

The Relationship between Courtesy Behaviour and the Quality of Work Delivered by Employees in Public Telecommunication Firms in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of courtesy, a key dimension of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), on work quality within Zimbabwe's public telecommunication sector. Drawing on OCB theory, the study utilised a mixed methods approach combining quantitative survey data from 350 employees and qualitative insights from six senior managers at TelOne and NetOne. Quantitative findings revealed a significant positive relationship between courtesy and work quality ($\beta = 0.451$, $p = 0.021$), suggesting that respectful communication, proactive conflict prevention and considerate workplace behaviour enhanced service delivery, attention to detail and operational efficiency. Qualitative results further underscored courtesy as a catalyst for team cohesion, smoother workflows and reduced interpersonal friction, particularly in resource-constrained and bureaucratic environments. However, the study also identified potential drawbacks. In high-pressure situations, employees often deprioritised courtesy in favour of task completion and excessive emphasis on harmony occasionally suppressed critical feedback and innovation. These findings highlighted the context-dependent nature of courtesy impact on organisational outcomes and emphasised the moderating role of leadership style and organisational cultural enablers. The study recommended fostering balanced workplace practices that promote courtesy alongside openness to constructive dialogue and systemic reforms to support sustainable improvements in work quality.

Keywords: Courtesy, Organisational citizenship behaviour, Work quality, public telecommunication firms

Introduction

Public telecommunication firms such as Tel-One and Net-One are central to advancing Zimbabwe's digital connectivity and socio-economic development. As state-owned enterprises (SOEs), they are mandated to provide critical communication infrastructure and support government efforts toward achieving nationwide digital inclusion. These organisations are instrumental in facilitating access to information and services, fostering economic participation and bridging the digital divide across urban and rural areas. However, despite their strategic importance, Zimbabwean public telecommunication firms face a constellation of challenges that undermine their operational efficiency and service delivery standards. These include chronic under-funding, bureaucratic inefficiencies and political interference, which collectively erode employee morale and hinder organisational effectiveness. (Mlambo & Dube, 2023). In such complex and resource-constrained environments, understanding the human behavioural factors that influence organisational performance has become increasingly

essential. One such factor is courtesy, a critical but often under-explored dimension of workplace behaviour. Courtesy is part of the broader construct of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), voluntary and discretionary actions by employees that, while not formally mandated, significantly contribute to organisational success. (Podsakoff et al., 2023). Courtesy encompasses proactive and considerate actions aimed at preventing workplace conflicts and fostering harmonious relationships. Behaviours such as informing colleagues about work plans, coordinating schedules to avoid disruptions and addressing potential misunderstandings before they escalated were key examples of courtesy in practice. This study investigated how courtesy, as a dimension of OCB, influenced the quality of work delivered by employees in Zimbabwe's public telecommunication firms. It aimed to fill an empirical gap in the literature by examining whether proactive interpersonal behaviours could enhance service standards and performance outcomes in bureaucratic and under-resourced work environments.

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in public telecommunication firms

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) refers to discretionary actions by employees that extend beyond formal job requirements and contribute to the overall functioning and effectiveness of the organisation. (Podsakoff et al., 2023). It is widely conceptualised across five key dimensions: altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, sportsmanship and courtesy. Courtesy entails considerate acts intended to prevent conflicts and minimise workplace friction, thus facilitating smooth collaboration. (Organ et al, 2022). Altruism involves voluntarily assisting colleagues with work-related challenges. Civic virtue reflects an employee's willingness to actively participate in organisational governance and company affairs. Conscientiousness captures efforts by employees to exceed minimum job expectations through responsibility and diligence and Sportsmanship denotes tolerance of workplace inconveniences without complaint. These dimensions collectively enhance organisational harmony and performance, but their manifestation in SOEs is shaped by unique contextual factors.

Recent studies have begun to examine OCB within public sector organisations. Mlambo and Dube (2023) affirm that OCB fosters teamwork, improves service delivery and strengthens organisational performance in SOEs. However, they caution that these behaviours are heavily moderated by leadership dynamics and organisational culture. Ndlovu and Chikodzi (2022) argue that transformational leadership styles are particularly effective in fostering OCB as supportive leaders inspire employees to transcend formal duties and contribute voluntarily to organisational goals.

