Workplace Incivility and its Effect upon Service Employee Creativity

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The current study aims to provide better insights concerning the sources of workplace incivility (supervisor, coworker and customer incivility) and explore its relationship on service employee creativity and also proposes the underlying mechanism that shapes the said relationship through the lens of Conservation of Resource Theory. This study is the nascent attempt in employee-driven service settings, where we proposed that these three sources of workplace incivility adversely impacts employee creativity through the sequential effect of emotional labour strategies (deep acting and surface acting) and emotional exhaustion. These insights provide directions to future researchers to conduct further studies and enrich the theoretical domain of incivility effects in service settings.

Keywords: Workplace Incivility, Deep Acting, Surface Acting, Emotional Exhaustion, Employee Creativity

1. Introduction

Workplace mistreatments have great importance in today's business scenario because of its damaging effects on both employees and organisation. Harmful effects of each type of mistreatments vary according to the intensity of each mistreatment. Many of the past studies have covered high deviant behaviours, such as bullying, harassment, abusive supervision, emotional abuse, interpersonal conflict, mobbing, social undermining, victimisation, and workplace aggression. In a meta-analytic framework, Hershcovis (2010) have differentiated five types of mistreatments; abusive supervision, bullying, incivility, social undermining, and interpersonal conflict by explaining their characteristics and intensity. Studies reveal that low deviant behaviour like workplace incivility has become more prevalent and have negative outcomes to the employees as well as the organisation (Pearson &Porath, 2005).

In the service context, frontline employees have to face different types of workplace incivility (Demsky et al., 2019), which can be from a supervisor, coworker and the customer. These uncivil interactions from varied sources will adversely affect their creativity to deliver services to the beneficiaries. In this line, several past studies have covered the negative consequences of workplace incivility, and none of these studies considered the role of varied sources of incivility and the underlying mechanism through which this workplace incivility affects employee creativity. Thus, the main aim of the study is to propose the research propositions connecting the three sources of incivility and its underlying mechanisms determining employee creativity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Workplace Incivility

Andersson and Pearson (1999) were first introduced the term workplace incivility to differentiate low deviant behaviour from other forms of mistreatment and defined it as "low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviours are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others" (p.457). Workplace incivility can be perpetrated by supervisors, coworkers and customers (Schilpzand et al., 2016), especially in the service context. Coworker incivility refers to uncivil behaviours perpetrated by coworkers and when the same behaviour instigated by supervisors called supervisor incivility (Reio, 2011). Customer incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behaviour perpetrated by someone in a customer or client role, with ambiguous intent to harm an employee (Sliter et al., 2010). Studies reported that workplace incivility results in decrease in occupational wellbeing (Lim et al., 2008), psychological, physical and mental health (Lim et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2000), job satisfaction (Sharma and Singh, 2016; Chen & Wang, 2019), situational wellbeing (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015), recovery experience (Nicholson & Griffin, 2015; Demsky et al., 2019), occupational and psychological wellbeing (Totterdell et al., 2012), health satisfaction (Miner-Rubino& Cortina, 2004) and supervisor and coworker satisfaction (Lim & Lee, 2011). Workplace incivility also leads to increase negative organisational factors such as turnover intention (Sguera et al, 2016; Sharma and Singh, 2016; Lim et al., 2008; Ghosh et al., 2013; Chen & Wang, 2019; Pearson et al, 2000), negative emotions (Abubakar et al., 2018), negative affect (Totterdell et al., 2012; Porath&Erez, 2009; Zhou et al., 2015; Pearson et al, 2000), perceived unfairness (Lim & Lee, 2011; Pearson et al, 2000), negative work rumination (Demsky et al., 2019), emotional exhaustion (Totterdell et al., 2012; Cho et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2015; Hur et al., 2016), surface acting (Hur et al., 2015), depression, work-family conflict, psychological distress (Lim & Lee, 2011)

and emotional drain (Totterdell et al., 2012). The in-depth literature search indicated that there is a need to understand the critical role of incivility types and its underlying mechanisms which influences front line employee's creativity in services setting. Thus, this study is an attempt to address this research gap in the literature by proposing the research propositions linking the sources of incivility, underlying mechanisms, and the outcome of employee creativity.

