

The Mechanism and Causes of Counterproductive Work Behavior: Organizational Constraints, Interpersonal Conflict, and Organizational Injustice

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an extensive review and discussion of counterproductive work behavior, which facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of counterproductive work behavior, and the functioning of its mechanisms, lays the foundation for future research, as well as provide new ideas and perspectives. This study reviews the definition of counterproductive work behavior, its mechanism of action, and its effects, and analyzes the possibility of different types of stressors leading to counterproductive work behavior in the context of modern society. This study lists three main types of stressors: organizational constraints, interpersonal conflict, and organizational injustice, discusses their definitions and analyzes their causes through different perspectives, in the psychological perspective, reference is made to Lazarus and Folkman's Psychological Stress and Coping Theory. In addition, this study also mentions some related mechanisms and interventions that may regulate stressors, namely growth mindset, self-efficacy, mindfulness, and yoga, which have also been proposed, but more discussion and research are needed in this area.

Keywords: Counterproductive work behavior, Stressor, Organizational constraints, Interpersonal conflict, Organizational injustice

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has gradually received extensive attention, because, with the development of society, people's work content and work environment are becoming more and more complex, and corresponding work pressures also follow. Previous studies have shown that the cause of counterproductive work behavior is caused by excessive stressors, and the generation of stressors is quite complicated. In some studies, significant correlations were observed between counterproductive work behavior and stressors [1]. According to a research report from International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2000, a severe deterioration of an employer's mental health is reported due to some situational factors in society such as the rapid development of informational technology, economic globalization, the transformation of organization forms, and excessive workload [2]. An increasing trend of work-induced stress in many countries cause more CWB to

occur accordingly, reflected as lower productivity and higher turnover rate in the workplace. For instance, in Germany, the growing unemployment rate is mainly due to rationalization and the rapid introduction of technology [2]. Although the efficiency of productivity is improved by introducing technology to some extent, the corresponding negative impact on employees is significant. Workers are under greater pressure to produce, not only because the deadline for completing the task is shortened, but also by the reason that they are responsible for the higher requirement of quantity and quality. In other words, more administrative work and decision-making work is induced. Besides the change of the mode of production due to the technology revolution, the shift of inter-organizational structure that needs more coordination based on teams has accelerated competition in the workplace which induced more work stress to employers which in turn results in CWB.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to discuss more dimensions of stressors, which will not only help to

further understand the causes and operating mechanisms of counterproductive work behavior but also help to develop corresponding preventive methods and interventions in the future. In terms of theory, it can provide new ideas and perspectives for future research, and in terms of practical value, it can also provide support and help for the mental health of modern people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)

2.1.1. Definition of CWB

Counterproductive work behavior has become a more considerable topic globally in the field of organizational management, paralleling the increasing research about labor conflicts such as strikes, low job satisfaction, and work stress. Estimation of Billions of dollars financial loss by organizations due to CWB globally [3]. The study of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) started from labor performances that caused the reduction of organizational productivity in the 19th century. These performances incorporate acts such as robbery, disruption, verbal abuse, withholding of exertion, lying, denying to coordinate, and physical ambush.[4] Bennett and Robinson systematically evaluated and classified these phenomena, which were conceptualized as workplace deviance to present the concept of CWB [5]. Distinct from the former, Bennett and Robinson considered CWB from the view of the organization. Sackett and DeVore defined CWB as any behavior that violates organizational goals. CWB is performed by individuals from the outside but essentially requires understanding and recognition from the perspective of the organization. Therefore, whether an employee's behavior positively affects productivity in the workplace needs to be considered and evaluated by the organization.

2.1.2. Influence of CWB

Various types of behaviors can be identified as CWB, research has indicated that CWB often violates organizational norms and negatively affect the organization by harming the long-term goals and common interests of all involved [6]. The negative consequences of CWB correlate with various working performances. It may correspond with the low completion of a task, increase of the difficulties of concentrating and decrease of remembering decision-making [7].

2.1.3. Stressor-Emotion Model

The stressor-emotion model (S-EM) was proposed by Spector and Fox. This model explains the relation of negative emotions (such as anger, upset, etc.) in the workplace and an individual's cognitive process that

leads to CWB [8]. S-EM consists of three stages: 1) the cognitive evaluation by an individual of the stress scenarios in the workplace, which produce a sense of frustration; 2) negative emotions are then created; 3) negative emotions lead to the performance of CWB. According to S-EM, CWB is initially triggered by the stress scenarios in the workplace, which is the essential condition to the cause of negative emotions. The main stress scenarios include organizational constraints, social conflicts, and perceived unfairness. To reduce CWB in the workplace, effectively managing the situational antecedents of CWB is crucial.

