

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR AMONG EMPLOYEES IN EMOTIONALLY DEMANDING JOBS: THE ROLES OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, JOB BURNOUT, AND AGE

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ABSTRACT

Interest in counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is growing in recent time because of the problems it creates for firms. The present study extended previous research on CWB by investigating the influence of perceived organizational support and job burnout on CWB among employees in emotionally demanding jobs. The study was a cross-sectional survey, in which a sample of 328 employees in organizations that render highly personalized service participated. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that employees with favorable perception of organizational support were less likely to exhibit CWB. Employees who reported job burnout showed higher tendency of engaging in CWB than those who did not report job burnout. However, age did not influence employees' tendency to engage in CWB. Employee assisted programs such as flexible working hours and cognitive re-training of employees to manage their expectations were recommended.

Key words: Counterproductive work behavior, support, burnout, emotional demand

INTRODUCTION

Employees engage in several types of behaviors that are detrimental to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. These behaviors are generally known in the organizational behavior literature as counterproductive work behaviors or CWB (Spector, Bauer, & Fox, 2010; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler, 2006). CWB is a general term for behaviors that harm or are intended to

harm the organization, organizational members or clients. CWB includes lateness to work; unauthorized absence from work; verbal attack on customers; keeping customers waiting longer than necessary; theft of company property; and hoarding work-relevant information from a co-worker.

While it may not be stated, the fact remains that by nature and design, most jobs guarantee that employees will perpetrate CWB at some point. However, the likelihood of CWB

occurring may be higher in some jobs than others. Jobs which evoke emotions and require a high level of emotional management skills by employees when performing their job functions, especially during service interaction with customers, may be more vulnerable to CWB. This assertion may be particularly true of intangible service-oriented jobs in the hospitality, health care and aviation industry, where employees may be expected to feign emotions during service interaction in order to provide satisfactory services to their customers. With traditional consumers of intangible services in the personal service industry becoming increasingly sophisticated in their demands, tastes and values, greater demand is made on the emotional management skills of contact employees as they strive to meet customers' expectations.

With higher level of emotional labor (faking a smile, suppressing genuine emotions) going into servicing customers needs, employees' reservoir of emotional resources depletes gradually, and may induce a feeling of depersonalization which may increase the likelihood of CWB occurring. However, the tendency to engage in CWB among employees working in emotionally tasking workplace might be weakened if they perceived that the organizational cares and values their contributions (perceived organizational support – POS).

In their analysis of perceived organizational support, Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) submitted that high level of POS elicited strong feeling of identification with organizational goals and values. Sherony & Green (2002)

corroborated it when they found that employees reciprocated organizational support with positive behaviors. Thus, employees in emotionally demanding jobs rather than engage in negative discretionary behaviors such as theft or sabotage, may instead display reciprocal behaviors such as protecting company property and punctuality to work, if they perceived the organization to be supportive. Hence, it is expected that favorable POS will weaken the tendency to CWB among employees in emotionally demanding jobs.

To date, a significant proportion of CWB research has been devoted to understanding the connections between job attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction), environmental factors, personality traits (e.g. conscientiousness and locus of control), leadership styles (e.g. transformational leadership) and different dimensions of CWB (Marrs, 2003; Penney & Spector, 2005; Townsend, Philips, & Elkins, 2000). Furthermore, literature suggests that POS and job burnout may be differentially related to CWB. However, majority of these studies selected participants from jobs that are low on emotional demands, thus creating a gap in literature on the role of high level of emotional demands on CWB. There is therefore a need to examine the influence of emotionally demanding jobs on CWB from a sample selected locally.

Literature Review

Monnastes (2010) obtained data from 235 white collar workers to investigate the relationship between

perceived organizational support and behaviors that impact negatively on the organization. They found that perceived organizational support correlated negatively with employee-oriented CWB and organization-oriented CWB. The finding implies that employees' were more likely to exhibit harmful behaviors if they perceived the organization as not supportive, while favorable perception of organizational support was less likely to be associated with CWB.

