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Leadership, Interpersonal Conflict, and Counterproductive Work Behavior: An Examination of the Stressor–Strain Process

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Abstract

Researchers have established a link between interpersonal conflicts among employees and counterproductive work behavior (CWB), which consists of acts that harm organizations and people in organizations. Both conflict and CWB can be damaging variables that have far reaching consequences for organizations. In a study of 116 employee–coworker dyads, we tested models linking leadership behaviors (passive/avoidant leadership and transformational leadership), interpersonal conflict (with coworkers and supervisors), and CWB directed toward the organization or other people. We found support for models positing that leadership behaviors and interpersonal conflict lead to negative emotions, which in turn lead to the amount of CWB committed.

Researchers have found that interpersonal conflict is an important occupational stressor with far reaching organizational consequences (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989; Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Smith & Sulsky, 1995). It is one of the most frequently occurring stressors (Keenan & Newton, 1985; Narayanan, Menon, & Spector, 1999), with employees across a variety of industries reporting that interpersonal conflicts occur on half of their workdays (Hahn, 2000). One potential consequence of interpersonal conflict that has been firmly established is an increase in the amount of counterproductive work behavior (CWB; behavior that harms organizations or organizational members; Hershcovis et al., 2007). What has been understudied is the connection between CWB and leadership behaviors, as well as the link between leadership behaviors and conflict. Using Spector and Fox's (2002) job stressor model of CWB and Bass's (1985) leadership theory, we propose a model in which a supervisor's leadership behavior and interpersonal conflict with both the leader and coworkers can jointly affect CWB. We also propose that negative emotions play a role in these relationships (see Figure 1).

Overview of CWB

Counterproductive work behavior is an important outcome variable for organizations since it is estimated to cost organizations billions of dollars each year in lost revenue, theft, and fraud (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2002). CWB has been referred to in the literature by a number of different terms including *organizational retaliatory behavior* (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999), *aggression*

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(Baron & Neuman, 1996), and *deviance* (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Despite the numerous terms that have been used to label this set of negative behaviors in the workplace, they all refer to the general construct of CWB, that is, behaviors by employees that "harm their organization or organization members, such as theft, sabotage, interpersonal aggression, work slowdowns, wasting time and/or materials, and spreading rumors" (Penney & Spector, 2002, p. 126). Employees can either direct CWB toward the organization (CWB-O; e.g. employees wasting resources or sabotaging equipment) or toward other employees (CWB-P; e.g., harassment or verbal abuse).

Since CWB is one of the strongest stressors with far-reaching organizational consequences (Bolger et al., 1989; Smith & Sulsky, 1995), it is quite appropriate that Spector and Fox (2002) linked interpersonal conflict to CWB in their job stressor model. According to this model, when employees experience stressors in the workplace (e.g., lacking proper tools or training as well as experiencing interpersonal conflict), they often feel a range of state-based negative emotions, most notably frustration and anger, and subsequently engage in CWB. While Spector and Fox (2002) focused on the mediating link of negative emotion between various stressors and strains, others researchers have found direct links between interpersonal conflict and CWB. Specifically, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Berry, Carpenter, and Barratt (2012) found a mean correlation of .48 (corrected for unreliability) between interpersonal conflict and CWB. Additionally, a meta-analysis by Hershcovis et al. (2007) found a mean correlation of .38 between interpersonal conflict and interpersonal aggression.

Recently, researchers have started to distinguish between sources of interpersonal conflict (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Frone, 2000). Using a sample of 319 young workers, Frone (2000) proposed that since an employee's supervisor is representative of the organization, interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor is likely to yield organizational outcomes. On the contrary, conflict with coworkers would be more likely to personally affect the employee himself or herself. His predictions were supported in that conflict with a supervisor was related to organizational outcomes of job dissatisfaction and turnover, while conflict with coworkers was related to personal outcomes of reduced self-esteem and depression. Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) built on Frone's (2000) work by examining how sources of interpersonal conflict differentially affected the types of CWB employees committed. Given that employees often respond with CWB aimed at the source of their displeasure (i.e., CWB-O or CWB-P), Bruk-Lee and Spector (2006) proposed and found support for their contention that interpersonal conflict with a supervisor would likely result in an employee committing CWB-O while interpersonal conflict with a coworker would be more likely to result in CWB-P. In a later meta-analysis, Hershcovis and Barling (2010), too, found that sources of aggression (including interpersonal conflict with both the supervisor and coworkers) affected outcomes. That is, supervisor aggression was more strongly related to CWB-O than to CWB-P. Together, these findings suggest that the perceived source of stressors is important for understanding when and why employees engage in CWB.

