Counterproductive Work Behavior: Investigations of Actors and Targets
[UNEDITED excerpt]

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Introduction

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Since the mid 1990s there has been an explosion of research interest in behaviors at work that harm employees and organizations. Much of this interest has been stimulated by media attention given to workplace violence, especially that perpetrated by coworkers, e.g., shootings in the U.S. Postal Service. Although such violence is quite rare, harmful behavior of lesser severity is commonplace. Research on milder forms has been featured in the national media, where it is often called "desk rage". We (the editors of this volume) will call the domain of research "counterproductive work behavior", although not all contributors will agree with this umbrella label.

More recently, there has been interest among researchers, managers, consultants, and the general public in the widely-reported experiences people have of being recipients of harmful behavior at the hands of supervisors, coworkers, and others. These experiences can range from systematic, openly abusive bullying to milder, ambiguous episodes of incivility.

Research concerning counterproductive behavior at work has considered two major classes of factors—individual employee characteristics and characteristics of the workplace. A variety of personality variables, such as conscientiousness, locus of control, narcissism, trait anger and anxiety, and Type A impatience/irritability are among a few of the variables linked to

these behaviors. Some researchers have focused on characteristics of the perpetrator, others on the victims, while others stress the dynamic interplay between the two. On the workplace side, research has shown that factors related to job stress, including lack of control, excessive workloads, poor relations with coworkers and supervisors and both intrarole and extrarole (e.g., work/family) conflicts, have been linked to harmful behaviors. In addition, fair treatment and workplace justice are important factors.

As the domain matures, more emphasis is being placed on the ramifications for individuals and organizations of these kinds of harmful behaviors, as well as approaches to solving the problems they create. This may prove to be the most controversial aspect of counterproductive work behavior research, as opinions vary widely regarding the locus of accountability (e.g., selection approaches versus organizational change) and the gamut of options available and hurdles facing victims of bullying. Our own work has suggested that a focus on employee perceptions of control and emotions can lead to job design and human resource practices that reduce harmful behavior.

The relative recency of most CWB research has undoubtedly contributed to a rather disjointed literature, with different "camps" developing different terminology and looking at somewhat different sides of an overlapping set of behaviors. These phenomena have been variously labeled as aggression, antisocial, deviance, delinquency, revenge, retaliation and our preference, counterproductive work behavior (from the perpetrator perspective), and abuse, bullying, incivility, and mobbing (from the victim/recipient perspective). Among the earliest empirical studies in the area of workplace aggression were published in the mid-1970s (Inkson & Simpson, 1975; Spector, 1975). Other early studies included Hollinger and Clark's (1982) paper on organizational deviance, Matthiesen, Raknes and Rokkum's (1989) study of workplace

bullying, Leymann's (1990) seminal work on mobbing, and Morrill and Thomas' (1992) paper on retaliation at work. By far, most papers in the area have been published since 2000.

The rapid and recent development in parallel of different perspectives has not left sufficient time for integrative work. This issue was noted as one of the most important for the field at an interactive paper session at the 2001 Academy of Management conference in Washington, DC. The session participants found that they were studying overlapping sets of behaviors from somewhat different theoretical perspectives, and tended to focus on distinctions and what is unique in each contribution, rather than connections. A need was felt for substantial integrative work to better tie it together. Several of the contributors to this book participated in that discussion, which inspired this volume.

The chapters in this book have been written by scholars who have adopted different perspectives, perhaps different vocabularies or labels, and who have studied somewhat different sets of possible causes, consequences, or solutions. We have emphasized the desirability of relating, where feasible, each contributor's work to work done from other perspectives. The goal of this volume is to offer an integrative perspective that highlights connections and distinctions among different people's work, as well as a discussion of how conditions/events in modern organizations contribute to CWB and things organizations might do to combat it.

We have chosen the global term of CWB, as it seems to encompass the critical features of the domain, without excluding the distinct contributions of the various conceptualizations. It is not the intent of this book to force everyone into taking the same perspective or using the same terminology. Rather its purpose is to build bridges among the different perspectives showing where they overlap and where they are different. One of the strengths of the CWB area is that there are so many different ideas that are contributing to an understanding of the underlying

causes and consequences to the various behaviors that we study. Each perspective adds

something important to our overall understanding.

This volume is divided into two sections, based on whether the central object of study is

the perpetrator or the victim/recipient of the behavior in question. Section I looks at

counterproductive work behavior from the perpetrator's perspective. Seven chapters discuss

CWB from a variety of theoretical vantage points, focusing often on different precursors and

consequences.

Joel Neuman and Robert Baron, two of the earliest researchers in the areas of aggression

and emotion in the workplace, lead off with the chapter entitled "Aggression in the Workplace:

A Social-Psychological Perspective." Their central argument is that efforts to harm

organizations or the individuals who work in organizations fall under the rubric of workplace

aggression. They specify the boundaries of aggression, which they define as "…any form of

behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated

to avoid such treatment" (p. __, this volume), requiring intent to cause harm, actions directed at

other living beings, and motivation of targets to avoid such treatment. The chapter discusses

areas of overlap with related concepts, and concludes with a proposed theoretical framework, the

General Affective Aggression Model (GAAM), to inform further research.

