

Individual Differences as Antecedents of Counterproductive Work Behaviour

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Abstract

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) has recently gained more interest in industrial and organizational psychology, as the impact of engagement of CWB is big, influencing not just the organization but also other stakeholders. The objective of this study was to look at individual factors as antecedents of CWB, focusing on personality, locus of control, and values. Data were collected from 267 students studying psychology by means of a questionnaire measuring CWB, the Big-Five factor personality, work locus of control, and values. Only agreeableness and conscientiousness (out of the five personality factor) was found to be negatively correlated to CWB. Work locus of control showed a positive correlation with CWB. Hedonism and power was found to be positively related to CWB, whereas benevolence and conformity was found to be negatively related to CWB. The findings on personality and locus of control as antecedents of CWB are consistent with past research, meaning that employers can use this finding in their selection process. The findings on values have given a new insight to an area that can be researched further in the process of understanding why individuals engage in CWB.

Keywords: counterproductive work behavior, personality, locus of control, values

1. Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) is an area that has been researched on more lately. CWB is a dimension of job performance, along with organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and task performance (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). OCB has been researched more rigorously, but it is only now that the attention is turning to CWB. Because CWB is considered to be part of job performance, it is therefore important to look at what factors are related to CWB. The reason being is that job performance of employees ultimately makes or breaks an organization.

CWB has been defined as any intentional behaviour on the part of an organization member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). The definition given clearly shows that CWB includes only behaviour that is intentional and voluntary, and normally these behaviours are a violation of organizational norms. Examples of CWB are theft, poor attendance, time and resource misuse, harassment etc. (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Spector et al., 2006). CWB affects not only the organization as whole due to financial implications, but it can also affect other stakeholders of the organization (e.g. other employees, customers, suppliers etc.). Murphy (1993) stated that employee deviance and delinquency have accounted for between \$6 billion and \$200 billion of organizational loss annually. This is not at all surprising, as Harper (1990) found that a good proportion of employees (33-75%) have engaged in some type of CWB at one point in serving in an organization. On top of financial implications to the organization, engagement in CWB also affects the human capital of the organization, where it has been suggested that being a target of CWB could lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and stress, and ultimately possibly leading to intention to leave the organization (Budd, Arvey, & Lawless, 1996; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Glomb, 2002).

CWB has been studied in two different ways, with some researchers concentrating on specific facets of CWB such as absence (e.g. Dalton & Mesch, 1991), aggression (e.g. Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Fox & Spector, 1999), and theft (e.g. Greenberg, 1990). On the other hand, some researchers look at these behaviours collectively, and name them CWB but also exploring different dimensions of CWB (e.g. Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Spector et al., 2006). Based on this, Sackett and DeVore (2001) have suggested that CWB be

summed up as a hierarchical model. This model suggests that CWB be looked at as an overall counterproductive construct, with other suggested dimensionality being organized underneath this. The current study will utilize Gruys and Sackett's model due to the width of inclusion of negative behaviours.

Parallel to research on the dimensionality of CWB, researchers have also been looking at antecedents of CWB. Generally, the antecedents of CWB can be divided into two factors: individual difference and situational factors. The current study will focus only on individual difference factors, more specifically looking at personality, locus of control, and values.

1.1 Personality and CWB

Personality and its relationship with CWB have been studied extensively. It has been suggested that since CWB is an act based individual choice, it is more likely to be influenced by personality traits rather than ability-related factors (Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006). Salgado (2002) conducted a meta-analysis to look at the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and CWB; more specifically hypothesizing that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability will be valid predictors of CWB (CWB includes absenteeism, accidents, deviant behaviours, and turnover). The results of the meta-analysis showed that none of the five personality traits were a predictor for absenteeism and accidents; all five personality traits were a predictor for lack of turnover; and only agreeableness and conscientiousness were predictors for deviant behaviour. Dalal (2005) in a meta-analysis on studies that looked at the relationship between OCB-CWB and looking at the relationship between certain antecedents and OCB as well as CWB found conscientiousness (as a facet of personality) as an antecedent of CWB and it was found to be related to CWB ($\rho = -.38$). Another meta-analysis by Berry, Ones, and Sackett (2007) found that agreeableness and conscientiousness to be negatively related to organizational and interpersonal deviance (a measure of CWB). A study by Bowling and Eschleman (2010) found that agreeableness and conscientiousness was negatively related to two types of CWB, behaviour directed towards the organization and also behaviour towards other personnel in the organization, and the same was found in a study by Mount, Ilies, and Johnson. Following this, a study by Bolton, Becker, and Barber (2010) found agreeableness and conscientiousness to be a predictor of CWB. From the aforementioned studies, it can be seen that personality can be a predictor of CWB, with agreeableness and conscientiousness being consistent predictors of it. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative significant relationship between agreeableness and conscientiousness and counterproductive work behaviour.

