

Correlates of Counterproductive Work Behaviour

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Understanding the correlates of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) is of increasing importance in organisational literature, both because of its relation with job performance and because of its collective cost to individuals and organisations. This study attempts to explore the relationship between CWB and the locus of control, organization-based self-esteem and the affective well-being of employees. Results showed a positive correlation between CWB and the external locus of control. Regression analysis indicated organization-based self-esteem to be the strongest predictor of CWB among employees.

Keywords: Counterproductive work behaviour, organization-based self-esteem, affective well-being

There is growing interest among organisational researchers on the topic of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). CWB refers to the behaviour of employees that harms an organisation or its members (Spector & Fox, 2002), and it includes acts such as theft, sabotage, verbal abuse, withholding efforts, lying, refusing to cooperate and physical assault (Penney & Spector, 2005). Workplace deviant behaviour (WDB) and CWB are used interchangeably in the literature. While there are similarities between CWB and WDB, the concept of CWB is broader than WDB (Hogan & Hogan, 1989). CPW is defined as potentially destructive behaviour (such as sabotaging work equipment, cheating or intentionally breaking work rules), which is intended to have harmful consequences on co-workers and the organisation (Miles, Borman, Spector & Fox, 2002; Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001), whereas WDB is defined as "voluntary behavior of organizational members that violates significant organizational norms, and in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organisation and/or its members" (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556).

In the current study, CWB refers to any form of behaviour that is deviant or negative behaviour, ranging from gossip or withholding effort to verbal abuse and sabotaging organisational property. Both legal and illegal behaviours are included, as are behaviours that violate organisational norms or policies, and those that do not violate

organisational policies but inflict harm on others within the organisation.

The concept of CWB in recent years has generated high interest among organisational researchers and practitioners because of its pervasiveness in organisations. An act can be counterproductive if it violates the major rules of organisational life (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Spector & Fox, 2002). CWB occurs in many different forms and with varying levels of severity. An employee may indulge in something as minor as not being punctual to something as serious as theft (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Victims of such behaviour include employers, other employees or both. CWB is pervasive and costly for organisations (Aquino, Galperin & Bennett, 2004). Previous studies (Ambrose, Seabright & Schminke, 2002; Giacalone, Riordan & Rosenfeld, 1997; Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Shamsudin, 2003; Thoms, Wolper, Scott & Jones, 2001) have revealed that most employees engage in some form of workplace deviance. This includes absenteeism, abusing sick day privileges, abusing drugs and alcohol, filing fake accident claims, sabotaging, breaking organisational rules, withholding effort, stealing, taking long breaks, working slowly, harassing other employees and hiding needed resources.

Well-being is a state of physical health and psychological wellness that allows for better

functioning in a dynamic environment. As put forth by Blalock and Blalock (2002), this state implies the ability to balance personal and work life, and is associated with physical, psychological, social and spiritual health. Every person experiences this state of well-being in different ways, and each individual must uncover what optimises their ability to achieve this.

LOC is defined as a generalised expectancy that outcomes in life are controlled either by the individual's own actions or by other forces. Rotter (1966) introduced the concept to represent the degree to which individuals believe to have control over the outcomes of their actions. LOC can be either internal or external. People rating high on internal control believe that they can influence the forces and events that shape their lives. People rating high on external control believe that their lives are determined by outside events and forces and other people.

Within the context of an organisation, many researchers have pointed out that LOC can be altered (Partridge & Johnston, 1989; Hansemark, 1998). This makes it a potential area of empirical research not only to enquire into possible individual differences that may be found, but also to develop methods and models that are capable of enhancing workers' abilities.

Organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) is the extent to which an employee believes himself/herself to be a valued member of the organisation. OBSE results from the self-evaluation of oneself within the organisation. Employees high on OBSE tend to perceive themselves as valuable, competent and capable members of the organisation. According to Korman (1976), people with strong OBSE derive a sense of satisfaction through their organisational roles.

Hypotheses

H1 CWB will be negatively related to OBSE.

H2 CWB will be negatively related to job-related affective well-being.

H3a CWB will be negatively related to an internal locus of control.

H3b CWB will be positively related to an external locus of control.

Method

Sample:

The sample comprised 60 (males and females) executives in the age range of 25-35 years with a minimum of 2 years of service in their current organisation. The sample had 34 males (56.67%) and 26 females (43.33%). Among them, 28 (46.67%) and 32 (53.33%) subjects were in the age range of 25-30 years and 31-35 years respectively. In addition, 38 (63.33%) subjects had a work experience of 2-5 years, whereas the remaining 22 (36.67%) had been working for more than 5 years.

