

The Journal of Accounting
and Management

Industrial Relations as a Mediator Between Organisational Conflict and Job Satisfaction: Evidence from Chinese Mining Firms in Zimbabwe

Molly Sukoluhle Mhlanga¹, Munyaradzi Chikove², Frank Ranganai Matenda³

Abstract: The Zimbabwean mining sector has experienced a substantial influx of Chinese foreign direct investment which, while stimulating economic growth, has also introduced complex and persistent labour relations challenges. This study investigates the mediating role of industrial relations in the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction within Chinese-owned mining companies operating in Zimbabwe. The study adopts a quantitative approach and is grounded in a positivist research philosophy. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through a stratified random sampling technique. The sample comprises of 250 employees working in Chinese-owned mining entities who were familiar with labour relations issues within their organisations. Structural equation modelling is employed to analyse the associations between industrial relations, organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The study results indicate that organisational conflict has a negative effect on both industrial relations and job satisfaction. In contrast, industrial relations has a positive effect on job satisfaction. Furthermore, industrial relations significantly mediate the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The indirect path from organisational conflict to job satisfaction through industrial relations is positive and statistically significant. Managers in Chinese-owned mining firms should strengthen industrial relations systems to effectively manage organisational conflict and improve employee job satisfaction. Basically, policymakers and organisational leaders should adopt strategies that strengthen industrial relations systems, promote job satisfaction, and reduce organisational conflict, thereby enhancing employee well-being and improving organisational performance. The study contributes to the existing literature on industrial relations, organisational conflict, and job satisfaction.

Keywords: industrial relations; organisational conflict; job satisfaction; Chinese mining firms; Zimbabwe

JEL Classification: O15, J24, J28

¹ Department of Human Capital Development, Faculty of Commerce, Lupane State University, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, E-mail: mollysuereds@gmail.com.

² Department of Human Capital Development, Faculty of Commerce, Lupane State University, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, E-mail: mchikove4@gmail.com.

³ Department of Operations Management, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, Corresponding author: frmatenda@gmail.com.



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY NC) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

The mining sector occupies a position of strategic importance in the Zimbabwean economy, acting as a primary driver of foreign direct investment, export earnings, and government revenue (Zimbabwe Chamber of Mines, 2024). According to the Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency (2025), the mining industry currently contributes 70% to foreign direct investment, 80% of exports, 19% to government revenues, 3% to direct formal employment and 13.5% to rational income. Further, the mining sector employs thousands of workers. Over the past two decades, Chinese investment has emerged as a dominant and transformative force within this sector, providing critical capital, advanced technology, and infrastructure necessary to revitalise production. However, this investment has proven to be a double-edged sword, accompanied by persistent and well-documented socio-labour challenges that threaten the sustainability and social legitimacy of these ventures. Numerous reports from trade unions, civil society, and academic researchers highlight a pattern of labour unrest, grievances over working conditions, wage disputes, and profound cross-cultural misunderstandings between Chinese management and Zimbabwean employees (Carciotto & Chikohomero, 2022; Chingono & Mawowa, 2020; Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, 2020). Moyo (2021) indicated that high-profile incidents, including strikes, protests, and, in extreme cases, violent confrontations, have brought these simmering tensions into sharp public focus, raising urgent questions about workplace harmony, employee welfare, and the long-term viability of such cross-cultural investment models. In the same vein, Mlambo and Dube (2021) postulated that foreign-owned mining firms, particularly those operated by Chinese investors, have faced criticism for poor labour practices, exploitation of workers, lack of transparency and accountability, high levels of labour unrest and workplace conflicts.

Organisational conflict (defined as the process arising from perceived divergences of interest, goals, values, or resource scarcity between individuals or groups within a workplace) is an inevitable and ubiquitous feature of organisational life (Rahim, 2017). While not inherently destructive and potentially a source of innovation if managed constructively, conflict that is poorly managed, ignored, or allowed to fester invariably leads to detrimental outcomes. These detrimental outcomes include low job satisfaction, decreased productivity, increased employee turnover, reduced inter-departmental cooperation, increased employee stress and emotional exhaustion, diminished individual and team morale, and a breakdown in communication channels. In the high-stakes, physically demanding, and risk-laden environment of mining, where safety protocols depend on trust and seamless coordination, the negative repercussions of unresolved conflict are amplified, posing direct threats to both human welfare and operational integrity.

Job satisfaction (conceptualised as an employee's overall affective or attitudinal disposition towards their job) results from an evaluative assessment of its various facets and stands as a fundamental construct in organisational psychology and human resource management (Spector, 2022). It is a key determinant of a range of critical organisational outcomes, including job performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, commitment, and, crucially, employee retention. In sectors characterised by skill shortages and high recruitment costs, such as mining, fostering job satisfaction is not merely a humanitarian concern but a strategic economic imperative. The well-documented dissatisfaction within Chinese-owned mines suggests a failure to meet this imperative, with significant costs for both employees and employers.

Industrial relations encompasses the complex system of rules, practices, procedures, and institutions that govern the interactions between employers and employees within the workplace. This system includes formal mechanisms such as collective bargaining agreements, grievance and dispute

resolution procedures, and employee participation forums, as well as informal norms of communication, mutual respect, and trust. Theorists argue that robust and effective industrial relations systems act as a critical buffer or mediation mechanism, capable of transforming potentially destructive conflict into constructive dialogue, thereby mitigating its negative impacts and protecting or even enhancing job satisfaction (Budd & Bhawe, 2019). However, within the unique and often fraught context of Chinese-owned enterprises in Zimbabwe - characterised by distinct hierarchical management styles, significant cultural and linguistic differences, and perceived or actual weak adherence to local labour norms and expectations - the efficacy, legitimacy, and practical application of these industrial relations systems is frequently called into question (Chambati, 2020; Mlambo, 2021). For instance, the role of industrial relations systems in managing conflict and promoting job satisfaction has been called into question following recent shooting incidents at Chinese mining firms in Zimbabwe, where Chinese managers allegedly shot and injured or killed local workers during labour disputes.

