

Workplace Bullying: A Process Model of Unbalanced Psychological Contract Fulfillments

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Abstract

This conceptual paper presents the process whereby supervisors engage in bullying behavior against their subordinates at work. The model draws on Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory to link psychological contract fulfillment with the bullying literature. Specifically, a conceptual model is developed to portray the process by which supervisors who perceive an unbalanced psychological contract fulfillment (under- or over-fulfilled) might commit one of two different types of workplace bullying (person- or work- related bullying) toward subordinates through the process intended to restore or maintain their sense of power. In addition, self-control and organizational culture are proposed to be the moderators that can affect the relationship between under- and over- fulfilled psychological contracts and bullying perpetration. The model thus contributes to the literature by highlighting the process and interactions of how bullying behavior occurs in the workplace.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, Psychological contract fulfillment, Power dependency

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การกลั่นแกล้งรังแกในที่ทำงาน: กระบวนการจากความไม่สมดุลของ การปฏิบัติตามสัญญาทางจิตวิทยา

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเชิงทฤษฎีชิ้นนี้นำเสนอกระบวนการในการอธิบายพฤติกรรมการกลั่นแกล้งรังแกกันระหว่างผู้บังคับบัญชาที่มีต่อผู้ใต้บังคับบัญชาในที่ทำงานโดยอาศัยทฤษฎีการพึ่งพาทางอำนาจของ Emerson (1962) เพื่อเชื่อมโยงวรรณกรรมในเรื่องการปฏิบัติตามสัญญาทางจิตวิทยากับวรรณกรรมในเรื่องการกลั่นแกล้งรังแก รูปแบบแนวคิดของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ถูกพัฒนาขึ้นเพื่อแสดงให้เห็นถึงกระบวนการเมื่อผู้บังคับบัญชารับรู้ถึงความไม่สมดุลของสัญญาทางจิตวิทยา ผู้บังคับบัญชาจะพยายามกู้คืนความรู้สึกของการมีอำนาจให้กลับสู่จุดสมดุลผ่านพฤติกรรมการกลั่นแกล้งผู้ใต้บังคับบัญชาทั้งด้านที่เกี่ยวข้องกับงานและส่วนบุคคลโดยที่ระดับของการกลั่นแกล้งนั้นจะขึ้นอยู่กับวัฒนธรรมองค์กรและการควบคุมตนเองของผู้บังคับบัญชา งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีส่วนช่วยอธิบายกระบวนการเกิดของพฤติกรรมการกลั่นแกล้งในที่ทำงานและสามารถนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในการป้องกันพฤติกรรมเชิงลบนี้ไม่ให้เกิดขึ้นในองค์กร

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Introduction

Bullying behavior has received growing research attention over the past few decades. Researchers have reported findings on negative consequences related to bullying both for organizations and individuals who are victims of bullies (for a summary review, see Rayner & Hoel, 1997). From the organization's perspective, bullying is shown to be counterproductive in that it is associated with higher intended and actual turnover, absenteeism, and decreased commitment (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Salin, 2003). On the victims' side, recent research demonstrates that exposure to bullying in the workplace is a serious problem for many workers, resulting in a high level of stress at work, lower levels of job satisfaction, psychosomatic symptoms, physical illness, and represents a serious problem for those exposed (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 1999). Thus, the occurrence of bullying at the workplace is costly to both employees and organizations as a whole.

The prevalence of bullying and its negative consequences on employees and organizations has resulted in increased attention both by the public and researchers. The focus of scholars in examining bullying has been on more accurately defining the concept and nature of bullying at the workplace, delineating the prevalence and forms of bullying, and identifying related antecedents of the occurrence of bullying.¹ In particular, research has addressed two areas of the role played in bullying by the victim's personality and by psychosocial factors in the workplace. For example, victims of bullying have been found to possess higher level of conscientiousness, literal-mindedness, naivety, and anxiety in social settings as well as lower self-esteem (Broadsky, 1976; Einarsen, Raknes, & Mattheisen, 1994). Furthermore, a survey among 2,200 employees, including both victims and observers of bullying, found that in bullying environments employees reported being more dissatisfied from perceiving a

¹ Note that bullying is different from abusive supervision. In particular, abusive supervision is a sustained nonphysical form of verbal or nonverbal aggression from a supervisor toward a subordinate while the source of bullying can also be from people other than supervisors and may also involve physical hostility (Boxall & Macky, 2016).

shortage of constructive leadership and limited options to monitor and control their own work tasks, and particularly high levels of role-conflict (Einarsen et al., 1994).