Measures:

Organisational-Based Self-Esteem Instrument (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989) indexes the degree to which employees believe that they are valuable, worthwhile and effectual members in their particular organisation. The instructions ask the respondent to think about his/her relationship with their employing organisation (e.g. "I count around here"). The scale consists of 10 items and is measured on a six-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The Cronbach-Alpha for 10 items in the original scale is .93 (Lee and Peccei, 2007). High scores on the scale are indicative of high work-related self-esteem.

The Counterproductive Work Behaviour Checklist or CWB-C (Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh & Kessler, 2004) was used to measure a wide range of CWB. Participants were presented with 32 items describing behavioural reactions (e.g. "purposely did your work incorrectly"; "stole something belonging to your employer"). They were asked to indicate how often they performed each behaviour. The response choices were presented in a five-point scale, ranging from "never" to "every day". Higher scores indicate higher levels of CWB. The CWB-C demonstrated good internal consistency for both the self and peer-report versions (0.89 and 0.97, respectively).

LOCO Inventory (Levenson, 1972) has been developed for use in organisations. The LOC

orientations are reflected in the way people feel about what happens in the organisation; how much control they, other significant persons, or neither (being a matter of luck) have in important organisational matters. These matters relate to success or effectiveness, influence, acceptability, career advancement and rewards. The distribution of 30 items in the inventory is divided into Internality, Externality (others) and Externality (luck); 10 items in each respectively. Split-half reliability coefficients for the instrument were 0.43, 0.45 and 0.55 respectively for the I, E-O and E-C sub-scales, and even-odd reliability coefficients were 0.14, 0.48 and 0.54 respectively.

Job-related Affective Well-being Scale or the JAWS Scale (van Katwyk, Fox, Spector & Kelloway, 2000) is a 30-item scale describing the emotional reactions of respondents to their job. In an application of the scale, respondents were asked how often they had experienced each of the emotions at work over the prior 30 days. Responses were made along a five-point scale with the anchors *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Quite often, Extremely often or always*. JAWS includes a wide variety of emotional experiences, both negative (e.g. "My job made me feel depressed") and positive (e.g. "My job made me feel content"), which can be placed into four categories (sub-scales) that fall along two dimensions: pleasurable and arousal (intensity). The scale can be scored in three ways: (1). An overall score of all 30 items with the negative emotions reverse scored; (2). Separate scores of all 15 negative items and all 15 positive items combined separately without reverse scoring; (3). Four scores matching the four dimension combinations: distress, excitement, depression and contentment, containing five items each. (Spector, 2002). For the current study, an overall score was used. Higher scores indicate higher levels of affective well-being.

Procedure

In order to test the hypotheses, data were collected from volunteers by means of questionnaires. Questionnaires were selected to form the basis of this research as they are relatively time and cost effective, and can be

administered to a small population, with ease. The questionnaires used in this study were anonymous to reduce the likelihood that respondents would modify their answers to be in accordance with perceived societal expectations. The first step was to request permission from the head of the human resources department at the participating organisations to conduct research in the organisation. Once access had been granted, the questionnaires were supplied to the human resources department at the organisation. A participant information sheet outlining the research and explaining its purpose was attached to each questionnaire. Employees willing to participate in the research were asked to leave their completed questionnaires in a sealed box on the HR executive's desk. The completed questionnaires were collected.

Results

The current study was conducted with the aim to find out the antecedents of counterproductive behaviour in marketing executives in the telecom sector. Descriptive statistics for the measures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and SDs of CWB, LOC, OBSE, SE (N=60)

Variables	Mean	SD
CWB	68.87	8.63
Locus of Control I (Internal)	32.28	6.83
EO (Control by Others)	23.03	7.13
EC (Control by Chance)	19.53	6.62
Self-Esteem	54.89	3.49
Well-Being	27.33	15.73

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients (r) were conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between the dependent-variable CWB and the independent variables LOC, OBSE and job-related well-being. In addition, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive values of LOC, organisational-based self-esteem (OBSE) and job-related well-being on the CWB of sales executives in the telecom sector.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation of CWB, LOC, OBSE and Work-Based Self-Esteem

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Counterproductive Work Behaviour	-	-.42**	.04	.17	-.34**	-.36**
2 Internal Locus of Control		-	.03	-.15	.21	.18
3 External Control by Others			-	.55**	-.11	-.16
4 External Control by Chance				-	.13	-.37**
5 Organisation-Based Self-Esteem					-	-.09
6 Job-Related Affective Well-Being						-