Zhao, Peng and Sheard (2013) investigated whether less favorable organizational support (measured as alienation) was related to CWB. They used a sample drawn made up of hotel workers. The authors found that employees who believed that the organization was not supportive were significantly more likely to engage in CWB, specifically organization-oriented CWB.

Previous research provides evidence that perceived organizational support is negatively associated with withdrawal behavior, which is a form of CWB, because of its effects on organizational functioning (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The authors found that employees with favorable perception of organizational support exhibited lower tendency towards withdrawal behavior such as unauthorized absence from work.

Favorable evaluation of organizational support significantly influenced job attitudes that impact organizational effectiveness. This was the outcome of a study conducted by Kelloway, Francis, Prosser, & Cameron (2007) in which they found that high POS employees had higher levels

of job satisfaction and commitment. Satisfied and committed employees may be less likely to exhibit behaviors that are detrimental to the organization. The reason may be because satisfaction may elicit high level of identification with the goals and values of the organization. Finding showed that low POS employees, on the other hand, were less committed to the organization and were more likely to turnover (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Hussain, & Asif, 2012). According to Lambert (2006), dissatisfied employees have a higher tendency to detach psychologically from the job (Lambert, 2006). Such psychological distancing would increase the likelihood of CWB occurring.

Bans, Whepley, Christopher, Oh, and Shin (2012) examined the relationship between emotions and CWB using exhaustion (a dimension of job burnout). Their sample consisted of 113 general employees in a large South Korean bank. They found a significant correlation between emotional exhaustion and CWB, specifically employee-oriented CWB and organization-oriented CWB. The authors concluded that high level of emotional exhaustion increased the likelihood of CWB. The finding suggests that employees who are emotionally exhausted will be more likely to exhibit detrimental work behaviors.

Bolton, Harvey, Grawitch and Barber (2012) investigated the relationship between job burnout (using the dimension of depersonalization) and counterproductive work behaviors. They found that depersonalization significantly influenced CWB. They concluded that the finding was con

sistent with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which argued that in a state of depleted emotional resources, heightened depersonalization increased the likelihood of CWB occurring. In a related study that investigated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and CWB, Krischer, Penney, and Hunter (2010) found that employees who reported being emotionally exhausted were more likely to display CWB. Liang and Hsieh (2007) found that of the three dimensions of job burnout, only depersonalization significantly predicted CWB measured as workplace deviance, among a sample made up of 303 Taiwanese flight attendants.

Research interest in detrimental work behavior in workplaces in Nigeria has started to attract attention from scholars and practitioners in recent time. For instance, Fagbohunbe, Akinbode, and Ayodeji (2012) found significant correlation between what they termed ‘organizational reaction variables’ (such as supervision, co-workers, physical work conditions, financial rewards) and behaviors that were considered CWB.

There have been mixed findings regarding the relationship between age and CWB. For instance, the result of a meta-analysis conducted by Lau and Sholihin (2005) found age to be one of the strongest demographic predictors of CWB. Similarly, Hershcovis, Turner, Barling et al. (2007), conducted a study and found that age significantly predicted employee-oriented CWB. The finding suggests that younger individuals were more likely to display behaviors that affected the organization negatively. Lastly, in

a critical assessment of the age – CWB relationship, Baucus and Near (1991), reported negative correlation between both such that younger employees had a higher tendency to deviate from organizational norms by engaging in behaviors considered detrimental to the organization.

Hypotheses

1. There will be significant negative relationship between perceived organizational support and counterproductive work behavior.
2. There will be significant positive relationship between job burnout and counterproductive work behavior.
3. There will be significant influence of age on counterproductive work behavior.

METHODS

Design and Participants

Using a cross-sectional survey design, 328 (120 females; 208 males) employees from the hospitality, aviation, and health care sectors were selected for the study using purposive sampling technique. Participants were contact-employees with responsibilities to relate directly with customers. Analysis of industry distribution of participants shows that 102 were from the hospitality industry, 85 from the aviation industry, and the remaining 141 from the health care sector. Of this total, 133 were married and 193 were single. In terms of job status, 119 were junior employees, 141 senior level employees, and 66 were manage-

ment level employees. Majority of the participants (57%) had organizational tenure of over 11 years. Participants' highest educational qualification varied from First school leaving certificate (11), Senior School Certificate (73), Ordinary National Diploma (68), First degree (127), and postgraduate qualifications (49).

