

SYSTEMATIZATION OF ANTECEDENTS AND EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE INCIVILITY

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ABSTRACT

Based on the literature review, the article presents the systematization of antecedents and effects of workplace incivility. Variables contributing to deviant workplace behaviour (antecedents) are placed within three categories: dispositional, behavioural, and contextual. Dispositional antecedents, which include characteristics of targets (certain demographic characteristics and personality traits) and characteristics of instigators (position and power, attributes, attitudes, and certain personality traits), are presented. After that, behavioural antecedents of targets (such as counterproductive work behaviour, annoying or provocative behaviour, etc.) and instigators (inappropriate conflict management style, “workaholism”, response to negative emotions, etc.) are stated. Furtherly, contextual antecedents that are divided into organizationally-based (organizational change and downsizing, hierarchy and autocracy, lack of organizational justice, inadequate organizational culture and climate, certain negative aspects of e-communication, etc.), and work-based antecedents (job design issues, inappropriate working conditions, performance pressure, etc.) are explained at the end. Finally, negative consequences of workplace incivility on employees and the organization are presented. The article ends with the concluding remarks, the implication of the research, and suggestions for future studies.

KEY WORDS

workplace incivility, antecedents, effects

CLASSIFICATION

JEL: M12, Z13

INTRODUCTION

Workplace incivility has attracted much attention in organizational behaviour studies in the last two decades. Andersson and Pearson introduced the construct of workplace incivility [1], which was defined as a low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect, which is assumed to be discourteous and careless. Andersson and Pearson [1] started a new research direction in workplace deviance, with growing interest of scholars, especially after 2015.

Examples of uncivil behaviour are: exclusion, ignoring, hostile look, demeaning [2, 3] interrupting, spreading rumours, eye-rolling, [4], disrespect, neglect, insult, verbal attacks, yelling [5, 6], inappropriate language, unprofessionally addressing, inappropriate jokes, unacceptable gestures [7], etc.

Several characteristics distinguish workplace incivility from other types of deviance at work. Firstly, workplace incivility has a low intensity and requires less energy than other more aggressive types of workplace deviance, such as workplace aggression and violence. Secondly, the intention to harm the target is not obvious – it is not clear if it is intentionally negative [8-10]. Therefore, workplace incivility depends on the interpretation of the individual who experiences or perceives it [11]. Workplace incivility might have many undesired outcomes and lead to more aggressive behaviour, so it should not be treated as the less relevant problem [9, 12].

There are numerous studies of workplace incivility that mainly investigated outcomes, antecedents, or processes of workplace incivility. Research subjects were focused on experienced incivility (investigation of the targets of uncivil behaviour), witnessed incivility (investigation of the witnesses of incivility), or instigated incivility (investigation of the instigators of uncivil behaviour). Workplace incivility was usually categorized regarding the source into superior incivility, co-worker incivility, subordinate incivility, and customer incivility.

The article aims to offer a general overview of various antecedents of workplace incivility – variables that contribute to incivility at work. The article integrates the results of previous studies into the comprehensive framework and shows the spectrum of various incivility antecedents. Such an approach enables a better understanding of the roots of workplace incivility. The article critically discusses the factors that should be considered regarding the level of incivility and preconditions that should be provided on an individual, organizational and work level aiming to reduce incivility at work. Also, various negative consequences of workplace incivility on employees and organizations are discussed to reveal the magnitude of this issue.

The systematization made in this article is based on the un-systematic literature review of previous theoretical and empirical research in workplace incivility. The study is based on peer-reviewed scientific papers written in English retrieved from Emerald, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, Elsevier, Scopus, Web of Science.

The article begins with the systematization of antecedents of workplace incivility, where antecedents are grouped into individual, behavioural and contextual. In the next section, workplace incivility consequences for employees and the organization are highlighted. The article ends with the discussion and conclusion regarding theory, implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies.

THE ANTECEDENTS OF WORKPLACE INCIVILITY

Antecedents of workplace incivility could be grouped into individual (dispositional) antecedents, behavioural antecedents, and situational (contextual) antecedents [13]. Cortina et al. [14] explain individual characteristics related to the perceived or experienced incivility (personality/behaviour), stigmatized identities that are related to experienced incivility (gender, ethnicity, weight, motherhood status, etc.), and job related or contextual antecedents of incivility.

INDIVIDUAL AND BEHAVIOURAL ANTECEDENTS

Table 1 presents the systematization of antecedents of workplace incivility, based on previous conceptual and empirical studies considering targets and instigators.

Table 1. Individual and behavioural antecedents of workplace incivility taking into account targets and instigators.

	Individual antecedents	Behavioural antecedents
Targets	Female gender Minority Lower organizational position Younger age Fatness Multiple children motherhood Generational specificities Lower competence and knowledge Personality traits (low agreeableness, high neuroticism, negative affect)	Counterproductive work behaviour Provocative behaviour Annoying behaviour Bothersome behaviour
Instigators	Position and power Attitudes and beliefs (regarding job insecurity, organizational injustice, job dissatisfaction, expected benefits from uncivil behaviour or low cost of such behaviour) Negative attributes Personality traits (low agreeableness, high neuroticism, low emotional intelligence, aggression, hostility, ego, internal competition, narcissism, psychopathy, lack of moral maturity, etc.)	Inadequate conflict management style “Workaholism” (which increases stress and decreases psychological capacity) Exhaustion Behavioural response to rage, fear, and anger Experienced incivility that motivates revenge Lack of communication

Individual antecedents are certain characteristics of a person that might predispose experience, perception, or appraisal of workplace incivility. Individual characteristics of targets could be female gender, minority, [3, 11, 15, 16], lower organizational position [11], younger age [17], fatness, multiple children motherhood [18], generational specificities [19], lower competence and knowledge [20], certain personality traits [18, 21] etc.

By investigating personality traits of targets, Milam et al. [21] find individuals low on agreeableness and high on neuroticism attract attention on them as targets. Similarly, Naimon et al. [22] concluded that low agreeableness, negative affectivity (N.A.), and low spirituality were positively related to experienced workplace incivility. When analysing each personality trait independently, Sliter et al. [23] find that negative affect, positive affect, and trait anger are positively related to the perception of incivility, while agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness were negatively related the perception of incivility. But, when all personality traits are analysed in a combined model, the strongest predictors of incivility are positive

affect and trait anger [23]. Similar replication study [24] finds that negative affect and trait anger are positively related to incivility perception, while emotional stability and positive affect are negatively related to incivility perception, but analysis of personality traits in the combined model showed that significant predictors of incivility perception are trait anger, positive affect, and extraversion.

In their empirical studies, scholars find certain individual characteristics of instigator related to workplace incivilities such as position and power [2, 11], attitudes (about job insecurity, organizational injustice, job dissatisfaction, etc.) [25], beliefs on expected benefits from uncivil behaviour or low cost of such behaviour [26, 27], negative attributes [28], certain personality traits [29]. Instigator personality traits that were found to be connected to workplace incivility were: type A personality, hostility, aggression, ego, internal competition [11, 26, 30], low agreeableness, psychopathy, and narcissism [31], low emotional intelligence [32], lack of moral maturity [33]. Batista and Reio [34] find that conscientiousness and agreeableness lower the relationship between stress and instigator incivility, while neuroticism and extraversion strengthen their connection.

Behavioural antecedents are behavioural characteristics that may predispose uncivil behaviour. Such behaviour of a target might be counterproductive work behaviour [29], provocativeness or annoyance related to personality [21], insensitivity or bothersome behaviour [2] etc. Instigator behavioural antecedents might be inadequate conflict management style (high dominating or low integrating style) [35], “workaholism” that increases stress and decreases psychical capacity [27] or exhaustion [25], response to rage, fear or anger [36], experienced incivility that motivates revenge [37] lack of adequate communication, etc.

CONTEXTUAL ANTECEDENTS

Contextual antecedents are associated with a situation that enables and facilitates workplace incivility. These antecedents are usually divided into two groups: organizationally based and work-based antecedents (Table 2).

Table 2. Contextual antecedents.

