

## Organizational justice and workplace bullying: validating two instruments and testing their joined relation with wellbeing.

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### Abstract

*The aim of the study was to examine the relation between workplace bullying, organizational justice and wellbeing. Two instruments were validated, the NAQ and the OJQ. The sample consisted of participants (N=177) from a civil service company. The result indicates that both instruments have high internal consistency. SEM analyses indicate a strong model fit but a moderate relation between organizational justice and workplace bullying. Both organizational justice and workplace bullying are associated with wellbeing but the joint effect was not stronger than each separate effect. The study examined how organizational justice is associated with workplace bullying, and how both constructs are related to well-being. Organizational justice is a new concept in this kind of research.*

**Keywords:** Workplace bullying, organizational justice, wellbeing.

### Workplace bullying

Workplace bullying is today recognized as an important social stressor at work. Almost 20% of the work population in Europe has reported being exposed to serious bullying or exposed to less systematic bullying at the work (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003). Similar findings have been reported in research on incivility: one third of personnel in a power position instigated uncivil acts (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001). In the same line of research, acts of incivility were found to have negative effects on job satisfaction and greater psychological distress.

Workplace bullying is a kind of systematic mistreatment of colleagues, subordinates, or superiors and can be viewed as an extreme type of social stress at work (Zapf et al. 2003). If lasting over time it often causes severe problem for the target. The most widely accepted definition of workplace bullying is:

“Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts” (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003, p. 15).

Workplace bullying concerns repeated actions or practices that are directed at one or more people and is unwanted by the target and often causes humiliation, offense, and distress. Bullying behavior can be carried out either deliberately or unconsciously. It can also be aggressive or instrumental, the latter referred to as strategic bullying by Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley and Harvey (2007). Furthermore, bullying at work constitutes persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and mistreatment from superiors, subordinates or colleagues (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2001), and causes an unpleasant work environment and interferes with work performance. Workplace bullying is in short negative acts that that are deliberate and occur in a persistent and systematic way (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011), and gradually undermine confidence and self-esteem (see e.g. Mathisen, Einarsen & Mykletun, 2008). Workplace bullying is a growing research field and has been receiving an increasing amount of research (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011). However, considering the number of papers produced over the last two decades, surprisingly little research has been conducted with the aim of investigating which organizational factors that are most associated with workplace bullying.

Studies on workplace bullying have been trying to chart targets' common traits (see e.g. Mathisen & Einarsen, 2000), bullies' personality traits (see e.g. Adams, 1992), and organizational outcomes (see e.g. Salin, 2001). Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) identify three types of workplace bullying, work related, person related and intimidating. The present study investigates the relation between organizational justice and workplace bullying. In an earlier study a robust yet modest relation between psychological climate and workplace, bullying was found (Eisele, 2015).

Organizational justice is here suggested as one major factor associated with workplace bullying. Organizational justice should be related to workplace bullying since targets of bullying often report perceiving a feeling of being treated unfairly. Likewise, being exposed to unfairness on a deliberate and regular basis can be a kind of bullying. That is, deliberate injustice might be the missing piece in workplace bullying instruments. In a meta-analysis, Bowling and Terry (2006) presented a model with organizational justice as one important factor contributing to a healthy workplace. Although unfairness has been shown to be a consistent mediator of workplace aggression (Barling, Dupré & Kelloway, 2009), this aspect of emotional abuse is not included in present workplace bullying questionnaires.

### ***Organizational justice***

When confronted with the concept organizational justice, people in general first think of the justice of decision outcomes - distributive justice (see e.g. Leventhal, 1980). Procedural justice is about the justice of the processes that leads to outcomes, (see e. g. Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This distinction between procedures and distribution is equivalent to decision control and process control. Early research on organizational justice was based on this two factor model. Greenberg (1987) introduced organizational justice with regard to how an employee judges the behavior of the organization and the resulting attitude and behavior that comes from this. The four factor model of organizational justice (Greenberg, 1993) suggests organizational justice is generally considered to consist of four sub-dimensions: 1) distributive justice, 2) procedural justice, 3) interactional justice, and 4) informational justice. Procedural justice refers to fairness issues concerning the methods, mechanisms, and processes used to determine outcomes (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Procedural justice is here conceptualized as fairness of procedures in decision-making (Colquitt, 2001). Fair procedures make employees feel they get an equal opportunity from the company and it indicates that they should perform well in future (Loi et.al. 2006).

