Positive affect predicting worker psychological response to cyber-bullying in the high-tech industry in Northern Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Online cyber-bullying has become a frequent occurrence in organizations. To understand individual dispositions and the organizational factors that effect online cyber-bullying, the present study investigates the relationship among positive affect, the perceived organizational innovation climate, and psychological responses to cyber-bullying. The research samples for this study are staff members from the high-tech manufacturing industry in Northern Taiwan. A total of 396 responses were validated for confirmatory factor analyses, correlation coefficient, and structural equation modeling (SEM). The research results revealed that a positive affect (PA) has a positive influence on perceived organizational innovation climate. Moreover, the perceived organizational innovation climate has a negative influence on psychological responses to cyber-bullying. Finally, the experience of cyber-bullying was positively correlated to the psychological response of being cyber-bullied, i.e., the more an individual had experienced cyber-bullying, the higher psychological response. The results further indicated an interesting finding for the mediating role of perceived organizational innovation climate between positive affect and psychological responses to cyber-bullying. Therefore, organizations can enhance the positive affect for employees and foster an effective organization innovation climate, so those workers are better adaptable to cope with cyber-bullying.

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1. Introduction

Cyber-bullying has become another form of workplace bullying and has become an issue for workplace competition (Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). Cyber-bullying involves the use of information, communication devices, and services to bully, harass, or intimidate individuals or groups (Bryce, 2008). Unlike traditional bullying, the traumatized victims of cyber-bullying are incapable of controverting the bullying because they do not know the identities of the perpetrators. As a result, victims who suffer from cyber-bullying may have negative effects that may include violent behavior when they are under pressure. In this context, the reasons behind cyber-bullying deserve further exploration. A previous study indicated that most victims are subjected to cyber-bullying in the workplace because of personality traits (Ragozzino & O'Brien, 2009). Positive psychology arises from the need to add a positive side to the predominant historical focus on pathology in psychology (Kanis, Brinkman, & Perry, 2009). Positive affect have been shown to be related to many positive outcomes, such as extraversion, physical

well-being, and adaptive coping (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Therefore, the positive affect influence psychological responses to cyber-bullying is worthy of exploration.

Heyman (2008) argued that people with a strong work ethic in a competitive work environment, such as the high-tech industry, become the targets of jealousy, and may experience intense bullying. Therefore, the emotional effects (i.e., psychological responses) of people with different levels of organizational innovation climate perception may be interplayed when confronted with bullying. It is plausible that meditation promotes psychological health because it facilitates individual insight into their self-feelings and lead to a more congruent self-evaluation (Vallacher & Nowak, 1994). In cases of positive self-esteem, this is not surprising. In fact, a positive self-evaluation may be perceived as acknowledging one's strengths. In contrast, expressing a negative self-evaluation may seem maladaptive (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). Low self-esteem relates to a high level of emotional effects from cyber-bullying, as examined in this study. Research has revealed that when people are bullied in the workplace for an extended period, they often experience negative effects (Liefooghe, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Thus, it would be helpful to know whether depressed individuals engage in the positive affect with the intention of reducing the intensity of being the recipient of cyber-bullying and the psychological effects post cyber-bullying along with those high-tech employees in Taiwan.

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2. Literature review

In this study, the focus on the self and non-judgmental awareness, such as positive psychology, may prove to be particularly useful for the study of cyber-bullying. Would positive affect for organizational innovation reflect individual response to cyber-bullying? This study answers this question and requires a careful consideration of the underlying factors of cyber-bullying.

2.1. Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is different from bullying in the physical world in several ways: the perpetrators of cyber-bullying are hidden; the number of bullied individuals is greater; and the speed of information sharing is faster (Belsey, 2006). Cyber-bullying occurs via deliberate acts such as sending threatening and aggressive emails, text messages, and/or instant messages to hurt or embarrass another person (Willard, 2007). Therefore, cyber-bullying is further defined as using information and communication technologies (such as email and cell phones text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites, and online personal polling websites) to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group with the intention to harm (Belsey, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvallo, & Trippett, 2006). Mishna, Saini, and Solomon (2009) indicated that cyber-bullying behavior is more serious than general bullying because cyber-bullies are usually anonymous (i.e. virtual identities) to spread rumors or video clips.

