

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY REGARDING THE MODERATING ROLE OF INCIVILITY BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR

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Abstract. *Lack of civility within the organization leads to serious damage to the interpersonal relationship among employees and can be a strong predictor for developing more severe forms of violence, resulting in low productivity, low job satisfaction, financial loss, as well as an increase in health insurance. Uncivility in work environment is a concept of antisocial behavior recently introduced, characterized by disrespect for others, recklessness, impoliteness, lack of manners and social isolation. The current research included 65 participants (32 male and 33 female), private sector employees, aged between 23 and 59 years ($M = 34.43$, $SD = 8.53$), who were invited to answer to the following questionnaires: a) Stress scales. The Stress scale combine four subscales - ICAWS - Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale; OCS - Organizational Constraints Scale; QWI - Quantitative Workload Inventory and PSI - Physical Symptoms Inventory; b) Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist. The CWB scale contains five subscales: abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal; c) Uncivil Workplace Behavior Scale. The results showed significant positive correlations between occupational stress and counterproductive work behavior ($r = .56$; $p = .000$), and between occupational stress and incivility ($r = .31$; $p = .001$). At the same time, we have found a significant positive correlation between counterproductive work behavior and incivility ($r = .39$; $p = .000$). Concerning gender differences in performing counterproductive work behaviors, the mean scores of CWB reported by males ($M = 45$, $SD = 8.89$) were significantly higher ($t(63) = 2.55$, $p = .014$) than those reported by female participants ($M = 40.4$; $SD = 4.91$). Regarding the main objective of the research, the moderation analysis certifies that uncivility of the employees performed within the organizational environment influences the relationship between occupational stress and counterproductive work behavior: $\Delta R^2 = .132$ It, $F(1, 61) = 16.280$, $p < .000$. In conclusion, this research revealed that impolite, rude behavior oriented toward other members of the organization, associated with increased occupational stress, will only hasten and accentuate the emergence of counterproductive work behaviors.*

Keywords: *incivility; occupational stress; counterproductive work behavior.*

Introduction

In the last decade, organizational researchers have examined counterproductive work behavior (CWB), defined as behaviors that harm or intends to harm organizations and their stakeholders, within the occupational stress framework. Other studies (e.g., Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001) were focused mainly on CWB as an emotion-based strain response to job stressors. The current one, aim to investigate the moderating effect of uncivility on the relationship between occupational stress and counterproductive work behavior.

Jex and Beehr (1991) mentioned that a job stressor is represented by any situation that requires an adaptive response on the part of an employee. A job stressor can be anything an employee might interpret as being threatening to his or her psychological or physical well-being (Spector, 2002). Job stressors are events or environmental conditions, intense or frequent enough, demanding certain types of physiological and psychosocial reactions from the individual (Elliot & Eisdorfer, 1982).

Le Blanc, De Jonge and Schaufeli (2000) mentioned that stimuli having the potential to generate stress within an organization could be divided into four main categories: job content, working conditions, employment conditions and workplace social network. The first category compile work stressors such as monotony of work, complexity of work, increased responsibility, work overload or underload. In the working conditions, category one can find the following stressors: poor working conditions, toxic substances, lack of hygiene, and lack of protection. The third category, employment conditions list stressors such as working hours, low payment and job insecurity. In the last category, social network stressors the authors mentioned: poor management, low social support, and discrimination.

Jex and Beehr (1991) defined the employee responses to those stressors as being a job strain. Those responses can be psychological, physical, or behavioral in nature (Beehr, 1995; Jex, 2002; Jex & Beehr, 1991). According to Spector and Jex (1998), and Spector and Fox (2002) job stressors represent events that are interpreted by the employees as threats to well-being and result in negative emotional reactions, such as anger, anxiety or depression. The most known psychological strains are depression, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. In the area of physical reactions, one can find symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, cardiovascular or skeletomuscular illnesses. Behavioral responses include absenteeism, poor performance or poor job quality, and turnover.

Some of the most common psychological effects are burnout, boredom, fatigue, anxiety, frustration etc. Physiological effects include various pains, ulcers, hormonal imbalances, heart disease etc. Behavioral effects are usually: abuse of harmful or toxic substances (tobacco, alcohol, and drugs), accidents, family problems, or effects in the organizational area such as decreased work performance, absenteeism, accidents, and turnover.

