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UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES' DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR: THE ROLE OF AGREEABLENESS AND STRESS RELATED TO WORK

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ABSTRACT

These days the majority of organizations struggle to overcome employees' misbehavior. Understanding why a phenomenon occurs, Employers and industrial organizational psychologists are interested to find factors contributing to such behaviors. The objectives of this study were to investigate the relationship between job stress and agreeableness (a type of personality traits) with employee deviant behaviors. Data were collected through 212 employee of an organization in Malaysia. The results showed that both job stress and agreeableness predict workplace deviant behavior. Results found that there is a positive relationship between job stress and workplace deviance and negative relationship between agreeableness and deviant behavior. It was also shown that agreeableness moderate the relationship between job stress and workplace deviant behavior. Implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Workplace deviant behavior; employee deviant behavior; job stress; personality trait agreeableness.

INTRODUCTION

Why employees might decide to engage in deviant behavior in organizations? This is a question that has captured the public's imagination for many decades. Several believe surrounding this issue has emerged; as a result deviant behavior has received considerable public attention. In recent years, it has also generated high interest among industrial organizational psychologists because of its pervasiveness in organizations (Farhadi et.al.2012). Why people may decide to engage in deviance action in organizations is an empirical question that has been confronted for several years, and in this study, we have tried to find some answers for this question. Industrial organizational psychologists have tried to prevent employee deviance in the workplace. However, the prevention of deviance in workplace first requires that organization to understand the processes and antecedents which lead to such behavior (Kessler & Spector 2007). A variety of individual and situational factors have been shown by prior organizational researchers (Andersson & Pearson 1999; Fox, Spector & Miles 2001; Spector & Fox 2002; Cullen & Sackett 2003; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler 2006;and Diefendorff, & Mehta 2007) to predict employee's deviant behaviors. Indeed, past WDB researchers have identified a number of antecedents which are commonly correlated with deviant behavior, and it seems logical that paying careful attention to these antecedents might reduce the amount of workplace deviance (Farhadi et.al.2012).

Job stress has been shown as the main variable that is highly related to deviant behaviors by several past studies (Chen & Spector 1992; Fox et al. 2001; Goh et al. 2003; Spector & Fox 2005; and Hershcovis et al. 2007). According to Spector and Fox (2005), the job stressors of interpersonal

conflict, interactional justice, organizational constraints, and job demands may relate to WDB. Hence, they concluded that job stressors may lead to increased WDB

Work related stress is not the only potential predictors of WDB. Indeed, several WDB studies have examined the effect of personality traits (Salgado 2002; Dalal 2005; Berry et al. 2007; Bowling 2010) as antecedent of workplace deviant behavior. For instance, Salgado (2002) did a meta-analysis on the big five personality domains and CWBs to investigate whether the big five were predictors of WDBs such as absenteeism, accidents, deviant behaviors, and turnover. The results of the meta-analysis of the five personality dimensions for predicting deviant behaviors showed that conscientiousness predicted deviant behaviors and turnover, and extroversion, openness, agreeableness and emotional stability predicted the turnover criterion.

Moreover, Mount et.al. (2006) found that agreeableness had a direct negative relationship with interpersonal counterproductive behaviors and job satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between agreeableness and workplace deviance. In addition, three meta-analytic results have shown agreeableness trait is negatively related to negative behavior in organizations (Berry et al. 2007; Dalal 2005; Salgado 2002).

Although many studies on antecedents of deviant behavior were done in the west, only a few number of those studies look at this among Asian (Farhadi et.al.2012). Therefore the objectives of this study are twofold:

a. to examine the relationship between job stress and agreeableness with workplace deviant behavior to look at the moderating effect of agreeableness on the relationship between job stress and workplace deviant behavior

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to collect the data for this study. Three variables being studied were the job stress scale, personality trait and workplace deviance. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 212 subjects who were working as civil servant in Malaysia who were randomly selected from a public organization. The collected data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regressions. The questionnaires consist of three parts: the job stress scale, personality trait and workplace deviance. Descriptive of questionnaires are as follows:

Workplace Deviant Behavior measurement: Employee deviant behavior was measured using Bennett and Robinson's (2000) Workplace Deviance Scale. This 19-item measure with a 7-point Likert-type response scale was used to measure the extent to which participants have engaged in workplace deviance during the past year. Item responses ranged from 1=never, 2=once a year, 3=twice a year, 4=several times a year, 5=monthly, 6=weekly, and 7=daily. Examples of the workplace deviance items included: "Played a mean trick on someone at work", "Made fun of someone at work", "Cursed at someone at work". Cronbach's alpha for the 19 workplace deviance items was $\alpha=0.91$.

