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The effects of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility

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Abstract

Workplace incivility is defined as 'low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect'. According to this definition, when the employees act rudely in their social interactions, it lead to some unexpected consequences damaging their employment and work-related issues in organisations. This study investigate the effects of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility. The data were collected from a total of 185 employees. Questionnaire technique has been used as the data gathering method. In data collection tool, a 7-item Workplace Incivility Scale, 20-item Mach IV Scale and 6-item Perceived Dissimilarity Scale were used. The results indicated that Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity have significant positive contributions on workplace incivility. The findings provide evidence that identifying the individual and situational predictors of workplace incivility lead managers to become more aware of hostile working environments and the need to revise their management techniques.

Keywords: Workplace incivility, Machiavellianism, person–group dissimilarity, incivility.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, workplace incivility is rising with the competitive nature of work environment and prevails in different types of organisations (Pearson & Porath, 2005). According to Andersson and Pearson's (1999) definition, uncivil behaviours can be seen in different forms in organisation and aim to violate its norms. Moreover, when employees experience uncivil behaviours in their working environment, they are likely to have negative emotions and behave in an act of aggression as a response to the perpetrator. In addition, increasing violence movements in the organisation pave the way for a spiral of violence and cause an uncivil culture amongst employees. So, it is very important for organisations to prevent uncivil behaviours and determine the individual and contextual factors as the basis for incivility for their own sake. Machiavellians, for example, are prone to engage in deviant behaviours in organisations (Kessler et al., 2010) and they are 'characterised in terms of their detachment and lack of emotional involvement with others' (Al Ain, Carre, Fantini-Hauwel, Baudouin & Besche-Richard, 2013, p. 1). In line with these emotional properties, it is expected them to act in a 'heartless' way and display uncivil behaviours in a workplace. On the other hand, dissimilarity perceptions among employees are likely to influence their work behaviours negatively (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). When employees position themselves as an 'out-group member', this categorisation lead them to see other employees as less trustworthy, honest and cooperative (Hobman & Bordia, 2006) which is the belief that constitutes the basis of incivility. Despite numerous studies on this topic, there is no empirical study both in national and international literature regarding the antecedents of workplace incivility related with these concepts, so the aim of the present study is to investigate the effects of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility. Although, the uncivil acts frequently seen as 'low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target' (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457) in organisations, there is a strong tendency to turn these acts into violent behaviours gradually. The next section looks at the literature on workplace incivility, Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity and proposes hypotheses about the association between workplace incivility and related concepts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Workplace incivility

Workplace incivility is defined as 'low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect' (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457) and these kind of uncivil behaviours can be seen in social attractions between colleagues in the workplace. These behaviours include verbal misuse (answering phone with inappropriate words, ignoring 'please' or 'thank you' in mutual conversations, spreading rumours, etc.), nonverbal behaviours (gazing, undermining or keeping away other employees etc.) and rude behaviours (talking with cell phones during meetings, standing uninvited in a colleague's office, opening doors without knocking, slamming the door in colleague's face, messiness in common areas, using speaker phone, talking/listening to music loudly in a shared office, etc.), which are all related to incivility with less severe form of maltreatment (Lim, Cortina & Magley, 2008; Martin, 1996; Porath & Pearson, 2010). While the pervasiveness of uncivil behaviours is worrying based on the recent studies of workplace incivility, the reality is that we still fall behind with the antecedents of rude behaviours. According to the Cortina, Magley, Williams and Langhout's (2001) study with the 1,167 employees in public sector, 71% of respondents stated that they were the targets of uncivil behaviours within the last 5 years. Similarly, Pearson, Andersson and Porath (2000) found that 78% of 775 workers felt that incivility had been increasingly spread over the organisation. Managers of Fortune 100 companies also reported that they are trying to solve workplace problem about incivility in 13% of their time (Porath & Pearson, 2013). Cortina et al. (2002) also found in their study that 23% of female court employees witnessed incivility at their workplace (Preston, 2007; Trudel, 2009). As seen in the results of the

studies, it is becoming a pressing issue which is visible in different forms/jobs and it can cause some harmful effects on employees in today's organisations.