Organizationally based antecedents	Organizational change, integration, and downsizing Pressure for productivity Autocracy and strict hierarchy Lack of organizational justice, lack of reciprocity norm, braking of psychological contract Inadequate climate/climate of informality Inadequate organizational culture Lack of civility policies and norms Low social support Communication issues (multi-communicating, e-communications, etc.)
Work-related antecedents	Role issues Lack of autonomy High job demand, Work overload High-performance pressure Inappropriate working conditions Work interdependence

Organizationally based antecedents of workplace incivility might be organizational change, integrations, and downsizing that impede job insecurity, part-time employment, and productivity pressure [1, 12, 26, 36, 38-40], autocracy and strict hierarchy [39], lack of organizational justice [25], lack of reciprocity norm [28], breaking of psychological contract [41], inadequate climate including climate of informality [1], inadequate corporate culture that tolerates incivility [40, 42-43], lack of civility policies and norms [44, 45], low social support [40, 46], e-communication issues, lack of face-to-face communication due to information technology and constant availability [12, 47-49], multi-communicating [15], globalization [39] etc.

Vickers [12] states that organizational change might cause higher workload, perception of job insecurity, and fewer resources aiming to cut costs, making employees more inclined to uncivil acts. Restructuring and downsizing usually cause the reduction of hierarchical levels, which cause loss of position, fewer promotion options, increased employee competition, workload, and pressure for productivity [1, 26, 38] – which all creates fertile ground for interpersonal deviance, including incivility.

Perceptions of injustice are associated with various negative behaviours at work [50], including engaging in revenge and expressing hostility [51]. Aquino *et al.* [52] find that distributive injustice is associated with negative behaviour, such as spreading rumours about individuals in the organization. Blau and Anderson [25] confirm that employees who experience distributive injustice are more inclined to workplace incivility. Additionally, the connection is found between workplace incivility and lack of procedural justice [53] and the lack of interpersonal justice [54]. The connection between low organizational justice and workplace incivility is often based on reciprocity norm according to which workers turn back the treatment they received (bad or good). Sears and Humiston [41] find that breaking the psychological contract leads to higher workplace incivility. A psychological contract within an organization is a belief in mutual obligations between the individual and the organization (relational or transactional), which is an important determinant of employee behaviour.

Organizational climate is the atmosphere at work that is created from experience, behaviour, and relationships among employees. The perception of an inappropriate or egoistic climate creates fertile ground for employees to engage in selfish behaviour and reckless to their coworkers [55]. Adding organic elements in organizational structure is driven by the need for flexibility. These organic elements, such as flattening organizational structure, favour the climate of informality, which allows more relaxed employees to cross the line of decency [1].

National culture, industry culture, and organizational culture are important factors that influence workplace incivility. The behaviour of employees is usually consistent with their values, assumptions, attitudes and beliefs, and organizational culture aims to shape these elements through their invisible and visible level. When culture is not adequate, it might encourage deviant behaviors and work mistreatment, including workplace incivility. If uncivil behaviour becomes part of a culture and stays unnoticed or unpunished, it may furtherly leverage the appearance of incivility at work [12, 40].

According to previous empirical research [12, 47], information technology enables constant availability due to e-communication with no strict difference between working and private time, which might disturb employees, causing their rude behaviour. Furthermore, the lack of in vivo communication might cause not being completely professional and polite [12].

Work-based antecedents include certain attributes of job and work environment. In this category, causes of workplace incivility could be inadequate job design, including role issues [56], lack of autonomy [58], high job demand, work overload, performance pressure [27, 59-61], inappropriate working conditions [37, 62], work interdependence [62] etc.

EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE INCIVILITY

The number of studies investigating workplace incivility has increased due to understanding its relatively frequent incidence in practice and its negative effects on the organization, employees, and other stakeholders. The systematization of negative consequences of workplace incivility is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Effects of workplace incivility.

Effects on employees	Effects on organization
Lower satisfaction with the job, with coworkers or supervisors Lower motivation, energy, commitment, engagement, and moral Lower job performance (efficiency, creativity, effectiveness) Absenteeism, turnover intention Lower dignity and self-esteem Negative emotions Worse mental and physical health Lower wellbeing and life satisfaction Worse family (private) relationships	Deterioration of financial results Higher costs Lower productivity Deterioration of reputation and image Undesirable organizational climate Poor work environment Employee turnover

Literature on workplace incivility reveals various negative consequences for employees such as lower satisfaction with the job [11, 44, 61-65], lower satisfaction with coworkers and supervisors [4], lower motivation and energy [66], reduced commitment, engagement, and moral [67, 68], reduced efficiency and creativity [69-72], lower job performance [73, 74], absenteeism [77], turnover intention [3, 44, 75], lower dignity and self-esteem [76], negative emotions [38], worse mental and physical health [2, 77-80], lower wellbeing and life satisfaction and [43, 46, 81], worse family relationships [9, 82-85], etc.