Contrasting perspectives highlight the constraints facing SOEs in developing economies. Chikasha (2024) notes that bureaucratic hurdles, resource shortages and rigid hierarchical structures often suppress OCB as employees may feel disempowered or demotivated to engage in discretionary behaviours. Conversely, Simango and Moyo (2023) suggest that in some instances, employees increase OCB as a coping mechanism to navigate institutional inefficiencies and maintain organisational functioning. These divergent findings underscore the complexity of OCB within SOEs, particularly in environments characterised by political instability and economic challenges.

Job satisfaction has also been identified as a key antecedent of OCB. Chuma and Sibanda (2022) report a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and OCB, though they argue that satisfaction alone may not be sufficient to sustain discretionary behaviours in politically charged and resource-constrained settings such as Zimbabwe. This suggests that

contextual factors, including leadership practices, organisational support and structural enablers, play a critical role in shaping OCB within SOEs.

Courtesy and the quality of work delivered

Courtesy behaviours such as proactively informing colleagues about potential work disruptions, coordinating activities to avoid conflicts and resolving misunderstandings amicably have been associated with improved workplace harmony and task efficiency. (Podsakoff et al., 2023). By fostering positive interpersonal relationships, courtesy helps minimise workflow interruptions and creates an environment where employees can focus on core responsibilities without unnecessary distractions. In resource-limited and bureaucratic public sector environments, courtesy may play an even more vital role. Mwangi and Chikafu (2023) describe courteous behaviours as social lubricants that enable smoother collaboration among employees, particularly in situations where formal systems are inefficient or absent. In such settings, employees who practice courtesy can bridge interpersonal and departmental divides, thereby facilitating more effective communication and teamwork.

However, the relationship between courtesy and work quality is not without contention. Murehwa and Nyoni (2024) report an insignificant correlation between courtesy and task quality in Zimbabwean public institutions, suggesting that while courtesy improves workplace relationships, it may not directly translate into enhanced performance outputs. They argue that structured and systemic challenges, such as inadequate resources and poor infrastructure, may overshadow the positive effects of courteous behaviours. Moreover, Chirwa (2023) found that courtesy indirectly contributes to work quality by creating a psychologically safe environment. Employees in courteous workplaces experience reduced stress, fewer interpersonal conflicts and greater emotional well-being, enabling them to concentrate more effectively on their tasks. This perspective aligns with the findings of Ndlovu & Marufu (2024), who observed that toxic work environments characterised by a lack of courtesy and respect are associated with higher employee turnover, absenteeism and diminished service quality in Zimbabwean SOEs.

Leadership practices significantly influence the expression and effectiveness of courtesy in the workplace. Leaders who model respectful and empathetic communication foster cultures of mutual respect that cascade through the organisation. (Tshuma, 2023). In contrast, transactional leadership styles emphasising rigid compliance may inhibit the development of courteous behaviours as employees become preoccupied with avoiding punishment rather than fostering positive relationships. Moreover, courtesy is increasingly linked with emotional intelligence, a competency essential for navigating workplace complexities. Hassan and Mutizwa (2023) argue that employees with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to demonstrate courtesy, manage conflicts and build constructive relationships that support collaborative work environments. However, Banda and Chigova (2024) caution that promoting courtesy without addressing deeper organisational inefficiencies may lead to superficial harmony that masks unresolved issues such as poor communication systems and weak accountability frameworks.

Rationale for the study

Despite the growing body of literature on OCB, the specific relationship between courtesy and the quality of work remains underexplored in the public sector organisations within developing countries. In Zimbabwe's public telecommunication firms, understanding this relationship is particularly critical given the dual challenges of operational constraints and public accountability demands. By investigating how courtesy influences work quality in these

settings, this study sought to contribute valuable insights for managers and policymakers striving to enhance employee performance and service delivery in SOEs. This study, therefore, aimed to examine the role of courtesy in shaping work quality within Zimbabwean public telecommunication firms, addressing a critical gap in both local and global empirical literature.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods and explanatory research design to investigate the relationship between courtesy behaviour and work quality within Zimbabwean public telecommunication firms. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled the researcher to capture both measurable patterns and contextual insights, ensuring a robust understanding of how interpersonal behaviours such as courtesy impact organisational outcomes in resource-constrained environments.

