



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Organization-Based Self-Esteem and Employee Outcomes: The Mediating Effects of Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection Strategies

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Abstract: Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) signals employees' perceptions of value, competence, and significance in the work organization. Self-regulatory mechanisms through which OBSE is associated with employees' workplace outcomes remain insufficiently examined. This study, carried out in Sri Lanka, examined whether self-regulation plays a mediating role between OBSE and three important employee outcomes, namely, work performance, prosocial motivation, and intention to quit. Data were collected from 283 first-level supervisors employed in private-sector organizations using a survey questionnaire. The findings showed that OBSE is highly associated with improved work performance, stronger prosocial motivation, and lower turnover intentions. OBSE positively associates with positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections while it negatively associates with defensiveness. Tests for mediation showed that positivity embracement and self-affirming reflections strengthen the positive association between OBSE and work performance, and favorable construals strengthen the association between OBSE and prosocial motivation. Defensiveness weakens the positive association of OBSE with work performance while it weakens the negative association of OBSE with intent to quit. Overall, the study underscores self-regulatory processes as mediators in explaining OBSE's effects on employee outcomes.

Keywords: OBSE, self-regulation, self-enhancement strategies, self-protection strategies, work performance, prosocial motivation, intent to quit

Abstrak: Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) mencerminkan persepsi karyawan mengenai nilai, kompetensi, dan keberartian diri mereka dalam organisasi tempat bekerja. Mekanisme regulasi diri yang menjelaskan hubungan antara OBSE dan berbagai hasil kerja karyawan masih belum banyak diteliti. Penelitian yang dilakukan di Sri Lanka ini bertujuan untuk menguji apakah regulasi diri berperan sebagai mediator dalam hubungan antara OBSE dan tiga hasil kerja utama karyawan, yaitu kinerja kerja, motivasi prososial, dan intensi untuk berhenti bekerja. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei menggunakan kuesioner terhadap 283 supervisor tingkat pertama yang bekerja pada organisasi sektor swasta. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa OBSE memiliki hubungan yang kuat dengan peningkatan kinerja kerja, motivasi prososial yang lebih tinggi, dan intensi untuk berhenti bekerja yang lebih rendah. OBSE berhubungan positif dengan strategi penerimaan terhadap hal-hal positif (positivity embracement), penafsiran yang menguntungkan diri (favorable construals), dan refleksi afirmasi diri (self-affirming reflections), serta berhubungan negatif dengan sikap defensif (defensiveness). Pengujian mediasi menunjukkan bahwa positivity embracement dan self-affirming reflections memperkuat hubungan positif antara OBSE dan kinerja kerja, sedangkan favorable construals memperkuat hubungan antara OBSE dan motivasi prososial. Sementara itu, defensiveness memperlemah hubungan positif antara OBSE dan kinerja kerja, serta memperlemah hubungan negatif antara OBSE dan intensi untuk berhenti bekerja. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan peran proses regulasi diri sebagai mediator dalam menjelaskan pengaruh OBSE terhadap berbagai hasil kerja karyawan.

Kata kunci: OBSE, regulasi diri, strategi peningkatan harga diri, strategi perlindungan diri, kinerja kerja, motivasi prososial, intensi untuk berhenti bekerja.

INTRODUCTION

Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) refers to the extent to which employees perceive themselves as capable, significant, and valuable members of their organizations (Pierce et al., 1989). As an organization-specific dimension of self-worth, OBSE has been recognized as an important psychological resource associated with employees' attitudes, motivation, and work-related behaviors. Previous

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research has demonstrated that employees with higher OBSE tend to report more favorable organizational attitudes and work-related outcomes, highlighting the relevance of perceived organizational worth for employee functioning (Gardner et al., 2018; Gardner et al., 2022; Pierce et al., 1989). Although these findings have established the importance of OBSE, understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying its relationships with different employee outcomes remains an important theoretical concern. In particular, further attention is needed to explain how employees' perceptions of their organizational worth are associated with the self-regulatory strategies they adopt and how these strategies, in turn, relate to their functioning within organizations.

One potential explanation involves the psychological processes through which individuals maintain, enhance, or protect their self-worth. Self-regulation perspectives suggest that individuals are motivated to preserve favorable self-evaluations while minimizing threats to their self-concept (Hepper et al., 2010). Within organizational settings, employees who perceive themselves as valuable and competent may be more inclined to adopt self-enhancement strategies that reinforce their positive organizational self-views. Conversely, employees with relatively lower OBSE may be more sensitive to evaluative threats and rely more heavily on defensive strategies to protect their self-worth. These regulatory tendencies may be relevant to how employees approach work responsibilities, develop motivation to benefit others, and evaluate their continued membership in an organization. However, the roles of distinct self-enhancement and self-protection strategies in explaining the relationships between OBSE and employee outcomes require further empirical examination.

Drawing on the self-regulatory strategies identified by Hepper et al. (2010), the present study examines three self-enhancement strategies—positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections—and one self-protection strategy, defensiveness. Positivity embracement involves accepting and incorporating favorable information into one's self-concept, whereas favorable construals involve interpreting experiences in ways that support positive self-evaluations. Self-affirming reflections help individuals maintain self-integrity when confronted with self-relevant threats, while defensiveness involves anticipating or deflecting information that may threaten self-worth (Hepper et al., 2010; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). These strategies provide a theoretical basis for examining how employees' perceptions of organizational worth may be associated with different forms of workplace functioning. Specifically, the present study focuses on three employee outcomes representing distinct domains: work performance as task-related functioning, prosocial motivation as the willingness to benefit others, and intention to quit as withdrawal cognition. Examining these outcomes simultaneously allows the study to consider whether different self-regulatory strategies account for different aspects of the associations between OBSE and employee outcomes.

An additional consideration concerns the organizational and cultural context in which these relationships are examined. Much of the foundational OBSE literature has emerged from Western organizational research traditions, although empirical studies have also demonstrated the relevance of OBSE in other contexts. For example, Gardner et al. (2018) examined values congruence, OBSE, and employee responses in Sri Lanka, providing evidence of the applicability of OBSE-related constructs in this setting. Nevertheless, the extent to which distinct self-

enhancement and self-protection strategies are associated with OBSE and employee outcomes in Sri Lankan organizations remains insufficiently examined. Accordingly, the present study adopts a contextual extension approach by applying established theoretical constructs and measurement perspectives to employees in Sri Lanka. Rather than proposing a culturally indigenous conceptualization of OBSE, the study examines whether the hypothesized self-regulatory pathways can be meaningfully investigated within this organizational context. This approach provides an opportunity to extend existing OBSE research by examining psychological mechanisms that have received comparatively limited attention in the Sri Lankan setting.

Building on these theoretical and contextual considerations, the present study proposes a mediation model in which self-enhancement and self-protection strategies serve as potential explanatory pathways linking OBSE with employee outcomes. Three research questions guide the investigation: (1) How is OBSE associated with employees' work performance, prosocial motivation, and intention to quit? (2) How is OBSE associated with distinct self-enhancement and self-protection strategies, and how are these strategies related to employee outcomes? and (3) To what extent do these self-regulatory strategies statistically mediate the associations between OBSE and the three employee outcomes? Accordingly, the study has three objectives: (1) to examine the direct associations between OBSE and work performance, prosocial motivation, and intention to quit; (2) to investigate the relationships between OBSE and the four self-regulatory strategies, as well as the associations of these strategies with employee outcomes; and (3) to evaluate the specific indirect associations between OBSE and employee outcomes through the proposed self-enhancement and self-protection strategies.

