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Work Behaviour: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Purpose: the purpose of this paper is to examine the association between workplace incivility and counterproductive work behaviour.

Methodology: the paper being a largely conceptual in nature adopted a desk research methodology in reviewing extant literature.

Findings: Based on the findings in extant literature, it was obvious that workplace incivility and counterproductive work behaviour have a significant nexus.

Unique Contribution: The study gave useful insights on the ubiquitous nature of workplace incivility and its attendant impact of work outcomes.

Recommendation: Organizations must act in a proactive manner in managing incivility so that it does degenerate to serious and corrosive consequences that eat away the workplace culture by promoting well-being in the workplace and preventing certain unsafe dynamics from establishing themselves.

Keywords: *Workplace Incivility, Counterproductive Work Behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

Workplace deviant behaviors have remained the focus of researchers' attention for many years. These behaviors have been studied from different perspectives: both as outcome variable and predictor variable (Bruursema, 2004; Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006). Workplace deviant behaviors, on one hand, spoil the organizational environment and on the other, lower the morale of the employees (Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). Initially, research regarding workplace deviance has been limited to different types of mistreatment such as harassment, bullying, aggression, and injustice (e.g., Chen & Spector, 1992). However, recently incivility has gained the attention of management researchers (Lim & Cortina, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005).

Anderson and Pearson in Zainab and Jahanvash (2014) defined incivility as low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are regarded as characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others. Incivility is somehow less intense than aggression but it is more prevalent in the organizations (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). The most common uncivil behaviors include demeaning, derogatory, and condescending comments, indifference to worker's opinion, ignoring a coworker, and browbeating (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001). Although incivility is at the low end of the workplace mistreatment continuum, but it may not be ignored or overlooked because of the devastating results that it brings along to the organization (Vickers, 2006).

Researchers have found workplace incivility to be negatively related to relationship between workplace incivility and productivity and job satisfaction, and positively associated with absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover intentions (Lim & Cortina, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005). According to some researchers, workplace incivility leads to more violent and aggressive behaviors (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Zainab and Jahanvash (2014) have also argued that the incivility can draw a similar reaction from other party or lead to more serious behaviors. It may lead to an escalating spiral where one act of incivility can provoke more serious acts on the part of the other party. Such situations would lead to extreme forms of counterproductive work behaviors, which may result in aggression or violence. There are some studies that have focused on the link between incivility and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB; Penney & Spector, 2005; Roberts, 2012).

Most research on WPI is based on the western context, however, the issue of this negative behavior is also a common issue in African organization in general and Nigerian firms in particular (Arshad and Ismail, 2018; Handoyo et al., 2018). To date, no human resource development (HRD) fraternity defines WPI as most of the local studies adopt the definition by the westerners. Therefore, in this paper, WPI was conceptualized as a low continuum level type of dysfunctional behavior with ambiguous intent to hurt others in the modern work environment. Various negative health and organizational outcomes were found to be associated with WPI (Lanzo *et al.*, 2016; Laschinger *et al.*, 2012; Oyeleye *et al.*, 2013). Negative behavior is not mentioned that due to this behavior, the targets experienced attitudinal, cognitive and behavioral outcomes. As for the victims of WPI, they prefer to conceal their feelings which eventually affect their well-being and work performance, thereby harming the productivity of the organization (Hur *et al.*, 2016).

A recent empirical study in the Malaysian public sector investigated the impacts of personality variables on WPI and organization performance (Ismail *et al.*, 2018). Another study involving employees in the private organization confirmed the existence of WPI which affects knowledge sharing (Arshad & Ismail, 2018). Thus, the existence of WPI creates challenges to HRD in initiating workplace learning as it contributes to a toxic work atmosphere that is unfavorable to employee's learning and growth (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Estes & Wang, 2008).

In the last two decades, workplace incivility has received the attention of organization researchers and practitioners. Various empirical studies have been conducted to identify and explain the causes and consequences of incivility for individuals and organizations. Intensive researches involving large samples in Europe and America throughout 1999–2009 show that workplace incivility has become a serious concern (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Lewis & Malecha, 2011; Pearson & Porath, 2009). Almost all studies conducted in America and Europe show an increasing trend of uncivil behaviors that are accepted by employees of various sectors/industries. This condition confirms that workplace incivility is a global problem that requires immediate attention from human resource and organization professionals (Ghosh *et al.*, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to examine the nexus between workplace incivility and counterproductive work behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Incivility (WPI)

Workplace incivility is described as low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm an employee. It is an uncivil behavior that is characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others. The retention and development of highly skilled employees is often important to an organizations human resource management. A “perfect” system is a system made up of human interactions where incivility or uncivil behaviours are never found, but the phenomenon workplace incivility is generally not well understood and accordingly not acknowledged as an issue that needs attention (Achara, Onyemaechi and Eberechi, 2020).