Despite the considerable economic footprint of Chinese mining investment and the evident severity of its associated labour relations challenges, there remains a notable paucity of empirical research that systematically and quantitatively examines the intricate interplay between organisational conflict, industrial relations and job satisfaction within this specific context. Existing literature often provides valuable but largely descriptive, anecdotal, or qualitative accounts of labour issues, lacking the rigorous quantitative analysis necessary to establish the strength, direction, and, most importantly, the causal pathways of the relationships between these constructs. This study seeks to bridge this significant gap in the literature by empirically investigating the mediating role of industrial relations in the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction among employees of Chinese-owned mining companies in Zimbabwe. The findings of this study aim to move beyond descriptive problem-identification to provide evidence-based, theoretical insights and practical recommendations for management, policymakers, and scholars dedicated to understanding and improving the foundational relational dynamics that underpin workplace health and sustainability in this critical and contested sector.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The ‘Literature review and hypotheses development’ section reviews existing literature and develops hypotheses. This is followed by the ‘Methodology and data’ section, which outlines the study’s methodology and data. The ‘Results’ section presents the study findings, which are then discussed in the ‘Discussion’ section. Finally, the ‘Conclusions’ section concludes the study and highlights avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Research Objectives

- To assess the impact of organisational conflict on industrial relations.
- To examine the effect of organisational conflict on job satisfaction.
- To explore the influence of industrial relations on job satisfaction.
- To determine whether industrial relations mediate the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx, posits that social and workplace dynamics are fundamentally shaped by power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups (Prayogi, 2023). In organisational contexts, this theory is applied to understand the tensions between employers and employees, often arising from competing interests over resources, control, and authority. Modern interpretations of conflict theory focus on how structural inequalities and lack of equity in decision-making processes lead to dissatisfaction, resistance, and, in some cases, industrial unrest (Mawowa, 2016). In the workplace, particularly in labour-intensive sectors like mining, conflict can stem from differences in wage expectations, safety concerns, unequal treatment (Rahim, 2017), and limited participation in managerial processes.

At the heart of conflict theory is the belief that organisations are not harmonious systems but rather arenas where different groups compete to achieve their own goals. Employees seek fair compensation, job security, and respect, while employers prioritise productivity, profit maximisation, and control over labour costs. When these goals clash, especially in contexts where industrial relations systems are weak or poorly managed, organisational conflict becomes more frequent and intense (Muchowe et al., 2023). The theory further argues that conflict is not inherently negative; rather, it is a normal and sometimes necessary force that can lead to positive change when properly managed (Mlambo, 2025; Chingono & Mutingi, 2021). This aligns with recent views that structured conflict resolution through collective bargaining and participatory practices can improve job satisfaction and organisational effectiveness.

In the context of this study, conflict theory is particularly relevant for explaining the underlying causes of workplace disputes in Chinese-owned mining companies in Zimbabwe. These firms often operate within a framework of cross-cultural management systems, where Chinese business models may conflict with local labour expectations and legal norms (Chingono & Mawowa, 2020). Conflict theory offers a lens to understand how power imbalances between foreign employers and local employees result in tensions that affect workers' satisfaction and workplace harmony. The Zimbabwean mining sector has experienced numerous labour-related grievances, illustrating the core proposition of conflict theory that organisational discord arises from structural inequalities and competing interests.

2.2.2. Justification of the Conflict Theory

Conflict theory has the ability to unpack the complex socio-economic and political dynamics at play within Chinese mining companies in Zimbabwe. While other theories such as systems theory or functionalism might focus on harmony and integration, conflict theory critically examines the power structures that perpetuate discontent and reduce job satisfaction (Orsini, 2024). Moreover, it supports the exploration of industrial relations as a mediating factor that can potentially transform adversarial relationships into cooperative engagements. By identifying the sources and nature of workplace conflict (Ferrare & Phillipppo, 2023), the theory helps justify the need for strong industrial relations mechanisms such as trade unions, grievance procedures, and employee representation to mitigate conflict and enhance job satisfaction (Anjum et al., 2021). When employees feel that their voices are heard and their rights are protected, the intensity of conflict may decrease, resulting in improved morale and retention.

2.3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Formulation

2.3.1. Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework (see Figure 1) indicates the relationships between the adopted constructs.

