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Relationships between Organizational Tolerance, Counterproductive Work Behavior and Health Complaints: A Moderated Mediation Model

Abstract

Purpose – The present study analyzes associations between organizational tolerance to workplace harassment, counterproductive work behavior and health complaints in organizations with more than 50 employees. This study also explores the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating impact of employee adaptability.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from 434 active workers using a cross-sectional survey, and common method bias was assessed. The measurement model was validated in SmartPLS 4. Moderated mediation hypotheses were then tested with the PROCESS macro, which estimates indirect effects and confidence intervals.

Findings – Our findings support both the simple and conditional mediation hypotheses. Specifically, work engagement mediates in the relationship between organizational tolerance and counterproductive work behavior, with the strength of this mediation varying in accordance with employee adaptability.

Originality / Value - This study underscores the critical yet underexplored role of organizational tolerance of psychological harassment in the workplace. Drawing on Einarsen's framework, the proposed model links organizational tolerance with other critical variables, supporting a moderated mediation that clarifies how organizational factors shape individual reactions to harassment. This approach offers a novel basis for developing more effective organizational interventions.

Practical implications These findings point to the potential value of implementing organizational intervention programs aimed at reducing tolerance for workplace harassment.

They also highlight the importance of developing personal coping skills to effectively manage undesirable behaviors in the workplace.

Keywords Organizational tolerance, workplace harassment, workplace bullying, workplace mobbing, workplace abuse, work engagement, employee adaptability, occupational health, counterproductive work behavior, psychosocial risks at work.

Paper type Research paper.

Introduction

Organizational behavior based on abuse, mistreatment or lack of respect is, unfortunately, a daily issue for many workers (Diez-Canseco *et al.*, 2022; Loh and Dollard, 2024; Martins *et al.*, 2023; Namie, 2017; Zanabazar *et al.*, 2023). Several reports have quantified the economic losses associated with this problem, which affects both employees' health and companies' profits. For instance, in Australia, the total cost is estimated at about \$36 billion annually (Li *et al.*, 2023), and according to a recent report by the European Trade Union Institute (Sultan-Taïeb *et al.*, 2024), depression caused by psychosocial work exposures costs European societies over €100 billion each year. Similarly, a study by the National Health Service estimated the cost of workplace bullying and harassment for British organizations to be €2.66 billion annually (McKay *et al.*, 2024).

Although workplace harassment, perpetrated by superiors, peers, or even subordinates, is a critical issue, it becomes even more serious when it occurs alongside organizational tolerance (OT). In other words, when the organization, understood as those who hold hierarchical positions within the structure, such as managers or members of the human resources department, adopts a permissive attitude when dealing with uncivil acts (Einarsen, 2005; Liang, 2025; Nielsen *et al.*, 2024; Perez-Larrazabal *et al.*, 2019).

Given the significance of workplace bullying, the aim of the present study is to identify critical variables in order to propose organizational management interventions that

foster improved working conditions. The theoretical underpinning of this research is grounded in the framework developed by Einarsen regarding workplace bullying. Although established some time ago (Einarsen, 2000, 2005), it remains a benchmark in more recent (Einarsen et al., 2020), and even current research (Nielsen et al., 2024). This framework conceptualizes bullying as a psychosocial process resulting from the interaction between a stressful work environment and individual coping resources, which ultimately leads to detrimental consequences at both the individual and organizational levels.

Following this logic, Einarsen et al. (2020) emphasize that harassment prevails largely due to an organization's permissive attitude toward it. This insight was pivotal in selecting organizational tolerance as a key construct in our study. Furthermore, Einarsen's model delineates two types of consequence: organizational and personal. These consequences are operationalized as work and health outcomes, and we materialize them here as counterproductive work behavior and health complaints, respectively.

Einarsen's framework also underscores the importance of the victim's personality, operationalized here as adaptability, and motivation, measured through work engagement.

The present study therefore expands on the original theoretical framework in order to define a model representing the different associations that exist between these selected variables. As such, it addresses a gap in Einarsen's work, which identifies constructs of interest but fails to quantify their specific effects.

OT and Work Engagement

Work engagement is conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling, and motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, which recent meta-analyses identify as a crucial buffer against toxic organizational environments (Mazzetti *et al.*, 2023).

