Perceived Workplace Incivility among Employees of Faith-Based Firms: The Predictive Role of Emotional Stability and Ethical-Moral Standard

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Abstract

Workplace incivility is not healthy for both the employers and the employees. Literature search revealed gap in knowledge on the predictive role of emotional stability and ethical-moral standard on perceived workplace incivility. To fill this gap and contribute in obtaining veritable solution to workplace incivility, present study extends the literature on workplace incivility by investigating perceived workplace incivility: the predictive role of emotional stability and ethical-moral standard. Participants were 133 employees (51 males and 82 females) of faith-based firms in Anambra State, selected through the use of total population sampling technique. Their ages ranged from 24 years to 47 years, with a mean age of 35.50 and a standard deviation of 2.18. Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS), Emotional Stability Scale (ESS), and Ethical-Moral Self Inventory (EMSI) were used for data collection. Two hypotheses were tested using multiple regression statistic. Result revealed that only ethical-moral standard significantly and positively predicted workplace incivility at β = .173, p<.05, (n = 133), while emotional stability did not, β = -.007, p>.05, (n = 133). Following these findings, it was recommended that faith-based business owners should be very conscious of how they talk down or neglect the contributions their employees are making. Such omissions could be among what their employees perceive as workplace incivility.
Keywords: *Workplace Incivility, Emotional Stability, Ethical-Moral Standard, Faith-based Employees*
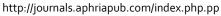
Introduction

Unemployment rate in Nigeria is yet to reasonably decrease. This situation has made

people to keep seeking for ways to survive, and it includes choosing to work in places they

are taken advantage of. Faith-based firms are perceived to be taking advantage of their

employees, believing that there are pools of job seekers who can replace their employees in

the event that they quit the job. Such firms are not guided by any vetted standard rules of engagement; rather, they hire their employees with job contract designed by them in such a way that it benefits them as the employer at the expense of their employees.

Investigation among employees of faith-based firms revealed that they carry out more job roles not actually described/defined in the terms they were hired; work longer hours beyond the scheduled working hours agreed upon during the time of hiring, with no compensation to show for it; and are paid less when compared with employees of State and Federal Governments' Institutions and employees of private businesses. In the midst of all these, observation revealed that they are not well appreciated, and that some are usually demeaned by how their employer talks to them or addresses issues concerning them. Such experiences can stir strong negative emotions in the workplace and could predispose to unethical practices associated with perceived workplace incivility.

According to Porath and Pearson (2012), workplace incivility is a low-intensity disrespectful behaviour that does not regard the dignity and self-esteem of other individuals that runs contrary to expectations of the individual and workplace norms for mutual respect. One interesting thing is that an action or omission could be perceived as workplace incivility depending on the side of the coin a person found him or herself. Incivility as a social interaction is perceived accordingly depending on the side (the instigator, the target, or the observer) one is (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2014). This made it important to look at the predictive role of some factors in enhancing or inhibiting coping with such perception. Meanwhile, one possibility is that employers of faith-based firms may not have considered their actions against their employees as workplace incivility.

Presence of incivility in a workplace is not oftentimes static. Meier and Gross (2015) observed that wherever it is found, incivility can take escalating, spiraling, or cascading forms. It could start from not greeting one's employer and graduate to tit-for-tat before escalating to what Lim, Ilies, Koopman, Christoforou, and Arvey, (2016) referred to as a spiral of more aggressive behaviors, with each exchange escalating spiral of incivility. It then becomes imperative to put a check on this considering that perceived workplace incivility is neither healthy for the employer nor the employee.

Employees needed to be in a healthy state of mind and body to function optimally. Studies (Porath & Pearson, 2010; Walsh & Magley, 2018 cited in Alola, Avci, & Ozturen, 2018) have shown that workplace incivility sabotages this healthy state and appears to be destructive to organizational sustainability. Due to fear of being sacked, employees of faith-based firms may re-direct towards a co-worker or subordinate, their acts of workplace incivility when the victim does not dare to retaliate directly against the employer (i.e. the instigator). Such acts could foster work-group conflict among employees and thwart the team playing spirit needed for organizational cohesion. One other likelihood is that workplace incivility can drain employees' emotional strength through lowering their level of frustration tolerance. It is pertinent to remember that some employees of faith-based firms are in the job for the sake of untold hardship they are facing. Thus, workplace incivility against them by their employers could incite flouting of ethical-moral standard behaviour approved by such firms.

