

# The Role of Relational Experiences, Mindfulness and Psychological Needs in Shaping Prosocial Behaviors of Retail Salesforce at Work.

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## ABSTRACT

Human connection at work is important. These relationships are developed and maintained within the work environment for task accomplishment and other behavioral outcomes. It generates a sense of camaraderie, collaboration, and support among coworkers by going beyond simple surface-level encounters especially in sales field. The performance of an organization and the level of job satisfaction among its employees in this case are the retail salesforce can both be significantly impacted by developing good relationships. Furthermore, the interactions between employees' mindfulness are also believed to be beneficial in exploring and shaping prosocial behaviors at work. In this study, we proposed that to develop a good employee relationship, behaviors such as sharing and caring, and mindfulness should be inculcated in the work culture. Using Self Determinants Theory as a basis, the findings of this study will help introduce the framework aimed at determining the role of relational experience and mindfulness of an employee that could enhance prosocial behaviors at work.

**Keyword:** Relational Experience, Mindfulness, Prosocial Behaviour, Self-Determination Theory, Retail Salesforce

## INTRODUCTION

Workplaces are fundamentally social environments where collaboration and interpersonal interaction are essential. Employees' willingness to go beyond their formal job descriptions and help colleagues or contribute positively to the organization reflects prosocial behaviour. Various organizational behaviour proponents believe that the extra work behaviour displayed by employees in the workplace will enhance organizational reputation, productivity, and performance (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume, 2009). According to United Nations General Assembly's sustainable development goal (SDG), among the seventeen global goals to be achieved is a decent work for all, wellbeing, good health. While individual traits influence such behaviours, relational experiences in the workplace play a pivotal role. These experiences shape how employees perceive their environment and determine whether they feel safe and valued enough to engage in helping actions. This is also hold true in a retail industry. A healthy and productive workplace environment depends heavily on the relationships between employees. Organizations can use a variety of strategies including team-building exercises, mentorship programmes, open lines of communication, and a supportive workplace culture that emphasises relationships between employees, to encourage employee's prosocial behaviour. This paper seeks to understand relational experiences and mindfulness role in shaping prosocial behaviour among employees and to propose strategies for nurturing such behaviours through relational and mindful interventions. In the end, a more successful and harmonious workplace results from employees who feel a sense of belonging to their coworkers and the company as a whole. Despite the importance of workplace relationships, there is less attention paid in the literature to exploring what are behavioral outcomes and how workplace relationships influence those outcomes. This is a significant literature gap that needed to be fulfilled. This paper thus aimed to address this question:

R1: How does relational experience and mindfulness affect prosocial behaviour among retail salesforces?

R2: What is the relationship between basic psychological needs and prosocial behaviour among retail salesforces?

R3: Do basic psychological needs mediate the effects of relational experience and mindfulness on prosocial behaviour among retail salesforces?

### **Retail Industry in Malaysia**

The retail industry in Malaysia plays a pivotal role in Malaysia economy. It includes businesses that sell goods directly to consumers, such as supermarkets, convenience stores, clothing shops, home improvement outlets, and online stores. The BIMB research house in 2024 reported that a Malaysia Distributive Trade sector which includes wholesale, retail and vehicle sales recorded a total sale of RM149.3 billion (The Edge, 2025). This augurs well with retail sector as one of the major contributor of Malaysia's GDP at 67 to 70 percent. Despite the economic uncertainty, Malaysia's retailers remain strong especially with the government effort in boosting the middle-class income, increasing digital innovation also with the inflow of foreign tourists to Malaysia. Retailers are also focusing on creating a better shopping experience. This includes offering better store layouts, self-checkout machines, and eco-friendly products. The retail industry is expected to continue evolving and expanding in the future.

