



**COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR  
AMONG THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR  
EMPLOYEES IN DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.**

by

**Laith Mohammad Saeed Weld Ali**

**(1343010917)**

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## **Kelakuan Kerja Tidak Produktif di kalangan Pekerja Perkhidmatan Awam di Dubai, United Arab Emirates.**

### **Abstrak**

Tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif adalah masalah utama bagi organisasi di seluruh dunia. Ia membawa kepada hasil negatif dan peningkatan kos yang tinggi bagi syarikat. Isu masih kabur dan kajian penyelidikan mengenai latar belakang tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif masih pada tahap yang rendah. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk meneroka faktor-faktor yang membawa kepada tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif. Dari kajian literatur yang sedia ada, keadilan organisasi dan sifat personaliti (*personality traits*) telah dipilih sebagai pembolehubah tidak bersandar dan hubungannya dengan tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif. Jarak kuasa (*power distance*) telah digunakan sebagai *moderator* dalam hubungan antara keadilan organisasi (*organizational justice*) dan tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif. Selain itu, sokongan organisasi (*organizational support*) juga bertindak sebagai *moderator* dalam mengenal pasti hubungan antara sifat personaliti dan tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif. Data telah dikumpulkan daripada kakitangan awam Jabatan Pembangunan Ekonomi di Dubai, UAE menggunakan kaedah secara sampel rawak berlapis (*stratified sampling*). Data yang diperolehi dianalisis dengan menggunakan teknik *partial least square structural equation modeling* dengan bantuan Smart PLS Software. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa prosedur, pengedaran dan interaksi keadilan adalah faktor penting yang mungkin menghalang tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif; manakala kestabilan emosi, sifat personaliti juga merupakan faktor penting yang korelasi secara negatif dengan tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa jarak kuasa (*power distance*) memberi kesan moderator dalam hubungan antara keadilan organisasi dan tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif; sementara sokongan organisasi juga memberi kesan moderator bagi mengurangkan tingkah laku tidak produktif dalam aspek persetujuan dan kesedaran. Hasil kajian ini akan memberi maklumat yang lebih jelas mengenai punca-punca tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif dalam setiap organisasi. Jika organisasi mengetahui punca berlaku tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif, mereka boleh bekerja secara proaktif untuk mengelakkan apa-apa jenis kejadian; mereka boleh mengambil langkah-langkah untuk meningkatkan hubungan dengan pekerja supaya pekerja berasa lebih di bantu dan dihargai dan akhirnya tingkah laku kerja tidak produktif dapat dikurangkan. Hasil kajian ini juga akan membantu majikan untuk melaksanakan program-program pengiktirafan agar pekerja di hargai oleh organisasi.

# **Counterproductive Work Behavior among the Public Service Sector Employees in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.**

## **Abstract**

Counterproductive work behavior is a major problem for organizations all over the world. It leads to negative outcomes and costs a lot for the companies. Despite the ubiquity of this issue, research works on the antecedents of counterproductive work behavior are very few. So the present research aims at exploring the factors leading to counterproductive work behavior. From the existing literature review, organizational justice and personality traits have been chosen to examine as the potential antecedents of counterproductive work behavior. While power distance was used as the moderator in the relationship between organizational justices and counterproductive work behavior and perceived organizational support as the moderator in the relationship between personality traits and counterproductive work behavior. For the purpose of the study, data were collected from the public civil servants of department of economic development in Dubai, UAE using the proportionate stratified random sampling. The collected data were analyzed using partial least square structural equation modeling technique with the help of smart PLS software. The statistical findings showed that procedural, distributive and interactional justices are significant factors that might hinder counterproductive work behavior; while emotional stability, a personality trait was also found to be significantly and negatively correlated with counterproductive work behavior. Findings revealed that power distance had moderating effects in the relationship between organizational justices and counterproductive work behavior; and perceived organizational support had moderating effects in reducing organizational deviant behaviors in conjunction with agreeableness and consciousness. The output of this study will provide significant insights regarding the causes of CWBs in organizations. If organizations understand the reasons of CWBs, they can work proactively to avoid such types of occurrences; ensure various steps to improve the relationships with the employees so that the employees feel more supported and valued by them and ultimately deviance behavior will be reduced. The findings of this study will also help employers to implement recognition programs to help show employees that they are valued by the organization.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of Study