Measures

Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2002) was used to assess the extent to which the participants felt that the organization valued and cared about them. The 8-item scale was rated on a 6-point scale (Strongly disagree = 1; Strongly agree = 6). In interpreting the scores, scores above the mean indicated favorable perception of organizational support, while scores below the mean indicated unfavorable perception of organizational support. In the present study, the scale yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .50.

Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) was used to measure job burnout. It was a 22-item scale predicated on 6-point scale (A few times a year = 1; Everyday = 6). Coker (1999) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .86 with a Nigerian sample. With the present sample, the scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .72. High scores indicated high burnout while lower scores indicated low burnout.

Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (Spector et al., 2006) was 32-item inventory that measured the

extent to which employees engaged in behaviors that interrupted organizational functioning. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (Never = 1; Everyday = 5). High scores indicated that the employees frequently engaged in counterproductive work behavior while low scores indicated low engagement in counterproductive work behavior. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in this study was .86.

Procedure

The researcher had audience with the human resource officer of the organizations visited, discussed his intention, and eventually secured permission to carry out the study. Thereafter, participants were then approached and requested to indicate their interest in participating in the study. The researcher discussed the goal of the study, benefits that might accrue to the participants as well as the organization. Owing to their busy schedule and to ensure high level of concentration, questionnaires were distributed during seminars, workshops, trainings and in the office for a small number of participants. Objections such as what to do should a participant decide to drop out of the study mid-way were entertained and those who gave their consent were eventually given a copy of the study instrument to complete. Because the instrument took an average of 20 minutes to complete, some completed theirs and returned it to the researcher, while those who needed more time were requested to submit at an agreed collation point where the questionnaires were later retrieved by the

researcher. Out of the 402 questionnaires distributed, 328 were duly completed and found usable.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested with multiple regression analysis,

while hypothesis 3 was tested with student t-test for independent samples.

RESULTS

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis on CWB

Predictors	β	t	R	R^2	F
Perceived organizational support	-.26**	- 4.93**	.27	.07	13.01**
Job burnout	.12*	2.21*			

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. $N = 328$.

As shown in Table 1, perception of organizational support significantly predicted counterproductive work behavior such that the more favorable the perception of organizational support, the lower the tendency to engage in counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = -.26$; $t = -4.93$; $p < .01$). This result supported hypothesis 1. The

results in Table 1 also confirmed hypothesis 2. Job burnout significantly predicted counterproductive work behavior such that employees' tendency to engage in counterproductive work behavior increased with job burnout ($\beta = .12$; $t = 2.21$; $p < .05$). To test hypothesis 3, a t-test was conducted. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of t-test on the influence of Age on CWB

Age category	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Young	232	58.70	21.29	326	-.69	>.05
Old	96	60.51	21.70			

As shown in Table 2, there was no significant influence of age on CWB, [$t(326) = -.69$, $p > .05$]. This implied that employees in emotionally demanding job tended to engage in counterproductive work behavior irrespective of age. The hypothesis 3 was, therefore, rejected.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the extent to which perceived organizational

support, job burnout and age influenced the tendency of employees in emotionally demanding jobs to engage in counterproductive work behavior.

It was hypothesized that perceived organizational support would significantly predict counterproductive work behavior. The findings showed that there was significant negative relationship between perceived organizational support and counterproductive work behavior such that favorable perception of organizational support

was associated with lower likelihood to engage in counterproductive work behavior. The results of the present study supported the findings of previous researches which showed a negative relationship between perceived organizational support and counterproductive work behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2008; Kelloway et al., 2010; Lambert, 2006).

