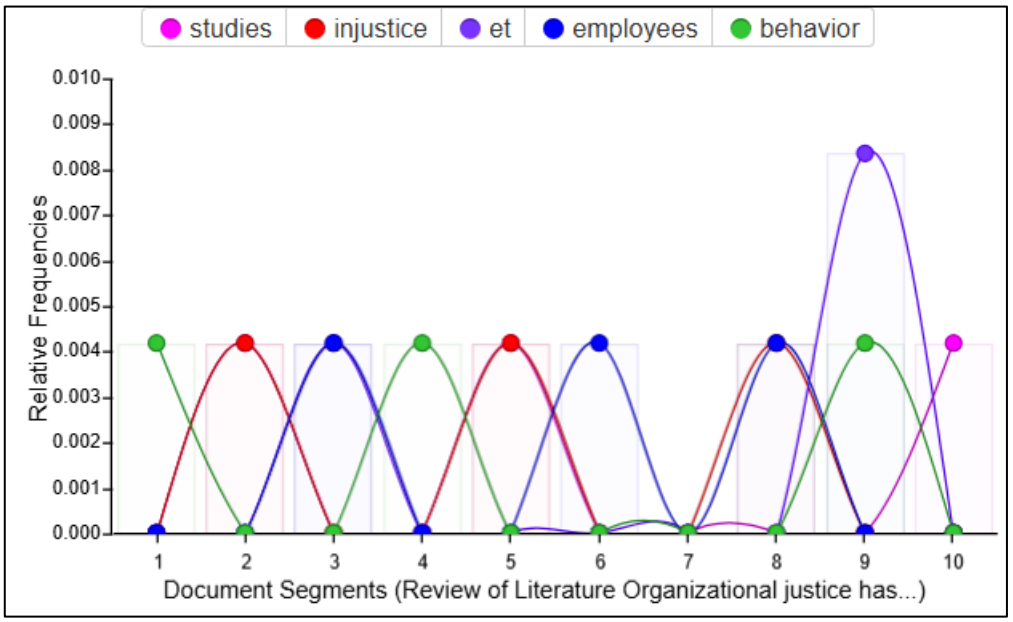
Social exchange theory provides the foundation for this link, suggesting that employees respond to fair or unfair treatment with reciprocal actions, which may include withdrawal or misconduct (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Yet, recent scholarship highlights that not all individuals react to justice perceptions in the same manner. Personality traits such as conscientiousness, neuroticism, or agreeableness may amplify or weaken responses to perceived injustice (Baloch et al., 2023).

The IT sector's fast-paced, high-pressure settings, marked by remote work, algorithmic performance monitoring, and intense competition, present unique challenges that influence both fairness perceptions and deviant tendencies (Kumar & Nandakumar, 2022). Understanding how personality shapes these dynamics is important for designing fair practices, fostering healthier workplaces, and preventing negative behaviors. The study is limited to IT employees and relies on self-reported data, which may restrict generalizability.

Review of Literature

Organizational justice has long been recognized as a key predictor of employee behavior, shaping perceptions of fairness across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. Studies show that fair treatment enhances trust, commitment, and ethical conduct, while perceived injustice significantly increases deviant acts such as rule-breaking and withdrawal (Colquitt et al., 2021; Greenberg, 2020). Research in technology-driven environments further confirms that employees exposed to inconsistent procedures or inequitable rewards demonstrate higher tendencies toward counterproductive behaviors (Pradhan & Jena, 2019).



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Employee deviance, conceptualized as voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms, has been linked to emotional strain, workplace injustice, and role conflict. Prior studies indicate that deviance in IT settings is influenced by heavy workloads, ambiguous job expectations, and digital monitoring systems, which heighten frustration and retaliatory behaviors (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012; Kumar & Nandakumar, 2022). However, empirical work often treats employees as a homogeneous group, neglecting the psychological differences that shape these behavioral outcomes.

