Organizational Injustice and Interpersonal Conflict on Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Dr. Kingsley Nyarko, University of Ghana, Psychology Department, P. O. Box LG 84, Legon, kingpong73@yahoo.com

Michael Ansah-Nyarko, University of Ghana, Psychology Department, P. O. Box LG 84, Legon, ansahnyarkom5@gmail.com

David Baba Sempah, Accra Institute of Technology, P. O. Box AN 19782, Accra, sirbabson@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examines the relationship between organisational injustice (OI), interpersonal conflict (IC) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWB). Using a cross sectional survey design, 119 participants with diverse socio-economic backgrounds were conveniently sampled from public and private corporate bodies in Accra. Participants completed questionnaire on (OI), (IC) and (CWB). The Pearson r and the independent samples t-test were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that organisational injustice and interpersonal conflict positively correlate with counterproductive work behaviour. In addition, and contrary to prediction, the result shows that older workers display more counterproductive work behaviours than younger workers. However, there was no gender difference in relation to counterproductive behaviours. The implications of the finding are discussed within the framework of equity theory, social exchange theory and psychological contract theory.

Keywords: Counterproductive work behaviour, organizational injustice, interpersonal conflict, public organizations, private organizations.

1. Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) has emerged as a major area of concern among researchers in industrial and organisational studies, managers, business stakeholders and the general public as a whole. In the literature, these behaviours are a set of distinct acts that share the characteristics that they are volitional as opposed to accidental or mandated and harm or intend to harm organizations and/or organization stakeholders, such as clients, co-workers', customers, and supervisors (Fox & Spector 2005; Spector 2011). This means that counterproductive work behaviour is a negative or deviant behaviour exhibited by workers at the workplace with the aim of harming and protesting against the organisation, co-workers, customers and clients in order to satisfy one's personal interest and it normally violates the organisational ethical codes and conduct. Some of these behaviours are reading of lotto papers, fidgeting of phones instead of working, abuse of the organization's internet by the downloading of Mexican soap operas, pornographic videos, and pictures just to mention a few.

Over the years, various researchers have studied a similar set of behaviours, though they have used different terminology depending on their theoretical focus, including: organizational delinquency (Hogan & Hogan, 1989), organization-motivated aggression (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin & Glew, 1996), organizational retaliatory behaviours (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1998), workplace deviance, (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Bennett, 1995), revenge (Bies & Tripp, 1998), and antisocial behaviour in organizations (Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997). Most importantly, the question to be asked in the face of these negative behaviours is, Do workers always intentionally decide to engage in CWB?

According to the integrative theory of counterproductive work behaviour developed by Martinko, Gundlach and Douglas (2002) workers do not always intentionally engage in counterproductive work behaviour even though they recognize individual differences such as gender, negative affectivity, emotional stability, integrity, attribution style, locus of control and self-core evaluations as potential predictors of counterproductive work behaviour. They strongly argued that there are rather some situational variables that pose pressure on workers and these pressures affect their cognitive processes and therefore push them to engage in these deviant acts. Some of these situational variables are inflexible policies, competitive environment, leadership style, rules and procedures, economic conditions, reward system, adverse working conditions, task difficulty, home life, organizational culture and prior outcomes. More so, other variables such as anger, anxiety, depression, personality, stress also contribute to counterproductive work behaviour as purported by (Salami, 2010, Penney & Spector, 2005).

According to the social exchange by Gouldner (1960) and Blau (1964), both employees and employers have unspecified obligations in social exchange; the exchange parties are expected to conform to the norm of reciprocity in the discharge of their obligations in the future. These exchanges are expected to be executed by both parties consistently, but if one party (employees) plays its part and the other fails, especially management, then employees may perceive unfair treatment and this

will further trigger interpersonal conflicts and the resultant effect in encouraging the aggrieved party to engage in deviant work behaviours.

In the literature, it has been established that procedural, distributive, and interactional injustices all provoke counterproductive behaviours (Flaherty & Moss, 2007, Demir, 2011). Jones (2009) indicates that interpersonal and Informational justice account for the most unique variance in CWB-S and procedural justice accounted for the most unique variance in CWB-O. A study by Penney and Spector (2005) found that the correlation between interpersonal conflict and CWB-P was significantly greater than the correlation between conflict and CWB-O when both variables were either self-reported or peer-reported. Interpersonal conflicts, sex and trait were found to be a strong predictor of both interpersonal and organisational aggression (Herschovis, et al. 2007; Haq, 2011, Cohen, Panter & Turan , 2012).