Based on the Job Demands-Resources model, it could be hypothesized that OT will be negatively associated with work engagement. Within this framework, OT would function as a

severe “hindrance demand”, a contextual stressor that depletes the employee’s emotional and cognitive resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Recent literature on Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) posits that when organizations overlook aggression, they erode the psychological safety necessary for employees to express “Vigor” and “Dedication” (Kobayashi, 2025). Furthermore, the perception of tolerance signals a breach of the psychological contract, compelling employees to conserve their remaining resources by withdrawing their engagement as a self-protective mechanism (Bansal and Garg, 2025). Consequently, in permissive environments, the energy required for vigilance prevents the absorption that is characteristic of high engagement.

Thus, following hypothesis can be established:

Hypothesis 1: OT will be negatively related to work engagement.

OT, Counterproductive Work Behavior and Health Complaints

A large body of empirical evidence supports the predictive role of negative working conditions in counterproductive work behavior and health outcomes (Aust *et al.*, 2023; Humphrey *et al.*, 2007; Javed *et al.*, 2023; Loh and Dollard, 2024; Martins *et al.*, 2023; Zanabazar *et al.*, 2023). Organizations that fail to ensure safe and healthy working conditions can severely harm their employees’ health and performance (De Smet *et al.*, 2003; Tziner *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, OT, characterized by a negligent attitude toward workplace safety and conflict resolution, may contribute to employee distress. This distress can manifest in various ways, with the most frequently studied outcomes being counterproductive work behavior and health complaints.

Counterproductive work behavior refers to a set of negative actions that harm an organization’s well-being. This behavior can be directed either toward the organization itself or toward individuals within it (Loh and Dollard, 2024). Some studies conceptualize

counterproductive work behavior as a form of protest against perceived unfair treatment (Kelloway *et al.*, 2010).

Organizational Cynicism (Zhang *et al.*, 2024) functions as the behavioral blueprint for counterproductive performance. Whereas the former is a corrosive attitude -a conviction that the organization lacks integrity and is undeserving of commitment – the latter is the execution of this pessimistic schema. The psychological gap created by cynicism allows employees to rationalize and engage in intentional behaviors that violate organizational norms, seeing this not as deviance, but as a justified response to a perceived organizational betrayal.

Based on this framework, a positive association between OT and employees' counterproductive work behavior is expected.

Hypothesis 2a: OT will be positively related to employees' counterproductive work behavior.

Numerous studies have documented the adverse effects of a toxic work environment on employees' health, including manifestations such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Nielsen *et al.*, 2015) and broader mental health issues (Boudrias *et al.*, 2021; Loh and Dollard, 2024). Based on this evidence, we expected to find a positive association between OT and health complaints.

Hypothesis 2b: OT will be positively related to health complaints.

Mediating Effect of Work Engagement

Previous studies have shown that higher levels of work engagement are associated with reduced counterproductive work behavior. Engaged employees are more likely to be committed and productive, which decreases the likelihood of their engaging in negative behaviors (Mvuyana *et al.*, 2025).

The following hypothesis was therefore formulated:

Hypothesis 3a: Work engagement will be negatively related to counterproductive work behavior.

Building on the expected link between work engagement and counterproductive work behavior, it is important to explore potential mechanisms that trigger or explain this association. Kelloway et al. (2010) suggest that counterproductive work behavior may not only stem from individual traits or momentary frustration, but may also be viewed as acts of protest by employees in response to perceived organizational injustice. Given this perspective, it is reasonable to consider a model in which counterproductive work behavior is influenced by both work engagement levels and employees' perceptions of organizational injustice, specifically in the form of OT. Thus, OT may contribute to a climate of injustice that reduces work engagement and increases the likelihood of deviant behavior.

The connection between OT and work engagement is supported by the PSC construct, which refers to employees' shared perception that their organization prioritizes psychological health and safety through its policies, practices, and procedures (Law *et al.*, 2011). A good PSC is associated with increased work engagement (Gan and Kee, 2024; Zadow *et al.*, 2023), whereas a poor PSC, potentially characterized by OT, may reduce work engagement. When employees perceive that their organization tolerates misconduct or excessive work demands, they may disengage, thereby increasing the likelihood of counterproductive work behavior.

In light of the above, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 4a: Work engagement will mediate the relationship between OT and counterproductive work behavior.

