

Counterproductive Work Behaviors to Cope With Person-Organization Misfit

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A random sample of employees was surveyed to explore the effect of person-organization fit on counterproductive work behaviors. There was a significant negative relationship between person-organization fit and counterproductive work behaviors. A lack of person-organization fit may be construed by employees as a depletion of psychological resource. As the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) argues, it appears that employees may have replenished the loss of this psychological resource (person-organization fit) by engaging in counterproductive work behaviors. Consequently, organizations should assess the person-organization fit of all employees and prevent the negative consequences of counterproductive work behaviors. The findings have several implications for practitioners.

Keywords: person-organization fit, counterproductive work behaviors, conservation of resources, recruitment

INTRODUCTION

A steady stream of research has addressed the antecedents and consequences of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) of employees. Spector et al. (2006, pp. 448-450) categorized CWB into five dimensions; abuse against others, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. Abuse against others was “harmful behaviors directed toward coworkers,” production deviance was “purposeful failure to perform job tasks effectively,” sabotage involved “defacing or destroying physical property belonging to the employer,” theft occurs when an individual steals employer’s property, and withdrawal represented behaviors that restricted the “amount of time working to less than is required by the organization.” Employee theft alone costs US businesses \$50 billion per year. Each of these CWB dimensions represent harmful behaviors by employees as a reaction to negative work environments such as stressors (Spector & Zhou, 2014), incivility (Welbourne & Sariol, 2017), organizational constraints (Pindek & Spector, 2016), etc. However, recent research has focused on internal attributions of CWB such as, self-identity (Yang et al. 2013), vocational fit (Iliescu et al., 2015), justice perceptions (Cohen & Diamant, 2019), descriptive and injunctive norm perceptions (Jacobson et al., 2020), psychological detachment (Tong et al., 2020), organizational identification (Ciampa et al., 2021), etc. As an intentional discretionary behavior, support exists for the use of CWB to cope with organizational stressors (Shoss et al., 2016). The current study focuses on the use of CWB to cope with a lack of person-organization fit (POF).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study uses attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) to explore why individuals engage in CWB. Attribution theory was originally developed by Heider (1958, p. 82) who categorized causal attributions of outcomes into “factors within the person and factors within the environment.” Past studies on CWB have focused mostly on factors within the environment. Much less attention has been paid to factors within the person that might encourage CWB. Weiner (1985) proposed that locus is one of the three dimensions of causal attributions. That is, individuals attribute causes of outcomes by judging whether the cause is located internally or externally. In addition, the stability and controllability of the causal attributions also guide individuals’ behaviors.

An important externally located, stable, and uncontrollable attribution of outcomes is person-organization fit (POF). Defined as “the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons” (Chatman 1989, p. 339), a lack of POF could be construed as a significant loss of resource. Drawing on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), employees who construe the lack of POF as a psychological breach of contract may attempt to offset the loss (POF) by conserving their time and energy in task performance (Kiazad et al., 2014). They may also retaliate by engaging in CWB. Thus, there will be a significant negative relationship between POF and CWB.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 189 participants ($M_{age} = 43.6$, Male = 48%) were recruited through CloudResearch and provided monetary compensation in exchange for their participation in the study. To qualify for participation in the study, respondents were required to be in current full-time employment with an organization. Results indicated that, on average, the participants held nearly 7 years and 8 months of employment history with their respective company. In addition, respondent employment represented a wide range of business sizes: 100 or less employees (27%), 100 – 999 employees (33%), 1000 – 3499 employees (17%) and 3500 or more employees (23%).