Quantitative phase

The quantitative phase aimed to establish the correlation between courtesy and work quality. A sample of 350 employees was surveyed across the head offices of two major public telecommunication firms, namely, Tel-One and Net-One. These organisations were selected as they represented key public telecommunication companies responsible for providing national communication services and face similar structural and operational challenges. Respondents in this phase included both management and non-management staff drawn from technical, administrative and customer service departments. To ensure fair representation across the different organisational levels and functions, stratified random sampling was employed. This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to account for hierarchical differences in employee experiences and perceptions, particularly since organisational dynamics and expectations may vary across job roles.

Data were collected using standardised, validated instruments. Respondents rated statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “*strongly disagree*” (1) to “*strongly agree*” (5), allowing for nuanced measurement of their perceptions. The courtesy sub-scale was adapted from the widely used organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) scale originally developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) and later validated in diverse organisational contexts by Wang (2021). This sub-scale assessed employees’ tendencies to proactively engage in behaviours aimed at preventing interpersonal conflicts and maintaining workplace harmony. The work quality scale was derived from Hackman & Oldham's (1980) Job Characteristics Model, which emphasises critical psychological states linked to job performance. It was further adapted for SOE environments by Mutasa & Nyamurera (2022) to reflect the specific performance indicators relevant in public sector organisations. Quantitative data were analysed using correlation analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between courtesy and work quality. Additionally, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS version 25 to test the hypothesised relationship within a multivariate framework. SEM allowed for the simultaneous examination of direct and indirect effects, offering deeper insights into the role of courtesy in shaping work outcomes. (Zhou et al., 2022).

Qualitative phase

A qualitative phase was conducted to complement and contextualise the quantitative findings. This phase aimed to explore participants’ lived experiences and perceptions regarding the role of courtesy in facilitating organisational effectiveness. A total of six senior managers were

purposely selected for semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of individuals with extensive experience in supervising staff and managing organisational workflows, as they could provide informed perspectives on how courteous behaviours influenced workplace dynamics. The interviews explored key themes such as the contribution of courtesy to improving teamwork and workflows, the role of courteous interactions in mitigating interpersonal conflicts and how courtesy impacts the quality and timeliness of work outputs within SOEs. Interviews were audio recorded (with participant's consent), transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework. This approach involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns and developing overarching themes. The qualitative findings served to triangulate with the survey results, strengthening the validity of the conclusion drawn.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed strict ethical standards to protect the rights and welfare of participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Midlands State University Research Ethics Committee before data collection. All participants were provided with detailed informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained. Identifying information was excluded from data sets and findings were reported in aggregate to prevent the attribution of responses to specific individuals. Data storage complied with data protection regulations, ensuring that only the researcher had access to raw information. The research process also aligned with the ethical guidelines set by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) as outlined by Moyo & Chikondo (2023). Attention was paid to issues of power dynamics, especially during interviews with managerial staff, to ensure open and honest participation without fear of repercussions.

Results and Discussion

The study's findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between courtesy behaviour and work quality among employees in Zimbabwe's public telecommunication firms. The quantitative analysis produced a standardised correlation coefficient of $\beta = 0.451$ ($p = 0.021$), indicating that there was a positive and statistically significant association between courtesy and improved work quality. Employees who consistently demonstrated courteous behaviours such as showing consideration for colleagues, proactively preventing misunderstandings and maintaining respectful communication were more likely to deliver outputs characterised by adherence to service standards, attention to detail and enhanced customer satisfaction. These findings support existing literature emphasising the critical role of interpersonal behaviours in shaping organisational effectiveness. For instance, Podsakoff et al. (2022) highlight courtesy as a central component of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), arguing that it minimises interpersonal friction and facilitates collaboration. In a similar vein, Li, Chen and Liu (2021) report that courtesy workplace cultures promote seamless workflows, reduce disruptions and foster environments where employees can focus on core responsibilities, ultimately leading to higher quality outcomes.

The qualitative phase of the study reinforced these quantitative results. Insights from interviews with senior managers revealed a shared perception of courtesy as an essential lubricant in organisational operations. One manager aptly described it as:

“Courtesy is like the oil that keeps operations running smoothly. When employees are respectful and communicate well, tasks flow more easily, errors are minimised and even customers notice the difference in service quality.”