WPI is a type of maltreatment in the organization which includes a covert type of aggression and this behavior demarcates from overt aggression. This negative behavior is known as low intensity and does not have the aim to detriment others (Pearson *et al.*, 2001). Examples of WPI are rude to others, sarcastic, do not cooperate and mocking to others. Other examples of such behavior are the exclusion of others, belittling others, mocking and gossiping (Alias *et al.*, 2013; Lim and Cortina, 2005). Hence, it is considered as lower-level intensity behavior compared to workplace violation. In most cases, it is brushed off and treated as part and parcel of workplace attitude (Pearson & Porath, 2009). At present, no written rules and regulations are imposed on the offenders due to the difficulty in measuring and identifying incivility behavior.

Workplace incivility in the Malaysia public service department Public service department responsibilities could be carried out in a harmonious work environment that includes having employees with high civil behavior. There are many provisions and regulations in place for the misconduct of civil servants. However, the act of incivility is not treated the same way or as severe as other work-related crimes such as failure to attend work, under the influence of drugs, severe debts, sexual harassment and physical abuse. The issues of such behavior should be looked into to increase the performance of the public service department in Malaysia (Abdullah & Halim, 2016). Local research involving public and private organization indicated that various forms of WPI exists

and are instigated by their co-workers such as demeaning remarks to colleagues or condescending and probed decision on an issue which a co-worker is accountable (Ismail and Zakuan, 2012). Ishak *et al.* (2018), empirical findings in a peninsular general hospital also indicated the existence of such behavior. Another local study by Ismail *et al.* (2018) involving 463 public service employees also confirmed the issue of this behavior.

Workplace incivility is a deviant behavior, verbally and non-verbally, such as a look of condescension, harsh words, impatience or a lack of respect for the dignity of others. As a result, employees who are victims of incivility have a tendency to decrease their commitment over time (Montgomery *et al.*, 2004). Other examples of unethical behavior include not saying thank you, heeding co-workers' suggestions, texting or sending emails during meetings, making derogatory comments, showing hostility, invasion of privacy, exclusive behavior, gossiping and ignoring or insulting coworkers (Pearson & Porath, 2009). In civil behavior in the workplace is a part of employees' daily behaviors in interacting with each other in an organization. The perpetrators sometimes do not realize they have conducted this behavior, such as undervaluing coworkers (for example, not saying thank you for the simple assistance provided), or asking for help in polite words to subordinates or fellow co-workers. Other examples of this behavior include actions such as using condescending language, making verbal and non-verbal threats, gossiping, ignoring coworkers' requests, and showing disrespect for others at work (Holm *et al.*, 2015). The hallmark of incivility is that sometimes the purpose is unclear, and is not intended to be detrimental to others. Although people sometimes behave rudely with a clear purpose to demean or insult others, at other times their disrespectful behavior can be caused by fatigue, carelessness, or indifference to local social norms. Thus, the existence of intention is unclear either from the perpetrator, the victim, or the bystander (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)

CWB is basically a voluntary or intentional behavior that could harm the interest of the organization either directly or indirectly by hurting the employees which resultantly reduces their effectiveness (McShane & Glinow, 2005). Spector *et al.* (2006) has categorized CWB into five facets: (a) abuse; behaviors that can be harmful physically or psychologically. It may include making nasty comments about coworker or reduce the effectiveness of coworker; (b) sabotage; affects the physical property of the organization (i.e. undermining the physical workplace of the organization); (c) production deviance; behaviors that destroy the work process; (d) theft; results from economic need, job dissatisfaction or injustice and can be regarded a form of aggression against the organization (Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002; Neuman & Baron, 1997) and; (e) withdrawal; behaviors that reduce the amount of time one works to less than what the organization requires. Sabotage and production deviance has a direct impact while the withdrawal behavior of employees has an indirect impact on the functioning of the organization (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001). Some employees may engage in CWB as emotional reaction or retaliation while others may opt it as a well-planned behavior (Fox & Spector, 2010).