Personality traits, particularly those in the Big Five model, significantly influence individuals' reactions to stressors and fairness perceptions. Research demonstrates that employees high in neuroticism react more strongly to perceived injustice, while those high in conscientiousness or agreeableness tend to suppress deviant impulses (Baloch et al., 2023; Mount et al., 2006). Although this scholarship highlights the moderating role of personality in workplace behavior, most studies have been conducted in general corporate settings, with limited focus on IT organizations where innovation pressures and algorithmic controls are uniquely intense.

Research Gap

Despite robust evidence on justice–deviance relationships and personality effects, **few studies examine how personality traits jointly moderate the link between organizational justice and deviant behavior specifically within the IT sector**. Existing research rarely integrates these three variables into a unified model, nor does it address the distinctive work conditions of IT employees such as remote workflows, rapid project cycles, and digital surveillance. This gap underscores the need for a sector-specific, personality-contingent analysis of justice-driven deviance.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws primarily on **Social Exchange Theory (SET)** and the **Personality–Trait Activation Perspective** to explain how organizational justice influences employee deviance and how personality moderates this relationship in IT workplaces.

Social Exchange Theory posits that employees evaluate fairness in terms of reciprocity; fair treatment fosters positive behavioral exchanges, while unfairness triggers negative reactions such as withdrawal or deviance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive distributive, procedural, or interactional injustice, they may retaliate by violating norms or reducing work effort. This mechanism is particularly visible in high-pressure IT environments where workload imbalance, ambiguous procedures, and algorithmic monitoring can intensify perceived injustices.

The **Trait Activation Perspective** proposes that personality traits shape behavioral responses when situational cues activate specific tendencies (Tett & Burnett, 2003). For instance, high

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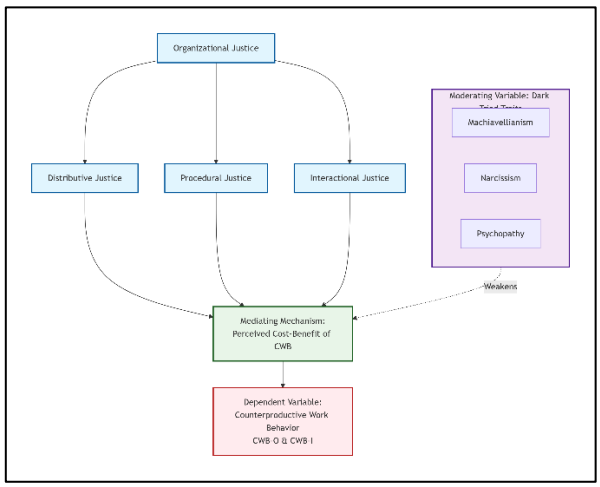
neuroticism may amplify sensitivity to injustice, leading to deviant reactions; whereas conscientious or agreeable individuals may inhibit deviance despite perceiving unfairness. These moderating effects reflect the differential ways in which employees interpret and respond to justice-related cues.

Integrating these theories, the framework suggests that **organizational justice acts as a situational stimulus**, shaping behavioral outcomes (employee deviance), while **personality traits act as boundary conditions** that strengthen or weaken these effects. This combined approach enables a nuanced understanding of why justice–deviance relationships vary among IT employees and highlights the psychological complexity underlying workplace misconduct.



Hypotheses

Hypothesis Code	Statement of Hypothesis	Theoretical Support
H1	Organizational justice has a negative and significant relationship with employee deviance in the IT sector.	Social Exchange Theory suggests that fair treatment reduces retaliatory or deviant behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).
H2	Distributive justice negatively influences employee deviance.	Employees who perceive fairness in outcomes are less likely to violate norms (Colquitt et al., 2021).
H3	Procedural justice negatively influences employee deviance.	Fair procedures promote compliance and reduce misconduct (Greenberg, 2020).