The effects of workplace incivility mainly refer to employees who have experienced incivility. But incivility may also affect employees who have witnessed incivility, especially if grounded on empathy for targets [76]. Furthermore, being involved in a negative event such as rudeness can also affect the instigator. Schilpzand et al. [13] discuss that instigators might face exclusion and distrust from others within the organization. An investigation of the effects of experienced incivility on employees Schilpzand et al. [13] assume that incivility from the superior is more harmful than incivility from a coworker and that incivility from a coworker is more harmful than incivility from the customer. On the other side, Caza and Cortina [61] discuss that incivility from coworkers is not less harmful than incivility from people with authority. Guo et al. [68] find that the connection between workplace incivility and employee work engagement is very complex, with many indirect elements that mediate that relationship. Miner et al. [46] stated that negative outcomes for employees could be mitigated by a higher social (organizational and emotional) support.

Furthermore, the organization might be burdened with the various consequence that comes from workplace incivility such as deterioration (reduction) of financial results [70], higher costs [86], lower productivity [38, 87], deterioration of reputation and image [68], undesirable organizational climate [29], poor work environment [1], employee turnover [11], etc.

DISCUSSION

Incivility at work presents a serious problem with numerous negative consequences for employees, the organization, and beyond. Literature review reveals many negative outcomes for employees that could be cognitive, emotional, behavioural, attitudinal, social, mental, and

physical. Previous studies confirmed that incivility affects not only the targets but witnesses and even instigators of incivility. Furthermore, organizations might have various problems in the area of financial results, reputation and image, productivity, climate and culture, work environment, and employee turnover due to increased incivility.

For that reason, it is important to understand better variables that contribute to the incidence of incivility at work. The literature explains numerous causes of workplace incivility that have been investigated empirically and could be placed within three categories: individual/dispositional, behavioural, or contextual. The recognition and understanding of these antecedents are important to shape preconditions to diminish and eliminate incivility.

Due to the possession of characteristics, such as obesity, low competence, physical disabilities, belonging to an ethnic or racial minority, female gender, young age, social status, rural origin, financial status, etc., some employees can easily become victims of inappropriate behaviour by their coworkers, superiors or clients. The role of certain demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, tenure, skill and knowledge level, minority, and obesity in electing experienced incivility is well examined in the scientific research. Yet, certain variables such as geographical origin, rural/urban origin, social background, physical disabilities, sex orientation, or other diversity specificities have not attracted sufficient research interest within the literature of workplace incivility. Hence, it would be useful to investigate these variables more deeply to understand better their role in electing workplace incivility as such incivility can serve as a camouflage for hidden discrimination.

Individual antecedents that fall into personality traits attracted much research interest. Results of empirical research have shown that low agreeableness, high neuroticism, and negative affect are traits not only of incivility instigators but of targets as well. Internal competition, ego, narcissism, psychopathy, low moral maturity, and additional traits characterize instigators. Therefore, these personality traits are undesirable in light of the need for civility. Furthermore, employees' counterproductive, provocative or annoying behaviour could attract attention to become targets of uncivil acts.

Additionally, employees who cannot cope with conflicts, stress, fear, anger, or other negative emotions or who experience incivility could fall into the trap of becoming uncivil perpetrators toward others. All these individual antecedents should be considered while shaping human resource policy, practice, and interventions, especially in employee selection and development. To avoid discrimination and harassment, proper values and principles, respect, diversity, and inclusion should be incorporated within organizational policies, rules, code of conduct, and culture.

Additional contextual antecedents of workplace incivility are organizationally based variables. Previous empirical studies reveal numerous organizational issues that should be considered: organizational change and downsizing, high autocracy and hierarchy, inadequate corporate culture and climate, lack of organizational justice, e-communication issues, insufficient organizational support, etc.