The study seeks to make three contributions to the OBSE literature. First, it extends existing research by integrating organization-based self-esteem with distinct self-regulatory strategies, thereby providing a more differentiated account of the psychological processes associated with organizational self-worth. Second, by examining multiple mediation pathways across task-related functioning, prosocial motivation, and withdrawal cognition, the study seeks to clarify whether particular self-enhancement and self-protection strategies are relevant to different employee outcomes. Third, by examining these relationships among supervisory-level employees in Sri Lanka, the study provides a contextual extension of established OBSE research without assuming that findings from a single national setting can establish broader cross-cultural generalizability. Overall, the proposed framework advances a mechanism-oriented perspective on OBSE by examining not only its direct associations with employee outcomes but also the potential explanatory roles of employees' strategies for maintaining, enhancing, and protecting their organizational self-worth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

OBSE

Self-esteem reflects what individuals make and maintain regarding the self as a totality (Rosenberg et al., 1995). It expresses a personal judgment of being capable, significant, and worthy, the degree to which individuals adhere to cultural norms, interpersonally belong, or get

ahead in the social world (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991). Individuals derive these personal judgments from an aggregation of experiences across several contexts that accumulate across time (Pierce et al., 1989). Previous research underscores the importance of situation-specific sub-dimensions of global self-esteem (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Organization-based self-esteem is a construct introduced by Pierce et al. (1989) for the workplace context. Organization-based self-esteem is “the degree to which an individual believes him or herself to be capable, significant, and worthy- in the workplace context” (Pierce et al., 1989, p. 625). Individuals “with high self-esteem, in general, are likely to have high OBSE, and they perceive themselves as important, meaningful, effectual, and worthwhile within their employing organization” (Pierce et al., 1989, p. 620). Most importantly, OBSE plays a significant and meaningful role within any person’s working life (Smith et al., 2022) and contributes to societies having a worthy self-regard. The simplified version of the model developed for the study is given in Figure 1. The literature is reviewed in depth to support the proposed model in the following sections.

OBSE and employee outcomes

The underlying assumption of OBSE is “employees with high OBSE behave in ways that maintain their positive views of themselves in the workplace and engage in behaviors that are valued by their organizations” (Pierce et al., 1989, p. 620). Consistent with this theorizing, findings consistently supported the effects of OBSE on many positive (e.g., work performance and prosocial motivation) and negative (e.g., quit intent) outcomes (Filosa & Alessandri, 2024; Gardner et al., 2022; Gardner & Wickramasinghe, 2023). Overall, previous empirical findings highlight the value of having employees with high OBSE. Such employees maintain positive self-worth, enhancing behaviors that would benefit all – employees, their employing organizations, and the society they live in. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

- H1: OBSE enhances work performance
- H2: OBSE enhances prosocial motivation
- H3: OBSE reduces intent to quit

Self-enhancement strategies

Individuals are motivated to maintain, enhance, and protect a favourable sense of self-worth, which manifests in one’s self-concept (Hepper et al., 2010; Zell et al., 2023). Of the self-regulation strategies, self-enhancement involves the maintenance of positive self-views while self-protection involves the minimization of negative self-views. Hepper et al. (2010) identified four reliable and discriminable strategies that individuals utilize, namely, positivity embracement, favorable construals, self-affirming reflections, and defensiveness. The latter is the only self-protection strategy. When considering determinants of self-regulatory motives, OBSE is at the forefront (Hepper et al., 2010). Building on the below-reviewed literature, OBSE positively relates to the three self-enhancement strategies because these are primarily used by high self-esteem individuals. Therefore, the following broad hypothesis is proposed for the three self-enhancement strategies, and specific hypotheses were proposed thereafter.

H4: OBSE positively relates to positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections

Positivity embracement. OBSE involves a domain-specific evaluation of self-worth, where it influences the

way employees process information coming from the organization that confirms or challenges their self-worth, such as positive feedback or evidence of competence coming from others at work. Individuals who use positivity embracement are willing to obtain such information and incorporate most of the positive feedback from others into their self-concept (Hepper et al., 2010). Hence, employees possessing higher OBSE could use positivity embracement more. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H4a: OBSE is positively related to positivity embracement.

Favorable construals. Individuals who use favorable construals form self-serving cognitions about the world (Zell et al., 2023). In the work context, employees possessing high OBSE could therefore be more inclined to use favorable construals in interpreting workplace events. These employees are more likely to interpret uncertain or ambiguous circumstances with a positive organizational self-view consistent with their established organizational worth. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H4b: OBSE is positively related to favorable construals.

Self-affirming reflections. When building on the arguments of self-affirmation theory, employees possessing high OBSE are in a better position to use self-affirming reflections to evaluate themselves positively in the organizational context (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In other words, when these employees are confronted with a particular criticism, failure, or self-threat, they are in a better position to reflect on their other valued aspects of self and sustain a consistent self-worth. Therefore, self-affirming reflections allow high OBSE employees to regulate their self-evaluations to maintain self-integrity (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H4c: OBSE is positively related to self-affirming reflections.

Self-protection strategy - Defensiveness

Individuals who use defensiveness prepare for as well as deflect negative reactions (Hepper et al., 2010), including self-handicapping behaviors that provide alternative explanations for poor performance. Ultimately, defensiveness protects what little self-esteem exists for those individuals who have a low sense of self-worth (Cai et al., 2011; Zell et al., 2023). Hence, OBSE is negatively related to defensiveness because this is a self-protection strategy used primarily by low self-esteem individuals. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H5: OBSE is negatively related to defensiveness.

Self-regulatory strategies and employee outcomes

Both self-enhancement and protection strategies drive the ways in which employees behave and make decisions at work in subtle and blatant ways (Hepper et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Self-affirmation and adaptive self-reflection have been discussed as potentially beneficial for responding to threats and maintaining effective functioning (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Kross et al., 2023), whereas defensiveness may be detrimental to work performance (Ashforth & Lee, 1990; Kim et al., 2023). Further, favorable construals enhance prosocial motivation (Göhler et al., 2023; Grant, 2008; Schneider & Weber, 2022; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Furthermore, positivity embracement is negatively related to quitting intent, while defensiveness is positively related to quitting intent

(Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2021). Therefore, the hypotheses driving this study are:

H6: Positivity embracement is positively related to work performance

H7: Self-affirming reflections are positively related to work performance

H8: Defensiveness is negatively related to work performance

H9: Favorable construals are positively related to prosocial motivation

H10: Positivity embracement is negatively related to intent to quit

H11: Defensiveness is positively related to intent to quit

Figure 2 shows the conceptual model with hypothesized paths for H1 to H11.



