

Workplace Incivility and Its Effects on Value Congruence, Recovery-Stress-State and the Intention to Quit

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Abstract

Negative social interactions, such as workplace incivility, show a strong connection to work-related negative outcomes, such as exhaustion or intention to quit. Despite being aware of the important role of incivility in employees' working life, there is still a lack of research on moderators and mediators in the relationship of incivility and work-related outcomes. In the present study, the moderating roles of stress, recovery and value incongruence on the relationship of incivility with intention to quit are analyzed. We approach this research question using following the theoretical concepts of the Risk Management Model and the dysempowerment theory. The study was prepared as online study. With the data of 371 participants the research question was investigated with a structural equation model (SEM). The overall fit of the modified structural model was satisfying. Supervisor incivility has significant negative effects on the experience of value congruence as well as stress and recovery at the workplace. This in turn leads to a higher intention to leave the organization. Coworker incivility showed a strong relation to supervisor incivility but showed only a significant effect on work-related recovery. The current research represents an important step in developing an understanding of the effects of workplace incivility on the employee's value congruence, experience of stress, recovery and the intention to quit.

Keywords

Incivility, Intention to Quit, Stress, Structural Equation Model, Value Congruence, Workplace Recovery

1. Introduction

The quality of social interactions at work is known to play an important role in the employees' well-being at the workplace. Whereas positive social interactions raise job satisfaction and commitment (Harris, Winskowski, & Engdahl, 2007; Heffner & Rentsch, 2001; Rousseau & Aubé, 2010), negative social interactions, such as workplace incivility, show a strong connection to work-related negative outcomes, such as exhaustion or intention to quit (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Miner-Rubino & Reed 2010; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Despite being aware of the important role of incivility in employees' working life, there is still a lack of research of moderators and mediators in the relationship between incivility and work-related outcomes (Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010). The primary aim in the present study was to investigate the process of workplace incivility and how it affects work-related outcomes like the intention to quit. Therefore, we focus on identifying the moderating roles of stress, recovery and value incongruence on the incivility-intention to quit relationship. We approach this research question using following theoretical concepts: Risk Management Model (Leiter, 2013) and dysempowerment theory (Kane & Montgomery, 1998).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Workplace Incivility

Andersson and Pearson (1999) define workplace incivility as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous displaying a lack of regard for others" (p. 457). This means unlike serious antisocial behavior (e.g. harassment, aggression or sabotage), incivility can be seen as a milder form of deviant behavior in which the intention to harm is less apparent (Lim et al., 2008). Incivility includes all forms of subtle harassment like gossiping, spreading rumors or acting rude, but it is not limited to verbal mistreatment. Incivility also includes nonverbal behaviors like excluding others, glaring or ignoring colleagues (Lim et al., 2008).

Incivility at the workplace has serious consequences. In many studies, it is related to exhaustion and experience of burnout (Cortina et al., 2001; Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007), lower commitment (Smith, Andrusyszyn & Laschinger, 2010), higher absenteeism (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2010; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012), and higher intention to quit (Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009; Lim et al., 2008; Ghosh, Reio Jr., & Bang, 2013).

It is important to note that top-down and lateral incivility can cause different outcomes. Top-down incivility describes incivility experienced from supervisors or persons with higher status, whereas lateral incivility refers to incivility experienced from coworkers or "peers". Both types of workplace incivility are positively correlated (Laschinger et al., 2009; Leiter, Laschinger, Day, & Gilin Oore, 2011) but show slightly different effects. Laschinger et al. (2009) found supervisor incivility to be a stronger predictor for job dissatisfaction and turnover intention than coworker incivility. They argued that employees experience supervisor incivility as less controllable and therefore experience a greater imbalance of power, which results in a stronger effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention. A similar result was found by Lim et al. (2008): In their study, only supervisor dissatisfaction had a significant relationship with turnover intention and mental health, whereas coworker dissatisfaction didn't influence work-related outcomes. On the other hand, Chang and Lyons (2012) found that uncivil behavior of coworkers had a direct impact on turnover intention whereas uncivil behavior from other work-related persons (e.g. supervisors, customers) had an indirect effect on turnover intention, mediated through emotional strain.

These findings raise the question how and why workplace incivility has such a strong and negative impact on work-related outcomes. Some theories give insight in the dynamics and outcomes of workplace incivility: Risk Management Model (Leiter, 2013), and dysempowerment theory (Kane & Montgomery, 1998).

The Risk Management Model (Leiter, 2013) assumes that the social environment of an organization has both emotional and rational qualities. Usually, professional relationships have a stronger rational component. First, this means that employees are uncertain how the relationship at work will further develop and have difficulties to respond to uncivil behavior properly. Second, employees feel as if they are excluded from their social group and are not worthy to be a capable member of the organization. Thus, the core motives of belonging, autonomy, and efficacy are violated. Both increased uncertainty/risk and social identity threat have the potential for strong emotional impact. This assumption is consistent with Affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano,

1996), where individuals react to specific work events with affection. Negative work events, like workplace incivility, will produce negative affective reactions, and these will in turn increase the experience of stress and on the other hand reduce the individual's resources (Leiter, 2013). If this imbalance of stress and resources perpetuates, it further depletes the individual's energy and leads to exhaustion, which is an indicator for burnout (e.g. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

The dysempowerment theory (Kane & Montgomery, 1998) gives another explanation on how workplace incivility may raise negative work-related outcomes. Dysempowerment theory argues that experiencing workplace incivility will be interpreted as an affront to the employees' own dignity as the employees' see their basic norms of respect and consideration being violated. Similarly to the dysempowerment theory, Leiter et al. (2011) assume that encountering incivility at work leads to distrust against organizational leadership, as employees interpret uncivil behavior as a violation of workplace norms. In line with these assumptions, Andersson and Pearson (1999) also argued that workplace incivility is a specific form of voluntary employee deviance that violates organizational norms.

To summarize these theories of the dynamics of workplace incivility, workplace incivility threatens social identity, creates a mismatch of personal and organizational norms, and increases stress and depletes individuals' resources. This conceptualization leads us the important question of both direct and indirect outcomes of workplace incivility. In following chapter, we therefore define important mediators in the relationship between workplace incivility and negative work-related outcomes such as the intention to quit.

2.2. Mediating Variables in the Incivility-Intention to Quit Relationship

Incivility at the workplace has a strong effect on negative emotions, raises stress and depletes the employees' resources (Leiter, 2013). An important aspect for reducing stress and increase resources is the aspect of recovery (Kallus, 2002). The model of recovery-stress-balance (Jiménez & Kallus, 2005; Kallus, in press) focuses on the interaction of stress and recovery at the workplace. According to this model, negative outcomes of high demands—such as stress—can be reduced by enhancing recovery strategies. Recovery processes at the workplace are different from person to person and can differ in quality. The studies of Sonnentag (2001) and Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag & Mojza (2011) indicate that by learning only the right recovery strategies, emotional exhaustion, perceived stress, and state negative affect are decreased. Recovery strategies at the workplace with high potential to buffer negative effects of demands on stress are work-related social support (support from coworkers or supervisors), work-related resources (e.g. autonomy, job control, and opportunity to use skills), undisturbed breaks and leisure time that are used to recover (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Halbesleben, 2006; Jiménez & Kallus, 2005; Martin, Salanova, & Peiro, 2007; Miner, Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Brady, 2012).

Next to recovery, value congruence is essential for buffering the relationship between demands and stress (Leiter, Frank, & Matheson, 2009). In general, values differ from person to person and are gained through personal and cultural experience, as well as through professional training. Maslach & Leiter (2008) distinguish between individual and corporate values. Individual values are "the ideals and motivations that originally attracted people to their jobs" (Maslach & Leiter, 2008: p. 501). Some people only have a general or vague idea about their individual values until they encounter an event that offends some of their expectations. Corporate values reflect functions and visions of the organization as a whole. A match in corporate and individual values is important for the employee as it increases the feeling of affiliation and may motivate the employee to reach the goal of the organization (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Therefore, corporate values should support employees to identify with the organization and develop a sense of commitment (Ghosh, 2008). Value congruence is found to be negatively related to emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Leiter, 2008). A mismatch of values on the other hand can lead to feelings of exhaustion, withdrawal and intention to quit. Leiter and Maslach (2009) found that value conflicts of nurses have an effect on the experience of cynicism, which in turn predicts intention to quit. That means that a mismatch of values goes hand in hand with social withdrawing and intention to quit.

2.3. Research Question

The main goal of the present study is to take a closer look at the relation between workplace incivility and the employee's intention to quit, by identifying possible mediators in this relationship. To concentrate the study we focused on the main aspects found in current research. According to the Risk Management Model (Leiter, 2013), workplace incivility involves a negative perception of the workplace and creates an imbalance of stress and

resources at the workplace. Referring to dysempowerment theory (Kane & Montgomery, 1998), we see individual and organizational norms as an important mediator in the incivility-intention to quit process. A match of individual and organizational norms can be referred to the term value congruence.

To investigate our research question, we bring together all relevant aspects found in the literature in the following structural equation model (SEM): First, we postulate that supervisor incivility and coworker incivility are highly intercorrelated and both affect the recovery-stress-state of employees by having a direct negative impact on recovery and thus raising the experience of stress. The relation between recovery and stress is based on the models of Jiménez and Kallus (2005) and Hahn et al. (2011). We further postulate that stress will have a positive relation with the intention to quit (see de Croon, Sluiter, Blonk, Broersen & Frings-Dresen, 2004; Riolli & Savicki, 2006).

Second, according to dysempowerment theory (Kane & Montgomery, 1998), both forms of incivility show a negative relation with value congruence and lower value congruence in turn will lead to a higher intention to quit. We further postulate in our hypothesized model that value congruence has a negative effect on the experience of stress at the workplace (Leiter, 2008; Leiter & Maslach, 2009). The hypothesized model is shown in **Figure 1**.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Design, Procedure and Sample

Austrian workers of different companies and industrial sectors were invited to fill-in an online survey about work-related issues. The access to the study was open for all German-speaking workers via an online platform. The link to the survey was promoted in different Austrian newspapers. 674 people completed the online questionnaire of which 371 remained after deleting cases with missing data.

In the sample (N = 371) were 43.4% women and 56.6% male. The mean age of the respondents was 42.5 (SD = 9.02). 25.6% have a university degree, 34.7% finished secondary school, 34% finished apprenticeship and 2.4% only had compulsory education. Most participants were working full time (44.2%), followed by 35% working part-time and 20.7% working full-time with regularly overtime hours. 16.1% of the participants worked in their current organization for less than two years, 34.5% worked in their organization for two to ten years, 49.3% worked in their organization for more than ten years. 39.4% of the people were working in a leading position, 7.5% stated to be the owner of the company (the remaining 53.1% stated to be in "another position"). The respondents worked in more than 17 different sectors e.g. in industry (14.0%), health and social services (12.1%) or at retail/wholesale (11.9%).

3.2. Material

Intention to quit (12q). Intention to quit was measured by a scale of three items (Jiménez, 2002). These three items show different aspects of the intention to quit the job: 1) The thought of looking for a new job already

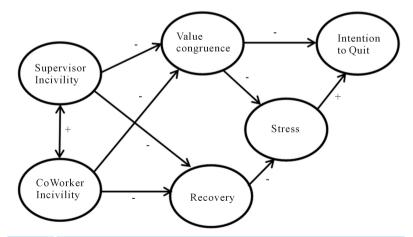


Figure 1. Hypothesized model of workplace incivility and work-related outcomes.

entered my mind, 2) I would prefer working in a different business, and 3) I have already looked for another job. The answer scale is evenly divided from "no", "rather no than yes", "rather yes than no", to "yes".

Value congruence. Congruence of individual and organizational values was assessed with the Area of Worklife Scale (AWS, Leiter & Maslach, 1999). This questionnaire assesses the areas of workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values with 29 items. The items are worded as statements, e.g. "Working here forces me to compromise my values". On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree", the participants have to indicate their degree of agreement with the statements about their job. Only the scale "values" is used in this analysis to operationalize the construct value congruence.

Workplace Incivility. The Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2001; adapted by Leiter et al., 2011) assesses the frequency of employee's experiences of workplace incivility in the previous month. Respondents have to rate how often they experienced disrespectful, rude or condescending behaviors of co-workers or supervisors (five items each) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 "never" to 6 "daily". A sample item for the dimension colleague incivility is "Ignored you or showed disrespect for your opinion".

Recovery-Stress State. The Recovery-Stress Questionnaire (RESTQ-Work) assesses the experience of stress and recovery in work-related settings and helps to create a profile of the recovery-stress state (Jiménez & Kallus, 2010). The RESTQ-Work consists of 27 items that can be further classified into two scores: stress and recovery. The items relate to the past seven days and nights by using an answer scale ranging from 0 = "never" to 6 = "always".

3.3. Analysis

The analysis in the current study consisted of two steps. First, a correlation analysis shows the relationships between all variables measured by the questionnaires. This is followed by a Structural Equation Modeling analysis (SEM) where the hypothesized model for workplace incivility and work-related outcomes were tested. The data was analyzed using the Analysis of Moment Structures program (AMOS) Version 21.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations and correlations between all variables are presented in **Table 1**. The reliability estimates for all variables were obtained by using the internal consistency assessed by Cronbach's Alpha (α). All correlations are significant at the .01 level. Both workplace incivility scales (supervisor and coworker) are positively intercorrelated (.58) and show high negative correlation coefficients with recovery (-.44 and -.41) and high positive correlation coefficients with stress (.35 and .48). Intention to quit (I2q) shows significant correlations with all other scales, displaying the highest coefficients with stress (.45) and value congruence (-.41).

Table 1. Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Cronbach's Alpha (α) and correlations among the study variables.

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Supervisor Incivility	1.30	1.26	.84										
2. Coworker Incivility	1.19	1.21	.86	.58									
3. High Workload (AWS)	3.57	.78	.81	.23	.22								
4. Control (AWS)	3.41	.94	.83	47	35	31							
5. Reward (AWS)	3.14	.92	.83	51	38	22	.47						
6. Community (AWS)	2.92	.77	.80	51	57	34	.39	.56					
7. Fairness (AWS)	2.80	.81	.85	51	37	24	.51	.56	.59				
8. Value congruence (AWS)	3.42	.74	.77	39	27	22	.46	.53	.49	.63			
9. Recovery (RESTQ-Work)	2.60	.97	.92	44	41	45	.53	.60	.59	.53	.51		
10. Stress (RESTQ-Work)	2.82	1.35	.93	.48	.35	.47	47	57	53	52	49	72	
11. Intention to quit (I2q)	2.72	.97	.78	.31	.20	.23	31	35	35	35	41	36	.45

Note: N = 371; all correlations for variables 1 - 7 are significant (p < .001).

4.2. Structural Equation Model (SEM)

To analyze our hypothesized model, a SEM with maximum likelihood estimation was conducted. There are different opinions about the criteria for an acceptable model fit. We refer to Beauducel and Wittmann (2005) who suggested a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) with values around .95 and above and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than .08 when analyzing a sample with a minimum of 250 cases. Next to the CFI and RMSEA, also the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were taken into account. The AGFI is regarded as acceptable if it succeeds a minimum threshold of .90, and the GFI is considered as acceptable if it reaches a value higher than .95 (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008).

The hypothesized model reached a bad fit ($\chi 2(241) = 958.193$, p < .01; AGFI = .779, GFI = .822, CFI = .847, RMSEA = .090), indicating the hypothesized model does not fit with the empirical found data. After that, the model was modified by correlating measurement errors and adding two additional paths (supervisor incivility x stress; value congruence x recovery).

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After these modifications the model shows an acceptable fit, reaching good fit indices: AGFI = .889, GFI = .914; CFI = .956; RMSEA = .049. The chi-square statistic was statistically significant ($\chi 2(233) = 439.196$, p < .01). As the chi-square is sensitive to sample size (high sample size results in having the chi-square almost always significant), it is common to take the fit indices in account. With a CFI greater than .95 and a RMSEA less than .06, the model can be interpreted as acceptable. The AGFI and GFI do not succeed the recommended value of .90 and .95, respectively, but some authors see this as a recommendation and not a fixed threshold (e.g. Brown, 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel & Moosbrugger, 2003).

The model showed the predicted paths to be in the expected direction, plus two additional paths between supervisor incivility and stress ($\beta = .13$, p < .05) and value congruence and recovery ($\beta = .59$, p < .05); and removing the paths between coworker incivility and value congruence ($\beta = .03$, ns.), and value congruence and stress ($\beta = .00$, ns.).

As predicted, supervisor and co-worker incivility are correlating positively (r = .61). As expected, supervisor and coworker incivility are negatively related to the experience of recovery (supervisor incivility: $\beta = -.16$; coworker incivility: $\beta = -.18$) and recovery in turn has a negative effect on stress ($\beta = -.71$), which makes recovery the mediator in the incivility-stress relationship. Additionally, supervisor incivility shows a direct positive path to stress ($\beta = .13$) and a negative path to value congruence ($\beta = -.49$). Both value congruence and stress show a direct effect on the intention to quit (value congruence: $\beta = -.37$; stress: $\beta = .26$), whereas recovery and stress partially mediate the effect of value congruence on the intention to quit. The tested model with all significant regression coefficients is shown in Figure 2.

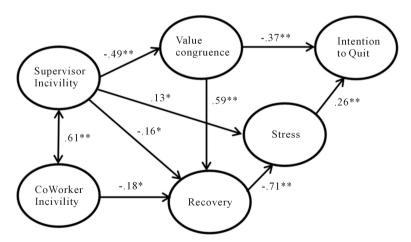


Figure 2. Regression coefficients for the workplace incivility model. *Note*: N = 371; **regression coefficient significant with p < .01; *regression coefficient significant with p < .05; non-significant coefficients have been removed; Chi-square = 439.196, df = 233, p-value < 0.01, AGFI = .889, GFI = .914 CFI = .956, RMSEA = .049.

5. Discussion

The main goal of the present study was to take a closer look at the relation between workplace incivility and employee's experience of stress, recovery, value congruence and the intention to quit by combining theories of Risk Management Model and dysempowerment theory. All in all, the model could be partially confirmed. The most dominant regression paths of the model can be summarized as following: Supervisor incivility showed a strong negative relation with value congruence and value congruence in turn had a strong negative effect on the intention to quit. The relation of supervisor incivility with stress was not assumed in the hypothesized model. On the other hand, the effect of coworker incivility on the intention to quit was much less obvious, being mediated by both recovery and stress and showing no path to value congruence. We will discuss every effect one after another to get an insight about the dynamics of workplace incivility.

The first important result is the strong negative path from supervisor incivility to value congruence, whereas coworker incivility showed a non-significant relation to value congruence. According to dysempowerment theory, uncivil behavior should be experienced as a violation of individual and organizational norms and thus reduces the feeling of value congruence. We could confirm this assumption only for top-down incivility (supervisor) but not for lateral incivility (coworker). The results indicated that only the experience of supervisor incivility leads to a feeling of value incongruence and norm-violation, whereas coworker incivility is more likely to be accepted and therefore does not have an effect on the individual's value congruence. Laschinger et al. (2009) argued that differences in the outcomes of supervisor and coworker incivility could be the result of power imbalance. Employees experience supervisor incivility as less controllable and therefore supervisor incivility might have a stronger effect on work-related outcomes than coworker incivility. Similar results were reported by Ghosh et al. (2013) who found a direct effect of supervisor incivility on turnover intention, but couldn't find a direct path between coworker incivility and turnover intent in their analyses. Coworker incivility only operated significantly when mediated by supervisor incivility.

Contrary to the findings of Leiter (2008), the predicted relation between value congruence and stress could not be replicated. Instead, the relation was mediated by recovery. Additionally, the path of value congruence on the intention to quit was negative. This supports recent research (e.g. Leiter & Maslach, 2009) where a mismatch of individual and organizational values can increase the employee's wish to quit the job.

The next result we want to discuss in detail is the relation of workplace incivility and the recovery-stress state. Both supervisor and coworker incivility showed a significant negative relation to recovery and recovery in turn affects the intention to quit, mediated by stress. This is in line with the Risk Management Model, where workplace incivility is seen as a threat to social identity and thus creates negative affect and an imbalance of stress and recovery. In the model of recovery-stress balance (Jiménez & Kallus, 2005, 2010; Kallus, in press), recovery processes potentially buffer negative effects of demands and are able to reduce feelings of stress. Our findings support both theories. Interestingly, supervisor incivility showed both a direct and indirect relation to the experience of stress, indicating that recovery does not fully mediate but moderate the relation between supervisor incivility and stress. In similar studies it is not recovery as a whole that moderates or mediates the relation between incivility and stress: Miner et al. (2012) found only emotional support (provided by any type of individual such as a friend or coworker) as well as organizational support to mediate the relation of workplace incivility and stress. The authors hereby refer to Cohen and Wills (1985) buffering model of social support. Emotional and organizational support can be subsumed under work-related recovery, in our study we speak of recovery in a wider sense not only including work-related recovery but also including recovery during non-work time. Supervisor incivility seems to have a negative effect on recovery and coworker incivility. This again supports the results of Laschinger et al. (2009) that supervisors are seen as more important for a healthy environment and therefore uncivil behavior by them leads to more worries which in turn hampers recovery processes.

5.1. Limitations

A limitation of the present study is analyzing our model with cross-sectional data, which limits the possibility for causal interpretation. We cannot definitely argue that incivility causes a higher experience of stress and lower recovery and thus raise the intention to quit. Although it seems plausible that being a target of incivility has an effect on the stress-recovery-state and the intention to quit of employees, a causal interpretation only can be done with longitudinal data. Therefore, future research examining our model with longitudinal data would be favorable.

Second, data were collected online via open access, which have the advantage of reaching a large number of participants. With this method, it was possible to collect a set of complete data without missing values from 371 people, allowing us to analyze these data with SEM. Having a look at the demographic data of our sample, we see that the sample is well distributed. The data have to be interpreted with caution, though as the might not be generalized to the total population.

5.2. Practical and Managerial Implications

Employees can be seen as the "chief ingredient" of any business success. Therefore, it lies in the responsibility of the organizational leaders to keep employees healthy and to do everything they can to maintain them in organization. Incivility at the workplace threatens the quality of worklife by increasing the risk of burnout and turnover intention. Leaders are able to reduce workplace incivility with constructive leadership behavior (see also Leiter, 2013). Successful leadership can minimize workgroup incivility and thus reduce negative workrelated outcomes. An important strategy to reduce incivility is to create a working environment of civility, respect and appraisal. First studies indicate that incivility interventions show success in decreasing the employees' risk of burnout (Leiter et al., 2011). These interventions focus on improving positive behaviors of civility (e.g. giving support, showing appraisal), thus creating self-sustaining positive work interactions. As changes in employees' behavior need much time, interventions that focus on organizational aspects should be developed simultaneously. One intervention could focus on creating a comprehensive organizational culture, where basic norms of respect and consideration are established. By this way, employees are getting clarity about their own values and the values of the organization one is working in. These aspects of the role of the leaders/supervisors are very important for healthy conditions at the workplace (Dunkl, Jimenez, Šarotar-Žižek, Milfelner, & Kallus, 2015). As values turned out to be crucial for the intent to quit in this study, we strongly support to focus on this health promoting strategy. Furthermore it is recommended to reduce employee stress by increasing their possibilities to recover from work, e.g. through a good company health management system. To summarize our results, the organization should focus on creating a congruence of individual and corporate values, improving civil behaviors and recovery possibilities in the workplace. With having all variables in an acceptable balance, the organization is able to develop a civil, health-supporting working environment and reduce negative outcomes like turnover intention.

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