2.2. The Source of Stress

2.2.1. Organizational Constraints

The 996 working system is a unique working time system in China, which refers to working from 9:00 to 21:00, 6 days a week. There is a study calling the 996 working system a form of modern slavery [9], because this greatly squeezes employees and poses great risks to their physical and mental health, a study specifically on the Chinese work environment shows that work stressors were negatively correlated with work well-being [10]. Such stressors can often be classified as organizational constraints. Organizational constraints are defined as working conditions in the work environment that interfere with and inhibit employee motivation and execution [11]. Oftentimes, it's something that makes it difficult or impossible for an employee to complete the job. For example, lack of equipment or information, lack of assistance, thus limiting performance [12].

2.2.1.1. Organizational Constraints in Social Perspective

Some researchers have found that among stressors, organizational constraints and workload are highly correlated because work content is very easy to accumulate when employees do not have the right equipment or tools to complete the work [13]. In other words, employee stress increases when the employee's work equipment does not meet and support the employee to complete their work tasks. In addition, assuming that under the circumstance that this kind of work equipment cannot be satisfied, the enterprise assigns a larger workload to the employees, and the pressure will increase more significantly.

2.2.1.2. Organizational Constraints in Psychological Perspective

According to the model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, an individual's assessment of stress has two parts, a primary assessment, and a secondary assessment. If the individual's situation is assessed as stressful, the individual's coping strategies will also adapt

to the situation and have corresponding consequences, which are expressed as positive consequences and negative consequences in this model. Among the positive consequences, the individual will experience higher levels of well-being and correspondingly less anxiety. In the negative outcome, the strategy implemented by the individual will not have an effect on the situation faced, and the individual's anxiety will not change, or even increase.

It can be assumed that when an individual is faced with an excessive workload or is unable to complete the work due to insufficient training, such situations will lead to relatively negative results, and thus the individual will develop negative emotions. Furthermore, this situation can create a vicious circle.

2.2.2. Interpersonal Conflict

At the sight of employees, interpersonal conflict in the workplace is an important source of occupational stress, that it can lead to significant negative consequences for employee's both mental and physical health. Conflict is normal and natural in our lives, especially in work settings. Since people have different experiences, values, resources, and opinions to deal with the task, disagreement, and argument in the workplace are usual. Conflict is simply understood as two parties having a sharp disagreement or divergent attitudes on something. According to Putman and Poole (1987), three key features are included in most conflicts: 1) parties are dependent on each other; 2) viewpoint of at least one of the parties that are opposite and incompatible among others to some extent. 3) parties have some type of interaction [14]. Thomas (1992) outlines the definition of conflict as "The process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about" [15]. It suggests that conflict is a broad concept that involves multiple interpersonal mistreatments in the workplace (e.g., aggression, incivility, bullying, mobbing) [16].

2.2.2.1. The Influence of Interpersonal Conflict

In 2006, ILO has specified bullying as significant workplace violence [2]. This indicated the rising concern on workplace conflict. Conflict sometimes may be beneficial to the organization since people may share different opinions and create new ideas and innovations by interactions with colleagues. Nevertheless, the detrimental impact on the organization is obvious. Lower productivity, poor communication, poor work performance are negative consequences caused by conflicts specifically interpersonal conflicts that happened between team members, employee-to-leader, employee-to-customers.

In a temporary working environment, cooperation among teams sharing different goals, coordination among employees in the same team is an emphasized issue of the leader [17]. Therefore, identifying and effectively managing interpersonal conflicts in the working settings is important based upon the highly complex and dynamic production environments such as the construction industry, innovation groups, and technology companies. [18]. Therefore, this issue recommends a challenging condition for improving the effectiveness of coordination among teammates.

2.2.3. Organizational Injustice

Organizational justice, which is fairness in the workplace, has three branches. Distributive injustice refers to the fairness of payment and working environment. Procedural injustice focuses on the methods used in decision-making, processes, and procedures. And interactional injustice is related to employee interpersonal treatment. In other words, when the effort and return are not proportional, the specific explanation of procedures is not given, and treat employees disrespectfully, will be in an unfair state [19]. Research suggests that distributive procedural and interactional inequities all lead to stress in the workplace. This stress generated by injustice would predict withdrawal and production deviance in CWB [20]. Some researches show that when the cause of workplace injustice is distributive, the purpose of the resulting sabotage is mostly related to restoring justice [21]. That is, people who are unfairly distributed tend to restore fairness. Meanwhile, reducing distributive injustice has a significant positive correlation with improving employee job satisfaction [22]. Therefore, solving distributive injustice in organizational injustice can not only significantly improve the self-perception of employees but also help reduce unfair behaviors in the workplace.

2.2.3.1. Distributive Injustice

When employees are not rewarded in proportion to their contributions, they may feel they are being treated unfairly. This is embodied in job distribution, salary, bonus, evaluation, and promotion [23]. According to social exchange theory, if an individual feels that he or she is being treated unfairly by the organization, then he or she is likely to try to reduce engagement through some form of behavior, such as disruptive behavior [24-25]. Employees may reduce the pressure of inequity by reducing their contributions, demanding more income, or even withdrawing from work [26].