Figure 1. Simplified conceptual model

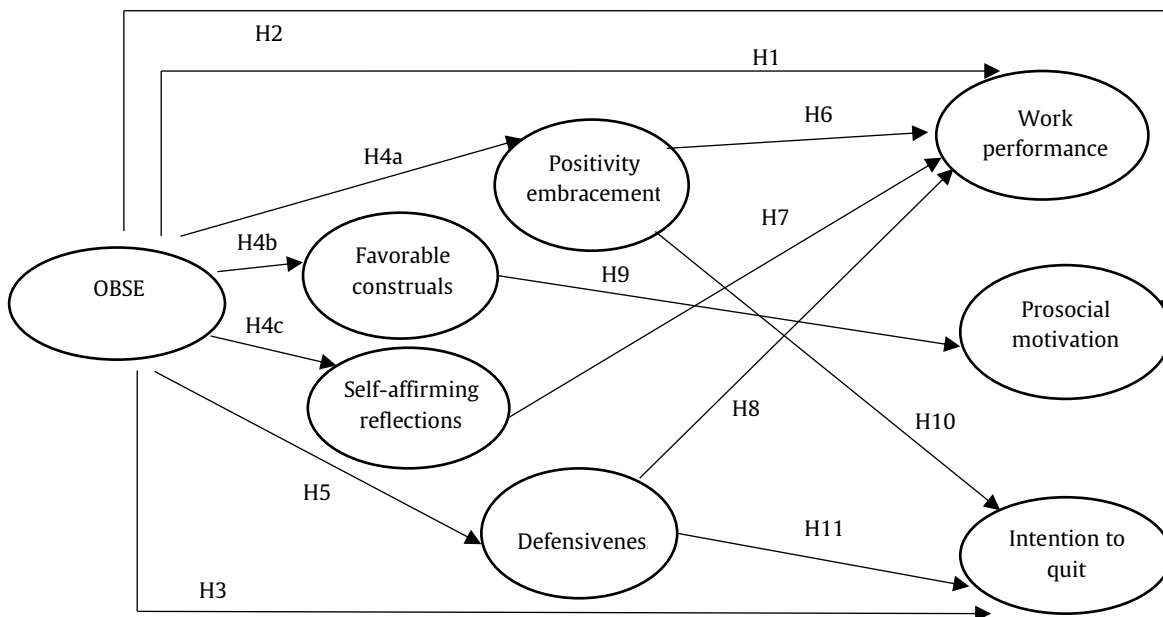


Figure 2. Conceptual model with hypothesized paths

Mediating effects of self-regulatory strategies

When considering the possible mediation effects, employees' use of self-regulatory strategies could drive their interpretation of feedback, response to self-relevant information, and maintenance or defense of self-worth, with these strategies providing a plausible mechanism through which OBSE could influence employees' workplace outcomes. Combined with Hypotheses 4 (4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d) and 5 above, it is proposed for the present study that self-enhancement and protection strategies operate as mediators between OBSE and three outcome variables. Therefore, the broad mediation hypothesis driving this study is:

H12: Self-enhancement and protection strategies mediate between OBSE and work performance, prosocial motivation, and intent to quit

The following paragraphs review the literature to propose specific hypotheses surrounding the above broad hypothesis. Work performance is an important behavioural manifestation of employees' organizational functioning. An individual with high OBSE could implement self-enhancement strategies by performing at a high level (Kim et al., 2023). Accordingly, the positivity embracement

strategy could provide a pathway through which OBSE is translated into work performance (Hepper et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12a: Positivity embracement mediates between OBSE and work performance.

Work environments inevitably expose employees to setbacks, criticism, and performance-related threats (Hepper et al., 2010). Theoretical accounts of self-affirmation and workplace reflection suggest that affirming valued aspects of the self may help individuals respond constructively to setbacks. These perspectives provide a rationale for examining whether self-affirming reflections are associated with work performance (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Kross et al., 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12b: Self-affirming reflections mediate between OBSE and work performance.

Defensiveness as a self-protection strategy reduces the positive effects of OBSE on work performance (Hepper et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2023; Zell et al., 2023). That is, employees who anticipate threats to their organizational self-worth could direct psychological attention toward protecting the self from negative evaluation. This could reduce the

available psychological resources to be devoted to work performance. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12c: Defensiveness mediates between OBSE and work performance.

Employees' interpretations of their work environment can influence whether helping others is viewed as meaningful, worthwhile, and consistent with their valued organizational identity (Cai et al., 2011; Göhler et al., 2023; Schneider & Weber, 2022; Zell et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2022). Employees possessing high OBSE could be more likely to develop favorable construals in the work context, reinforcing their positive sense of contribution and belonging that could increase their intention of helping colleagues and contributing to collective goals (Grant, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12d: Favorable construals mediate between OBSE and prosocial motivation.

An employee with high OBSE, perceiving self-worth within the organizational context, could find staying with the organization attractive, depicting low levels of quitting intent. When building on the self-enhancement literature (Cai et al., 2011; Hepper et al., 2010; Hong et al., 2021; Zell et al., 2023), positivity embracement could play a mediating role between OBSE and quit intent. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12e: Positivity embracement mediates between OBSE and quit intent.

The self-protection strategy of defensiveness could mediate between OBSE and quit intent (Charles-Leija et al., 2023), where employees find withdrawal from the organization an attractive option to escape threats to their organizational self-worth (Cai et al., 2011; Hepper et al., 2010; Zell et al., 2023). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H12f: Defensiveness mediates between OBSE and quit intent.

METHODS

Study design and measures

The present study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional research design. A questionnaire survey was used for data collection. The survey is deemed to be appropriate to test a theoretically grounded structural model at a single time frame (Collier, 2020). This study design also aimed to test the hypothesized structural relationships using statistical techniques. Therefore, the study used well-established measurement scales that are detailed in Table 1. Since these measurement scales were drawn from highly regarded publications, any interested parties could obtain the measurement scales, response scales, and scoring directions by referring to the original publications. In brief, all items, except work performance and prosocial motivation, were on five-point Likert scales, where 1= Strongly disagree and 5= Strongly agree. Work performance was on a five-point Likert scale, where 1= Never, 5= Always, whereas prosocial motivation was also on a five-point Likert scale, where 1= Not at all, 5 = Very strongly. The use of well-established measurement scales is consistent with positioning the study as a contextual extension. The use of previously validated measures as-is provided continuity with prior research and enabled the proposed relationships to be meaningfully compared with findings reported in prior studies. Although the possibility that cultural or contextual differences may influence item interpretation can be

recognized as a limitation, previous studies such as Gardner and Wickramasinghe (2023), Gardner et al. (2018), and Akuratiyagamage (2003) showed the possibility of using well-established items in their original language, i.e., English. The populace of the country widely speaks the English Language for official, commercial, and daily use due to British colonization for 152 years from 1796, and it is identified as the "link language" in the constitution of Sri Lanka. As detailed in the next section, the target population is supervisory-level employees, and they are expected to possess sufficient English-language proficiency since it is generally considered a prerequisite for securing employment in Sri Lanka.

Table 1. Measurement Scales Used

Construct	Source of measure and number of items
OBSE	Pierce et al. (1989): 10
Positivity embracement	Hepper et al. (2010): 5
Favorable construals	Hepper et al. (2010): 5
Self-affirming reflections	Hepper et al. (2010): 5
Defensiveness	Hepper et al. (2010): 5
Work performance	Williams and Anderson (1991): 6
Quit intent	Bentein et al. (2005): 3
Prosocial motivation	Grant (2008): 4

Sample and data collection

Participants were employees permanently engaged at the supervisory level (first level of management) in a diverse set of private sector organizations in Sri Lanka. One of the main reasons for selecting the target population is their appropriateness to respond sufficiently to the survey. Another reason is that these employees operate at a theoretically relevant interface between organizational expectations and day-to-day employee experiences. The minimum tenure required to participate in the survey was five years in the current workplace. This condition was set to include participants with accumulated sufficient experience to develop relatively stable perceptions of their value and competence (Pierce et al., 1989). Therefore, inclusion criteria were: 1) participants must be permanently engaged in private sector organizations, 2) they must be in supervisory-level job positions, and 3) they must have a minimum organizational tenure of five years. The exact population of this job role is unknown in Sri Lanka due to the unavailability of national-level data. Hence, convenience and snowball sampling methods were used, which are two of the validated methods of sampling (Collier, 2020). The survey invitation and Google Form questionnaire were distributed through social media platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook. After recruiting initial participants on social media, snowball sampling was performed by asking them to share the survey link with their own digital networks to trigger referral chains. The survey ran for six months from May 2025. Participation in the survey is anonymous and voluntary. The purpose of the study was communicated to them, and they indicated their willingness to participate before starting the survey. Further, they were allowed to quit the survey at any time without submitting it. The Google Form questionnaire enforced a mandatory-response constraint on all items before submission was permitted. This constraint yielded a complete dataset with zero missing entries across all items. The advantage of this was that statistical imputation and missing data deletion techniques (like listwise deletion)

became unnecessary (Albaum et al., 2010). Further, this eliminated the limitation of AMOS's bootstrap procedure when testing for mediation effects. The total number of valid responses received was 283. Because statistical power in covariance-structure modeling depends on degrees of freedom and assumed model misspecification, sample size should not be assessed against a single universal cutoff (MacCallum et al., 1996). Regarding respondents' characteristics, all participants were in supervisory-level job roles; 32% were female; the mean age was 29 years (minimum 24, maximum 35, SD = 4); mean tenure was 6 years (minimum 5, maximum 8, SD = .3), after rounding off results to the nearest single digit.