However, in spite of the increasing attention to the topic, the literature still lacks a comprehensive process model of bullying. Specifically, research on the theoretical underpinnings of bullying is still limited and how the processes of how it evolves in the workplace are still only partially clarified. The focus of the current paper is to meet this need by presenting a conceptual process model of how workplace bullying may unfold at the workplace, along with a number of research propositions.

In drawing from Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory, the model conceptualizes bullying as a dyadic process between supervisors and subordinates that may occur over time in organizations. Further, bullying behavior is viewed as rooted in individual-organization relationships, such as in terms of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989). Addressing bullying as a dyadic process among supervisors and subordinates, and building on psychological contract literature, we propose that bullying behavior by supervisors toward subordinates may result from supervisor perceptions of psychological contract under-fulfillment or over-fulfillment, by the organization and might be a result by supervisors to restore their sense of power balance. In doing so, they may engage in bullying towards their subordinates.

Specifically, the readjustment is conducted via two types of workplace bullying: person-related or work-related bullying toward subordinates. The model thus integrates and builds upon the literature by aligning the streams of research on the psychological contract and workplace bullying with the processes of power dependence (Emerson, 1962). A number of research propositions are derived. While we mainly focus on the supervisor-subordinate relationship in respect to bullying, we also extend our model assumption on the peer-related bullying in the discussion section of the article. Ultimately, our research has the goal to contribute to the understanding of bullying, and by such, prevent the bullying occurrence and help organizations develop a more ethical work climate.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on two main constructs--workplace bullying and psychological contract fulfillment--in relation to

the main theory that provides the foundation of the paper, namely Emerson's (1962) power dependence approach. In the second section, we outline the theoretical model, describing the proposed relationships, as well as moderating variables, and derive a number of specific propositions to guide future research. In closing, the final section of the paper discusses the main contributions, applies the model to other than the supervisor-subordinate dyad, and summarizes the future research directions.

Literature Review

Workplace Bullying

According to Roland (1989), *bullying* is defined as a form of negative behavior, conducted persistently by an individual or a group and directed against an individual who is not able to defend oneself in the actual situation. Therefore, the concept of bullying at work refers to negative workplace behaviors that an employee feels subject to, over a period of time. It also refers to a situation where, for whatever reasons, the targets are unable to defend themselves. Precisely, the first part of the definition refers to the repeated exposure of enduring negative acts in the workplace (Einarsen, 2000). This implies that a single negative act or isolated negative event is not considered bullying. Secondly, the bullying definition refers to an imbalance in formal or informal power between in the enactor and recipient of bullies (i.e., between two separate involved parties), which connects it with power dependence theory (Emerson, 1962).

Most of the previous research on workplace bullying has focused on the work environment and personality factors in explaining bullying behavior. First, this research has found a relationship between bullying and the quality of work environment, such as leadership style, role conflict, and work control (Rayner & Hoel, 1997). For example, Einarsen et al. (1994) argued that high levels of role conflict and insufficient work control are the main predictors of bullying, and they accounted for approximately ten percent of the variance in bullying. Also, particular leadership styles, such as a *laissez faire* style or 'weak' leadership, are found to be associated with bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 1999). Second, with respect to individual differences, other studies have suggested that personality factors, especially the victim's, play a large role in predicting workplace bullying. For example, victims of bullying at work have

been shown to have low self-esteem and to be anxious in social settings (Einarsen et al., 1994). In addition, most of research seems limited and focused more on victims rather than on perpetrators (Baillien et al., 2011; Branch et al., 2013).

So far, the majority of studies that have explored the incidence of workplace bullying in various organizations have found that most of the participants report that they were bullied by their supervisors, to a lesser degree by their coworkers, and an even smaller degree by a subordinate (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003). To be consistent with the prior studies, the present paper, therefore, approaches bullying in terms of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Importantly, as cited in the above definition, bullying targets must perceive themselves as having less power and, therefore, having difficulties defending themselves. Negative behaviors can, therefore, not be called bullying if both parties have or perceive themselves having, approximately equal 'strength' (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). This aspect of power imbalance builds a strong linkage between the bullying and power dependence theory.