Spector (1998) and Spector and Fox (2002) developed a job stress/emotion/CWB model that suggests CWB is an emotion-based response to stressors at work. Negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety, have been shown to mediate the relationship between CWB and job stressors (Fox et al., 2001). Lee (2003) examined the effect of conflict source (supervisor vs. coworker) on CWB target (organizational vs. personal).

She found some support that negative emotions mediated the relationship between conflict with one's supervisor and organizational CWB.

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) represents a set of volitional acts that can be aimed at the organization itself or people in the organization (e.g., supervisor, coworker, subordinates) and either harm or are carried out with the explicit intention to harm (Spector & Fox, 2005).

Counterproductive work behaviors include, among others: abusive behavior, physical and verbal aggression, poor performance, sabotage, theft, absenteeism, delays etc. Those behaviors are produced intentionally by employees and have a negative effect on the organization, employees or other stakeholders. The typology of these behaviors includes both behaviors oriented against organization and behaviors oriented against individuals. Behaviors that are oriented against organization can range from minor forms of counterproductive behavior such as excessive breaks, early departure or the slow pace of work, to serious forms such as sabotage or theft. At the same time, counterproductive behaviors aimed at employees can range from relatively minor ones such as gossip, favoritism to actions with more serious implications such as sexual harassment, abuse, and bullying.

Studies on the dimensionality of CWB have shown that it can be divided into five categories: abuse against others, sabotage, production deviance, theft, and withdrawal (Spector et al., 2006). Abuse against others represents harmful behaviors that can be psychological or physical in nature. Examples are making nasty comments about coworkers or undermining a coworker's ability to work effectively (Spector et al., 2006). Sabotage affects physical property belonging to the organization (i.e., defacing or destroying the physical workplace), whereas production deviance represents behaviors that destroy the work process (e.g., purposefully performing one's work incorrectly) (Spector et al., 2006). Moreover, production deviance is generally passive in nature, whereas sabotage is more active. Theft can be considered a form of aggression against the organization (Neuman & Baron, 1997) even though it usually results from economic need, injustice, or job dissatisfaction (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002). Withdrawal consists of behaviors that reduce the amount of time one works to less than what the organization requires (e.g., leaving early or taking longer breaks than allowed; Spector et al., 2006).

Bennett and Robinson (2001) mentioned three main trends in the analysis of predictors of counterproductive behavior, namely: deviance as a reaction to the employee experiences; deviance as a reflection of employees' personality; deviance as an adaptation to social context. In the first category, deviance as a reaction to the employee experiences, we meet research on theft, vandalism, aggression in response to frustration, lack of control or perception of injustice, unfairness, which apparently is one of the strongest predictors of counterproductive work behavior.

The second category, deviance as a reflection of employees' personality claims that different dimensions of personality might explain some of the variances of deviant behavior (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998). In the same direction, the research conducted by Shin, Ashton and Lee (2001) showed that certain personality dimensions predict various types of organizational deviance. Deviance oriented against the organization is thus associated with low conscientiousness and interpersonal deviance is associated with low levels of extraversion and agreeability.

Colbert, Mount, Witt, Harter and Barrick (2004) showed that emotional stability, conscientiousness and agreeability moderates the relationship between perceived work situation and counterproductive behaviors. Other research conducted by Douglas and Martinko (2001) showed that anger, attributional style, negative affectivity, and other personality factors explain a large proportion of the variance of work bullying.

The third category - deviance as an adaptation to the social context - is based on the assumption that by definition, organizational deviance involves violation of organizational norms, but it seems that peer pressure, specific norms and regulations actually supporting the deviance are essential for it to occur. A primary predictor of antisocial behavior at work is the degree of peers' involvement in similar behavior (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Mikulay, Neuman, and Finkelstein (2001) showed that one factor that may be considered as a predictor of counterproductive behavior is represented by the lack of loyalty of employees to the organization.

In a study of abusive behavior in the workplace, Keashly, Trott, and MacLean (1994) found that all participants had experienced at least one incident of nonsexual, nonphysical abusive behavior. They have also reported that the supervisors, followed by peers and subordinates, represented the most common perpetrator. In addition, they have reported a higher degree of impact by abuse from supervisors than from coworkers (Keashly, Trott & MacLean, 2002). Similarly, in their study of employee aggression, Greenberg and Barling (1999) found that more than 70% of participants reported having psychologically aggressed at least once. Gossiping about or arguing with the target were the most frequent forms of psychological aggression.