Data analysis methods

The data were screened for suitability for analysis before applying covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) and maximum likelihood estimation using IBM SPSS 26 and AMOS 26 released in 2019. First, the data were screened for suitability for analysis. The data were tested for univariate normality using skewness and kurtosis statistics. Mahalanobis distance (D^2) was used to assess multivariate outliers. Variance inflation factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics in SPSS were used for multicollinearity assessment.

Thereafter, data analysis methods were used to address three aspects – 1) whether constructs are measured adequately, i.e., the measurement model fit, 2) whether the proposed theoretical relationships provide an acceptable overall representation of the data, i.e., the hypothesized structural model fit, and 3) whether the structural paths and indirect effects are statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction, i.e., the support for hypotheses. The study followed the two-step approach to SEM, i.e., the measurement model followed by the hypothesized structural model.

The measurement model was established via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Results were generated for construct reliability (Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability [CR]), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted [AVE] and Standardized Regression Weights), and discriminant validity (Pearson Correlation Coefficients [r], square root of the AVE, and Heterotrait-Monotrait [HTMT] ratio) to evaluate the constructs, following the approach proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT values were calculated using the HTMT Online Calculator (Henseler, 2026). Further, the fit indices of chi-square (χ^2), degrees of freedom (df), the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were used (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Collier, 2020; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The hypothesized structural model was developed by extending the established measurement model. Therefore, the hypothesized structural model contained the theoretically specified relationships among latent constructs, while retaining their measurement indicators. It was tested using the fit indices of χ^2 , df, χ^2/df , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

Once the hypothesized structural model is established, the direct, indirect, and total effects were calculated using 5000 bootstraps at 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals. Bollen-Stine bootstrap p-value was also calculated. Hypotheses were tested using standardized path coefficients (β), critical ratios (C.R.), and p-values. Since the intention is to compare which predictor has the strongest

effect within the same model, standardized weights were considered appropriate. To evaluate the magnitude of the variance explained, squared multiple correlations (R^2) and Cohen's f^2 effect size statistics (Cohen 1988) were used. Squared multiple correlations were converted into Cohen's f^2 effect size statistics and interpreted using Cohen's (1988) operational benchmarks (Cohen's f^2 effect size = $R^2 / (1 - R^2)$), where small: $f^2 \geq .02$, medium: $f^2 \geq .15$, and large: $f^2 \geq .35$).

RESULTS OF STUDY

Regarding univariate normality, skewness statistics ranged from .047 to 1.227, and kurtosis statistics ranged from .066 to 3.288. Both skewness and kurtosis statistics are within the acceptable range (Collier, 2020). Critical Ratio (c.r.) values were not used since Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012) state that for large samples (> 200), the c.r. criterion should not be applied to test the significance of skewness and kurtosis. Regarding multivariate outliers, using a chi-square critical value of 77.419 ($p < .001$, 43 df), cases with Mahalanobis distance values exceeding this threshold were considered potential multivariate outliers. The maximum observed Mahalanobis distance fell below this critical value ($D^2 = 68.018$, df = 43, $p < .001$). Further, p1 and p2 values did not fall below .001. Therefore, all cases were retained for subsequent analyses. Regarding multicollinearity assessment, VIF statistics in SPSS were less than 3 (VIF < 3); Tolerance values were above the threshold (Tolerance > .10), suggesting multicollinearity was not violated in the measurement model.

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity statistics for the eight constructs examined in the study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .725 to .928, indicating satisfactory internal consistency across all measurement scales. The reported composite reliability (CR) values ranged from .881 to .967, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of .70. These findings suggest that the measurement instruments demonstrated adequate internal consistency.

Regarding convergent validity, five constructs demonstrated average variance extracted (AVE) values above the conventional threshold of .50: OBSE (.527), defensiveness (.579), work performance (.662), prosocial motivation (.816), and intention to quit (.839). However, positivity embracement (.493), favorable construals (.471), and self-affirming reflections (.488) yielded AVE values slightly below this threshold. These results indicate that convergent validity was not fully established for all constructs and that the three constructs with lower AVE values require further examination. The explained variation percentages ranged from 51.73% to 83.87%, while the table reported a single factor for each construct.

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables. The descriptive statistics indicate relatively high mean scores for OBSE ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .67$), work performance ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .73$), and prosocial motivation ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .98$). Among the self-regulatory strategies, self-affirming reflections had the highest mean score ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .61$), followed by favorable construals ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .69$), positivity embracement ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .88$), and defensiveness ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .64$). Intention to quit had a mean score of 2.57 ($SD = .77$).

The correlation results revealed that OBSE was positively associated with work performance ($r = .324$, $p < .01$) and prosocial motivation ($r = .373$, $p < .01$), while being

negatively associated with intention to quit ($r = -.131, p < .05$). OBSE also demonstrated positive correlations with positivity embracement ($r = .312, p < .01$), favorable construals ($r = .377, p < .01$), and self-affirming reflections ($r = .453, p < .01$), whereas its correlation with defensiveness was negative ($r = -.153, p < .01$). These findings indicate that employees reporting higher organizational self-esteem also tended to report greater use of self-enhancement strategies and lower levels of defensiveness.

The relationships between self-regulatory strategies and employee outcomes showed different patterns. Work performance was positively correlated with positivity embracement ($r = .271, p < .01$) and self-affirming reflections ($r = .322, p < .01$). Prosocial motivation was positively associated with favorable construals ($r = .429, p < .01$), whereas intention to quit was negatively associated with positivity embracement ($r = -.118, p < .05$) and positively associated with defensiveness ($r = .154, p < .01$). The highest correlation among the constructs was observed between positivity embracement and favorable construals ($r = .601, p < .01$). Overall, the correlation analysis provides preliminary evidence consistent with several hypothesized relationships and supports further examination through the structural model.

Table 4 summarizes the goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model and the hypothesized structural model. The measurement model yielded $\chi^2 = 1885.227$ with 832 degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 2.266$), while the structural model yielded $\chi^2 = 1887.447$ with 847 degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 2.228$). Both chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratios were below 3.00. The RMSEA values were .067 (90% CI [.064, .071]) for the measurement model and .066 (90% CI [.061, .070]) for the structural model, indicating reasonable approximate fit according to this index.

The comparative fit index (CFI) increased from .802 in the measurement model to .828 in the structural model, while the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) increased from .788 to

.814. Similarly, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) decreased from .091 to .088. Although these results indicate modest improvements in several fit indices, the CFI and TLI values remained below the commonly recommended threshold of .90, and the SRMR values exceeded .08. Therefore, the model-fit results provide mixed evidence, with acceptable approximate fit according to RMSEA but limitations in incremental and residual-based fit. Hu and Bentler (1999) discussed stringent joint fit-index criteria, whereas Marsh et al. (2004) cautioned against applying fixed cutoffs mechanically across different models. The structural model also demonstrated lower Akaike information criterion (AIC = 2750.738) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC = 3191.450) values than the measurement model (AIC = 2848.169; BIC = 3256.945). The reported Bollen–Stine bootstrap results indicated $p > .05$ for both models.

Table 5 presents the estimated total, direct, and indirect effects among OBSE, self-regulatory strategies, and employee outcomes. The direct-effect estimates showed that OBSE was positively associated with work performance ($\beta = .163, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.024, .306]$) and prosocial motivation ($\beta = .206, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.075, .329]$), while being negatively associated with intention to quit ($\beta = -.258, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.389, -.122]$). These findings are consistent with the hypothesized directions of H1, H2, and H3.