Emerson's Power Dependence Theory

Notably, the above definition of bullying refers to a state of power-imbalance, i.e., one where there is a victim and perpetrator. Accordingly, the present model draws from Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory to clarify some of the processes that are related to the processes of bullying at the workplace. In Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory, *power* is defined as a function of the dependence of one individual on another, which equals the imbalance of power in the bullying relationship. In a two-party exchange relation, the power of one party (A) over another party (B) is a function of the dependence of B on A (Cook & Rice, 2001).

Emerson (1962) claimed that (work) relationships can be balanced or imbalanced and that a power inequality results from an imbalance in power between two or more actors. Specifically, Emerson outlines a number of strategies to reinstall power, stating that whenever there is a perception of imbalance of power between two individuals or parties, the mere perception of such, will trigger the motivation in individual(s) to re-install a balanced sense of power. Stated differently, if individuals

perceive that their relationship is unbalanced, they will strive to achieve a re-negotiation of their power relationship, with the goal of reducing the imbalance, and try to get back to the more balanced level.

The present paper draws from this theory and applies it to the work context together with the unbalanced psychological contract fulfillment (over- and under-fulfilled psychological contract). The present paper derives a model that explains how bullying can occur between supervisors and their subordinates. Specifically, we expect that the different perceived forms of psychological contracts, and their breaking, will display differential effects towards the two main types of supervisor-subordinate workplace bullying: person- and task-related bullying behavior. We draw from Emerson's power dependence theory to explain this effect because the relationship between supervisors and subordinates in the organizational context is one of power distance. For example, it might be the perception of hierarchical power difference that leads supervisors to choose their subordinate targets. Accordingly, Emerson's power dependence theory is a suitable framework within which to discuss the occurrence of bullying.

Two Main Forms of Bullying

Einarsen (1999) distinguished two main forms of workplace bullying: First, there is person-related bullying that includes acts such as blaming, insulting, isolating, making physical threats, or invading the privacy of subordinates, etc. (Einarsen, 1999; Salin, 2003) Second, there is work-related bullying that includes assigning unnecessarily monotonous tasks, assigning too much work, changing assignments or making tasks unnecessarily more difficult. It may also derail from preventing autonomy in the task, or imposing impossible deadlines. In other words, in total, supervisors can bully their subordinates either through personal manipulation or through the nature and structure of work assignments.

Both forms of workplace bullying are counterproductive work behaviors that fall within the scope of inappropriate actions that are contrary to the interests of the organization (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). The differentiation between these two types of workplace bullying, however, is important in our framework model. Precisely we

outline how unbalanced psychological contract fulfillments can lead to either one or the other form of these two types of workplace bullying.

Psychological Contract Fulfillment

A *psychological contract* refers to employees' beliefs about the terms and conditions of implied reciprocal exchange agreements between themselves and another party. Specifically, psychological contracts cover "beliefs about what employees believe they are entitled to receive, or should receive, because they believe that their employer conveyed promises to provide those things" (Rosen, Chang, Johnson, & Levy, 2009, p. 203). Therefore, an important feature of psychological contracts is that they are based on perceived promises made by the employer, either explicit or implicit, which generally extend beyond the formal written contract.

Psychological contracts can either be of *transactional content* or *relational content* (Rousseau, 1990). *Transactional content* refers to explicitly and implicitly specified exchanges over a limited period of time, such as obligations about high pay or merit pay, promotional opportunities, and benefits whereas *relational content*, refers to the long-term exchanges that maintain the employee-employer relationship (e.g., obligations about personal support, job security, growth, and development opportunities). Providing transactional rewards such as pay or wages is usually seen as an important obligation of an employer to enter into a work contract, and it is also an essential component of the psychological contract. On the contrary, relational rewards are, in general, less tangible and are usually seen as extra rewards in addition to the transactional rewards from the job.

Building on Tsui et al.'s (1997) model of the social exchange theory, Morrison and Robinson (1997) propose an implicit equation underlying an individual's perception of a psychological contract with the organization, which describes how individuals evaluate of the two parties' promises and contributions:

$$\frac{\text{Benefits Provided by Organization}}{\text{Benefits Promised by Organization}} \quad \text{vs} \quad \frac{\text{Contributions Provided by Individual}}{\text{Contributions Promised by Individual}}$$