Previous research has found a strong association between work engagement and subjective well-being (Ding and Si, 2023; Garg and Singh, 2020; Lizano, 2021). Similarly, there is a large body of evidence pointing to the negative health consequences of workplace

bullying and psychological harassment, particularly in relation to mental health disorders (Conway *et al.*, 2025; Lever *et al.*, 2019). Working in such environments is associated with an increased risk of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion (Verkuil *et al.*, 2015). These adverse outcomes are often intensified in organizational contexts in which harmful behavior is ignored or tolerated. We therefore expected OT to negatively influence health outcomes, partly through its impact on work engagement.

Based on these expected associations, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 3b: Work engagement will be negatively related to health complaints.

Hypothesis 4b: Work engagement will mediate the relationship between OT and health complaints.

Moderator Effect of Employee Adaptability

To enable them to effectively manage the various demands of their job, employees rely on resources that help them achieve goals, reduce effort, and foster individual development (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Personal resources in particular have been the subject of frequent study (Buruck *et al.*, 2016). For example, Bakker *et al.* (2007) found that innovation and skills enhanced work engagement when job demands were high.

Moreover, the detrimental impact of an adverse social climate -specifically regarding organizational tolerance of workplace bullying- is heavily contingent upon individual appraisals (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2018). Contemporary research conducted within the Job Demands-Resources framework has demonstrated that personal resources act as critical buffers in this dynamic. For instance, Rai and Agarwal (2018) found that Psychological Capital, particularly in the form of resilience and optimism, mitigates the negative effects of workplace bullying on engagement and protects against employee burnout. Similarly, recent findings suggest that high self-efficacy enables employees to better navigate toxic

organizational cultures, reducing the psychological strain associated with perceived lack of organizational support against harassment (Anasori *et al.*, 2020).

In this context, De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017) found that perceived organizational politics negatively impacted employees' citizenship behavior, with resilience moderating this effect (higher levels of resilience were found to render the association weaker).

Since personal adaptability refers to the ability to manage changes at work (Griffin *et al.*, 2007), this personal resource may enable employees to handle threatening situations more efficiently, potentially reducing their negative emotional impact while fostering a more constructive approach to overcoming challenges. Employees with low adaptability may also have a diminished capacity to counteract the effects of OT on both their counterproductive work behavior and health concerns. As a result, we hypothesized that the relationship between OT and both counterproductive work behavior and health complaints will be mediated by work engagement and that this mediation effect is expected to be significant only at high levels of adaptability.

Based on the reviewed bibliography, we propose the following hypotheses, illustrated in Figure 1:

Hypothesis 5a: The mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between OT and counterproductive work behavior will be moderated by employee adaptability.

Hypothesis 5b: The mediating effect of work engagement in the relationship between OT and health complaints will be moderated by employee adaptability.

These hypotheses align with Einarsen's (2020) framework, as they conceptualize organizational tolerance as a cause that triggers immediate emotional reactions, conditioned by personality factors, which subsequently manifest as both individual health-related and organizational behavioral outcomes.

