



## The role of emotions in the control-resistance dyad

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the implications of perceived Socio-Ideological Organizational Controls (SIOC) dimensions on actors' lived experiences in the workplace. We explored whether emotions mediate the dyad control-resistance. Data was collected from 385 participants, via a self-administered questionnaire framed as part of a cross-sectional survey design. Our findings suggest that SIOC dimension related to the promotion of values is an important predictor of experiencing higher positive emotions and lower negative emotions at work. The positive emotions, in turn, predict higher organisational citizenship levels and lower resistance behaviours. Based on these findings, we discuss the role and effectiveness of organisational controls inspired by discursive practices.

### 1. Introduction

In management literature, rationalist and normative theories look at the issue of control and attempt to explain how and why organisations adopt certain forms of control (Barley & Kunda, 1992) rather than others. Among the various types of control mechanisms illustrated in literature, we are particularly interested in those that aim at influencing individuals' behaviours. Rational explanations (e.g. the promotion of employees' self-interest) or normative ones (e.g. organisations' efforts to regulate thoughts and emotions) tend to underpin the debate on what guides organisations in the choice of their preferred control mechanisms. In spite of the nature of the explanation, the aim of control is often that of fostering behaviours that favour a predictable and effective organisational climate (Etzioni, 1965; Gabriel, 1999; Malmi & Brown, 2008; Raelin, 2011; Styhre, 2008), and that comply with organizational expectations (Collinson, 1994). A dichotomy between bureaucratic mechanisms aimed at enacting desired cognitions and motivations, and cultural and emotional regulation stresses the fact that organisations use different means to obtain actors' compliance, or to exert power and pressure over employees (Fineman, 2001; Gabriel, 1999). This suggests that the notion of control cannot be dissociated from the notion of resistance to power (Gabriel, 1999), and from the possible cognitions and emotions that can be tied to such resistance.

In our study, we aim to contribute to this debate, paying particular attention to the role of emotions per se, and to the extent to which ideological controls can be associated with the emotions individuals' feel in the workplace. To do so, our first goal is to understand if ideological controls are associated with individual performance. In addition

to bureaucratic ones, new forms of control relying on culture, promotion of beliefs, and change of procedures and structures (Fleming, 2013; Gabriel, 1999; Gabriel, Geiger, & Letiche, 2011) align employees' behaviours, and broadly create organisationally productive environments. Some examples of those types of controls are the Socio-Ideological Organizational Controls (SIOC), as proposed by Alvesson and Karreman (2004). Their aim is to influence the mind-sets of employees, who would eventually internalize the desired values and norms. The difference between SIOC and the more traditional forms of control is that the latter tend to rely on bureaucratic procedures that require a direct type of surveillance over actors (Ouchi & Maguire, 1975; Snell & Youndt, 1995). SIOC, instead, are tied to post bureaucratic management ideas framed for overcoming the limitations of bureaucracy, facilitating adaptation, potentiating innovation (McKenna, Garcia Lorenzo, & Bridgman, 2010), reducing resistance to control, and reducing counterproductive work behaviours (CWB; Erkama, 2010; Fleming, 2013; Dischner, 2015). Based on a functionalist perspective, in this study we illustrate the links between perceived SIOC, productive behaviours, and possible resistant behaviours. We add new evidence for identifying other possible antecedents of in-role and extra-role behaviours like organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB). Research on organizational performance, OCB, and CWB (Berry, Ones & Sackett, 2007; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Dalal, 2005; Jiang, Lepak, Hu & Baer, 2012) tends to adopt a more bureaucratic perspective, pivoting around the use of human resource policies, leadership support, justice, and reciprocity to the organization.

In our overall attempt to understand the relations of ideological controls with expected behaviours but also the possible reactions to its

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existence, our second goal is to expand the debate about the processes that explain the possible reduction of resistance to perceived ideological controls. As *Jensen and Raver (2012)* argued, the effects of SIOC on employees' cooperation and/or resistance behaviours are still not clear because of their subtleness and ambiguity (*Erkama, 2010; Fleming, 2013; Gabriel, 1999*). At a first glance, organizations tend to reduce the potential for resistance (*El-Sawad & Korczynski, 2007*), by shifting from detailed rules guiding daily work, to forms of control that “rely on enculturation, identification with company objectives, and processes of subjectification” (*Styhre, 2008, p. 640*). Some scholars also argue that because employees actually do not perceive the new forms of control, their potential to resist is eradicated from the workplace (*Casey, 1996, 1999; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992*).

Through the introduction of SIOC, individuals are colonized from the inside, rather than from above or from the outside, and, therefore, they might comply with organizational demands by adopting “desirable” behaviours, or they might allow a mutual adjustment due to the shared sense making that replaces the asymmetrical processes associated with bureaucratic controls (*Raelin, 2011*). These considerations emerging from the literature highlight the subjective aspects associated with employees' lived experience. Employees might perceive the values portrayed by the organization, they might comply with the prevailing discourses, they might adhere to rituals, and comply with expectations (*Collinson, 1994*), but the ways such dynamics occur still offers scope for further exploration, especially in terms of actors' emotional responses. This micro perspective we adopt in our study (*Wright & Boswell, 2002; Krausert, 2017*) allows us to understand the extent to which employees' perception of controls can be associated with less compliance with normative expectations and specific resistance behaviours.

