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Guest Editors

Professor Bayode Isaiah Popoola
Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling,
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile Ife
Nigeria

Professor Olubukola Olakunbi Ojo
Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile Ife
Nigeria

Professor Abiodun Adebayo Adediran
Department of History,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile Ife
Nigeria

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR AMONG SCHOOL TEACHERS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH AND JOB STRESS

Ike E. Onyishi
Chizoba B. Onunkwo
University of Nigeria - Nsukka

Abstract

In the workplace, including school environment, workers engage in behaviours that may threaten the viability of organizations. Among such behaviors are those that may be termed counterproductive. Researchers have continued to examine the causes of such behaviours in work environments. In this study, a cross sectional design was employed to investigate the relationship between psychological contract breach, job stress and counterproductive work behavior among two hundred and twenty three (223) secondary school teachers (178 females and 45 males) in southeast, Nigeria. The result of the hierarchical regression analyses showed that psychological contract breach has a positive significant relationship with counterproductive work behavior. The result equally showed that stress is a significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior. Implications of the findings to teachers' productive and counterproductive work behaviors were discussed and suggestions for further study were offered.

Keywords: Work behaviour, Contract Breach, Stress, School Teachers, Nigeria

Introduction

Efficiency of school systems to a large extent depends on the ability of teachers to satisfactorily perform duties assigned to them. In recent years, there have been decline in the standard of education in Nigeria and it appears that many attribute this not only to students' attitude but also to low performance and general poor work attitude of teachers. Thus, teachers may also engage in less productive behavior and exhibit what may be referred to as counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Organizational researchers have explored issues relating to counterproductive work behaviors, such as overt acts of aggression (Douglass & Martinko, 2001; Early & Steffan, 1986; Martinko, Gundlach & Douglass, 2002), interpersonal conflict, sabotage (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and theft (Greenberg, 1990; 1993), drug use (Hogan & Hogan 1989). Counterproductive work behavior has conceptual resemblance with constructs such as incivility, workplace aggression, workplace deviance, sabotage, theft and apathy (Fodchuk, 2007; Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2010; Penney, Hunter & Perry, 2011; Wu & Lebreton, 2011). It encompasses a wide range of negative work behaviors that threaten the survival, productivity and other legitimate objectives of an organization.

Scholars have variously defined counterproductive work behavior. For instance, Marcus and Schuler (2004) defined it as any act by a member of an organization that is very likely to do harm but no benefit to other members of the organization or the organization as a whole. Penney and Spector (2005) hold that counterproductive work behavior are behaviors by employees that harm an organization, which included acts such as theft, sabotage, verbal abuse, withholding of effort, lying, refusing to cooperate and physical assault. So, any behavior by workers that are detrimental to organizational success can be classified as counterproductive.

One of the most consistent views about counterproductive workplace behaviors is to develop ways of identifying antecedents of these sets of behaviors with intention of eliminating or reducing the predisposing factors. From this perspective, two streams of research have emerged. The first stream of research views CWB from organizational justice perspective, portraying CWB as a cognition-based response to experienced injustice (Greenberg, 1990; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997; Skarlicki, Folger & Tesluk, 1999). Secondly, some other researchers view CWB as an emotion-based response to stressful organizational conditions (Chen & Spector, 1992; Fox & Spector, 1999; Storms & Spector, 1987). In line with these two prominent views, we propose here that psychological contract breach and job stress will be related to CWB.

Psychological contract breach could be seen as a possible antecedent of CWB. The relationship between psychological contract breach and CWB could be explained from varying theoretical perspectives. Reasoning from the affective theory paradigm, a negative event at the work

place causes negative emotional reactions such as anger or frustration and work withdrawal intention (Spector, 1975)). According to Spector's model, frustration of goals results in emotional and behavioral reactions. The emotional response such as anger results in increased psychological arousal in response to frustration, individuals engage in several actions, including an attempt to find alternatives that allow goal attainment. Adams (1965) states in his equity theory that when an employee perceives inadequate compensation for their work, the employee would naturally respond in a way that helps him or her to restore equity. Breach of psychological contract triggers feelings of inequity that may result in negative work behavior such as CWB as the employee attempts to create a balance between input and output (Adams, 1965). Here, employee engagement in CWB in response to contract breach becomes a way of restoring equity (Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2010). The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) has also been used to explain how employees react to psychological contract breach (Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2010). The social exchange theory posits that employees in a reciprocity process that workers tend to react to good gestures provided by their employers by engaging in behaviors that benefit the organization. On the other hand, employees could as well engage in counterproductive behaviors if they perceive that the organization has breached certain contractual agreement with them. Acts of aggression directed toward the organization, sabotage, theft or withdrawal from the situation (which may have emanated from the feelings of contract breach) could become possible alternatives for individuals who perceive psychological contract breach.

