

Lin Dar Ong¹

TRUST IN COWORKERS AND EMPLOYEES' WORK BEHAVIOUR

This study aims to examine the relationships of trust in coworkers, coworkers' directed organizational citizenship behaviour, and coworkers' targeted counterproductive work behaviour. 502 employees from 10 organisations in Malaysia completed the questionnaires. The empirical results suggest that when employees trust in coworkers, they would show more organisational citizenship behaviour and less counterproductive work behaviour directed at their coworkers.

Keywords: trust, organisational citizenship behaviour, counterproductive work behaviour, employee performance.

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ДОВІРА ДО КОЛЕГ І ПОВЕДІНКА СПІВРОБІТНИКІВ НА РОБОЧОМУ МІСЦІ

У статті досліджено взаємозв'язок довіри до колег, керованої громадянської організаційної поведінки і навмисної контрпродуктивної робочої поведінки. Опитування було проведено серед 502 співробітників 10 малайзійських організацій. Результати аналізу показали, що чим більше співробітники довіряють один одному, тим вище ймовірність прояву громадянської організаційної поведінки і нижче — навмисної контрпродуктивної робочої поведінки, націленої проти колег.

Ключові слова: довіра, громадянська організаційна поведінка, контрпродуктивна робоча поведінка, поведінка співробітників.

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ДОВЕРИЕ К КОЛЛЕГАМ И ПОВЕДЕНИЕ СОТРУДНИКОВ НА РАБОЧЕМ МЕСТЕ

В статье исследована взаимосвязь доверия к коллегам, управляемого гражданского организационного поведения и намеренного контрпродуктивного рабочего поведения. Опрос был проведен среди 502 сотрудников 10 малайзийских организаций. Результаты анализа показали, что чем больше сотрудники доверяют друг другу, тем выше вероятность проявления гражданского организационного поведения и ниже — намеренного контрпродуктивного рабочего поведения, нацеленного против коллег.

Ключевые слова: доверие, гражданское организационное поведение, контрпродуктивное рабочее поведение, поведение сотрудников.

1. Introduction. Individuals in most organisations generally interact and work alongside their coworkers on a regular basis to fulfil their job requirements and personal needs for social interaction. As employees and their coworkers have equal power, trust is considered as the hallmark of effective relationships between them. Trust is important because it is a precursor to quality social exchange relationships and it may contribute to improved performance of employees (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009; Ferres, Connell, & Travaglione, 2004).

Existing studies have demonstrated that the coworkers' trustworthiness (Tan & Lim), the trust that leaders have to coworkers (Lau & Liden, 2008), trust transfer-

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ability (i.e., the number of third parties who trust coworkers), and the frequency of interpersonal OCB performed by coworkers (Ferrin, Dirks & Shah, 2006) are related to trust in coworkers. Some existing studies have focused on the effects of trust in coworkers on a range of desired outcomes such as employees' proactive behaviour at work (Parker, Williams & Turner, 2006), perceived organisational support, affective commitment (Ferres et al., 2004), willingness to provide resources to coworkers (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009), and trust in organisations (Tan & Lim, 2009).

According to Yakovleva, Reilly and Werko (2010), trust between coworkers is an important predictor of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), especially when coworkers are physically close. Nevertheless, empirical support for the relationships between trust in coworkers and coworker-directed OCB (OCBC), as well as between trust in coworkers and coworkers-directed counterproductive work behaviour (CWBC), are lacking.

In this study, we examine whether trust in coworkers is related to coworkers-directed OCB (OCBC) and coworkers-targeted CWB (CWBC). The research model and hypotheses of the study are presented in the following sections.

2. Literature Review. The following subsections review previous studies on trust in coworkers, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB).

Trust in coworkers. Trust can be defined as the willingness of individuals to be vulnerable based upon positive expectations about the intentions or actions of another (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Trust lies at the heart of interpersonal relationships among organisational members. It has important organisational and interpersonal consequences such as organisational performance (Salamon & Robinson, 2008) and individuals' OCB (Yakovleva et al., 2010).

Tan and Lim (2009) adapted Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) definition of trust and define trust in coworkers as "the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of fellow coworkers whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control" (p. 46). According to Sherony and Green (2002), coworker exchanges involve exchanges between employees and their coworkers who report to the same supervisor. Coworkers may be the employee's team members, but not necessarily so. The term "coworkers" in this study encompasses employees who work in a same department and report to the same boss; they do not necessarily belong to the same team. Using Singaporean Chinese as samples, Tan and Lim reported that coworkers' benevolence and integrity were significantly and positively related to trust in coworkers. According to Lin (2007), distributive justice is related to trust in coworkers.