2.2. Machiavellianism

Rim (1992) defined Machiavellianism as 'a disposition to manipulate interpersonal relationships' (p. 487) and Christie and Geis (1970) tried to explain this personality trait with three properties namely: interpersonal tactics, cynical views and abstract morality. Machiavellians see other people as a bridge which links them to something more important for their success and they typically behave in a pragmatic manner by virtue of their cost/benefit calculations. They always tend to give priority to money, power and competition (Stewart & Stewart, 2006) and have tendency to engage in hostile feelings (Locke & Christensen, 2007), take revenge against other people (Nathanson, Paulhus & Williams, 2006), involve in nonverbal aggression at work (Corzine & Hozier, 2005), ethically suspect choices (Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Trevino, 2010) and show bullying behaviours (Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco & Vernon, 2012; Linton & Power, 2013). Because of the detrimental effects of Machiavellian personality, self-focused and unethical actions may have a negative impact on employees' performance and well-being and damage the workplace environment (Pilch & Turska, 2015; Winter et al., 2004).

2.3. Person–group dissimilarity

Hobman, Bordia and Gallois (2004) defined dissimilarity as 'the degree to which an individual and some second entity differ in terms of various characteristics' (p. 562). In a work group, people can share common demographic background, work values, goals, interests, cognitive abilities or personality properties and it is widely expected that these similarities amongst group members affect group decisions, communication quality, job performance and their productivity positively. The association between similarity and attraction asserts that 'higher similarity is associated with higher attraction between individuals' (Boele, Sijtsema, Klimstra, Denissen & Meeus, 2017, p. 221). Besides, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) describes that the differences between group members negatively affect the properties of their interpersonal relationships and sense of belonging to a group. On the other hand, if an employee feels dissimilarity and differs from other group members, she/he can be excluded from team network, social interactions and discussions (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998) in a workplace. Thus, excluded members are expected to lose their attachment to the group norms and consequently, they feel less involved and as out-group member in the organisational processes.

2.4. Relationships between variables

When we look at the relationship between Machiavellianism and workplace incivility, it is important to refer to the social exchange theory, which suggests that when employees are involved in a social relationship, they often prioritise their interests and calculate the best possible means. More clearly, employees have tendency to maximise their profits and hide their true intentions, especially in competitive situations. As stated before, Machiavellians can cause harm to others and compete for rewards, status or recognition because of their strategic orientation. They also 'manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, persuade others more and otherwise differ significantly from their low Machiavellian counterparts' (Christie & Geis, 1970, p. 312). Consistent with these information, researchers previously stated in their study that Machiavellians have tendency to engage in unethical decisions at work (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010), cheat at school exams (Elias, 2015), foster employees' emotional exhaustion (Gkorezis, Petridou & Krouklidoua, 2015) use aggression (Jones & Paulhus, 2009), focus on their achievements (Sakalaki, Richardson & Thepaut, 2007) and bullying behaviour at work (Pilch & Turska, 2015). On the other hand, workplace incivility includes impolite behaviours which violate organisational norms and respect in a working environment. Machiavellian employees also have low concern for organisational norms and principles, so it is possible for them to behave in

uncivil attitudes to other employees for their personal interests. Moreover, social relations and communication styles in organisations can affect employees' behaviours and lead them to be engaged in uncivil manners. For example, Miles, Borman, Spector and Fox (2002) stated that negative emotions in working environment are correlated with deviant behaviours, so it is possible for Machiavellians to hurt their colleagues with uncivil behaviours as a result of their competitive and detrimental ambitions.

Following these information about the Machiavellian personality and workplace incivility, it may be suggested that if employees are goal-oriented, show little concern for others' emotions and do everything for their benefits in an working environment, they would be likely to involve in uncivil behaviours which could help them to gain some interpersonal profits. Moreover, competition between colleagues may also lead a hostile and stressful working environment which leads to uncivil behaviours (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Thereby, the connection between Machiavellian personality and workplace incivility leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Machiavellian personality contributes positively to workplace incivility.