With regard to gender differences in the execution of counterproductive work behaviour, it was found that both men and young workers engage in more deviant acts as compared with women and older workers (Öcel & Aydin, 2010; Ferguson, Carlson, Hunter & Whitten, 2012). However, other researchers in their study found no gender differences in deviant behaviour (Bayram, Gursakal & Bilgel 2009; Omar, et al 2011,).

In undertaking this study, the researchers sought to explore and assess the importance of the relationship between organisational injustice, interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviours in predicting employees' expectations of exchange relationships and effective communication among corporate workers in Ghana. Based on the literature reviewed and the objective of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated: 1) Organisational injustice will be positive and significantly related to counterproductive work behaviour, 2) Interpersonal conflict will be positive and significantly related to counterproductive work behaviour, 3) Males will engage more in counterproductive work behaviours than females, and 4) younger workers will engage in more counterproductive work behaviours than older workers.

2. Method
2.1 Sample
Participants were drawn from both public and private sector corporate bodies within the Accra metropolis. In order to qualify for the study, a participant should have worked for the organisation for at least one year. This strategy was adopted with the understanding that for a person to experience injustice and interpersonal conflicts, one year and above is enough for such a worker to have had that experience. In all one hundred and forty questionnaires were distributed to participants from various public and private corporate bodies; out of these, one hundred and nineteen-filled out questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 85% and this formed the sample size for the study.

Out of the one hundred and nineteen participants sampled, 89 were males representing 74.8% and females were 30 representing 25.2%. The age range was between 18 and 60 years, with majority of them, 92 representing 77.3% being young and 27, representing 22.7% being old. Sectorally, the study employed 52 employees from the public sector representing 43.7% and 67 workers from the private sector representing 56.3%. In terms of their educational level, only 7 (5.9%) had completed primary education representing, 19 (16%) had completed secondary school representing, 69 (58%) had completed tertiary education and this encompasses colleges of education, polytechnics, professional schools and universities, and 24 (20.1%) had had higher education comprising those with master's and doctorate degrees.

2.2 Procedure
To start with the data collection, an introductory letter was obtained from the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana, to the Human Resource department in the various corporate bodies in Accra, requesting their workers to be used as a population for the study. After the Human resource managers had agreed to our request, we introduced the objectives of the study to them and those who voluntarily consented to the study were selected for the study. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were asked not to indicate their name and phone numbers on the questionnaire. The researcher assistants' names, e-mail addresses and phone numbers were provided the respondents who may need clarification on some of the questions that might not be clear to them. Participants were given a thank-you message for their contribution in the study.

2.3 Measures
The research design was a survey, and therefore a questionnaire was designed to gather data for the study. The demographic variables that were used in the study are age, gender, educational level, type of organization (public or private). The main measures are the interpersonal conflict scale, the organizational injustice scale, and the counterproductive work behaviour scale.

2.3.1 Interpersonal conflict

The second part netted interpersonal conflict. Spector and Jex's (1998) Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (ICAWS) was used to measure interpersonal conflict at work. The ICAW is a four-item scale developed by Spector and Jex (1998.). Items on this scale ask about interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and more specifically about disputes or confrontations and how often the respondent was the recipient of offensive behaviour. It is a 5-point likert scale with once per month or never, coded 1, to very often per day, coded 5. Some of the items are; how often do co-workers ignore or exclude you while at work? How often do co-workers raise their voices at you while at work? High scores on this scale represent frequent conflicts with others, with a possible range from 4 to 20. The Cronbach Alpha for the scale is .74.

2.3.2 Organisational injustice

The third part captured organisational injustice measure. Colquitt's (2001) Organizational Justice Measure which was used to assess participants' perceptions of organizational injustice. His measure assesses perceptions along three dimensions including distributive injustice, procedural injustice, and interactional injustice. It is a 5-point likert scale with 1 representing to a large extent and 5 being to a small extent. Some of the items are; do your outcomes reflect what you have contributed to the organization? Have those procedures been free of bias? Have they treated you in a polite manner? Higher scores on the measure would indicate higher levels of perceived organizational injustice and lower scores will indicate lower levels of perceived organizational injustice. Colquitt obtained good internal consistencies for each sub-scale (alphas = .93, .92, and .90 respectively) with .93 for the whole measure.