In the second place, according to equity theory, the differences between output-input ratios of employees and output-input ratios of employees' colleagues decide the employees' work motivation [27]. When employees find that their input-output ratio is different from that of others,

they will feel unfair and have an impact on their work motivation. That is to say, the inequity caused by the imbalance between income and output will not only lead to destructive behaviors of employees but also reduce their work motivation.

In the past, when distributive injustice was mentioned, most researches focused on individuals' perceptions of fairness [28-30]. In other words, these studies focus on people's subjective feelings. However, as society changes, people should also pay attention to organizational injustice caused by effort-reward imbalance, which is an objective reason. I think one of the reasons for this phenomenon in today's society is introversion.

"Involution" originates from the Agricultural Involution of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. According to this book, involution refers to the phenomenon of a social or cultural model stagnating or failing to transform into another advanced model after reaching a certain form or stage of development [31]. The involution theory from Geertz holds that greater inputs do not produce proportional outputs. However, in the current social background, more and more scholars have a different interpretation of this word. In this process, people need to try their best in all aspects to gain a small competitive advantage in society, occupy the living space of others, and cause mental internal consumption and waste. In a stressful and competitive environment for a long time, most people feel anxious and stressed.

In the workplace, although a person's labor value can reach 1000 yuan, others are willing to lower their value to get the job. More and more people are forced to choose jobs that do not meet their level or are forced to earn less than they deserve [32]. People cannot get output that matches their labor output. In this case, people will think of themselves as distributive injustice in organizational injustice.

Therefore, this study suggests that distributive injustice used to be more rooted in people's different perceptions of injustice, but now the development of involution causes injustice from the external environment.

2.2.4. The Lingering Effects

Most people dare not quit the competition for fear of losing more resources after stopping the competition in the workplace. At this time, employees will lose interest in their work, because they can not get the corresponding pay and need to endure the pressure. Job boredom is positively correlated with theft and horseplay in CWB. Employees may sabotage the organization or harm others to entertain themselves and eliminate boredom [33]. However, employees who are bored with their jobs are most likely to withdraw from their jobs [34]. In other words, people avoid boredom by using things like long breaks to escape the work environment. CWB which is

caused by boredom can be recognized as a possible aftereffect of distributive injustice in modern society.

2.2.5. Regulation of Stressors

Some specific mechanisms, cognitive strategies, and even intervention methods can positively regulate negative emotions caused by stress. For example, Mindfulness is a state of consciousness in which an individual pays attention to the present moment with an accepting and non-judgmental mindset [35]. The most associated approach is that developed by Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Experiments have shown that meditation-based mindfulness-based stress reduction methods can help lower blood pressure in high-stress workers [36], adjust their breathing rate and heart rate [37], and mindfulness can counteract the negative effects of stress and improve workplace well-being [38]. In addition, some factors may have positive effects, such as higher self-efficacy or a growth mindset. Several studies have shown a negative correlation between self-efficacy and occupational stress [39], and there is also evidence that yoga can reduce stress and anxiety [40], moreover, the population with a growth mindset is more receptive, pays more attention to individual development, and is better at coping with challenges.

3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The study mainly has three limitations. First, this study mainly focuses on the causes and mechanisms of CWB. There is not enough discussion on the possible negative effects of CWB in the follow-up, and whether CWB will have a positive effect to some extent requires further research. Second, this study is only a literature review, so there is no relevant experimental data to support the conclusion of this study. Sufficient relevant data need to be obtained in future empirical research to support the conclusion of this review. Finally, this study intends to replenish the contemporary performance of the antecedents of CWB based upon S-EM. which has certain limitations to offer the further study of CWB. Since only one model was referenced in the study, so in terms of theory, there are certain limitations in terms of the number of models referenced and the effectiveness of the theory, because a single theoretical model has limited options for research perspectives in research, it is impossible to analyze and explain phenomena and their interactions from multiple dimensions. In addition, the model has been proposed for too long, the categorization is too broad, it is difficult to verify specifically the hypothesis related to CWB and may not meet the current context of the era, as the situation in which people live will become more complex as the era develops.

4. CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the antecedents of counterproductive work behavior and its mechanism and summarizes the factors that may lead to CWB according to the stress model proposed by Spector and Fox. Through the definition of different stressors, the different manifestations of these stressors in daily life are further discussed and extended on this basis. In addition, this study discusses some methods or interventions that can positively regulate the causes of CWB. However, further research is still needed on the effectiveness and specificity of these methods for different pressures, as well as their respective strengths and weaknesses. Based on reflections in the study, researchers can conduct a more complete, specific, and in-depth study of stressors through the current summary of stressors.

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