Regarding self-regulatory strategies, OBSE demonstrated positive associations with positivity embracement ($\beta = .419, p < .001$), favorable construals ($\beta = .466, p < .01$), and self-affirming reflections ($\beta = .610, p < .001$). In contrast, OBSE was negatively associated with defensiveness ($\beta = -.137, p < .05$). Among these relationships, self-affirming reflections exhibited the strongest standardized coefficient, suggesting that OBSE was more strongly associated with this self-enhancement strategy than with the other three strategies. These findings were consistent with H4a–H4c and H5.

Table 2. Fit indices for validity and reliability

Construct	Explained variation	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Square root of AVE	Composite reliability	Number of factors yielded
OBSE	56.39	.863	.527	.73	.965	1
Positivity embracement	51.73	.741	.493	.70	.891	1
Favorable construals	53.00	.725	.471	.69	.881	1
Self-affirming reflections	54.89	.763	.488	.70	.893	1
Defensiveness	56.84	.798	.579	.76	.916	1
Work performance	70.93	.876	.662	.81	.967	1
Prosocial motivation	82.61	.928	.816	.90	.959	1
Intent to quit	83.87	.806	.839	.92	.912	1

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficients among the study variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 OBSE	4.26	.67	-						
2 Positivity embracement	3.51	.88	.312**	-					
3 Favorable construals	3.62	.69	.377**	.601**	-				
4 Self-affirming reflections	3.83	.61	.453**	.368**	.358**	-			
5 Defensiveness	3.25	.64	-.153**	-.323**	-.334**	-.128*	-		
6 Work performance	4.21	.73	.324**	.271**	.031	.322**	-.016	-	
7 Prosocial motivation	4.58	.98	.373**	.034	.429**	.020	-.071	.161*	-
8 Intent to quit	2.57	.77	-.131*	-.118*	-.017	-.041	.154**	-.016	-.229**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4. Summarizes The Goodness-Of-Fit Indices

Fit index	Measurement model (CFA)	Hypothesized structural model
χ^2	1885.227	1887.447
df	832	847
χ^2/df	2.266	2.228
CFI	.802	.828
TLI	.788	.814
RMSEA	.067, 90% CI [.064, .071]	.066 90% CI [.061, .070]
SRMR	.091	.088
AIC	2848.169	2750.738
BIC	3256.945	3191.450
Bollen-Stine bootstrap	$p > .05$	$p > .05$

Table 5. Total, direct, and indirect effects

From	To	Effect (β) [LL, UL]			Direct effect hypotheses
		Total	Direct	Indirect	
OBSE	Work performance	.362*** [.252, .468]	.163* [.024, .306]	.218*** [.110, .307]	H1 supported
OBSE	Prosocial motivation	.386*** [.281, .481]	.206** [.075, .329]	.181*** [.108, .279]	H2 supported
OBSE	Quit intent	-.150* [-.277, -.022]	-.258** [-.389, -.122]	-.108** [-.216, -.046]	H3 supported
OBSE	Positivity embracement	.419*** [.246, .569]	.419*** [.246, .569]	-	H4a supported
OBSE	Favorable construals	.466** [.345, .575]	.466** [.345, .575]	-	H4b supported
OBSE	Self-affirming reflections	.610*** [.470, .723]	.610*** [.470, .723]	-	H4c supported
OBSE	Defensiveness	-.137* [-.240, -.023]	-.137* [-.240, -.023]	-	H5 supported
Positivity embracement	Work performance	.202** [.087, .318]	.202** [.087, .318]	-	H6 supported
Self-affirming reflections	Work performance	.219* [.054, .353]	.219* [.054, .353]	-	H7 supported
Defensiveness	Work performance	-.145** [-.247, -.046]	-.145** [-.247, -.046]	-	H8 supported
Favorable construals	Prosocial motivation	.388*** [.257, .528]	.388*** [.257, .528]	-	H9 supported
Positivity embracement	Quit intent	-.204** [-.348, -.062]	-.204** [-.348, -.062]	-	H10 supported
Defensiveness	Quit intent	.165* [.004, .321]	.165* [.004, .321]	-	H11 supported

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The relationships between self-regulatory strategies and employee outcomes also varied. Positivity embracement ($\beta = .202$, $p < .01$) and self-affirming reflections ($\beta = .219$, $p < .05$) were positively associated with work performance, whereas defensiveness showed a negative association ($\beta = -.145$, $p < .01$). Favorable construals were positively associated with prosocial motivation ($\beta = .388$, $p < .001$). For intention to quit, positivity embracement demonstrated a negative association ($\beta = -.204$, $p < .01$), while defensiveness showed a positive association ($\beta = .165$, $p < .05$). These results were consistent with the expected directions of H6–H11.

Table 5 additionally reports total and aggregate indirect effects. For prosocial motivation, the reported total effect was $\beta = .386$, with a direct effect of $\beta = .206$ and an indirect effect of $\beta = .181$. For work performance, the reported total effect was $\beta = .362$, with direct and indirect effects of $\beta = .163$ and $\beta = .218$, respectively. For intention to quit, the corresponding values were $\beta = -.150$, $\beta = -.258$, and $\beta = -.108$. Overall, the structural path estimates demonstrate differentiated relationships between OBSE, self-regulatory strategies, and employee outcomes. These associations are consistent with the theoretical proposition that employees'

perceptions of organizational self-worth are related to distinct self-regulatory strategies, which are themselves associated with different aspects of workplace functioning.

Table 6 presents the hypothesized mediation pathways linking OBSE with work performance, prosocial motivation, and intention to quit through four self-regulatory strategies. Three indirect pathways were specified for work performance, one for prosocial motivation, and two for intention to quit. Regarding work performance, OBSE was positively associated with positivity embracement ($\beta = .419$), which was positively associated with work performance ($\beta = .202$). A similar pattern was observed for self-affirming reflections, with positive associations between OBSE and self-affirming reflections ($\beta = .610$) and between self-affirming reflections and work performance ($\beta = .219$). These component relationships are consistent with positive indirect associations through positivity embracement (H12a) and self-affirming reflections (H12b). In contrast, OBSE was negatively associated with defensiveness ($\beta = -.137$), while defensiveness was negatively associated with work performance ($\beta = -.145$). The product of these two negative coefficients indicates a positive indirect association, consistent with the proposed direction of H12c.

For prosocial motivation, OBSE demonstrated a positive association with favorable construals ($\beta = .466$), which in turn was positively associated with prosocial motivation ($\beta = .388$). The product of these component coefficients indicates a positive indirect association through favorable construals, consistent with the hypothesized pathway in H12d. Regarding intention to quit, two parallel mediation pathways were examined. The first involved positivity embracement, which was positively associated with OBSE ($\beta = .419$) and negatively associated with intention to quit ($\beta = -.204$). The second involved defensiveness, which was negatively associated with OBSE ($\beta = -.137$) and positively associated with intention to quit ($\beta = .165$). Both combinations indicate negative indirect associations between OBSE and intention to quit, consistent with the

directions proposed in H12e and H12f. Taken together, the component path estimates are directionally consistent with the six proposed mediation pathways. The aggregate indirect-effect estimates reported in Table 5 also suggest that self-regulatory strategies may account for part of the associations between OBSE and the employee outcomes.

Squared multiple correlations (R^2) and Cohen's f^2 statistics are shown in Table 7. Large omnibus effect sizes were yielded for self-affirming reflections ($R^2 = .372$, $f^2 = .592$), and prosocial motivation ($R^2 = .267$, $f^2 = .364$). Cohen's f^2 statistics indicate that while individual paths leading to defensiveness and intent to quit achieved statistical significance, their combined explanatory power remains small compared to the effect sizes of the rest of the constructs shown in Table 7.

