Workplace Employees’ Pro-Organizational Unethical Behavior: An Integrated Theoretical Model

YUN ZHANG, SONG CHEN and BIN HE

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on the pro-organizational unethical behavior. Based on the prior model proposed by Umpires et al., this paper puts forward an integrated theoretical model of pro-organizational unethical behavior. The future research has been discussed.

KEYWORDS

Pro-Organizational Unethical Behavior, Integrated Theoretical Model.

INTRODUCTION

Pro-organizational unethical behavior (PUB) defended as “unethical behaviors which focus on help members in the group or organizations, as a result that violate the core social values, customs, laws and standards of conduct appropriate behaviors” (Umpires et al., 2010). At present, the research on PUB has made some achievements, but some aspects need to be further developed: Firstly, most scholars have studied the antecedent variables of PUB, but the study of the effect variables of PUB is almost blank, Umpires and Bingham (2011) proposed a theoretical framework based on the social exchange theory, but did not carry out empirical tests. Secondly, the previous studies pay more attention to the individual characteristics, including personal traits, organizational identity on the impact of PUB; the impact of superior research mostly on the leadership of the impact of PUB, and so on, there were few studies on the behavior of other colleagues or the relationship between the individual caused by PUB. In addition, most of the existing research is static research, to take self-reported questionnaire research methods, will be affected by data homogeneity bias and social desirability. Finally, there is no research related to the interaction between the organization and the individual on the impact of individual PUB, such as organizational culture, organizational ethical climate and so on. It is necessary to combine the current theoretical research and practical experience to carry out the integration of multi-perspective research, to build a more explanatory enterprise PUB model.

Yun Zhang, Wuzhou University, No.82 fumin 3rd road, wanxiu district, Wuzhou , Guangxi, 543002, China; Guangdong University of Technology, No. 161 yinglong road, tianhe district, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 510520, China.
Song Chen, Wuzhou University, No.82 fumin 3rd road, wanxiu district, Wuzhou, Guangxi, 543002, China.
Bin He, Guangdong University of Technology, No. 161 yinglong road, tianhe district, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 510520, China.
A REVIEW OF THE THEORY

The current research of PUB is mainly carried out from three levels: individual, organizational, and leadership. The individual level analysis the impact of personal characteristics and individual perception on PUB; the organizational level analysis the impact of organizational identity and organizational commitment on PUB; the leadership level analysis of leader style and behavior of the impact on employees’ PUB.

Research about PUB has achieved some success, but there are some limitations. First of all, the existing research for the willing of PUB and PUB itself is no distinction. The measurement of PUB is mainly about willingness and frequency, and the willingness to engage in PUB is the immoral act itself. In Western culture, the individual pursues individualism, not influence by the surrounding colleagues and the environment. However, this measurement method may not be appropriate in the study of Chinese. In China, we should pay attention to the guanxi, the members of the organization do not necessarily have the willingness to engage in PUB. There may be exit other reasons for engaging in such behavior.

Secondly, the study has ignored the impact of organizational environment on the staff lead to PUB, such as organizational performance, organizational ethics and so on. Employees are misrepresented because of an unethical atmosphere, resulting in a series of unethical behavior; when the organization sets too high organizational performance, the employee tends to complete the task through the immoral behavior.

Finally, most of the current research focused on the study of formation mechanism of PUB, less concerned about the individual after the impact of PUB (individual and organization). PUB on the impact of the individual mainly in two aspects: First, individual psychological changes, the individual engaged in the PUB will feel shame or guilt, which still need further study; Second, the impact of others, resulting in PUB spread within the organization. The impact of PUB on the organization is mainly reflected in the organizational culture and organizational values, when the organization of this behavior is ignored or even encouraged, the organization's value will be distorted.