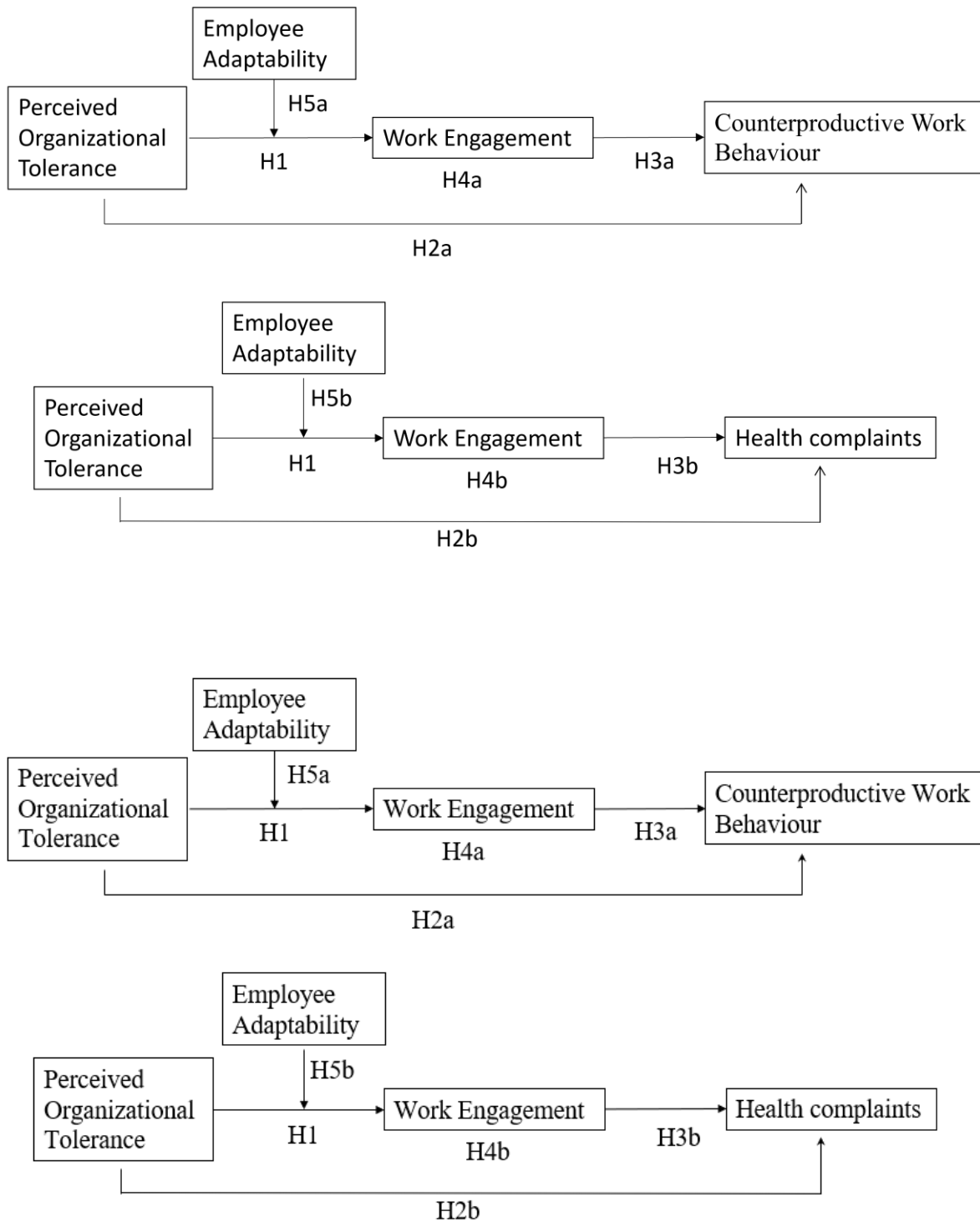


Figure 1. Hypothesized moderated mediation models.

Method

Sample and data collection

As determined by the G-power software (Multiple regression: R^2 deviation from zero), and based on $f^2 = .03$, alpha error = .05, power of .8 and four predictors to be included in the final model, Regarding the sample, a minimum size of 403 workers was deemed essential to ensure adequate statistical analysis.

A total of 434 full-time active workers from various companies with more than 50 employees voluntarily participated in the study by completing a questionnaire. All were aged between 26 and 75 years, with a mean age of 42.53 years ($SD = 8.06$). Their job tenure varied from several months to 55 years, with a mean of 13.74 years ($SD = 8.42$). The sample comprised 223 women (51.4%) and 211 men (48.6%). In terms of type of employer, 104 were employed in private companies (24%), 273 in public funded organizations (62.9%), and 57 in public institutions (13.1%).

The present study intentionally focused on companies with a workforce of more than 50. This decision was based on the Spanish Law on Occupational Risk Prevention (BOE, 2022), which states that a Safety and Health Committee must be established in all enterprises or establishments with 50 or more workers. This means that risk management practices are formally established in companies of this size, making them suitable candidates for the type of questions included in the Perceived Occupational Tolerance (POT) questionnaire. Since OT refers to managerial negligence in handling workplace conflicts, it was assumed that respondents from companies with similar established procedures, would provide a more homogeneous view of such situations.

Regarding the economic sectors in which respondents' organizations operate, the majority were classified within the education and research sector (40.8%), followed by technology and communications (29.3%). Other sectors included community services (5.8%), industry and manufacturing (5.3%), healthcare (4.4%), energy and mining (4.1%),

construction (2.5%), food (2.1%), occupational health (1.6%), catering, commerce, and tourism (0.9%), consultancy (0.7%) and banking and finance (0.7%).