1.2 Locus of control and CWB

Locus of control (LOC) is the extent to which an individual believes s/he controls things that happens around them (both positive and negative events; Rotter, 1966), and so it can be considered as an individual factor that will have a relationship with CWB. A person with an internal locus of control believes that s/he is responsible for his/her own actions; whereas a person with an external locus of control believes that outside forces (e.g. fate, chance, powerful others) are responsible for things that happen to them. Spector (1982) has found LOC to be linked to job satisfaction and job performance, hence the reason behind intuitively thinking that LOC could be a possible antecedent of CWB. Reiss and Mitra (1998) and O'Brien (2004) found individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to engage in CWB, as they believe that these behaviours are more acceptable. Thus, based on the literature reviewed, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive significant relationship between work locus of control and counterproductive work behaviour.

1.3 Values and CWB

Values have been studied extensively, be it by itself or in relation to other constructs (Lee & Soutar, 2010; Morselli, Spini, & Devos, 2012; Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998; Schwartz, 1999); but to date there has been little to no research found on the relationship between values and either CWB. Values can be defined as "principles for action encompassing abstract goals in life and modes of conduct that an individual or a collective considers preferable across contexts and situations" (Braithwaite & Blamey, 1998, p. 364). Since values can be viewed as a guiding principle in an individual's life, perhaps it is worthwhile to explore if values does indeed have an effect on CWB. Schwartz (1992) put forth ten values: conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, and, security. A study by Bruursema (2007) in looking at overall CWB, found it to be only significantly correlated to benevolence ($r = -.16$), hedonism ($r = .16$), and stimulation ($r = .14$). None of the values were significantly correlated to CWB directed to other individuals in the organization; but it was found that benevolence, achievement, and stimulation were all correlated with

CWB directed towards the organization. Based on the research available, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between values and CWB.

2. Methods

A survey was conducted to collect the data for this research. The participants were psychology students from the University of Melbourne's Department of Psychology. They were recruited from the Research Participation Pool (RPP); as well as getting students undertaking a third-year subject at the above said department to participate. The sample consisted of 72 males and 194 females with an age range of 17 – 52 ($M = 21.29$, $SD = 3.94$). The participants were also asked to state their full-time and part-time work experience (in months worked). The part-time work experience ranged from never worked at all to having 120 months ($M = 37.18$, $SD = 26.9$) experience whereas the full-time experience ranged from 0 months to 420 months ($M = 8.36$, $SD = 37.09$). The questionnaire consisted of four parts: demographic information, a scale to measure Counterproductive Work Behaviour, the Work Locus of Control scale, and the Schwartz Value Survey. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson correlation. Description of the questionnaire is as follows:

2.1 Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)

A 63-item questionnaire (based on Gruys and Sackett, 2003) was used in this study to measure counterproductive work behaviour; where CWB can be categorised into eleven distinct categories and an overall score. Respondents were asked to rate the items using a five-point Likert scale based on how acceptable do they think the behaviours are. High scores indicate higher acceptability of the counterproductive behaviours (high counterproductive work behaviour) and lower scores indicate low acceptability of the behaviours (low counterproductive work behaviour). The current study found the internal consistency reliability to range from 0.61 (alcohol use) to 0.89 (misuse of time and resources); with only two dimensions reporting an alpha value of smaller than 0.70.

2.2 Personality

100 items (20 items for each domain) was used from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) which was developed by Goldberg (1999) to assess the Big-5 factor domain which measures extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness/intellect. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'very inaccurate' and 5 = 'very accurate') to indicate to which extent each item was typical of their behaviour. Some items were negatively worded thus those items needs to be reverse-scored. The items from each of the scales were scrambled so that there is no obvious pattern. The score for each scale is the total of all the items in that scale. The coefficient alpha of the preliminary IPIP scales are: Extraversion = 0.91, Agreeableness = 0.88, Conscientiousness = 0.88, Emotional Stability = 0.91 and Intellect/Imagination = 0.90. (Goldberg, 1999)