In recent years, workplace deviance (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007; Bodankin & Tziner, 2009; Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2009; Dilchert, Ones, Davis, & Rostow, 2009; Levy & Tziner, 2011) or counterproductive work/organizational behavior (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Levine, 2010; Ho, 2012; Spain et al., 2014; Schyns, 2015) has gained much research attention since this manifestation has been shown to have important economic, sociological, and psychological implications (Aubé et al., 2009; Bodankin & Tziner, 2009). Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) is defined as “any intentional behavior on the part of an organizational member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests” (Sackett & De Vore, 2001; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Lily & Aharon, 2014). Examples of such counterproductive behavior include theft, sabotage, withdrawal, harassment, and drug use (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Gruys & Sackett, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Sackett & DeVore, 2001; Spector et al., 2009).

Counterproductive work behaviors are costly to both individuals and organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2003; Berry et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014; Aaron, 2016). Such behaviors are defined as “dysfunctional” because they almost invariably violate important organizational norms and harm organizations in several ways relevant to their goals, employees, procedures, productivity, and profitability (Aubé, et al., 2009; Dalal, 2005;

Lanyon & Goodstein, 2004; Pearson, et al., 2005; Robinson, 2008; Spector & Fox, 2005; Spector et al., 2006; Vardi & Weitz, 2004). Employees who display counterproductive workplace behaviors are more likely to develop stress related problems and to resign (O’Leary et al., 1996), and to experience low self-esteem, increased lack of confidence at work and physical and psychological pains (Griffin, et al., 1998). Thus, by accessing the antecedents of CWB, we may be better equipped to expose the motivational roots of such behavior.

Counterproductive work behaviors are “volitional acts that harm or are intended to harm organizations or people in organizations” (Spector & Fox, 2009). The literature in this area has frequently focused on counterproductive work behavior’s dispositional and situational antecedents (Bolton et al., 2012; Fox et al., 2009; Jensen & Patel, 2011; Wu & LeBreton, 2011). Some research has focused on examining both counterproductive work behavior that is targeted towards individuals and counterproductive work behavior that is targeted towards the organization as a whole (Bennett & Robinson, 2010; Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2009; Bowling et al., 2011). Other research has examined the complex relationship between counterproductive work behavior both as an emotion-based response and a cognition-based response to perceived injustice (Fox & Spector, 2010; Fox, et al., 2009; Skarlicki & Folger, 2012; Skarlicki et al., 2010).

The extant literature’s focus on prediction leaves opportunities to research the impact of CWBs beyond the internal structure of the organization. That is, how do

customers respond to counterproductive work behaviors? The presence of counterproductive work behavior can undermine the organization's efforts to build and maintain customer loyalty, as evidenced by the ability of such behaviors to cost organizations millions of dollars a year (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Counterproductive work behaviors can be a violation of social trust. Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) are an expensive phenomenon for an organization, costing over four billion dollars in addition to human-related costs such as low morale and turnover (Greenberg, 2012). Even inoffensive, low-intensity CWBs can have an effect on targets, including decreased job satisfaction, job withdrawal, and increased psychological distress (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Both situational and individual differences can prelude counterproductive work behaviors, depending on the cognitive processing of the offender (Martinko et al., 2011).

Research examining counterproductive work behaviors has been conducted continuously throughout past decades, but there has been a particularly large volume of studies published since 2012 (Shockley et al., 2012; Sakurai & Jex, 2012; Lemay et al., 2012; Balducci et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 2012; Holtom et al., 2012). Primary studies have tended to focus on the correlations between positive affect and organizational citizenship behaviors, as well as negative affect and CWBs (Richards & Schat, 2011). Meanwhile, meta-analytic studies in this area have concentrated on predictors of job performance (Organ & Ryan, 1995; Borman et al., 2001; Dalal, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2009; Lyubomirsky et al., 2009).

