

Employee Aggression, Labeling and Emotional Intelligence

Martin Popescu D. Dana Maria

Abstract— The aims of this research are to broaden the study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The study sample consisted in 441 Romanian employees from companies all over the country. Data has been collected through web surveys and processed with SPSS. The results indicated an average correlation between the two constructs and their sub variables, employees with a high level of emotional intelligence tend to be less aggressive. In addition, labeling was considered an individual difference which has the power to influence the level of employee aggression. A regression model was used to underline the importance of emotional intelligence together with labeling as predictors of CWB. Results have shown that this regression model enforces the assumption that labeling and emotional intelligence, taken together, predict CWB. Employees, who label themselves as victims and have a low degree of emotional intelligence, have a higher level of CWB.

Keywords—Aggression, CWB, emotional intelligence, labeling.

I. INTRODUCTION

ALL organizations are in fact living environments constructed as an open system ensuring their evolution and survival in time. They cannot be seen as a conglomerate, a sum of departments or employees. The relations between employees are so relevant for the company's success that they make the difference between a destructive environment and a constructive and motivating one. All organizational rules - written and unwritten - have been created in order to provide a common ground for these interactions, but very often employees get out of this normed environment and exhibit behaviors that may harm the relationship with their peers as well as with the organization. Every conflict starts from the differences between people's needs.

This research addresses the role of emotional intelligence as an individual difference which plays a role in the manifestation of aggressive behavior in the workplace. The aggressiveness of the organizational environment represents a taboo subject in many Romanian companies, buried under the avalanche of other organizational problems which so often occupy the field of interest for the management teams.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Bennett and Robinson mentioned that scientific literature examines mainly three categories of causes for organizational aggression, namely: experiences at work, personality traits of

the abuser and the phenomenon of adaptation of the employee to the work environment [1]. Mayer, Caruso and Salovey explain that, if the employee's emotional intelligence improves, deviant behaviors are reduced remarkably, thus revealing negative relationship between emotional intelligence and employee deviant behavior [2].

In addition, Spector suggested that the lack of autonomy and confusion in human relationships give rise to counterproductive behaviors (CWB), while Glomb argued that personality traits are determinants of CWB [3], [4]. Marcus and Schuler mentioned that self-regulation is an important antecedent of CWB, saying that the component of emotional intelligence referring to the ability to control emotions affects the CWB of employees [5], [6]. Siu identified the causal relationship between emotional intelligence and negative behaviors [7]. Namely, when employees are unable to control their emotions, they are likely to fail in social interactions and to experience negative emotions, resulting in CWB [8]-[10].

A. Emotional Intelligence

For the purposes of this research, emotional intelligence has been described in terms of "emotional empathy, attention to, and discrimination of, one's emotions, accurate recognition of one's own and others' moods, and mood management or control over emotions" [11]-[14]. This is the central meaning behind Mehrabian's General Emotional Intelligence Scale (GEIS). A second construct that completes and at the same time contrasts the concept of emotional intelligence is emotional thinking. Emotional thinking is a new and relevant aspect of low emotional intelligence. Emotional thinking has been shown to be a key correlate of failure in achieving life success [11].

B. Organizational aggression

Through the natural selection process, humans have inherited all types of tendencies to resort to aggressive behaviors at different times in order to survive. At the same time, through the development of culture, law and education, aggression ceased to be one of the primary ways to resolve disputes. Nevertheless, its frequency in certain contexts such as the organizational one continues to be alarming [15]. Aggression is an escalating process during which the confronted person ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts [16]. Scientists have classified organizational aggression in many ways, one of the relevant distinctions is the dichotomy mentioned by Buss: verbal aggression versus the physical aggression [17]. The most common type of aggression in the organizational environment is related to verbal aggression, organizations are

D. M. Martin Popescuis with the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Bucharest University, Panduri, 90 (phone: +720 012 206; e-mail: martindanamaria@gmail.com).

built in such a manner as not to tolerate physical violence. Unfortunately, this vehemence is not present in terms of verbal, psychological aggression, oriented towards employees as well as the organization. This type of aggression holds the central role of the present research.

One of the forms of organizational aggression is defined as counterproductive behavior (CWB). CWB is a set of distinct acts that have common characteristics: they are intentional and harm or intend to harm the organization or the organization's stakeholders. CWB does not refer to acts which include those that comply with the organization, those that are unintentional and accidental.

H1. Emotional intelligence is negatively correlated to counterproductive work behavior.

C. Labelling

Not all victims react to aggression the same way [18]. Factors such as self-efficacy, positive and negative affectivity, sense of coherence, influence the effects that it has on targets [19].

E. M. Lemert underlines the following sequences of deviant behaviors:

1. initial situation - the perception that the individual is no different from others;
2. after applying the label - the individual's reaction: "why am I treated like that?";
3. answer to labeling - "I do not seem to be like everyone else. Maybe I am different";
4. final reaction could be one of compliance or rejection of the label [20].

The last step generates the higher difficulty consisting in the attachment to the already internalized label because labeled people have tendency to comply with the label, to bring arguments in order to confirm the attributed quality. Cognitive assessment of the situation leading to labeling has a strong impact on how the stressful situations are perceived. According to Einarsen self-labeling refers to an individual's subjective perceptions of being a target of bullying and thus acknowledging oneself a status/identity as a victim [21]. To further understand the labeling process, the present study makes the assumptions that people who label themselves as victims of aggression are in fact people who own higher levels of aggression.

H2. There are differences in the level of counterproductive behavior between victims and non-victims.

H3. Emotional intelligence and victimization represent a good predictor for the level of counterproductive work behavior.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Sample

In order to study the objectives and hypotheses of this research, a pseudo-random sampling method was used in combination with stratified sampling method. The researcher sent 4,500 messages to employees throughout Romania. Data collection was performed by web survey method.

Questionnaires were applied online; this being the method preferred by the participants and consisted in sending a message with a link to the online survey and the opportunity to fill it anytime. The response rate to the questionnaire survey was of approximately 10%. Of the 441 subjects who responded to questionnaires, 287 are male (65%) and 154 female (35%). Regarding the age of the subjects, it varies between 19 and 58 years, with a mean age of 29 years. The research was conducted during an entire calendar year starting March 2013 and ending April 2014. Hypothesis testing was performed with SPSS V.20.

B. Instruments

The method used in this study is based on questionnaires and the assessment tools are behavioral scales.

The General Emotional Intelligence Scale (GEIS) is a tool developed by Albert Mehrabian. GEIS has two components: emotional intelligence and emotional thinking. The internal consistency coefficient for the first component identified by Mehrabian - Emotional Intelligence (first 37 items) - is .85 and the internal consistency for the emotional thinking component (the final 8 items) is .79. Respondents use a Likert scale of 9 points to report the degree of agreement or disagreement with each item.

Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C): Spector et al. (2006) developed an instrument for measuring CWB and its short version contains 32 items including the organizational and interpersonal dimensions, as well as five subscales: abuse against others, production deviance, sabotage, theft and withdrawal. The internal consistency of the instrument as reported by the authors is high (.90) and scoring is done on a Lickert scale of 1 to 5 points (1 = never, 5 = every day).

C. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Due to the fact that both instruments have been written in English, an adaptation process has taken place in order to use them on a Romanian speaking sample. Double blind method was used for the translation from Romanian into English and vice versa. The items resulting from the translation of the items were then compared with the original version through retroversion.

One of the steps in the statistical analysis was to verify the internal consistency of the research instruments. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient was .87 for GEIS and .91 for CWB. This information shows that the instruments are as reliable as previously mentioned by the authors.

IV. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

A. Correlation between CWB and GEIS

Both counterproductive work behavior and emotional intelligence are composite constructs, each of which comprises several subscales. This is why we have addressed both the general relationship between its values and the subscales' values. This provides a better overview on the relationship. The first step of the approach consists in analyzing the relations between general constructs. Thus an

average correlation of $r = -.386$ ($p < .01$) was obtained between the overall level of emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behavior. For the sample consisting of women, a value of $r = -.449$ ($p < .01$) was obtained and a correlation of $r = -.343$ ($p < .01$) corresponded to the men sample. Table I below highlights the correlations between the subscales of CWB and GEIS:

TABLE I
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SUBSCALES OF GEIS AND CWB

	A	PD	S	F	W
EI	-.310**	-.186**	-.234**	-.230**	-.263**
ET	.282**	.248**	.219**	.231**	.297**

** Correlation is significant at a level of .01 (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at a level of .05 (2-tailed).

It is interesting that the highest correlation was obtained for the abuse scale because it is the only scale regarding a type of behavior which is people oriented, the other scales are being directed against the organization. These relations describe an interesting pattern of abuse and also the fact that people with a lower level of emotional intelligence report a higher level of abuse towards others.