Rousseau (2000) defined psychological contract as the employees beliefs concerning mutual obligations, that the organization has failed to deliver its obligations. An effective reaction may follow including feelings of anger and betrayal. Breach refers to the cognition that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligations whereas feeling of violations refer to the affects following breach (Conway & Briner, 2005). During the recruitment process, the employer and interviewee will discuss what they can offer each other in the prospective relationship. If agreement is reached, it is expected that the parties will fulfill their aspects of the contract terms. Although these agreement may not be precise, but, in psychological terms, issues as to whether promises and expectations have been kept and met, and whether the resulting arrangements are fair, are fundamental to the trust between the employee and the employer. Psychological contract could be transactional or relational. The transactional aspect focuses on the economic or monetary base in which case there is clear expectations that the organization will fairly compensate the performance delivered and punish inadequate or inappropriate acts, while the relational aspect is a socio-emotional base that underlies expectations of shared ideals and values, and respect and support in the interpersonal relationships. Psychological contract breach occurs if employees perceive that their firm, or its agents, have failed to deliver on what they perceive was promised, or vice versa (Morrison, & Robinson, 1997). Employees or employers who perceive a breach are likely to respond negatively. Responses may occur in the form of reduced loyalty, commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Perceptions that once psychological contract has been breached may arise shortly after the employee joins the company or even after years of satisfactory service.

Prior researches suggests that psychological contract breach (PCB) may predispose employees to engaging in negative behaviors such as counterproductive work behavior (Montes & Irving, 2008; Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2007; Restubog, Horsney, Bordia & Eposo, 2008). Studies have shown that employee's perception that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligation is related to feelings of anger, betrayal, and resentment and these in turn lead to decreased employee motivation, dissatisfaction, loss of loyalty and withdrawal (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Thus, psychological contract breach has profound impact on job attitudes and job attitudes are important predictors of key behavior as job performance. When employers break psychological contracts, employees' trust in the organization is harmed (Jensen, Opland & Ryan, 2010), and this in turn leads to engagement in negative job behaviors that may harm the organization. It is hypothesized that psychological contract breach will predict counterproductive work behavior.

Beyond the impact of an individual perception about the organizations they work for on CWB, job stress have also been seen as a possible contributor to negative job behaviors (Fox, Spector, Miles, 2001). Stress is an adaptive reaction to environmental demands or stressors that triggers a fight-or-flight response. This response creates hormonal changes that mobilize the body for extraordinary demands. Stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and/or psychological processes, that is a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special physical and/or psychological demands upon a person (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). Thus, stress could be

conceptualized as anything an individual interprets as threatening to his or her psychological or physical well being (Spector & Fox, 2002). Interest in stress in workplaces emanate from the fact that stress is now becoming a major contributor to health and performance problems of individuals and has significant effect on organization in terms of costs that may be quantifiable. Because of its significant economic implications, stress is not only a burden but one of the fastest growing concerns to contemporary organizations especially given the higher levels of competition and environmental turbulence, that seems not allow organizations to bear costs including those that may be associated with stress. For instance, stress brings about unwanted feelings and behaviors such as job dissatisfaction, lower motivation low employee morale, less organizational commitment, lowered overall quality of work life, absenteeism, turnover, intention to leave the job, lower productivity, decreased quantity and quality of work, inability to make sound decision, more theft, sabotage and work stoppage which are indicators of counter productive work behavior, occupational burnout, alienation and increased smoking and alcohol intake. Researcher have also shown that stress has serious organizational costs implications such as reduced preference/productivity (lack of added value to product and/or service), high replacement costs in connection with labor turnover (increase in recruitment, training and retraining costs) increased sick pay, increased health-care costs and disability payments, higher grievance and litigation/compensation costs, and costs of equipment damage.

Researchers have presented counterproductive work behavior as an emotion-based response to stressful organizational conditions (Fox, Spector, Miles, 2001). Integrating counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and job stress literatures, Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) has tried to propose a job stress/emotion/counterproductive work behavior (CWB) model that suggests that CWBs are responses to job stressor at work. This view suggests that people monitor and evaluate events in the environment. Some of those events that threaten well-being are job stressors which include role conflict and ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, and situational constraints. Stress produces a range of undesirable expensive and debilitating consequences which affect both individuals and organization and one probable outcome is CWB, which occur as individuals react to stressful work situation. Studies (e.g. Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2000; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) have demonstrated that teachers also experience stress as they perform their jobs. There is however dearth of literature on the link between stress and counterproductive work behavior of teachers, especially in developing countries of Africa, including Nigeria. The present study is therefore one of the first attempts at linking stress and CWB among teachers in Nigeria.