Regarding the behavioral reactions to CWB, LeBlanc and Kelloway (2002) mentioned turnover and decrements in communication and performance. Work-related psychological reactions are job dissatisfaction, work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, and decrements in normative commitment, and affective commitment (Tepper, 2000). The psychological reactions to CWB were studied by many researchers who found that CWB leads to feelings of depression and anxiety, emotional exhaustion, life dissatisfaction (Tepper, 2000), decrements in emotional well-being (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002; Schat & Kelloway, 2000).

Incivility at work is a relatively new concept of antisocial behavior introduced in organizational psychology studies, characterized by disrespect for others, rudeness, disrespect, boorishness etc. (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Johnson & Invik, 2001). Incivility refers to relatively mild, insensitive, rude, or discourteous behavior toward others at work (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). Incivility and interpersonal conflict involve perceptions of interpersonal mistreatment, but the perceived (benign, benevolent, or malevolent) intent of the instigator varies with each. For example, the underlying motive of incivility is ambiguous, whereas there is clear hostile intent with interpersonal conflict (Penney & Spector, 2005).

The literature described deviations at work as a continuum starting from incivility to aggression or violence (Vickers, 2006), incivility being defined as low-intensity deviance (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001). Even if the unpolite behavior was defined as low intensity, it should not be confused with a minor problem (Vickers, 2006). Impoliteness deserves serious attention because of its harmful effects on both individuals and organizations. Previous findings showed that organizational and

individual performance, as well as employee productivity, health, labor attitudes and interpersonal relationships in the organizational environment were negatively affected by the lack of civility in the workplace (Neuman & Baron, 1997; Pearson, Anderson & Wegner, 2001).

Anderson and Pearson (1999, p.457) define work incivility as "... low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect". They also pointed out that witnessing incivility could encourage a kind of incivility spiral so that behavior increasingly rude might become a defining characteristic of organizational climate. Examples of incivility are speaking to someone in a demeaning manner; treating someone like a child; publicly undermining someone's credibility; excluding someone from a meeting; not greeting someone; and cutting someone off when they are speaking (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000).

Hartman (1996) argues that every organization highlights certain norms of interpersonal respect and a shared understanding of morality and ways to behavior within the community. Any type of rude behavior violates these rules, transforming rudeness into a specific variety of workplace deviance, defined by Robinson and Bennett (1997, p.5) such as "a voluntary behavior that violates the organization's rules and by this threatening the organizational and individual well-being".

A more detailed account of the concept of incivility at work is encountered in the work of Lim, Cortina, and Magley (2008). They say that there are three important characteristics that differentiate incivility of other forms of mistreatment at work: violating the norms of respect, intensity, and ambiguity in the intent to harm. In conclusion, the lack of civility in the workplace can lead to impaired interpersonal relationships and can be a strong predictor for developing more severe forms of violence (Lim & Cortina, 2005).

Reactions to incivility include effects at the individual level, such as stress and decrements in psychological well-being and satisfaction (Lim & Cortina, 2005), and effects at the organizational level such as low performance, job dissatisfaction and intent to quit (Lim & Cortina, 2005). Participants in Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2000) study of workplace incivility reported specific ways of coping with incivility, starting from committing intentional acts such as reducing efforts at work (25%) and reducing one's organizational commitment (33%), to intentionally avoiding the instigator (25%), whereas some others decreased the amount of time spent at work. Twelve percent of participants actually quit their jobs in response to uncivil acts. Furthermore, 5% of respondents stole property from the instigator as retaliation for unfair treatment, whereas another 5% stole property from the organization itself (Pearson et al., 2001). One has also to be aware that a work incivility target may also direct his aggression towards the organization. Penney (2002) examined the relationship between incivility and CWB, using both self- and peer-reports, discovering that both self- and peer-reports of incivility were related to self-report of CWB.

Methods

Given those previous empirical findings, it was expected that the relationship between occupational stress and CWB to be moderated by workplace incivility. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1: there will be a positive correlation between stress subscales and CWB

Hypothesis 2: there will be a positive correlation between CBW and incivility

Hypothesis 2: incivility will moderate the relation between stress and CWB.

The employee (self) survey included measures of job stress, incivility and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). Participants were private sector employees, aged between 23 and 59 years ($M = 34.43$, $SD = 8.53$), 32 male and 33 female. They were invited to fill in a set of questionnaires compiling the following measures: Stress scales (Spector & Jex, 1998) which combine four subscales - ICAWS - Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale; OCS - Organizational Constraints Scale; QWI - Quantitative Workload Inventory and PSI - Physical Symptoms Inventory; Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (Spector et al., 2006). The CWB scale contains five subscales: abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft and withdrawal; and Uncivil Workplace Behavior Scale (Martin & Hine, 2005).

Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale, ICAWS, is a four-item scale, who asks about how well the respondent gets along with others at work, specifically getting into arguments with others and how often others act nasty to the respondent. High scores represent frequent conflicts with others, with a possible range from 4 to 20. Internal consistency reliability was reported by Spector and Jex (1998) to average .74. *Organizational Constraints Scale*, OCS, was based on the work of Peters and O'Connor (1980) who listed 11 areas of constraints, e.g., faulty equipment, or incomplete information. Respondents are asked to indicate how often it is difficult or impossible to do his or her job because of each item. High scores represent high levels of constraints, with a possible range of scores from 11 to 55. *Quantitative Workload Inventory*, QWI, is a 5-item scale designed to assess the amount or quantity of work in a job, as opposed to qualitative workload, which is the difficulty of the work. Respondents are asked to indicate how often each statement occurs. High scores represent a high level of workload, with a possible range from 5 to 25. Spector and Jex (1998) reported an average internal consistency of .82. *Physical Symptoms Inventory*, PSI, assess the physical, somatic health symptoms thought by stress researchers to be associated with psychological distress. Each is a condition/state about which a person would likely be aware, e.g., headache. Respondents are asked to indicate for each symptom if they did not have it, had it, or saw a doctor for it in the past 30 days.

Counterproductive work behavior was measured using the 32-item Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) (Spector et al., 2006), that produces 5 subscales of abuse (harmful and nasty behaviors that affect other people), production deviance (purposely doing the job incorrectly or allowing errors to occur), sabotage (destroying the physical environment), theft, and withdrawal (avoiding work through being absent or late). Respondents indicate how often they engage in specific behaviors on the job. Response options range from 1 (never) to 5 (every day), with high scores representing the higher incidence of CWB.

The Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire, UWBQ, (Martin & Hine, 2005) is a 17-

item multidimensional instrument assessing four different facets of workplace incivility: gossiping, hostility, exclusionary behavior, and privacy invasion. Participants were asked to rate how often they experienced particular uncivil workplace behavior (from their supervisors or co-workers) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Never* (1) to *Very Often* (5). Higher scores indicated experience of more frequent uncivil behaviors from supervisor or co-workers. Martin and Hine (2005) reported that coefficient alpha for the UWBQ was .92.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the measures are presented in Table 1 and the inter-correlations among the measures are displayed in Table 2 and 3. The distribution of scores on each of the measures appeared to be normal, with the exception of CWB total score, production deviance, sabotage, theft, withdrawal, organizational constraints and privacy invasion. For these three measures, the distribution of scores was positively skewed.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for measures

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interpersonal Conflict at Work	65	8.49	1.786
Organizational Constraints	65	19.85	5.922
Quantitative Workload	65	13.69	4.633
Physical Symptoms	65	5.52	3.593
Stress total score	65	11.8885	2.71247
Abuse	65	1.4496	.31145
Production deviance	65	1.2821	.40065
Sabotage	65	1.0769	.17450
Theft	65	1.1108	.30214
Withdrawal	65	1.9269	.63542
CWB total score	65	42.6769	7.46472
Exclusionary behavior	65	2.0031	.50805
Gossiping	65	1.7923	.61646
Privacy invasion	65	1.3462	.45862
Hostility	65	1.7269	.47747
UWB total score	65	1.7171	.36088
Valid N (listwise)	65		

Significant correlations were found between stress (composite score) and CWB ($r=.564$, $p<.01$), and also between the majority of subscales of each measure. Therefore, support was found for the first hypothesis. On one hand, the CWB composite score is positively correlated with Organizational Constraints ($r=.446$, $p<.01$), Quantitative Workload ($r=.355$, $p<.01$) and Physical Symptoms ($r=.417$, $p<.01$), but not with Interpersonal Conflict at Work. On the other hand, the Stress composite score positively correlate with Abuse ($r=.467$, $p<.01$), Production deviance ($r=.321$, $p<.01$), Theft ($r=.507$, $p<.01$) and Withdrawal ($r=.451$, $p<.01$), but not with Sabotage.

