

Exploring Reciprocity Dynamics among Employees in Organizational Settings: A Multi-Method Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the interplay between reciprocity norms, social exchange, emotional labor strategies, and employee task performance within organizational contexts. Utilizing structural equation modeling and multi-group analysis, the findings reveal that social exchange mediates the relationship between generalized and negative reciprocity and employee task performance. Additionally, emotional labor strategies, namely deep acting and surface acting, moderate the associations between reciprocity norms and social exchange. Deep acting strengthens the positive relationship between generalized reciprocity and social exchange, while surface acting weakens it. Conversely, high levels of surface acting exacerbate the negative impact of negative reciprocity on social exchange, whereas high levels of deep acting mitigate this effect. These findings underscore the importance of fostering reciprocal organizational cultures and understanding the role of emotional labor in shaping employee experiences and outcomes.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Reciprocity, embedded in Chinese traditional values such as "repaying oneself with love" and "reciprocity", plays a crucial role in social exchanges (Zou Wenchi et al., 2013). It is deemed essential for maintaining stable social systems (Gouldner, 1960). Social exchange theory posits reciprocity as vital for sustained social exchange, where the receiving party reciprocates rewards (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). Reciprocity not only enhances employees' commitment but also fosters inter-organizational connections (Caimo et al., 2015). Reciprocity, considered both a moral norm and a behavior, encompasses generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity (Sahlins, 1972; Sparrowe et al., 1997; Wu et al., 2006). Positive reciprocity fosters mutual benefit, while negative reciprocity harms both parties (Uhl Bien et al., 2003). Scholars advocate studying reciprocity's impact on individuals and organizations (Cropanzano et al., 2005). Mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, advocated by China's "Belt and Road" strategy, drive international cooperation (Sun, 2023). This symbiotic approach fosters organizational growth and individual development (Chen Chunhua, 2018). With China's economic transformation, knowledge-based employees drive societal and economic development. Their unique characteristics challenge traditional management approaches. Effective management of this demographic is crucial for organizational success (Sun et al., 2024).

1.2 Problem Statement

Knowledge is pivotal for small and medium-sized technology enterprises (Meng Xiangjie, 2022). Knowledge workers emphasize learning and innovation, necessitating diverse management methods. Task performance, crucial for employee growth, is influenced by reciprocal situations. Generalized reciprocity, balanced reciprocity, and negative reciprocity impact organizational dynamics (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). Task performance, comprising proficiency, initiative, and adaptability, is influenced by various factors. While micro-level factors like leadership affect performance, macro-level factors such as reciprocity norms remain underexplored (Griffin et al., 2007). Existing research highlights the impact of reciprocity on task performance but lacks clarity on its mechanisms. Balanced reciprocity, while ideal, is challenging to maintain due to difficulties in reciprocating promptly and equivalently (Sahlins, 1972). Understanding their effects can enhance organizational competitiveness and guide managerial strategies (Sun et al., 2024). This study aims to explore the relationship between organizational reciprocity and task performance among knowledge-based employees in Chinese technology enterprises. It addresses gaps in macro-level research and provides insights for enhancing employee task performance.

1.3 Research Questions

The specific research questions are as follows:

- (1) Does generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity influence the task performance of knowledge-based employees in Chinese small and medium-sized technology-based enterprises?
- (2) To what extent does social exchange mediate the relationship between generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and the task performance of knowledge-based employees in Chinese small and medium-sized technology-based enterprises?
- (3) How do emotional labor strategies moderate the association between generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and social exchange?