Many researchers categorized CWB into different categories. Sackett and DeVore (2001) defined CWB as a contrary act by a member in an organization which focuses on individual behaviour and does not benefit the organization. Sackett & DeVore (2001) concluded that CWB is a hierarchy model which thoroughly observes unproductive behavior. An individual who

involves in CWB is prone to be involved in other CWB (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). Gruys and Sackett (2003) also categorized CWB to those targeted behaviour by listing 11 factors such as theft, destruction of organization property, misuse of organization information, misuse of time and resources, dangerous behaviour, lateness to work, unsatisfactory work quality, drug addiction, use of abusive words, and dangerous physical behaviour.

Fox dan Spector (1999) introduced Model of work frustration-aggression, an extreme cognitive-affective approach. This model explains that every activity leading to disappointment may lead to affective reaction. Cognitive is said to play a less important role in the following sequence (reaction-affective response-respond). Individual affective respond is simple (locus of control, anger) and one will slow down counterproductive work behaviour may be due to certain punishment. This model is able to explain behaviours other than aggressive but CWB is not driven by other factors other than aggressive. Behaviours such as absenteeism, neglecting a company's properties and inefficient at work, for instance, dreaming, surfing the internet, and long rest may be driven by factors other than aggression. Hot-tempered is an example of interpersonal CWB whereby an individual will express his/her anger at work (Fox & Spector, 1999). This is an individual reaction based on personal experience such as depression, less autonomy, organization injustice, organization constraint, and emotional and perception at workplace. CWB is said to be a response of frustration in obtaining strong empirical support and any wrongdoings are the effect of stress and tension faced (Fox, Spector dan Miles, 2001).

Since two decades ago, studies on CWB has shown a progress. Past studies related to aggression categorized two objectives, i.e. hostile and instrumental. Hostile aggression means to harm other parties including hatred and jealousy. This group of people is more aggressive and hostile than those with bad-tempered, impulsive and has the intention to cause harm on the target. Meanwhile, instrumental aggression does not depend solely on emotion but also have the intention to harm the target. In general, the main objective of an individual is to react aggressively and to cause harm but instrumental aggression has a far advance objective such as robbery (Anderson dan Bushman, 2002). The behaviour categorized as CWB (Spector et al., 2007) fall into two categories, i.e. the behaviour directed at the organization and the behaviour directed at the individual in an organization (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Spector, 2007b). Spector's Model (2006) explained that the counterproductive work behaviour can be categorized into two, i.e. counterproductive work behaviour for an organization (CWB-o) and counterproductive work behaviour for an individual at an organization (CWB-i) (Spector *et al.*, 2006). This classification is very important and helpful in understanding CWB issues in an organization.

These are such deviant behaviors which are continuously increasing day by day and is a big problem in any organization. These behaviors have been damaging the organizations. Researchers are taking interests in this topic (Mawritz *et al.*, 2012). CWB are those behaviors causing the harm to employees or organization in certain forms like bullying of employees, theft, breaking the organizational things or damaging the important papers of organization etc. such behaviors can occur one at one time or there is possibility that these behaviors can go simultaneously together. (Fagbohungebe *et al.*, 2012). CWBs are those behaviors which are against the organizational goals and benefits. Spector *et al.* (2006) categorized in five categories: abuse, sabotage, production deviance, theft, and withdrawal behaviors. Thus further found that people show different reaction to overcome work place incivility and severity of incivility can cause a lot

of damage to organization. Some employees use production deviance behavior as a strategy. If a strategy is to gain “as a strategy to obtain control over stressors and its negative emotional reactions” then it becomes more dust hating (Krischer *et al.*, 2010). Employees who do not have security of their jobs may show deviant behaviors or may involve in counterproductive work behaviors which are not good for organization betterment. Like, Relationship between Job Insecurity, Workplace Incivility and Counterproductive work behaviors among employees: Role of Work Family Conflict.

Bultena (1998) cited in Adesubomi (2018) found that if employees have job insecurity they are involved in counter productive work behaviors. Research has revealed that work place incivility is such behavior which may decrease the workers’ productivity, performance, creativity, satisfaction and increase their absentees, laziness, their intentionally delay of work and their turnover intentions (Lim & Cortina, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005). These kind of behaviors may lead the person towards work family conflict because working and family. A research was performed on 280 subordinates and their partners and it was studied that how abusive supervision affect their family. Abused subordinates have been found to experience increased intensity of work-to-family conflict. Similar results have been reported by (Hoobler & Hu 2013).

