ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relations among conflict management styles and target and instigator incivility and job performance, organizational commitment, and turnover intent. Data from 270 employees suggested that experiencing and instigating uncivil behavior occurred frequently. Using an integrative conflict management style was positively associated with job performance and organizational commitment and negatively with turnover intent. Dominant conflict management style was negatively associated with organizational commitment and positively with turnover intent. Both types of incivility were negatively associated with job performance and organizational commitment, and positively with turnover intent. Target incivility was the most powerful predictor in the hierarchical regression models.

Keywords: Conflict Management Styles, Job Performance, Organizational Commitment, Turnover Intent, Workplace Incivility

INTRODUCTION

Workplace incivility has been identified as a pernicious and prevalent problem for organizations within the last decade. The focus on this issue is warranted given that research has established that incivility exacts costs on organizations, both directly and indirectly. A recent study linked workplace incivility directly to lost productivity (Lewis & Malecha, 2011). Workplace incivility is defined as a form of organizational deviance on an interpersonal level and is characterized by low-intensity behaviors that violate respectful workplace norms, appearing vague as to intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is insidious in nature, subtle, and difficult to identify, manage, and prevent (Cortina, 2008). Uncivil behaviors in organizations have far-reaching negative effects although they do not usually merit organizational or legal sanctions. Incidences of incivility usually go unreported because they are difficult to ascertain or document clearly, and the intent to harm may or may not be apparent. Cortina and Magley (2009)
found in their study that only 1% to 6% of employees who had experienced incivility filed formal complaints.

Empirical research provides insight into the prevalence of this issue: 71% of 1,180 public sector employees surveyed in the United States had experienced some form of workplace incivility in the previous 5 years (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001) and 76% of a cross-industry sample of 507 workers in the past year (Reio, 2011). Likewise, 85% of 553 nurses experienced incivility (Lewis & Malecha, 2011) and 90.4% of 659 nurses reported some degree of coworker incivility within the past year (Smith, Andrusyszyn, & Laschinger, 2010). Finally, 91% of 180 workers from a cross-sectional sample of 20 different organizations in Singapore (N = 180) experienced incivility within the previous 5 years (Lim & Lee, 2011).

Workplace incivility may be considered a cause or trigger of conflict as well as the consequential behaviors arising from conflict. Consistent with the concept of incivility being both an antecedent and outcome of conflict, conflict is defined as a “process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about” (Thomas, 1992, p. 653). Rahim (2002) attributes differences in attitudes, values, level of skills and behaviors for conflict between coworkers or between employees and their organization. Ineffective management of workplace conflict leads to detrimental outcomes for organizations and its members.

Workplace conflict, at lower levels, is akin to workplace incivility, lower in intensity but over time, has the potential to escalate. Recent studies established that interpersonal conflict is associated with counterproductive (deviant) workplace behaviors (Kisamore, Jawahar, Liguori, Mharapara & Stone, 2010) and conflict management styles may be associated with workplace incivility (Bartlett, 2010). Earlier, workplace incivility was identified as a precursor to aggression and violent behaviors (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Meyer (2004) asserts that unresolved workplace conflict may lead to antisocial behaviors, covert retaliation, and even violence. Baillien, Neyens, De Witte, and De Cuyper (2009) found that workplace bullying (a form of incivility, but is intentional rather than ambiguous in intent) arises from interpersonal conflicts and the way that those conflicts are managed.

The investigation of any linkage between workplace incivility and conflict management styles (CMS) is scant in the literature, especially as it relates to job-related factors. Both workplace incivility and CMS may have an impact on how workers perform their jobs (job performance), their commitment to their organization, and their intent to leave their jobs. Additionally, much research is concentrated on the perspective of targets of incivility with limited research on instigators of incivility (Reio & Ghosh, 2009). However, some studies do point to some differences between targets and instigators of incivility (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2005).

The purpose of the current study is twofold: 1. to investigate the relationships between workplace incivility and CMS for both instigators’ and targets of incivility; and 2. assess the effects of workplace incivility and CMS on perceived job performance, organizational commitment, and turnover intent for both instigators and targets of incivility.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses both workplace incivility and CMS theories as foundations to explain the negative effects of experiencing and instigating incivility on job performance, organizational commitment, and turnover intent.

Workplace Incivility

Violations of workplace norms for mutual respect can result in individuals behaving rudely towards others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). As compared to more intentional, serious forms of deviant workplace behavior, such as bullying and physical violence, workplace incivility is relatively mild because the intent to
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