A counterproductive work behavior violates significant organizational norms and in doing so threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both (Robinson & Bennett, 2010). It is important to investigate the antecedents in regards to CWBs because work is a social context. When an individual engages in a CWB, the effects are not limited to the individual and the organization; the behavior might also affect co-workers, customers or other third parties. Andersson and Pearson (2010) described the process by which third parties react to minor CWBs or general incivility. These reactions to the CWB may include perceptions of interpersonal injustice, negative affect, and a desire to reciprocate with another CWB. Andersson and Pearson (2010) also explained that even if the CWB is not directed at the third party, when third parties witness incivility or CWBs occurring, it can still lead to negative reactions.

There are several reasons why studying CWBs is warranted. First, they have large ramifications in terms of monetary costs to organizations. It is estimated that organizations lose between \$6 and \$200 billion each year due to CWBs (Murphy, 2010). Second, a large percentage of individuals engage in CWBs, although the consequences are not always serious. As Peterson (2011) noted, CWBs are most often smaller acts, such as petty theft, rather than individuals embezzling large sums of money. Third, the changing nature of work also necessitates research on CWBs. As Andersson and Pearson (2010) explained, the need for civility between individuals becomes more important as interactions at work increase in both complexity and frequency, which has become the case in many industries and occupations (Offerman & Gowing, 2010).



Past research indicated various factors that may predict counterproductive workplace behavior. These include individual differences such as employees' personal traits and abilities (Berry et al., 2007; Dalal, 2005; Dilchert et al., 2007; Salgado, 2003), job experiences (Hollinger, 2010; Kulas, et al., 2007), and work stressors such as difficult work conditions, harsh supervision, role ambiguity, role and interpersonal conflicts (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Chen & Spector, 1992; Diefendorff & Mehta, 2007; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Spector & Fox, 2005). By way of illustration, dissatisfied employees are more likely to engage in theft behaviors (Kulas et al., 2007); abusive supervision is prone to influence employees' propensity to engage in negative employee behavior intended not only to harm the abuser but also to cause damage to the organization (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007); and workplace stressors are likely related to sabotage, interpersonal aggression, hostility, and complaints (Chen & Spector, 1992). Studies have also unearthed the interaction between personal factors and organizational stressors (Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Fox et al., 2001; Penny & Spector, 2011) and CWB.

CWB research has typically focused on individual-level behavior, with an exception for few studies such as Glomb & Liao (2003), which found that the level of aggression in a work group is a predictor of interpersonal aggression, and Peterson (2011) showed that ethical climate can predict various types of CWB, and Detert et al., (2009) found that abusive supervision influenced counterproductive measured at the business unit level. This narrow focus on the individual level of analysis is unfortunate, because counterproductive behavior in organizations could take place at the group level or at the departmental or organizational level. Some forms of CWBs may even occur at a level higher than that of

the organization, such as those that can occur at the industry- or occupation-level (e.g., price fixing on an industry level) or even at a national level (e.g., degree to which bribery and corruption is common and/or acceptable within a particular country).

Employees CWB are aware that they are violating commonly shared ethical and moral principles, such as rules (Collins & Griffin, 1998), so that their aim is to harm the organization and even the people within it, including colleagues, supervisors, subordinates, and clients (Fox, Spector & Miles, 2001). Particularly in public sector, CWB has been categorized into actions directed toward organizations (CWB-O), and those directed toward people (CWB-I). Public servants carry out CWB-O by taking excessively long breaks, pretending to stay at home from work with a fictitious illness, or signing the presence in the workplace on behalf of a colleague (Robinson & Bennet, 1995), for example. CWB-I includes spreading false rumors about others, bullying, using violence, and physically or verbally abusing (Sackett & De Vore, 2001). Thus, CWB is considered a response to a perceived organizational stress, in order to reduce frustrations arising from the organizational environment (Spector & Fox, 2005; Penny & Spector, 2005).

A study by Zaghini et al (2016) found that nurses' CWB may lead to unfavorable outcomes for patients, and if not prevented, countered, or controlled, could cultivate a culture of deviant conduct that may easily infiltrate the entire membership of the organization, with extremely dangerous results for hospital clients. CWB are becoming an increasing problem in organizations. This is also the case in the nursing field, and impacts

the quality of healthcare, as well as general workplace health and safety (Zaghini et al., 2016).