Distributive justice refers to what extent people's outcome reflects the effort they have put into their work. Whether the outcome is appropriate for the work they have completed, reflects what they have contributed to the organization, and is justified given their performance (Leventhal, 1976). Interactional justice or interpersonal justice is about whether people are treated with respect, dignity and politeness by others (Greenberg, 1990). Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment they receive during the enactment of organizational procedures, and is believed to be created by respect, justification, politeness, and truthfulness (Bies & Moag, 1986). Employees seek respect from their supervisors to share information and avoid rude remarks, since supervisors are those near to them.

Interpersonal justice regards issues regarding whether an authority figure that enacted procedures treated you in a polite manner, with dignity and respect, and refrained from improper remarks or comments (Bies & Moag, 1986). Interpersonal justice is about how to react to decision making agents as compared to procedural justice that is about how to react to decision making systems (Colquitt, 2001). Informational justice is about whether an authority figure has been can did in (his/her) communications with you and whether he/she explained the procedures thoroughly (Bies & Moag, 1986). Employees are motivated to build upon trust with supervisors when they are being treated fairly and thus results in good performance (Schminke et al., 2000). Interactional justice helps the organization to build a stronger relationship between supervisors and employees. Informational justice is the level of access to information that an employee has in the organization, for example, supervisors being honest with employees (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Unjust situations produce frustration and stress and induce negative effects that sometimes break down individual dignity and self-worth (Neuman & Baron, 1998). Distributive justice affects performance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), and performance can increase when perception of justice is improved (Karriker & Williams, 2009). Three distribution rules that lead to distributive justice if applied accordingly include equality, equity and needs (Cropanzano & Folger, 1991).

Nasurdin and Khuan (2011) illustrated that distributive justice had a positive and significant relationship with task performance. In a similar element, procedural justice was found to be positively and significantly related to

contextual performance. Palaiologos, Papazekos, and Panayotopoulou, (2011) showed that distributive, procedural, and interactional justice are related to different dimensions of performance appraisal. Wang, Liao, Xia, and Chang, (2010) found that the relationship of organizational justice to work performance was mostly indirect, mediated by organizational commitment and LMX. Zainalipour, Fini, and Mirkamali (2010) found a positive relationship between organizational justice and job satisfaction. Correlation analysis for the three components of organizational justice showed that two dimensions of organizational justice, namely interactional and distributive justice, had positive relations with four dimensions of job satisfaction, namely pay, promotion, supervision, and co-worker. Sense of organizational justice has a positive prediction role on employees' organizational identification (Guangling, 2011). It is likely that organizational identification positively promotes employees' organizational citizenship behavior. Being submitted to workplace bullying has a negative effect on organizational identification. There is therefore reason to believe that organizational justice is a factor with a strong relation to workplace bullying.

### ***Well-being***

Recently new surveys have been developed, such as the Flourishing Scale (FS), to describe the highest levels of mental health (Keyes, 2002). FS reflects general psychological needs, such as the need for competence, relatedness, and self-acceptance (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and produces an overview of positive functioning across diverse domains that are widely believed to be important (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi & Biswas-Diener, 2010). Flourishing Scale (FS) assess several universal human psychological needs, such as the need for competence, relatedness, and self-acceptance (Ryan & Deci, 2001). According to Diener and Seligman (2004) FS reflects a social-psychological richness incorporating important aspects of human functioning.

### ***Organizational justice and well-being***

The indirect relationship between organizational justice and well-being has been studied by, for example, Aryee, Budhwar and Chen (2000) who found that procedural justice relate positively to leader member exchange. Studies, (e g Schmitt & Dorfel, 1999) have shown that procedural justice is positively related to general well-being. Theories that can be more direct associated with organizational justice and employee's well-being are the social exchange theory and the injustice-stress theory. The social exchange theory postulates that the social exchange relationship between the organization and the employees develops through a series of mutual exchanges that calls for a reciprocal commitment. Social exchange theory involves a series of interdependent interactions that are conditional on the actions of the other partner in the social relationship, and generate obligations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The injustice-stress theory is an integration of work stress and organizational justice that was developed by Vermunt and Steensma (2001). This theory implies that each individual has certain things that they are looking forward to in their lives. Failure to meet these demands would cause individuals to experience dissatisfaction, reduced life satisfaction, and strain. A gap between what is desired and what is received is deleterious to a healthy psychological and physical well-being (Vermunt & Steensma, 2001). The present study is an attempt to examine the relationship between the independent variable (organizational justice) and the dependent variable (well-being). As well as the relationship between workplace bullying and organizational justice and their joint relationship with well-being.

