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CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Words, Trust, and Cultural Experiences Can Affect Involvement in an Organization

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Readers of this section will encounter three separate sets of effects regarding when and how we become involved with or avoid people and organizations. The explanations range from trust to verbal aggression to cultural awareness. Filiz Tabak and Nhung T. Hendy examined how trust might aid work engagement through links from organizational job embeddedness and perceived organizational support (“Work Engagement: Trust as a Mediator of the Impact of Organizational Job Embeddedness and Perceived Organizational Support”). Nurul Ain Hidayah binti Abas and Kathleen Otto add to evidence that it’s not only sticks and stones, because words really do hurt us (“Interpersonal Mistreatment, Organizational Attitudes and Well-Being: The Impact of Instigator’s Hierarchical Position and Demographic Characteristics”). Kerri Anne Crowne and Robert L. Engle studied effects that may guide preparations or selections of individuals for the increasing number of work and study assignments away from a home country (“Antecedents of Cross-Cultural Adaptation Stress in Short-Term International Assignments”).

Tabak and Hendy

Organizations value the likely energy, identification, and high performance of employees motivated in their work through mechanisms such as work engagement. Organizational work engagement (OWE) is a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006). Tabak and Hendy hypothesize that both organizational job embeddedness (OJE) and perceived organizational support contribute to desired levels of engagement, and that trust in a leader mediates this contribution. They describe job embeddedness as “the combination of relationships employees develop with other individuals on-or off-the-job, perceived

fit between employees’ and an employer’s (and the community’s) values, and the sacrifice involved if the employees leave their jobs and communities” (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). They refer to perceived organizational support (POS) as “employees’ perceptions of the degree to which an organization cares about and values their contributions and is interested in their general well-being” (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Tabak and Hendy then model the dynamics among these variables, with trust in a leader as a mediator linking OJE and POS to OWE. Their review explains that trust relates to many important variables in separate relationships, and they note and seek to reduce the scarcity of research comprehensively addressing (a) the mechanisms connecting embeddedness, job attitudes, and behaviors, (b) the effects of trust in leadership as an antecedent of work engagement and as an extension of OJE, and (c) the dynamics between POS and engagement. In a cross-sectional study of a local county government organization, they found that POS and OJE both significantly influenced work engagement through supervisory trust, evidence that all of these variables indicate key job resources regarding work engagement.

Abas and Otto

Verbal abuse and aggression in the workplace is a widespread problem with serious negative consequences. While our focus on workplace aggression often turns to acts of physical violence, these smaller acts of interpersonal mistreatment take a major toll on the quality of work life, employee productivity, and employee health (Neuman, 2012). It is logical to expect that verbal abuse in the workplace would have a dampening effect on employees’

enthusiasm for their positions. Hurt feelings and a loss of commitment for the organization are likely to follow, as we have learned from previous research. But, as Abas and Otto outline for us, the source of the verbal abuse may well have an impact on the target. The authors explore the role of hierarchical position, age, and gender on the consequences of verbal abuse in the workplace.

Using an experimental research design, Abas and Otto presented vignettes to participants that described scenarios in which they were verbally abused. Vignettes differed with regard to the source of the verbal abuse, manipulating the hierarchical relationship (supervisor vs. colleague), the gender of the source, and the relative age (older/younger).

In terms of consequences, the authors looked at the effects of verbal abuse on organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and positive/negative emotions. Overall, they found that hierarchical position is important in explaining attitudes among employees who have experienced verbal abuse, in that mistreatment by supervisors is more damaging than that from colleagues. Further, gender played a significant role, with mistreatment by males increasing turnover intentions. Finally, they found that the age of the source of mistreatment also had a significant impact on positive emotions of the target.

This study adds to our understanding of the impact of interpersonal mistreatment, and reinforces previous findings that verbal abuse undermines the emotional well-being of employees and leads to undesirable workplace outcomes. It also helps us to understand the more subtle nuances of how mistreatment by different organizational members affects workers.

Crowne and Engle

The brevity of short-term international assignments may not only offer organizations low direct costs and minimal disruption of families and careers, but also add increased adaptation stress on travelers with limited time to adjust while accomplishing a short-term task. In choosing whom to send on short-term trips, a manager can easily check the possibly relevant control variables of age, gender, and prior international experience. Crowne and Engle used a student sample that seemed relevant to examine the effects of cultural intelligence (CQ) as a key variable, plus perceived language fluency and the number of previous international experiences, on cross-cultural adaptation stress. They review and explain the elements of “cognitive cross-cultural intelligence” as aiding an individual’s ability to deal with adaptation stress that naturally arises while assigned in a foreign country.

The separate studied elements that might contribute to reductions in adaptation stress included meta-cognitive cultural intelligence, cognitive cultural intelligence,

motivational cultural intelligence, and behavioral cultural intelligence. Additionally, they hypothesized that higher levels of perceived native-language fluency would reduce cross-cultural adaptation stress, reasoning that such fluency would provide such advantages as knowledge, communication skill, and perspective to aid adjustment. Crown and Engle found in their self-selected sample that lower stress associated with increased motivational CQ and lower (not higher) levels of perceived language ability. Older students and female students experienced higher levels of adaptation stress. Crowne and Engle comment that “Motivational CQ—the individual’s desire to direct attention and energy toward pursuing multicultural experiences (Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2011)—when evaluated along with the other factors, picks up enough of those factors’ ability to explain the variance in stress levels to become the single dominant CQ predictive factor with regard to stress.” These several findings both inform managerial decisions about international assignments and suggest targeted research into the topic.

Together, these three new articles contribute to our understanding of how people react to each other in a variety of organizational circumstances. Each will likely stimulate additional research.

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