1.4 Research Significance

This study contributes to understanding the relationship, mechanism, and boundary conditions between different reciprocity forms and task performance among knowledge-based

employees in Chinese enterprises, enriching social exchange theory literature (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). While prior research focuses on the differential effects of reciprocity on work attitudes and behaviors, it neglects their impact on task performance (Parzefall, 2008; Qurateline et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2006; Li Shuangyan et al., 2008). By emphasizing generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity, this study clarifies their differential effects on individual intrinsic work motivation, deepening reciprocity norm understanding and social exchange theory. Practically, this research aids managers in identifying and adjusting reciprocity scenarios in human resource management systems. By recognizing the negative impact of balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity on employee motivation, managers can refine existing policies. Moreover, understanding the importance of deep play in emotional labor strategies can guide managers in improving employee task performance through optimized reciprocity norms and enhanced emotional labor strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reciprocity

Reciprocity, crucial for fostering symbiotic relationships between enterprises and employees, is defined as the moral obligation to provide and reciprocate help (Gouldner, 1960). Anthropologist Sahlins (1972) categorized reciprocity into generalized, balanced, and negative forms based on the equivalence, interest, and immediacy of returns. Generalized reciprocity entails selfless giving without expecting immediate or equivalent returns (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). Balanced reciprocity demands equivalent and timely returns, emphasizing fairness (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). In contrast, negative reciprocity seeks to maximize self-interest by demanding timely and equivalent returns while potentially harming the other party's interests (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). Evaluating the goodwill of such behavior is pivotal (Stanca et al., 2009). Existing studies predominantly focus on reciprocity norms, beliefs, and behaviors, impacting organizational relationships, employee abilities, work behaviors, and psychological states (Caimo et al., 2015; DeMarco et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Moed et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2006; Zou et al., 2015). Reciprocity influences employee knowledge sharing, deviant behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, psychological needs fulfillment, emotions, job satisfaction, task performance, turnover intention, and organizational commitment (Li Shuangyan et al., 2009a, 2009b; Parzefall, 2008; Qurateline et al., 2018; Restubog et al., 2010; Wuyts et al., 2018). It also impacts interpersonal relationships within organizations, including relationship strength, organizational trust, leader-member exchange, and team-member exchange (Li Shuangyan et al., 2009b; Lu Xinxin et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2015).

2.2 Task Performance

Task performance encompasses employees' perceptions that their actions contribute to the organization's core technology, evaluated through task proficiency, initiative, and adaptability (Griffin et al., 2007). Employees' task performance is detailed within their job roles, constituting role behavior (Wang Hui et al., 2003). Researchers primarily investigate micro-level antecedents of task performance, focusing on process, individual, and leadership factors. Process-wise, leader-member exchange positively influences task performance, enhancing employees' perception of recognition and rewards (Yang Chunjiang et al., 2015; Tse et al., 2012). Individual behaviors, such as civic ethics and cross-border activities, positively correlate with task performance, whereas deviant behavior negatively impacts it (Wei Jiangru, 2009; Cui Mingming et al., 2018; Yu Xuan et al., 2017). Cognitive factors, including trust in leaders and emotional commitment, enhance task performance (Wei Huimin et al., 2008). Task factors, like job fit and perceived organizational support, also influence task performance positively (Chi et al., 2012; Wayne et al., 1997). Leadership factors, such as transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, foster task performance (Yang Chunjiang et al., 2015;

Wang Shuhong et al., 2015). Macro-level factors like organizational atmosphere, relationship norms, and reward systems also impact task performance (Palmatier et al., 2007; Yu Xuan et al., 2017; Mowen et al., 1981).

2.3 Social Exchange

Social exchange, rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), involves one party assisting another with an expectation of future returns, relying fundamentally on trust (Shore et al., 2006). Unlike economic exchange, social exchange entails broad, unspecified obligations (Tsui et al., 1997). Employee contributions in social exchange include assisting colleagues and accepting organizational requests beyond their agreed-upon responsibilities (Tsui et al., 1997). Improvements in organizational support foster increased social exchange levels, positively impacting employee task performance (Yang Yichun, 2024). Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and organizational culture promote perceived social exchange, while hierarchical organizational culture diminishes it (Song et al., 2009). Enhanced social exchange correlates with reduced absenteeism, increased organizational citizenship behavior, and heightened commitment (Shore et al., 2006; Zhou Tianmei et al., 2019). Higher social exchange levels foster employee identification with organizational culture, autonomy in work, and increased effort, ultimately improving work quality and organizational citizenship commitment (Kuvaas et al., 2010).