2.3 Work Locus of Control Scale

A 16-item questionnaire developed by Spector (1988) was utilized to assess an individual's control belief in the workplace. Respondents used a six-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree' and 6 = 'strongly agree') to indicate their agreement to the statements in the scale. Half the items tapped on to the external locus of control and the other half tapped on to the internal locus of control. The items that represent internal locus of control are reverse scored (The items are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 14, and 15). The score for the scale is the total of all the items in the scale. Higher scores on the scale indicate an external locus of control. The reliability coefficient of this scale ranged from 0.75 to 0.85. (Spector, 1988)

2.4 Schwartz Value Survey

A 57-item questionnaire developed by Schwartz (1992) was utilized to assess values. The 57 items taps into 10 values: conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, and, security. Each item expresses an aspect of the motivational goal of one value. An explanatory phrase in parentheses following the item further specifies its meaning. Respondents rated the importance of each value item in guiding them in their lives using a nine-point Likert scale ranging from -1 to 7 (-1 = 'opposed to my values'; 0 = 'not important'; 1 & 2 = 'unlabeled'; 3 = 'important'; 4 & 5 = 'unlabeled'; 6 = 'very important'; and 7 = 'of supreme importance'). The higher number shows that the value is more important as a guiding principle in the respondent's life. The score for each value is the mean of the ratings of the items that measure the specific value (ranges from three to eight items per value). For correlational analysis, each item was firstly centered using the mean of the 57 items, then the score for each value is the mean of the centered items that measure the scale.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation between CWB (overall and the eleven dimensions) and personality as

well as locus of control. It can be seen that only agreeableness and conscientiousness were found to be negatively related to overall CWB. Conscientiousness was negatively correlated to seven dimensions of CWB (theft and related behaviour, destruction of property, misuse of information, poor quality work, alcohol use, drug use, inappropriate verbal actions, and inappropriate physical actions) and agreeableness was negatively correlated to only three dimensions of CWB (theft and related behaviour, misuse of information, and poor quality work). Openness was only negatively correlated to theft and related behaviour, and neuroticism was negatively correlated to poor quality work only. Extraversion was not correlated to any of the CWB dimensions. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 1. Correlations between CWB (and its dimensions) and personality and work LOC

Variable	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Neuroticism	Openness/Intellect	Work Locus of Control
1. Theft and related behavior	-.18**	-.23**	-.11	-.12	-.19**	.18**
2. Destruction of property	-.07	-.13*	-.08	-.09	-.09	.22**
3. Misuse of information	-.14*	-.18**	-.12	-.07	-.10	.23**
4. Misuse of time and resources	-.09	-.10	.01	.01	-.10	.10
5. Unsafe behavior	-.02	-.07	-.12	-.12	.01	.07
6. Poor attendance	-.04	-.09	.05	-.03	-.08	.20**
7. Poor quality work	-.13*	-.17**	-.01	-.16**	-.05	.15*
8. Alcohol use	-.12	-.26**	.05	-.04	.08	.07
9. Drug use	-.08	-.22**	-.04	-.02	.08	-.03
10. Inappropriate verbal actions	-.12	-.13*	-.03	-.05	-.04	.10
11. Inappropriate physical actions	-.10	-.09	-.07	-.05	-.07	.11
12. Overall CWB	-.14*	-.21**	-.05	-.09	-.07	.18**

Note. Sample sizes were 260-266. ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.01$

It can also be seen from Table 1 that work locus of control was positively correlated to overall CWB, with it also being positively correlated to five dimensions of CWB (theft and related behaviour, destruction of property, misuse of information, poor attendance, and poor quality work). Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Results of Pearson correlation between CWB and values can be seen in Table 2. In relation to overall CWB, it was found to be positively correlated to hedonism and power; and it was also negatively correlated to benevolence and conformity. Security was not related to any dimension of CWB. Conformity, tradition, benevolence, and achievement were negatively correlated to some of the dimensions of CWB (refer to Table 2 for specific pairings). Hedonism, self-direction, and stimulation were positively correlated with a few dimensions of CWB. Interestingly, universalism was negatively related to three dimensions of CWB (misuse of time and resources, poor attendance, and poor quality work) but it was also positively correlated to the CWB dimension of drug use). Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported, as not all values were related to CWB.