Leadership as a Stressor

While interpersonal conflict is a commonly examined stressor, we propose that certain types of leadership behaviors can also act as a stressor. The widely studied and respected Bass's (1985) theory of leadership describes three types of leadership behaviors: transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant. Transformational leadership consists of instilling pride, respect, and faith in the leader and is centered on the articulation of a vision for the organization (Masi & Cooke, 2000). Transactional leadership is characterized by the exchange of one thing of value for another between the leader and subordinates (e.g., labor for pay) as well as the careful correction of follower mistakes by the leader (Masi & Cooke, 2000). Finally, passive–avoidant leadership involves leaders avoiding responsibilities or only becoming involved in problems when absolutely necessary (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005).

Bass (1985) operationalized each of these sets of leadership behavior into multiple dimensions. First, transformational leadership comprises four general components: idealized influence, inspirational

motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence refers to leaders who are "admired, respected, and trusted" (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003, p. 208), while inspirational motivation refers to leaders who "behave in ways that motivate those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work" (Bass et al., 2003, p. 208). Additionally, intellectual stimulation is defined as leaders who "stimulate their followers' effort to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (Bass et al., 2003, p. 208) while individualized consideration means that "leaders pay attention to each individual's need for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor" (Bass et al., 2003, p. 208). Due to the high correlations often observed among measures of these four components, they are often combined into a single variable, labeled transformational leadership (Bass et al., 2003).

Second, at the most basic level, transactional leadership is defined by reciprocity between the leader and his or her subordinates (Masi & Cooke, 2000). Although there has been some debate about the dimensions of transactional leadership, researchers have found support for using two main dimensions (Avolio, 1999; Bass et al., 2003; Bono & Judge, 2004; Hater & Bass, 1988). These are contingent reward and active management-by-exception. Contingent reward refers to leadership that clarifies expectations, assigns performance goals, and provides rewards and recognition upon goal attainment. Active management-by-exception is defined as leadership that specifies the rules for compliance and monitors the subordinates closely for mistakes and errors.

Finally, passive–avoidant leadership (one type of poor leadership proposed by Kelloway et al., 2005) is composed of two subscales: passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire. The former involves taking action only when problems arise, while a laissez-faire leader avoids leadership responsibilities and take no action at all. Due to their conceptual similarity, these last two scales, passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire, have typically been combined (Bass et al., 2003; Bono & Judge, 2004).

In the current study, we focus only on transformational and passive–avoidant leadership. Transformational leadership is considered a mostly positive form of leadership that yields organizational outcomes, including increased subordinate satisfaction, enhanced motivation, and improved performance (Bass, 1996; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wofford, Whittington, & Goodwin, 2001). Therefore, we consider transformational leadership to be a form of social support, whereby the leader provides both emotion-focused (encouragement) and instrumental (advice) support. Leaders who are transformational would be expected to create a climate of mutual respect and trust that would reduce conflicts within their work groups. In turn, their employees would experience fewer negative emotions, such as anger or frustration. On the other hand, passive–avoidant leadership involves either taking action only when problems arise or taking no action at all and is related to numerous negative organizational outcomes. Specifically, Bass et al. (2003) found that passive–avoidant leadership was negatively related to group cohesion. We therefore argue that passive–avoidant leadership behaviors can act as a stressor where employees are more likely to feel angry or frustrated because of their leader's reluctance to provide direction and structure, failure to clarify expectations, and unwillingness to help solve problems. Since passive–avoidant leaders avoid taking action and shirk their responsibilities, we propose that employees are not likely to engage in conflict with these leaders since the opportunity rarely arises. It is important to note that we do not focus on transactional leadership because researchers have found mixed results between it and organizational outcomes (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Masi & Cooke, 2000).