2.4 Emotional Labor Strategies

Emotional labor, defined by Hochschild in 1983, involves individuals managing their public expression and behavior (Hochschild, 1983). Employees utilize different strategies, deep acting and surface acting, to regulate emotions, impacting service recipient satisfaction and organizational survival (Singh, 2000; Wang Haiwen et al., 2018). Individual and external factors influence employees' adoption of emotional labor strategies. Individual factors like affective congruence and empathetic disposition impact surface acting, while goal congruence correlates with reduced surface acting (Ozcelik, 2013; Aw et al., 2020). Higher individual role modeling enhances deep acting and reduces surface acting (Chi et al., 2016). External factors, like high-performance work systems, foster deep acting by increasing organizational support and encouraging employees to align with emotional requirements (Zheng Xiaoming et al., 2020). Negative emotions reduce deep acting, while perceived organizational politics promote surface acting (Ozcelik, 2013; Fang et al., 2019).

2.5 Management Theory

Social exchange theory, originating in the mid-20th century, focuses on the transactional process between individuals or organizations, emphasizing the exchange of mutual value (Yang Pengfei, 2016). It posits that individuals engage in social relationships and activities to obtain rewards or remuneration (Zhou Zhijuan et al., 2009). Self-determination theory, established in the 1980s by Deci and Ryan, explores human behavioral motivation (Zhang Jian et al., 2011). Sub-theories like social cognitive theory and basic psychological needs theory have practical applications, guiding individuals to actively shape behavior and attitudes (Zhang Jian et al., 2011). Understanding employee work motivation elucidates how organizational context influences work outcomes. Emotion regulation theory, developed in the 1980s, posits that emotional regulation unfolds during emotional development (Gross, 1998b; Hou Ruihe et al., 2006). Gross's two-stage model suggests pre-attention and response attention emotional regulation stages (Gross, 1998a). Incorporating emotional labor strategies like deep acting and surface acting, Grandey (2000) aligns emotional labor with the regulation process, suggesting that emotional labor reflects individual emotional regulation efforts.

2.6 Research Hypotheses

Drawing from prior research, this study develops hypotheses pertinent to its research focus. Involving four variables—namely, independent, dependent, and mediator variables—eight hypotheses are formulated, considering three dimensions of the independent variable. Balanced reciprocity, characterized by organizations offering support to employees with expectations of equitable returns, faces challenges due to the difficulty in assessing equal value and timely reciprocation (Sahlins, 1972; Wu et al., 2006). In contrast, broad reciprocity, encompassing various management aspects, emerges as a prevailing norm, thus warranting investigation into its association with employee task performance.

Hypotheses are listed below:

- (1) Hypothesis 1 suggests that there exists a positive correlation between generalized reciprocity and employee task performance.
- (2) Hypothesis 2 posits a negative correlation between negative reciprocity and employee task performance.
- (3) Hypothesis 3 proposes that social exchange serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between generalized reciprocity and employee task performance.
- (4) Hypothesis 4 suggests that social exchange acts as a mediator in the relationship between negative reciprocity and employee task performance.
- (5) Hypothesis 5 posits that deep acting moderates the positive correlation between generalized reciprocity and social exchange, enhancing the relationship at higher levels.
- (6) Hypothesis 6 suggests that surface acting moderates the positive correlation between generalized reciprocity and social exchange, attenuating the relationship at higher levels.
- (7) Hypothesis 7 proposes that surface acting moderates the negative correlation between negative reciprocity and social exchange, amplifying the relationship at higher levels.
- (8) Hypothesis 8 suggests that deep acting moderates the negative correlation between negative reciprocity and social exchange, diminishing the relationship at higher levels.

