



Counterproductive work behavior as protest

E. Kevin Kelloway*, Lori Francis, Matthew Prosser, James E. Cameron

Department of Psychology, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, Canada B3H 3C3

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Counterproductive work behaviors
Protest
Injustice
Identification
Instrumentality

ABSTRACT

We suggest that counterproductive work behaviors can be viewed as a form of protest in which organizational members express dissatisfaction with or attempt to resolve injustice within the organization. Incorporating the three key predictors (injustice, identity and instrumentality, [Klandermans, B., (1997). *The social psychology of protest*. Oxford: Blackwell.]) from the protest literature leads us to propose that counterproductive behaviors can be both individual and collective. Crossing this dimension with concepts of organizational and individual deviance leads to a fourfold classification of counterproductive work behaviors.

© 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Organizational members engage in counterproductive (Spector & Fox, 2005a,b) or dysfunctional (Robinson, 2008) behavior when they willfully commit acts that have the intention of harming organizations or people within them (Spector & Fox, 2005a,b). This broad definition subsumes behaviors such as theft (e.g., Greenberg, 1990), sabotage (e.g., Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002), workplace violence and aggression (e.g., Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway, 2009; Kelloway, Barling, & Hurrell, 2006), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), revenge (Bies & Tripp, 2005) and service sabotage (e.g., Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Mullen & Kelloway, submitted for publication). Research on such topics has proliferated in recent years in recognition of the staggering financial (Robinson, 2008), personal (e.g., Schat & Kelloway, 2005) and organizational (e.g., Rogers & Kelloway, 1997) costs associated with counterproductive behavior.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of this research has focused on predicting counterproductive work behaviors (Robinson, 2008) in an attempt to understand why individuals would engage in these behaviors and how they might be prevented. Thus, theory and research on counterproductive work behaviors has largely held a managerial perspective that focuses on the dysfunctionality of this type of behavior (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 2005; Robinson, 2008). In contrast, we examine the flip side of this view, and consider the individual and collective functionality of engaging in “counterproductive” behavior.

Specifically we propose that counterproductive work behaviors can be productively viewed as a form of protest behavior in which individuals and groups attempt to redress, draw attention to, or express dissatisfaction with organizational events. Incorporating models of protest (e.g., Klandermans, 1997; Kelloway, Francis, Catano, & Teed, 2007; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990) into the study of counterproductive work behaviors is consistent with existing empirical data, in that perceived injustice emerges as the dominant predictor (Robinson, 2008). However, we go beyond the current theoretical perspective to consider the nature (i.e., identity and attachments) and anticipated outcomes (i.e., perceived instrumentality) of the perpetrator in addition to injustice.

We suggest that this perspective offers several conceptual advantages to the study of counterproductive behavior. First, some instances of counterproductive behavior are designed to protest or voice dissatisfaction in the workplace. Indeed the term “sabotage” allegedly emerged early in the industrial revolution when Belgian workers would throw their wooden shoes (i.e., “sabots”) into the machinery in order to disable the equipment. Instances of sabotage in protesting dissatisfying work conditions are among the earliest studied instances of counterproductive work behaviors (e.g., Mangione & Quinn, 1975).

Second, researchers are increasingly moving beyond the individual level of analysis in studying counterproductive work behaviors (Robinson, 2008). To date, such efforts have largely focused on identifying group level predictors of individual acts of deviance (see for example, Glomb & Liao, 2003; Robinson & O’Leary-Kelly, 1998) and the counterproductive acts themselves are

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kevin.kelloway@smu.ca (E.K. Kelloway).

almost always defined as the behavior of individuals (e.g., Spector, Fox, & Domagalski, 2006). However, much of the literature on protest behaviors focuses on collective action (e.g., Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears, 2008) and we suggest that counterproductive behaviors can encompass both individual and collective behaviors. Some examples of collective counterproductive behaviors (e.g., work-slow campaigns, work to rule, co-ordinated sick days) are instituted within the domain of industrial relations and we recognize that defining them as counterproductive is a political decision (Spector & Fox, 2005a,b) – what is counterproductive for the organization may be productive or functional for the individual or group. Other forms of collective counterproductive behavior may include mobbing (e.g., Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005) or bullying (Rayner & Cooper, 2006), and collective acts of violence that occur in the context of a labor dispute (Francis, Cameron, & Kelloway, 2006).

