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A study on Relationships of Individual Trait, Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Withdrawal Behavior: The Mediating Effect of Empathy

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Abstract

A lot of research works have been done to explore relationships between personality trait and employee behavior in organization. This study focused on relationships among guilt-proneness trait, organizational citizenship behavior and withdrawal behavior. Besides, we attempted to examine the mediating role of empathy. Guilt-proneness is a particular trait that has caught increasing attention of organization psychologist. A better understanding of these relationships will help improve employee performance. The method to carry out this study was using a survey. To address research goals, several statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted. Results indicated that: (1) guilt-proneness is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively related to withdrawal behavior; (2) empathy is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively related to withdrawal behavior; (3) empathy partially mediate the relation between guilt-proneness and organizational citizenship behavior. The practical implications based on the results of this study were discussed.

Keywords: guilt, organizational citizenship behavior, withdrawal behavior, empathy

1. Introduction

The effect of personality trait on employee behaviors in organization has been caught attention by organizational psychologists. Among numerous personality traits, guilt-proneness is a particular personality which has caught increasing notice in recent years. However, there are only a few studies on guilt and organizational behaviors. Our central goal is to investigate whether individual's tendency of guilt-proneness poses effect on employee organizational behaviors and the interaction of guilt-proneness with empathy, to better determine their influence in organization settings.

Organizations often benefit when their employees are willing to contribute to the organization above and beyond their formally defined job descriptions. These so-called organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) come in a variety of forms, including helping behavior, sportsmanship, loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Equally important to

organizations are those negative behaviors like withdrawal behaviors. Given their impacts to organizations, understanding the causes of OCBs and withdrawal behaviors is an important task.

Although a strong body of evidence has suggested that positive affectivity tends to be associated with higher levels of positive organizational emotion or behavior and negative affectivity tends to be associated with lower levels, guilt-proneness, being seen as one kind of negative emotion or personality trait, has shown inconsistent influences on employee organizational behaviors.

Previous studies have suggested that guilt may promote pro-social behavior (Teroni & Bruun, 2011) and negatively correlated with unethical decision making (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011). Flynn and Schaumberg's (2011) research demonstrated that a dispositional tendency to feel guilt motivates individuals to exert greater effort on their work-related tasks that, in turn, strengthens their affinity for the organization. Individuals who are more guilt-prone reported higher levels of organizational attachment. Their work has explained how some unique qualities of being guilt-prone can actually predict positive attitudes toward the firm. However, literatures have only reported the relationship between guilt-proneness and individual's emotion and positive behavior in organization. Thus, the focus of this study was to investigate relationships between guilt-proneness and both the individual's positive (organizational citizenship behavior, OCB) and negative (withdrawal behavior) behaviors in organization.

Given that guilt is generally seen as a negative emotion, it would seem intuitive that guilt-proneness, a proneness to experience guilt, should correlate negatively with expected organizational behaviors such as OCBs, and positively correlate with unexpected organizational behaviors such as withdrawal behaviors, we propose that a proneness to experience guilt may not. If an employee is prone to experience guilt, then that employee may work harder to avoid and repair negative outcomes such as helping others or exhibiting sportsmanship. This leads us to put forth the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Guilt-proneness will be positively related to OCBs;

Hypothesis 2: Guilt-proneness will be negatively related to withdrawal behaviors;

Another question is, because the link between guilt-proneness and individual's behavior in organization is counterintuitive, is there any variable to mediate the relationship between guilt-proneness and organizational behaviors?

Given that individuals who tend to feel guilty are highly averse to disappointing others (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996), they may feel more motivated to exhibit high levels of task effort in order to fulfill their assigned roles than do their less guilt-prone colleagues. In addition, guilt-prone people are generally more supportive in interpersonal relationships, offering comfort and aid to close others in need (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). Thus, we suggest that individuals who are more guilt-prone will exhibit more empathy to other people. In addition, the link between guilt-proneness and organizational behaviors are influenced by greater empathy. Particularly, we suggest that empathy enhances guilt-prone employees' levels of OCBs. That is, guilt-prone employees will exhibit higher levels of OCBs in their organization because they have more empathy than their less guilt-prone colleagues. This theorizing about the relationship between guilt-proneness, empathy, and organizational behaviors leads us to put forth the following set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Guilt-proneness will be positively related to empathy;

*Hypothesis 4: Empathy will mediate the relationship between guilt-*proneness *and organizational citizenship behaviors.*

Hypothesis 5: Empathy will mediate the relationship between guilt and withdrawal behaviors.

2. Method

We used a survey to carry out this study.

Participants

A total of 247 participants were included in this study. All participants were current fulltime employees of various organizations. Participants completed the survey on the website (149 samples) or by a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (98 samples). The background characteristic description of all participants is present in table 1.