**p<0.01

Inspection of the correlations between variables provides support for Hypothesis 1. Table 2 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between CWB and reported self-esteem in the organisation ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$); hence, individuals with high self-esteem in the organisation tend to report less counterproductive behaviours. Research hypothesis 2 is also retained as the findings point out a negative correlation between CWB and well-being at the work place ($r = -.36$, $p > .01$). The correlation coefficient suggests that lower counterproductive behaviour scores are correlated with higher scores on work-related well-being.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b, which stated that a more-external LOC would relate to an increased reporting of CWB and a more-internal LOC would relate to decreased reporting of CWB, were tested with correlations between LOC and CPWs. Moderate significant correlations were found in the expected direction for the internal locus of control. Specifically, there is a negative correlation between CWB and internal LOC ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$). Table 2 demonstrates that the CWB scores are positively correlated with external control by others and external control by chance ($r = .04$, n.s., $r = .17$, n.s. respectively). Therefore, hypothesis 3a is accepted and hypothesis 3b rejected.

Table 2 also depicts positive correlations between the independent variables of organisation-based self-esteem and work-related well-being. To view the overall CWB reported by the subjects, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The model analysis included the three independent variables of organisational-based self-esteem, work-related well-being and locus of control. The linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to the CWB (R squared = .39, adjusted R squared = .34, $F(5,54) = 6.98$, $P = .000$). An estimated 34% of variance of the CWB reported by the subjects can be accounted for by the linear combination of predictors, organisation-based self-esteem, work-related well-being and locus of control.

A multiple regression analysis also indicates the relative contribution of each independent variable to the prediction of the dependent variable, that is, CWB. As indicated in Table 3, out of the three independent variables entered, organisation-based self-esteem is the strongest predictor of CWB. The regression equation for the standardised variables was as follows: Predicted CWB score = $115.384 + .321(\text{Internal LOC}) - .283(\text{External Control by Others}) + .251(\text{External Control by Chance}) - .914(\text{Organisational-Based}$

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression with CWB as the Dependent Variable

Independent Variables	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	115.38	9.61	12.01	.000	
Internal LOC	-.32	.14	-.25	-2.23	.030
External LOC(Others)	-.28	.16	-.23	-1.77	.083
External LOC(Chance)	.25	.18	.19	1.37	.176
Organisation-Based Self-Esteem	-.91	.28	-.37	-3.23	.002
Well-Being	-.18	.06	-.32	-2.76	.008

Self-Esteem) $-.175$ (Work-Related Well-Being). Interestingly, external control by others has a negative regression coefficient (opposite in sign from its correlation with CWB) but a positive (though insignificant) correlation with CWB. This indicates that though external control by others contributes positively (though insignificantly) to CWB, after accounting for the other variables, employees scoring high on external control by others were expected to have lower scores on CWB. External LOC did not contribute significantly to the model.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to find the antecedents of CWB. Understanding the antecedents of CWB is of increasing importance in organisational literature, both because of its relation with job performance and because of its collective cost to individuals and organisations.

The results of the current study supported the idea that CWB is negatively related to organisational-based self-esteem and job-related affective well-being. Findings on similar lines have been reported; for example, high self-esteem is associated with self-efficacy and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001), life satisfaction (Campbell, 1981), conscientiousness, extroversion, and emotional stability (Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling & Potter, 2001).

On an intensive search of the extant literature, the consistency theory posits motivations for acting in a counterproductive manner. The obtained negative relation between self-esteem and counterproductive behaviours can be explained in the framework of the consistency theory. Within this view, individuals show behaviour that is consistent with their self-image (Korman, 1970), thus aligning their level of performance with their self-concept. Korman's view implies that people with high self-esteem would perform better than those who are low on self-esteem, so that there is congruency between their self-image and behaviour. As CWB is an important component of job performance (Viswesvaran, Schmidt & Ones, 2005), the employees with high OBSE engage in fewer counterproductive behaviours.

Results also show a high positive correlation between self-esteem and well-being, and a negative relation between CWB and well-being. Gardener and Pierce (2010) showed that perceived autonomy and task significance have a strong correlation with organisation-based self-esteem. This relationship tends to explain the negative relationship between CWB and well-being in the organisation.