This study delineates hypotheses exploring the intricate dynamics between reciprocity norms, social exchange, and employee task performance, shedding light on their interplay in organizational contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical analysis to investigate the intricate relationship among reciprocity, work motivation, and task performance (Sun & Zuo, 2024). Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, this research identifies gaps and formulates theoretical models and hypotheses. Empirical validation is conducted using data collected from surveys, wherein the following methods are employed. Utilizing established scales, the questionnaire is tailored to the research objectives and participants. Preliminary surveys assess the questionnaire's reliability and validity, followed by refinements for a large-scale survey. Subsequently, research hypotheses and theoretical models are proposed based on the validated questionnaires. Data collected from the survey are analyzed using SPSS 26.0 and Amos 26.0. Descriptive statistics and homogeneity tests are performed, followed by reliability and validity assessments through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. SEM evaluates the correlation between reciprocity and task performance, including testing of the mediation model. Discussions are drawn from the analysis results.

3.2 Analysis Scale

This study formed variable scales through a meticulous process: firstly, a review of domestic and international literature was conducted to derive measurements of reciprocity, task

performance, and social exchange. Modifications were made to existing scales to suit the research objectives, ensuring scientific rigor. Utilizing scales developed by Wu et al. (2006), generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity were measured. General reciprocity included three items, reflecting the company's supportive stance, while negative reciprocity comprised five items, capturing perceptions of exploitation and neglect. Task performance was assessed using Griffin et al.'s (2007) scale, validated in the Chinese context by Li et al. (2012). The scale comprises seven items, evaluating various aspects of job proficiency and adaptability. A scale by Shore et al. (2006), adapted and validated by Wu et al. (2006), measured social exchange with five items. It assessed perceptions of investment, reciprocity, and future prospects within the company. Deep and surface acting were measured using Brotheridge et al.'s (2003) emotional labor scale, validated for the Chinese context (Linchuan et al., 2011). Deep acting included two items focusing on genuine emotional expression, while surface acting comprised two items assessing emotional suppression. Control variables included age, gender, education, working years, job position, and position level. These variables were chosen based on their established relationships with motivation and psychological needs satisfaction (Jungert et al., 2018; King et al., 2017; Yperen et al., 2003). Before the main survey, a pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted with 70 participants, yielding 65 valid responses. Reliability and validity tests were conducted using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 20.0, demonstrating high reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

3.3 Reliability and Validity Testing

Cronbach's coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of the variables. Generalized and negative reciprocity showed coefficients of 0.78 and 0.90 respectively, while task performance and social exchange had coefficients of 0.92 and 0.89 respectively. The reliability coefficients for deep acting and surface acting were 0.72 and 0.89 respectively, indicating satisfactory reliability across all scales. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the validity of the theoretical model. The fit indices for first-order latent variables indicated good fit: generalized reciprocity ($\chi^2 = 5.93$, $df = 2$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.06$), negative reciprocity ($\chi^2 = 37.86$, $df = 14$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.05$), and social exchange ($\chi^2 = 48.92$, $df = 20$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.05$). Additionally, second-order latent variables, including task performance, exhibited satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 50.42$, $df = 24$, $CFI = 0.99$, $RMSEA = 0.04$). The average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliabilities (CR) exceeded critical values, indicating good convergent validity and reliability. Discriminant validity was confirmed as the square roots of the AVEs exceeded inter-variable correlations. Model comparison confirmed the superiority of the six-factor model ($\chi^2 = 491.58$, $df = 335$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.03$) over alternative models, indicating strong discriminant validity. The survey questionnaire was divided into three parts and collected at different time points, aligning with recommendations in previous literature (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Model comparison further validated the absence of serious common method bias.