Workplace Incivility and Counterproductive Work Behaviour:

Anderssson and Pearson (1999) cited in Guo and Kumar (2020) argued that workplace incivility overlaps with CWB, although CWB differs from incivility in several ways. First, CWB is a behavior that typically intends to inflict harm on a person or organization, whereas incivility is harmful behavior that is not necessarily intentional or malicious. That is, any harmful intent can be easily dismissed or denied. For example, the instigator may claim the behavior was due to ignorance or an oversight on his/her part, or may accuse the target of misunderstanding the behavior or being overly-sensitive (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Lanhout, 2001). Second, incivility includes behaviors that are milder than most forms of CWB. That is, while some indirect, passive forms of CWB (for example ignoring or making derogatory marks about someone) may also be considered incivility, openly hostile behaviors, such as making threats and sabotage, are not. By the same token, behaviors such as failing to invite someone to lunch would be considered workplace incivility, but not CWB. Finally, CWB and incivility differ in the direction from which they approach the social dynamic wherein these behaviors may occur. According to Spector’s job stress model, incivility would be classified as a stressor, that is, some event or condition in the environment that requires a response, whereas CWB is considered a behavioral strain, or an individual’s response to a perceived stressor.

Thus, the CWB literature focuses on the actor and variables related to the performance of CWB, such as personality traits of actors and environmental conditions, including stressors, which may encourage or elicit CWB (for example lack of justice, organizational constraints). Workplace incivility, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the target’s perspective and reactions. That is, how perceiving one to be the target or recipient of uncivil behavior does affects attitudes and behavior. Thus, measures of CWB generally ask the participant to indicate how often they perform certain CWBs, while a measure of incivility would ask participants how often they have been the recipient of uncivil behavior. Of course, within a social exchange, a single behavior (e.g., refusing to help a co-worker) can be considered an act of CWB by one person and also be perceived

as incivility by another. However, because we are examining these phenomena from an intra-individual perspective, it is important to make the distinction between perceiving oneself to be a target of incivility (i.e., a stressor) and behaving in response to some provocation or stressor (i.e., a behavioral strain), as the psychological experience is very different.

Furthermore, Andersson and Pearson (1999) cited in Guo and Kumar (2020) acknowledged the social nature of workplace incivility and argued that acts of incivility have the potential to foster unpleasant exchanges or even lead to more serious behaviors. They describe an incivility spiral wherein an act of workplace incivility on the part of one individual leads to an act of incivility by a second party that may be of equal or increasing intensity. In the former case, the exchange is non-escalating. The latter case, on the other hand, results in an escalating spiral wherein each act is followed by an increasingly negative act. Situations such as these have the potential to lead to more intense forms of CWB, perhaps resulting ultimately in aggression or violence wherein the intent to inflict harm is indisputable.

Workplace incivility also has much in common with employee abuse (Keashly, Hunter, & Harvey, 1997; Keashly *et al.*, 1994), mobbing/bullying (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002), and inter-personal conflict (Spector & Jex, 1998). While these constructs share overlapping behavior sets with workplace incivility, they generally refer to patterns of behavior with clear hostile intent which occur over time. In contrast, workplace incivility is milder and is often ambiguous with regard to its underlying motive. Thus, the difference is largely a matter of degree. The unique contribution that is made by including incivility alongside these distinct, albeit related constructs is the idea that behaviors do not necessarily have to be clearly and deliberately hostile to negatively impact an individual or organization.

CONCLUSION

Workplace incivility has been describe as “...low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. These behavior has brought about interpersonal conflict or mistreatment among employees such as bullying, mobbing, aggression, emotional abuse, harassment. Although workplace incivility occurs at all levels of the organization, it also leads to unfavorable working atmosphere that prevents employees' learning and development. Workplace incivility has been widely considered as an important workplace stressor. Incivility is a costly and pervasive workplace behavior that has important negative affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences for its targets, witnesses, and instigators. It is a rising threat for human resource development specialists, since it is happening leads to a toxic work atmosphere. Workplace incivility is evident in behaviors that demonstrate lack of regard for others in the workplace, behaviors that are described as rude or discourteous. Consequently, this results in an adverse organizational climate, thereby raising uncivil behavior among employees. Based on the findings in extant literature, it was obvious that workplace incivility and counterproductive work behaviour have a significant nexus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Organizations must act in a proactive manner in managing incivility so that it does degenerate to serious and corrosive consequences that eat away the workplace culture by promoting well-being in the workplace and preventing certain unsafe dynamics from establishing themselves.

- ii. In dealing with workplace incivility, organizations should train both employees and managers on the relationship management competence because relationship management abilities of would result in improved handling of workplace aggression and uncivil behaviours.

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