### **Underpinning Theory: Self Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s. It is a widely acclaimed theory of human motivation that emphasizes the role of psychological needs in the development of intrinsic motivation and well-being. The traditional model of motivation emphasizes the external rewards and punishment, however SDT believe that motivation generally arises within an individual which are self-driven or self-determine. These will in turn be transformed into affecting their creativity, mental health, persistence and performance. There are three fundamental components of SDT that need to be satisfied, namely (i) Autonomy (ii) Competence (iii) Relatedness. The first which is autonomy, this is an act of acting with full volition and personal endorsement. Autonomy means a person feels the origins of their action and more likely to be motivated and engaged when doing their work. Another component is competence. The importance of this element can be seen in the blend of mastery experience and interaction with the environment over tasks. When a person feels confident with their task at hand, they will invest time with the work even if it is difficult. The third element of SDT is relatedness. This element emphasises connection and personal growth within the environment. An individual who feels connected will eventually internalise the values and will contribute positively to the environment they are in.

The fundamental thrust in Self Determination Theory (SDT) are the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness. It is also a mechanism that offers understanding of human motivation and wellbeing. Therefore, in a workplace such as in retail environments, the elements should be nurtured to enhance wellbeing and lead to a more motivated individual.

### **Understanding Prosocial Behaviour at work**

Prosocial behaviour refers to actions that benefit others, such as cooperation, sharing, helping, and caring. In this study, we contend that individuals with high levels of self-control would engage in more prosocial behaviour, which in turn associates with greater life satisfaction. Prosocial behaviour was defined as behaviour through which people benefit others (Eisenberg, 1982), including helping, cooperating, comforting, sharing, and donating (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998; Greener and Crick, 1999). This behaviour is beneficial for the people to whom it is directed (individuals or the organization). In general, a prosocial behaviour in the workplace can be described as any act aimed at improving the situation of the person to whom the help is directed (Bierhoff, 2002). Prosocial behaviours at work can be considered a key element of organizational effectiveness in the sense that they lead to improvement in the work environment through a series of acts performed by employees. Prosocial behaviours at the workplace can be divided into two categories: pro-organizational behaviours and pro-

individual behaviours. The emergence of prosocial behaviour at work is essentially because of the influence of two major factors which are internal influence and the external ones. The interactions of both factors are critical for an organization aiming to improve organizational performance.

### **Relational Experience**

Relational experiences foster a sense of belonging, build trust among colleagues, and encourage individuals to contribute beyond their formal duties. They also cultivate a cooperative environment where prosocial actions are normalized and reciprocated. On the other hand, negative relational experiences, marked by conflict, exclusion, or lack of recognition. This negative experience can reduce psychological safety, diminish morale, and suppress prosocial engagement (Li et al. (2024). Relational experiences are multidimensional and often include, (i) emotional support (ii) mentorship and guidance (iii) collaborative exchanges. Understanding the importance of these experiences allows organizations to proactively design cultures that reinforce relational richness and, in turn, promote prosocial behaviour as a strategic advantage. Relational experience also intersects with employee motivation and performance. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan), the need for relatedness or feeling connected to others is one of the three basic psychological needs that drive human motivation. Employees who experience positive relationships in the workplace are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, meaning they engage in their work out of genuine interest and internal satisfaction (McAnally & Hagger, 2024). This intrinsic motivation often leads to better creativity, quality of work, and long-term commitment to the organization (Wang & Wang et al, 2024). However, relational experience is not solely the responsibility of managers. It is a shared commitment that involves every member of the organization. Employees contribute to the relational climate through their behaviour, attitudes, and willingness to cooperate. Encouraging teamwork, mentoring, social interactions, and inclusive practices can help build a culture where positive relational experiences are the norm rather than the exception. In conclusion, relational experience is a vital dimension of workplace culture that significantly influences individual and organizational outcomes. By fostering authentic connections, effective communication, trust, and empathy, organizations can create an environment where people thrive both personally and professionally. In a world increasingly defined by complexity and change, investing in relational experiences is not just a moral imperative, but is considered as a strategic competitive advantage as in the word of Welbourne (2025) which states that relational capital as a “powerful asset” that firms leverage to “unlock competitive advantage” in today’s hyper-competitive landscape.