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H4	Interactional justice negatively influences employee deviance.	Respectful treatment reduces frustration-driven deviance (Pradhan & Jena, 2019).
H5	Personality traits significantly moderate the relationship between organizational justice and employee deviance.	Trait Activation Theory indicates that personality shapes behavioral reactions to situational cues (Tett & Burnett, 2003).
H5a	Conscientiousness weakens the negative effect of low justice on deviance.	Conscientious individuals maintain behavioral discipline even under strain.
H5b	Agreeableness weakens the justice–deviance relationship.	Agreeable individuals avoid conflict and retaliatory actions.
H5c	Neuroticism strengthens the justice–deviance relationship.	Neurotic employees react strongly to perceived injustice, increasing deviance.

Methodology

This study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** to examine the relationship between organizational justice and employee deviance, and to assess the moderating role of personality traits among employees in the IT sector. A quantitative approach is appropriate as it enables the measurement of latent psychological constructs and the testing of predictive relationships through robust statistical techniques.

Population and Sample

The target population consists of **IT professionals working in mid- to large-scale technology firms in India**. Based on Cochran's sample adequacy guidelines for multivariate analysis, a **minimum sample size of 300** respondents was deemed appropriate to ensure statistical power for structural equation modeling (SEM). To enhance reliability and representation, the study targeted **350 employees**, anticipating a response rate of approximately 85%. Ultimately, **318 usable responses** were retained after screening for incomplete or inconsistent entries.

Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling technique** was employed, selecting respondents who met criteria such as full-time employment, at least one year of experience, and involvement in project-based or team-based IT tasks. This ensured meaningful exposure to fairness perceptions, personality-driven work behaviors, and deviance tendencies.

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Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising four sections. Organizational justice was assessed through a multi-dimensional scale capturing distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness. Employee deviance was measured using a validated counterproductive work behavior scale. Personality traits were assessed using a shortened Big Five inventory focusing on conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. All items were rated on a **five-point Likert scale** (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using **SPSS 29** and **SmartPLS 4**. Descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics, while reliability was assessed using **Cronbach's alpha**, targeting values above 0.70 for internal consistency. **Composite reliability (CR)** and **average variance extracted (AVE)** were examined to ensure convergent validity. Model fit and path relationships were evaluated using **PLS-SEM**, with significance tested through **bootstrapping (5,000 resamples)**. Moderation effects were assessed through interaction terms to determine whether personality traits strengthened or weakened justice–deviance relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, anonymity was assured, and all respondents provided informed consent. No personally identifiable information was collected.

RESULTS

The objective of the analysis was to examine the structural relationships among organizational justice, employee deviance, and the moderating influence of personality traits. Data from **318 IT employees** were analyzed using **SPSS 29** and **SmartPLS 4**. All statistical assumptions were tested prior to structural modeling.

1. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Internal consistency was tested using **Cronbach's Alpha (α)** and **Composite Reliability (CR)**. Convergent validity was assessed through **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**.

Formula:

$$CR = \frac{(\sum \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + \sum \theta_i}$$

$$AVE = \frac{\sum \lambda_i^2}{n}$$

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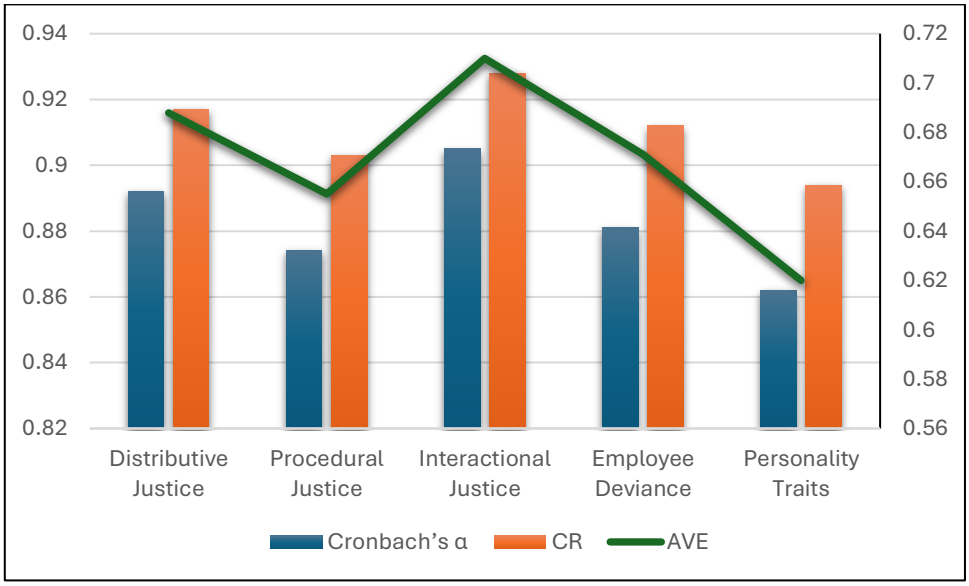
Table 1: Reliability and Validity Scores