In particular, this equation suggests that individuals, such as supervisors, compare the ratio of what they have received from the organization relative to the perceived organizational promises to the ratio of what they provide the organization relative to what they had promised to provide. In other words, the comparison is between how well the organization has fulfilled its promised obligations to how well the individuals (supervisors) have done so forms the basis of psychological contract evaluative perception (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Based on this equation, Tsui et al. (1997) derives four forms of individual-organization relationships on the basis of different combinations of inducements organization offer to individuals and contributions it expects from individuals, including two balanced cases (quasi-spot contract and mutual-investment relations), and two unbalanced cases (under-investment and over-investment relations).² In the present paper, since our objective is to explain bullying, we are mainly interested in the impact that unbalanced psychological contracts have on the described work relationship. Consequently, we address one “balanced group” (integrating the two balanced conditions of quasi-spot contract and mutual-investment relations) and compare it to the other two unbalanced cases—over and under-fulfillments, described as follows:

1. The *mutual-fulfilled psychological contract*: the ratio of what the organization provides relative to what it promises is equal to the ratio of what supervisors provide relative to what they promise. In this case, the ratio of the organization’s side and the ratio of the supervisors’ side could be equally high or low (HH, LL).³

2. The *over-fulfilled psychological contract*: the ratio of what the organization provides relative to what it promises is greater than the ratio of what the supervisors provide (or are able to provide) relative to what they promise (HL).

3. The *under-fulfilled psychological contract (psychological contract breach)*: the ratio of what the organization provides relative to what it promises is less than the ratio of what the supervisors provide relative to what they promise (LH).

² More details of these 4 forms of psychological contracts see Tsui et al (1997)

³ H=high, L=low

The Under- and Over-Fulfilled Contract relating to Person-and Task related Bullying

In general, psychological contract research has focused mainly on negative consequences associated with perceived psychological contract *under*-fulfillment (e.g., Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Receiving less than what one has been promised to (low ‘benefits’ ratio in terms of Morrison & Robinson’s equation), in particular under a high level of personal investment (high ‘contributions’ ratio) appears to have the most negative or detrimental consequences, in this case, for supervisors. The perception of the under-fulfilled psychological contract can reflect both cognitive, mental calculations of what one has received relative to what one promised (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), and affective, “feelings of betrayal and deeper psychological distress in which the victim experiences anger, resentment, a sense of injustice and wrongful harm” (Rousseau, 1989, p. 129). As a result, supervisors who perceive the under-fulfilled psychological contract may experience several degrees of feeling ranging from disappointment, frustration, retaliation, and aggression, which they then may have to address and work with.

Some supervisors may retaliate directly toward the organization by increasing their sense of workplace deviation, or lowering OCB toward the organization (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). However, others may be unable to do so, i.e., unable to confront the actual source of workplace stressors (organization), in particular, if the source of violation might be ‘stronger’ than they are themselves, like a superior, or be represented only by an abstract structure (e.g., unjust business systems), rather than a person that could be directly targeted. Accordingly, when the psychological contract is violated it may not be (conscientiously) apparent to them which organizational representative has done them harm, or, they may not dare to identify the actual perpetrator. For example, if they retaliated against a superior, through whom individuals commonly personify their organization, they may subject themselves to further negative organizational consequences, such as demotions or disciplinary action (Hoobler & Brass, 2006).

Thus, supervisors may instead redirect a harmful behavior from a primary to a secondary target or victim, especially *less powerful* individuals—their subordinates. In the present paper, we develop the theoretical understanding, that – in some cases – supervisors may respond to experiencing unbalanced psychological contract fulfillments by (re)directing their emotional, or cognitive distress, toward a secondary target—their subordinates as a process of restoring their sense of power (building on Emerson's, power dependence theory).

In addition to the negative consequences of an *under-fulfilled* psychological contract, research so far has mostly ignored the fact that an *over-fulfilled* psychological contract may also bring about negative consequences. For example, examples of over-fulfilled psychological contracts could include: an unexpected promotion, an (unwanted) new assignment of a high-priority, or a high-impact project, that was given to supervisors allowing them to have the development opportunity, or to show leadership strength. But these might also imply additional, unwanted work, or work that is difficult in itself (in short: a high 'benefits'-ratio, Morrison & Robinson, 1997, whereas a *low* one was expected), and in particular under a low 'contribution' ratio (i.e., low interest, or low motivation to development) the supervisor could perceive an over-fulfilled psychological contract. As we will outline in the following, we expect that such psychological contract over-fulfillment to have negative consequences. While the supervisor will have to re-direct his cognitive and affective "feelings of betrayal ..." (Rousseau, 1989, p. 129), similar to in the situation above, in this case he/she might do so in a different way, namely by engaging in work-rather than person-related bullying. In the following, we detail the process that leads to the two types of unbalanced psychological contracts and explain how this may lead to two different forms of bullying.