2.3.3 Counterproductive Work Behaviour

This part measured counterproductive work behaviour. Robinson and Bennett (1995) Organisational Deviance scale was employed. It is made up of two main parts thus Interpersonal Deviance section which is made up of 7 items and organisational deviant section also made up of 12 items. It is a 5-point likert scale type with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. Some of the items for CWB-P and CWB-O are; Made fun of someone at work? Said something hurtful to someone at work? Made an ethnic, religious, or racial remark at work? Taken property from work without permission? Spent too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working? Falsified a receipt to get reimbursed for more money than you spent on business expenses? The Cronbach Alpha for the measure is .83.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey was statistically analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The main statistical tests used to analyze the hypotheses were Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) and the Independent t-test. The Pearson r was used to find out the extent to which organisational injustice and interpersonal conflict relate to counterproductive work behaviour (i.e. hypotheses 1&2). The independent t test was used to test sex and age differences in relation to counterproductive work behaviour (i.e. hypotheses 3&4).

3. Results

Table 1 Summary of Means and Standard Deviations of Organizational Injustice, Interpersonal Conflict and Counterproductive work Behaviour (n=119)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Interpersonal Conflict	7.66	3.07
Organizational Injustice	45.88	11.38
Counterproductive Work Behaviour	39.22	15.64

Relationship between organizational injustice, interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviours
Table 2 Relationship between interpersonal conflict, injustice and Counterproductive work behaviour

Study Variables	Counterproductive work behaviour	
Interpersonal Conflict	- 43**	-
Injustice	.22*	-

**p < .01, n = 119

The result of the correlation analysis shown on table 2 above indicates that a positive and significant relationship between organisational injustice and counterproductive work behaviour [r $_{(119)}$ = .22, $p < .05$]. This means that the higher the perception of injustice by employees, the higher their engagement in counterproductive behaviours and vice versa. Hence the hypothesis establishing a positive and significant relationship between organizational injustice and counterproductive work behaviour is supported.

Again, a positive and significant relationship was found between interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work

behaviour [r $_{(119)}$ = .43, p < .01]. The relationship was positive and significant indicating that the more workers engaged in interpersonal conflict the more they are likely to exhibit counterproductive work behaviours. Therefore the hypothesis that interpersonal conflict will be positive and significantly related with counterproductive work behaviour is supported.

Gender and Age differences in relation to counterproductive work behaviour
Table 3: Summary of Independent t-test showing Gender and Age differences in the engagement of Counterproductive Work Behaviour

Variables		N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Counterproductive							
Work Behaviour	Male	89	40.17	15.47		1.143	0.13
	Female	30	36.40	16.07			
	Young (18-39yrs)	92	37.75	15.17	117	-1.192	.03*
	Old (40yrs and above)	27	40.22	16.46			

*p < .05, n = 119

The results as depicted on table 3 above show that there is no difference between males (M = 40.17; SD = 15.47) and females (M = 36.40; SD = 16.07) in relation to counterproductive work behaviour [t $_{(117)}$ = 1.143, p > .05]. Thus the hypothesis that, males will engage more in CWB than females was not supported by the data.

Again, the result as shown on table 3 indicates a significant difference between younger workers (M = 37.75, SD = 15.17) and older workers (M = 40.22, SD = 16.46) in relation to the exhibition of counterproductive work behaviour [t $_{(117)}$ = -1.912, p < .05]. The result shows that younger workers differ from that of older workers but not in the direction of the hypothesis. It however, shows that older workers are those who normally exhibit counterproductive work behaviour as compared to younger workers and therefore the hypothesis was not supported by the data.

4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The complaints about workers deviant behaviour at work normally howled by business owners, government and other stakeholders in the country can be avoided if the necessary conducive work environment needed for effective work performance is provided to workers; this will motivate and encourage them to perform beyond their expected roles and also engage in voluntary behaviours. The current study explored organizational injustice, interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviour. The results provide evidence to support the following propositions: organizational injustice will be positive and significantly related with counterproductive work behaviour; interpersonal conflicts will be positive and significantly related with counterproductive work behaviour. However, the propositions that males will engage more in counterproductive work behaviour than females, and younger workers will engage in more counterproductive work behaviours than older workers were not supported.

Relationship between organizational injustice and counterproductive work behaviour
In hypothesis one, it was stated that organisational injustice will correlate positively and significantly with counterproductive work behaviour. This hypothesis was supported by the data. This means that the more workers or employees perceived unfair treatment in their work environment, the more they are likely to engage in deviant behaviours at work (CWB). This finding corroborates past empirical studies (e.g., Johnson, et al. 2003; Jones, 2009; Demir, 2011). Psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989), social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and equity theory (Adams, 1960) all posit that people appreciate and value fair treatment which then motivates them to maintain fairness with co-workers and the organisation. These theories further suggest that employees always evaluate their inputs and outcome with their colleagues at work and when they establish that there is equity, fair treatment, and the employers also adequately adhere to the psychological contract, justice is then perceived which therefore motivates them to perform beyond their expected roles. For example, one of the respondents commented that "equitable rewards motivate them to work harder."