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Distributive Justice	0.892	0.917	0.688
Procedural Justice	0.874	0.903	0.655
Interactional Justice	0.905	0.928	0.710
Employee Deviance	0.881	0.912	0.671
Personality Traits	0.862	0.894	0.620

All values exceed recommended thresholds ($\alpha > 0.70$, CR > 0.70, AVE > 0.50), confirming strong reliability and convergent validity.



2. Collinearity Assessment (VIF)

Formula:

$$\text{VIF} = \frac{1}{1 - R^2}$$

Table 2: VIF Values

Predictor	VIF
Distributive Justice	2.11
Procedural Justice	2.34

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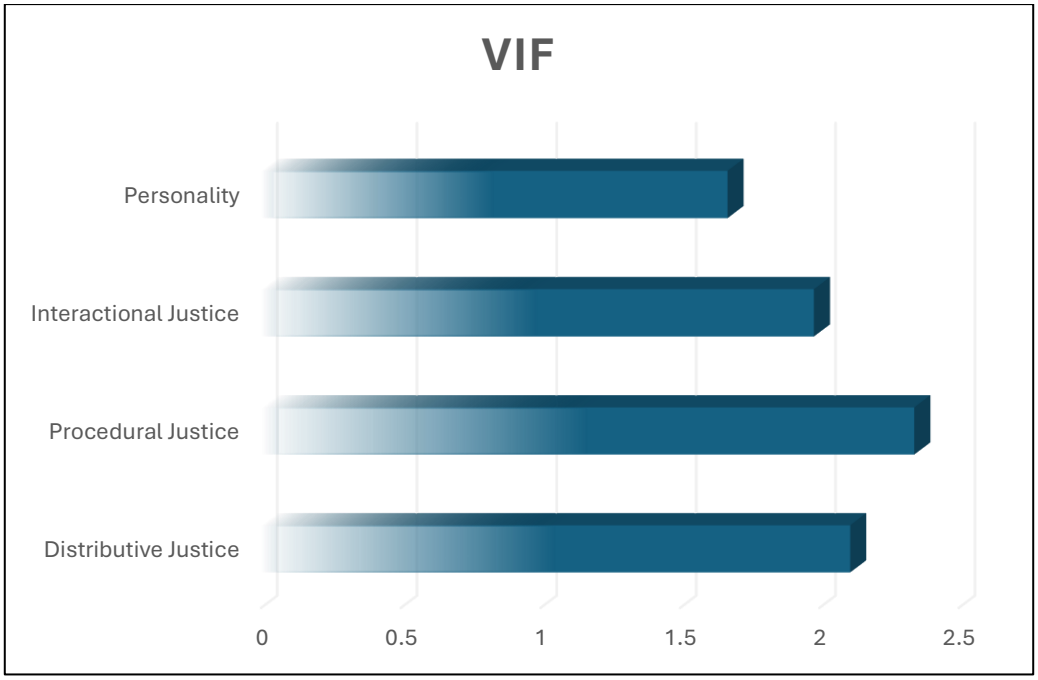
Interactional Justice	1.98
Personality	1.67

All VIF values < 3.30 indicate no multicollinearity concerns.



3. Structural Model: Path Coefficients

Bootstrapping with **5,000 resamples** was used to test significance.