Proposed Theoretical Model

Figure 1 displays the process model of bullying as the theoretical framework of this paper. The first part of the model describes the development of both forms of unbalanced psychological contracts between the organization and the supervisors. The second part demonstrates the process of how the two forms of unbalanced

psychological contract cause supervisors to engage in two different forms of bullying, namely person- and task-related bullying, in order to restore or maintain their sense of power.

Further adding two moderating context variables, i.e., supervisory self-control as well as the organizational culture (in the sense of high or low morale), as displayed in Figure 1, we outline that the process does not evolve in a vacuum void of context, but there are moderating conditions that may have an influence on the relationship between the unbalanced psychological contract experience and the engagement of workplace bullying. In the following, we will outline the model components and derive a number of research propositions, which could be addressed by further empirical investigations.

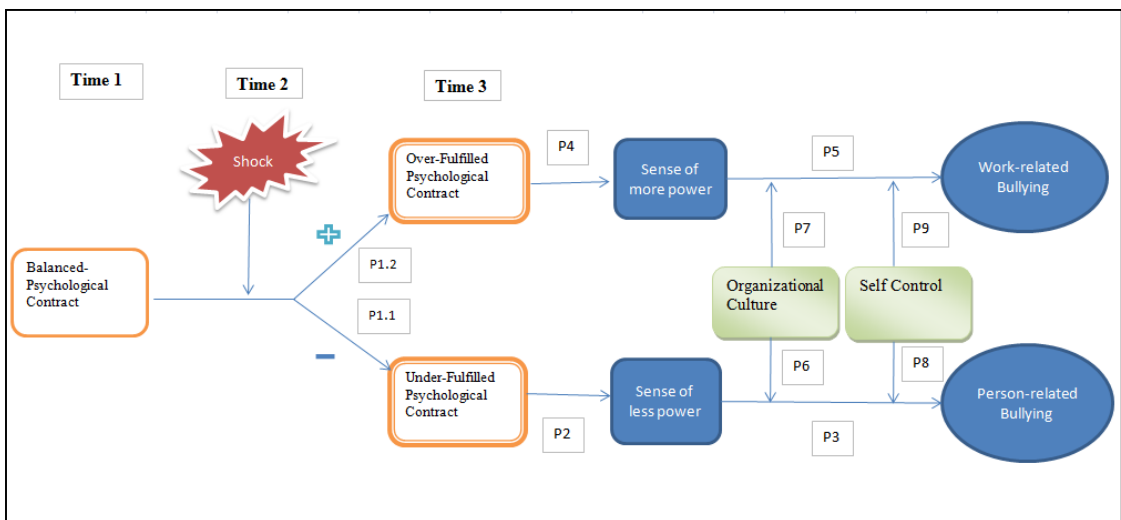


Figure 1 Theoretical framework of psychological contract fulfillments and two types of workplace bullying (moderated by the self-control characteristic and organizational culture)

Note. “P” in Figure1 refers to the propositions in the theoretical model. For example P1.1 and P1.2 denote proposition 1.1 and proposition 1.2 in the context, respectively.

First Part: The Relationship between Organization and Supervisor(s)

The first part of the model in Figure 1 describes how supervisor perceptions of a balanced-or mutually-fulfilled psychological contract, in which they believe that they had been (i.e., own and organizations' 'contributions' and 'benefits' are equally agreed on) may change. This stage of the relationship is described in the step from Time 1 to Time 3 in the model. We argue that any shock, referring to a precipitating unexpected event (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Interrieden, 2005), issued by the organization, at the second time point (Time 2), might provoke the supervisors' perception of a balanced- psychological contract to change to an unbalanced- psychological contract (either over-fulfilled or under-fulfilled psychological contract), which is then the prevalent perception at time period three (Time 3). This shock, leading to a change in the nature of the psychological contract, could be either positive or negative. An example of a negative shock would be supervisors *not* receiving a promised promotion (referring to the 'benefit'-side of the equation, see Morrison & Robinson, 1997) despite having completed all assigned projects successfully, and in particular after having invested a lot of personal effort (high ratio on the 'contribution'-side of the equation). This could change supervisor perceptions of having a balanced psychological contract to having an under-fulfilled psychological contract.