Measures

Guilt-proneness. Guilt-proneness inventory was consisted of eight 7-point-scale items which were selected from Cohen et al.'s (2011) Guilt and Shame Proneness (GASP) scale. The Cronbach's α = .79, indicating a sufficient reliability.

Empathy. Seven 5-point-scale items were selected from Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 2009) scale which mainly measured perspective-taking.

Organizational citizenship behaviors. Seven 5-point-scale items were selected from Williams & Anderson's (1991) OCB scale. The Cronbach's α =.88 , indicating a good internal consistency reliability.

Withdrawal behaviors. We constructed a seven-item inventory to measure employees' withdrawal behaviors. The Cronbach's α =.759 , indicating a sufficient internal consistency reliability.

Data analysis

To address research goals, several statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted.

3. Results

Sample description

Table 1 represents the general background characteristics for the total samples.

Table 1. General description of the total sample.

Background	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	88	35.6
	Female	159	64.4
Age	Under 20	4	1.6
	21-25	109	44.1
	26-30	40	16.2
	31-35	20	8.1
	36-40	13	5.3
	41-45	16	6.5
	Above 46	45	18.2
Position	Senior Manager	10	4
	Middle Manager	18	7.3
	Junior Manager	36	14.6
	General employees	147	59.5
	Others	36	14.6
Education degree	Graduate school	37	15
	Undergraduate	183	74.1
	Senior high school	25	10.1
	Junior high school	2	0.8

Correlation analysis

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables are presented in table 2. As shown, guilt-proneness is positively related to empathy ($r = .166$, $p < .01$) and OCB ($r = .294$, $p < .001$); empathy is positively related to OCB ($r = .296$, $p < .001$) and negatively related to withdrawal behavior ($r = -.178$, $p < .001$). However, correlation between guilt-proneness and withdrawal behavior is not significant. The results show support for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3, but not Hypothesis 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Guilt-proneness	5.67	.88	1			
2. Empathy	3.68	.59	.166**	1		
3. OCB	3.85	.50	.294***	.296***	1	
4. Withdrawal Behavior	2.70	.70	-.048	-.178**	-.214**	1

Hierarchical regression analysis

In order to investigate the mediating role of empathy, several procedures of hierarchical regression analysis were conducted. First, the simple linear regression was adapted. Regression coefficient was non-significant when withdrawal behavior was regressed on guilt-proneness (β = -.012, p > .05), thus the procedure to explore the mediating role of empathy in the guilt-withdrawal behavior relationship was suspended. As for the mediating role of empathy in the guilt- OCB relationship, regression results are shown in Table 3. Regression coefficient was significant when empathy was regressed on guilt-proneness (β = .190, p < .01). Also, regression coefficient was significant when OCB was regressed on guilt (β = .310, p < .001). Furthermore, when OCB was regressed on both guilt and empathy, regression coefficient was significant for empathy (β = .245, p < .001), and the regression coefficient was reduced for guilt-pronemess (β = .263, p < .001). Thus empathy demonstrated a partial mediating effect in the guilt- OCB relationship. The hierarchical regression analysis results show support for Hypothesis 4, but not Hypothesis 5.

Table 3. Results of Hierarchical regression analysis.

	Empathy		OCBs			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Control						
sex	-.051	-.090	.036	-.028	.051	-.006
age	-.144	-.165*	-.137*	-.171	-.094	-.130
IV						
Guilt-proneness		.190**		.310***		.263***
Mediator						
Empathy					.295***	.245***
R^2	.091	.125	.026	.115	.105	.167
Adjusted R^2	.057	.088	-.011	.077	.067	.128
ΔR^2		.033		.089***	.079***	.052***
F-value	2.649**	3.360**	.707	3.059**	2.780**	4.285***

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

In sum, our research results indicated that: (1) guilt-proneness is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively related to withdrawal behavior; (2) empathy is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively related to withdrawal behavior; (3) empathy partially mediate the relation between guilt-proneness and organizational citizenship behavior. Based on these findings, we provide some suggestions as follows:

Psychologists and organizational managers tended to believe that individuals who are more prone to experience positive affect are more likely to develop a positive affinity for the organization. Our results suggest that such positive-positive relationship does not always exist. The feeling of guilt is negative, but it may induce some positive behaviors such as OCBs and reduce some behaviors such as withdrawal behaviors. Another crucial ability for employees is empathy, which may also increase employees' positive behaviors and decrease employees' negative behaviors. We suggest that organizational management should give attention to employees' and applicants' guilt-proneness trait and empathy ability. The employee selection and training program are suggested to include such competences.

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