### ***Workplace bullying and well-being***

Optimism is important to successful functioning and well-being (Scheier & Carver, 2003). Since prolonged workplace bullying has negative effects on self-worth, it should have a direct impact on optimism. Therefore, a strong relationship between perception of bullying and general well-being is expected. In addition, negative relationships between exposure to bullying and well-being have been found in a study by Einarsen and Raknes (1997). Meta-analyses of individual-level outcomes of exposure to workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) pinpoint both job-related and health-related factors. Job-related factors are burnout, intention to leave, reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Health-related factors are mental and physical stress and well-being. Many employees suffer from severe mistreatment at work that has negative effects on health, motivation, and well-being (Einarsen et al 2011).

People in charge are often unwilling to accept the problem and thus do not do much to prevent workplace bullying. Workplace bullying involves repeated actions or practices that are directed at one or more people. The concept assumes that the actions are unwanted by the target and carried out deliberately or unconsciously (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia (2003). The feeling of being helpless and being let down often causes humiliation, offense, distress, and interferes with work performance, thus causing an unpleasant work environment.

In a study by Vartia (2001) both the targets of bullying and the observers reported more general stress and mental stress, reactions than did respondents from the workplaces with no self-reported bullying. The targets also expressed feelings of low self-confidence more often than did those who had not reported being subjected to bullying (Vartia, 2001). Victimization due to workplace bullying appears to change employees' perceptions of their work environment and life in general into one involving threat, danger, insecurity, and self-questioning (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). The strongest relationship existed between experiences of personal derogation and psychological well-being (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996).

Exposures to negative acts are related to health problems such as anxiety and insomnia and social isolation (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002) and even depression (Högh, Henriksson & Burr, 2005). Being mistreated by other members of one's workplace has deviating effects on self-worth (see e.g. Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Considering these findings, one should expect a strong relationship between bullying and well-being. While amount of studies examining the relation between organizational justice and well-being are rather sparse, there are numerous studies on the relationship between workplace bullying and well-being. There are both empirical and logical reasons to assume a strong relationship between perception of bullying and general well-being is expected. A negative relationship between exposure to bullying and well-being has been found in a study by Einarsen and Raknes (1997).

Many employees suffer from harm or impairment at work that has negative effects on both health and well-being (Einarsen et al 2011). In a study by Vartia (2001) both the targets of bullying and the observers reported more general stress and mental stress, reactions than did respondents from the workplaces with no self-reported bullying. Victimization due to workplace bullying appears to change employees' perceptions of their work environment and life in general into one involving threat, danger, insecurity, and self-questioning (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). The strongest relationship existed between experiences of personal derogation and psychological well-being (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Thus, the aims of the present study were to: 1) Validate the Swedish versions of two instruments, the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and the Organizational Justice Questionnaire (OJQ). 2) Test if and how organizational justice is related to workplace bullying. 3) Test how organizational justice and workplace bullying is related to wellbeing.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants (N=180) were randomly assigned from a public sector company with 670 employees. There were three dropouts, thus the sample consisted of 177 participants. The sample consisted of 136 women and 45 men with a mean age of 47.

### **Material**

#### **Workplace bullying**

Workplace bullying was measured with the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ). NAQ consist of three subscales; work related, person related and intimidating. Work-related (7 items), example item: Having your opinions and views ignored; person-related (12 items), example item: Spreading of gossip and rumors about you; and intimidating (3 items), example item: Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse.

The version of the NAQ-R (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009) used in this study has 22 items, measuring exposure to bullying within the last 6 months, with the response alternatives: "Never," "Now and then," "Monthly," "Weekly" and "Daily". A single-item measuring self-labelled victimization from bullying during the last 6 months was then included after presenting the respondents with a global definition of bullying (see Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Salin, 2001). This was followed by a number of questions regarding the experience of bullying, such as frequency of encounters, duration of experience and who the main perpetrators were, etc. Participants were then given six alternatives: "no," "yes, very rarely," "yes, now and then," "yes, several times per month," "yes, several times per week" and "yes, almost daily."

#### **Organizational justice**

Perceptions of organizational justice were measured with a questionnaire developed by Colquitt (2001). OJQ consist of four subscales: procedural, distributive, interpersonal, and informational. Procedural justice, 7 items. Example item: To what extent have you had influence over the outcome arrived at by work place procedures? Distributive

justice, 4 items. Example item: To what extent does your outcome reflect what you have contributed to the organization? Interpersonal justice, 4 items. Example item: To what extent has the authority figure that enacted the procedure treated you with respect? Informational justice, 5 items. Example item: To what extent did the authority figure who enacted the procedure communicate details in a timely manner?