Conversely, supervisors could receive a positive shock such as, receiving an unanticipated job promotion or additional project assignments that require additional time investment on their part, when they are not be interested or willing to invest 'more' in terms of 'contributions' and efforts from their side. This might represent a trigger towards a perception of an over-fulfilled psychological contract. The process of changing from a balanced to an unbalanced psychological contract can be very common because of the ever-changing occurrences in life. However, we expect that it has a significant impact on the nature and occurrence of bullying in organizations. We propose:

Proposition 1.1: *If there is any negative shock occurring at Time 2, then the supervisors' perception will change to an under-fulfilled psychological contract at Time 3.*

Proposition 1.2: *If there is any positive shock occurring at Time 2, then the supervisors' perception will change to an over-fulfilled psychological contract at Time 3.*

Second Part: The Relationship between Supervisor(s) and Subordinate(s)

The under-fulfilled psychological contract

Next, as presented in Figure 1, the upper path represents the situation where supervisors believe that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligations. As a result, they may have a sense of having less power than they had under the balanced psychological contract with the organization (Time 1). In drawing from Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory, in situations of imbalance of power between two individuals, each person, especially the one with lower power, is motivated to restore power back to the balanced level. Therefore, the supervisors might want to restore their sense of power, and one possible way to do so, is by bullying their subordinates, in terms of personal manipulations. This would include behaviors such as un-justified criticism, blaming, and verbally abusing their subordinates. Specifically, the experience of an under-fulfilled psychological contract might cause supervisors to engage in personal bullying of subordinates because: 1) they feel it is justified and, 2) it serves to elevate their sense of power as being "one who cannot be taken advantage of" (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). We posit:

Proposition 2: *In an under-fulfilled psychological contract, supervisors perceive that they have less power than they thought they had in the balanced psychological contract fulfillment at Time 1.*

Proposition 3: *The sense of less power causes the supervisors to commit personal bullying to subordinates in order to restore their sense of power.*

The over-fulfilled psychological contract

Conversely, as displayed by the lower path in the Figure 1, when supervisors perceive that the organization has over fulfilled its obligations, i.e., their organization has actually given them more than what they are willing, motivated, or able to ‘contribute’ to their organization in return, they may feel overwhelmed and overloaded with work, by these new requirements and demands. As noted, this would be particularly the case if these challenging changes were not desired (‘benefits’-side of the equation). In short, they might not like the newly obtained ‘benefits’-side of the equation, when in particular on the other side they are unwilling or unable to engage in the extra effort. Accordingly, these supervisors could be ‘tempted’ to ‘re-negotiate’ their prior work relationship contract, by delegating all additional new work to one or more individual subordinate, up until the point at which task-related bullying results. In drawing from Emerson (1962), supervisors might readjust their sense of power, raising it higher to the new balanced level, by requiring their subordinates to perform large sections of the supervisors work. The repeated force from the supervisor to push employees working harder might result in work-related bullying. Taken together, we posit the following:

Proposition 4: *In an over-fulfilled psychological contract, supervisors perceive that they have a higher level of power than they thought they had before in the balanced psychological contract fulfillment (Time 1).*

Proposition 5: *The sense of possessing a higher level of power causes supervisors to use work-related bullying as a process of maintaining this higher level of power.*

Moderating Effects of Organizational Culture and Self-Control

Since power-relationships and psychological contract re-negotiations do not take place in isolation, apart from the organizational context, we have chosen the concept of control as two relevant moderating variables that might influence this relationship. In particular, we are interested in two different control systems, namely organizational culture and self-control, one of which represents an internal (self-control), and the other represents an external source of control (organizational

culture). We argue that both moderators can affect the relationship between under- and over- fulfilled psychological contracts and bullying perpetration, as described in the following.

External Control: Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, thus, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1985, p. 19). According to this definition, Schein claimed that shared basic assumptions, defined as unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, held by individuals in organizations, are the key to understanding culture. Specifically, the shared beliefs on stimulus control in this case may be that individuals learn that aggressive behaviors in their organization may be penalized or not. The knowledge about this expected punishment of behaviors is relevant for bullying perpetration. Specifically, if bullying (and/or other forms of aggression workplace behavior) may be largely “tolerated”, possibly even viewed favorably to “enhance organizations competitiveness” the relationships described above might be more likely to happen (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). Under the poor organizational culture, especially toward aggressive behaviors in the organization, supervisors who perceive an unbalanced psychological contract fulfillment, therefore, are more likely to commit bullying because these disrespectful behaviors and those harming others are tolerated in their organization (Agervold, 2009; Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). Conversely, if there are policies against bullying, or punishment for those who bully others, this is less likely so. If the perception exists that the organization allows, promotes, or favors those who do bullying compared to those who do not, the perpetrator may perceive that the cost of bullying is very low. Vartia (1996), for example, was able to demonstrate that organizations with a lack of ability to influence matters that are of concern to employees (in this case the supervisor), with poor flow of information, and with differences in opinions mostly being settled by taking advantage of one’s position, or authority, are associated with higher levels of bullying. Therefore, in the following we

will argue that the organizational culture, in terms of tolerance towards bullying behaviors, will influence supervisors' decision to engage in bullying under both under-fulfilled and over-fulfilled psychological contract, as one way to restore and retain their sense of power. In other words, we propose:

Proposition 6: *Organizational culture moderates the relationship between the perception of an under-fulfilled psychological contract and bullying behavior such that supervisors who want to restore their sense of power back to the balanced level are more likely to commit person-related bullying under a culture that a) tolerates bullying work behaviors, and b) less likely to do so, under a culture that does not tolerate such.*

Proposition 7: *Organizational culture moderates the relationship between an over-fulfilled psychological contract and bullying behavior such that supervisors who want to maintain their sense of having more power are more likely to commit work-related bullying under a) a culture that tolerates bullying work behaviors and b) less likely to do so, under a culture that does not tolerate such.*

Internal Control: Self-Control

Further, *internal control* of bullies might moderate the translation of unbalanced psychological contract fulfillment into the perpetration of bullying. Specifically, the level of *self-control*, which refers to a self-regulatory mechanism that holds people back from reacting to provocations in aggressive ways (Bordia, Restubog & Tang, 2008) may decrease the likelihood of workplace bullying. Lower levels of self-control, conversely, might increase the likelihood with which unbalanced psychological contract fulfillment will be translated into the perpetration of bullying.

While there are a growing number of studies investigating the relationship between self-control and (general) aggressive workplace behaviors (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004), so far, research on the role of self-control in moderating the bullying is scant. However, there are a few studies available. For example, Archer, Ireland, and Power (2007) found that prisoners who lack self-control are more likely to provoke a potential bully or to be generally more risk-taking, outgoing and readily available to bully than those who are not. Geen (2001) argued that individuals with high self-control

are better at slowing or delaying their reactions to anger-producing events than those with low self-control. Summarizing, with regard to the more general aggressive workplace behaviors, Marcus and Schuler (2004) demonstrated that self-control is negatively related to a range of dysfunctional behaviors in the workplace and they showed that the counterproductive workplace behavior is largely a result of low self-control in the perpetrators.

Integrating these findings, we propose that self-control moderates the relationship between under- or over-fulfilled psychological contracts and bullying behavior. In particular, we expect that self-control will keep people from acting aggressively, and the relationship between bullying and psychological contract under-fulfillment will be stronger for people with low self-control. Higher levels of self-control, conversely, should encourage supervisors with both psychological contract under- and over-fulfillment to avoid behaving aggressively, specifically avoid bullying their subordinates. In other words, we propose that:

Proposition 8: *Self-control moderates the relationship between the under-fulfilled psychological contract and bullying, such that a perception of less power engenders supervisors to bully their subordinates a) more if they have a low level of self-control and b) less if they have high levels of self-control.*

Proposition 9: *Self-control moderates the relationship between the over-fulfilled psychological contract and bullying, such that the perception of more power engenders a supervisor to bully their subordinates a) more if they have a low level of self-control and b) less if they have high levels of self-control.*

Discussion

Contributions to the Literature

This paper makes several contributions to the literature. In it, we bring together the literatures on psychological contract fulfillment, bullying behavior, power and dependence to develop a framework that describes the process of bullying in the workplace between supervisors and subordinates. Specifically, this paper makes four contributions to the workplace bullying and psychological contract literature as

follows. First, we make inferences based on Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory and apply it to the context of psychological contract fulfillment and workplace bullying. In other words, the paper provides two unbalanced views of psychological contract fulfillment, including over- and under- fulfilled psychological contracts and describes how they could influence the perpetration of bullying in the workplace. In addition, we contribute to the literature by including the role of over-fulfilled psychological contracts in addition to the focus of the majority of prior research that has only emphasized the negative consequences of psychological contract under-fulfillment on outcomes. We discuss how both types of unbalanced psychological contracts can lead to the same negative outcome, such as bullying.