Studies have demonstrated that stress is linked to many deviant and negative work behavior including, workplace alcohol use (Cooper, Russell, Skinner, & Windle, 1992; Crum, Muntaner, Eaton & Anthony, 1995; Onyishi & Ugwu, 2012), cocaine (Jaffe & Kilbey, 1994), marijuana (Schafer & Brown, 1991), and tobacco (Ikard, Green, & Horn, 1969). So, as individuals react to stressful job requirements, they tend to engage in negative job behaviors coping mechanisms. It is therefore hypothesized that job stress will be a significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior of school teachers.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Two hundred and fifty of the three sets of the questionnaire were administered to 250 teachers from five (5) public secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria, at in their places of work. The participants completed and signed a recruitment form before the survey was given to them. Out of the 250 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 232 were completed and returned (representing 92.8% return rate). Out of the 232 returned copies, nine were discarded for improper completion and only 223, were used for the data analysis.

The participants consisted of 178 women and 45 men. Their age ranged between 24 and 61 years with a mean age of 54.65. Fifty (50) of them were single; one hundred and seventy one (171) were married; and two (2) were divorced. The job tenure of participants ranged from 1 to 35 years. All the participants volunteered to participate in the study.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to gather information in this study. They are: Role-based Stress Inventory (Rizzo, House and Lirtzman, 1970), Psychological Contract Breach Scale (Robinson & Morrison, 2000), and Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale (Fox & Spector, 1999).

Role-based Stress Inventory. Role-based Stress Inventory developed by Rizzo, House and Lirtzman (1970) is designed to measure the degree of stress experienced by workers in organization. It is a 23-item instrument designed in a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. The item were scored as follows: strongly agree = 5- points, agree = 4 points, undecided = 3-point, disagree = 2 points and strongly disagree = 1 point, for positively worded statements, while the negatively worded statements were reversed scored. The instrument was adapted by Ugwu (1995) in Nigeria with reported internal consistency reliability co-efficient of .90.

Psychological Contract Breach Scale. Psychological Contract Breach Scale was developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000). It is a 5-item instrument designed to measure employees' global perception of psychological contract breach. A Likert type scale anchored by strongly disagree = 1, disagree=2, undecided =3, agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5, was used to indicate the extent of agreement/disagreement with each item. A sample item is "I feel that my employer has come through in fulfilling the promises made to me when I was hired. A Cronbach's alpha of .89 was obtained for this measure by Robinson and Morrison (2000). In interpreting the instrument, Robinson and Morrison indicated that the lower the score, the lower the contract fulfillments. Items, 1, 2, 3, were positively worded while items 4 and 5 were negatively worded with high score meaning high contract breach. Oji (2012) reported internal consistency reliability estimate (Cronbach's alpha of .82) in a sample of Nigerian workers.

Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale. The Counterproductive Work Behavior Scale developed by Fox and Spector (1999), was used to measure counterproductive work behaviors exhibited by the participants. It is a 33- item scale that followed the Likert type response format that ranged from 1= never to 5 =Everyday. The participants responded on this scale (never-everyday) how often they engage in certain activities, such as "made fun of someone at work". The scale is made up of 5 dimensions of counterproductive work behavior such as sabotage, withdrawal, production deviance, theft, and abuse. The scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .86 in different administrations (Fox and Spector, 1999; Fox, Spector, and Miles, 2001). A Cronbach's alpha of .83 was obtained for the present study.

Results

Hierarchical regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses of this study. The relationship between the demographic variables and other variables were analyzed using Pearson correlation. Table I shows the correlation coefficients for the study variables and Table 2 shows the regression results.

Table 1: Inter-correlations among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	-							
2 Age	.08	-						
3 Marital Status	.04	.56***	-					
4 Organizational Tenure	.10	.78***	.45***	-				
5 Job Tenure	.15*	.73***	.43***	.95***	-			
6 Stress	-.23**	.08	-.11	-.10	-.16*	-		
7 Psychological Contract Breach	-.002	-.14**	-.09	-.18**	-.14*	.01	-	
8 Counterproductive Work Behavior	-.05	.03	.14*	-.05	-.04	.26**	.18**	-

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

The results of the correlation analysis as presented in Table I showed that among the demographic variables, only marital status had a relationship with counterproductive work behavior

($r = .14$, $p < .05$). Psychological contract breach had a significant relationship with counterproductive work behavior ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). Stress was also significantly related with counterproductive work behavior ($r = .26$, $p < .001$).

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analyses

Variable	Step 1	Step 2
	<i>B</i>	β
Contract Breach	.18**	.18**
Stress		.26***
R^2	.03	.10
F	7.26**	12.59***

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses showed that psychological contract breach was a significantly predictor of counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = .18$, $R^2 = .03$, $p < .01$). Based on this, the hypothesis that employee's perception of psychological contract will be positively related to their report of counterproductive work behavior is therefore confirmed. Thus, the higher the employees perceived contract breach, the higher they report engagement in counterproductive work behavior. Job stress was also found to be a significant predictor of counterproductive work behavior ($\beta = .26$, $R^2 = .10$, $p < .01$). Stress contributed 10% of the variance in counterproductive work behavior above the contribution of counterproductive work behavior. The hypothesis that job stress will be significantly related to counter productive work behavior was also confirmed.