When we look at the relationship between person–group dissimilarity and workplace incivility, it is important to refer to attraction–selection–attrition theory which suggests that employees are naturally attracted to people whom they perceive to be similar to themselves in an organisation. More clearly, employees have tendency to constitute their membership in a work group according to their comparisons which are based on some characteristics. Thus, dissimilar employees are considered themselves as 'out-group' member in an organisation and feel less obliged to abide by organisational norms and values, so it is more possible for them to engage in uncivil behaviours which have numerous detrimental effects on organisational dynamics. It is also possible that low levels of identification reflect an employee's perception of lack of support with his/her colleagues and uncivil behaviours directed towards them (Liao, Joshi & Chuang, 2004). In the context of dissimilarity on uncivil behaviour, Wright, Giammarino and Parad (1986) examined the effects of peer acceptance/rejection on aggressive behaviour and found that negative behaviours are related with peer rejection when employees are 'different' from other group members. Consistent with this study, researchers have also found that dissimilarity is related with low levels of self-esteem (Chattopadhyay, 1999), turnover (Jackson et al., 1991), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1998) and causes negative behaviours towards supervisors and peers (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002), group members (Tsui et al., 1992) as well as the organisation (Chattopadhyay, 1999). Eventually, negative and rude behaviours may exist among employees and this may cause unacceptable relationships in organisations.

Following these information about the person–group dissimilarity and workplace incivility, it may be expected that employees who perceive themselves as dissimilar in group norms and work attitudes also feel less involved in work group processes. Dissimilar employees would be likely to engage in uncivil behaviours as a result of lower levels of identification with their work group. Thereby, the linkage between person–group dissimilarity and workplace incivility leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Person–group dissimilarity contributes positively to workplace incivility.

2.5. The conceptual model of the study

Overall, the research model consists of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity as independent variables and workplace incivility as the dependent variable. With this research model, it is aimed to analyse the contributions of these variables to workplace incivility. The research model is presented below (Figure 1):

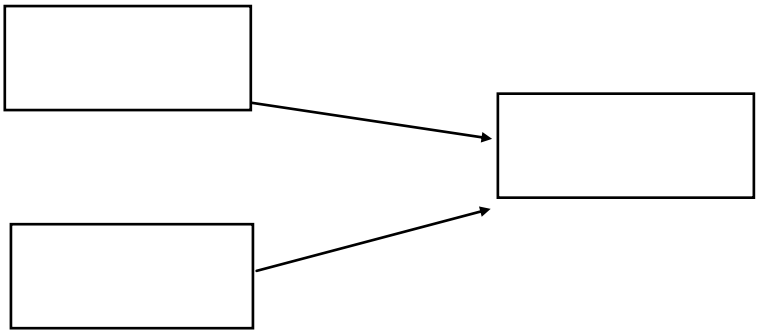

Figure 1. The conceptual research model

3. Method

The data of the study were collected from four business organisations functioning in the private sector in Istanbul. Among a convenient sample of 570 employees; 185 employees responded the survey. In the sample of 185 participants, 54.4% were female and 71.1% held at least a university degree. In terms of age, 45.6% of the sample was younger than 30 years old and 13.3% were older than 45 years old. The average age of the employees was 32.7 years, ranging from 19 to 60 years. All employees had been employed by their organisations for at least 4 months. On average, employees were employed in their company for 6.0 years. Three measurement scales are used in this study in order to evaluate the effects of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility. In the questionnaire, there were also eight demographic questions to be analysed for comparing groups. In data collection tool, Workplace Incivility Scale of Cortina et al. (2001); Mach IV Scale of Christie and Geis (1970) and Perceived Dissimilarity Scale of Hobman et al. (2004) were used.

Workplace incivility is measured by a 7-item scale which was developed by Cortina et al. (2001). Some of the scale items are; 'Address you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately', 'Make demeaning or derogatory remarks about you', 'Pay little attention to your statement or show little interest in your opinion'. The Cronbach alpha value of the instrument was determined as 0.89. Participants were asked to rate the frequency with which each of the workplace incidences occurred and were asked to respond on a scale from 1 indicating 'never' to 5 indicating 'very often'.

