

DOCTORAL THESIS

Why do groups engage in counterproductive work behavior?: the roles of group stressors and group affect

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**Why Do Groups Engage in Counterproductive Work
Behavior? The Roles of Group Stressors and Group Affect**

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ABSTRACT

Group counterproductive work behavior (GCWB) refers to homogeneous behaviors by members of a work group that violate organizational norms and harm the organization and its members. Despite the devastating impact of GCWB, it is still unknown why groups engage in GCWB as a whole and why some groups are more counterproductive than others.

Although counterproductive work behavior (CWB) has become a topical issue in recent years and significant progress has been made in developing our knowledge of such destructive behaviors in the workplace, there are several limitations in the extant literature. First, CWB has almost exclusively been examined at the individual level. As a shared character of groups, however, GCWB may have a distinct theoretical rationale. Second, a cognitive-oriented approach has dominated the literature. However, research adopting an affective perspective may add to our understanding of CWB.

The purpose of the present study is to advance GCWB research by examining antecedents and mediating and moderating processes. Integrating affective events theory and the theory of group affect, I develop a theoretical model of GCWB. The model proposes that group stressors (i.e. toxic leadership and relationship conflict) lead to shared negative affective tone in groups, which in turn leads to GCWB. I propose that negative affective tone mediates the relationship between group stressors and GCWB. Moreover, I hypothesize that task interdependence and norms of

emotional expression not only moderate the relationship between group stressors and negative affective tone, but also moderate the mediating effect through negative affective tone. I also hypothesize that ethical climate moderates the relationship between negative affective tone and GCWB, and moderates the mediating effect through negative affective tone.

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a pilot study (N = 86; 26 groups) and a main study (N = 244; 82 groups). By examining construct structure, aggregation, and correlations with antecedents, the pilot study validated GCWB as a meaningful, group-level construct. Next, two waves of data were collected in the main study to test the theoretical model. I found that toxic leadership and relationship conflict were significantly related to GCWB. Negative affective tone mediated the relationship between the group stressors (toxic leadership and relationship conflict) and GCWB. Task interdependence moderated the above mediating effect through negative affective tone, as well as the relationship between group stressors and negative affective tone. However, norms of emotional expression and ethical climate did not demonstrate moderating or moderated mediation effects.

The present thesis contributes to GCWB theoretical development and provides practical implications for organizations. Group stressors, such as toxic leadership and relationship conflict, may result in GCWB in groups. The findings demonstrated that negative affective tone shared by group members is an important process in the development of GCWB when groups suffer stressors. Moreover, high task interdependence among members strengthens affective processes. Organizations

should prevent negative emotional contagion and promote positive emotions in groups.

Keywords: Group counterproductive work behavior; Affective tone; Emotional contagion; Toxic leadership; Relationship conflict

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