B. Differences between victims and non-victims

Literature is replete with information that supports the existence of a vicious circle regarding aggression. Specifically it regards the cases in which a person has been exposed to aggressive behaviors and subsequently becomes an aggressor on its own. We wanted to capture this aspect by emphasizing the differences between the group of people who are labeling themselves as victims and the group of people who don't consider themselves victims, related to their level of counterproductive work behavior. The data obtained through the statistical analysis is the following:

TABLE II
GROUP STATISTICS

	Labelling	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
CWB	Yes	55	45.29	8.728	1.177
	No	365	42.11	7.777	.407

CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior, N = sample size

The descriptive analysis of the data indicates a higher average of counterproductive behavior for the group of employees who consider themselves victims (45.29) than the average of the group of employees who don't label themselves as victims (42.11). T test revealed the following values:

TABLE III
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST

t-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
						Lower Upper
CWB	2.78	418	.006	3.181	1.144	.934 5.429

CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior, df = degree of difference

A level of significance with a value less than .05 was

obtained for the t test and the significance level for the Levene test for equality of variance has a value greater than .05. These data support the confirmation of the research hypothesis. To strengthen the statistical decision of rejecting the null hypothesis, a sensitivity analysis was made using the program G*Power. We obtained a medium effect size ($d = .42$) assigned to a high power of .90 and the critical value for t (1.649) was lower than the obtained t (2.782). All this information, together with the descriptive statistical indicators, concludes with the confirmation of the research hypothesis: there are differences between the levels of counterproductive behavior depending on labeling. People who state that they are victims of aggression have a higher level of counterproductive behavior than those who do not consider themselves victims.

C. Predictors for CWB

The identification of predictive elements for CWB would make a notable contribution to the series of organizational measures that can be taken to reduce its frequency. For the purpose of this research, a regression model is proposed by using the following predictors: overall emotional intelligence and labeling. The sample consists of 420 Romanian employees from different companies all over the country. This number differs to the one mentioned before (441) due to the extraction of missing answers from the data sample.

Table IV presents the main results on the chosen model:

TABLE IV
MODEL SUMMARY**

Model	R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.415 [*]	.173	7.266	.173	.000	1.972

* Predictors: (Constant), Labeling, Emotional Intelligence

** Dependent Variable: Counterproductive Work Behavior

The ANOVA test mentioned in Table V contains a summary of significant F tests and, as noted, the multiple regression coefficient is statistically significant ($\text{Sig.} = .000$) and this aspect draws the conclusion that the calculated prediction model is better than random prediction.

TABLE V
ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4593.078	2	2296.539	43.495	.000 [*]
Residual	22017.634	417	52.8		
Total	26610.712	419			

* Predictors: (Constant), Labeling, Emotional Intelligence

** Dependent Variable: Counterproductive Work Behavior

The effect size ($R = .415$, $R \text{ square} = .173$) is medium to high and along with all the information above it helps us underline the fact that emotional intelligence together with labeling represent a good predictor for counterproductive work behavior. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A well-recognized fact is that women and men do not have

the same emotional skills; their behaviors differ visibly in the same social context. This was the premise that split the approach on the correlation between emotional intelligence and CWB, depending on gender. The difference between victims and non-victims is also sustained by the results of the statistical analysis. Specifically, people who label themselves as victims have a higher level of aggressive behavior than those who do not. It is important to note that only 13% of the respondents reported to be victims. If we divide this frequency analysis by gender, another interesting result emerges: 10.79% of men consider themselves victims while women have a higher rate of 17.60%. The difference is big and can make important contribution in understanding the way in which the two genders approach aggression.

One of the most common endeavors in social sciences is the act of identifying predictors for different behaviors. Our research model brings an important contribution to the study of counterproductive behavior by emphasizing two individual factors: emotional intelligence and labeling. Taken together, they describe a significant amount of variation in counterproductive behavior. A number of implications arise from this observation: emotional intelligence can be used as a criterion in the selection of staff in companies which promote a peaceful climate and labeling can be used as a topic of great interest for organizational diagnosis programs.

Beyond confirming the research hypotheses, our study comes with a series of limitations, the impact of which must be assumed. Some of these limitations are presented below in the form of recommendations for future research:

- the format of the research tools: although internet and computers are widely accessible nowadays, a web survey does restrict the access to certain categories of employees who don't interact frequently with a computer;
- the size of the instruments: GEIS consists of 45 items and CWB consists of 32 items. Some of the participants stated that they were close to giving up filling the questionnaires due to their size;
- the categorization of aggression targets – the main targets on which we have focused our attention in this study are the employees and the organization. There are at least two other categories to be studied further: one depending on the different roles an employee holds inside the organization (subordinate or superior) and one depending on the position of the target towards the organization (sometimes aggression is directed towards people outside the organization: customers, family members).

All these limitations are starting points for future research that takes into account other variables which intervene in the relationship between emotional intelligence and CWB. They also lead to a wider study of individual differences between employees in terms of CWB.

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