Participants were instructed to respond to a series of questions related to their career. First, participants were instructed to respond to 5 items assessing their POF ($\alpha = 0.96$) which included items such as “My personal values match my organization’s values and culture.” Next, CWB ($\alpha = 0.89$) was measured by a 5-item scale which included items such as “In the past three months, I talked to colleagues about the negative aspects of work.” The CWB items did not measure behaviors such as, theft, sabotage, withdrawal, etc. The items primarily represented demeaning or devaluing the organization to colleagues and outsiders. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

The convergent and discriminant validity of the two scales was assessed by factor analyses. Confirmatory factor analyses of the 5-item scales yielded satisfactory fit statistics for POF (CFI = 0.94) and CWB (CFI = 0.95) and each of the path estimates was significant ($t > 2.00$). Thus, convergent validity was established. Discriminant validity was also established since a factor analysis of POF and CWB yielded a two-factor solution with eigen values greater than 1. The KMO was 0.87 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1730.31$, $df = 45$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the reliable and valid measures of POF and CWB were uncorrelated. A path model indicated that the effect of POF on CWB was significantly negative ($\lambda = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$). Consequently, when employees perceive that their own values and norms does not match those of the organization, they engage in CWB. Table 1 displays the items, the mean, and the standard deviation of POF and CWB. The items used to measure POF and CWB are displayed in the following table (See Table 1).

TABLE 1
MEASURES OF POF AND CWB

	M	SD
Person-Organization Fit Items	3.68	0.98
The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values.		
My organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.		
My personal values match my organization's values and culture.		
There is a good match between my emphasis on fairness and my organization's emphasis on fairness.		
There is a good match between my emphasis on honesty and my organization's emphasis on honesty.		
Counterproductive Work Behavior Items	1.99	1.01
In the past 3 months, I complained about minor work-related issues.		
In the past 3 months, I made problems at work bigger than what they were.		
In the past three months, I talked to colleagues about the negative aspects of work.		
In the past 3 months, I talked to colleagues about the negative aspects of work.		
In the past 3 months, I talked to people outside of the organization about negative aspects of work.		

DISCUSSION

Although the cross-sectional design of this study will not allow causal conclusions, organizations should be aware that POF could be an external, stable, and uncontrollable predictor of CWB. Ideally, organizations should recruit individuals with similar norms and values. However, with time, employees' emphasis on norms and values might change and organizations should track any lack of fit between the organization and its members. The importance of tracking this mismatch is evident by the significant negative effect of POF on CWB. That is, as POF improves, CWB declines.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study indicate that organizations should recruit and select employees who perceive a strong person-organization fit. This requires providing realistic information regarding the organization's culture and values to job candidates. In addition, Organizations should routinely monitor its members' person-organization fit since employees' norms and values may change over time.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations to this study. First, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow us to conclude that POF Misfit causes CWB. Second, potential moderators and mediators of the effect of POF Misfit on CWB was not accounted for. Finally, the path estimate of the effect of POF on CWB was only -0.33, meaning only 11% of the variance of CWB was explained by the model. Consequently, the results may reflect omitted variable bias.

Future research should conduct a longitudinal survey of the effect of POF Misfit on CWB. This will enable researchers to make causal conclusions regarding the effect of POF Misfit on CWB. Future research should also explore why individual may perceive POF Misfit. For example, Burrow et al. (2020) argued that, over time, changes in self-continuity may result in derailment among organizational members. Defined as "the perception that who one is has changed over time in constitution and course" (Burrow et al. p. 587),

derailed individuals perceived more stress, negative affect, and depression. Consequently, derailed individuals may perceive POF Misfit.

Another potential determinant of POF Misfit is subjective career plateauing. Hierarchically and job-content plateaued employees may no longer appreciate the values of their contributions to organizational outcomes resulting in POF Misfit. Although job crafting and leisure activities might act as buffers for organizational misfits (Vogel et al., 2016), empirical evidence provides overwhelming support for the undesirable effects of value incongruence which might result in POF Misfit.

Future research should also explore under what circumstances, POF Misfit is manifested in CWB. For example, job tenure, age, gender, education, person-job fit and other individual differences may moderate or mediate the effect of POF Misfit on CWB. The current study directs future researchers to explore additional causal determinants of CWB.

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