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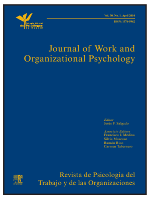
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Relationships between counterproductive work behavior, perceived justice and climate, occupational status, and leader-member exchange

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ABSTRACT

The present work used Social Exchange Theory as a framework for understanding Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB). We sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining psychologically experienced organizational distributive justice and climate as predictors of counterproductive workplace behavior, while exploring whether immediate job and exchange characteristics – employee occupational level and leader-member exchange – can clarify these associations. Two studies were conducted in different organizations respectively: (1) a governmental electricity company and (2) a private company specializing in electronic device commerce. The results supported the hypotheses and indicated negative relationships between perceived organizational distributive justice, overall and ethical climates, and CWB. Importantly, the quality of perceived leader-member exchange and employee's occupational level were found to moderate the relationship between perceived distributional justice and organizational ethical climate (respectively) and counterproductive work behavior.

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Relaciones entre comportamiento laboral contraproducente, justicia percibida y clima, estatus ocupacional e intercambio líder-subordinado

Palabras clave:
Comportamiento laboral contraproducente
Justicia organizacional percibida
Clima organizacional
Clima a ético
Intercambio líder-subordinado
Nivel ocupacional

RESUMEN

Este estudio ha utilizado la Teoría del Intercambio Social como marco explicativo del comportamiento laboral contraproducente. Pretendíamos contribuir al cuerpo existente de conocimientos analizando la justicia distributiva organizativa experimentada psicológicamente y el clima como predictores del comportamiento contraproducente en el trabajo, a la vez que explorar si las características inmediatas del puesto de trabajo y del intercambio (nivel ocupacional del empleado e intercambio líder-subordinado) pueden clarificar estas asociaciones. Se realizaron dos estudios en diferentes organizaciones, una empresa de electricidad pública y una empresa privada especializada en la venta de dispositivos electrónicos respectivamente. Los resultados han refrendado las hipótesis, indicando relaciones negativas entre justicia distributiva organizativa percibida, climas general y ético y comportamiento laboral contraproducente. Es importante que se encontrara que la calidad del intercambio percibido líder-subordinado y el nivel ocupacional del empleado moderaban la relación entre justicia distributiva percibida y clima organizativo ético, respectivamente, y comportamiento laboral contraproducente.

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Counterproductive Work Behavior

In recent years, workplace deviance (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007; Bodankin & Tziner, 2009; Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Dilchert, Ones, Davis, & Rostow, 2007; Levy & Tziner, 2011) or counterproductive work/organizational behavior (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Ho, 2012; Levine, 2010) has gained much research attention, since this manifestation has been shown to have important economical, sociological, and psychological implications (Aubé, Rousseau, Mama, & Morin, 2009; Bodankin & Tziner, 2009). Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) was defined as "any intentional behavior on the part of an organizational member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests" (Sackett & De Vore, 2001, p.145). Examples of such counterproductive behavior include theft, sabotage, withdrawal, harassment, and drug use (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Sackett & DeVore,

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2001; Spector et al., 2006). Counterproductive work behaviors are costly to both individuals and organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2003). Such behaviors are defined as "dysfunctional" because they almost invariably (but not necessarily, see below) violate important organizational norms and harm organizations in several ways relevant to their goals, employees, procedures, productivity, and profitability (Aubé, Rousseau, Mama, & Morin, 2009; Dalal, 2005; Lanyon & Goodstein, 2004; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005; Robinson, 2008; Spector & Fox, 2005; Spector et al., 2006; Vardi & Weitz, 2004). Employees who display counterproductive workplace behaviors are more likely to develop stress related problems and to resign (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996), and to experience low self-esteem, increased lack of confidence at work and physical and psychological pains (Griffin, O'Leary, & Collins, 1998). Therefore, by accessing the psychological antecedents of CWB, we may be better equipped to expose the motivational roots of such behavior.

Past research indicated various factors that may predict counterproductive workplace behavior. These include individual differences such as employees' personal traits and abilities (e.g., Berry et al., 2007; Dalal, 2005; Dilchert et al., 2007; Salgado, 2002; Salgado, Moscoso, & Anderson, 2013), job experiences (e.g., Hollinger & Clark, 1982; Kulas, McInnerney, DeMuth, & Jadwinski, 2007), and work stressors such as difficult work conditions, harsh supervision, role ambiguity, role and interpersonal conflicts (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Chen & Spector, 1992; Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Spector & Fox, 2005). By way of illustration, dissatisfied employees are more likely to engage in theft behaviors (Kulas et al., 2007); abusive supervision is prone to influence employees' propensity to engage in negative employee behavior intended not only to harm the abuser but also to cause damage to the organization (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007); and workplace stressors are likely related to sabotage, interpersonal aggression, hostility, and complaints (Chen & Spector, 1992). Studies have also unearthed the interaction between personal factors and organizational stressors (e.g., Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001; Penny & Spector, 2002, 2005) and CWB. For example, employees' emotions, reflected in high levels of negative mood, were found to be at least partial mediators between job stressors and counterproductive work behavior (Fox et al., 2001). Negative affectivity was also addressed as a moderator of the relationship between factors such as workplace incivility, interpersonal conflict, and organizational constraints, and employees' misbehavior (Penny & Spector, 2005).