3. Theoretical Development and Prepositions

In the service context, even though workplace incivility produces adverse impact, victims may use emotion regulation strategies to cope up with incivility experiences. Hoch child (1983) invented the term emotional labour and defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display". According to Emotion Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998a, 1998b), one may regulate their emotion either by antecedent focused emotion regulation which involves situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, and cognitive change or by response focused emotion regulation or response modulation in which one influences the response once they are elicited. Grandey (2000) describes antecedent focused emotional regulation as the process of modifying feelings by "thinking good thoughts" or reappraising the event which is same as deep acting and response focused emotion regulation as the process of modifying expression by faking or enhancing facial and bodily signs of emotion which is same as surface acting. In accordance with Conservation of Resource Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), workplace incivility can be considered as an environmental threat which will lead to choosing coping strategies to reduce resource loss.

Preposition 1: Workplace incivility from supervisors, coworkers and customers positively associated with a) deep acting and b) surface acting.

An individual continuously compares emotional displays and display rules in the emotion regulation process so that it can be viewed as a cyclical discrepancy-monitoring and reduction process (Diefendorff&Gosserand, 2003). So that deep acting and surface acting requires sufficient resources which leads to emotional depletion that can be termed as emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is one of the stress dimension of burnout and "feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources" (Christina, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001). Conservation of Resource Theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989) can be used as sufficient support for such a relationship. According to the said theory, transitions or coping strategies from external threat may be stressful that further leads to resource loss. Accordingly, service employees who engage in surface acting and deep acting deplete emotional resources which further leads to emotional exhaustion.

Preposition 2: Emotional regulation strategies (deep acting and surface acting) will be positively associated with emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion causes resource depletion and further hinders employee creativity. Creativity is the precursor for innovation and defined as "the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain" (Amabile et al., 1996). In the service settings, an employee can behave creatively by producing a novel solution to a customer problem, dealing with complaints creatively and suggesting for new procedures to deliver customer service. Such efforts require sufficient cognitive resources to develop creative and domain-relevant skills (Amabile et al., 1996; Wong and Pang, 2003). In the case of emotional exhaustion, one lacks physical and emotional resources, and one may conserve resources for anticipating future loss which is consistent with Conservation of Resource Theory (Hobfoll, 1989).Such effort reduces the level of service employee's creativity towards customers.

Preposition 3: Emotional exhaustion will be negatively associated with employee creativity.

4. Study Directions

The current study contributed to the existing literature by providing theoretical support on the relationship between workplace incivility and employee creativity. Emotional labour and emotional exhaustion have taken as a mediating mechanism with the supporting arguments of Conservation of Resource Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). This study provides a valid research gap for future researchers in the unexplored areas of workplace incivility. Studies on different sources of incivility provide clear understanding of the adverse effect of each cause of incivility behaviour on employee creativity. Only limited studies have conducted emotion regulation strategies as a reaction to incivility experiences. Future studies considering emotion regulation as a result of workplace incivility will guide the employees to choose suitable strategies to improve creativity. In the service context, employee creativity towards customers has great importance. So studies on workplace mistreatment which hinders the creativity will be helpful in to identify the intensity and adverse effect.

The study primarily conducted to guide future researchers in the area of workplace incivility by examining different dimensions and consequences of low deviant mistreatments happening in the workplace. The study also provides various implications to employees, managers and organisations by exploring the underlying mechanism in which workplace incivility results low creativity. Empirical studies by analysing various sources of incivility will help the organisation to take corrective measures by identifying the characteristics and role of the instigators. The organisation can provide training on emotion regulation strategies to service employees by analysing differential role played by various emotional regulation strategies (deep acting and surface acting) in coping workplace incivility.

This training will help the employee to reduce the discrepancy between their felt emotions and display rules which will reduce emotional exhaustion and motivate their creative behaviour. Future researchers can consider empirical studies on the prepositions developed by the study. More studies on workplace incivility will be a significant contribution to the Human Resource Managers to develop a civil work environment which will attract and retain high talented workforce.

5. References

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