Ethical approval for the present study was obtained from the institutional review board of a public academic institution. Participants were invited to voluntarily complete the questionnaire via a web-based form, accessed through a letter of invitation circulated on the research team's social media platforms. Participants were informed of the study aims and the aggregate use of responses for academic purposes, and were assured that the data collected would be anonymous and that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Instruments

The first section of questionnaire gathered information about participants' employment and socio-demographic characteristics. The following constructs were then assessed using the validated instruments described below:

Organizational Tolerance of Workplace Harassment was measured by the Perceived Organizational Tolerance (POT) scale, developed by Perez-Larrazabal and Topa (2016). This 18-item instrument assesses employees' perceptions of how effectively their organization handles uncivil workplace behavior. The psychometric properties of this scale have been validated previously (Perez-Larrazabal *et al.*, 2019). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .87.

Counterproductive work behavior was assessed using the corresponding 5-item subscale of the revised version of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (Koopmans *et al.*, 2014). The items measure behaviors such as displaying negativity, deliberately harming the organization, or intentionally making mistakes. In the present study, the subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .65.

Work Engagement was measured using the 17-item Spanish version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). This instrument had adequate

psychometric properties in previous studies with Spanish-speaking populations (Müller Gilchrist *et al.*, 2013). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Health Complaints were assessed using seven items from the Spanish version of the SF-36v2 Health Survey (Alonso *et al.*, 1995), specifically its emotional (e.g., nervousness, depression) and physical subscales. We also used the four items of the A.19 subscale from the Health at Work Survey (2001), which assesses sleep-related problems. Previous studies have supported the use of these instruments for evaluating mental and physical health (Lim *et al.*, 2008) and sleep disorders (Querstret and Cropley, 2012). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .89.

Employee Adaptability was measured using six relevant items from the Adaptive Performance subscale developed (2013) and then further refined (2014) by Koopmans *et al.* The items assess whether employees are capable of demonstrating resilience under stress, generating creative solutions, and coping with uncertain work situations. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha was .74.

All the scales instruments had response scales ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree”.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using established statistical procedures. Following current recommendations for validity assessment (Hair *et al.*, 2022; Henseler *et al.*, 2015), the measurement model was evaluated by calculating indicator loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and heterotrait–monotrait ratios. Consistently with contemporary approaches to mediation and moderation analysis (Hayes, 2018), the hypotheses were tested using a conditional process modeling framework to estimate indirect effects contingent on the moderator. Moderated mediation is supported when the magnitude of the indirect effect differs across levels of the moderating variable (Edwards and Lambert, 2007).

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

We evaluated the psychometric properties of the scales using PLS-SEM. Following standard guidelines (Hair and Alamer, 2022), we assessed indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Although some Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were below the .50 threshold due to the broad theoretical scope of the constructs, Composite Reliability (ρ_c) scores were consistently high (ranging from .73 to .91), supporting the internal consistency of the measures. Furthermore, discriminant validity was confirmed, as all heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios were well below the conservative .85 cutoff. Detailed tables showing factor loadings, validity metrics, and item-level statistics are provided in the Supplementary Material (Tables ST1–ST3). See file “Supplementary_material_measurement_model.docx” on Emerald’s content-hosting platform.

The results of the descriptive and correlational analyses presented in Table 1 provisionally support the hypotheses.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	42.52	8.06	-					
2. Seniority	13.74	8.42	.66**	-				
3. OT	3.65	0.61	-.19**	-.18	-			
4. Health Complaints	2.01	0.72	.01	.03	.13**	-		
5. Work Engagement	3.30	0.53	.04	.03	-.19**	-.17**	-	
6. Employee Adaptability	3.73	0.54	-.02	.00	-.23**	-.19**	.58**	-
7. Counterproductive work behavior	2.08	0.57	-.17**	-.12*	.15**	.45**	-.25**	-.20**

Note: ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$

Harman's single factor test was conducted to assess the potential presence of common method bias using an unrotated exploratory factor analysis (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The results indicated that the first unrotated factor explained 18.38% of the total variance, which

is substantially below the commonly used threshold of 50%. Therefore, common method bias is unlikely to be a serious concern in the dataset.

Simple Mediation Analysis of Counterproductive Work Behavior

The first analysis aimed to assess the indirect effect of OT on counterproductive work behavior through work engagement. The results indicated a significant negative effect of OT on work engagement ($B = -.166$, $SE = .041$, 95% CI $[-.245; -.086]$, $p = .000$), supporting Hypothesis 1, and a significant negative association between work engagement and counterproductive work behavior ($B = -.249$, $SE = .050$, 95% CI $[-.349; -.149]$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3a. Importantly, the analysis also revealed a significant direct effect of OT of counterproductive work behavior ($B = .102$, $SE = .043$, 95% CI $[.016; .188]$, $p = .019$), supporting Hypothesis 2a, as well as a significant indirect effect ($B = .041$, $SE = .013$, 95% CI $[.019; .071]$). A subsequent Sobel test confirmed the mediation effect ($z = 3.09$, $p = .001$). Taken together, these results indicate a significant mediating effect in the relationship between OT and counterproductive work behavior, supporting Hypothesis 4a.