Moreover, issues concerning workplace incivility has attracted researchers' interest and generated a good number of studies. However, literature search on workplace incivility revealed that scholarly research to identify the predictive role of emotional stability and ethical-moral standard on workplace incivility, is yet to be fully explored. The present study extended the literature on workplace incivility following the observed dearth of literature and gap in knowledge regarding the predictive role of emotional stability and ethical moral standard on workplace incivility among employees of faith-based firms. This study was adjudged imperative due to the suspicion that observed turnover intention of employees in such firms could be as a result of incivility. Thus, the purpose of this study included the following:

i.   To find it out if emotional stability would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility.

ii. To find it out if ethical-moral standard would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

This study used social exchange theory as the theoretical framework. Blau (1964) propounded that social exchange theory offers a social psychological perspective to explain and understand exchange process between parties. Social exchange process includes how employees in an organization perceive and react to interactions between them and other parties in the organization. This theory offers an opportunity to understand inter-intrapersonal relationship going on in the organization and the importance of studying

incivility. The theory offers the reason to understand mutual incivility in the context of where one party expresses incivility toward another party and the receiving party retaliates. Andersson and Pearson (1999) and Glomb and Liao (2003) used social exchange theory to explain incivility in the workplace, and Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggested theoretical evidence of an escalating and reciprocal nature of uncivil behavior, using a "tit-for-tat" pattern (Shim, 2010).

Social exchange theory equally offers the background to understand emotional stability in an organization. Emotion is considered to be a self-organizing system (Izard, Ackerman, Schoff & Fine, 2000), and social exchange theory provides the background to understand how interpersonal relationships that exist in organization affect the efficiency of an emotional system to automatically maintains its equilibrium. Li and Ahlstrom (2015) argued that a stable emotion system is referred to as 'pattern A' and an unstable emotion system is referred to as 'pattern B'. By 'pattern A' and pattern 'pattern B', Li and Ahlstrom (2015) were referring to a long intermittent period between emotion episodes and a short recovery time and a short intermittent period between emotion episodes and a long recovery time, respectively. Exchange processes that result to pay-offs or rewards for employees could lead to interactions that elicit stable emotion system. Employees may seek interactions that promote efficiency of thei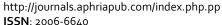r emotional system, but they are also at the receiving end of behaviours from other parties in the organization that elicit unstable emotion system. These actions and reactions go side by side, and where efficiency of emotional system is severed, workplace incivility may occur.

Similarly, social exchange theory provides a perspective to understand ethical-moral behaviour in organization. Ethical-moral workplace behaviour refers to how an employee's behaviours in an organization conform to the organization's approved standard way of behaving. Social exchange theory assumes that individuals, in a freely competitive social system, are goal-oriented. This provides the bases to understand why employers outline ways their employees should be behaving in the organization, especially in the contemporary competitive business world. In the competitive nature of social systems, exchange processes could lead to differentiation of power and privilege, where power lies with those individuals who possess greater resources that provide an advantage in the social exchange. This theory offers the background to understand why employers could be perceived as holding more power since they are seen as having more resources that places them in a better position to benefit from the exchange. However, when such power is not equitably distributed in an organization, there the problems lie. Possible effect of such inequality could be that employees will perceive incivility via how the employer treats them. When the victim of incivility does not dare to retaliate directly against the employer (as the instigator), unethical workplace behaviour could be used as reaction against the employer's incivility. This may be caused by victim's desire for revenge triggered by negative affect (Etodike & Eze, 2017). Moreover, defaulting from code of ethics of the organization sabotages the moral awareness (Rest, 1986) found to have significant effect on compliance with the organization's ethics (Pflugrath, Martinov-Bennie & Chen, 2007).