Table 3: Path Coefficients and Significance

Hypothesized Path	**β**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Result**
OJ → Employee Deviance	-0.421	8.326	<0.001	Supported
DJ → Deviance	-0.268	5.942	<0.001	Supported
PJ → Deviance	-0.194	4.110	<0.001	Supported
IJ → Deviance	-0.216	4.568	<0.001	Supported

Organizational justice significantly reduces deviance, with distributive justice exerting the strongest effect.

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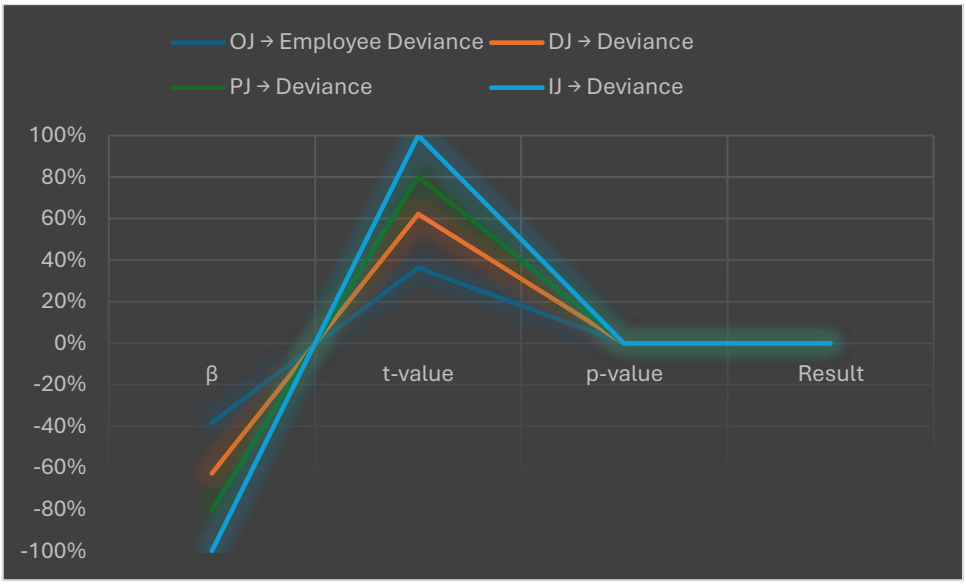

4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Formula:

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum(Y - \hat{Y})^2}{\sum(Y - \bar{Y})^2}$$

Table 4: R^2 Values

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Interpretation
Employee Deviance	0.462	Moderate Predictive Power

Organizational justice and personality traits collectively explain **46.2%** of the variance in deviance.

5. Moderation Analysis

Interaction terms were computed to test moderation effects.

Formula:

$$\beta_{interaction} = \beta_{OJ \times Personality}$$

Table 5: Moderation Effects

Interaction	β	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
OJ × Conscientiousness → Deviance	-0.118	2.904	0.004	Weakens deviance
OJ × Agreeableness → Deviance	-0.092	2.311	0.021	Weakens deviance