Machiavellianism is measured by a 20-item scale which was developed by Christie and Geis (1970). Some of the scale items are; 'It is wise to flatter important people', 'The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear'. 'It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there', 'Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're forced to do so'. The Cronbach alpha value of the instrument was determined as 0.64. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement with the items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Perceived dissimilarity is measured by a 6-item scale which was developed by Hobman et al. (2004). Some of the scale items are presented in the following sentences; 'I feel I am visibly dissimilar to other group members', 'I feel my work values and/or motivations are dissimilar to other group members', 'I feel I am professionally and/or educationally dissimilar to other group members'. The Cronbach alpha value of the instrument was determined as 0.72. Scale items range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The data were analysed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20). The normality and linearity tests were done. Frequencies, means and standard deviations were also calculated to describe the sample and the general results. Finally, simple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Factor and reliability analysis

The exploratory factor analysis for 'workplace incivility' revealed one factor structure. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was found as 0.583 and Barlett's test produced the value of 67,008 with a significance level of 0.000. The remaining three items loaded under one factor which accounted for 56.175% of the total variance. According to the nature of the items, that factor was named as 'incivility'. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha value of the factor was determined as 0.606.

The exploratory factor analysis for 'person–group dissimilarity' revealed a two-factor structure. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was found as 0.537 and Barlett's test produced the value of 503,208 with a significance level of 0.000. The remaining four items loaded under two factors which accounted for 92.893% of the total variance. According to the nature of the items, these two factors were named as 'informational dissimilarity' and 'value dissimilarity'. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha values of the factors were determined as 0.950 and 0.896 respectively.

The exploratory factor analysis for 'Machiavellianism' revealed a two-factor structure. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was found as 0.554 and Barlett's test produced the value of 259,055 with a significance level of 0.000. The remaining five items loaded under two factors which accounted for 72.258% of the total variance. According to the nature of the items, these two factors were named as 'tactics' and 'morality'. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha values of the factors were determined as 0.743 and 0.747, respectively.

4.2. Means, standard deviations and correlations of variables

The means, standard deviations and correlations between the variables are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations between variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Cr. alfa	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	32.73	8.71		1	0.020	0.017	0.012	0.023	0.034
2. Tenure	6.02	5.46			1	0.024	0.038	0.018	0.041
3. Total tenure	10.01	8.04				1	0.036	0.029	0.017
4. Workplace incivility	2.82	0.49	0.60				1	0.324**	0.253**
5. PGD	3.02	0.63	0.76					1	0.124
6.Mach	3.53	0.58	0.55						1

**$p < 0.01$ significant (2-tailed)

4.3. Hypothesis testing

In order to test Hypothesis 1, simple regression analysis was conducted. As it can be seen in Table 2, Machiavellianism was positively related (Beta = 0.253; $p = 0.000$) with workplace incivility and it can explain 6% of the total variance in workplace incivility ($F = 12.326$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, *Hypothesis 1 was supported.*

Table 2. The effect of Machiavellianism on workplace incivility

Dependent variable	Workplace incivility		
Independent variable	Machiavellianism		
Adjusted R^2: 0.06	F test: 12.326	Significance: 0.000	
Variable in equation	Beta	T	p
Workplace incivility	0.253	3.258	0.000
N:185			

In order to test Hypothesis 2, simple regression analysis was conducted. As a result, person–group dissimilarity was positively related (Beta = 0.324; p = 0.000) with workplace incivility and it can explain 10% of the total variance in workplace incivility (F = 17.467, p < 0.01). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 3. The effect of person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility

Dependent variable	Workplace incivility		
Independent variable	Person–group dissimilarity		
Adjusted R^2: 0.10	F test: 17.467	Significance: 0.000	
Variable in equation	Beta	T	p
Workplace incivility	0.324	6.185	0.000
N:185			

5. Discussions

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of Machiavellianism and person–group dissimilarity on workplace incivility. The literature review shows that both Machiavellianism and dissimilarity among employees have detrimental consequences for work life. The findings of this study also show that the level of Machiavellian attitudes and perception of dissimilarity amongst employees are important indicators of a stressful working environment and have a great impact on organisational well-being. Despite the various numbers of research studies related with aggressive behaviours in work life (Bies, Tripp & Kramer, 1997; Fox & Spector, 1999; Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001; Robinson & Bennett, 1995; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), there are still gaps about the antecedents of uncivil behaviours in organisations. So, this study advances our knowledge in workplace aggression literature by highlighting the rude behaviours and its antecedents. On the other hand, the findings also show that the mean of uncivil behaviours in corporate companies was not high as we expected. In corporate companies, employees have to act in line with a set of rules and norms during their interpersonal interactions and it may be undesirable to engage in such uncivil behaviours in terms of their job security. Furthermore, in Turkey, employees have concerns about losing their jobs and performance appraisal points, so they would be expected to be more polite than they feel in working environment. As many researchers have proposed workplace incivility as 'a low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent' (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457; Pearson & Porath, 2004), the present study also aimed to explain the mechanism through which factors influences uncivil behaviours in organisations.