3.4 Data Collection Process

A cross-sectional study involving 25 MBA & DBA students from Asia City University was conducted to collect data through a questionnaire survey. These students, who are middle- and senior-level managers in small and medium-sized technology companies located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, facilitated access to five participating companies representing various technology sectors. These sectors included new materials technology, energy-saving and environmental protection technology, financial technology, electronic information technology, and biotechnology. A total of 697 questionnaires were distributed using the Questionnaire Star platform link, resulting in 584 valid responses, yielding an effective

response rate of 83.8%. This division aimed to reduce potential biases associated with self-reporting.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to assess sample demographics such as gender, age, education, and job position, ensuring alignment with research requirements. Reliability testing was conducted to assess data credibility, using Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) as a criterion. This process ensured the reliability of the collected data and bolstered the credibility of subsequent analyses. SEM was employed using MPLUS 7.0 to analyze the direct and mediation effects of the theoretical model. SEM facilitated the explanation of latent variables and tested mediation models effectively (Sheng et al., 2018; Hu et al., 1999).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Summary of Interviewees

The study surveyed 584 respondents, achieving an effective response rate of 83.8%. Notably, the gender distribution showed 42.0% male and 58% female respondents, indicating a slightly higher representation of women. Regarding age, individuals aged 23-29 comprised the largest segment at 42.47%, followed by those aged 30-35 at 37.5%. Employees under 22 years old accounted for 6.34%, consistent with the inclusion criteria targeting the new generation of knowledge workers. Concerning education, bachelor's degree holders constituted the majority at 70.2%, followed by master's degree holders at 15.75%. Furthermore, most respondents (49.66%) reported 2-5 years of work experience, reflecting a diverse range of career stages. The study encompassed various job positions, including general management (11.6%), production (15.4%), marketing (19.0%), logistics (23.6%), finance (12.2%), and technology (11.0%), with 7.2% in other roles. This broad representation ensures a comprehensive examination of emotional labor strategies across different job functions, aligning with previous research emphasizing the relevance of emotional communication across various organizational roles (Xanthopoulou et al., 2018).

4.2 The Relationship between Reciprocity and Employee Task Performance

Descriptive analysis of the variables was conducted using SPSS VERSION 22.0. Additionally, structural equation modeling (SEM) in MPLUS VERSION 7.0, employing maximum likelihood estimation, assessed the direct and mediating effects (Shenget al., 2018). The analysis treated all variables as latent. Exogenous variables included generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity, deep acting, and surface acting, while endogenous variables encompassed social exchange and task performance. Multigroup structural model analysis in AMOS VERSION 23.0 further explored the moderating role of deep acting and surface acting in reciprocity's relationship with social exchange.

Table4-1: Descriptive Analysis

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	32.52	5.42	1								
Gender	1.58	0.49	-0.22**	1							
Length of service	3.81	3.35	0.41**	-0.04	1						
Generalized reciprocity	4.20	1.38	-0.01	-0.04	-0.03	(0.88)					
Negative reciprocity	3.91	1.29	-0.07	0.04	-0.07	-0.15**	(0.91)				
Social exchange	4.22	0.95	-0.07	0.00	-0.03	0.31**	-0.25**	(0.89)			
Deep acting	4.41	1.18	0.00	-0.02	0.04	0.13**	-0.10*	0.23**	(0.72)		
Surface acting	3.52	1.39	0.03	0.02	-0.07	-0.09*	0.13**	-0.11**	-0.48**	(0.89)	
Task performance	4.68	1.11	-0.01	0.00	0.05	0.37**	-0.29**	0.45**	0.23**	-0.12**	(0.92)

Generalized reciprocity, characterized by altruism, fosters positive employee feedback, enhancing task performance. Conversely, negative reciprocity, driven by self-interest, diminishes employee task performance. These findings align with social exchange theory, which emphasizes the reciprocal nature of interactions between actors and targets. Organizations fostering generalized reciprocity tend to overinvest in employees, fostering higher task performance. In contrast, those endorsing negative reciprocity build underinvested exchange relationships, reducing task performance due to organizational pursuit of self-interest.