In a related study by Porath, MacInnes, and Folkes (2011), incivility among government employees is not normal, it is not rare either. Finding by Raman, Samsivan and Kumar (2016), towards frontline staff at the service counters at each of the ministries in Malaysia showed that intentionally working slow, taking long breaks, sabotage of equipment, theft of property, showing favoritism, gossiping, sexual harassment, blaming others, verbal abuse, physical abuse, receiving bribe, and being corrupt are frequently occurred.

Under this backdrop, the present study focuses on the antecedents of counterproductive work behavior (CWB). This study examines personality characteristics and organizational justice as the predictors of the CWB that causes huge troubles in any organization. In addition, potential moderators are examined. First, Power Distance that the individual committing the CWB has suffered an organizational injustice is hypothesized to moderate the relationship. Secondly, it is also expected that perceived organizational support can also moderate the relationship between personality traits and counterproductive work behavior.

## 1.1 Problem Statement

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) encompasses a wide range of workers' negative behaviors that threaten the survival, productivity and other legitimate objectives of an organization. The most researched counterproductive work behaviors include absenteeism (Gruys, 2010), theft (Greenberg, 2011; 2010), sabotage (Sharlicki & Folger, 2012), drug use (Barsky, 2011), and overt acts of aggression or extreme apathy (Douglass & Martinko, 2009; Eagly & Steffan, 2010; Martinko et al., 2011; & Neuman & Baron, 2012). During the last decade, research on these behaviors has been extensively diverse. As a result, the term 'counterproductive work behavior' became the umbrella of any negative behavior that is directed against the workplace such as antisocial behaviors (Giacalone & Greenberg, 2012), delinquency (Hogan & Hogan, 2009) deviance (Hollinger, 2010) retaliation (Sharlicki & Folger, 2012) or revenge (Bies et al., 2012).

Though there are some researches concentrating towards the antecedents of CWB (Brimcombe, 2012; Cohran, 2014; Johnson, 2013; Shafie, 2009; Neff, 2009), those studies focused on a single dimension either organizational issues or personal characteristics as the antecedents of CWBs, hence leaving a gap for extensive research on this topic. Brimcombe (2012) focused variables on the procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice; Cohran (2014) applied two variables (justice and affect); and a study by Shafie (2009) adopted ethical work climate and moral awareness as part of his variables. But these variables revealed weak correlation. For this reason the present study has included both organizational justice and personality traits as the antecedents of

counterproductive work behavior and two moderators namely power distance and perceived organizational support.

Many studies have theorized a negative relationship between organizational justice and CWBs, but results have been inconsistent (Spector & Fox, 2005). While studies that examine the relationship between different justice types and CWBs are limited, the type of justice perception could be a possible explanation to the incongruences in findings. For example, studies that have examined the effect of distributive justice on CWBs have generally found non-significant results (Aquino et al., 1999; Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Fox et al., 2001), while studies linking interpersonal justice to CWBs have found negative and somewhat consistent results (Aquino et al., 2009; Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Skarlicki & Folger, 2012). A possible explanation for this—based on the SEM of CWBs (Spector & Fox, 2005)—is that interpersonal mistreatment may cause a more pronounced emotional reaction than differences in the allocation of resources and it requires further investigation of the relationship between organizational justice and CWBs.

Despite the cost and prevalence of counterproductive work behavior, knowledge regarding workplace deviance is limited. Past research has recognized the study of justice as an antecedent to CWBs (Cohen & Spector, 2001), and multiple theories predict a strong negative relationship between justice and CWBs (Adams, 1965; Spector & Fox, 2005). However, studies examining the relationship between justice and CWBs have yielded inconsistent results (Spector & Fox, 2005), with some studies reporting very large correlations and others non-significant results (Ann, 2006; Akreimi et al., 2010; Hilary,