Moderated Mediation of Counterproductive Work Behavior

The second analysis aimed to explore the moderating effect of adaptability on the relationship between OT and work engagement. The overall model was significant ($F(3,430) = 76.81$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .348$) and significant main effects were found for OT ($B = .482$, $SE = .230$, 95% CI $[.028; .936]$, $p < .03$) and adaptability ($B = 1.073$, $SE = .226$, 95% CI $[.628; 1.512]$, $p = .000$), as well as for their interaction term ($B = -.138$, $SE = .059$, $p = .019$, $\Delta R^2 = .008$). Specifically, the results indicated that the association between OT and work engagement was non-significant at low ($-1SD$; $B = .041$, $SE = .052$, $p < .427$) and moderate levels of adaptability (Mean; $B = -.032$, $SE = .035$, $p < .355$), but became significant and negative at high levels ($+1SD$; $B = -.107$, $SE = .042$, $p = .010$).

As expected, employees with higher adaptability reported higher levels of work engagement for the same level of OT, as illustrated in Figure 2.

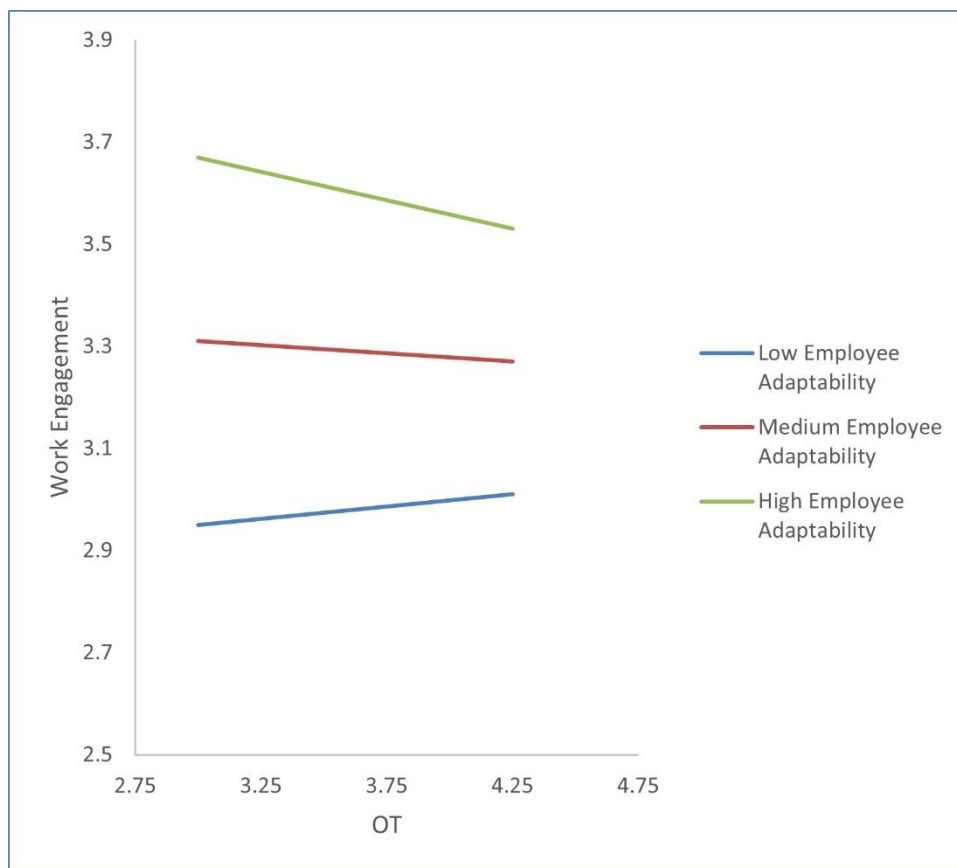


Figure 2 Interaction between OT and adaptability in predicting work engagement.