**Well-being**

Well-being was measured with the Flourishing Scale (FS) (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi & Biswas-Diener, 2010) that consists of eight items describing aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships, to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life. All items are phrased in a positive direction. Each item of the FS is answered on a 1–7 scale that ranges from Strong Disagreement to Strong Agreement. High scores signify that respondents view themselves in positive terms in important areas of functioning. Example items: “I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me”. “I am optimistic about my future.”

**Procedure**

The OJQ was translated from English to Swedish and then back translated. No ambiguous items were found. The NAQ was translated from English, Norwegian, and Spanish to Swedish by three independent translators. The three translated versions were almost identical. Thus, both instruments could be used after only minor adjustments. The contact was established prior to the research with the main union for public sector workers. A local union represent did a random selection to create the sample. All participants in the sample were requested to fill out the questionnaire. They were told that after completion of the survey results will be given to them. Prior to analyses, a target sample was detracted from the whole sample. Target sample being defined as all participants perceiving being bullied on any of the items in the NAQ.

**Results**

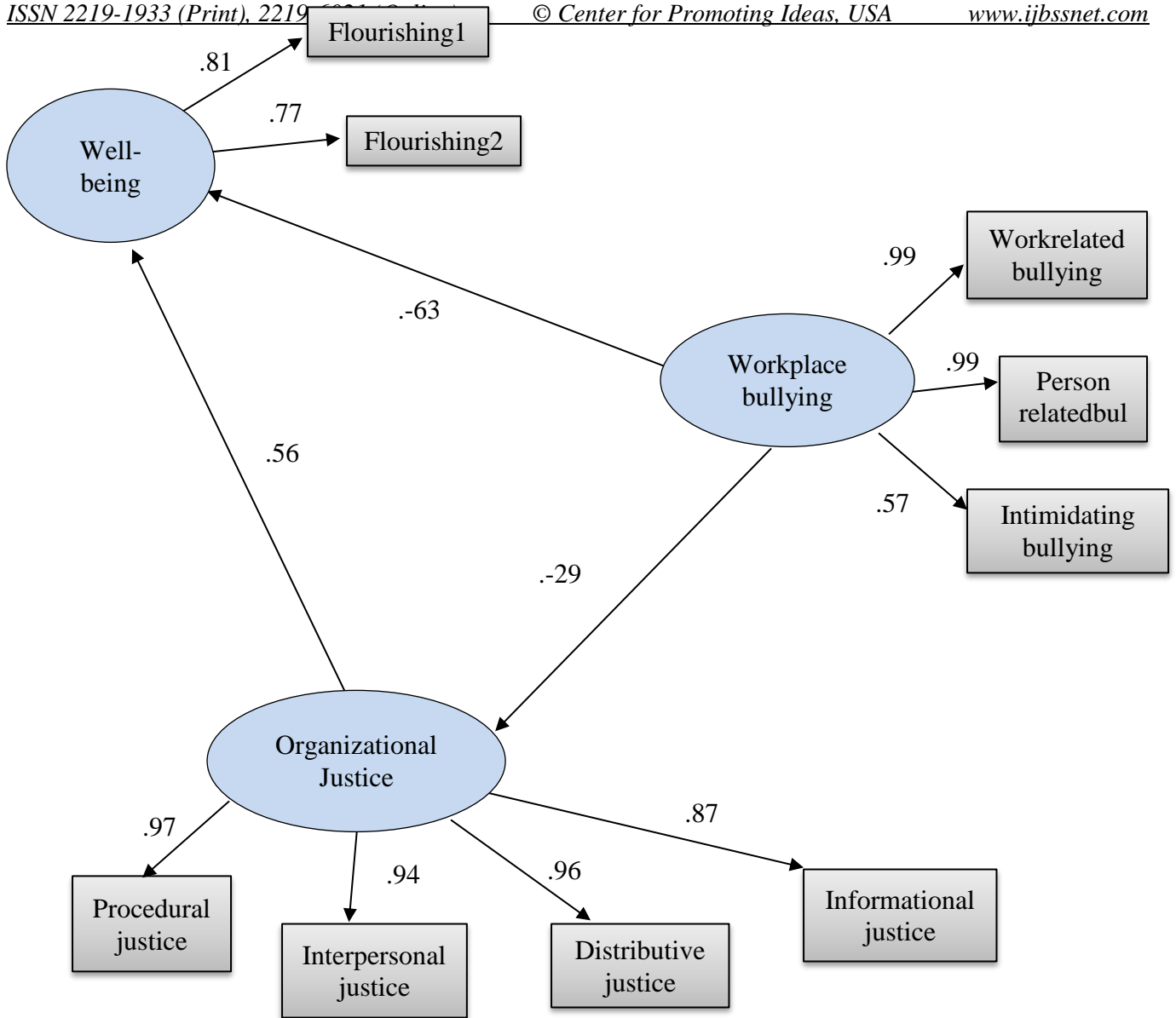
The reliability of both NAQ and OJQ was very high (table 1). Although intimidation bullying and distributive justice less than the other five factors. Just as in many studies before (see e g Einarsen, 2000) the target sample in this study consist of 22 percent of the whole sample. Intimidating type of bullying had less association with organizational justice than work-related and person-related bullying (table 1). All three workplace bullying factors had a negative correlation with wellbeing and all four organizational justice factors had a positive correlation with wellbeing (table 1).