Though most of the aforementioned research work stressed employees' intentions to harm the organizational environment in one way or another, and despite our concentration in the present work on behavior which is counterproductive, it should be mentioned that there are also studies indicating that, paradoxically, in some circumstances, counterproductive work behavior may stem from good intentions and as a part of the pursuit of organizational goals (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Vardi & Wiener, 1996; Warren, 2003). For instance, Salgado (2002) found that those employees who rate highly on the personality factor "conscientiousness" are also likely to display deviant behaviors and frequent employee turnover. Moreover, it has also been claimed that deviant behaviors in the workplace can have *positive* consequences. This type of counterproductive behavior has been termed "constructive deviance" (Galperin, 2002; Galperin & Burke, 2006; Tziner, Fein, Sharoni, Bar-Hen, & Nord, 2010; Tziner, Goldberg, & Or, 2006). The constructive deviance can be divided into two broader categories, namely, "interpersonal constructive deviance", directed at individuals such as managers whose demands are being followed in order to improve organizational processes, and "organizational constructive deviance", directed at the organization and aimed at helping the organization to find creative ways to solve organizational problems (see Bodankin & Tziner, 2009). Thus, in these situations, violating organizational norms may actually serve as a source of innovation and creativity and even contribute to the organization's competitive advantage (Howell & Higgins, 1990; Howell, Shea, & Higgins, 1998; Krau, 2008). Further, the relationship between constructive and disruptive workplace behaviors may be complicated, for instance when the same individual exhibits the two kinds of behavior. For example, Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad (2007) argued that some leaders may display both constructive and destructive behavior. Specifically, leaders may act destructively on one dimension but constructively on the other. Therefore, it could be that like the leaders, the organizational members may be at the same time "constructive" and "disruptive".

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) framework. Counterproductive work behavior may be understood within the framework of Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET is an influential paradigm in examination of any exchange relationship, which posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis. Its basic propositions are that people tend to repeat actions that were rewarded in the past, and the more often a particular behavior has resulted in a reward the more likely it is that a person will implement it (Homans, 1958). Importantly, SET claims that social relationships are based on trust that gestures of goodwill will be reciprocated (Blau, 1964). Social Exchange Theory was used to understand workplace behavior. In a recent meta-analysis, Colquitt et al. (2013) indicated that in the past decade many organizational researches have focused on social exchange as a type of interpersonal relationship, drawing mainly on Blau's (1964) theorizing, and that SET was the dominant approach for examining reactions to justice perceptions. The results of the meta-analysis point to strong relationships between justice dimensions and indicators of social exchange. Specifically, social exchange variables such as trust, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, and leader-member exchange, were found to be important to relationships between justice, task performance, and citizenship behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013). In the past, social exchange in an organizational context was proposed to be conceptualized at two levels: (a) global exchanges between employees and the organization and (b) dyadic relationships between employees and their supervisors (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). Later, Cole, Schaninger, and Harris (2007) proposed the concept of "workplace social exchange network" which focuses on three elements in the workplace that have exchange relationships with employees: the organization, the leader, and the work team.

One example of SET implementation in organizational research is in explaining organizational loyalty (e.g., Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Scholl, 1981). Eisenberger et al. (1986) suggested that employees form a general belief regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about them, i.e., "organizational support". Accordingly, higher obligations to contribute to the organization are expected under high levels of perceived organizational support. Moreover, perceived organizational support was said to be associated with trust that the organization would reward the employees for fulfilling their exchange obligations. Conversely, employees who perceive that their organization does not meet the expected obligations would be less satisfied with their jobs and workplace experiences than those who perceive that obligations were fulfilled (Homans, 1961). A meta-analysis of factors predicting workplace aggression revealed that job dissatisfaction is related to organizational but not to interpersonal aggression (Hershcovis et al., 2007). In addition, past research suggested that a specific aspect of workplace social exchange – leader-member exchange (LMX) and perceived organizational support (POS) – may influence the association between individuals' justice judgments and their work attitudes and behavior (Manogran, Stauffer, & Conlon, 1994; Moorman, Blakely, & Neihoff, 1998), and that psychological contract breach predicts employees' performance and absenteeism (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003).

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