Figure 1. Integrated theoretical model of workplace employees’ PUB.
INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL AND DISCUSSION

Umpires and Bingham (2011) based on the theory of social exchange and social identity theory put forward the PUB model. On the basis of their model, this paper constructs an integrated theoretical model based on social network relationship, pro-organization's unethical willing and behavioral distinction, combining with the current research results (Figure 1).

This model can further enrich the existing model: First, based on the actual situation of China, this paper puts forward the distinction between the willing of PUB and PUB behavior, and constructs the model from the individual, the leadership and the organization. Second, in the exploration of the former variables, this article through the perspective of the previous research integration, from three perspectives to extract: from the individual cognitive point of view, that individual personality traits, personal moral awareness of its engaged in PUB; Exchange and social identity perspective, that the workplace staff organizational identity and organizational commitment to its impact in the PUB; from the perspective of people - scenarios, that leadership style and leadership behavior, organizational culture and other factors affect the staff engaged in PUB. Third, in the study of the results of the variables, from two levels to discuss the impact on the individual and the impact of the organization, enrich the original model in a single level of discussion. Fourthly, from the dynamic perspective discussed when the individual engaged in PUB and then affect others to engage in the behavior, such as organizational culture.

The future research of PUB can be carried out from the following aspects.

Firstly, develop a measure of PUB willingness and behavior. Most of the widely accepted PUB concepts and scale designs are based on Western cultures, including measurements developed by Umpires et al. (2010), and developed by Matherne et al. (2012) PUB frequency scale, but the Umpires’ scale only considers behavioral intentions, without considering the behavior itself, and this scale only considers the benefit of the organization, without considering the benefit of the individual. While Matherne’s scale lacks a large-scale test. Therefore, future research can develop a measure of the validity and reliability for local characteristics.

Secondly, deepen the research of influencing factors. Individual PUB’s decision-making process is very complex, whether the current research has found the real core factors? The current research base on the social cognitive and social identity, from the individual, organization, leadership three levels to study the impact variables of PUB. Future research can be considered from other perspectives to further explore this aspect at multiple levels. First of all, not only consider the three levels of individual, organization and leadership, but also need to consider the social network relations, social and moral standards, laws and regulations, from horizontal and vertical, micro and macro and other aspects to broaden the research level. In the analysis of social, organizational and personal relationship between the impacts of individual PUB, change the previous static point of view, with a dynamic perspective instead of the previous static perspective. In addition, the individual level can be studied from the control points, personality traits and morality. The organizational level can be explored from the perspective of organizational culture, organizational fairness and
organizational goals. The leadership level can be viewed from the perspectives of leaders' behavior.

Thirdly, develop coping strategies. The impact of PUB on individuals and organizations has not received much attention. The existing research on the outcome variables has only stayed at the theoretical level. The impact of PUB on individuals and organizations has not been paid more attention. Businesses may benefit from employees’ PUB and condone such behavior, and some companies even reward employees’ PUB, which in some way increases the expectation of employees' return to PUB. PUB's coping strategies can provide guidance for them. Future research can expand this area.

Fourthly, integrate different theoretical perspective. There are some studies on PUB based on different perspectives, and some useful insights have been put forward. These limitations can be compensated by the integration of perspective. For example, from the perspective of social exchange and social identity, PUB do not take into account the impact of individual personality traits on this behavior, which can be made from the perspective of personal cognitive; another example, from the perspective of people-scenario exchange research leadership style and behavior of the impact on PUB, but did not consider the "circle "on the impact of employee behavior, which can be made from the perspective of social networks to make up. Different theoretical perspective integration will contribute to the future depth of PUB research.

Finally, expand research methods. PUB has been measured by the form of self-report, which will undoubtedly make the data affected by the social impression. Future research can use case study, experimental analysis and other methods, improve the validity and reliability of the results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bin He is the corresponding author. This work was financially supported by the Humanities & Social Science Project from Chinese Ministry of Education (grant number 16YJAZH014), and Philosophy and Social Science Foundation of Guangdong Province (grant number GD15CGL03).

REFERENCES