One plausible explanation for this finding concerns whether employees perceive the support they get from management as 'forced' or discretionary. When employees perceive that the favorable treatments they received from the organization are voluntary, the possibility that such cognition would influence the feelings of support among employees is high. For example, annual increases in pay, and bonus payment in a profitable financial year, without unions having to enter into hard negotiations with management would convey such favorable treatment as volitional. When favorable organizational decisions or actions are perceived as discretionary by workers, it enhances employees' feelings of support by the organization, which in turn may reduce the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that are inimical to the organization's interest.

Similarly, employees in highly personalized service industry such as healthcare, aviation and hotels often have to relate with a diverse set of customers some of whom may be disrespectful, hard-to-please, and over-demanding. This may elicit negative emotions during service interactions; thereby increasing the chances of CWB occurring. However, employees who feel indebted in some way to the

organization may suppress the urge to engage in behaviors that could have negative effects on the organization's well-being.

Also, the finding in this study can be explained from the socio-economic perspective. During periods of high unemployment, having a job may influence the formation of positive attitude towards one's employer, and reduce behaviors that might be detrimental to the workings of the organization. The negative aspects of the job such as extended working hours and salary freeze may become less important at such periods. This argument may hold true especially in countries such as Nigeria where social safety nets for the unemployed and elderly are either grossly inadequate or non-existent. And as the number of dependants under one's care increases, there will be a reduced tendency that the employed would display deviant behaviors that could cost their job.

The study found that job burnout had significant influence on counterproductive work behavior. The finding indicated that as job burnout increased the tendency to exhibit counterproductive work behavior also increased. This implied that employees who experienced increased level of job burnout were more likely to display counterproductive work behaviors. The results of the present study corroborated previous findings that reported positive relationship between job burnout and counterproductive work behavior across occupations (Bans et al., 2012; Bolton et al., 2012; Liang & Hsieh, 2007).

According to the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989),

individuals are often motivated to prevent loss of personal resources (such as time, energy, effort, money) by seeking activities that might help in conserving these resources. Typically, most jobs in the hotel, healthcare and aviation sectors in Nigeria, as in other countries require long working hours, and high level face-to-face interaction with clients. Because there may be a high number of customers to attend to, employees may feel drained, leading to arousal of negative emotions. And as contact employees strive to satisfy customers' demands, they experience depletion of emotional resources, causing them to become increasingly detached from the job. The resulting state of depersonalization might increase the chances of CWB, such as withdrawal, tardiness, and client-oriented aggressive behaviors occurring.

The study found that age had no significant influence on counterproductive work behavior. In other words older employees and younger employees were at equal likelihood of exhibiting counterproductive work behaviors. The finding in this study contradicts past studies which demonstrated an inverse relationship between age and CWB such that older age was associated with lower tendency to engage in destructive work behaviors (Lau & Sholihin, 2005) and vice versa (Baucus & Near, 1991).

CONCLUSION

The study was able to establish that favorable perception of organizational support was associated with decreased counterproductive work

behavior. Also, the study found that higher level of job burnout was associated with higher tendency to perpetrate CWB. These findings lead to the conclusion that psychological factors contribute to CWB and may play a role in interventions aimed at managing CWB in organizations.

Since perceived organizational support and job burnout have been shown to be predictive of counterproductive work behavior, it is recommended that employees in high emotionally demanding jobs should be retrained at regular intervals. This may help in increasing their capacity to handle the demands of customer and reduce the occurrence of negative work behaviors as a result of high workload.

Management should engage in activities that enhance employees' perception of the organization as supportive, caring, and appreciative of employees' contributions to organizational functioning. Doing this may help build positive attitudes towards the organization, which may spill over to how employees relate with customers.

Personnel issues relating to emotionally demanding jobs should take into cognizance the challenges these employees encounter during service interactions with customers. An appreciation of the challenges they encounter may prompt management to explore corrective strategies to lessen employees' exposure to damaging work situations.

This study was not without some limitations. Results may be prone to common method variance because it relied on self-reports. Future studies that combine self-report and objective measures may be more beneficial.

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