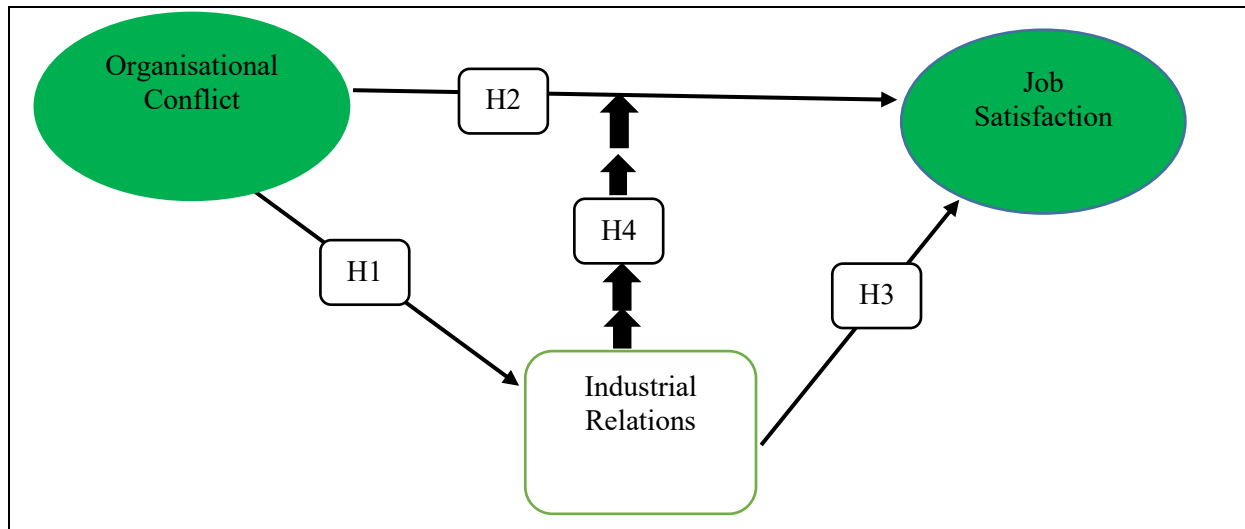


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

2.3.2. Hypotheses Development

Organisational conflict and industrial relations

Organisational conflict, characterised by frequent disagreements, adversarial interactions, and unresolved grievances, is posited to have a corrosive effect on the very foundations of positive industrial relations. Conflict consumes relational capital such as trust, hampers open and honest communication, and diverts collective energy from cooperation and productivity towards contention and defensiveness (De Wit et al., 2020). In contexts where conflict is prevalent and management systems are perceived as unfair or unresponsive, the formal mechanisms designed for dialogue such as grievance procedures, consultative committees, and collective bargaining become strained, discredited, or ignored. This leads to a systemic deterioration of the overall industrial relations climate, marked by cynicism, distrust, and a belief that the “rules of the game” are stacked against the employee (Anjum et al., 2021). Based on the reviewed literature, it can be hypothesised that:

H1: Organisational conflict is negatively associated with industrial relations.

Organisational conflict and job satisfaction

A substantial body of literature supports the direct negative impact of chronic or intense conflict on employees' psychological well-being and job attitudes. Persistent conflict, whether task-oriented or interpersonal, creates a stressful (Musevenzo et al., 2024), hostile, and unpredictable work environment, which systematically diminishes an employee's affective attachment to and evaluation of their job (Spector, 2022). Relationship conflict, in particular - rooted in personal animosities, interpersonal friction, and feelings of disrespect - is strongly and consistently linked to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and significantly reduced job satisfaction (Dahiya et al., 2025). In the high-pressure context of the mining sector, conflicts over safety, resource allocation, overtime, and fundamental fairness are not merely administrative issues but are directly and viscerally detrimental to

employee morale, engagement, and overall satisfaction (Hlongwa, 2019). Premised on the reviewed literature, it can be hypothesised that:

H2: Organisational conflict is adversely linked to job satisfaction.

Industrial relations and job satisfaction

Positive industrial relations, characterised by procedural fairness, effective two-way communication, mutual respect, and participatory decision-making mechanisms, are theorised to be fundamentally conducive to employee well-being. Maryani and Gazali (2024) asserted that when employees perceive that they are treated justly, that their voice is heard and valued, and that management is responsive and trustworthy, their overall cognitive and affective evaluation of their job and the organisation improve significantly (Pembi et al., 2023). Drawing on Barry and Wilkinson (2022), strong industrial relations systems primarily fulfil critical hygiene needs providing security, fair supervision, and equitable policies which act to prevent dissatisfaction. Furthermore, industrial relations systems that go beyond mere compliance to foster genuine involvement can also activate motivators, such as feelings of recognition and responsibility, thereby actively generating satisfaction. Empirical studies across various contexts consistently demonstrate a positive and significant correlation between constructive industrial relations climates and higher levels of reported job satisfaction (Snape & Redman, 2019; Hayes, 2022). Based on the reviewed literature, it can be hypothesised that:

H3: Industrial relations is positively associated with job satisfaction.

Mediating role of industrial relations on the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction

The core theoretical and empirical proposition of this study is that industrial relations serves as the primary explanatory mechanism, i.e., the mediator, in the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction. Industrial relations mediates the link between conflict and job satisfaction by fostering a culture of communication, fairness, and recognition. Existing literature also indicate that industrial relations plays a crucial mediating role in transforming the potentially negative effects of organisational conflict into constructive outcomes that enhance employee satisfaction and organisational performance. According to Pembi et al. (2023), conflict in organisations is inevitable, but its consequences depend largely on how it is managed through structured industrial relations mechanisms. Effective industrial relations systems - characterised by open communication channels, collective bargaining, and grievance-handling procedures - enable conflicts to be addressed fairly, reducing tension and promoting a sense of justice and inclusion among employees. Pavlović et al. (2021) advocated that workplaces with well-established industrial relations frameworks experience fewer disruptions, higher job satisfaction, and improved labour management cooperation. By providing institutional mechanisms for dialogue and dispute resolution, industrial relations transform conflicts from destructive to developmental, supporting both organisational stability and employee morale.