### **Employee Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is defined as an individual present-focused, non-judgemental awareness of feelings, thoughts of surroundings. A person who are mindful are more responsive to the need of others. The portrayal of greater sensitivity and compassion is the manifestation of mindfulness in an individual. Mindful employees tend to be more patient, less reactive, and more willing to offer help, even in high-pressure situations. In this sense, mindfulness acts as an internal regulatory mechanism that supports ethical and socially responsible conduct. Mindful employees are autonomously eager to pursue goals that are intrinsic compared to extrinsically motivated goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In view of this reason, further understanding of the issues and possible positive impact of employee mindfulness on prosocial behaviour should be studied and empirically tested. Numerous literatures including in neuroscience, psychology, medicine support the notions that mindfulness facilitates attention, emotions, behaviour of a person and performance at work Ndubisi, (2012). Remarkably though, the influence of mindfulness on prosocial behaviour is yet to be explored extensively. Dane & Brummel (2014) purported that only a few research has been done to address mindfulness from the perspective of workplace. In addition, most existing research mostly adopt a collective set of mindfulness rather than an individual level of analysis such as in the study of Ray et al. (2011). However, the complexities of mindfulness concept lie in interchangeable perspective of mindfulness. It has been defined and operationalized in many different terms, resulting in unclear definition when one speaks of mindfulness (Reb & Choi, 2014). The authors basically conceptualize mindfulness in a more inclusive view, rather than dividing the terms mindfulness into two camps. One rooted in the scientific camp, and another is within the Buddhist camp.

According to the authors, the most prominent research attention is from the mindfulness training program and lies the basis of three different components of Mindfulness such as (i) Intention, (ii) Attention and (iii) Attitude as suggested by (Shapiro, 2009). Stenberg (2000) on the other hand, explains mindfulness concept can be

interpreted in three different approaches. First, mindfulness as a cognitive ability, second, as a personality trait, and finally, mindfulness as cognitive style. This is similar to the study by (Brown & Ryan, 2003) which also examined mindfulness in different views either state, trait or ability. Mindfulness, according to Bohlmeijer et al., (2010). historically was conceptualized as a state mindfulness, which means is achievable through the process of meditation. Trait mindfulness, on the other hand, varies based on their “interaction with their immediate environment” and because of its dispositional nature, rather than acquiring intervention such as Mindfulness Based -Stress Reduction (MSBR) training to achieve state mindfulness. These types of trait mindfulness according to (Jakkowski and Holas, 2014) can be achievable naturally if a person display autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which is basically a theme in Self Determination Theory. Some of the scholars also contended that mindfulness does not require a meditative training and is within reach of everyone (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dane, 2011). Through various literature search, researcher found that mindfulness as an antidote to mindlessness- that is the state of reduced attention and automatic functioning.

## Hypothesis Development

Following the foundation laid out in the Self-Determining Theory (SDT), Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, this study tries to understand how relational experiences and mindfulness contribute to prosocial behaviour in the workplace. These theories provide a strong foundation for explaining the psychological and social processes that influence positive employee behaviour. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), individuals are more likely to engage in helpful, cooperative, and positive behaviours when their basic psychological needs are fulfilled. These needs namely (i) autonomy (the feeling of having control over one's actions), (ii) competence (feeling capable and effective), and (iii) relatedness (feeling connected to others) are considered essential for personal growth and motivation. Employees are considerably more inclined to behave in a manner that is advantageous to both the organization and its stakeholders when they perceive that they are receiving adequate assistance in these domains. Consequently, this investigation suggests that the fulfilment of fundamental psychological requirements serves as a conduit between prosocial behaviour and personal and relational factors (such as mindfulness). This perspective is further bolstered by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which posits that workplace relationships are founded on the principle of reciprocity. When employees receive caring, respect, and support from their supervisors or colleagues, they frequently develop a sense of obligation to reciprocate. This may be demonstrated in a professional setting by engaging in prosocial behaviours, such as demonstrating extra effort, being cooperative, or assisting others. Conversely, the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) framework (Organ, 1988) provides a practical approach to evaluating and comprehending prosocial behaviours in the workplace. OCB encompasses behaviours that are not explicitly mandated by the job but that foster a positive and productive work environment. These behaviours include exceeding expectations, being courteous, and assisting colleagues.