2011; Ilie et al., 2012). Given the discrepancies in these findings, it is important to examine possible moderators in the justice – CWBs relationship (Spector & Fox, 2005). Culture may influence the relationship between justice and CWBs. However, current research on organizational justice as an antecedent to CWBs has failed to consider the role cultural dimensions play in this relationship. Power distance (PD) is a dimension of culture that reflects the degree of acceptance and comfort with hierarchical structures (Hofstede, 2001). PD has an impact on people's reactions to fairness in the workplace, and as such may influence employee engagement in CWB (Bialas, 2009; Rao & Pearce, 2016). Although progress has been made in understanding how the work situations (perceived organizational support) and individual characteristics (personality traits) contribute to the occurrence of workplace deviance, research has not fully examined how these two factors jointly relate to counterproductive work behavior.

The personality traits have been used to study many other types of work related constructs and behaviors, including workplace bullying (Lind et al., 2009), workplace accidents (Clarke & Robertson, 2008), salary earnings (Nyhus & Pons, 2005), and job satisfaction (Deutsch, 2012). Therefore, this comprehensive model of personality is a useful taxonomy for organizing and understanding other multi-faceted constructs and may also be useful in assessing the relationship between personality traits and counterproductive workplace behaviors specifically. To date, however, this model is much less commonly used in relation to counterproductive workplace behaviors. For this reason the present study has chosen the personality traits to investigate their impact on counterproductive work behavior.

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to an “employees’ general belief that their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being” (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). According to organizational support theory, the development of perceived organizational support is due, in part, to an employee’s tendency to assign the organization humanlike characteristics (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Because of this personification of the organization, employees view favorable or unfavorable treatment by the organization as an indication of the extent to which the organization likes them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, if employees feel supported by the organization they will feel obligated to care about that organization’s well-being and put forth effort to help the organization succeed and achieve its goals. This support interacting with the personality traits will also result in a better outcome (Ann, 2006). But perceived organizational support has not been investigated much in the literature. To date, only a few studies have looked at the relationship between perceived organizational support and counterproductive work behavior which produced mixed findings (Chen, Fah & Jin, 2015;Manu & Balu, 2016; Sarah, 2010). For this reason the present study seeks to investigate the moderating effect of POS in the relationship between personality traits and counterproductive work behavior.

Indeed, the Middle East has been essentially left out of the recent surge of international and cross-cultural research. For example, an analysis of all articles from the Journal of International Business Studies from 2009 to 2013 reveals that less than one percent of the 436 articles published in the decade focused on a Muslim country in the Middle East. Indeed, only a handful of organizational scholars have focused on managerial

similarities and differences across borders and within countries in this part of the world (Ali, 2010, 2009, 2011; Rice, 2012). The limited research in the Middle East region is attributed to several factors such as burgeoning research costs, funding difficulties, cultural limitations which limit access to the adult population (particularly with females), and data gathering problems that range from sampling to fieldwork issues (Yavas, 2013; Yavas & Habib, 2010; Tuncalp, 2010). And this lack of empirical work on CWBs in Middle East may be due to the Islamic values of each countries in Middle East and therefore it motivated the researcher to conduct the present study.

Perhaps the genesis of value variation across the Middle East countries stems from Islamic beliefs and the extent to which each country upholds these beliefs in their respective legal, political and business environments. One key study (Ali & Al-Shakhis, 2009) of beliefs about work found that Emirates managers are more individualistic, less egalitarian, and less humanistic. A noted distinction that may play a role in these differences is the Islamic inclination of each group: the majority of Emirates are predominantly from the Sunnisect (Ali & Al-Shakhis, 2009). United Arab Emirates (UAE) is arguably the most fundamental and devoted Muslim state (Hickson & Pugh, 2009). While the cross-cultural research train has picked up speed in the past two decades it has yet to establish a regular stop in the Middle East. Hofstede (2001) seminal study of cultural values did include UAE that scored high in power distance, high in uncertainty avoidance, low in individualism, and high in masculinity. Ronen and Shenkar (2012), in a synthesis of cross-cultural attitudinal research, also grouped six Middle Eastern countries together in an Arab cluster (that included UAE, Kuwait, Oman, and SaudiArabia). While Hofstede's