Discussion

The results of the study provide support to the hypothesized relationship between psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behavior among government secondary school teachers. This means that high counterproductive work behavior could be linked with contract breach and contract fulfillment leads to less counterproductive behavior (Restuboa, et al. 2008). This result could be explained based on equity theory (Adams, 1963) explanation of employee reactions to unfair treatment by the employing organization. According to equity theory explanation, employees who experience unfairness or injustice will attempt to restore equilibrium by engaging in behavior that restores feelings of equity. Engagement in counterproductive work behavior by employees who perceive that their contract has been breached becomes an attempt to restore equity. Also, arguing from the social exchange perspective, the found positive relation between psychological contract breach and CWB could be as a result of attempt by employees to reciprocate the perceived maltreatment of employers by engaging in CWB.

This result is consistent with earlier studies such as Kickul, Neuman, Parker, and Finkl (2001) who found that interactional injustice was related to anti-citizenship behavior. As argued by Montes and Irving (2008), contract breach lead to employee loss of trust in the employer/organization. Other earlier studies (e.g. Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003) also support this line of reasoning that contract breach or feelings of inequity would lead to negative work behaviors that could be vied as counterproductive.

The results also support the proposition that job stress will be a significant predictor of CWB of secondary school teachers. The findings showed that job stress is related to counterproductive work behavior, meaning that increase in job stress leads to increase in counterproductive work behavior among secondary school teachers. This result is in line with earlier finding in stress and burnout literature that support the link between stress and burnout and negative job behaviors. For instance, Leiter and Maslach (1988) maintains that employees that experience stress or burnout are more likely to withdraw from their jobs, invest less time, and energy, do less work and do it less effectively than those who experience less stress and burnout.

The study has highlighted the relevance of contextual variables in employee engagement in counterproductive work behavior. When employees feel that the organization care less about their welfare and is no longer working towards fulfilling their promises to them, they tend to engage in less productive behaviors but rather engage in counterproductive work behavior. Employees therefore engage in counterproductive work behavior just to get back at their employer for not fulfilling their contract terms.

The role of stress in counterproductive work behavior was also explored. Excessive job demands predisposes employees to stress and when this is the case, they tend to engage in some aversive behavior. Stress produces arrays of undesirable expensive and debilitating consequences which affect both the individual and organization. As a result of stress at work, employees engage in some negative work behavior, such as, absenteeism, intention to leave the job, job dissatisfaction, lower productivity, sabotage, increased smoking and alcohol intake, just to get relief from stress and struck equilibrium to their psychological and physical well being.

These results have profound implications for management of secondary school system in the country especially government-owned secondary schools where the study was conducted. The role of secondary education in moral and professional development of young people cannot be overemphasized. The role of teachers in achieving the goals of secondary education is also obvious. It is therefore necessary to guide against factors that limits teachers' productivity especially factors that predisposes them to engage in behavior that could be termed counterproductive. Managers of our school systems should therefore intensify effort in positioning the Nigerian school system to meet internationally acceptable standards. In our school systems, incidence of poor remuneration, delay in payment, undue delay in promotion, corrupt human resource practices including those related to posting, recruitment, and training create rooms for feeling of injustice that could culminate to perception of contract breach.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The study focused on secondary school teachers of public schools in Nsukka. Generalization of these results to all teachers in Nigerian school systems may not be appropriate. In order to make this study more comprehensive, future researchers should carry out similar studies in other schools including private schools. A comparison of CWB between teachers in public and private schools may shed more light into our understanding of CWB in schools.

The use of only self-report measures in the study is a major limitation. The use of other measures such as supervisor-report or co-worker report of CWB may have reduced the bias associated with the use of self-report measures. However, the assurance of confidentiality to the participants may have reduced the occurrence of social desirability bias associated with self-report measure to some extent.

Counterproductive work behavior does no good to any organization. Its definition demonstrates that the behaviors are not needed at all in any organization. Still, they seem to be prevalent in many organizations. The school is not isolated from it. Employees engage in such behavior when they perceive that their contract has been breached or experience stress. Thus, employees tend to engage in these behaviors either to get back at their employers or as a reaction to aversive organizational environment. Because of the negative effects of CWB on organizational performance schools should evolve strategies that could insulate their teachers from engaging in CWB and so that their effort would be channeled towards more productive behaviors that will enable students benefit optimally from secondary education.

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Author Information

Ike E. Onyishi

ikeonyishi@yahoo.com

ernest.onyishi@unn.edu.ng

and

Chizoba B. Onunkwo

Department of Psychology

University of Nigeria

Nsukka