Chapter 2 is "Understanding the Many Faces of Workplace Violence" by Manon Mireille

LeBlanc and Julian Barling. These authors examine a subset of counterproductive behaviors

experienced by people at work involving actual physical violence, although not necessarily

committed by organization members. They categorize violence into four types based on the

perpetrator's relationship to the organization. First, there is violence by individuals unrelated to

the organization, as in robbery. Second, violence can be perpetrated by a non-employee with a

legitimate connection to the organization, as a client. Third, a current or former employee might engage in violence against members of the organization. Finally, violence can spillover from outside of work by an individual with no legitimate relation to the organization, but a relationship with an organization member, such as a current or former partner. They argue that each of these classes of workplace violence poses unique requirements for the efforts of researchers and practitioners to understand and confront these behaviors.

Chapter 3, by Robert Bies and Thomas Tripp, is "The Study of Revenge in the Workplace: Conceptual, Ideological, and Empirical Issues." The authors look closely at ideological assumptions, particularly managerial bias, that they argue pervades much research in the field. They express their preference for the umbrella concept of workplace aggression, rather than counterproductive work behavior, as it does not contain the pro-management value judgments inherent in the "counterproductive", "counter-normative", "deviant", or "dysfunctional" labels. They call for a more value-neutral modeling of revenge, which also takes into account potentially valuable functions of such behaviors, from an employee-centered as well as manager-centered point of view.

Chapters 4 and 5 expand the domain to include broader ethical and philosophical considerations, to help us understand the phenomena of CWB in new ways. First, Robert Folger and Daniel Skarlicki look "Beyond Counterproductive Work Behavior: Moral Emotions and Deontic Retaliation vs. Reconciliation". This chapter begins with the authors' original construct of Organizational Retaliatory Behavior (ORB), a way in which organization members seek to punish their organizations and its representatives for perceived injustice. Rather than a static, one-time event, they seek to unravel a process that may include further retaliation or reconciliation. They broaden their focus with the notion of moral emotions, third parties to the

process, and prospects for reconciliation. As in the previous chapter on revenge, retaliation is not necessarily viewed as counterproductive or dysfunctional for the organization. The concept of "legitimate retaliation" is considered, including the functions of holding managers accountable to moral codes of behavior and providing employees who feel mistreated with psychological restoration of equity. Folger and Skarlicki contribute a broadly interdisciplinary investigation of the origins and consequences of retaliation, notably an exploration of possible evolutionary origins of deontic emotion and moral outrage. Finally they consider the process by which the continuation of mutual retaliation can be replaced by the alternative response of reconciliation.

Rebecca Bennett, Karl Aquino, Americus Reed, II, and Stefan Thau expand the original concept of workplace deviance with an exploration of moral identity in Chapter 5, entitled "The Normative Nature Of Employee Deviance and the Impact Of Moral Identity." Their starting point is the original Robinson and Bennett (1995) delineation of employee deviance as "voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and threatens the well-being of the organization, its members, or both." (p __, this volume). With norms as the starting point of determining what is and what isn't deviance, the core question becomes, what is the source of organizational, and ultimately, societal norms? Who defines notions of propriety, and how are these notions transmitted to individuals within a culture? The authors go on to examine what happens when an individual within a culture views the norms of that culture to be deviant. The authors examine the role of moral identity in the ways in which individuals chose to behave within deviant organizational cultures.

In Chapter 6, Susan Burroughs and Larry James offer a new tool for assessing employees' proclivity to engage in CWB, in "Advancing the Assessment of Dispositional Aggressiveness Via Conditional Reasoning." This chapter offers an individual differences

perspective, proposing that some people are dispositionally more inclined than others to respond aggressively in response to perceived negative stimuli. This "motive to aggress" or dispositional aggressiveness is difficult to assess, due to self-protective, social desirability, and instrumental factors. The authors offer "conditional reasoning" as a tool for examining individuals' latent motives to engage in aggressive or counterproductive behavior. The measure taps several underlying justification mechanisms, social cognitive biases, and implicit theories that are more likely to be salient in people who are inclined to respond aggressively. A program of research is described, with the goal of using conditional reasoning to more fully understand and address the issues of counterproductive work behavior.

The editors of this book (Paul E. Spector and Suzy Fox) conclude Section I with our own perspective, "The Stressor-Emotion Model of Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)". This chapter is an attempt to specify the boundaries of the CWB construct, to clarify definitional ambiguities, and to outline areas of overlap and divergence from related concepts presented in the foregoing chapters. Specifically, CWB is compared and contrasted to notions of violence, aggression, retaliation, revenge, and deviance. Definitional questions needing clarification include the necessity/sufficiency of intent, realization of harmful outcomes, and emotionality versus instrumentality as motivation. The resulting model of CWB integrates the domains of human aggression and occupational stress, putting the construct within the framework of job stress. It offers a broad description of a process that includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to perceived environmental (organizational) conditions. Perceived antecedent conditions may include constraints that interfere with goals, injustice, interpersonal conflict, or other sources of job stress, all of which have the potential to elicit a range of negative emotions, which in turn may play a role in the individual's engagement in behaviors that harm

the organization or its members. Perceived control, attributions, and personality inform perceptions, reactions, and choices throughout the process.