Ogungbamila (2015) looked at factors predicting workplace incivility, and Sharma and Singh (2016) and Zia-ud-Din, Arif and Shabbir (2017) examined impact of workplace incivility. Finding obtained by Etodike and Eze (2017) implied that as emotional regulation of the

employees improve, workplace incivility reduces. Emotional stability of employees has been found to indicate how employees socially adjust at their workplace (Vidya, Nordin, & Mainul, 2015). Rothmann and Coetzer (2003) reported that emotional stability is recognized as a significant predictor of job performance. It has also been obtained that emotional stability plays a very important role in maintaining conducive workplace social interactions (Lee, Dougherty, & Turban, 2000). Contrarily, individuals who are considered emotionally unstable have been found to display ineffective coping mechanisms and to carry a hostile attitude (Clutterbuck & Lane, 2004). Meanwhile, O'Leary and Stewart (2007) found that the existence of a strong code of ethics did not appear to assist to act more ethically when faced with a dilemma. Pflugrath et al., (2007), however, reported that the presence of a code of ethics can improve the quality of employees' judgments. Empirical evidence from the experiment of Ariely (2012) supports that when moral awareness is stimulated, it will lead to moral intention and ethical decisions. In a similar way, Zhang, Chiu and Wei (2009) found that organizational ethical culture positively affects ethical sensitivity of employees. In line with the above, the following hypotheses guided the study:

i. Emotional stability would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility

ii. Ethical-moral standard would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility

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Method

Participants

The participants were 133 employees (51 males and 82 females) of faith-based firms situated in Anambra State. Their ages ranged from 24 years to 47 years, with a mean age of 35.50 and a standard deviation of 2.18. Through the use of total population sampling technique, the participants were employed from business firms owned and operated by three Catholic Dioceses present in Anambra State.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for the study. The instruments included Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) by Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001), Emotional Stability Scale (ESS) by Li and Ahlstrom (2015), and Ethical-Moral Self Inventory (EMSI) by Fitts (1965). WIS by Cortina et al., (2001) is a 7-item scale designed to assess the extent to which employees engage in rude and disrespectful behaviors towards other individuals in the workplace; ESS by Li and Ahlstrom (2015) is a 10-item instrument designed to measure the threshold of emotion response and the time of emotional recovery; and EMSI by Fitts (1965) is a 28-item inventory designed to measure compliance to ethical standard and morality.

For the use of these instruments in this study, 64 participants were employed for a pilot test and Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of .92, .89 and .86, were obtained by the researchers for WIS, ESS and EMSI, respectively. Besides, the norm used in this study in each of these instruments were generated among employees of faith-based firms via the same pilot test.

Procedure

Participants of this study were met individually in their workplaces. On acknowledgement of self-introduction done by the researchers, participants willingly volunteered to participate. Before administering the instruments on them, adequate rapport was created and the goals of the study were explained. The instruments were collected immediately each participant attended to all the items of the instruments.

Design and Statistic

This is a survey study that used predictive design. Multiple regression statistic was used to analyze the data collected.

Result

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for mean and standard deviations of the variables tested in the study

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Stability	133	73.6842	18.26255
Ethical-Moral Standard	133	62.2256	7.17595
Valid N (listwise)	133		

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis for predictive effects of emotional stability and ethical-moral standard on workplace incivility

Coefficients[a]

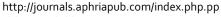| Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	55.311	20.411		2.710	.008
	Emotional Stability	-.010	.119	-.007	-.081	.935
	Ethical-Moral Standard	.604	.302	.173	1.997	.048

a. Dependent Variable: Workplace Incivility

The result as presented in the multiple regression table above showed that hypothesis I which stated that emotional stability would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility was not confirmed at β = -.007, p>.05, (n = 133). The finding in hypothesis I implied that as emotional stability of the employees improves, workplace incivility will decrease.

From the same table, result showed that hypothesis II which stated that ethical-moral standard would significantly and positively predict workplace incivility, was confirmed at β = .173, p<.05, (n = 133). The above finding in hypothesis II implied that ethical-moral standard significantly and positively predicted workplace incivility.