Leadership and CWB

In keeping with the job stressor model (Spector & Fox, 2002), we propose that employees whose leaders display transformational leadership behaviors are less likely to engage in conflict with their supervisors and in turn less likely to feel negative emotions such as anger and frustration. This is because transformational leaders show individualized consideration for each employee and generate a sense of excitement

and mission (e.g., inspirational motivation) surrounding work. As a result, employees are less likely to engage in CWB, especially CWB-O since employees likely view leaders as representative of the organization. On the contrary, we consider passive–avoidant leadership to be a type of stressor. When leaders engage in these types of uncaring behaviors, employees are more likely to become angry and frustrated since they feel undervalued and are provided with no constructive direction. As a result, employees are more likely to engage in CWB, especially CWB-O. Previous literature provides support for the notion of linking leadership behaviors and CWB. For example, several researchers have examined CWB as an outcome of various aspects of leadership including verbal aggression from leaders (Marrs, 2000), participative leadership (Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2006), charismatic leadership (Hepworth & Towler, 2004), socialized charismatic leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006), and leader–member exchange (LMX; Townsend, Phillips, & Elkins, 2000). As can be expected, employees committed greater amounts of CWB when experiencing verbal aggression from their leaders but committed fewer instances of CWB under conditions of participative leadership, charismatic leadership, and high LMX. More specifically, Hepworth and Towler (2004) found that charismatic leadership (i.e., inspirational motivation and individualized consideration combined) was negatively related to overall work aggression, and their results supported the idea that this relationship was partially mediated by employee empowerment. Additionally, Brown and Trevino (2006) found that charismatic leadership, aggregated at the group level, was negatively related to workplace deviance.

Current Study and Hypotheses

On the basis of the job stressor model (Spector & Fox, 2002), we proposed and tested models linking leadership behaviors, interpersonal conflict, negative emotions, and CWB (see Figure 1 for the CWB-O model and Figure 2 for the CWB-P model). Within each model, we argue that passive–avoidant leadership behaviors can act as a stressor and that transformational leadership behaviors can serve as social support to followers. More specifically, we propose that transformational leadership behaviors are likely to reduce interpersonal conflict with both the supervisor and employees' coworkers because transformational leaders create a culture where each employee is valued for their problem-solving abilities and treated as an individual. Therefore, conflict in these groups is likely to be productive task conflict that relates to problem-solving and not destructive personal conflict (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). As a result of the decreased interpersonal conflict, employees are less likely to feel negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, and therefore would be less likely to engage in CWB. We also link passive–avoidant leadership directly to negative emotions that lead to CWB. Passive–avoidant leadership refers to a leader who avoids his or her responsibilities and only takes action when absolutely necessary. Thus, employees may find they are working with insufficient guidance and direction, and they may have to compensate for a supervisor who does not perform necessary tasks. Furthermore, employees might not receive rewards or praise from passive–avoidant supervisors for properly completing tasks. Rather, employees are only punished for infractions and therefore are likely to try to avoid "being caught" for such infractions (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland, & Hetland, 2007). Under these circumstances, employees are more likely to feel angry and frustrated due to the inherent injustice of not being praised or rewarded for effective performance. It is important to note that we do not link passive–avoidant leadership to either type of interpersonal conflict. This is because passive–avoidant leaders tend to avoid dealing with subordinates' problems and shirk responsibilities. Therefore, these behaviors, while stressful, would not be expected to generate interpersonal conflicts.

To investigate this connection, we used 116 coworker dyads. It should be noted that we differentiate between types of interpersonal conflict (i.e., conflict with the supervisor and conflict with coworkers) as well as types of CWB committed (i.e., CWB-O and CWB-P). Furthermore, both models are tested using coworker-reported leadership variables.

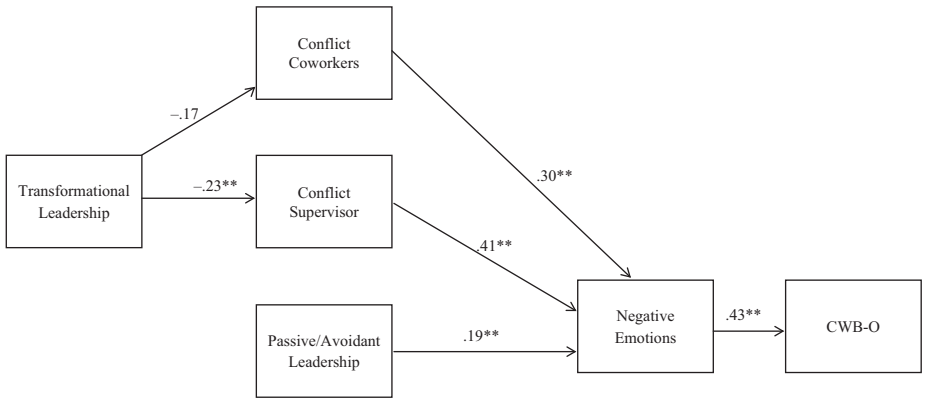

Figure 1. CWB-O as the outcome variable; unstandardized parameter estimates were used. ** $p < .01$.