Also, the mediating function of industrial relations is evident in how it aligns management and employee interests through participatory engagement. According to Huaman et al. (2023), industrial relations serves as the “social infrastructure” of the workplace, ensuring that conflict resolution processes are equitable, transparent and mutually beneficial. When employees perceive that their grievances are acknowledged and addressed through recognised procedures, job satisfaction increases because of improved trust in management and perceived fairness (Inegbedion, 2024). Empirical

research by Santos et al. (2024) in multinational enterprises demonstrated that formal grievance procedures and collective representation significantly reduce the emotional strain associated with workplace conflict, improving employees' affective well-being and satisfaction. Jehn and Bendersky (2018) emphasised that well-managed conflicts, when processed through institutionalised industrial relations systems, can enhance creativity and problem-solving while strengthening interpersonal relationships. Interestingly, studies in Asian and European contexts have shown that employee involvement in decision-making and dispute resolution enhances job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Duarte & Silva, 2023). Hence, industrial relations not only reduce the negative psychological impact of workplace conflict but also facilitate the transformation of adversarial relationships into collaborative partnerships, resulting in higher motivation and reduced turnover.

Thus, industrial relations act as a buffer that cushions the impact of organisational conflict by promoting procedural justice, ensuring dialogue, and fostering a positive work environment. The mediating role of industrial relations is thus vital in achieving harmony between organisational efficiency and employee welfare, both central to sustainable human resource management and long-term institutional success. Conversely, extant literature indicates that in organisations where industrial relations are weak or absent, unresolved conflicts lead to employee dissatisfaction, mistrust and decreased productivity. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Industrial relations mediates the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction.

3. Methodology and Data

This study adopts a quantitative approach, involving the collection and analysis of numerical data, and is guided by a positivist research paradigm. An explanatory case study design was adopted to examine the causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between organisational conflict, industrial relations, and job satisfaction within a specific real-life context. Although often associated with qualitative research, case study designs are also appropriate for quantitative studies that test theoretically grounded relationships in context. In this study, Chinese-owned mining companies in Zimbabwe represent a critical and under-researched setting with unique labour dynamics. The design is particularly suitable as the study seeks to address “how” and “why” questions, with quantitative techniques enabling the empirical testing of the proposed relationships and underlying mechanisms. This design facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay among organisational conflict, industrial relations, and job satisfaction within the sector's unique socio-political, cultural, and industrial context. It enables the researchers to embed quantitative hypothesis testing within the rich contextual fabric of the case, allowing for the exploration of the nuances of organisational conflict, industrial relations, and job satisfaction while employing rigorous statistical methods for analysis (Hendren et al., 2023) and generalisation across case units. Thus, the holistic nature of the issues can be effectively addressed (Cannas et al., 2024). The case study design enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the collection of rich data.

The target population for this study comprised 710 employees working at selected Chinese-owned mining companies operating in Zimbabwe. This target population included employees across various hierarchical levels and across different functional departments. A sample size of 250 respondents was selected. To ensure the sample was representative of the population's heterogeneity, a stratified random sampling technique was employed (Petropoulos et al., 2024). Etikan and Bala (2017) highlighted that this method enhances representativeness and improved the precision of estimates for

subpopulations. The population was stratified based on two key criteria appropriate to the research variables: job level/category (to capture perspectives across the organisational hierarchy) and department/function (as experiences may differ by work nature).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered online. The questionnaire link was distributed to respondents via email and WhatsApp, enabling the researchers to reach a large number of participants within a short period and facilitating efficient follow-ups. Of the 250 questionnaires distributed, 244 were returned, giving a response rate of 97.6%. After removing incomplete or invalid responses, 240 questionnaires were used for data analysis yielding an effective response rate of 96%. Most valid responses came from men (72%), with women accounting for 28%. Further, most respondents (32%) were between 40 years and 49 years old, followed by 28% from the age group of 30 - 39 years.

3.1. Instruments

- **Industrial Relations**

In this study, the perceived quality of the industrial relations climate was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from established industrial relations climate instruments (see, for example, Dastmalchian et al., 2020). Assessed dimensions include management consultation, employee voice, effectiveness of grievance procedures, encouragement of union representation, mutual trust, and transparency in dispute handling. Barry and Wilkinson (2022) applied this scale and reported adequate test-retest reliability for factors related to job satisfaction, with Cronbach's alpha indicating strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.87$).

- **Job Satisfaction**

In this analysis, job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), developed by Weiss, Kalleberg, and colleagues at the University of Minnesota in the 1960s. The MSQ is a paper-based survey that assesses employee job satisfaction, offering insights into specific job aspects. The original 20-item scale was adapted to 15 items for this study's context. The scale's validity is supported by previous research (see, for instance, Dziuba et al., 2020), which confirms its high reliability, stability, and cross-cultural equivalence.

- **Organisational Conflict**

Organisational conflict was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from established conflict scales (see, for example, Larsen et al., 2023). Items assessed the frequency of disagreements between employees and management and among employees, the effectiveness of conflict resolution, personal stress from unresolved conflict, and the disruption of organisational goals by conflict. The scale has been validated in many countries (see, for example, Zakaria et al., 2023; Spector et al., 2023).

In this study, we used SmartPLS software and adopted the PLS path modelling approach to estimate the structural equation model. Several metrics were employed to assess the reliability and validity of the results, as well as the model's goodness of fit.

4. Results

The study results are presented in this section.

4.1. Measurement Model Testing

In this study, we used Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) to assess internal consistency reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) to assess the convergent validity. Table 1 presents the CA, CR, and AVE values. The CA and CR values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming the internal consistency of the constructs and indicating that the data are reliable (Hair et al., 2010; Musevenzo et al., 2024). Convergent validity was also established, as the AVE values are above the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010; Nunnally, 1994).