On the other hand if workers' realize that there exist inequity, contract violation and deficiency in exchanges, they feel distressed, cheated and disappointment. These negative emotional feelings lead to the effort of restoring equity by engaging in counterproductive work behaviours. In effect, if the employee's perception of psychological contract violation increases, then their counterproductive work behaviour also increases. The study again is supported by Flaherty and Moss (2007) work which investigated the impact of workplace injustice on counterproductive work behaviour with personality and team context as moderating variables. They concluded that procedural, distributive and interactional injustices triggered counterproductive

work behaviours.

The support for this hypothesis in the Ghanaian environment might be due to the fact that most Ghanaian employees are beginning to attach prodigious significance to fairness in the organization. That is why 24.4% of employees who made additional comments regarding the outcomes they derive for their efforts and productivity at work suggested and lamented on the following: "managements must reward us based on our inputs at work but not according to the time we spend at work," "salary is based on personal discretion," "profit is enjoyed by the minority few," "management do not want my progress at all," "the climate at the workplace is not courteous due to autocratic leadership style," "the pay I receive does not justify the work I do," "work assiduously towards the growth of the institution but woefully not been recognized by management." It is obvious that these comments do not bode well for the health of organizations that seek progress and development. When employees feel that they are treasured as a result of being treated and rewarded fairly, they are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours that inure to the benefit of the organization.

Relationship between interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviour
The second hypothesis stated that interpersonal conflict will be positive and significantly related to counterproductive work behaviour. This hypothesis was supported by the data and corroborates past empirical studies (e.g., Cohen, et al. 2012; Herschovis, et al. 2007; Haq, 2011). According to the equity theory (Adams, 1960), people's perception and beliefs about the fairness of their treatment at work affect their motivation, attitudes, and behaviours at work. This perception is executed by comparing their input-outputs relations to that of their co-workers at work. When they perceive inequity, it arouses some emotional instability and the slightest provocation by co-workers leads to fierce misunderstanding and thus leads to conflicts that pose danger to the organization's well-being. The longer the conflict persists the more it develops into other deviant behaviours with the intent of restoring equity.

The study again concurs with Penney and Spector's (2005) study which ascertained the extent to which new job stressors and workplace incivility influence employee satisfaction and counterproductive work behaviour. Their result established a strong correlation between interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviour. Furthermore, other researchers have found a strong relationship between interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviour (Bowling & Eschleman 2010; Tseng & associates, 2009). These scholars posit that interpersonal conflict arouses some affective factors such as tension, friction, animosity and impatience; and because majority of workers find it difficult in regulating their emotions, they therefore carry it over into their task performance which eventually leads to a reduction in their level of productivity at work.

This means that if optimum performances can be achieved, employees should be more emotionally stable. Hence policy makers and management should take a critical look at their reinforcement interventions in order to maintain emotional balance of the employees. This will encourage employees who stay with the organization to perform beyond their expected roles. In line with Cohen et al. (2012), when employees perceive equity and satisfied with their outcomes, it arouses less negative affectivity which reduces interpersonal conflicts and counterproductive work behaviour.

Reasons for this finding could be due to personal and organizational variables. For instance, personality characteristics such as introversion, conscientiousness; socio-economic background; as well as organizational climate, role ambiguity could trigger conflict among employees. These differing characteristics could lead to interpersonal conflict thus making employees engage more in CWB to draw attention to their fractured relationships at work.

Demographic variables and counterproductive work behaviour
The third hypothesis which stated gender differences in counterproductive work behaviours was not supported by the data. The difference between males and females who engage in counterproductive work behaviour was not statistically different from zero. This means that when it comes to deviant acts at work, both men and women do engage in it, especially when injustices and conflict are perceived. The finding of this study corroborates that of Bayram et al. (2009) who found no gender differences in the exhibition of counterproductive work behaviour; and Halim et al. (2011) who also found no significant differences between males and females in relation to workplace deviant.

On the contrary, Ferguson et al. (2012) observed that men engage in more deviant behaviours in response to family-to-work conflict than females. Other researchers (e.g. Öcel & Aydin, 2010) have found gender differences in the display of CWB. Again, Cohen et al (2012) found that women engage less in CWB as compared to men. Herschovis (2007) found that men engage more in aggression than women. The reason for this result might be due to the collectivistic culture of Ghanaians. Due to the "WE" feeling of the employees, any injustices and conflicts perceived by one employee is seen to be a collective problem and therefore together frown on them. This is because there is a saying that if one observes the bear of a brother

being burnt; they need to quickly get water ready because it is believed that, they could be the next victim.