Trust in coworkers has also been linked to organisational and individual outcomes. In Cook and Wall's (1980) view, trust among employees contributes to an overall workplace trust. Trust could facilitate an effective relationship between employees and their coworkers. Some research report that trust in coworkers is related to organisational citizenship behaviour (Yakovleva et al., 2010), perceived organisational support, affective commitment, and intention to quit (Ferres et al., 2004). In addition, Parker et al. (2006) affirmed the role of trust in coworkers in promoting proactive work behaviour such as actively solving problem and implementing ideas in a workplace. When employees trust their coworkers, they are more likely to try things beyond core tasks and take the risks of making mistakes.

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Organ (1997) defines OCB as behaviour that contributes "to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance" (p. 91). This definition is similar to the definition of contextual performance introduced by Borman and Motowidlo (1997). They defined contextual performance as behaviour that maintains or improves the social and psychological context within which core tasks are performed. Some examples of OCB include assisting others with their duties, attending functions that are not required, and offering ideas to improve the functioning of an organisation (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006).

According to the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; as cited in Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997), there is an unspoken obligation to reciprocate quality social interactions. Consistent with the theory, past research noted that employees are more likely to engage in OCB whenever they trust their employer would act in their interests (Organ, 1998). Williams and Anderson (1991) proposed two dimensions of OCB according to the targets or directions of the behaviour. They categorized OCB into two broad categories. The first category, individuals-directed OCB (OCBI) refers to interpersonal helping behaviour that captures altruism and courtesy behaviour. Some examples of OCBI include helping others with heavy workloads and those who are absent. The second category, organisation-directed OCB (OCBO) includes conscientiousness, sportsmanship and civic virtue. Some examples of OCBO include attending voluntary events pertaining to an organisation and offering ideas to improve the functioning of an organisation.

Researchers tend to suggest that OCBI may have stronger relations with interpersonal exchange and attitudinal variables such as leader-member exchange (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), concern for others (McNeely & Meglino, 1994), and prosocial values motives (Rioux & Penner, 2001). On the other hand, organisation-directed OCB (OCBO) rather than individuals-directed OCB (OCBI) is more likely to be influenced by organisational factors such as pleasant working conditions (Williams & Anderson, 1991), participative leadership behaviour (Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2010), psychological contract fulfilment (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007), and procedural justice (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000).

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). CWB is described as an aspect of job performance (e.g., Rotundo & Sackett, 2002); a behavioural strain, a form of retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997); and a type of protest behaviour in a workplace (Kelloway, Francis, Prosser, & Cameron, 2010).

According to Baron and Neuman (1996), there are two categories of CWB, namely organisation-targeted CWB (CWBO) and individuals-targeted CWB (CWBI). Some examples of CWBO include trying to look busy while doing nothing and coming to work late without permission; whereas CWBI include behaviour such as insulting someone about their job performance and starting an argument with co-workers (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001).

The occurrence of CWB has serious implications for organisations and employees such as lost productivity, increased insurance costs, lost or damaged property, as well as greater dissatisfaction, job stress, and turnover (Penney & Spector, 2005). According to Bowling and Gruys (2010), CWB could result in substantial financial and personal costs to organisations and members. When an employee engages in

workplace deviant behaviour such as acting rudely toward someone at work and intentionally working slower, the performance of business units is likely to suffer (Dunlop & Lee, 2004).

3. Research model and hypotheses. Figure 1 shows the research model of this study. It illustrates diagrammatically the relationships among the constructs in this study.

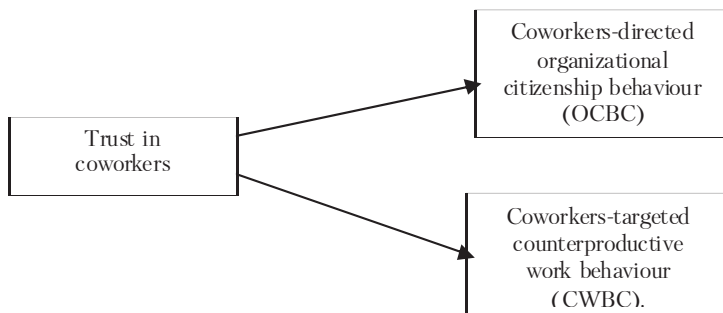


Figure 1. Research Model

Trust influences employees' behaviour towards others at work and plays an important role in social exchange among organisational members (Rubin, Bommer & Bachrach, 2010). Organ (1990) indicates that employees are more likely to reciprocate positive treatment they receive from others by engaging in citizenship behaviour. The reciprocation is generally based on the beliefs or expectations that others will fulfil their obligations in the future (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). A meta-analysis by Colquitt et al. (2007) summarizes the impact of trust on employees' job performance. They conclude that employees who trust their managers have better task performance, engage more in OCB, and commit less CWB.

Trust in supervisor has been shown to be related to the supervisor-directed citizenship behaviour (Wech, 2002). Researchers suggest that employees who trust their supervisors are more likely to engage in OCB (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Poon, 2006). There is also some empirical support that trust in coworkers is positively related to individual's OCB. Through a longitudinal study, Choi (2006) reports that trust among organisational members tend to increase employees' helping behaviour (i.e., one of the OCB dimensions). Trust in coworkers, according to Parker et al. (2006), is related to proactive work behaviour (i.e., a behaviour that encompasses both task performance and OCB). Individuals are more willing to share resources and provide assistance to their coworkers when they trust them (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2009).

We propose that employee's trust in coworkers is positively related to coworkers-directed OCB (OCBC). We thus propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Trust in coworkers is positively related to coworkers-directed OCB (OCBC).

Past research has noted that trust in organisation could help to lower employees' withdrawal behaviour such as absenteeism, lateness, and turnover (Beehr & Gupta, 1978). According to Ferres et al. (2004), trust in coworkers is negatively related to

intention to leave. Taken together, previous work demonstrates that trust could mitigate the occurrence of undesirable behaviour in a workplace.

Trust in senior management, according to Thau, Crossley, Bennett, and Sczesny (2007), is significantly and negatively linked to antisocial work behaviour. They suggest that CWB falls under the broader construct of antisocial work behaviour. Besides, according to the authors, employees tend to act in the ways that protect their self-interests such as taking property from work without permission when there is little trust in management.

Accordingly, we propose that when employees trust their coworkers, they are less likely to engage in coworkers-targeted CWB (CWBC). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Trust in coworkers is negatively related to coworkers targeted CWB (CWBC).

4. Research Methodology.

Sample and data collection procedures. The data were collected from full-time employees in Malaysia. The participating employees have at least one co-worker with whom they interact in their organisations. Their coworkers were from the same department and reported to the same supervisor.

The participants were from 10 different organisations located in Kuala Lumpur and the state of Selangor. The employee's questionnaires were distributed to 596 employees who agreed to participate voluntarily in the survey. They were asked to evaluate trust in coworkers. The total of 580 coworkers agreed to participate and they were each given a separate questionnaire. They were requested to evaluate the participating employees' coworkers-directed OCB (OCBC) and coworkers-targeted CWB (CWBC). This multi-source data collection procedure was necessary to address the one source biasness.

Pre-assigned matched code numbers were also used to match each questionnaire for employee with corresponding coworkers' ratings. Participants were assured that the coding system and their returned questionnaires were confidential, and that no one in their organisation had access to them.

Research Measures.

Trust in coworkers Measures. A four-item trust scale developed by Mayer and Davis (1999) was used to measure trust in coworkers. They reported an internal reliability of .69 for this scale. In this study, the participating employees responded to each item using a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. The items were slightly rephrased to gauge their assessment of trust in coworkers. The Mayer and Davis's original items and the rephrased items (in parentheses and italic type face) are as follows.

I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on top management. (reversed-scored).

(I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on my coworkers).

If I had my way, I wouldn't let top management have any influence over issues that are important to me (reversed-scored).

(If I had my way, I wouldn't let my coworkers have any influence over issues that are important to me).

I would be willing to let top management have complete control over my future in this company.

(I would be willing to let my coworkers have complete control over my future in this organisation).

I would be comfortable giving top management a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.

(I would be comfortable giving my coworkers a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions).

Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) Measures. Lee and Allen (2002) selected the OCB items from a pool of previous OCB scales to avoid an overlapping of the workplace deviance behaviour scale. They identified 8 items individuals-directed OCB (OCBI). They reported a Cronbach's alpha of .83 for OCBI in their original study.

The OCBI items were rephrased to enable the coworkers to evaluate the participating employees' coworkers directed OCB (OCBC). An example of the authors' original OCBI items is "Helps others who have been absent" was rephrased as "This employee helps other coworkers who have been absent". The items had 7 response options ranging from 1 = never to 7 = always, to measure how often the employees are engaged in OCBO and OCBC.

Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB) Measures. The 7-item scale by Bennett and Robinson (2000) was used to assess CWB. The authors reported Cronbach's alphas of .78 for the interpersonal deviance scales, respectively. In this study, the items were rated on the 7-point scale ranging from 1 = never to 7 = always.

An example of Bennett and Robinson's original interpersonal deviance item is "Acted rudely towards someone at work." To allow the coworkers to clearly evaluate the employees' coworkers-targeted CWB (CWBC), this item was rephrased as "This employee acted rudely towards other coworkers at work."

5. Data analysis. Table 1 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, zero-order correlations, and Cronbach's alphas for the major variables. Overall, these correlations support the proposed model. The internal reliabilities of each of the 3 measures were above .70, and they met the minimum threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978). We used SEM to test the model and to obtain information on the unique paths between the constructs.

Table 1. Summary of Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities (n = 502)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Trust in co-workers	5.70	2.21	(.73)		
2. OCBC	5.75	3.97	.49**	(.82)	
3. CBWC	1.55	2.40	-.15**	-.19**	(.81)

Note: Coefficients alpha are in parentheses. OCBC = coworkers-directed OCB; CWBC = coworkers-targeted CWB.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

We tested the hypothesized structural model using the IBM SPSS Amos 18 programme. Multiple indices of fit were calculated to assess the model (Kelloway, 1996). The hypothesized model provided a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 227.5$, ratio = 1.95, GFI = .95, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .043.

Figure 2 shows the significant pathways for the model. In relation to hypothesis 1, trust in coworkers was positively related to coworkers-directed OCB ($\beta = .62$, $p <$

.001). These findings are consistent with the past research that supports the relationship between trust and OCB (e.g., Love & Forret, 2008; Yakovleva et al., 2010). According to Choi (2006), trust in coworkers is significantly and positively related to employees' helping behaviour (i.e., a sub-dimension of OCB). Lau and Cobb (2010) explain that trust is necessary for reciprocal exchange among the individuals at work as it would lead to more organisational citizenship behaviour.

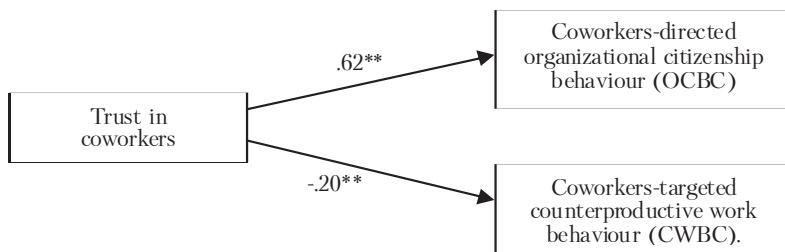


Figure 2. Significant Pathways, ** $p < .01$.

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, trust in coworkers was negatively related to coworkers-targeted CWB ($\beta = -.20$, $p < .001$). Colquitt et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis reveals that trust has a significant and negative relationship with employees' CWB. Bowler and Brass (2006) posit that employees would engage less in coworkers-targeted CWB (CWBC) and organisation-targeted CWB (CWBO) when they view their coworkers favourably. When employees trust their coworkers, they would hesitate to harm their coworkers and organisations. Trust is perhaps important to build and maintain long-term social exchange relationships (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Settoon & Mossholder, 2002).

6. Conclusion. Trust creates an environment where individuals tend to assist others at work and showing concern towards them. Trust allows them to focus their attention on the tasks allotted to them as they believe their coworkers will not take advantage of them. It is reasonable for organisations to develop and embrace a climate of greater trust among employees. Management may create an awareness of collective goals, use team-based rewards instead of individual reward systems, and provide team building training to facilitate the emergence of trust among employees.

In summary, this study suggested that employees' work behaviour can be improved by promoting positive values and trust among employees as well as curbing social undermining behaviour in the workplace. Organisations thus should invest considerable time and money to build trusting relationships among employees.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 30.07.2012.