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity results

Items	CA	CR	AVE
IR	0.879	0.909	0.658
JS	0.998	0.935	0.672
OC	0.903	0.932	0.665

IR, industrial relations; JS, job satisfaction; OC, organisational conflict; CA, Cronbach's alpha; CR, composite reliability.

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity, and the results are presented in Table 2. The square roots of the AVE values exceed the correlation coefficients among the variables, indicating the presence of discriminant validity (Wan & Duffy, 2022). Furthermore, the correlation coefficients for the variables used in this study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation coefficient matrix and discriminant validity

	IR	JS	OC
IR	0.811		
JS	0.765	0.820	
OC	0.782	0.723	0.815

Note: Bold values signify the square root of AVE.

IR, industrial relations; JS, job satisfaction; OC, organisational conflict.

Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) technique (see Table 3). The HTMT ratios ranged from 0.858 to 0.881, all below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating that adequate discriminant validity was established among the constructs.

Table 3. Heterotrait–Monotrait and discriminant validity

	IR	JS	OC
IR			
JS	0.858		
OC	0.878	0.881	

IR, industrial relations; JS, job satisfaction; OC, organisational conflict.

4.2. Goodness-of-Fit Metrics

The normed fit index (NFI) and the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) were used to assess the goodness-of-fit of the proposed model in this study (see Table 4). The SRMR value of 0.078 falls below the recommended threshold of 0.08 (Goretzko et al., 2024), indicating an acceptable model fit. Furthermore, the NFI value of 0.911 exceeds the suggested benchmark of 0.90, suggesting that the

model fits the data well (Musevenzo et al., 2024). Overall, these results indicate that the proposed model demonstrates a satisfactory fit to the data.

Table 4. Goodness-of-fit results

SRMR	NFI
0.078	0.911

SRMR, standardised root mean square residual; NFI, normed fit index.

4.3. Structural Equation Model and Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modelling was employed to test the relationships among the variables indicated in the conceptual framework. The estimated structural path coefficients linked to the hypothesised relationships are reported in Table 5 below. This study assessed the significance of both direct and indirect effects using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples.

The results indicate that organisational conflict has a negative effect on industrial relations ($\beta = -0.274$, $t = 2.452$, $p = 0.001$). Also, organisational conflict negatively influences job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.227$, $t = 2.451$, $p = 0.024$), and industrial relations has a positive effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.215$, $t = 2.187$, $p = 0.001$). Further, results indicate that industrial relations significantly mediate the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The indirect path from organisational conflict to job satisfaction through industrial relations is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 2.304$, $p = 0.001$). This suggests that organisational conflict influences job satisfaction through its effect on industrial relations. In other words, changes in the level of organisational conflict affect industrial relations, which in turn impacts employees' job satisfaction. In summary, H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported.

Table 5. SEM path results and hypotheses decisions

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	T statistic	P-values	Decision
Direct effect					
H1	OC → IR	-0.274	2.452	0.001	Supported
H2	OC → JS	-0.227	2.451	0.024	Supported
H3	IR → JS	0.215	2.187	0.001	Supported
Mediating effect					
H4	OC → IR → JS	0.206	2.304	0.001	Supported

IR, industrial relations; JS, job satisfaction; OC, organisational conflict.

Figure 2 provides a comprehensive visual representation of the fitted model, displaying both coefficients and relationship among the variables. It enables researchers to gain insights into the overall structural dynamics of the model and the complex interactions among its constructs.