Second, this paper explores two control variables of moderating effects, including self-control and organizational culture to constrain the relationship between unbalanced psychological contract fulfillments and bullying perpetration through the control of power-balancing mechanisms. Third, this paper underscores that the imbalance of psychological contract fulfillment is negative to individuals and organizations. Consequently, organizations should investigate whether or not individuals' psychological contracts are in line with the exchange relationship that an organization is seeking to create (Shore & Barksdale, 1998) because inequalities in psychological contract fulfillment may cause individuals, such as supervisors, to bully their subordinates. Understanding the role of this relationship has further implications by highlighting the need for organizations to create policies and procedures that prevent the occurrence of bullying behavior by maintaining the equality or balance of psychological contract fulfillment toward workers. Fourth, previous research has only emphasized on the target's (i.e., subordinate's) perspective. However, while the victim's perspective, perceptions, and reactions are important, the present paper also considers the supervisor's or perpetrator's point of view based on our belief that bullying behavior cannot be fully understood unless we also consider this other perspective. Thus the present paper addresses the phenomenon of bullying as an interactive or dyadic process among supervisors and subordinates.

Future Research

Taken together, this paper sets the groundwork for future empirical research on the issue of workplace bullying by introducing a theoretical framework based on the Emerson's (1962) power dependence theory and by presenting research propositions. Therefore, researchers should empirically explore the questions we have outlined, issues regarding psychological contract fulfillment and workplace bullying, and work toward testing the model. Further investigation and different empirical methods and designs (e.g., longitudinal studies) are also needed to gain a better understanding of bullying which often occurs over time within the organization. In addition, the psychological contract is not a static phenomenon, so its meaning and impact may change and evolve across time, people, and situations (Shore & Tetrick, 1994) and this should be considered in future research as well.

The research propositions at the current stage are directed towards specific bullying whereby supervisors direct such behavior towards their subordinates. Bullying in general is expected to more likely occur in hierarchical, than in lateral, working relationships, due to the general prerequisite of an unequal or imbalanced power relationship. But it is also possible for bullying to occur in other types of employee relationships within the organization, such as among peers. Therefore, we believe that the applicability of the framework is broad and that it may be extend to explain bullying among peers for several reasons. First, the assumption that subordinates develop a balanced psychological contract towards their peers at Time 1 should also hold for the context of bullying among peers. If there is any positive or negative event shock at Time 2, then it might change the subordinates' perception of the balanced psychological contract to the unbalanced psychological contract at Time 3 (Proposition 1).

Second, the process of power re-balancing as outlined in propositions 2 to 5 should also apply to those in peer relationships. However, the process of restoring or maintaining the sense of power by bullying peers will be less likely to happen than in the case of supervisors bullying subordinates because the supervisors have a hierarchical or legitimate power over subordinates, making it easier to repeatedly

attack subordinates. In contrast, subordinates who may want to restore or maintain their sense of power within peer relationships generally do not have legitimate power over their peers. Therefore, they might have to find targets that seem to be less powerful than themselves. In other words, subordinates who want to use either of these two types of bullying have to seek targets they perceive to have low self-esteem or low self-efficacy. In addition, the perceived power imbalance in an organization can partly explain the large number of victims being bullied by supervisors.

However, power imbalances are not necessarily only due to formal power differences, but also may be created by situation and contextual characteristics (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993). In this case, power differences could occur among peers due to factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, or race. For example, gender roles and minority status may affect bullying behavior, as it can be assumed that women and minorities are perceived to have less power and status even among peers (Salin, 2003). In summary, in the case of bullying among peers, more research is required to gain more understanding of the individual characteristics of targets and the role played by such in terms of perceptions of power imbalances leading to bullying behavior. Consequently, researchers are encouraged to not only apply the framework to work relationships where there is a power differential, such as the supervisor-subordinate dyad, but also test its generalizability to work relationships, such as peer, where there is not this imbalance of power.

Conclusion

This theoretical paper develops a model that applies Emerson's power dependence theory to demonstrate the bullying process. Specifically, the model portrays how two types of unbalanced of psychological contract fulfillments cause supervisors to commit two different forms of workplace bullying against their subordinates through the process of their attempting to restore or maintain a sense of power. In particular, the model combines the psychological contract fulfillment and power dependence to describe how workplace bullying might occur at the workplace and how the relationship between the antecedents and bullying may be further moderated by the effects of organizational culture and self-control. The aim of the

paper is to create a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and processes of workplace bullying. As such the model highlights the factors and process involved and therefore may assist organizations in preventing this negative social misbehavior from occurring.

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