Table 6. Mediation effects

Hypothesis	Structural path	β , 95% CI [LL, UL]	Status
Work performance:			
H1	OBSE → Work performance	.163* [.024, .306]	Supported
H12a	OBSE → Positivity embracement → Work performance	OBSE → Positivity embracement: .419*** [.246, .569] Positivity embracement → Work performance: .202** [.087, .318]	Supported
H12b	OBSE → Self-affirming reflections → Work performance	OBSE → Self-affirming reflections: .610*** [.470, .723] Self-affirming reflections → Work performance: .219* [.054, .353]	Supported
H12c	OBSE → Defensiveness → Work performance	OBSE → Defensiveness: -.137* [-.240, -.023] Defensiveness → Work performance: -.145** [-.247, -.046]	Supported
Prosocial motivation:			
H2	OBSE → Prosocial motivation	.206** [.075, .329]	Supported
H12d	OBSE → Favorable construals → Prosocial motivation	OBSE → Favorable construals: .466*** [.345, .575] Favorable construals → Prosocial motivation: .388*** [.257, .528]	Supported
Intent to quit:			
H3	OBSE → Intent to quit	-.258** [-.389, -.122]	Supported
H12e	OBSE → Positivity embracement → Intent to quit	OBSE → Positivity embracement: .419*** [.246, .569] Positivity embracement → Intent to quit: -.204*** [-.348, -.062]	Supported
H12f	OBSE → Defensiveness → Intent to quit	OBSE → Defensiveness: -.137* [-.240, -.023] Defensiveness → Intent to quit: .165* [.004, .321]	Supported

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 7. Squared multiple correlations and Cohen's f^2 statistics

Construct	R^2	Calculated Cohen's f^2	Cohen's f^2 interpretation
Self-affirming reflections (Mediator)	.372***	.372/(1-.372) = .592	Large effect size ($\geq .35$)
Prosocial motivation (Dependent)	.267**	.267/(1-.267) = .364	Large effect size ($\geq .35$)
Favorable construals (Mediator)	.217**	.217/(1-.217) = .277	Medium effect size ($\geq .15$)
Work performance (Dependent)	.215**	.215/(1-.215) = .274	Medium effect size ($\geq .15$)
Positivity embracement (Mediator)	.176**	.176/(1-.176) = .214	Medium effect size ($\geq .15$)
Intent to quit (Dependent)	.083**	.083/(1-.083) = .091	Small effect size ($\geq .02$)
Defensiveness (Mediator)	.019**	.019/(1-.019) = .019	Negligible/No effect ($< .02$)

Note: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis can broadly be classified into four categories: structural paths and hypothesis testing, explanatory power and variance, core synthesis of the hypothesized structural model, and findings of the study in

relation to the literature. First, the OBSE-to-work performance paths (H12a, H12b, and H12c) examined parallel multiple mediation, where OBSE predicts work performance through three distinct mediators (positivity embracement, self-affirming reflections, and defensiveness), as shown in Tables 5 and 6. OBSE's direct

effect on work performance was significant ($\beta = .163$, p below .05). OBSE was positively associated with positivity embracement, which in turn was positively associated with work performance, consistent with H12a and complementary positive partial mediation. OBSE had a strong positive association with self-affirming reflections and explained 37.2% of its variance ($\beta = .610$, p below .001; R -squared = .372). Self-affirming reflections were positively associated with work performance ($\beta = .219$, p below .05), consistent with H12b and complementary positive partial mediation.

OBSE had a significant negative association with defensiveness ($\beta = -.137$, p below .05; R -squared = .019), while defensiveness was negatively associated with work performance ($\beta = -.145$, p below .01). This pattern is consistent with H12c, where two negative paths produce a positive indirect association (MacKinnon et al., 2000; Zhao et al., 2010). That is, higher OBSE was associated with lower defensiveness, which in turn was associated with higher work performance. Overall, considering the three parallel mediation paths, the direct effect of OBSE on work performance remained significant ($\beta = .163$, p below .05), alongside the reported combined indirect effect ($\beta = .218$, p below .001). Both effects were positive, suggesting complementary partial mediation.

Second, the OBSE-to-prosocial motivation path (H12d) examined mediation through favorable construals. OBSE's total effect on prosocial motivation was positive and significant ($\beta = .386$, p below .001). OBSE was positively associated with favorable construals ($\beta = .466$, p below .01), explaining 21.7% of its variance (R -squared = .217). Favorable construals were positively associated with prosocial motivation ($\beta = .388$, p below .001). Since the direct effect of OBSE on prosocial motivation remained significant ($\beta = .206$, p below .01), alongside the reported significant indirect effect ($\beta = .181$, p below .001), H12d was consistent with complementary positive partial mediation.

Third, the OBSE-to-intention to quit paths (H12e and H12f) examined parallel multiple mediation through positivity embracement and defensiveness. OBSE's reported total effect on intention to quit was negative and significant ($\beta = -.150$, p below .05), while its direct effect was also negative ($\beta = -.258$, p below .01). On the one hand, the path through positivity embracement produced a negative indirect coefficient of approximately $-.085$, calculated from the product of $.419$ and $-.204$. Higher OBSE was associated with greater positivity embracement, which was associated with lower intention to quit.

On the other hand, the path through defensiveness produced a negative indirect coefficient of approximately $-.023$, calculated from the product of $-.137$ and $.165$. Higher OBSE was associated with lower defensiveness, which in turn was associated with lower intention to quit. Accordingly, both H12e and H12f showed negative indirect associations (MacKinnon et al., 2000; Zhao et al., 2010). Since the direct and indirect coefficients were negative, these pathways were more consistent with complementary rather than competitive mediation. Overall, the model explained 8.3% of the variance in intention to quit (R -squared = .083).

The study provides four main findings regarding explanatory power and variance. First, the model's strongest empirical relationships involved self-affirming reflections and favorable construals. OBSE explained 37.2% of the variance in self-affirming reflections and 21.7% of the variance in favorable construals. The model also demonstrated a large overall Cohen's f -squared effect size for prosocial motivation (f -squared = .364) and a medium

effect size for work performance (f -squared = .274). These findings highlight the relevance of self-affirming reflections and favorable construals within the proposed model.

Second, defensiveness showed a relatively weak association with OBSE in terms of explained variance (R -squared = .019). Nevertheless, defensiveness was negatively associated with work performance and positively associated with intention to quit. The negative association between OBSE and defensiveness, combined with these relationships, indicated a positive indirect association with work performance and a negative indirect association with intention to quit. Thus, defensiveness remained relevant to both proposed mediation pathways despite its limited explained variance.

Third, the findings showed negative indirect associations between OBSE and intention to quit through positivity embracement and defensiveness. OBSE had a significant negative direct effect on intention to quit ($\beta = -.258$), while both mediating pathways also showed negative coefficients. These findings were consistent with complementary mediation rather than competitive mediation or suppression (MacKinnon et al., 2000; Zhao et al., 2010). The model explained a relatively small proportion of the variance in intention to quit (R -squared = .083; f -squared = .091), suggesting that other variables not included in the current model may play important roles in explaining employees' intention to quit.

Fourth, the overall performance of the hypothesized structural model showed varying levels of explanatory power across the endogenous variables. Self-affirming reflections (R -squared = .372, f -squared = .592) and prosocial motivation (R -squared = .267, f -squared = .364) demonstrated large overall effect sizes based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. Favorable construals (f -squared = .277), work performance (f -squared = .274), and positivity embracement (f -squared = .214) demonstrated medium overall effect sizes. In contrast, intention to quit (R -squared = .083, f -squared = .091) showed a small effect size, while defensiveness (R -squared = .019, f -squared = .019) demonstrated negligible explanatory power. Overall, the explanatory power of the model varied across self-regulatory strategies and employee outcomes.