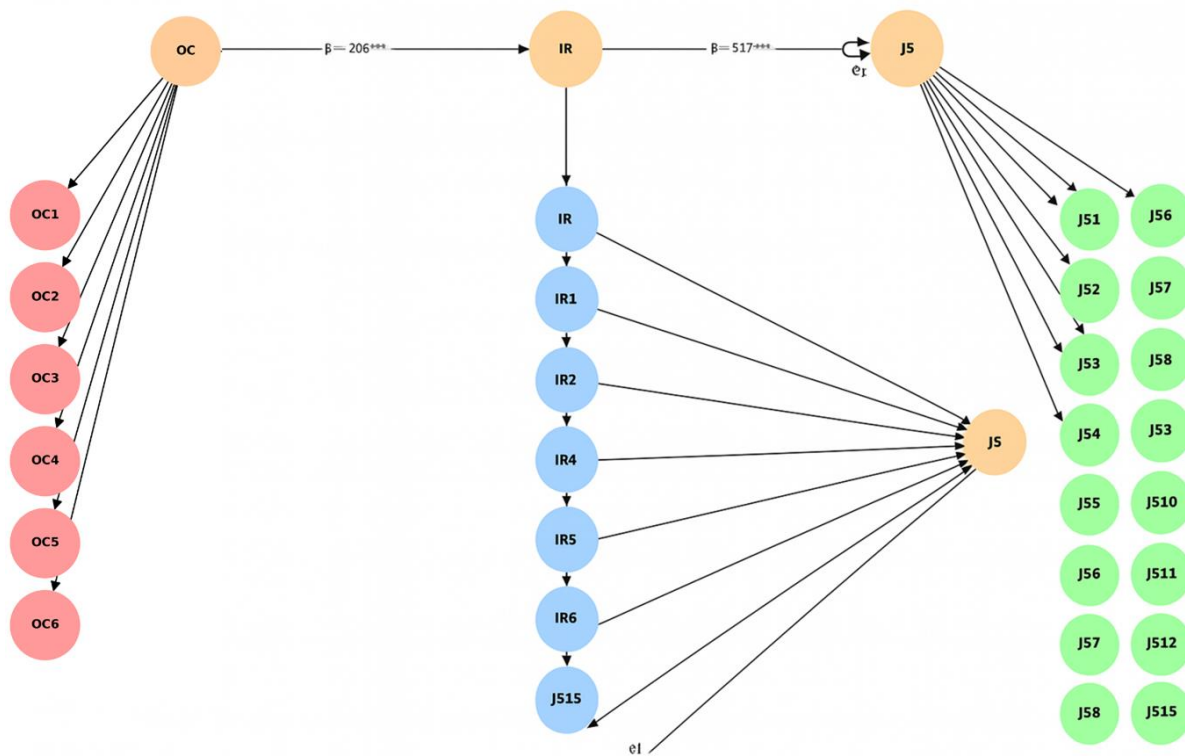


Figure 2. Structural equation model

IR, industrial relations; JS, job satisfaction; OC, organisational conflict.

5. Discussion

The study results reveal that organisational conflict negatively affect industrial relations, indicating that higher levels of organisational conflict tend to undermine industrial relations within the workplace. When conflict becomes frequent or poorly managed, it can erode trust between management and employees, weaken mutual respect, and disrupt effective communication channels. This deterioration often leads to increased tension, reduced cooperation, and adversarial interactions between stakeholders, including trade unions and management. As a result, the organisation may experience more grievances, disputes, and possible work stoppages, all of which negatively affect productivity and overall organisational stability. Furthermore, persistent conflict can create a hostile work environment, lowering employee morale and engagement, and making it more difficult to achieve consensus on important organisational decisions. Bensouda and El Aissaoui (2025) postulated that poorly managed conflicts lead to reduced productivity, economic losses and reputational damage. Castellini et al. (2022) opined that interpersonal conflicts in the workplace hinder employee health and performance, while also undermining individuals' rights and dignity. Bensouda et al. (2025) argued that labour conflicts weaken employee motivation, creating barriers to innovation and organisational competitiveness. Similarly, Shahid and Azhar (2013) emphasised that unsettled conflicts disrupt organisational equilibrium, leading to a substantial decline in worker motivation and engagement, which ultimately decreases productivity and overall effectiveness. These disruptions also increase worker turnover rates, thereby jeopardising operational continuity and team cohesion (Bensouda et al.,

2025). Thus, effectively managing and resolving organisational conflict is critical to fostering healthy industrial relations and ensuring long-term organisational performance. On the other hand, organisational conflict can have a positive influence on industrial relations. Bensouda and El Aissaoui (2025) highlighted that constructive management can transform conflicts into levers of cohesion, regulation, and innovation. Existing literature also indicated that conflict can trigger better decision-making if managed well.

We discovered that organisational conflicts negatively affect job satisfaction, highlighting that higher levels of organisational conflict reduce job satisfaction. Organisational conflicts negatively affect job satisfaction by creating a work environment characterised by tension, stress, and uncertainty. When conflicts are frequent or poorly managed, they can strain relationships among employees and between staff and management, leading to reduced trust and morale. This often results in employees feeling undervalued, frustrated, and less engaged in their work. Over time, such conditions diminish overall job satisfaction, as employees experience less enjoyment and fulfilment in their roles, which may also increase absenteeism and turnover intentions. In support of our finding, Castellini et al. (2022) posited that interpersonal conflicts at workplace hamper job satisfaction. Musariwa et al. (2024) opined that conflict creates stress, reduces morale, and fosters antagonism, which all diminish satisfaction. Existent literature also indicated that individuals who experience workplace conflict tend to report lower job satisfaction and are more likely to suffer from poorer mental and physical health.

Study findings indicate that industrial relations positively affect job satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of industrial relations enhance job satisfaction. Positive industrial relations enhance job satisfaction by fostering a supportive and cooperative work environment. When relationships between management, employees, and trade unions are characterised by trust, fairness, and effective communication, employees are more likely to feel valued and respected. This promotes a sense of security and inclusion, which increases morale and engagement. As a result, employees experience greater satisfaction with their jobs, leading to improved commitment, productivity, and overall organisational performance. Shabane et al. (2022) found that positive industrial relations improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover across sectors. Hossain and Rahman (2016) propounded that there is a positive connection between sound industrial relations and job satisfaction.

In line with our expectations, we discovered that industrial relations mediate the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The indirect path from organisational conflict to job satisfaction through industrial relations is positive and statistically significant. The finding offers an important theoretical and practical insight. It suggests that while organisational conflict may inherently carry disruptive potential, its ultimate impact on job satisfaction is not deterministic but contingent upon the quality of industrial relations within the organisation. Effective industrial relations - characterised by trust, open communication, fair procedures, and collaborative engagement between management and employees - can absorb, channel, and even transform conflict into constructive outcomes. In such contexts, conflict may be managed in ways that reinforce perceptions of fairness and voice, thereby enhancing rather than diminishing job satisfaction. This underscores the strategic role of robust industrial relations systems as a buffering and enabling mechanism, capable of converting potentially negative organisational dynamics into positive employee attitudes and experiences. Shabane et al. (2022) argued that the state of management-worker relations explains how conflict translates into dissatisfaction. GoGloby (2026) articulated that effective industrial relations ensure that worker concerns are addressed and fair practices are upheld, leading to improved job satisfaction as employees feel heard and their issues are resolved promptly.