In consideration of the related results, Machiavellian motives can form a basis for uncivil behaviours amongst employees as proposed in the introduction part. Rewards, promotions and titles are important for Machiavellians and they may appraise the situation to compete for potential threat or harm (Lazarus, 1999). According to social interdependence theory (Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson & Sun, 2003), social rewards are related with an employee's ability to interact with other colleagues and hostility can occur when co-workers compete for same goals, status or rewards. For example, when employees evaluate the working environment and feel the potential challenge to them, they are more likely to engage in an emotional reaction which may prompt them to behave in uncivil behaviour. As stated by other researchers (Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Cox, 1993; Jackson, 1993;

Pearson & Porath, 2005), competition for resources and power inequality between colleagues can be seen as prior reasons for hostility in an organisation. Besides, organisational culture may play an important role in Machiavellian attitudes-uncivil behaviours relationship by embracing competitive culture and ignoring uncivil behaviours. If an organisation's behavioural norms and ethical codes are not supported by a participative & supportive culture, employees may be in uncivil behaviours by embracing general disrespect (Lim & Cortina, 2005). So, our findings make a contribution to the previous studies which have stated that competitive dynamics and hostile interpersonal relationships amongst employees may lead to uncivil behaviours in organisations.

Another factor that may affect uncivil behaviours at work is person–group dissimilarity perception in working environment. In fact, some researchers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fiske, 2000) have proposed that being an 'in-group' member can be accepted as a main motivator for positive employee behaviour. In a similar vein, employees 'adapt their cognitions, emotions and behaviours to fit better into the social world of work' (Cortina, 2008, p. 62). In a working environment, employees' perceptions about their colleagues and a sense of belonging to the group might have a crucial impact on their work attitudes and behaviours. As stated previously, dissimilar employees in a peer group may be excluded from social relations and bonds and face with an isolation (Ibarra, 1992). Generally, group leaders form basic norms and behavioural patterns and expect others to conform. In this case, an employee whose behaviours differ from the rest of the work group will be alienated by group members. Therefore, it is expected for dissimilar employees to choose a counterproductive way to express themselves in this stressful working environment and engage in uncivil behaviours against their colleagues. In line with this explanation, Lennings (1997) stated that in stressful conditions, counterproductive work behaviours can be used as coping mechanisms by individuals. In other words, workplace incivility might be dependent on the perceptions of the employee whose social needs are not satisfied with their intergroup interactions with their colleagues.

By demonstrating antecedents related with incivility, it is expected from managers to act in ways that prevent rude behaviours in workplace environment. When looking at the pervasiveness of rude behaviours in organisations, there is a necessity for everyone to see the negative consequences for both employees and stakeholders. Organisational managers should constitute behavioural norms that will develop supportive social relations and discourage impolite behaviours amongst employees. Whereas prior researches on workplace incivility mostly have targeted on the properties of the victim, this study has displayed that group properties and diversity factors are also important for understanding the uncivil behaviours. It is important for managers not to categorise uncivil behaviours as just a 'personal issue' (Pearson et al., 2000), they should create a code of conduct document in organisation, make it applicable to everyone and place a high value on courtesy in social relationships. Besides, it is also suggested that managers should care about person–group fit while assigning group tasks and consider personality traits during the selection process.

All data was gathered via self-reports from employees, so it is possible for them to minimise the pervasiveness of uncivil behaviours in order to keep their personal information for their own safety. In addition, it is essential to reach larger sample size for the generalisation of the findings. The participants of this study were mostly from same education level, social and occupational status, so new studies with different and larger sampling will be useful to better understand how incivility affects organisations.

The research confirmed the relationships between workplace incivility and the independent variables but we need further studies for investigating the antecedents of uncivil behaviours at work in different organisational cultures. It is also suggested that future research should investigate the emotional–behavioural process of uncivil behaviours and the effects of related parties (target, witness and instigator) separately on this process. Accordingly, it is advised for researchers to pay attention to other predictors that leads to competitive and diverse work environments leading to workplace incivility and conduct new studies at multidimensional level for the extension of the results.

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