The hypothesized structural model provides valuable insights into mechanisms through which OBSE transmits its influence across the three workplace outcomes. As hypothesized based on the theoretical grounding, OBSE utilizes three distinct, asymmetric mediation paths to drive downstream variance in work performance (via positivity embracement, self-affirming reflections, and defensiveness), prosocial motivation (via favorable construals), and intent to quit (via positivity embracement and defensiveness). First, OBSE successfully transmits its variance through simultaneous, parallel mechanisms to work performance and prosocial motivation. Since the direct paths remain statistically significant even when these mediators are active, both mediation paths support parallel partial mediation. Second, the two mediation paths from OBSE to intent to quit via positivity embracement and defensiveness operate uniquely. OBSE decreases intent to quit, with the overall mediation path exerting a downward specific indirect effect, which led to generating a competitive statistical suppression effect.

Although OBSE theory has been developed and examined predominantly within Western organizational research traditions, emerging evidence indicates that OBSE is also relevant in non-Western contexts (such as Gardner et al., 2018). In this regard, the most appropriate question to ask is whether self-regulatory processes through which organizational self-worth is translated into employee

outcomes are similarly evident in different cultural and organizational contexts. The present study addressed this question.

With regard to OBSE and employee outcomes, OBSE is positively related to improved work performance, stronger prosocial motivation, and lower turnover intentions. These findings indicate that high OBSE employees are more likely to develop favourable patterns of work functioning and lower withdrawal cognition. These relationships can be interpreted through the self-evaluation function of OBSE. Employees who regard themselves as capable and valued within the organization may be motivated to behave in ways consistent with organizational self-view. Effective work performance can provide behavioural evidence that reinforces a positive sense of organizational worth, while prosocial motivation may represent another form of contribution through which employees enact a valued organizational identity. Similarly, the negative relationship between OBSE and turnover intention reinforces previous conceptualizations, where employees who perceive themselves as valuable organizational members are more likely to reciprocate with continued membership. The findings are consistent with the foundational conceptualization of OBSE (Pierce et al., 1989) and also align with previous empirical research linking OBSE with favourable employee functioning, such as Filosa and Alessandri (2024) and Gardner et al. (2018).

With regard to OBSE and self-regulatory strategies, the findings indicate that employees' perceptions of their organizational worth are associated with systematic differences in the way they regulate self-relevant information. A possible theoretical explanation is that OBSE provides a domain-specific basis for interpreting information about one's organizational value. Employees with relatively high OBSE are likely to possess a more favourable organizational self-schema. For example, positive feedback is, therefore, more congruent with their existing self-view and may be more readily accepted and incorporated into that self-view. This is a plausible rationale for the positive relationship between OBSE and positivity embracement. Similarly, a favourable organizational self-view may provide employees with greater scope to interpret ambiguous workplace events in ways that preserve a positive evaluation of themselves, which is consistent with the relationship between OBSE and favorable construals. The positive relationship between OBSE and self-affirming reflections can also be understood in terms of self-integrity. When employees experience criticism or other self-relevant threats, individuals with a stronger sense of organizational worth may have greater psychological resources from which to reaffirm valued aspects of themselves. Self-affirmation can therefore allow an employee to acknowledge a specific setback without necessarily allowing that setback to undermine the broader sense of organizational worth (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In contrast, the negative relationship between OBSE and defensiveness suggests a different regulatory process. Employees with lower OBSE may be more sensitive to evaluative information because negative feedback can have greater implications for an already vulnerable organizational self-view. Defensiveness may consequently become a means of anticipating, deflecting, or minimizing potential threats to self-worth (Hepper et al., 2010). These findings are, therefore, consistent with the view that self-protection becomes particularly relevant when individuals perceive threats to a valued aspect of the self. Further, these findings are broadly consistent with self-regulation research, which identifies self-regulation strategies as distinguishable

strategies for regulating self-worth (Hepper et al., 2010; Zell et al., 2023).

With regard to self-regulatory strategies as mediators, the present study extends the literature by providing evidence that self-regulatory strategies are systematically related to OBSE via mediation paths. This provides a basis for understanding how employees' organizational self-worth may be translated into different forms of employee functioning through how they respond to positive information and regulate threats to self-integrity. The tests for mediation showed that self-regulatory strategies mediate between work performance, prosocial motivation, and intention to quit. However, the findings indicate that different self-regulatory strategies are associated with different OBSE–outcome relationships. For work performance, positivity embracement, self-affirming reflections, and defensiveness provided a positive indirect path between OBSE and work performance. For prosocial motivation, favorable construals provided a positive indirect path between OBSE and prosocial motivation, suggesting that the way employees interpret workplace circumstances may be particularly relevant when translating organizational self-worth into motivation to benefit others consistent with their valued organizational identity. These interpretations are broadly compatible with research on self-affirmation, reflection at work, and prosocial processes (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Göhler et al., 2023; Kross et al., 2023; Schneider & Weber, 2022; Zhang et al., 2025; Zhong et al., 2022). For intent to quit, defensiveness was associated with a negative indirect path to quit intent. Similarly, positivity embracement was associated with a negative indirect path to quit intent, indicating that employees who more readily embrace positive feedback may be more likely to continue organizational membership more consistent with their self-view. These findings are consistent with the previous studies (Charles-Leija et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2021; Zell et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Four main conclusions can be drawn from the findings. First, OBSE enhances work performance and prosocial motivation while reducing intent to quit. The study reinforces the value of organizational self-worth as a psychological resource associated with constructive employee functioning and lower withdrawal cognition. Second, the study adds a self-regulatory perspective to OBSE by showing direct relationships. The findings showed that OBSE enhances positivity embracement, favorable construals, and self-affirming reflections, which are self-enhancement strategies. As predicted, OBSE is negatively related to defensiveness, which is a self-protection strategy. All these are direct relationships that OBSE maintains. Third, and most importantly, selected self-regulatory strategies provided mediating paths linking OBSE with the three employee outcomes. Specifically, the findings showed the significance of positivity embracement to work performance and quit intent, favorable construals to prosocial motivation, self-affirming reflections to work performance, and defensiveness to work performance and quit intent. Therefore, self-regulation strategies mediate all paths hypothesized in the study and support partial mediations. The findings therefore suggest that the consequences of organizational self-worth may depend partly on how employees process positive information, interpret workplace experiences, affirm their self-integrity,

and protect themselves from evaluative threats. However, the contribution of self-regulatory strategies in terms of Cohen's f^2 effect size statistic varies, as discussed in the section on discussion of findings. Overall, the core contribution of the study is to shift attention from OBSE as a direct predictor of employee outcomes toward the self-worth regulatory processes through which organizational self-esteem may be translated into employee functioning. This provides a more process-oriented basis for future research on OBSE across organizational and cultural contexts.

Theoretical contributions

The findings suggest that OBSE and its effects on work outcomes may depend on how employees regulate and maintain their self-worth. The findings contribute to OBSE scholarship in three principal ways. First, the study provides evidence that OBSE is associated with important employee outcomes. The consistency of these relationships with prior OBSE research (e.g., Gardner et al., 2018; Pierce et al., 1989) supports the relevance of organizational self-worth as an employee-level psychological resource.

Second, the study connected organizational self-worth with four self-regulatory strategies rather than treating self-enhancement and self-protection as broad tendencies and provided evidence that different strategies may be associated with OBSE in different ways. This provides a more differentiated account of self-regulatory processes connected to organizational self-worth and complements related previous research such as Hepper et al. (2010) and Zell et al. (2023).

Third, the study emphasized self-regulatory cognition as an essential mechanism that influences OBSE–employee outcomes relationships from a process-oriented perspective, emphasizing that the effects of OBSE on employee outcomes may be contingent on how employees regulate their self-worth, i.e., self-regulatory strategies operate as potential self-regulatory mechanisms or explanatory paths between OBSE and employee outcomes. The process-oriented perspective added theoretical depth to models that otherwise treat OBSE primarily as a direct predictor of employee outcomes. Therefore, although the relationships established the relevance of OBSE and self-regulatory strategies, the subsequent mediation findings provided insight into the psychological processes leading to workplace outcomes. This mediation analysis is the central theoretical contribution of the study. The findings on the mediation indicate that the consequences of OBSE are not uniform across self-regulatory processes. Different strategies appear to connect OBSE with different forms of employee functioning. This is an important extension of OBSE research because it moves the explanation from the question of whether employees with high OBSE have more favourable outcomes to a more theoretically informative question of which self-worth regulatory processes help to explain which employee outcomes.