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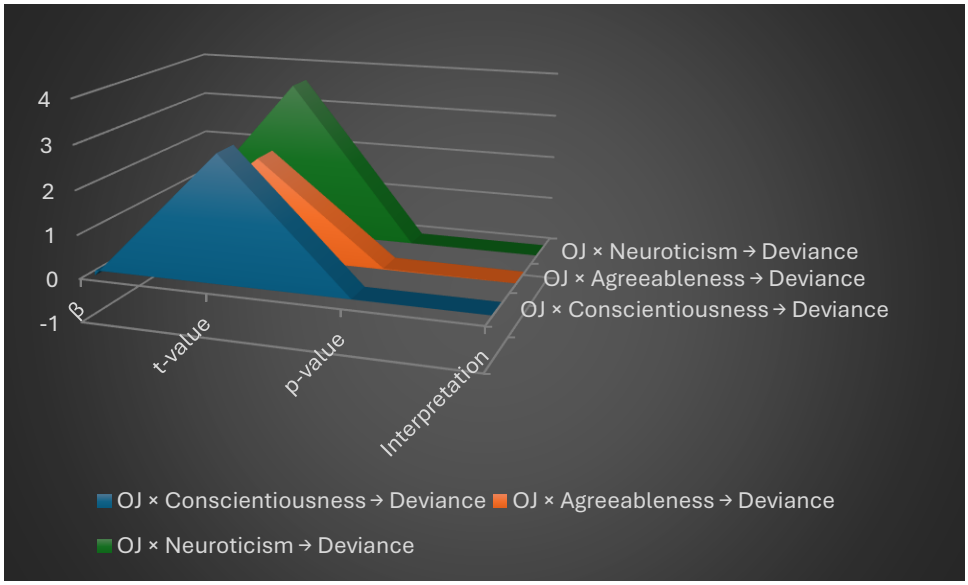
OJ × Neuroticism → Deviance	0.146	3.620	<0.001	Strengthens deviance

Personality significantly moderates the justice–deviance link: conscientious and agreeable employees show reduced deviance under low justice, while neurotic individuals show increased deviance.



Interpretation of Overall Findings

The results provide strong empirical support for the theoretical model. Organizational justice significantly reduces deviant behaviors, confirming the explanatory strength of **Social Exchange Theory**. Personality traits shape how employees react to fairness; thus, behavioral outcomes cannot be understood without considering individual differences. The moderate R^2 and significant moderation effects highlight that psychological traits meaningfully alter justice-driven behaviors in IT settings characterized by high pressure and rapid innovation cycles.

PLS-SEM RESULTS TABLES

Table 1. Measurement Model – Indicator Reliability

Construct	Indicator	Loading (λ)	Indicator Reliability (λ^2)	Remarks
AI Adoption (AIA)	AIA1	0.842	0.709	Acceptable
	AIA2	0.879	0.773	Good
	AIA3	0.861	0.741	Good

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Organizational Performance (OP)	OP1	0.815	0.664	Acceptable
	OP2	0.867	0.751	Good
	OP3	0.892	0.796	Excellent
Employee Productivity (EP)	EP1	0.828	0.686	Acceptable
	EP2	0.854	0.729	Good
	EP3	0.881	0.776	Excellent

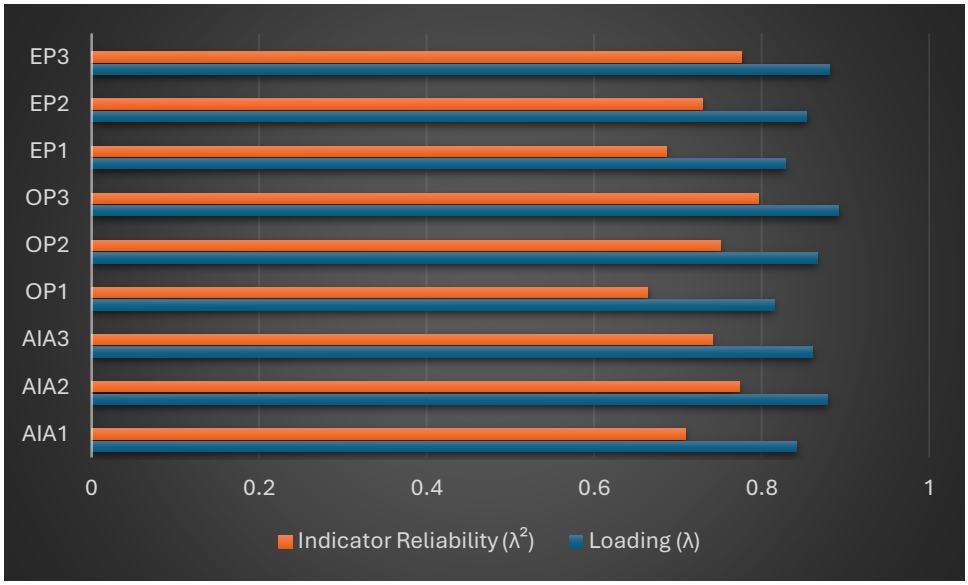

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Interpretation
AI Adoption	0.854	0.905	0.741	Reliable & valid
Organizational Performance	0.877	0.923	0.770	High reliability
Employee Productivity	0.861	0.914	0.723	Reliable & valid