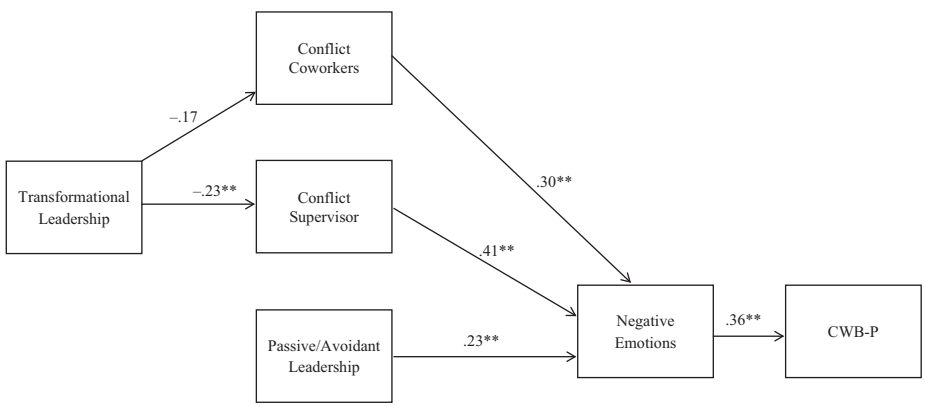

Figure 2. CWB-P as the outcome variable; unstandardized parameter estimates were used. ** $p < .01$.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 116 employee and coworker dyads. Of the 116 participants, 31% were men ($n = 36$) and 21.6% occupied managerial positions ($n = 25$). On average, employees worked 36.6 hours per week (to be eligible, participants were required to work 20 or more hours per week). Employees were recruited from the southeast region of the United States and worked in a variety of organizations. They were told that they were participating in a study on the workplace.

Data were collected in two ways. First, employees from a government organization were recruited via presentations to small work groups. Hard copies of the surveys were distributed to a centrally located work area. They were asked to complete the surveys at their convenience and to return them in a sealed manila envelope to an in-basket upon completion. The researcher picked up completed surveys from the in-basket after the specified deadline. In the other subsample, hard copies of questionnaires were distributed to employees taking classes at a local university (both graduate and undergraduate classes). They were asked to complete the surveys and return them to a member of the research team in person or via intracampus mail.

To reduce common method variance (e.g., single-source bias), employees were asked to identify a coworker who worked for the same supervisor. A coworker survey was given to the employee who was asked to give it to the coworker. Employees were asked to put the same secret code on both forms so the researchers could match their survey to the coworker while maintaining anonymity. Coworkers returned completed surveys using the same procedure as the employees. For both subsamples, there were no incentives given for recruiting the coworker. Therefore, we have no reason to believe that the participants would complete the coworker survey themselves. To ensure anonymity, no names or specific places of employment were collected.

Measures

Participants' surveys included measures of leadership, interpersonal conflict, negative emotions, and CWB. Coworker surveys contained only the leadership survey.

Leadership

The supervisor's leadership was measured with the MLQ Form 5x-Short instrument (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Both the participant and the coworker indicated how often their shared supervisor displayed specific leader behaviors, using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all*, 4 = *always*). We combined 20 items to create one transformational leadership factor. The passive–avoidant leadership factor consisted of eight items across two scales. These include the management-by-exception passive scale and the laissez-faire scale. The Cronbach's alphas are as follows: coworker-reported transformational leadership $\alpha = .94$, coworker-reported passive–avoidant leadership $\alpha = .86$, self-reported transformational leadership $\alpha = .95$, and self-reported passive–avoidant leadership $\alpha = .85$.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict was measured using the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (ICAWS; Spector & Jex, 1998). Each set of questions measures the extent to which the employee experiences arguments, yelling, and rudeness while interacting with the supervisor or coworkers, respectively. The scale consists of four items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*. High scores represent high levels of conflict. Sample items include "How often do you get into fights with your supervisor?" and "How often does your supervisor yell at you at work?" In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha for conflict with supervisor was .84 and for conflict with coworkers was .75.

Negative Emotions

This variable was measured using 10 items from Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, and Kelloway's (2000) Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS). Respondents indicated how often they experience each of 10 negative emotional states at work. Response choices are in the standard 1-to-5 Likert format where a 1 indicates almost never and a 5 indicates extremely often or always, with high scores representing high levels of negative emotions. Sample items include "My job makes me feel furious" and "My job makes me feel angry." For this study, Cronbach's alpha was .88.