Finally, we suggest that examining counterproductive behaviors as protest behaviors responds to Robinson's (2008) calls for more integration, consideration of motivations, and consideration of consequences in the study of dysfunctional work behaviors. We draw heavily on the social identity model of collective action proposed by Van Zomeren et al. (2008) to formulate an integrative model of counterproductive behavior that explicitly considers the motives and expectancies of actors at both the individual and group levels. In developing this model, we first briefly review the nature of counterproductive behaviors and the literature on protest behaviors. We then integrate these two literatures in proposing a model of counterproductive behaviors as protest.

1. Defining counterproductive behaviors

There are a number of ways to conceptualize counterproductive behaviors. Prior to the mid 1990s, the most common approach was to examine individual dysfunctional behaviors with no suggestion of an overarching construct. For example, individuals studied topics such as lateness (Blau, 1995), workplace violence (Rogers & Kelloway, 1997), sabotage (Mangione & Quinn, 1975), theft (Greenberg, 1990), and absenteeism (e.g., Johns, 1994) with little recognition that these disparate behaviors may reflect some commonality. A more integrative view was proposed by Robinson and Bennett (1995) whose typology of deviant behavior in organizations conceptualized deviance as incorporating disparate behaviors organized according to the nature of the target (i.e., individual vs. organizational) and the severity of the behavior. Their typology validated the work of a number of earlier researchers (e.g., Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Wheeler, 1976) and further germinated a fount of research ranging from bullying (Lavan & Martin, 2007), cyber-loafing (Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Blau, Yang, & Ward-Cook, 2006), workplace violence (Kelloway et al., 2006), organizational ethics (Brown & Trevino, 2006), sabotage (Ambrose et al., 2002), citizenship behavior (Lee & Allen, 2002), counterproductive workplace behavior (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001), and incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001) to name a few.

Drawing on Kaplan's (1975) notion of organizationally specific norms, Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined workplace deviance as behavior that voluntarily violates organizational norms, thereby threatening the well-being of members and the organization itself. Thus, according to this framework workplace deviance is not defined in terms of any system of moral standards, rather such behavior deviates from the formal and informal norms as prescribed by procedure, policy, and rules. Further, this approach asserts that to be considered deviant behavior must have at least the potential to harm either the well-being of the organization or its members, thereby excluding breaches of decorum such as poor manners and other social blunders.

Stemming from this working definition and an earlier classification by Hollinger (1986), Hollinger & Clark (1982), Robinson and Bennett (1995) presented a comprehensive typology comprising two dimensions in which any behavior that fits the definition can be categorized and differentiated from other deviant actions. The first dimension types deviant behavior according to its severity, ranging from minor to severe. Some deviant behavior, such as a worker talking with coworkers instead of working, would be classified as a minor deviant act. Other incidents, such as a physical assault, would be classified as severe.

The second dimension types deviant behavior according to the target, such that the behavior may be harmful to an individual's (interpersonal deviance) or the organization's well-being (organizational deviance). Crossing these two dimensions results in four quadrants in which to classify deviant behavior. These are labeled as Production Deviance (low severity, organizational target, e.g., leaving early or taking too many breaks), Property Deviance (high in severity, organizational target, e.g., stealing or accepting kickbacks), Political Deviance (low in severity, individual target, e.g., gossiping or counterproductive competition), and Personal Aggression (high in severity, interpersonal target, e.g. verbal abuse or sexual harassment).

A measure based on this typology (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) comprised two dimensions based on the target of deviant acts, with each subscale incorporating a range of behaviors in terms of severity. Some have challenged both the typology and the measure in part because interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance are highly correlated ($r = .62$), perhaps reflecting an artifact precipitated by the common use of both the typology and measure (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007). Others (Sackett & DeVore, 2002) have criticized the model because it was developed from employees' perceptions of the similarity of deviant behaviors (using the multi-dimensional scaling technique) rather than from quantitative covariance between actual deviant behaviors (using factor analysis). Other researchers have subsequently elaborated the structure of workplace deviance to incorporate dimensions such as relevance of the associated task (Gruys & Sackett, 2003) and behavior specific domains such as alcohol and drug use (Sackett & DeVore, 2002). However, Robinson and Bennett's (1995) model and its associated measure (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) dominates the literature (c.f. Berry, Ones & Sackett, 2007 meta-analysis) and we draw heavily on this model as we explore the ways in which counterproductive work behavior might reflect a type of protest.

2. A model of protest

Research on organizational injustice suggests the importance of deontological accounts for understanding how individuals respond to organizational events (e.g., Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). That is, researchers are urged to recognize that

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/879752>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/879752>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)