The index of moderated mediation was significant: $B = .034$, $SE = .014$, 95% CI [.010; .067]). Moreover, the analysis revealed a conditional indirect effect of OT on counterproductive work behavior through work engagement. This indirect effect was non-significant at low ($-1SD$; $B = -.010$, $SE = .013$, 95% CI [-.039; .012]) and moderate (Mean; $B = .008$, $SE = .009$, 95% CI [-.009; .027]) levels of adaptability, but significant at high levels of adaptability ($+1SD$; $B = .026$, $SE = .010$, 95% CI [.009; .051]).

Table 2

Moderated mediation analyses using PROCESS Macro (Model 7) for Counterproductive Work Behavior.

Variables	Mediator model	DV model
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	Work Engagement		Counterproductive Work Behavior	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	-.6041	.8935	2.5293**	.2539
Perceived Organizational Tolerance	.4828*	.2309	.1024*	.0438
Employee Adaptability	1.0738 **	.2267		
Perceived Organizational Tolerance x Adaptability	-.1381*	.0590		
Work Engagement			-.2493**	.0508
R ²	.3489		.0757	

Mediator: Work Engagement	b	CI
Index of moderated mediation	.0344	(.0101 .0666)
-1 SD Employee Adaptability	-.0114	(-.0394 .0113)
Mean Employee Adaptability	.0116	(-.0066 .0295)
+1SD Employee Adaptability	.0231	(.0042 .0444)

N =434. Bootstrap sample size =1,000. 95 % Confidence Interval (CI).

Bootstrapped effects and confidence intervals are shown for the moderated mediation.

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

Supporting Hypothesis 5a, these results suggest that work engagement only mediates the relationship between OT and counterproductive work behavior among employees with high levels of adaptability.

Simple Mediation Analysis of Health Complaints

The results indicated a significant positive effect of OT on health complaints (*B*= .122, *SE*= .056, 95% CI [.010; .234], *p* = .03), supporting Hypothesis 2b, and a significant negative association between work engagement and health complaints (*B*= -.204, *SE*= .065, 95% CI [-.334; -.075], *p* < .002), supporting Hypothesis 3b. They also revealed a significant total effect of OT on health complaints (*B*= .156, *SE*= .056, 95% CI [.045; .267], *p* = .005) and an indirect effect through work engagement (*B*= .034, *SE*= .015, 95% CI [.010; .071]). A subsequent Sobel test confirmed the mediation effect (*z* = 2.428, *p* = .015). Taken together, these results indicate that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between OT and health complaints, thereby supporting Hypothesis 4b.

Moderated Mediation of Health Complaints

The index of moderated mediation was significant: $B = .028$, $SE = .014$, 95% CI [.007; .063]). The analysis revealed a conditional indirect effect of OT on health complaints through work engagement, which was significant at high levels of adaptability (+1SD; $B = .022$, $SE = .011$, 95% CI [.005; .051]). In contrast, the indirect effect was not significant at either moderate (Mean; $B = .006$, $SE = .008$, 95% CI [-.073; .027]) and low levels of adaptability (-1SD; $B = -.008$, $SE = .011$, 95% CI [-.037; .009]).

These results suggest that work engagement only mediates the relationship between OT and health complaints among employees characterized by high levels of adaptability, thereby supporting Hypothesis 5b.

Table 3

Moderated mediation analyses using the PROCESS Macro (Model 7) for Health Complaints.

Variables	Mediator model		DV model	
	Work Engagement		Health Complaints	
	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	-.6041	.8935	2.2347	.3293
Perceived Organizational Tolerance	.4828*	.2309	.1224*	.0568
Employee Adaptability	1.0738**	.2267		
Perceived Organizational Tolerance x Adaptability	-.1381	.0590		
Work Engagement			-.2049**	.0659
R ²	.3489		.0392	
Mediator: Engagement	b		CI	
Index of moderated mediation	.0283		(.0053 .0587)	
-1 SD Employee Adaptability	-.0093		(-.0366 .0117)	
Mean Employee Adaptability	.0095		(-.0052 .0279)	
+1SD Employee Adaptability	.0190		(.0024 .0398)	

N = 434. Bootstrap sample size = 1,000. 95 % Confidence Interval (CI).

Bootstrapped effects and confidence intervals are shown for the moderated mediation.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

Discussion

The findings of our study confirm the hypothesized moderated mediation model, effectively operationalizing the structural components of Einarsen's framework, which underpins the current study. Specifically, our results validate the framework by demonstrating how an organizational action, such as Organizational Tolerance, triggers a psychological process through Work Engagement, which ultimately results in both personal health complaints and organizational consequences like counterproductive work behavior. Furthermore, by confirming that these pathways are influenced by individual resources, specifically adaptability, our study provides empirical weight to Einarsen's proposition that bullying outcomes are a product of the interaction between environment and individual factors.

Beyond merely validating these pathways, the results reveal the key role played by organizational tolerance toward workplace mistreatment. Specifically, the data indicate that a permissive organizational climate is not a passive background factor but rather a key driver of the observed outcomes.

The mediating role of work engagement was supported in relation to both counterproductive work behavior and health complaints. Additionally, in both cases, the moderating role of employee adaptability was confirmed with the mediating effect only being significant at high levels of adaptability. In other words, the indirect effect of OT on these outcomes, via work engagement, is conditional upon high levels of the moderator.

Our results are consistent with contemporary literature on destructive leadership, specifically regarding the Laissez-faire Style (Glambek *et al.*, 2018). The observed negative impact of organizational tolerance suggests that passivity in the face of bullying is not merely a neutral absence of leadership, but rather an active stressor. By failing to intervene, the organization signals tacit approval of aggressive behaviors, thereby eroding psychological

safety. This perception of insufficient support directly undermines employee engagement, creating a breeding ground for the health complaints and counterproductive work behaviors identified in our model.

These results are also consistent with the PSC framework. High organizational tolerance acts as a visible manifestation of a poor PSC, indicating that management prioritizes productivity or other goals over employees' psychological health (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). In this context, the perceived lack of institutional protection functions as a resource-depleting mechanism. Without the safeguard of a supportive safety climate, employees experience a rapid erosion of work engagement, which subsequently paves the way for the emergence of health complaints and counterproductive behaviors.

Our findings offer a nuanced view of the role played by personal resources in toxic work environments. Contrary to the idea which suggests that high adaptability protects employees, our results indicate that highly adaptable individuals can be paradoxically more vulnerable to the depletion of engagement in the presence of permissive leadership.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, self-report measures were used to explore employee perceptions. Self-reported data may introduce methodological biases, such as social desirability, and leading to the inflation of the associations observed among constructs (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Second, the cross-sectional design of the study limits our ability to draw causal inferences. Although significant associations were found, the absence of temporal separation precludes any inferences being drawn regarding the directionality of the effects observed. Future studies should use longitudinal or diary-based designs. However, the cross-sectional design employed here serves as a valuable exploratory analysis. Third, since data were collected from organizations

within a single national context, cross-cultural generalizability is limited. Cultural values and organizational norms may influence the perception of OT or adaptability. Future studies should explore these variables across diverse cultural or regional settings to enhance the external validity of our findings. Fourth, although the models tested in this study yielded significant results, future research may benefit from exploring alternative moderators with related conceptual foundations beyond adaptability. For instance, the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Maggiori *et al.*, 2017), or resilience (Luthans *et al.*, 2008) may serve as useful complementary constructs. Lastly, future studies might adopt different analytical models involving OT, exploring for instance its role as a moderator or as an outcome variable, depending on the theoretical assumptions and research context.

Practical Implications

Given that the impact of workplace bullying is shaped by the interaction between organizational factors and individual differences, as proposed by Einarsen (2020), practitioners should implement comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that address both the work environment and individual coping resources.

Another key conclusion drawn by this study is that a tolerant approach to managing psychosocial risks can ultimately become a risk for the organization. Organizations that tolerate workplace incivility risk reducing their profitability, either through a direct decline in efficiency or through the deterioration of employee health.

Regarding public policy making, the results of this study highlight the fact that organizational tolerance may be considered a public health issue.

The study offers critical insights for Human Resource Management, particularly as regards the retention of high-potential talent. Organizations often operate under the assumption that highly adaptable and autonomous employees are self-sufficient and require less supervision. Our findings issue a stark warning against this. We demonstrate that

adaptable employees are not immune to toxic leadership; indeed, they may be the first to suffer disengagement and health issues when their proactivity clashes with managerial passivity.

Conclusion

This study confirms the importance of key variables from Einarsen's framework in the bullying process. The quantification of these dependencies via the moderated mediation model offers counter-intuitive insights, exposing the complexity of employee reactions to toxic environments. Most significantly, the results indicate that organizational tolerance is a construct that is by no means negligible. It stands as a silent but potent architect of workplace dysfunction, demanding urgent attention in both future theoretical development and organizational intervention.

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