Table 2. Correlations between CWB (and its dimensions) and values

Variable	Achievement	Benevolence	Conformity	Hedonism	Power	Security	Self-direction	Stimulation	Tradition	Universalism
1. Theft and related behavior	-.01	-.20**	-.09	.20**	.18**	-.04	-.04	.06	-.00	-.12
2. Destruction of property	-.06	-.03	-.06	.10	.01	-.07	.05	.02	.00	.01
3. Misuse of information	-.08	-.11	-.10	.16**	.14*	-.03	.06	.06	-.08	-.06

4. Misuse of time and resources	.02	-.16*	-.06	.15*	.16*	-.02	-.04	-.01	.04	-.16*
5. Unsafe behavior	.03	.01	-.13*	.08	.03	-.02	-.01	.04	-.09	-.03
6. Poor attendance	.02	-.13*	-.03	.08	.15*	-.05	-.03	-.00	.09	-.14*
7. Poor quality work	.06	-.10	-.14*	.10	.14*	-.09	.02	.07	.00	-.13*
8. Alcohol use	-.15*	-.08	-.21**	.28**	.05	-.08	.12*	.21**	-.17**	.07
9. Drug use	-.17**	-.01	-.20**	.19**	-.08	-.08	.19**	.19**	-.15*	.19**
10. Inappropriate verbal actions	-.03	-.08	-.16*	.18**	.11	-.07	.06	.11	-.16**	-.05
11. Inappropriate physical actions	-.15*	-.05	-.06	.12	.12	-.07	.10	.12	-.01	-.04
12. Overall CWB	-.05	-.13*	-.16*	.21**	.14*	-.08	.05	.10	-.06	-.08

Note. Sample sizes were 260-266. ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.01$

The results of the current study clearly showed a negative relationship between overall CWB and two facets of personality: agreeableness and conscientiousness. The research finding is consistent with the findings of Berry, Ones, and Sackett (2007), Bolton, Becker, and Barber (2010), Bowling and Eschleman (2010), Mount, Ilies, and Johnson (2006), and Salgado (2002); where all of these researchers found only agreeableness and conscientiousness (as facets of personality) to be negatively related to CWB. Agreeable individuals (scoring low on the scale) are concerned about others, cooperative, considerate, and tend to follow rules; and this makes them less likely to engage in CWB. These individuals will want to have a good relationship with everyone, and perhaps also the organization; and thus are less likely to want to engage in CWB to ensure good relationships. Similarly, conscientious individuals careful, hardworking, perfectionists, orderly, industrious, and seems to have a need for achievement. Thus, these individuals tend to think about what they are doing, and so are unlikely to engage in CWB. It is also clear from the results that personality is related to different dimensions of CWB, and this is something that can be explored further in future studies.

Locus of control was also found to be positively correlated to CWB, and this simply translates to individuals who have an external locus tend to engage in more CWB. Individuals who have an external locus of control believes that anything that happens (be it good or bad) is due to external forces (luck or other people) and never due to their own self (individuals who have an internal locus believe this). Hence, individuals who have an external locus of control are more likely to engage in CWB, as it is easy for these individuals to blame their behaviour on an external force.

Values were another aspect that was studied, and it was found that hedonism and power was positively related to CWB; and benevolence and conformity was negatively related to CWB. The findings of the current study does reflect the findings of Bruursema (2007), with some differences in the findings as well. Hedonistic individuals tend to seek pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself, and individuals with high power need social status and prestige and like to have control or dominance over people and resources. This perhaps can explain why hedonism and power are positively related to CWB, because these individuals will engage in CWB due to gratification and fulfillment of personal goals. Individuals who are high in benevolence tend to look after people who are close to them (in terms of personal contact), and so it is no wonder individuals who are high in benevolence do not engage in CWB as they want to have good interpersonal relationships with other individuals that they are in constant contact with. Individuals who are low in conformity tend to have their own minds and do not follow the majority, hence why these individuals are less likely to engage in CWB. It is important to note however that the results explained here are only based on overall CWB, but there is need to look in more details at how values are related to the different dimensions of CWB.

It should be noted however that the correlations found in the current study was not strong, ranging from 0.12 to 0.28 only (correlations that were significant). The current study utilized Gruys and Sackett's (2003) dimensionality of CWB, as it is the widest; but possibly this is also a limitation of this study as there are too many dimensions. There are other ways of looking at dimensions of CWB and future studies could try using other scales (e.g. Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Spector et. al., 2006). Another limitation is the use of a student sample, where even though most respondents have work experience, it would be interesting to see what the findings will be when utilizing a working sample.

4. Conclusion

Based on results of the current study, it can be concluded that two of the facets of personality (agreeableness and conscientiousness) is related to CWB, which is consistent with the findings of previous research. LOC is also related to CWB, with individuals with an external LOC engaging in higher CWB. The findings regarding values have given new insight into the relationship between values and CWB, with more room for future research. In conclusion, since individual differences have been found to be related to CWB, organizations could put something in place in their recruitment and selection process to vet out individuals who are likely to engage in CWB.

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