As far as CWB is concerned, a number of researchers believe that there is a significant correlation between CWB and job-related negative effects. Spector and Fox (2005) propose through their 'stressor-emotion hypothesis' that emotionally critical internal states, such as anger, anxiety and fear, are the immediate antecedents of CWB, which is seen as a way to enact (and discharge) such states. A very similar view is put forward by Bechtoldt, Welk, Hartig, and Zapf (2007), who suggest that CWB is an emotion-regulation strategy with which individuals may overcome negative emotions at work. In line with this interpretation, this research extends support to the belief that perceived well-being at work place tends to reduce CWB.

Another finding of the study was that the internal LOC was correlated negatively with CWB. This is as expected since the internal LOC is usually associated with positive outcomes. People rating high on internal control believe that they can influence the forces and events that shape their lives. People rating high on external control believe that their lives are determined by outside events and forces and other people. This personality variable has been shown to relate to a number of organisationally relevant variables. This finding can be explained using the causal reasoning perspective of CWB (Martinko, Gundlach & Douglas, 2002), which proposes that the attributions an individual makes regarding the cause of workplace events creates emotions and behaviours that result in CWB. In this paradigm, situational variables and individual differences either independently or synergistically affect cognitive processing through attributions or perceptions of disequilibria, which leads to CWB. In their model, they briefly mention that LOC may result in attributions that are related to the

opportunity for the individual to commit CWB, without being more precise.

LOC is frequently cited as an important contribution to organisational effectiveness. Spector (1975) proposed a model that states that the frustration of goals results in emotional and behavioural reactions. The emotional response, anger, is aversive and results in increased psychological arousal. In response to frustration, individuals engage in several actions, including an attempt to find alternatives that allow goal attainment, acts of aggression directed toward the organisation or withdrawal from the situation (Spector, 1978). It was later found that LOC moderated this relationship such that individuals with an external LOC were more likely to respond to frustration in counterproductive ways, relative to individuals with an internal LOC (Storms & Spector, 1987).

LOC is a cognitive rather than an affective trait concerning a person's generalised beliefs about control over events that have the potential to reward or punish (Rotter, 1996). Internals are individuals who believe they have control whereas externals believe control exists elsewhere, such as with fate, luck or powerful others. As a personality variable, LOC reflects an individual's tendencies and is distinct from perceptions of control in particular situations. Perlow and Latham (1993) provided the best evidence in support of the LOC connection with CWB. They found that LOC scores predicted subsequent employee termination for assaulting patients of a residential treatment facility.

Organisation-based self-esteem emerged as the strongest predictor of CWB. The self-esteem of an individual is a result of one's experiences at the workplace (e.g., Brockner, 1988; Korman, 1970, 1976). Individuals who come to feel efficacious and competent, derived from their own experiences (e.g., successful completion of a project), come to hold positive images of themselves. Quite naturally, an individual's experience of success at the workplace is conducive to that individual's OBSE.

Korman (1970) hypothesised that "all other things being equal, individuals will engage in and find satisfying those behavioural roles which

maximize their sense of cognitive balance or consistency" (p. 32). He predicted that (a) "individuals will be motivated to perform on a task or job in a manner which is consistent with the self-image with which they approach the task or job situation", and (b) "individuals will tend to choose and find most satisfying those jobs and task roles which are consistent with their self-cognitions" (Korman, 1970, p.32). This means that people who have positive images of themselves will engage in behaviours, possess attitudes and choose roles that reinforce that positive image. In contrast, people who have negative images of themselves will engage in behaviours (or withhold effort) and possess attitudes that are consistent with that negative image.

Conclusion

The author predicted that work-related well-being and self-esteem would be positively correlated with counterproductive workplace behaviour. In order to decrease the probability of WDB, organisations can make employees perceive well-being and induce the behaviour that gives a boost to their self-esteem at the work place. Providing humanistic welfare and reasonable compensation is one of the ways to increase well-being. Organisations would do well to consider how the treatment of employees could lead to CWB, and that CWB is often hidden. Instituting fair procedures, reducing stress where possible and empowering employees can go a long way towards reducing CWB and enhancing the well-being of both organisations and their stakeholders. It is clear that OBSE has demonstrated its empirical utility in research on a broad range of constructs in the organisational sciences. At this point, we can conclude that self-esteem, both global as well as organisation-based (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings & Dunham, 1989) plays a central role in the direction and motivation of human behaviours. What remains unclear are the exact mechanisms (e.g., self-consistency, self-enhancement) and the time associated with the operation of these mechanisms by which self-esteem has its effects. Just as importantly, the organisational policies, programs and procedures that lead to the healthy development of employee self-esteem require further study.

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