Fourth, when interpreting the findings alongside previous studies, self-regulatory strategies meaningfully affect the relationships between OBSE and work outcomes. These findings support the broader proposition that self-regulation represents related but distinguishable forms of self-worth regulation (Hepper et al., 2010; Zell et al., 2023). Further, the findings in connection with OBSE, defensiveness, and work performance, and OBSE, defensiveness, and intent to quit are important and novel contributions since OBSE literature does not provide adequate evidence on how defensive cognition interacts with OBSE. The finding on the effect of defensiveness on

intent to quit could also be used to explain why high OBSE does not always translate into stronger retention intentions. Furthermore, the results showed the significance of positivity embracement to work performance and self-affirming reflections to work performance. In the present study, the strength of the relationship between self-affirming reflections and work performance is stronger than that between positivity embracement and work performance. This finding provides empirical support to the contention that while work performance positively relates to positivity embracement and self-affirming reflections, work performance is most strongly related to self-affirming reflections (Hepper et al., 2010).

Fifth, the study was conducted in Sri Lanka and provided a contextual extension of the established OBSE theory. The findings are well aligned with previous research conducted in the country, namely, Gardner et al. (2018). The study suggests that the theoretically specified self-regulatory processes can be meaningfully examined using established constructs and measures supporting the claims of Gardner et al. (2018).

Practical implications

First, the findings showed that employees with higher levels of OBSE have a greater psychological attachment to an organizational environment in which they perceive themselves as valuable members. Further, such employees are more capable of translating their favourable organizational self-view into constructive workplace behaviour.

Second, self-regulatory strategies can determine how employees embrace positive information, construe workplace experiences, affirm their self-integrity, and protect themselves from evaluative threats. These strategies provide a plausible mechanism through which OBSE can influence important workplace outcomes. Positivity embracement can reinforce a sense of belonging with affirming information about their competence and organizational worth, reinforcing their motivation to maintain behaviours that generate positive evaluations and reducing the motivation to leave. Further, employees who construe workplace events favourably may be more likely to interpret their organizational role as meaningful and their relationships with others as opportunities for positive contribution. Favorable construals can therefore reinforce perceptions that helping others is consistent with a valued organizational identity. Similarly, the acceptance of positive feedback may strengthen employees' perception that their contributions are valued, creating motivational conditions under which they are willing to invest effort beyond their formal role. Self-affirming reflections can similarly protect a coherent sense of worth when employees encounter setbacks or criticism, allowing them to remain psychologically engaged with their work rather than allowing a single negative experience to undermine their functioning. In contrast to self-enhancement strategies, defensiveness may be particularly consequential when employees experience organizational evaluation as threatening. Defensiveness may consume psychological resources in efforts to protect the self from anticipated negative evaluation, thereby diverting attention away from work-related demands. Repeated efforts to protect a vulnerable organizational self-concept may increase psychological disengagement and make withdrawal appear to be a means of avoiding further threats to self-worth. Therefore, self-regulatory strategies may also explain employees' withdrawal cognitions.

Third, the findings suggest that OBSE maintains mediating effects on employee outcomes through employees' self-regulatory strategies. For example, the findings showed that positivity embracement and defensiveness are expected to represent alternative mechanisms through which OBSE is associated with quit intent. When all findings relating to mediation are taken together, the findings suggest that self-regulatory strategies represent an important explanatory path when interpreting how OBSE translates into employee outcomes.

Considering the above practical implications, the findings of the study might be immensely useful for leaders of organizations and human resource practitioners when designing and developing practices to attract, motivate, and retain employees. Therefore, the findings could provide insights into potential interventions to strengthen employees' OBSE and cultivate a workplace environment encouraging adaptive self-enhancement while discouraging unnecessary self-protective responses. Still, these intervention recommendations should be interpreted as practice-relevant considerations rather than tested interventions in this study.

- The findings suggest that psychological processes influence OBSE's effects on employee outcomes. Therefore, organizations should consider developing psychological capital as a part of human resource management strategy and embedding psychological capital development into organizational learning.
- As part of psychological capital, organizations could maintain OBSE as a metric and assess it during annual engagement surveys. Such an effort by organizations could create an environment where employees may feel motivated to translate their internal resources into positive workplace outcomes.
- Managers should recognize employees' perceptions of their organizational self-worth to better understand their constructive functioning and withdrawal cognition. Managers' provision of clear performance expectations and constructive feedback as well as appropriate recognition of employee contributions, may inform them about their organizational value.
- Positivity embracement enhances OBSE's effects on work performance and reduces quit intent. Hence, organizations could provide strengths-based feedback and recognition programmes, introduce practices to build supervisor support to enhance employees' contributions, and adopt appreciative inquiry methods to reinforce positive reframing to assist employees in translating their OBSE into enhanced work performance.
- Favourable construals enhance OBSE's effects on prosocial motivation. This suggests that employees' interpretations of workplace experiences may be relevant to their motivation to contribute to others. Organizations should, therefore, consider creating work environments in which employees have opportunities to understand how their individual responsibilities contribute to broader team and organizational objectives.
- Organizations can introduce training programmes on areas such as cognitive reframing, optimistic thinking, and constructive interpretation of workplace events. Organizations should also embed these skills into their leadership development programmes. Such attempts could be relevant to employees' motivation to contribute to others - prosocial motivation.
- The way employees process positive self-relevant information may be important for self-affirming reflections. Therefore, on the one hand, managers may consider providing performance feedback that is specific, credible, and developmentally oriented. On the other hand, organizations should include self-affirmation activities in training programmes, reflection activities in onboarding programmes for newly recruited employees, and encourage immediate supervisors to provide developmental feedback for employees based on their strengths and achievements. Such practices could potentially provide employees with useful information for maintaining a positive organizational self-view while also supporting their learning and growth.
- The negative relationship between OBSE and defensiveness and the positive relationship between defensiveness and quit intent indicate that defensive self-protection may be relevant to both performance and withdrawal cognition. Therefore, the identification of defensive work behaviours and taking actions to mitigate these are important. Immediate supervisors should be trained to identify employees' defensive behaviours, such as blame shifting, avoidance, and impression management driven by fear at work.
- Organizations must ensure psychological safety for employees to feel secure in accepting feedback without using self-protection strategies. Therefore, development-oriented and respectful feedback practices may provide a useful basis for reducing unnecessary evaluative threat. This also suggests that managers should be attentive to workplace conditions in which employees may perceive feedback as threatening to their organizational worth.

Limitations and future research

Firstly, the data were collected using non-probability sampling methods. Future research could replicate the model using probability-based or organizationally stratified samples across different sectors, organizational sizes, hierarchical levels, and occupational groups. Second, the cross-sectional design has limitations on temporal ordering and causality. Therefore, more research should be conducted to deepen our understanding. Third, the study used established measures. Although this approach supports conceptual continuity and comparison with previous research, future studies could examine measurement equivalence of item scales across different contexts. Fourth, the cross-sectional design has limitations in directly observing the underlying psychological processes. Future research could employ longitudinal, experimental, or qualitative approaches to examine more directly how employees respond to workplace context. Finally, comparative studies involving Sri Lanka and other countries would be particularly useful for determining which aspects of the model are broadly consistent with OBSE theory and which may be sensitive to country context. In this regard, limited literature is available in the domain of the present study in Asian contexts.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by the author. Responses were treated anonymous, and confidentiality was assured throughout data handling and analysis.

Consent for publication

Survey respondents provided consent to use their anonymized responses for the purpose of this publication.

Conflicts of interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest in this research.

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