



## Explaining workplace delinquency: The role of Honesty–Humility, ethical culture, and employee surveillance



Reinout E. de Vries<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Jean-Louis van Gelder<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> University of Twente, The Netherlands

<sup>c</sup> Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), The Netherlands

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 8 March 2015

Received in revised form 1 June 2015

Accepted 3 June 2015

Available online 18 June 2015

#### Keywords:

HEXACO

Honesty–Humility

Conscientiousness

Ethical culture

Employee surveillance

Workplace delinquency

Occupational crime

Routine Activity Theory

### ABSTRACT

In this research the effects of personality and organizational characteristics on workplace delinquency were investigated. In a sample of 455 respondents from a wide variety of organizations, two personality traits, HEXACO Honesty–Humility and Conscientiousness, and two organizational characteristics, ethical culture and employee surveillance, explained a significant amount of variance in workplace delinquency. No interaction effects between personality and organizational practices in the explanation of workplace delinquency were found. Results are discussed in light of the role of personality and Routine Activity Theory in predicting unethical behaviors, delinquency, and/or occupational crime in organizations.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Workplace delinquency is extremely costly for organizations. For instance, employee theft in the retail sector alone had an estimated cost of \$18.1 billion in lost revenue in 2012 in the U.S. (Hollinger & Adams, 2014). Figures such as these may even be conservative, given that they do not take into account ‘gray’ zones of workplace delinquency, such as ‘time’ theft, ‘job benefit’ losses (e.g., telephone misuse), vandalism, and lower performance due to, for instance, drug use at work. Furthermore, loss estimates may be much higher still if one takes into account additional social costs, such as ensuing conflicts and distrust among employers and employees. Consequently, for organizations, the prevention of workplace delinquency carries major financial and social benefits.

Prevention can take two forms: 1) selection of the ‘right’ employees, and 2) modification of employee behaviors through (informal and formal) organizational control systems. In this study, we examine both. Specifically, we focus on employee integrity as captured by the HEXACO Honesty–Humility personality trait, which has been found to be the most important personality predictor of (workplace) delinquency (e.g., Lee, Ashton, & De Vries, 2005), and on two organizational control systems, that is a) an organization’s ethical culture and b) its

use of employee surveillance practices. Additionally, we investigate whether Honesty–Humility interacts with ethical culture and employee surveillance in the explanation of workplace delinquency.

### 1. HEXACO Honesty–Humility

The HEXACO model of personality posits that personality is most optimally described using six dimensions that together form the HEXACO acronym, that is, Honesty–Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Like its predecessor, the Big Five model of personality (Goldberg, 1990), the HEXACO model is grounded in a cross-cultural lexical approach, and although there is still debate on the ‘optimal’ structure of personality, recent evidence suggests that the maximum cross-culturally replicable personality space indeed comprises six instead of five factors (De Raad et al., 2014).

The main difference between the Big Five model and the HEXACO model is the inclusion of Honesty–Humility in the latter. Honesty–Humility is defined on its positive pole by sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty, and on its negative pole by slyness, injustice, greediness, and pretentiousness. At work, Honesty–Humility has been found to be negatively related to all kinds of counterproductive or delinquent behaviors, such as counterproductive work behavior (Wiltshire, Bourdage, & Lee, 2014; Zettler & Hilbig, 2010), workplace delinquency or anti-social behavior (Lee, Ashton, & De Vries, 2005; Lee, Ashton, &

\* Corresponding author at: VU University Amsterdam, Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Van der Boechorststraat 1, 1081 BT Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel.: +31 20 5988718.

E-mail address: [re.de.vries@vu.nl](mailto:re.de.vries@vu.nl) (R.E. de Vries).

Shin, 2005), sexual harassment (Lee, Gizzarone, & Ashton, 2003), and unethical leadership (De Vries, 2012). Accordingly, people low in Honesty–Humility seem to be more likely to use and abuse the organization for personal—e.g., material, social, and sexual—gains. In line with these findings, we expect Honesty–Humility to be negatively related to workplace delinquency.

## 2. Ethical culture and employee surveillance

Ethical culture and employee surveillance can be considered two different organizational solutions to employee norm violations. Ethical culture, defined by Kaptein (2009, p. 262) as “the informal control system of an organization [which] encompasses the experiences, assumptions, and expectations of managers and employees about how the organization prevents them from behaving unethically and encourages them to behave ethically” can be considered a ‘soft control’ system. That is, ethical culture influences behaviors indirectly through its focus on shared organizational attitudes and norms vis-à-vis workplace delinquency. Ethical culture has been found to be an important predictor of unethical behavior (Kaptein, 2010). That is, organizations with high levels of corporate ethical virtues are less likely to have employees who behave unethically. The relation between ethical culture and unethical behaviors seems to be stronger than the more often researched relation between aspects of ethical climate (Victor & Cullen, 1988) and dysfunctional or unethical behaviors (see Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Martin & Cullen, 2006, for meta-analytic reviews).