Finally, the third goal we aim to achieve by focusing on emotions is to understand the extent to which they are associated with ideological forms of control (*Fineman, 1993, 2001; Fineman & Sturdy, 1999; Elfenbein, 2007*), and the reporting of productive and resistance behaviours. According to these authors, emotions are deeply associated with the aims and processes of control in organizations. Emotions can be considered instrumental to shaping organizational interests, and to some extent can even be an object of exchange – e.g. commoditized emotions (*Lindebaum, 2012*). Thus, a key role of our study is to understand the role that emotions play in the control-resistance dyad. Although emotions are consistently reported as antecedents of OCB and CWB (*Dalal, 2005; Kaplan, Bradley, Luchman & Haynes, 2009*), few studies shed light on the link between organizational controls and the emergence (or co-occurrence) of affective states. This occurs in spite of the strong theorization about emotions and their roles in organizations (*Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Elfenbein, 2007; Fineman, 1993, 2001*).

Studies that attempt to explore the links between ideological controls and emotions tend to draw on interpretivist epistemologies (e.g. *Alvesson & Karreman, 2004; Erkama, 2010; Fineman & Sturdy, 1999*). By taking a different epistemological stance, we add new evidence to how positive and negative emotions can account for the relationship between perceived SIOC and self-reported behaviours. Our three goals rely on the subjectification of individuals, the perceptions emerging from the SIOC affecting them, and the emotions they report. We refer to the SIOC based on *Gabriel's (1999)* work, which we will detail further on in this paper. We also refer to the individual level of analysis, which allows us to capture employees' lived experience in their work setting. To do so we focus on what they think about their organization, what emotions they associate to specific events, and what type of behaviours they say they perform (in-role, extra-role, and resistant behaviours). Specifically, we consider a comparison between two types of relationships: the one between employees' emotions and the perceptions of organisation's discourses; and the one between employees' emotions and the perceptions of organizations' adoption of practices that affect the tangible side of control (e.g. modifying surveillance technologies, implementing structural changes).

### 1.1. Socio-ideological organizational controls (SIOC) and implications on productive and resistance behaviours

The key aspect that differentiates SIOC from the traditional controls is that SIOC attempt to generate a particular form of organizational experience for employees, based on the micro-processes of interpretation and meanings that can become widely understood and shared by organizational actors (*Alvesson & Karreman, 2004*). Although the literature suggests that SIOC have instrumental aspects similar to traditional controls (*Ouchi & Maguire, 1975; Snell & Youndt, 1995; Yu & Ming, 2008*), traditional controls are particularly focused on Human Resource policies and exert direct control over performance as a way of aligning individuals with the interests of the organization (*Wright & Boswell, 2002*). SIOC, instead, aim at gaining employees' support; they do so by providing individuals with a set of discourses that can influence their self-guidance and implement new organizational procedures and arrangements.

A specific discussion about SIOC emerges from *Gabriel's (1999)* work. He distinguishes these types of controls from traditional ones in terms of how the actual control is implemented. Traditional controls influence, constrain, and shape individuals from the outside, while SIOC use language and discourse to affect individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, ultimately influencing their identities. In his reflections, *Gabriel* emphasizes how these controls fall into the following four interrelated categories: (1) structural changes – associated with flatter hierarchies, flexible working practices, continuous benchmarking, and measurement; (2) changes in manufacturing technologies – associated with lean production but also applicable to service organizations if interpreted as changes in the way the services are delivered; (3) changes in surveillance technologies – associated with systems that can make single individuals accountable for operational failures; and (4) concerted attempts by management to promote new sets of values, attitudes, and beliefs favouring quality, service excellence, teamwork and, last but not least, loyalty. This last category is closely linked with the cultural aspects of control. It tends to reflect those elements that are used by management for building strong corporate cultures, or for giving rise to discourses that generate compliance with organizational expectations (*Casey, 1996; Fleming, 2013; Willmott, 1993*). In terms of results, they help to control individuals through changes in the arrangements of work. However, in terms of ways of acting and attributing meaning to work itself, the first three categories are linked with a set of non-discursive practices while the last one is directly linked with a more discursive perspective implemented by management. The last directly promotes meanings and influences actors' ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other individuals.

Literature offers contrasting explanations on the effects of SIOC: the cultural perspective, the post-structuralist perspective, and the support perspective. The cultural perspective identifies the effectiveness of SIOC in their ability to foster the internalization of values and which, in turn, guides employees' actions (*Giorgi, Lockwood & Glynn, 2015; Harris & Ogbonna, 2011; Kunda, 2006; Malmi & Brown, 2008*). The cultural perspective suggests that organizations can create strong cultures by inculcating values, spreading beliefs, and regulating emotions (*Kunda, 2006; Malmi & Brown, 2008; Peters & Waterman, 1982*). This affects employees' performance and supports that of the organization. The criticism to this cultural perspective is that it might lead to overlooking the existence of organizational subcultures as well as the different ways individuals make sense of the values and beliefs portrayed by the organization (*Malmi & Brown, 2008*). Drawing on this criticism, one identifies the need for understanding how individuals perceive discourses and values and participate in the socialization practices as agents of the behaviours desired by the organization.

The post-structuralist perspective suggests that the effectiveness of SIOC relies on the subjectification of individuals, and on the changes in their identity (*Gabriel, 1999*). Thus, the promotion of beliefs and the organizational process may lead individuals to redefine themselves

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