4.3 The Mediating Relationship between Social Exchange and Task Performance

The mediation effect model demonstrated significant positive correlations between generalized reciprocity and social exchange ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.31$) and significant negative correlations between negative reciprocity and social exchange ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = -0.23$). Additionally, social exchange was positively associated with task performance ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.36$). Generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity were also significantly related to task performance ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.01$, $\beta = -0.17$). The model's validity was confirmed by good fit indices in the CFA results ($\chi^2 = 421.59$, $df = 266$, $TLI = 0.98$, $SRMR = 0.04$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.03$). These findings support the mediating role of social exchange between generalized reciprocity and task performance (H3) as well as between negative reciprocity and task performance (H4). Bootstrapping analysis ($N = 5000$) reinforced these results, showing indirect effects of generalized reciprocity [0.07, 0.16] and negative reciprocity [-0.12, -0.05] on task performance, both excluding zero, thus confirming H3 and H4. The Sobel z-test further validated the significant indirect effects of generalized reciprocity and negative reciprocity on task performance ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.12$; $p < 0.01$, $\beta = -0.10$), providing additional support for H3 and H4.

Table 4-2: Direct and Mediating Effects Model

	Direct effect		Mediating effect	
	Task performance	Social exchange	Social exchange	Task performance
Generalized reciprocity	0.38** (0.04)	0.31** (0.03)		0.27** (0.04)
Negative reciprocity	-0.26** (0.04)	-0.23** (0.03)		-0.17** (0.03)
Social exchange				0.36** (0.07)
Age	-0.05 (0.04)			-0.02 (0.01)
Gender	0.02 (0.04)			0.02 (0.08)
Length of service	0.07 (0.04)			0.07 (0.01)
χ^2	190.83	421.59		
df	113	266		
TLI	0.98	0.98		
CFI	0.98	0.98		
SRMR	0.03	0.04		
RMSEA	0.03	0.03		

Table 4-3: Isolated Mediating Effects

Indirect path	UPCs		DM (M * N)	Sobel test	P value
	M	N			
H6a Generalized reciprocity→social exchange→task performance	0.22	0.53	0.12	5.21	P < 0.01
H6b Negative reciprocity → social exchange → task performance	-0.17	0.59	-0.10	-5.00	P < 0.01

Social exchange, rooted in social exchange theory, entails reciprocal help with future expectations. This study distinguishes between economic and social exchange, with social exchange emphasizing unspecified, extensive obligations. Generalized reciprocity, focused on altruism, contrasts with negative reciprocity, which demands immediate, often self-serving returns. These norms differently influence perceived social exchange. Literature indicates social exchange's mediating role in organizational relationships and employee outcomes like task performance. Consistent with social exchange theory, generalized reciprocity positively influences social exchange, enhancing task performance through increased organizational investment in employee development. Conversely, negative reciprocity diminishes social exchange, leading to reduced task performance due to immediate, often employee-detrimental reciprocity demands.

4.4 The Moderating Effect of Emotional Labor Strategies

Utilizing Structural Equation Models (SEM) and drawing on methodologies from prior research, this study investigates emotional labor's moderating impact. A multi-group structural model analysis is used to investigate how deep acting and surface acting moderate the relationships between generalized reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and social exchange. Respondents were divided into high and low groups based on median scores for deep acting (median = 4.67) and surface acting (median = 3.33). Results demonstrate significant moderating effects, supporting hypotheses H5, H6, H7, and H8.