6. Conclusions

This study analysed the mediating role of industrial relations in the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction within Chinese-owned mining companies operating in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a quantitative approach grounded in a positivist research philosophy. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through a stratified random sampling technique. The sample comprised of 250 employees working in Chinese-owned mining entities who were familiar with labour relations issues within their organisations. Structural equation modelling was implemented to analyse the associations between industrial relations, organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The study results indicate that organisational conflict has a negative effect on both industrial relations and job satisfaction. In contrast, industrial relations has a positive effect on job satisfaction. Further, industrial relations significantly mediate the relationship between organisational conflict and job satisfaction. The indirect path from organisational conflict to job satisfaction through industrial relations is positive and statistically significant.

Future research could extend this study by adopting longitudinal designs to examine how organisational conflict, industrial relations, and job satisfaction evolve over time, as the current study employed a cross-sectional approach that limits causal interpretation. Comparative studies between Chinese-owned, locally owned, and other foreign-owned mining firms could also provide deeper insights into how ownership structures influence organisational conflict management, industrial relations and job satisfaction. Additionally, cross-country investigations within African mining sectors may help identify the institutional, cultural, and regulatory factors that shape industrial relations, conflict management and job satisfaction practices in enterprises. Future studies may further incorporate additional mediating or moderating variables, such as leadership style, organisational justice, organisational culture, and employee voice mechanisms, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics linking organisational conflict and job satisfaction. Finally, the use of mixed methods approaches, including qualitative interviews with employees, managers, and trade union representatives, could offer richer insights into the underlying causes of workplace conflict, effectiveness of industrial relations mechanisms in promoting workplace harmony, and job satisfaction strategies.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the reviewers for their constructive recommendations, comments, and suggestions, which have substantially improved the quality of the manuscript. The authors also express their sincere appreciation to all participants who contributed to the study.

References

- Anjum, A., Ming, X., Siddiqi, A. F., Rasool, S. F., & Hafeez, M. (2021). Impact of work-family conflict on job burnout and job satisfaction: Moderating role of job support. *Psychology Research and Behaviour Management, 14*, 335-348.
- Barry, M., & Wilkinson, A. (2022). Employee voice, psychologisation and human resource management (HRM). *Human Resource Management Journal, 32*(3), 631-646.
- Bensouda, A., & El Aissaoui, H. (2025). The impact of labour conflicts on organisational performance: Insights from a literature review. *International Journal of Accounting Finance Auditing Management and Economics, 6*(10), 364-382.

- Bensouda, A., El Aissaoui, H., & Ourdi, A. (2025). Impact of labour conflicts on employee innovation: The role of proactive HRM. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23, 2900.
- Budd, J. W., & Bhave, D. P. (2019). The employment relationship: Key elements, alternative frames of reference, and implications for HRM. In A. Wilkinson, N. Bacon, D. Lepak and S. Snell (eds), *SAGE Handbook of Human Resource Management* (2nd ed.), pp. 41–64. SAGE.
- Cannas, V. G., Ciano, M. P., Saltalamacchia, M., & Secchi, R. (2024). Artificial intelligence in supply chain and operations management: A multiple case study research. *International Journal of Production Research*, 62(9), 3333–3360.
- Carciotto, S., & Chikohomero, R. (2022). Chinese labour practices in six southern African countries. *Institute for Security Studies Monographs*, 2022(207), 928-961.
- Castellini, G., Consonni, D., & Costa, G. (2022). Conflicts in the workplace, negative acts and health consequences: evidence from a clinical evaluation. *Industrial Health*, 61(1), 40-55.
- Chambati, W. (2020). Chinese investment and Zimbabwe's labour regime. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 9(2), 156–177.
- Chingono, H., & Mawowa, S. (2020). Chinese investment in Zimbabwe and the impact on industrial relations. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(4), 789–804.
- Chingono, T., & Mutingi, M. (2021). Occupational health and safety challenges in Chinese-owned mining enterprises in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 47(4), 689–705.
- Dahiya, R., Singh, A., & Pandey, A. (2025). Social strife at work: unravelling the link between workplace relationship conflict and employee ostracism behavior. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 36(1), 48-69.
- Dastmalchian, A., Bacon, N., Blyton, P., & Fiorito, J. (2020). The Employment Relations Climate: A critical review and agenda for research. *ILR Review*, 73(4), 859–886.
- De Wit, F. R. C., Greer, L. L., & Jehn, K. A. (2020). The paradox of intragroup conflict: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 105(2), 132-168.
- Duarte, A. P., & Silva, V. H. (2023). Satisfaction with internal communication and hospitality employees' turnover intention: Exploring the mediating role of organizational support and job satisfaction. *Administrative Sciences*, 13(10), 216.
- Dziuba, S. T., Ingaldi, M., & Zhuravskaya, M. (2020). Examination of job satisfaction and employee performance's impact on workplace safety. *CzOTO*, 2(1), 18-25.
- Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6), 00149.
- Ferrare, J. J., & Phillippo, K. (2023). Conflict theory extended: A framework for understanding contemporary struggles over education policy. *Educational Policy*, 37(3), 587-623.
- GoGloby. (2026). *What Is Industrial Relation?* <https://gogloby.com/glossary/industrial-relation/#:~:text=Industrial%20Relation%20Definition,communication%20channels%20and%20mutual%20collaboration>
- Goretzko, D., Siemund, K., & Sterner, P. (2024). Evaluating model fit of measurement models in confirmatory factor analysis. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 84(1), 123–144.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Hendren, K., Newcomer, K., Pandey, S. K., Smith, M., & Sumner, N. (2023). How qualitative research methods can be leveraged to strengthen mixed methods research in public policy and public administration? *Public Administration Review*, 83(3), 468-485.
- Hlongwa, S. (2019). Occupational stress and job satisfaction in the mining industry. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 29(3), 281-287.
- Hossain, M. A., & Rahman, T. (2016). The impact of sound industrial relations on job satisfaction: A case of different manufacturing industries in Bangladesh. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 8(11), 1-5.