Personality traits measurement: This construct was measured using a set of Mini-Markers developed by Saucier (1994). This 8-item measure with a 9-point Likert-type response scale was used to measure agreeableness. Item responses ranged from 1=extremely inaccurate, 2=very inaccurate, 3=moderately inaccurate, 4=slightly inaccurate, 5=?, 6=slightly accurate, 7=moderately accurate, 8=very accurate, and 9=extremely accurate. The Cronbach's alpha for the 8-items was $\alpha=0.85$.

Work-Related Stress: This construct was measured using a modified form of the Stress in General Scale (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001). This 15- item scale consisted of stress-related works and participants responded to each item by rating whether or not they experienced these stress-related feelings at work. Item responses included: 0 = no, undecided (?) = 1, 2 = yes. Example items included: “Demanding”. Cronbach’s Alpha for the 15 job- related stress items was $\alpha = .693$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Pearson correlation as seen in Table 1 shows that there was a positive significant relationship between job stress and workplace deviant behavior ($r = .32, p < 0.01$). The findings showed that the higher the perception of job stress by employee higher intend to engage in deviant behavior. Hence, controlling employee stress can reduce the amount of deviant behavior in organizations. Pearson’s Correlation coefficient was also used to analyse the relationship between agreeableness and workplace deviant behavior. The result of the analysis as shown in Table 1, indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between agreeableness and workplace deviant behavior ($r = -.36, p < 0.01$). Therefore, based on this finding, the current study was able to support this hypothesis.

Table 1. Means, standard deviation and correlations among observed variables

variables	M	SD	1	2
1. Workplace deviant behavior	1.9	.90	-	
2. Job stress	.79	.36	.32*	-
3. agreeableness	6.3	.76	-.31*	-.36*

* $p < 0.01$

This finding is consistent with Mount et.al. (2006), Salgado (2002), and Graziano and Eisenberg (1997), who agrees there is a negative relationship between agreeableness and deviant behavior. Mount et.al. (2006) found that agreeableness had a direct negative relationship with interpersonal counterproductive behaviors. Graziano and Eisenberg (1997) found that employees ranked high on agreeableness are more likely to display less hostility and aggression toward others. Salgado (2002) stated that agreeableness was a valid predictor of deviant behavior and turnover.

Table 2 multiple Regression Analyses Results of the Moderating Role of Agreeableness

	B	SE B	β	R^2	F	$R^2\Delta$
Model 1				.104	25.4*	.108*
Stress	.802	.159	.329*			

Model 2			.176	23.4*	.075*
Stress	.580	.161	.238*		
Agreeableness	-.343	.078	-.289*		

*p<0.01

The next hypothesis proposed that agreeableness moderate the relationship between work-related stress and WDB, a multiple regression was performed into two steps. Dependent variable (WDB) was first regressed onto the independent variable (job stress) in step one (see table 2). In this stage the presented model account for 10.4% of the variance ($F = 25.4, p < .01$). In other words, 10.4 percent of change in the dependent variable is due to the independent variable.

In the second step, job stress and agreeableness were entered in the model which accounted for an additional 17.6 % of the variance (R Square change = .075, $F = 19.3, p < .01$). As it can be seen in table 2, the observe change in R Square increased in step 2 after moderator variable was added to the model. In addition, agreeableness was found to significantly predict WDB ($\beta = -.289, p < .01$). Therefore, this study was able to support this hypothesis, which stated agreeableness moderate the relationship between job stress and WDB.

This hypothesis was predicted that agreeableness would moderate the relationship between job stress and workplace deviant behavior such that the relationship between the job stress and WDB differs as a function of agreeableness. Thus, as expected, reducing job stress was shown to be related to decrease employee engagement in deviant behaviors by controlling personality trait. More specifically, this finding implies that employers and managers who want to develop policies to decrease deviant behavior in workplace should focus on stressors in work and personality of applicant as well.

CONCLUSION

As a result, support was found regarding the moderating effect of agreeableness on the stress-deviance relationship, this study provides an important step for research in this area. As better understanding the precursors of workplace deviance is essential to finding ways to reduce such behaviors, the current study adds to the extant literature by finding evidence for the impact of personality traits on employees' decisions to engage in workplace deviance, which has been primarily overlooked in previous research. Thus, this study not only adds incrementally to the research on workplace deviance, but it also has a number of practical implications for future studies.

For reducing the amount of workplace deviance, this study explored several relationships among individual and situational factors that may lead to workplace deviant behavior, but further exploration of the concept of workplace deviance and related factors should be done. Future research should examine the impact of other factors such as; work environments, job security, job characteristics, length of workday, time spent working from home, leadership style, employee status (i.e., part time versus full-time workers) and cultural differences which contribute in workplace deviant behavior.

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