Table 4-4: Moderating Effect of Emotional Labor

Deep acting			
Path	β (high group)	β (low group)	$\Delta\chi^2$, $\Delta df = 1$
H7a: Generalized reciprocity \rightarrow social exchange	0.55** (0.06)	0.14* (0.04)	18.44**
H8b: Negative reciprocity \rightarrow social exchange	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.36** (0.04)	6.00*
Surface acting			
Path	β (high group)	β (low group)	$\Delta\chi^2$, $\Delta df = 1$
H7b: Generalized reciprocity \rightarrow social exchange	0.11 (0.04)	0.51** (0.05)	14.05**
H8a: Negative reciprocity \rightarrow social exchange	-0.40** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	14.78**

Generalized reciprocity positively influences social exchange when deep acting is high ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.55$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 18.44$) compared to low ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.14$), supporting H5. Conversely, when surface acting is high ($\beta = 0.11$, n.s., $\Delta\chi^2 = 14.05$) rather than low ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = 0.51$), the positive relationship weakens, supporting H6. High surface acting strengthens the negative relationship between negative reciprocity and social exchange ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < 0.01$, $\Delta\chi^2 = 14.78$) compared to low ($\beta = -0.03$, n.s.), supporting H7. High levels of deep acting mitigate the negative correlation between negative reciprocity and social exchange ($\beta = -0.08$, n.s., $\Delta\chi^2 = 6.00$) when compared to low levels ($p < 0.01$, $\beta = -0.36$), thereby providing support for H8. Emotion regulation theory defines emotional labor strategies (i.e., deep acting, surface acting) as responses to organizational rules regarding emotional display (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Xanthopoulou et al., 2018). Deep acting involves aligning inner feelings with organizational expectations, while surface acting masks true emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Xanthopoulou et al., 2018). Emotional labor's impact on social exchange remains underexplored despite its relevance to organizational relationships (Humphrey et al., 2015; Troth et al., 2018). Conversely, high surface acting weakens this relationship by signaling insincerity and decreasing organizational trust (Shore et al., 2006). Similarly, high surface acting exacerbates the negative impact of NR on social exchange by increasing exhaustion and

reducing perceived organizational investment (Brotheridge et al., 2003). However, high deep acting mitigates this negative impact by maintaining stable psychological states and positive interactions (Diefendorff et al., 2005).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research contributes to the understanding of organizational dynamics by examining the interplay between reciprocity norms, social exchange, emotional labor strategies, and employee task performance. Through a comprehensive analysis, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, the study confirmed the positive relationship between social exchange and employee task performance, emphasizing the importance of fostering a supportive and reciprocal organizational environment. This underscores the significance of social exchange theory in elucidating the mechanisms driving employee behavior and performance. Secondly, the mediating role of social exchange in the relationship between reciprocity norms (generalized and negative reciprocity) and task performance was established. It was found that generalized reciprocity promotes positive social exchange, thereby enhancing task performance, while negative reciprocity hampers social exchange, leading to decreased task performance. These findings shed light on the intricate dynamics between organizational norms, interpersonal relationships, and employee outcomes. Furthermore, the study uncovered the moderating effect of emotional labor strategies, specifically deep and surface acting, on the relationships in reciprocity norms and social exchange. Deep acting was found to strengthen the positive relationship between generalized reciprocity and social exchange, while surface acting weakened this relationship. Conversely, high levels of surface acting exacerbated the negative impact of negative reciprocity on social exchange, whereas high levels of deep acting mitigated this effect. These insights highlight the nuanced role of emotional labor strategies in shaping employees' perceptions and experiences within the organizational context. Overall, this research offers valuable implications for both theory and practice. The findings underscore the importance of fostering a culture of reciprocity and trust within organizations to promote positive social exchange and enhance employee task performance. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of considering emotional labor strategies as moderators in understanding the complex interrelationships between organizational norms, social exchange processes, and employee outcomes. By recognizing and leveraging these dynamics, organizations can cultivate a more supportive and conducive work environment, ultimately leading to improved employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Future research could further explore the boundary conditions and underlying mechanisms of these relationships, as well as investigate additional factors that may influence organizational dynamics and employee behavior.

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