Counterproductive Work Behavior

Counterproductive work behavior was assessed using the full version of the Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) developed by Spector et al. (2006). We took advantage of the versatility in this scale and examined two types of CWB: CWB directed at the organization (CWB-O) and CWB directed at individuals within the organization (CWB-P). Sample CWB-O items include asking participants the frequency in which they "purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property" and "stole something belonging to [his or her] employer." For CWB-P, sample items include the frequency an employee "insulted someone about their job performance" and "verbally abused someone at work." Using a

5-point Likert-type format, ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *every day*, 21 items assessed CWB-O ($\alpha = .92$) and 21 items ($\alpha = .85$) assessed CWB-P (Spector, 2011). High scores indicated high incidence of CWB. It should be noted that the full version used to assess CWB-O and CWB-P is typically 45 items; however, one item was omitted due to a clerical error, so the total scale in the current study consisted of 44 items, with two items not fitting into the either subscale.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, conflict with supervisors was significantly correlated with both self-reported transformational leadership ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$) and coworker-reported transformational leadership ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$). Conflict with coworkers was correlated with coworker-reported transformational leadership ($r = -.20$, $p < .05$) but not with self-reported transformational leadership. Contrary to our expectations, coworker- and self-reported passive–avoidant leadership was related to both types of interpersonal conflict (*r*'s range from .21 to .51). As expected, the negative-emotions variable was correlated with self-reported passive–avoidant leadership ($r = .40$, $p < .01$) and coworker-reported passive–avoidant leadership ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). Additionally, as expected, the negative-emotions variable was related to conflict with coworkers ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), conflict with the supervisor ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), CWB-O ($r = .47$, $p < .01$), and CWB-P ($r = .39$, $p < .01$).

To test the proposed models, we entered the obtained correlation matrix, using coworker-reported leadership variables, into LISREL 8.53 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006) to examine whether the data fit the proposed models. As indicators of model fit, we used the chi-squared test of exact fit, the root mean square error of approximation (*RMSEA*), including the *p*-value test of close fit for *RMSEA*, the Normed Fit Index (*NFI*), the Non-Normed Fit Index (*NNFI*), and the Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*). Results of these indices suggest adequate fit for our models [CWB-O; $\chi^2(15) = 162.75$, *RMSEA* = .067, *NFI* = .90, *NNFI* = .94, *CFI* = .96; and for CWB-P; $\chi^2(15) = 156.04$, *RMSEA* = .067, *NFI* = .90, *NNFI* = .95, *CFI* = .96]. Figures 1 and 2 contain the unstandardized parameter estimates for the paths between adjacent variables in the model. As can be seen, overall, the parameter estimates for the paths are similar to the observed correlations. Exceptions, though, are the paths between coworker-reported transformational leadership and conflict with coworkers. In both models, these paths were insignificant although the correlations were significant.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. CWB-O	–								
2. CWB-P	.47**	–							
3. Conflict with coworkers	.12	.34**	–						
4. Conflict with supervisor	.37**	.23*	.31**	–					
5. Negative emotions	.47**	.39**	.32**	.43**	–				
6. Transformational leadership (Co)	−.10	−.15	−.20*	−.27**	−.10	–			
7. Passive/avoidant leadership (Co)	.23*	.17	.21*	.29**	.29**	−.52**	–		
8. Transformational leadership (Self)	−.32**	−.12	−.16	−.41**	−.25**	.49**	−.12	–	
9. Passive/avoidant leadership (Self)	.22*	.19*	.35**	.51**	.40**	−.31**	.54**	−.46**	–
Mean	31.61	26.35	1.43	1.42	2.51	46.91	9.69	44.64	10.53
SD	7.66	6.88	0.45	0.61	0.85	17.51	6.96	19.18	7.29

Note. *Correlation is significant at the .05 level.**Correlation is significant at the .01 level.
"Co" leadership variables were reported by a coworker, and "Self" leadership variables were reported by the participant.

Discussion

In the current study, we integrated Spector and Fox's (2002) job stressor model of CWB with Bass's (1985) leadership theory to develop models examining leadership behaviors, interpersonal conflict, negative emotions, and CWB. We found that transformational leadership was associated with a decrease in conflict with the supervisor. Additionally, passive/avoidant leadership was positively associated with the negative-emotions variable, which, in turn, was positively associated with both types of CWB. Interestingly, the parameter estimate between negative emotions and CWB-P (.36) was slightly smaller than the parameter estimate between negative emotions and CWB-O (.43). Although this could be due to chance, it is possible that the difference reflects the notion that employees more likely aim negative behaviors at the source of their displeasure and that a supervisor is often considered a representative of the organization (e.g., Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Frone, 2000; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010).