Organizations that go through organizational change and restructuring should manage changes wisely, considering the influence on employees. It becomes particularly important in the case of downsizing, which often causes layoffs, reduction of wages, loss of positions, and performance pressure. Adequate employee support is important to prevent negative emotions and retaliation that could lead to undesired behaviour, including incivility. Furthermore, organizations characterized by a bureaucratic structure and autocracy should assure, through organizational norms and policy, that power and position are not misused for uncivil behaviour downwards. Regarding global trends of spreading rapid e-communication, it is important to set proper policies regarding e-communication to avoid undesirable situations

that may frustrate employees, causing incivility, which is emphasized especially keeping in mind the increasing use of e-communication, which was especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizational injustice is the next important element that could elicit workplace incivility and other undesirable outcomes that result from unjust distribution, procedures, or interaction within an organization. Therefore, it is important to establish distributive, procedural, and interactional justice within the organization.

Corporate climate and culture take a special place in creating a foundation to decrease incivility at work. Leiter [88] states that workplace incivility depends more on the climate or culture than on individuals. Hence, a positive organizational climate should be developed, such as a caring climate nurtured with professional and positive attitudes, assumptions, and behaviour, whereby an appropriate leadership style is particularly needed. Cultural setting creates an arena in which personal characteristics are displayed and may elicit or diminish incivility at work. Pattani et al. [89] highlights the existence of the culture of silence that refers to the inability of leaders to detect and deal with workplace incivility so that incivility remains unsolved. Positive organizational culture support ideas that are beneficial for the organization and thus could help in building competitive advantage. A strong positive organizational culture aims to motivate employees toward incorporating important organizational values and implementing them in their working practice, which should be strengthened through an incentive system.

Furthermore, organizational culture creates the basis for shaping an adequate work environment. When organizational culture is appropriate and based on the proper value frame, it influences employees to perceive the need for desirable and courteous conduct. To create a desirable work environment and the feeling of mutual moral obligations, corporate culture should incorporate values such as openness, justice, fairness, trustfulness [90], dignity and respect, integrity, personal development [91], organizational support, warm interpersonal relationship, commitment [92], consideration, cooperation [14], spirituality, patience, resiliency, psychological capital [93], protection of privacy [94], ethics [27, 95-97], etc. Emphasizing the significance of the core values and ethical codes will circularize the domain of acceptable workplace behaviour.

Considering work-related variables as a part of the incivility context, it is important to assure adequate work setting, including adequate job design, adequate working conditions, appropriate workload, job security, etc., to decrease work-related roots of incivility. An inspiring, healthy, safe, and respectful work environment is expected to enhance positive thinking and perceptions, enabling employees to focus on achieving their work objectives better.

External antecedents of workplace incivility beyond organizational boundaries have not attracted enough research interest. Some scholars investigate private aspects such as family incivility, confirming its influence on incivility at work [98] or negative influence of media that encourage rude behaviour by role modelling [47], etc. Therefore, this literature gap leaves space for further studies.

It could be concluded that managers and employees should understand workplace incivility's nature, antecedents, and effects. Civility norms should be prioritized and explicitly expressed, which should be leveraged through a proper incentive system. By their behaviour, managers should give an example for employees to follow. Furthermore, various management approaches toward civility should be conducted, such as civility interventions and programs, employee development, and training techniques (coaching, workshops, role play, case studies, multimedia, etc.) to develop diversity awareness, civility acceptance, interpersonal and conflict management skills, stress coping styles, etc.

This article presents numerous arguments to justify the need for civility. However, it is worth pointing out that civility should not be forced for bad purposes. Cortina et al. [14] cited Calabrese that civility is sometimes misused as a means to “limit, silence or control the free expression of the weak” side. Therefore, it is important to set the value of workplace incivility with positive, not negative, intentions.

CONCLUSION

This article offers a comprehensive overview of the antecedents of workplace incivility and the systematization of multiple outcomes of incivility. Previous literature on workplace incivility reveals that various antecedents of workplace incivility mutually interact, so further studies could be oriented to explore the mutual dependence of these variables and their influence on workplace incivility. Furthermore, workplace incivility’s mediation and moderation role should be investigated more deeply. In previous studies, dynamics and interventions of workplace incivility are not sufficiently investigated, which leaves the space for conducting additional studies in that area. As quantitative studies dominate, it would be useful to conduct more qualitative and meta-analytic studies to illuminate the complex workplace incivility problem better.

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