Section II, the Victim Perspective, looks at various approaches to understanding causes and consequences to people who are the targets of socially, occupationally, emotionally, and psychologically harmful behavior. The four chapters in this section vary in the severity and overtness of behaviors being considered, as well as in approaches to studying the dynamics involved and solutions offered. Interest in this area began in Scandinavia and Central Europe, and attracted widespread interest in the United Kingdom before becoming a significant subject of interest in the U.S. This global approach is reflected in the following four chapters.

In Chapter 8, Christine Pearson, Lynne M. Andersson, and Christine L. Porath investigate "Workplace Incivility". Of the harmful workplace behaviors covered in Section 2 of this volume, incivility appears to be the most low-keyed, chronic, and ubiquitous form. The actor's intentions, indeed awareness, are not necessarily a factor in the effects of incivility on the target. The authors imply that, on the contrary, the opposite of incivility, or civility, may require a level of respect for one's fellow human beings, which is often lacking in today's workplace. They define the construct as "low intensity deviant (rude, discourteous) behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (p. xx, this volume). The boundaries of the construct are basically set by workplace norms of civility. Incivility is thus viewed not as a single, static event, but rather as an interactive process among individuals within a situational context. The authors link the widely-shared perception that workplace incivility is a growing phenomenon to widespread changes in the culture and climate of today's organizations.

Behaviors in question are escalated to "Emotional abuse in the workplace" in Chapter 9, by Loraleigh Keashly and Steve Harvey. By definition, emotional abuse deals with severe, hostile actions that have short- and long-term effects on the victim's self-perceptions and well-being. The authors have refined the definition of emotional abuse to emphasize the persistent, repetitive patterns of verbal and nonverbal (but non-physical) behaviors that harm or are intended to harm the target. Similar to counterproductive work behavior, emotional abuse is studied in a job stress framework, but from the perspective of the target. The authors develop a comprehensive analysis of emotional abuse as a complex interplay among situational forces, actor characteristics, and target-oriented factors. All three sets of factors are required to understand emotional abuse as a socially constructed experience within the "social cauldron" of organizational life.

Dieter Zapf and Ståle Einarsen offer a continental European perspective in Chapter 10, "Mobbing at Work: Escalated Conflicts in Organizations". The chapter begins with a historical overview of the Scandinavian, German, and Austrian origins of this entire domain of research, in which the authors of this chapter played a pioneering role. The chapter continues with a clarification of the definitional boundaries of the construct, including the nature and severity of mistreatment, the frequency and the duration of the mobbing behaviors, the target's reactions, the perpetrator's intent, and imbalance of power between the parties. As emphasized in this volume's chapters on emotional abuse and counterproductive work behavior, mobbing is viewed in the job stress framework. However, this is carried to a more extreme extent, following the effects on mobbing victims through a process that may be considered a form of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The chapter explicates the similarities and distinctions between bullying

and mobbing, and goes on to review empirical research on categories of mobbing, personal, social, and organizational causes, and consequences for the victim as well as the organization.

In chapter 11, Charlotte Rayner and Loraleigh Keashly summarize "Bullying at work: A perspective from Britain and North America". The authors provide perhaps the broadest definition of the phenomenon from the target's perspective, namely "persistent negative interpersonal behavior experienced by people at work" (p. xx, this volume). Interest in bullying is traced from earlier work on bullying among school children, a research stream that, enriched by their discovery of continental European work on mobbing, was developed by the authors into the growing research domain in the UK and North America of workplace bullying. In this chapter, the authors discuss issues of definition, labeling, relationships, power, intent, perspective, causes, and consequences. Some of the empirical work of the authors, who have been active in developing measurements of bullying, is outlined. The chapter points to early efforts by organizations in the UK and the U.S. to develop guidelines and practices to address the problem of workplace bullying.

In chapter 12, the editors conclude this book with an effort to locate the key terms and principles that the foregoing conceptualizations have in common, and those that differentiate the perspectives. This concluding chapter considers weaknesses in the generally shared methodological approaches, and outlines future directions for the field.

As these chapters will show, there is a great deal of overlap in the phenomena studied from these varying perspectives. Although the literatures of the actor and victim sides have been unrelated, the underlying phenomena are linked. Acts of bullying and mobbing are acts of CWB directed at coworkers, and they can vary from fairly mild verbal behaviors to fairly serious

physically aggressive acts. It is our hope that this book will help stimulate integrative research

that links the various aspects of CWB both within and between actor and victim perspectives.