Managers consistently observed that courtesy behaviours contributed to more cohesive teams and reduced workplace tension. Employees who were respectful and considerate towards their colleagues tended to foster positive relationships, which in turn improved coordination and minimised conflicts during task execution. This environment was perceived to be particularly beneficial in the resource-constrained and bureaucratic settings typical of Zimbabwean SOEs, where effective collaboration was essential for organisational success. However, the findings also uncovered important nuances and potential challenges associated with courtesy in the workplace. Some managers cautioned that during periods of heightened pressure, such as meeting critical deadlines or responding to service disruptions, employees often deprioritised courtesy in favour of speed and task completion. As one interviewee noted:

“In high-pressure situations, people sometimes drop the politeness just to get things done. It’s understandable, but over time it can strain relationships and affect the overall quality of work.”

This observation aligned with studies by Ng and Feldman (2020), who warn that while courtesy promotes harmony, it can inadvertently suppress necessary directness or constructive feedback in task-focused environments. Excessive emphasis on politeness may lead to surface acting, where employees mask genuine feelings to appear agreeable, potentially resulting in emotional exhaustion and reduced job performance.

Similarly, Van Kleef et al. (2019) argue that overly courteous environments may hinder constructive confrontation and critical evaluation, both of which are essential for continuous improvement and innovation. In the context of Zimbabwean SOEs characterised by rigid hierarchies and limited resources, managers acknowledged that courtesy alone was insufficient to sustain high performance. Structural reforms and supportive leadership were identified as critical enablers for translating courteous interactions into tangible improvements in work quality.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) findings here.

Paths	Coefficients	Sample mean	Std. dev	T-statistics	P-values
COT -> EJP	0.150	0.150	0.074	2.016	0.044

COT = Courtesy, SPF

Source: (Primary data 2025)

The study found out that *Courtesy* had a statistically significant positive influence on employee job performance, with a standardised regression coefficient of 0.150 and a p-value of 0.044. Thus, Hypothesis 1d, which proposed that courtesy significantly enhanced employee job performance, was supported. This suggested that higher levels of courteous behaviour, such as conflict avoidance, respect for colleagues’ needs and maintaining interpersonal harmony, contributed positively to performance in public telecommunication firms. Courtesy, as a dimension of OCB, involves behaviours that mitigate interpersonal conflict and foster positive workplace relationships. Podsakoff et al. (2020) emphasise the role of courteous behaviour in enhancing teamwork, reducing conflict and promoting a collaborative climate, all of which facilitate higher productivity and job performance. In high-contact work environments, such as those found in service-oriented public firms, courtesy plays a central role in shaping employee

interactions and outcomes. Moreover, the findings affirm that both organisational citizenship behaviours, such as altruism, conscientiousness, civic virtue and work environment perceptions contribute significantly to variations in employee job performance. This aligns with the foundational work of Podsakoff et al. (2000), who argue that OCB enhances organisational effectiveness by fostering cooperation, responsibility and interpersonal harmony. Similarly, Organ and Ryan (1995) contend that discretionary behaviours like OCB are instrumental in improving job satisfaction and individual productivity, particularly when cultivated within supportive organisational cultures. Overall, the findings underscored the multifaceted role of courtesy in influencing employee performance. While courtesy behaviours were shown to enhance teamwork, communication and service delivery, their effectiveness depended on organisational culture, leadership styles and contextual factors such as workload pressures. These results highlighted the need for balanced approaches that promoted courtesy while also fostering openness to critical feedback and systemic improvements.

The findings of this study demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between courtesy behaviour and work quality among employees in Zimbabwe's public telecommunication firms. Employees who exhibited higher levels of courtesy, characterised by respectful interactions, proactive communication and efforts to prevent workplace conflicts, were more likely to deliver work of higher quality, including adherence to service standards, attention to detail and improved customer satisfaction. These results suggested that courtesy contributed meaningfully to fostering a collaborative and efficient work environment within state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The results aligned with existing literature, emphasising the value of interpersonal behaviours in enhancing organisational outcomes. Podsakoff et al. (2022) identify courtesy as a critical dimension of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), highlighting its role in minimising workplace friction and promoting teamwork. Similarly, Li, Chen and Liu (2021) argue that courteous workplace cultures help streamline workflows and reduce unnecessary disruptions, enabling employees to focus more effectively on core responsibilities. In the Zimbabwean context, where public telecommunications firms often operated under resource constraints, bureaucratic courtesy appeared to act as a compensatory mechanism that supported cooperation and mitigated workplace stress.