2.2. Psychological response to cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is called an "invisible fist." Most researchers believe that if a person is the object of negative behavior in the workplace, a majority of them will react emotionally (Saunders, Huynh, & Delahunty, 2007). Psychological research into the consequences of being the recipient of bullying has mainly focused on affective disorders and psychological constructs (Mills, Guerin, Lynch, Daly, & Fitzpatrick, 2004). After being bullied, victims usually have physiological and psychological symptoms, such as stress, anxiety, tension, fear, depression, loss of confidence, low job satisfaction, and decreased commitment to the organization (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Mika, Marko, & Jussi, 2000). According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), although cyber-bullying does not actually cause physiological pain, showed that 33% of the recipients of bullying felt depressed. Smith et al. (2006), and Slonje and Smith (2008) have shown that 38% of the recipients of bullying felt physiologically and mentally distraught. Victims of cyber-bullying may be at a higher risk of suicide more than victims of traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). A majority of the cyber-bullied victims opt not to confront their bully, i.e. the aggressor. De Wet (2010) also found that victims of workplace bullying were reluctant to confront their bully, but some do try to act assertively. Workplace bullying ultimately causes distress in the work environment and even increased employee risk of illness (Nelson & Simmons, 2003).

2.3. Cyber-bullying experience

Mishna et al. (2009) found that there are several types of cyber-bullying: posting, coercing, backstabbing, and masquerading. The research participants from Mishna et al. (2009) believed that aggressors concealed their identity in order to bully and to increase their power. They described several stealthy acts that are regular occurrences on the Internet, e.g., email, MSN, social networking sites, and gaming sites. Ybarra, Diener-West, and Leaf (2007) indicated that cyber-bullying behavior have no regional restrictions; that cyber-bullying perpetrators do not have a concrete identity, appearance, or any co-sharing elements. Monks and Smith (2006) have stated that cyber-bullying is performed indirectly, such as spreading false rumors, relational bullying, social communication bullying, or by requesting companions to not share information with an individual. For example, Willard (2006, 2007) divided the purposes of cyber-bullying into several types: (1) online fights, such as flaming, which refers to the arbitrary spreading of offensive language and information with the purpose of making the person who sees the message feel awkward; (2) slandering, which refers to the distribution of photographs or false rumors about an individual to destroy the reputation and social relationships of that person; (3) intrusion into an individual's web account to distribute false information to defame the victim or to send out information to cut off the victim's friendship with another person; (4) spreading an individual's secret or dispatching a message to embarrass him or her; (5) usage of social groups on the Internet to exclude an individual; and (6) repeated transmissions of the same message to paralyze an individual's mailbox.

Experience in this study referred to exposure, meaning that the target does not consciously have to be aware of the experience of cyber-bullying. In some cases, workplace cyber-bullying could be seen as a psychosocial hazard, a hazard that emanates from the cyber world. The victims consider themselves mistreated and have been found to suffer significant psychological harm like bothering, embarrassment, anger, upset, stressed, worried, afraid, alone, defenseless, depressed, threatened, and distressed (Kwan & Skoric, 2013; Slonje et al., 2013). In this sense, our first hypothesis is:

H1: Cyber-bullying experience is significantly correlated to the psychological responses of being the recipient of cyber-bullying.

2.4. Organization innovative climate

Organizational Climate is defined as "the shared perceptions of employees concerning the practices, procedures, and types of behaviors that are rewarded and supported in a particular setting" (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). According to Ekvall (1994), the climate is shaped by the interaction between the organization and its members. The organization offers opportunities, as well as boundaries, for the possible interaction and climate that has developed. Within the organization, its structures and processes affect individuals, personalities, attitudes, knowledge, and experience (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Organizational climate has an impact on creativity and may prevent innovation from developing (Ekvall, 1994). Organizational climate research also considers whether the climate should be regarded holistically or as different sub-climates (Arvidsson, Johansson, Ek, & Akselsson, 2006). Workplace bullying has been linked to a lack of social support from colleagues and rivalry between colleagues (Schat & Kelloway, 2003). This focus allows us to consider the social context factors, such as mutual trust, interdependence, openness to others, and allowance of the realization via worker perceptions and empirical information. This study has moved beyond organizational climate to an innovation climate. However, conflict can easily be the source of bullying with the behavior as deliberate and purposeful (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007) and influenced perceptions of organizational innovative climate in relation to the attitude of being the recipient of bullying (Vartia, 1996) results in significant long-term physical and emotional effects (MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray, & Aldous, 2010). Our next hypothesis:

H2: Perceived organizational innovation climate is significantly correlated to the psychological responses to cyber-bullying.