Employee surveillance can be defined as the formal control system of an organization, which encompasses the checks and monitoring practices through which an organization attempts to prevent employees from behaving unethically. In contrast to ethical culture, employee surveillance can be considered a ‘hard control’ system. That is, instead of goading employees into behaving ethically through its culture, organizations using employee surveillance enforce ethical behaviors by actively monitoring deviations from organizational norms. Much less research attention has been paid to the formal (employee surveillance) control system than to the informal (ethical culture) control system. According to the Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), lack of surveillance (or: guardianship) is one of the three factors, together with motivated offenders and suitable targets, that account for the occurrence of crime. When there is surveillance, opportunities for (workplace) delinquency are curtailed. According to this perspective, opportunity makes the thief. For example, retail stores with more sophisticated surveillance systems have been found to report lower levels of theft, both by employees and shoplifters (Hollinger & Adams, 2014). And in industries in which employees work in jobs with less strictly controlled access to goods and money, higher levels of theft have been reported than in industries in which this access is relatively restricted (Hollinger & Davis, 2006). Based on the findings on ethical culture and employee surveillance, we expect both to be negatively related to workplace delinquency.

## 3. Personality–organization interactions

To our knowledge, no research has so far addressed possible interactions between personality on the one hand and ethical culture or employee surveillance on the other, although research has investigated the interaction between Honesty–Humility and perceptions of organizational politics (Wiltshire et al., 2014; Zettler & Hilbig, 2010) and the interactions between personality and situational strength (Meyer et al., 2014) in the prediction of counterproductive work behavior. Both Zettler and Hilbig (2010) and Wiltshire et al. (2014) found that Honesty–Humility interacted with perceptions of organizational politics such that lower levels of Honesty–Humility were more strongly associated with counterproductive work behavior when higher levels of organizational politics were observed. Perceptions of organizational politics

pertain to perceptions of illegitimate and unsanctioned workplace behaviors that are intended to maximize self-interest (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009)—behaviors that are less likely to occur in an ethical culture. Consequently, the results of these studies seem to suggest that in an unethical culture, lower levels of Honesty–Humility will be more strongly related to workplace delinquency.

We also expect Honesty–Humility to be more strongly related to workplace delinquency when employee surveillance is low rather than high. Counterintuitively, Meyer et al. (2014) found that Conscientiousness had a stronger (negative) relation with counterproductive work behavior when levels of organizational ‘constraints’ (e.g., organizational control mechanisms that reduce autonomy) were high rather than low. However, their study focused on general work constraints whereas our study focuses on employee surveillance. Opportunities to act unethically for people low on Honesty–Humility may be more restricted when surveillance systems are in place or when employees have limited access to valuable goods or information. Furthermore, when an ethical culture suggests or dictates what are ‘right’ behaviors, employees low on Honesty–Humility are probably less likely to commit delinquent acts because—when found out—such behaviors may result in a loss of status or position in the group or organization.

To summarize, we hypothesize that both personality in the form of Honesty–Humility and two organizational factors—ethical culture and employee surveillance—predict workplace delinquency. Honesty–Humility, ethical culture, and employee surveillance are believed to have both independent and interacting relations with workplace delinquency, with the highest levels of workplace delinquency observed when Honesty–Humility, ethical culture, and employee surveillance are low.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample and procedure

Data were collected in three waves, each two weeks apart. In total 1672 members of a large-scale ISO certified research panel, who worked in a wide variety of organizations, were approached to fill out a number of questionnaires, of whom 913 (54.6%) responded in the first wave. The second wave contained 736 participants, and the third wave 590 participants. Of these 590 participants, we retained 455 participants (27.2%) who had worked in their company for three years or more (for explanation, see below and Footnote 3). This final sample consisted of 206 (45.3%) women with a mean age of 45.6 ( $SD = 10.5$ ), with the following educational background: 89 (19.6%) primary or secondary lower level education, 227 (49.9%) secondary higher level or tertiary lower level education, and 139 (30.5%) tertiary higher level education. With respect to religiosity, 206 (45.3%) respondents indicated that they were either atheist or agnostic whereas 249 (54.7%) were affiliated with one of the main religions or considered themselves to be ‘spiritual.’ On average, respondents had worked for 14.3 years ( $SD = 10.1$ ) and occupied, on a 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) scale denoting the hierarchical level, a mean hierarchical position of 2.9 ( $SD = 1.0$ ) in their organization. The top five occupational sectors represented in the sample were government/security, education, medicine/wellness, trade/commerce, and business services and the respondents worked in a wide variety of jobs (e.g., as an operator, accountant, librarian, bus driver, or teacher).

### 4.2. Instruments

#### 4.2.1. HEXACO-PI-R

Ratings on the 208-item Dutch HEXACO-PI-R (De Vries, Wawoe, & Holtrop, in press) were obtained in the first wave of data collection to measure the six personality domains, Honesty–Humility (H), Emotionality (E), eXtraversion (X), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), and Openness to Experience (O), and two interstitial facets,

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات