Conflict and abusive workplace behaviors: The moderating effects of social competencies

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the moderating effects of social competencies, specifically political skill, self-monitoring and emotional intelligence, on the workplace conflict – abusive behavior relationship.

Design/methodology/approach

This study utilized data collected from undergraduate students who were recruited from two mid-sized mid-western universities majoring in psychology, management, human relations and social work. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test the study hypotheses.

Findings

Results indicated that interpersonal conflict in the workplace is associated with employee engagement in counterproductive work behaviors. Results also suggested that social competencies interacted with interpersonal conflict to predict likelihood of abusing of others at work. Politically skilled workers and high self-monitors were more likely to engage in abusive behaviors when experiencing high levels of interpersonal workplace conflict.

Originality/Value

This study is the first to show that certain social competencies may actually have negative ramifications in the workplace. Specifically, individuals who are politically skilled and/or high self-monitors are more likely to abuse others when they themselves experience interpersonal conflict.

Keywords: interpersonal conflict; political skill; self-monitoring; hostility; abuse

Classification: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that in the U.S., civil behaviors are on the decline while hostile interactions are becoming more prevalent (Farkas and Johnson, 2002). Hostile interactions range from relatively mild behaviors including rudeness and insensitivity to overt aggression including road rage and homicide. The fact that hostile behaviors are becoming increasingly commonplace is apparent in organizational life as well (Cortina *et al.,* 2001; Lim and Cortina, 2005; Pearson and Porath, 2005). Hostile interactions, however, are especially problematic in the workplace because perpetrators and targets are likely to be in frequent contact with each other which can lead to escalation or displacement of aggression by the involved parties and even witnesses of these negative interactions (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Hornstein, 1996; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Namie, 2003, 2007; Pearson *et al.*, 2000). Additionally, long-term abuse by the perpetrator (Namie, 2003, 2007) as well as revenge (Bies and Tripp, 1998) or counter-aggression (Lee and Brotheridge, 2006) by the target are likely given regular contact by the parties involved and threats to identity and self-esteem that are often a part of hostile interactions in the workplace (Burton and Hoobler, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.,* 2007).

Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine factors that predict engagement in abusive behavior at work. This study adds to the current research by not only examining the efficacy of contextual (e.g., interpersonal conflict) and demographic factors (e.g., gender, hours worked, job satisfaction) for predicting frequency of engagement in abusive behaviors but also examines

whether an individual's level of social competency (e.g., political skill, self-monitoring) moderates this relationship.

Impact of Workplace Hostility

Abusive and uncivil behavior at work is estimated to affect a significant portion of the U.S. workforce. Estimates of the percentage of employees who are affected by such behaviors range from approximately one-third to over a half of the workforce, depending on the behaviors included as examples of abusive and uncivil workplace behaviors (Cortina *et al.*, 2001; Keashley and Jagatic, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik *et al.*, 2007; Namie, 2007). Such behaviors undermine the physical health, mental health, and effectiveness of both targets and witnesses to abuse; and ultimately the organizations in which they work.

Research supports the relationship between various forms negative interactions at work and reduced employee performance (Keashly and Neuman, 2006; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Pearson *et al.*, 2000), job satisfaction (Lim *et al.*, 2008), and organizational citizenship behaviors (Dalal, 2005). Empirical research also suggests that employees who are exposed to hostile work interactions, whether directly as a target or indirectly as a witness, are prone to increased withdrawal behaviors including increased absenteeism and turnover (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Rayner, 1997). Likewise, these employees have an increased likelihood of experiencing a myriad of mental and/or physical health disorders (Björkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back, 1994; Lim *et al.*, 2008; Namie, 2003, 2007; Rospenda, 2002; Vartia, 2001).

Employees, however, are not alone in their suffering; their respective organizations also suffer in a variety of ways. Abusive behavior in the workplace often leads to voluntary or involuntary termination of talented employees who became targets of abuse (Namie, 2003, 2007). A survey study by Namie (2007) indicated that approximately 40% of targets of bullying, a

persistent form of workplace abuse, voluntarily leave their job. Targets of abuse, however, often do not do so immediately, thus making it more difficult for organizations to see the ramifications of ignoring employees' abusive behaviors. Instead, targets and even witnesses usually only quit after a series of attempts to end the abuse and usually only after their productivity declines substantially or they find another job (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Namie, 2007). As described by Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, p. 427), "…resisting workers do not give up; they continue trying to end abuse until exiting the organization." Before finally giving up, targets often talk to many others including individuals inside and outside the organization in an effort to seek support in coping with workplace abuse (Hoel *et al.*, 2004). This attempt to cope, however, can lead to damage of the organization's reputation (Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott, 2008). Also, if left unchecked, workplace abuse can create a contentious workplace climate that permeates the entire organization (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Pearson and Porath, 2004). Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008, p. 305) refer to such establishments as "employee abusive organizations;" a characterization that is also consistent with Parzefall and Salin (2010).

Two decades ago, Leymann (1990) estimated that the cost of each incident of bullying in the workplace is between $30,000 and $100,000 annually. In his book, *The No Asshole Rule*, Sutton (2007) describes a case in which one individual's harassing behavior cost the employing organization $160,000 annually, mostly to replace employees who quit in order to avoid the harassment. Additionally, Namie (2007) estimated that the turnover of 28 million American workers is attributable to workplace bullying.

According to Adams and Crawford (1992, p. 13), abusive behavior at work is a "more crippling and devastating problem for employee and employers than all other work-related stresses put together." Abusive behavior is a mid-range form of counterproductive work behavior

falling between workplace incivility and extreme forms of workplace violence. Much research has shown that people who experience abusive interactions often act hostility toward others (Bies and Tripp, 2005; Lee and Brotheridge, 2006; Miles *et al.*, 2002; Spector, Fox, Goh *et al.*, 2006) or engage in other forms of resistance (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

Range of Hostile Interactions

As noted above, there are many forms of hostile interactions at work. These types of interactions can be placed along a continuum ranging from relatively low intensity hostile actions that are not intended to harm others, often labeled *incivility* (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), to highly hostile interactions such as *bullying* and *mobbing* (Rodriguez-Carballeira *et al.*, 2010) that are meant to psychologically and emotionally harm others. Uncivil interactions and interpersonal hostility in the workplace can spiral (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007) escalating conflict (Glasl, 1982) and resulting in retaliatory acts (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997) up to intentional physical violence including homicide (Felson and Steadman, 1983). This paper focuses on generalized abuse at work, adopting the Spector and Fox's (2001) conceptualization which includes low to moderate intensity verbal and emotional abuse, as well as some moderate forms of physical aggression.

First, we seek to show that interpersonal conflict at work is related to abusive behavior. This test is conducted as a control in order to verify that our data are consistent with previous research, such as Penney and Spector (2005) which showed that incivility and interpersonal conflicts were positively related to counterproductive work behavior.

H1. Interpersonal conflict at work will be positively related to engagement in abusive behavior at work.

Social Competencies

Individuals vary in how they respond to conflict; not all people respond by abusing others. Individual differences beyond job satisfaction, gender and number of hours worked may influence the conflict – abuse relationship (see for example Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007 regarding negative reciprocity beliefs). There has been a renewed interest in social competency research, including the constructs of political skill, emotional intelligence, and self-monitoring. Abusive behavior at work, like incivility, is an inherently social interaction (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). The current study investigates whether social competencies (viz., political skill, self-monitoring and emotional intelligence) mitigate or augment the tendency to reciprocate experienced interpersonal conflict with abuse toward others.

Political Skill

Mintzberg (1983) first identified the construct of political skill when describing an individual trait necessary for effectively navigating the political dimension of workplace life. Scholarship on the construct of political skill began in the late 1990s with work by Ferris *et al.* (1999) who sought to obtain evidence supporting convergent and discriminant validity of the construct. Ferris and colleagues define political skill as "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn *et al.*, 2004, p. 311). Based on this definition, one can argue that political skill involves a capacity to effectively deal with and through others (Ferris *et al.*, 2005). Politically skilled individuals are able to promote individual or organizational goals regardless of time, place and method (Ferris *et al.*, 2000). Additionally, politically skilled individuals tend to gravitate towards people-oriented majors and different sub-dimension profiles of the political skill construct are related to attraction to different occupations (Kaplan, 2008).

Extant research suggests political skill can prevent negative workplace outcomes by attenuating the harmful effects of role overload (Perrewé *et al.*, 2004) and role conflict (Jawahar *et al.*, 2007). Although the positive effects of political skill have been widely documented (e.g., Jawahar *et al.*, 2008; Perrewé *et al.*, 2005), negative effects of political skill, such as engagement in abusive behavior, have received no scholarly attention. Given that politically skilled individuals are very adept in the social aspects of the workplace, we believe that they are attune to nuances in workplace dynamics and may engage in some abusive behaviors at work to influence others' behaviors to facilitate their own goals.

H2a. Political skill will be positively related to engagement in abusive behavior at work.

Emotional intelligence

Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) is credited with the popularization of the concept of emotional intelligence, although its roots can be traced back to Thorndike's (1920) writings on social intelligence. Research on the construct of emotional intelligence began through the pioneering work of Salovey and Mayer (1990). The literature on emotional intelligence reveals several models (e.g., Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1998; Mayer *et al.*, 2001) and divergent definitions of emotional intelligence. Despite these competing models and definitions, there is some convergence in that they all generally support the idea that emotionally intelligent people are able to accurately discern others' emotions and display appropriate emotions.

Though several theoretical models (e.g., George, 2000; Jordan *et al.*, 2002) have been proposed for the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace-relevant constructs, empirical data which tests these models are lacking (Zeidner *et al.*, 2004). Extant emotional and workplace outcome research has, however, suggested that emotional intelligence is related to success in communicating ideas, goals, and intentions (Goleman, 1998). The construct of

emotional intelligence does not address the ability of an individual to tailor behavior to situations, nor has any research been conducted to test this ability. Because emotionally intelligent people look beyond surface events and appearances to understand the emotions that are driving others' actions we believe they are likely to diffuse workplace tensions and conflict rather than escalating or spreading them by abusing others.

H2b. Emotional intelligence will be negatively related to self-reported level of engagement in abusive behavior at work.

Self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is a social psychological construct of expressive behavior and self-presentation that reflects the extent to which a person is guided by situational cues (Snyder, 1974). Barrick *et al.* (2005) state that self-monitoring may lead individuals to choose to engage in socially acceptable behavior and to choose not to engage in other types of behavior. Barrick and colleagues also indicate that it represents person-based constraints – internal factors that may influence the behaviors in which an individual chooses to engage. Scholars and empirical research suggests that, at work, high self-monitors are skillful at advancing their careers possibly due to a high level of skill in using impression management strategies to influence performance ratings (Day *et al.*, 2002; Gangestad and Snyder, 2000; Lau and Shaffer, 1999). Day *et al.* (2002) also found that that self-monitoring is related to leader emergence; thus supporting Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly's (1998) assertion that high-self monitors are viewed as being more leader-like because they manage their public appearances to match what others think a leader should be. Longitudinal research by Blickle *et al.* (2008) found that self-monitoring strongly influenced an individual's receptiveness to mentoring, a primarily social relationship. Work by Blakely *et al.* (2003), revealed a positive relationship between self-monitoring and organizational citizenship

behavior directed towards an individual; thus indicating that high-self monitors were likely to go above and beyond their job requirements to help co-workers.

Research on self-monitoring also reveals a number of negative factors that are related to being a high self-monitor. The meta-analysis by Day *et al.* (2002) indicated that self-monitoring was positively related with role conflict and role ambiguity. This finding may be due to the propensity for high self-monitors to hold boundary-spanning roles (Mehra and Schenkel, 2007). The results from the Day *et al.* (2002) also corroborated earlier findings that high self-monitors tend to report lower levels of organizational commitment and less stable social bonds (Gangestad and Snyder, 2000). Because high self-monitors are career-focused but are also likely to deal with high levels of role conflict and ambiguity yet have lower levels of commitment to their employing organization and other people, we believe they are more likely to be abusive toward others when faced with interpersonal conflict. This is likely because situations involving interpersonal conflict may be viewed as a threat to the high self-monitor's career advancement and authority and thus they may intentionally or not, step over the bound of acceptable behavior, acting in ways that can be perceived as abusive, to reassert their power.

H2c. Self-monitoring will be positively related to levels of engagement in abusive behavior at work.

Given the prevalence of hostile interactions at work, it is important to investigate if social competencies moderate the relationship between experienced interpersonal conflict and abuse toward others. We believe that some social competencies (i.e., political skill and self-monitoring) will increase the relationship between interpersonal conflict and abuse in the workplace while another social competency (i.e., emotional intelligence) will reduce the conflict-abuse relationship. Thus, one final hypothesis is offered.

H3. Social competencies including political skill (3a), emotional intelligence (3b), and self-monitoring (3c) will moderate the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and self-reported levels of engagement in abusive behavior at work.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology, management, human relations, and social work courses at two mid-sized mid-western universities were recruited for participation during the 2007 spring and summer semesters. Surveys were administered via web survey and participation was incentivized with extra credit. In total, 230 students were recruited, resulting in a useable sample of 213 (92.6% response rate). While participation in the study was limited to students who worked at least 20 hours per week, over half of the sample (n=110) indicated working 36 or more hours per week. Participants were primarily female (71%; n=151), and the modal age range of participants (n=101) was 21 to 25 years.

Measures

Control variables

Three factors were employed as control variables: job satisfaction, number of hours worked, and gender. Research has shown the influence of job satisfaction, number of hours worked, and gender must be statistically controlled given these variables are related to an individual's likelihood of or opportunity to engage in abusive behaviors (e.g., Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Lagerspetz, 1994; Spector, Fox, Penney *et al.*, 2006).

Job satisfaction. Research has demonstrated that workplace stressors such as conflict, abuse, violence and interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors are negatively related to job satisfaction (Lapierre *et al.*, 2005; Penney and Spector, 2005). Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction

Survey (JSS; α = .93) is a composite measure of satisfaction. The inventory is a self-report instrument which measures nine facets of job satisfaction including pay, promotion, supervision, coworkers, contingent rewards, nature of work, fringe benefits, operating conditions and communication. The JSS is comprised of 36 items, with 4-items for each of the nine subscales and half of all the items are negatively worded. Scores on the subscales can be combined to assess global job satisfaction. Responses for the JSS were based on a 6-point scale anchored "1=*disagree very much*" to "6=*agree very much.*"

Number of hours worked. The greater the number of hours a person works per week, the greater is his or her likely exposure to interpersonal conflict at work as well as opportunity to engage in abusive behaviors at work. Harvey and Keashly (2003) found a positive relationship (*r*=.30) between time spent at work and experienced aggression at work. In the current study, participants self-reported the number of hours they worked per week by choosing the number of hours worked from one of six intervals. Intervals ranged from "1=*less than 20*" to "6=*over 40*" hours.

Gender. Research suggests that males are more prone to overt types of aggression including physical aggression while females tend to engage in covert aggressive acts (e.g., Björkqvist, Österman and Lagerspetz, 1994), and that they are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Penney and Spector, 2005). Furthermore, research by Ólafsson and Jóhannsdóttir (2004) showed that men use assertive coping strategies when exposed to abuse, while females are more likely to ask for help and use avoidance strategies to cope with abuse. Research is mixed regarding whether there are gender differences in frequency of experienced non-sexual harassment and if so, which gender experiences it more frequently

(Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck; Namie, 2007; Rospenda, 2002). Accordingly, participants self-reported their gender (male=1; female=2).

Focal variables

We examined three measures to assess the social competency constructs of interest. Each of the three measures we used are accepted measures of their respective constructs.

Interpersonal conflict at work. Spector and Jex's (1998) 4-item Interpersonal Conflict at Work (ICAWS; α = .67) scale assessed the extent to which the respondent experiences hostile interactions at work. Responses were made on a 5-point scale anchored "1=*less than once per month*" and "5=*several times per day*." The 4-items used were (1) "How often do other people yell at you at work," (2) How often do you get into arguments with others at work," (3) "How often are people rude to you at work," and (4) "How often do people do nasty things to you at work."

Political skill. Ferris *et al.*'s (2005) Political Skill Inventory (PSI; α = .89) was used. The PSI is an 18-item measure that uses a 7-point Likert scale anchored "1=*strongly disagree*" and 5=*strongly agree.*" A representative item is "I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others."

Emotional intelligence. Brackett *et al.'s* (2006) Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SRIES; α = .78) was used in the current study. The SRIES is a 19-item self-report measure that uses a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored "1=*very inaccurate*" to "5=*very accurate*." A representative item is "By looking at people's facial expressions, I recognize the emotions they are experiencing."

Self-monitoring. Snyder and Gangestad's (1986) Self-Monitoring Scale (SM; α = .76) was used to measure self-monitoring. The SM scale is an 18-item self-report measure that uses a

true/false response format. A sample item on the SM scale is "In different situations and with different people, I often act like different persons." Higher scores reflect a higher propensity the individual alters his/her behavior based on contextual cues.

Counterproductive work behavior-abuse. The short form Abuse subscale of Spector, Fox, Penney *et al.*'s (2006) Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C; $\alpha = .86$) was used. The short form of the CWB-C is a 33 item self-report measure that includes 5 subscales: abuse, production deviance, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. Responses on the CWB-C Abuse subscale were made on a 5-point scale anchored "1=*never*" to "5=*every day.*" Spector, Fox, Penney *et al.* (2006) note that the Abuse subscale contains items that assess a broad range of negative workplace behaviors including low intensity behaviors of ambiguous intent that characterize workplace incivility (e.g., "ignored someone at work"), to non-physical but intentional aggression (e.g., "played a mean prank to embarrass someone at work"), to moderate physical violence (e.g., "hit or pushed someone at work).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables are provided in Table 1, with Cronbach's alpha estimates listed along the diagonal. In order to test the study hypotheses, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Consistent with recommendations by Cohen *et al.* (1999) we centered the predictor variables using their respective means to reduce multicollinearity. Control variables were entered in step one, focal variables in step two, and hypothesized two-way interactions were entered in step three.

As shown in Table 2, all three steps were significant, with each step accounting for significant incremental validity in predicting abusive behavior at work. Significant interactions between interpersonal conflict at work and both political skill and self-monitoring were noted. A

significant interaction between interpersonal conflict and emotional intelligence, however, was not evident likely due to significant overlap between political skill and emotional intelligence (r=.54).

As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), follow-up median split analyses were conducted to further test the significant moderator effects. Scores falling below the median (5.78) for political skill were treated as "low" and scores falling at or above the median were treated as "high." The analyses indicated that interpersonal conflict significantly predicted engagement in abuse at both low [$F(1, 110)=5.74$, $p<0.05$; $\beta=.22$] and high [$F(1,99)= 20.07$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.41$] levels of political skill (see Figure 1).

A median split was also conducted for self-monitoring consistent with the method used for the political skill analyses. Scores that fell below the median (10) were labeled as "low" while scores equal to and above the median were labeled as "high." The analyses indicated that interpersonal conflict significantly predicted engagement in abuse for high [$F(1,109)= 36.07$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.50$] but not low [$F(1,101)= .211$, ns; $\beta=.05$] self-monitors (see Figure 2).

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Results confirm a relationship between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and employee engagement in counterproductive workplace behaviors (i.e., abuse of others). Results also suggest that social competencies interact with interpersonal conflict to predict likelihood of abusing of others at work. In particular, politically skilled workers and high self-monitors were *more* likely to engage in abusive behaviors when experiencing high levels of interpersonal workplace conflict.

Contribution of Current Study and Future Research Directions

This study is the first to show that certain social competencies may actually have negative ramifications. While previous research has suggested that political skill and self-monitoring are generally good qualities for employees to possess, the present study shows such competencies may also have dysfunctional consequences. Specifically, our results suggest that individuals high in self-monitoring and political skill may be more likely to abuse others when they themselves experience interpersonal conflict. This finding is consistent with Mehra and Schenkel's (2007) finding that high self-monitors often experience high levels of role conflict. Future research should investigate whether workers abused by those high in political skill and self-monitoring perceive such behavior as abusive. It is possible that those who display high social competence may engage in abusive behaviors that go unnoticed or unchallenged by others. By engaging in some mildly abusive behaviors such as ignoring others or embarrassing select others, politically skilled individuals may subtly shape workplace dynamics to regain a sense of control to mitigate the effects of the interpersonal conflict they experience. Future research is needed that will help predict organizational consequences of abuse including the potential downward spiral of workplace civility.

An alternative explanation for these findings is that politically skilled individuals may be reporting more abusive behaviors but these behaviors may not be "abuse" per se, but instead instances of revenge. Thus, the politically skilled individuals may be aware the perceptions of injustice by employees can have many negative consequences for organizations and thus they take action in order to realign the behavior of others with accepted moral standards (Tripp and Bies, 1997) and thus increase employee morale and productivity (Bies and Tripp, 1998). When viewed in isolation the behaviors may fit with definitions of abusive behaviors, but when viewed in context, these behaviors may be viewed as instances of revenge. Bies and Tripp (2005) noted

that this may not necessarily be a dark side phenomenon, suggesting that individuals who are often engaging in revenge may be doing so for the purpose of helping others, and thus there may be positive consequences. Further research is necessary to determine whether such behaviors are instances of uninitiated abuse, instances of revenge, or are best described by a different label.

Study Limitations

Several weaknesses of the current study are important to note. First, the current study is cross-sectional in nature and thus no conclusions regarding causality are possible. While it makes intuitive sense that individuals who experience conflict at work are likely to retaliate by engaging in abusive behaviors, it is also possible that individuals who are abusive at work are likely to experience interpersonal conflict, presumably from the individuals who are the targets of the abuse. This is, however, unlikely given that our sample was predominantly female and females may be less likely to engage in direct forms of revenge (Hutchinson and Eveline, 2010). Also, most abuse comes from supervisors and individuals of higher rank than targets (Namie, 2007); thus they are people who targets of abuse are less likely to retaliate against. It is also possible that individuals who are abusive to others at work project their abusive tendencies onto others and thus perceive interactions at work to be more discordant than they really are. Longitudinal research is necessary to further investigate this relationship including identifying the direction of the relationship.

Second, all measures collected in this study were both self-reported and collected concurrently. As such, they are all potentially subject to common method biases. Participants in this study, however, were the only and best source of information for all of the study variables, and as such this potential bias was to a large extent unavoidable (see Hoyt *et al.*, 2006). Likewise, despite the many works that argue the severity of repercussions from common method

biases (e.g., Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), more recent literature has begun to argue that these effects may not be as detrimental as once thought (e.g., Lance *et al.*, in press; Spector, 2006), a view consistent with Spector (1987) who noted that common method variance may not be a significant issue in terms of biasing results. Regardless, future research should aid in resolving these concerns.

Third, our sample was relatively young and restricted in terms of age. The modal age of our sample fell between 21 and 25 years of age. Research has shown that age is negatively related to CWB thus members of our sample may engage in more abuse simply as a function of age.

It is worthy to note that the magnitude of the true relationship between social competencies and abuse is likely stronger than what we found in this study. High self-monitors and those who are politically skilled are individuals who are interested in impression management and thus are probably less likely to report engagement in abusive and other forms of counterproductive work behaviors.

Practical Implications

The current study has a number of implications for practice. Organizational leaders need to be responsive to abusive behavior in the workplace in order to foster a positive workplace environment. Also, career development professionals need to understand possible negative consequences of seemingly positive applicant characteristics. Although much research has been conducted on workplace incivility, abuse, and hostile interactions; organizations remain relatively unresponsive to these issues (Namie, 2007). Estes and Wang (2008, p. 232) indicated that "…workplace incivility is an issue that has been largely neglected by HRD professionals…" Meglich-Sespico *et al.* (2007) point out that targets of bullying receive little help or reparation

for their suffering. One clear trend emerges: failure to respond can be damaging to employees. As Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, p. 421) noted, "Witnesses and targets reported that their experiences and failure of organizational authorities to stop abuse stripped away their beliefs that "good prevails over evil." Due to their understanding of organizational politics, however, politically skilled individuals are likely to rise to leadership which may make purging workplaces of abusive behavior even more difficult. Given the results of the current study, politically skilled individuals are more likely to engage in abusive behaviors as a result of interpersonal conflict which can be devastating to the organizational culture.

Summary

Much research has been conducted that examined the positive ramifications of social competencies including political skill and self-monitoring. The current study revealed negative aspects of these competencies, specifically a stronger conflict—abuse relationship for individuals who are politically skilled and/or high self-monitors. Organizational leaders and human resource professionals need to be aware of the potential negative repercussions that these social competencies may yield in the workplace.

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Table 1

Correlations between study variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.71	0.46	--							
2. Hours Worked	3.90	1.81	.01	--						
3. Job Satisfaction	4.10	0.74	-.03	.15*	(.93)					
4. Interpersonal Conflict	1.69	0.49	-.07	.01	-.25**	(.67)				
5. Political Skill	5.71	0.62	-.13	.17*	.26**	-.15*	(.89)			
6. Emotional Intelligence	3.75	0.40	.02	.10	.17*	-.11	.54**	(.78)		
7. Self-monitoring	9.86	3.74	-.22**	.05	.13	-.06	.33**	.28**	(.76)	
8. Abuse	1.22	0.28	-.17*	.05	-.30**	.30**	.00	-.13	.13	(.86)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2

Overall regression analysis results

Variable	Adjusted R^2	ΔR^2	β
Step 1 (control variables)	.131***	.131***	
Job Satisfaction			-.322***
Hours Worked			.097
Gender			-.176**
Step 2	.218***	.087***	
Job Satisfaction			-.284***
Hours Worked			.076
Gender			-.105
Interpersonal Conflict at Work			.230***
Political Skill			.127
Emotional Intelligence			-.170*
Self-Monitoring			.159*
Step 3 (interactions)	.282***	.065**	
Job Satisfaction			-.282***
Hours Worked			.076
Gender			-.130*
Interpersonal Conflict at Work			.262***
Political Skill			-.538*
Emotional Intelligence			.122
Self-Monitoring			-.397†
Inter. Conflict X Political Skill			.701*
Inter. Conflict X Emotional Intelligence			-.342
Inter. Conflict X Self-Monitoring			.583*

† $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

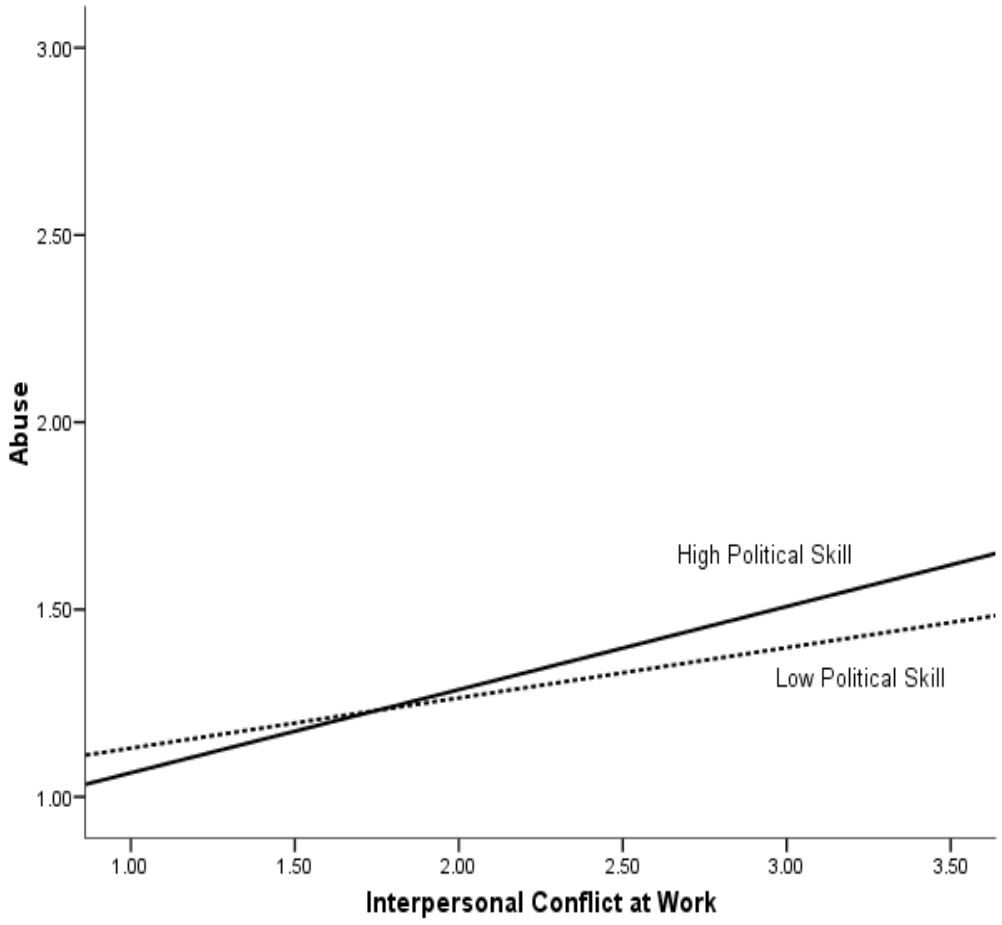


Figure 1. Political skill as a moderator of the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and abusive workplace behavior.

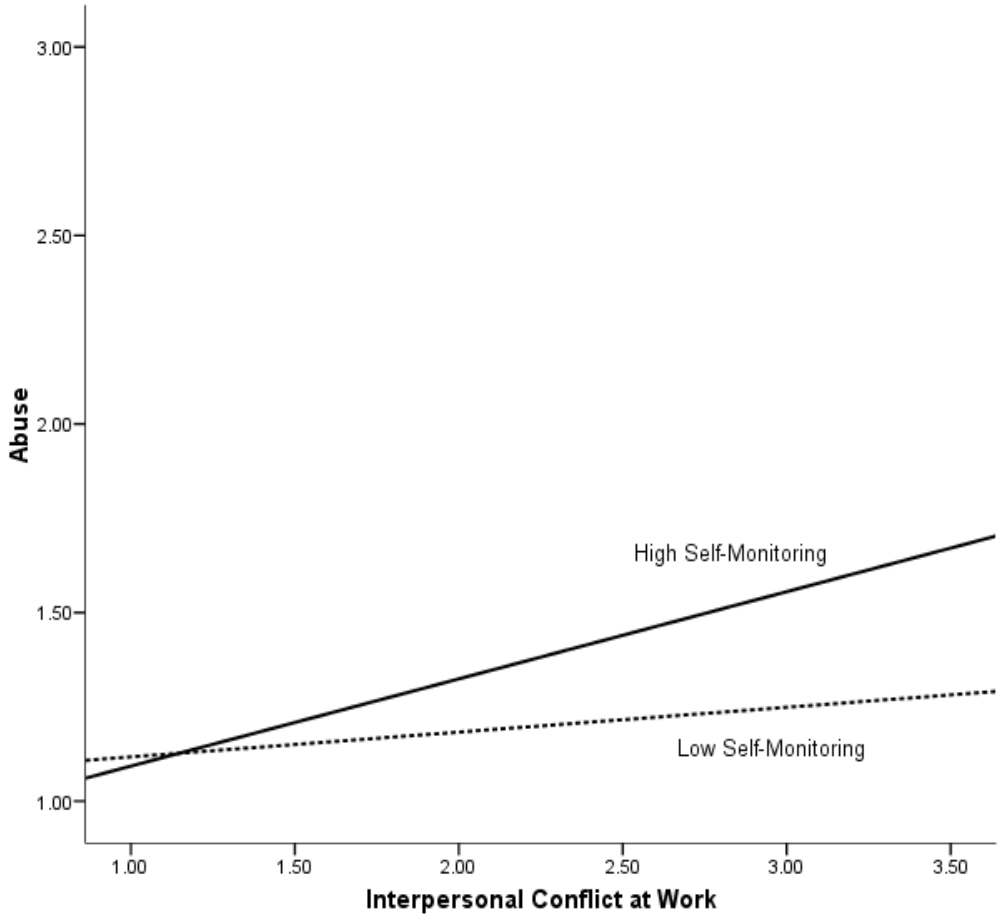


Figure 2. Self-monitoring as a moderator of the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and abusive workplace behavior.

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