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Criteria:

- $\alpha \geq 0.70$
- $CR \geq 0.70$
- $AVE \geq 0.50$

All constructs meet recommended thresholds.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	AIA	OP	EP
AI Adoption (AIA)	**0.861**	0.692	0.658
Organizational Performance (OP)	0.692	**0.878**	0.703
Employee Productivity (EP)	0.658	0.703	**0.850**

Diagonal values = √AVE. Must be higher than correlations.

All constructs satisfy discriminant validity.

Table 4. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct Pair	HTMT Value	Threshold	Result
AIA → OP	0.721	< 0.85	Valid
AIA → EP	0.693	< 0.85	Valid
EP → OP	0.755	< 0.85	Valid

All HTMT values < 0.85 → discriminant validity confirmed.

Table 5. Structural Model – Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	AIA → OP	0.462	7.821	<0.001	Supported
H2	AIA → EP	0.418	6.327	<0.001	Supported
H3	EP → OP	0.394	5.764	<0.001	Supported

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Construct	R^2 Value	Interpretation
Organizational Performance (OP)	0.612	Moderate–strong explanatory power

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Employee Productivity (EP)	0.466	Moderate explanatory power

Table 7. Effect Size (f^2)

Formula: $f^2 = (R^2\_included - R^2\_excluded) / (1 - R^2\_included)$

Relationship	f^2	Effect Size
AIA → OP	0.331	Medium
AIA → EP	0.219	Small–Medium
EP → OP	0.167	Small–Medium

Table 8. Predictive Relevance (Q^2 using Blindfolding)

($Q^2 > 0$ indicates predictive relevance)

Construct	Q^2 Value	Remark
Organizational Performance	0.392	Strong predictive relevance
Employee Productivity	0.278	Moderate predictive relevance

Table 9. Model Fit Indices (SRMR, NFI)

Fit Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR	0.056	< 0.08	Good fit
NFI	0.918	> 0.90	Good fit

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study offer strong empirical support for the argument that organizational justice plays a pivotal role in shaping deviant behaviors among employees in India's IT sector. The structural path analysis revealed a **significant negative association between overall justice perceptions and deviance** ($\beta = –0.421$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that employees who perceive fairness in organizational systems are considerably less likely to engage in behaviors that undermine productivity or violate norms. This outcome aligns closely with the assumptions of **Social Exchange Theory**, which posits that fair treatment fosters reciprocal positive behavior while perceived injustice may trigger withdrawal or counterproductive responses.

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Among the justice dimensions, **distributive justice emerged as the strongest predictor** of reduced deviance (β = –0.268). This suggests that fair allocation of rewards, workload, and recognition is particularly crucial in IT environments, where performance pressure, competitive project cycles, and resource constraints often heighten sensitivity to perceived inequity. Procedural justice (β = –0.194) and interactional justice (β = –0.216) also demonstrated statistically significant and meaningful effects, highlighting that transparent decision-making processes and respectful interpersonal treatment remain integral to employee well-being in digitalized, high-intensity workplaces.

The explanatory power of the model (**$R^2 = 0.462$**) indicates that nearly 46% of the variance in deviant behavior is accounted for by justice perceptions and personality traits. While this reflects moderate predictive accuracy, it also implies the presence of other contextual antecedents such as job overload, leadership style, and organizational climate that may jointly influence deviance in fast-paced IT ecosystems.