The study again found a significant difference between younger workers and older workers in the exhibition of counterproductive work behaviour, but it was not in support with the researchers' hypothesis. In the present study, and contrary to the researchers' predictions, older workers exhibited more counterproductive work behaviour than younger workers. The current finding was contrary to Cohen et al. (2012) study which found that older workers and women engage less in counterproductive work behaviour than younger workers and men. The reason for the current finding might be due to the perception that 'a person who is down fears no fall.' That is because older workers have in their mind's eye that they are left with few years to go on retirement, have less responsibility and have nothing to lose so any injustices and interpersonal conflicts perceived lands in counterproductive work behaviour. Also in Ghana, there is an assumption that life begins at forty (40) and per the definition of the current study, the perimeter for younger worker ends at thirty-nine years, meaning these workers are yet to start life, have more responsibility ahead of them and for that matter need to be careful in the way they handle injustices and interpersonal conflicts at work so as to prevent any sacking from management.

This study like most research is not without limitations. The current study is both a survey and correlational in nature and therefore was limited with regard to establishing cause and effect relationships. As a result only relationships between the variables could be established which might not present a precise link between the variables due to the presence of potential extraneous variables. Although the researchers considered both public and private corporate bodies in order to get a fair view of the variables and also make generalization more plausible, they failed to account for the variability that exist between the two sectors. The identified limitations notwithstanding, the findings of the study could be used to improve organizational and institutional effectiveness.

Findings from the present study have practical implications which can help improve employer-employee relationships. As indicated earlier, the study found evidence to suggest that psychological contract violations and inequity give birth to perception of injustices and interpersonal conflict which eventually lead to counterproductive work behaviour. Recommendations in the World Health Report (2006) proposed that superiors should be well-founded, fair and give employees feedback on performance in order to improve superior-employee relationship.

Also, employees should be given fair and realistic compensation. The corporate workforce should receive decent pay and also on time. Other non-monetary benefits should be provided, such as study leave, provident fund, health insurance or child education policy and housing loan since these have influence on employees' productivity.

Again, since organisational injustice and interpersonal conflict are important variables that strongly predict employees' unproductive work behaviours, it is recommended that further research should be conducted, but must look at the various types of injustices and their influence on counterproductive behaviour. In terms of conflicts, future researchers should also explore other types of conflict for example, task- and process-conflicts on deviant work behaviour.

Furthermore, in order to appreciate employees' attitudes at the workplace better, and the reasons why they take certain actions, it is suggested that researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods in future studies. Qualitative methods, especially interviews provide a fertile ground for the researcher to hear respondents' opinions on how they perceive injustice and interpersonal conflict at the workplace. For instance, why do some employees continue to stay in their organizations even though their psychological contracts are violated, when the distribution of outcome processes and interactions at work are unfair, and why others also engage in counterproductive work behaviour.

Finally, it is suggested that more organisational injustice, interpersonal conflict and counterproductive work behaviour research be conducted in the Ghanaian setting so as to help us better understand the constructs and how they operate in our organizations.

5. Summary and Conclusion

In the course of discharging their duties and responsibilities, employees, depending on how they are treated by management exhibit behaviour that is 'two edged sword' in nature, meaning their actions can build and destroy organisations. They can help an organisation to thrive when treated well and in the same vein help organisations to die out if mistreated. The current result gives a clear indication of the nature of employees' behaviour where both perceive injustices and interpersonal conflicts have a positive relationship with counterproductive work behaviour. Therefore, any organization that holds the mantra of growth and increase productivity must make the conscious effort to cherish their employees, provide serene atmosphere that respects and meet their affective, cognitive, and behavioural needs.

The principle of marketing says that customers are supposed to be treated as 'Kings and Queens' in every business if the organisation wants to reach the apex of success but had forgotten that without the expertise and creative work of these employees there will be nothing for these customers to consume. These employees therefore equally need to be treated as "Kings and Queens" in their various organisations so as to give them a fair idea about royal treatment which in turn will help them to reciprocate to customers. If organisations sow 'Kings and Queens Employees,' they will grow and become royal plants that will bear royal fruits that can be used to serve their royal majesty 'Kings and Queens Customers' and finally increase the goodwill, productivity and financial standing of the organisation.

Again management should make their employees their number one priority and ensure that rewards are fairly and objectively given to those who are due so as to avoid the perception of injustice and the breed of interpersonal conflict at work because the two variables are strong predictors of counterproductive work behaviour.

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