**Table 1: Means, standard deviations, first order correlations, and Cronbach’s alpha values of the study variables.**

	Means (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Work related bullying (1)	2.09 1.31	<b>.98</b>							
Person related bullying (2)	1.89 1.04	.98	<b>.97</b>						
Intimidating bullying (3)	1.50 .70	.57	.56	<b>.85</b>					
Procedural justice (4)	2.54 .78	-.31	-.33	.06	<b>.94</b>				
Distributive justice (5)	2.64 .77	-.21	-.22	.05	.92	<b>.89</b>			
Interpersonal justice (6)	2.69 .78	-.35	-.36	.04	.94	.90	<b>.90</b>		
Informational justice (7)	2.69 .77	-.14	-.16	.05	.83	.92	.75	<b>.94</b>	
Well-being (8)		-.81	-.81	-.61	.62	.64	.71	.73	<b>.87</b>
		.000	.000	.01	.001	.001	.001	.001	.001

Note: All measurement on a 5 degree scale. N= 177

The relation between workplace bullying and organizational justice was modest but there associations with wellbeing were strong (figure 1). SEM analyses indicate a strong model fit for the whole sample and no model fit for the target sample (table 2).



**Figure 1: Structural equation modeling of the relationship between workplace bullying, organizational justice and well-being.**

**Table 2: Goodness-of-Fit for Confirmatory Factor Analyses of complete model**

	<u>Chi-square</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>RMSEA</u>	<u>CMIN/DF</u>	<u>CFI</u>
<u>Complete sample</u> <u>N=177</u>	<u>98.08</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>.04</u>	<u>2.08</u>	<u>.97</u>
<u>Target sample</u> <u>N=42</u>	<u>103.49</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>.15</u>	<u>2.93</u>	<u>.67</u>

### Discussion

To conclude, there is an association between organizational justice and workplace bullying. The relation between these two constructs is however, moderate despite a strong model fit of the Structural educational modeling.

One reason for this moderate relation could be a threshold phenomenon. People may respond differently to extreme bad work climate than to moderate bad work climate. That is, perhaps only extreme workplace bullying correlate with other variables such as organizational justice. We do not know what the threshold for this 'extremeness' is but it could be one explanation for the modest correlations between work climate and bullying (Eisele, 2015), and the modest correlation found here between organizational justice and workplace bullying. This highlights the importance of analyzing the target sample separately.

Perceiving organizational injustice and perceiving being mistreated at work should have negative effects on wellbeing. This was confirmed in the present study. Organizational justice correlated positively with wellbeing and workplace bullying correlated negatively with wellbeing. However, the joint effect of both independent variables on well-being was less than suspected.

The lesson learned is to develop methods to discover more severe workplace bullying. It is important to analyze different subsamples separately but the differences between perceiving bullying and suffer from bullying need to be addressed more. The target sample was rather small. Despite this shortcoming, the study has shown that workplace bullying is equally important for general well-being than organizational justice.

People in charge are often unwilling to accept workplace bullying as a problem and therefore do not do much to prevent bullying. The lack of routines to deal with mistreatments can be seen as a dysfunction of work organizations. Deviant organizational behavior should be studied more directly. That is, current measurements of general work climate or organizational culture are too vague to be able to discover these kinds of dysfunctional ties. A suggestion for further studies is therefore to more directly approach dysfunctional aspects of organizational behavior.

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