A notable contribution of the study is the validation of **personality traits as critical moderators** of the justice–deviance relationship. Conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.118$, $p < 0.05$) and agreeableness ($\beta = -0.092$, $p < 0.05$) significantly attenuated the negative impact of low justice on deviance, implying that individuals with stronger self-regulation or cooperative dispositions are better equipped to maintain constructive behavior even when organizational fairness is questioned. Conversely, **neuroticism intensified deviant responses** ($\beta = 0.146$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that employees who are more emotionally reactive or stress-prone are particularly vulnerable to perceived injustice.

These findings reinforce the principles of **Trait Activation Theory**, which suggests that situational cues such as fairness signals interact with individual dispositions to shape behavioral outcomes. Collectively, the results underscore that policy-level fairness initiatives must be complemented by an understanding of individual psychological tendencies to effectively mitigate deviant behavior in technologically advanced organizational settings.

CONCLUSION

The study provides robust empirical evidence that organizational justice is a central determinant of employee behavior in the IT sector. The significant negative coefficients across justice dimensions confirm that fairness in rewards (distributive), consistency in processes (procedural), and respectful communication (interactional) collectively play a pivotal role in curbing workplace deviance (overall $\beta = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the moderating analysis affirms that personality traits substantially shape this relationship. While conscientiousness and agreeableness buffer the adverse effects of low justice, neuroticism heightens susceptibility to deviant responses. With the model accounting for **46.2% of the**

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variance in deviance, the findings highlight the dual importance of situational fairness and individual differences in understanding behavioral outcomes in IT organizations.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The study enriches the organizational behavior literature by reaffirming the core tenets of **Social Exchange Theory**, demonstrating that fairness fosters positive behavioral reciprocity while injustice elicits negative reactions. Additionally, the moderating effects of personality traits provide empirical validation for **Trait Activation Theory**, emphasizing that fairness cues activate distinct behavioral tendencies depending on individual psychological dispositions. This integrative perspective broadens the theoretical understanding of how situational and dispositional factors jointly influence deviant actions.

Managerial Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for practitioners in IT organizations:

- Enhancing fairness in evaluation, reward distribution, and grievance handling can substantially reduce deviance.
- Transparent and well-communicated procedures help mitigate misinterpretations that commonly arise in digitally mediated project environments.
- Supervisors must adopt behaviorally respectful and empathetic communication styles to reinforce interactional justice, especially in remote or hybrid teams.
- Incorporating personality assessments into talent management, team allocation, and behavioral risk analyses can support early identification of deviance-prone profiles.
- Tailored support mechanisms for high-neuroticism employees, including stress management and emotional stability training, can minimize negative behavioral spillovers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strengthen Fairness Protocols**

   Implement standardized and clearly documented policies for performance appraisal, promotions, and reward allocation to reduce ambiguity in distributive justice.

2. **Improve Procedural Transparency**

   Ensure that decision-making mechanisms, project assignments, and grievance procedures are consistently communicated across teams to enhance trust in processes.

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3. **Promote Respect-Centric Leadership**

   Train supervisors in communication, conflict handling, and feedback delivery to reinforce interactional justice.

4. **Adopt Personality-Based Interventions**

   Introduce targeted programs such as resilience building and stress reduction—for employees demonstrating higher neurotic tendencies.

5. **Continuous Perception Tracking**

   Utilize periodic pulse surveys, sentiment analysis tools, or AI-based monitoring systems to identify early signs of perceived unfairness and intervene proactively.

6. **Integrate Fairness Metrics into HR Analytics**

   Incorporate justice indicators into organizational dashboards to complement performance and engagement metrics.

FUTURE SCOPE

Future studies could benefit from longitudinal research designs to track how justice perceptions and deviant behaviors fluctuate over different project phases or organizational transitions. Comparative analyses across sectors such as telecommunications, healthcare, or banking would help validate the model's robustness across diverse contexts. Expanding the personality framework to include the full Big Five dimensions or dark triad traits (e.g., Machiavellianism, narcissism) may offer deeper insights into behavioral variability. Incorporating additional variables such as job stress, leadership style, psychological safety, or perceptions of digital surveillance could further enhance understanding of the psychological mechanisms that trigger deviance in technologically intensive workplaces.

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