

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR, TRAIT ANXIETY AND TRAIT ANGER: A LATENT TRANSITION ANALYSIS

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Introduction

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) are intentional harmful and costly acts for the organization and its members. Understanding them at a process level is essential for preventing and managing CWB.

Trait anger — the tendency to experience anger in various situations over time — was found to be one of the strongest predictor for CWB (e.g., meta-analysis, Hershcovis, Turner et al., 2007). Individuals high on trait anger engage in hostile behaviors as they tend to perceive the context as frustrating and are also very sensitive to provocation.

Trait anxiety — the tendency to feel threatened in stressful situations — is also related to CWB (it leads to perceiving more stressors and consequent negative responses).

It appears that studies considering the relationship between anger trait and CWB and anxiety trait and CWB, respectively are cross-sectional, which seriously limits the understanding of the traits' role in the process of CWB development. Therefore, a limited insight exists with respect to whether personality affects the intraindividual process of CWBs' transformation over time.

Objective. In order to address this caveat, our study investigates the intraindividual transitions from one moment to another between different levels of CWB and whether trait anxiety and trait anger are predicting these transition probabilities.

Methods

Data

2400 observations from 8-wave data (time lag of 3 weeks) collected from 300 Romanian employees (Mage = 36.18, SD = 9.94; %F = 56.7)

Measures

CWB - Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist 10-item version (Spector et al., 2010).

Trait anger – STAXI-2 (Spielberger, 1988)

Trait anxiety – STAI-Y (Spielberger, 2007)

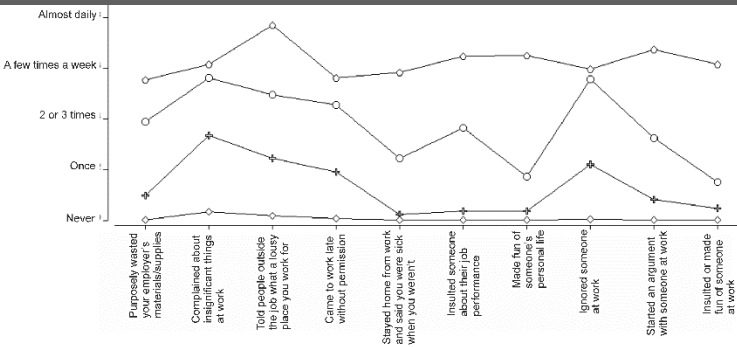
Data analysis

A three-step latent Markov model analysis was conducted in Latent Gold 5.1.

In the first stage a latent class model was used to isolate different latent classes based on the frequency of CWB.

Second, the latent class probabilities were used to study within persons transitions between states over time.

Finally, covariates (trait anxiety and trait anger) were introduced to test whether they were associated with the initial states and with the probabilities to transition from one state of CWB to another.



Profile plot of the latent states of CWB

hardly once +
once ◇
occasionally ○
frequently ◻

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Continued

Results

Latent class analysis

The latent class analysis revealed that **four latent states of CWB fitted the data best** as the BIC of this model was the lowest.

The first three latent states contained between 31% and 32% of the participants while the fourth contained 5.6%.

After averaging the probabilities of choosing each response option across the CWB items, it was revealed that:

- the first latent state was characterized by “hardly once” reporting CWB;
- the second latent state was characterized by the probability of reporting “once” CWB;
- the third latent state was typified by the high probability to “occasionally” engage in CWB;
- the last latent state yielded the highest probability to report “frequent” CWBs.

3-Step Markov model

The 3-step Markov model indicated that both trait anxiety and trait anger were positively associated with the initial states of CWB.

The Wald-test yielded also that both traits were significantly related with the likelihood to transition to another state as compared to not transitioning (stationary probabilities).

Discussion

Trait anxiety seems to favorize the escalation from a lower CWB state to the ones with higher frequencies.

Trait anger appears to be less important in this process. It is involved only in flipping back and forth between the states of “hardly once” and “once” doing CWB.

The results are intriguing, since the bulk of previous research argued for the key role of trait anger and only few studies considered the role of trait anxiety. Hence, our results emphasize the crucial role of analyzing the CWB phenomena unfolding overtime.

Overall, being rather anxious in nature favors CWB more than being angry. A potential explanation is that anxiety enhances the perception of stressors and the experience of stress across situations, this a well-known predictor of CWB. Future avenues of research need to focus on a more thorough differential analysis as regards the personality predictors of CWB, as anxiety can be a game-changer when compared with narrow traits, integrity features or the popular Big Five trait approach.

Transition probabilities predicted by Trait ANXIETY

hardly once	once
hardly once	occasional
occasional	frequent
frequent	occasional

Transition probabilities predicted by Trait ANGER

hardly once	once
once	hardly once

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