## Relational Experience and Basic Psychological Needs

Relational experience plays a vital role in fulfilling an individual's basic psychological needs, particularly the need for relatedness, as outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the workplace, relational experiences such as mutual respect, emotional support, trust, and open communication create a positive social environment where employees feel valued and connected. These interactions not only strengthen interpersonal bonds but also contribute to the satisfaction of psychological needs like autonomy and competence—for example, when employees are encouraged to express their opinions and are given opportunities to grow. When these needs are met through meaningful relationships, individuals are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, leading to greater engagement, well-being, and prosocial behaviour. Based on these, we proposed that:

**H1: Relational Experience has a positive effect on Basic Psychological Needs.**

## Employee Mindfulness and Basic Psychological Needs

Employee mindfulness refers to the ability to remain present, attentive, and non-judgmental can significantly enhance the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as proposed by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When employees practice mindfulness, they become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and surroundings, allowing them to respond rather than react



to workplace situations. This awareness fosters a sense of autonomy, as mindful employees feel more in control of their actions and decisions. It also supports competence, as mindfulness improves focus, clarity, and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, mindful individuals tend to engage in more empathetic and meaningful interactions, which enhances relatedness by deepening their connection with others. Together, these effects contribute to a more motivated, emotionally balanced, and socially engaged workforce. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis”

## H2: Employee Mindfulness has a positive effect on Basic Psychological Needs

### Basic Psychological Needs and Prosocial Behaviour at Work

Basic psychological needs which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are essential drivers of prosocial behaviour in the workplace, as outlined in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When employees feel that they have the freedom to make choices (autonomy), believe in their abilities to perform tasks effectively (competence), and experience meaningful connections with others (relatedness), they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to support and help their colleagues. This intrinsic motivation fosters behaviours such as cooperation, sharing knowledge, offering assistance, and showing empathy—all of which contribute to a positive and collaborative work environment. In short, when employees’ psychological needs are fulfilled, they are naturally inclined to engage in actions that benefit others and strengthen the social fabric of the organization. Accordingly, we hypothesised that:

## H3: Basic Psychological Needs has a positive influence on Prosocial Behaviour at Work.

### The mediating role of Basic Psychological Needs

Empirical studies have supported this mediating role. For instance, research has shown that employees who perceive strong relational support and who practice mindfulness report higher levels of need satisfaction, which in turn predicts higher engagement in organizational citizenship behaviours which is a proxy for prosocial behaviour (Schultz et al. (2015; Reb, J., Narayanan, J., & Chaturvedi, S.,2014) This suggests that without the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, even positive relational and mindfulness experiences may not fully translate into consistent prosocial actions. In summary, basic psychological needs act as the psychological bridge linking the external environment (e.g., relational experiences) and internal capacities (e.g., mindfulness) to observable workplace behaviour. As a mediating variable, need satisfaction explains how and why employees become motivated to help, support, and uplift others in the workplace. By fostering conditions that satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness, organizations can nurture a culture of prosocial behaviour that is sustainable, authentic, and deeply embedded in the employee experience. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Basic Psychological Needs mediates the relationship between relational experience and Prosocial Behaviour.

H5: Basic Psychological Needs mediates the relationship between employee mindfulness and Prosocial Behaviour.