Discussion

The result in hypothesis I suggested that as emotional stability of employees of faith-based firms increases, their perceived workplace incivility, will reduce. This result found support in social exchange theory that offers the background to understand how interpersonal relationships affect the efficiency of an emotional system to automatically maintains its equilibrium. Interpersonal relationships in an organization generates emotional episodes via associated actions and reactions. From this finding, the importance of long threshold of emotion response and short recovery time is shown. This finding becomes imperative to underscore the need that for employees not to feel frustrated and display hostile attitude (Clutterbuck & Lane, 2004), but to have an improved job performance (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003), stability of their emotion is necessary. It is by recognizing this and attaining it that employees will come to work and maintain conducive workplace social interactions (Lee et al., 2000). Such will positively affect an employee's social adjustment at the

workplace (Vidya et al., 2015) and enhance effective coping mechanism, even as a victim of employer's incivility. A reason as this could found further explanation in the finding made by Etodike and Eze (2017) which implied that emotional stability is important in the overall occurrence of workplace incivility.

Another important revelation was made in the result obtained on hypothesis 2, where ethical-moral standard significantly and positively predicted workplace incivility. Such result suggested that flouting of ethical-moral standard of an organization could be a consequence of perceived workplace incivility or a precursor to workplace incivility. This finding supports the view that flouting organizational ethical standard could be a kind of revenge (Etodike & Eze, 2017) from an employee due to perceived workplace incivility by the employer. This then presupposes that as employees interpret the perceived workplace incivility meted to them by their employer, they could justify their spiral of incivility, notwithstanding the firm's ethical-moral standard. Thus, the finding that having organizational ethical code of conduct in place will not guarantee compliance, as was obtained by O'Leary and Stewart (2007), could not agree less.

Furthermore, this finding offers different facets to understand the predictive role of ethical-moral standard on perceived workplace incivility. Specifically, it provided an opportunity to understand that employee's tendency to flout organizational ethics could be seen from how such incivility exposed employees to negative experiences that make them lower their bar in identifying with the organization. Such negative exposures inhibit their moral awareness (Rest, 1986) in the organization. Engaging in such act could console them, especially as they

dare not retaliate directly against the employer. However, this then makes the finding reported by Ariely (2012), that when moral awareness is stimulated, it will lead to moral intention and ethical decisions, more practical.

Implications of the Study

Perceived workplace incivility could mar the sustainability of an organization. It could lead to decrease in job performance and possibly to other negativities like turnover, abseentism, and presentism. By inhibiting compliance to ethical code of conduct of a given firm, workplace incivility will likely be breeding aggressive, rebellious, and frustrated employees. It is these kinds of employees that are considered toxics to organizational cohesion, sustainability, and competitive advantage.

Recommendations

Findings obtained were found to be far-reaching. It this therefore recommended that faith-based business owners should be very conscious of how they talk down or neglect the contributions their employees are making. Such omissions could be among what their employees perceive as workplace incivility.

Employees of faith-based firms should be of know that what they perceive as workplace incivility from their employer could be perceived differently by their employer. The researchers therefore recommend that before such employees adopt ineffective coping style or decide to flout the code of ethics of the firm, they should first approach their employer to have a dialogue. Through this way they will make known to the employer how they perceive the actions or omissions of the employer they considered disrespectful.

Limitations of the Study

It is appropriate to note that though far-reaching findings were made in this study, caution should be applied in generalizing the findings due to the following limitations:

Only employees of faith-based firms participated in this study. The findings should not be applied to employees of State or Federal institutions or private businesses.

In line that only employees of faith-based firms owned by Catholic Dioceses present in Anambra State were employed in the study, the findings should not be generalized to other employees working for faith-based firms owned by other Christian denominations present in Anambra State.

Conclusion

Observed gap in knowledge on the predictive role of emotional stability and ethical-moral standard on perceived workplace incivility among employees of faith-based firms could be contributory to why incivility is still present in workplaces. In line with the revelations made in the present study, the researchers are concluding that emotional stability and ethical-moral standard play important role on occurrence of workplace incivility among employees of faith-based firms. As such, faith-based business owners should understand that flouting of the firm's ethical code of conduct by their employees could be sign that their actions or omissions as employers may be perceived as uncivil by their employees.

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