The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative analysis, indicating that managers viewed courtesy as a key factor in enhancing team cohesion and operational efficiency. Respectful and considerate behaviours among employees were reported to contribute to smoother workflows, fewer errors and improved service quality. These outcomes are particularly relevant in SOEs where cross-departmental collaboration was often required to achieve organisational goals. This observation aligned with studies such as Liao and Hui (2022), which emphasise the importance of psychological safety created by courteous interactions in supporting employee performance and overall organisational success. Despite these positive associations, the findings also revealed potential challenges and limitations in relying solely on courtesy to drive work quality. In high-pressure situations, such as during tight deadlines or operational crises, employees were observed to deprioritise courteous interactions in favour of task completion. This tendency underscores the possibility that the benefits of courtesy may be situational rather than universal. Ndlovu (2024) similarly argues that under intense work pressure, employees in SOEs may revert to task-focused behaviours at the expense of maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, which can lead to strained teamwork and a decline in overall work quality over time. Furthermore, scholars such as Ng and Feldman (2020) caution that excessive emphasis on courtesy may result in surface acting, where employees suppress their genuine emotions to maintain polite interactions. This emotional labour can lead to burnout and disengagement, ultimately undermining performance. Van Kleef et al. (2019) extend this

critique by suggesting that highly courteous environments may inadvertently discourage constructive criticism and open dialogue, which are essential for innovation and continuous improvement. In rigid bureaucratic systems, this dynamic could reinforce hierarchical barriers, allowing systemic issues to persist unchallenged.

Additionally, Grant and Parker (2021) warn that prioritising harmony over directness may limit critical evaluations of work processes and delay necessary organisational reforms. In task-intensive environments, employees might avoid offering critical feedback or addressing inefficiencies to maintain polite interactions, leading to stagnation and reduced long-term effectiveness. These insights highlight the importance of contextual factors in shaping the effectiveness of courtesy. Leadership style and organisational culture are particularly influential. Transformational leadership, which emphasises empathy and open communication, can amplify the positive effects of courtesy by fostering mutual respect and psychological safety. (Ndlovu & Chikodzi, 2022). In contrast, transactional leadership styles focused on compliance may suppress authentic courtesy, reducing its impact on work quality. Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of courtesy in influencing employee performance. While courtesy behaviours contribute to improved teamwork communication and service delivery, their effectiveness depends on organisational context, leadership practices and structural enablers. Promoting courtesy through training and leadership development is vital, but these efforts must be complemented by systemic reforms that address underlying organisational inefficiencies. A balanced approach that encourages respectful interactions while fostering constructive feedback and innovation is essential for sustaining high levels of work quality in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlighted the significant yet context-dependent influence of courtesy on work quality within Zimbabwe's public telecommunication firms. As a key dimension of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), courtesy manifested through respectful communication, proactive conflict prevention and consideration for colleagues was found to positively contribute to teamwork, operational harmony and overall service delivery standards. The quantitative findings established a moderate positive relationship between courtesy behaviours and work quality, suggesting that interpersonal respect and collaboration were essential for achieving high performance in bureaucratic and resource-constrained environments. However, the study also revealed potential limitations in relying solely on courtesy as a driver of organisational effectiveness. While courtesy fosters interpersonal trust and smooth workflows, excessive emphasis on maintaining harmony may discourage critical dialogue, constructive feedback and innovation. This phenomenon is particularly evident in hierarchical state-owned enterprises (SOEs), where employees may avoid addressing systemic inefficiencies to preserve politeness, potentially undermining long-term performance gains. These findings underscore the importance of organisational culture, leadership practices and structural enablers in amplifying or constraining the positive effects of courtesy.

Implications for Practice

- Embed courtesy in performance frameworks: Organisations should recognise and reward courteous behaviour in formal performance management systems ensuring employees are incentivised to maintain respectful interactions while delivering high quality outputs.
- Develop leadership that models courtesy: Managers should be trained to model and promote respectful, empathetic communication, creating a psychologically safe workplace where courtesy enhances, not suppresses, constructive dialogue.
- Balance interpersonal harmony and task focus: SOEs must guard against over-emphasising harmony at the expense of productivity by cultivating a culture that values both courtesy and critical engagement.

Future research directions

Future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to assess how courtesy influences work quality over time and under varying operational pressures. Investigating moderating variables such as leadership style, organisational support and employee emotional intelligence could provide deeper insights into the conditions under which courtesy is most effective. Additionally, comparative studies across different public sector organisations and cultural contexts may illuminate how courtesy interacts with institutional structure to shape performance outcomes. Such research would refine theoretical and practical understanding of the role of courtesy in organisational effectiveness, particularly in developing country contexts.

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