### Theoretical Frameworks Linking Relational Experience, Employee Mindfulness and Prosocial Behaviour

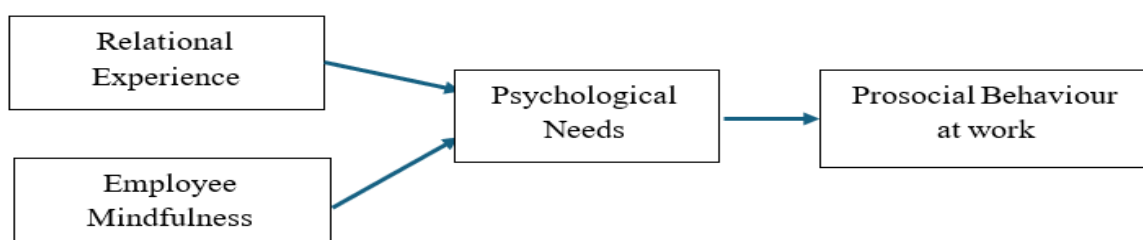


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

We proposed a cross-sectional quantitative research methodology to be employed for this research. The study will employ a structured questionnaire distributed to retail sales employees across major urban cities in Malaysia. Data collection will be conducted online and in-person, providing respondents with the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience. This method is also considered cheaper and able to cover the geographical location in Malaysia. The target population comprises retail salesforce employees in Malaysia across various segments such as supermarkets, department stores, and fashion retailers. A target sample of 300 respondents will be recruited using stratified random sampling. This is to ensure broad representation across geographic regions and retail types. The questionnaire will include validated measurement scales for relational experience, mindfulness, basic psychological needs, and prosocial behaviour at work, adapted from prior literature. Data will be analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0 to test both direct and mediating relationships in the proposed model. Although this is a conceptual paper, previous empirical studies have provided preliminary support for the proposed relationships. For example, Schultz et al. (2015) found that mindfulness and relational support predicted prosocial behaviours through the satisfaction of psychological needs. This reinforces the potential of applying the proposed framework in a Malaysian retail context.

## Theoretical Implication

This study adopts Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), as its main theoretical underpinning to examine how relational experiences and mindfulness influence prosocial behaviour in the workplace. The theory posits that an individual are more inclined towards success and growth if the three foundations of intrinsic motivational requirements of needs are fulfilled. These foundations are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Within the framework, relational experiences which refers to interpersonal relationships between colleagues within the workplace such as mutual trusts, emotional connection and supportive environment creates needs for relatedness which is central to SDT.

In addition to relational experience, an employee mindfulness is also important in fostering self-awareness and emotional regulation. When these elements are built within the individual in workplace, they are likely to respond, promoting ethical behaviour and showing empathy to their colleagues and also the customers whom they are dealing with. Also, those employees with mindful behaviour will always act for a collective need rather than their own needs. This theoretical model aligns with findings by Reb et al. (2014), who demonstrated that supervisor mindfulness significantly influenced employee well-being and performance. Such empirical insights substantiate the relevance of integrating both relational and mindfulness constructs in understanding prosocial outcomes. Additionally, it is important to note that the development of prosocial behaviour should be supported within the framework of internal motivation.

The proposed theoretical framework suggests that relational experiences and mindfulness function as key antecedents that facilitate the fulfilment of basic psychological needs. These needs, in turn, mediate the relationship between the two antecedents and prosocial behaviour. In other words, when employees experience positive relationships and maintain a mindful approach to their work, they are more likely to feel psychologically nourished and, consequently, act in ways that are helpful, cooperative, and socially responsible. In summary, this framework integrates both social and intrinsic psychological mechanisms to explain how employees develop prosocial tendencies. By drawing on SDT, the study highlights the importance of workplace relationships and personal mindfulness in cultivating environments where prosocial behaviour thrives. This approach not only deepens our understanding of motivational processes in the workplace but also provides practical insights for fostering a more supportive and ethically engaged organizational culture.

## CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper proposes that relational experiences and mindfulness play critical roles in fostering prosocial behaviour among employees in the workplace. By integrating insights from social exchange theory and self-determination theory, this paper argues that high-quality interpersonal interactions, when coupled with mindful awareness, can enhance employees' intrinsic motivation to act in ways that benefit others and the organization. The framework presented contributes to the growing body of organizational behaviour literature

by highlighting how internal (mindfulness) and external (relational experiences) factors jointly influence prosocial outcomes. It also emphasizes the need for organizations to cultivate supportive relational climates and promote mindfulness practices to nurture a more compassionate and collaborative workforce.

### Future suggestion

Future research should empirically test the proposed relationships using robust quantitative methods and explore potential mediators such as psychological safety or emotional regulation. Future studies should validate this conceptual model with quantitative techniques such as SEM. Prior research by Schultz et al. (2015) and McAnally & Hagger (2024) confirm that need satisfaction is a strong mediator in predicting prosocial behaviours, suggesting that similar results can be expected in the retail context. Ultimately, this conceptual model lays the groundwork for deeper investigations into the social and psychological antecedents of prosocial behaviour at work. or practitioners, this paper highlights the need to incorporate mindfulness and relational engagement into employee development programs. Organizational leaders can foster a prosocial culture by modelling empathetic behaviour and supporting employees' especially in the retail setting towards their psychological well-being at work.

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