Table 2. Correlation matrix between stress and CWB

		Abuse	Production deviance	Theft	Withdrawal	CWB total
Organizational Constraints	Pearson Correl.	.379**	.253*	.357**	.378**	.446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.042	.003	.002	.000

Quantitative Workload	Pearson Correl.	.265*	.199	.427**	.291*	.355**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	.112	.000	.019	.004
Physical Symptoms	Pearson Correl.	.299*	.189	.375**	.369**	.417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.132	.002	.002	.001
Stress total	Pearson Correl.	.467**	.321**	.507**	.451**	.564**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.009	.000	.000	.000

Support was also found for the second hypothesis. Self-reported incivility was positively correlated with self-reported CWB ($r=.395, p<.01$). The sub-scales correlations were significant only for the relations between Incivility and Abuse ($r=.466, p<.01$) and for CWB composite score with Gossiping ($r=.437, p<.01$), and Hostility ($r=.299, p<.05$).

Table 3. Correlation matrix between Incivility and CWB

		Abuse	Sabotage	CWB total
Gossiping	Pearson Correl.	.569**	.272*	.437**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.028	.000
Hostility	Pearson Correl.	.404**	.240	.299*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.054	.015
UWB total	Pearson Correl.	.466**	.161	.395**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.201	.001

Finally, we have tested the hypothesis that predicted that incivility would moderate the relation between stress and CWB. The regression analyses (Table 4, 5 and 6) was conducted by entering the incivility and stress in the first step followed by the moderator, product term in the second step – stress X incivility. The outcome of the moderated regression for the relation between stress and CWB is significant, incivility being a strong moderator of the CWB outcome ($\Delta R^2=3566.215 F(3, 64) = 20.638, p < 0.01$).

Table 4. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1324.050	2	662.025	18.306	.000 ^b
	Residual	2242.165	62	36.164		
	Total	3566.215	64			
2	Regression	1796.383	3	598.794	20.638	.000 ^c
	Residual	1769.832	61	29.014		
	Total	3566.215	64			

a. Dependent Variable: CWB total

b. Predictors: (Constant), UWB total, stress total

c. Predictors: (Constant), UWB total, stress total, stress x UWB

Table 5. Regression model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.609 ^a	.371	.351	6.01365
2	.710 ^b	.504	.479	5.38643

a. Predictors: (Constant), UWB total, stress total;

b. (Constant), UWB total, stress total, stress x UWB

Table 6. Regression analysis - Beta coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.109	4.310		4.202	.000
	Stress total	1.344	.292	.488	4.604	.000

	UWB total	5.003	2.194	.242	2.280	.026
2	(Constant)	88.770	17.933		4.950	.000
	Stress total	-4.855	1.559	-1.764	-3.115	.003
	UWB total	-39.283	11.150	-1.899	-3.523	.001
	Stress x UWB	3.817	.946	3.581	4.035	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CWB total

Conclusions

One of the most consistent findings of presents research and mirrored by the previous empirical studies presented in the occupational stress literature is the positive relationship between experienced stressors and CWB. In the current study, all of the correlations between job stressors (Organizational Constraints, Quantitative Workload, and Physical Symptoms) and CWB were significant and positive.

Moreover, the correlation between Incivility and CWB was significant. However, the results using Incivility and CWB subscales were mixed. Incivility was not significantly related to Production deviance, Theft or Withdrawal subscales of CWB; although, CWB was significantly related to Gossiping and Hostility scales of Incivility.

The results of the current study are mirrored by those obtained by other studies, showing a clear link between occupational stressors and CWB, and provide further support for Spector's (1998) model of job stress and CWB. Moreover, they support the findings reported by Andersson and Pearson's (1999) about the incivility spiral and suggest that employees being targets of workplace incivility may increase the likelihood of engaging in CWB. The incivility spiral implies that being subjected to incivility could provoke an individual to engage in retaliatory acts, such as CWB.

It is clear that the relationship between incivility and CWB deserved further attention, being a process which can easily become a loop function - the CWB performed by one individual (especially in the interpersonal area) could be experienced by others as incivility or other job strain which may increase their propensity to engage in CWB.

Despite several shortcomings, such as relatively small sample size and self-reported measures, the present research brought to light some interesting findings. Workplace incivility, a variable that has only recently received attention in organizational research, showed a strong relationship with CWB as well as with occupational stress. In conclusion, experiencing workplace incivility in addition to other job stressors appears to increase the likelihood that an individual will engage in CWB.

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