Additionally, as seen in the correlation matrix, we found that the negative emotions were positively correlated with both types of interpersonal conflict, CWB-O, CWB-P, and passive/avoidant leadership. The negative emotions variable was also negatively related to transformational leadership (self-reported). Not only do these findings fit with Spector and Fox's (2002) job stressor model, but they show how leadership can act as a source of social support or as a stressor. Specifically, positive types of leadership were associated with fewer negative strain behaviors while negative types of leadership were associated with more negative strain behaviors. Additionally, participants seemed to categorize the supervisor as a representative of the organization and therefore aimed strains in the direction of the organization (e.g., CWB-O).

Contrary to our expectations, passive/avoidant leadership was related to both types of interpersonal conflict. We hypothesized that interpersonal conflict and passive–avoidant leadership would be unrelated because this type of leadership involved an uncaring leader who avoided engaging in the work environment. Therefore, we expected employees experiencing these types of leadership behaviors from their supervisors would certainly be frustrated and angry but would not have the opportunity to engage in conflict, at least with the supervisor, because of that supervisor's avoidant nature. It would be interesting to tease apart active interpersonal conflicts from passive–aggressive behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the current study is the relatively small sample size. Although significance was detected, future research should replicate these findings with larger samples across a variety of populations to facilitate generalizability. Additionally, as is typical of survey research, the method does not facilitate causal conclusions. In other words, it cannot be determined from this study whether conflict yielded CWB, whether acts of CWB resulted in interpersonal conflict, or whether third variables accounted for both. Next, CWB was assessed with self-report data. Although respondents would be the most accurate sources about which CWBs they engage in, they may be unwilling to be entirely candid about their behavior, or they may not accurately remember how often they engage in CWB. However, Dalal (2005) suggested that self-reports of CWB may be more accurate and better sources of data than other reports, particularly supervisors who are subject to halo and other biases. Furthermore, Berry et al. (2012) found in their meta-analysis that correlations of CWB with other variables were similar between self- and other-reports of CWB.

Another limitation concerns the nature of transformational leadership. While most researchers indicate that transformational leadership positively relates to subordinate satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Bass, 1996; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Wofford et al., 2001), some researchers have found that this is not necessarily the case. For example, Ashkanasy (2003) suggested the possibility for the charisma associated with transformational leadership to be seen as exploitive by followers. Since the transformational leadership scale does not distinguish between this type of *pseudo-transformational leadership* (Ashkanasy, 2003; Bass, 1996) and true transformational leadership, the relationship between transformational

leadership and interpersonal conflict might have been attenuated. Future research should attempt to disentangle true transformational leadership from pseudo-transformational leadership.

Future research should also examine leadership behaviors using additional sources. Specifically, it would be interesting to conduct a multilevel study where team leaders are rated by multiple subordinates. Although our study showed significant convergence between participants and their coworkers, a multilevel design with a larger number of subordinates per leader might provide more insights into the extent to which shared perceptions of the leader might relate to conflict and CWB and would enable us to explore relationships at both the individual employee and the work group level.

Implications

Regardless of these limitations, there are clear implications for both theory and practice. First, we tied together two disparate theories: Spector and Fox's (2002) job stressor model of CWB and Bass's (1985) leadership theory. Doing so allows us to offer support for categorizing negative leadership as a stressor that can potentially lead to organizational consequences, such as CWB. Second, organizations should note that poor leadership, even at lower levels of the organization, is associated with adverse outcomes that can have widespread effects on the organization as a whole. This suggests that the negative effects are not confined to coworkers, but rather, poor leadership is associated with an increase in counterproductive behaviors directed toward the organization. Therefore, organizations have even more reasons to pay attention to leadership development at all levels of the organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study underscores the potential negative effects of interpersonal conflict and poor leadership on organizations. We found that poor leadership was associated with conflict, CWB, and negative emotions and that the target of CWB in some cases matched the source of the stressor. Given the monetary and nonmonetary costs of interpersonal conflict and CWB, researchers and practitioners alike should be concerned with finding ways to alleviate their effects. Our results suggest that a focus on leadership might be a good place to start.

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