- Huaman, N., Morales-García, W. C., Castillo-Blanco, R., Saintila, J., Huancahuire-Vega, S., Morales-García, S. B., Calizaya-Milla, Y. E., & Palacios-Fonseca, A. (2023). An explanatory model of work-family conflict and resilience as predictors of job satisfaction in nurses: the mediating role of work engagement and communication skills. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health, 14*, 21501319231151380.
- Inegbedion, H. E. (2024). Work-life balance and employee commitment: Mediating effect of job satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, 1349555.
- Jehn, K. A., & Bendersky, C. (2018). Intragroup conflict in organizations: A contingency perspective on the conflict-outcome relationship. *Research in Organizational Behaviour, 38*(1), 1–32.
- Larsen, L., Helland, M. S., & Holt, T. (2023). Validation of the Conflict Resolution Scale from the Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales and a New Abbreviated Short Form. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 32*(10), 2915-2930.
- Maryani, M., & Gazali, A. U. (2024). The effect of work conflict on job stress and employee performance. *Golden Ratio of Human Resource Management, 4*(2), 158-171.
- Mawowa, S. (2016). Labour and foreign direct investment: A case of Chinese mines in Zimbabwe. *Labour, Capital and Society, 49*(1), 67-85.
- Mlambo, C. (2025). Worker rights and social justice in Zimbabwe's mining sector. *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science, 11*(9), 394-403
- Mlambo, S. (2021). Labour relations and dispute resolution in Zimbabwe's Chinese-owned mines: A case study of Shangani Mine. *African Journal of Employee Relations, 45*(2), 45–67.
- Mlambo, S., & Dube, N. (2021). Foreign direct investment and labour standards: The case of Chinese mining firms in Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Business, 22*(3), 345–362.
- Moyo, T. (2021). Labour unrest in Zimbabwe's Chinese-owned mines. *African Studies Quarterly, 20*(1), 45–62.
- Muchowe, R. M., Tshuma, S., Dube, M., & Dhende, N. (2023). Causes of unfair labour practices in Chinese owned firms in the mining sector in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Research Publications, 135*(1), 101-108.
- Musariwa, P., Rampersad, R., & Govender, N. (2024). Challenges in the practices of corporate social responsibility in Zimbabwe: The case of the mining industry. *Journal of Contemporary Management, 20*(si1), 288-310.
- Musevenzo, T., Mashavira, N., Chikove, M., & Matenda, F.R. (2024). Employee engagement, job satisfaction and decent work in the Zimbabwean gold mining sector. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/ SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur, 22*(0), a2710.
- Nunnally, J. C. (1994). *Psychometric theory 3E*. Tata McGraw-Hill Education.
- Orsini, A. (2024). Marxism and conflict theory. In *Sociological theory: From comte to postcolonialism* (pp. 361-434). Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Pavlović, M., Stojanović-Višić, B., & Ristić, M. R. (2022). The relationship between workplace conflicts and job satisfaction in the public sector in Serbia. *Management: Journal of Sustainable Business and Management Solutions in Emerging Economies, 27*(1), 55-68.
- Pembi, S., Ikemefuna, M., Kibikiwa, G. M., & Zoakah, J. D. (2023). Conflict in organisations: An examination of its types, sources, effects and management strategies. *Organization and Human Capital Development, 2*(1), 53.
- Petropoulos, F., Laporte, G., Aktas, E., Alumur, S. A., Archetti, C., Ayhan, H., Battarra, M., Bennell, J. A., Bourjolly, J. M., Boylan, J. E., & Breton, M. (2024). Operational research: Methods and applications. *Journal of the Operational Research Society, 75*(3), 423-617.
- Prayogi, A. (2023). Social change in conflict theory: A descriptive study. *ARRUS Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 3*(1), 37-42.
- Rahim, M. A. (2017). *Managing conflict in organizations* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Santos, T., Santos, E., Sousa, M., & Oliveira, M. (2024). The mediating effect of motivation between internal communication and job satisfaction. *Administrative Sciences, 14*(4), 69.

Shabane, Z. W., Schultz, C., Lessing, K. F., & Van Hoek, C. E. (2022). Influence of job satisfaction on employee relations and work engagement. *African Journal of Employee Relations*, 46(1), 1-25.

Shahid, A., & Azhar, S. M. (2013). Gaining employee commitment: Linking to organizational effectiveness. *Journal of Management Research*, 5(1), 250.

Snape, E., & Redman, T. (2019). Industrial relations climate: A review of current research and future directions. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 6(4), 246–262.

Spector, P. E. (2022). *Job satisfaction: From assessment to intervention*. Routledge.

Spector, P. E., Gray, C. E., & Rosen, C. C. (2023). Are biasing factors idiosyncratic to measures? A comparison of interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, and workload. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 38(5), 983-1002.

Wan, W., & Duffy, R.D. (2022). Decent work and turnover intention among new generation employees: The mediating role of job satisfaction and the moderating role of job autonomy. *Sage Open*, 12(2), 21582440221094591.

Zakaria, N., Ahmad, A., & Azman, N. (2023). Conflict management styles and organizational commitment: A study among Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor employees. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 8(9), 22.

Zimbabwe Chamber of Mines. (2024). *Annual mining sector report*. Government Printers.

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. (2020). *Report on labour violations in foreign-owned mines*.

Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency. (2025). *Invest - promote Zimbabwe*. Government of Zimbabwe.