

Relationship between Loneliness in the Workplace and Deviant Work Behaviors: Evidence from a Thai Government Bank

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Abstract: -As the banking industry is currently being challenged by many external forces, which requires a massive change in all areas, acknowledging key factors that influence its operation system is very important and valuable for the banks, especially a government bank. As a government bank operates under an uncertainty of changing environment and the government control, placing more emphasis on components that can cause organizational failure is essential for survival. Workplace loneliness and deviance are perceived as critical factors that have an impact on both individual and organizational productivity and effectiveness. Although workplace loneliness and deviance have increasingly become an interesting topic in a management field in the past years, no study has attempted to explore the direct relationship between loneliness at work and deviant workplace behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this present study is to examine the relationship between loneliness in the workplace and deviant work behaviors of employees at Thai government bank. Data were gathered from 143 employees of Thai government bank headquarters through a questionnaire. The results found an intermediate positive correlation between loneliness at work and deviant work behavior ($r = .495, p < .01$). The results of linear regression analysis indicated that loneliness at work could explain 25% of variance to deviant work behavior ($R^2 = .245, F(1, 143) = 45.839, p < .01$). In sum, the more government bank's employees felt loneliness at work, the more likely they engaged in deviant work behaviors. Limitations and recommendations for further studies were also discussed.

Keywords: Loneliness in the workplace, deviant work behaviors, employees, Thai government bank

Introduction

Today's organizations have inevitably faced a rapidly changing environment, which forces organizations to adjust agilely and flexibly to cope with change. Numerous factors have been considered as the vital tools to help organizations get through a highly turbulent environment and change. Human resource is primarily viewed as the key component that determines the organizational survival and success when confronts with a rapid change and a world of disruption. However, organizational accomplishment is not only dependent upon an individual employee, but also heavily counts on teamwork. The interaction of employees in team can result in new ideas creation, the emergence of innovation, and the reduction of time consuming to accomplish the tasks. Previous research found that teamwork productivity and effectiveness is based on rewards, leadership, training, goals, salary, and motivation (Tohidi, 2011). In addition, recent research also revealed that healthy relationships in team can increase

employees' morale, which is imperative for organizational success (Jarrett, 2017). Nevertheless, building a good relationship between employees is not an easy task as today's organizations have encountered countless factors that impede them to achieve the goals such as political, economic, societal, and technological forces. Among these factors, societal forces play a vital role to determine the success or failure of employees' relationships.

A recent article in human resource management indicated that many organizations are now experiencing workplace loneliness epidemic, which ruins employees' wellbeing and organizational performance (Hava, 2017). Workplace loneliness is viewed as the critical factor that affects teamwork productivity and effectiveness, and causes organizational failure. Also, workplace deviance has been taken into the consideration as a key factor that affects individual and organizational performance and productivity (Kanten & Ülker,

2013). Recent research found the significant relationships between workplace loneliness and affective commitment and intention to leave a job (Ertosun & Erdil, 2012; Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014). Besides, the negative association of loneliness in the workplace and job satisfaction was also found in a related research (Tabancali, 2016). Previous research also discovered a negative relationship between job satisfaction and deviant behavior and a positive relationship between workplace stress and deviant behavior (Omar et al., 2011).

Although the focus on workplace loneliness and deviance topics has increasingly become more interesting in a management field in the past years, no study has attempted to explore the direct relationship between loneliness at work and deviant workplace behaviors. Additionally, as the banking industry is currently being challenged by various external forces, which requires a massive change and adaption, recognizing what key factors that influence its system is very important and valuable for the banks, particularly a government bank. As a government bank operates under an uncertainty of changing environment and a likelihood of government intervention, placing more emphasis on components that can cause organizational failure is essential for existence. Therefore, the purpose of this present study is to examine the relationship between loneliness in the workplace and deviant work behaviors of employees at Thai government bank.

Literature Reviews

Loneliness in the workplace topic has increasingly been paid more attention in the past years. Numerous studies reported the negative effects of loneliness at work such as low commitment, propensity to leave a job, and job satisfaction (Ertosun & Erdil, 2012; Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014; Tabancali, 2016). Loneliness is experienced when a person subjectively feels insufficient social connections with others (Sarpkaya, 2014). Wright et al. (2006) described loneliness at work as an unhappiness that ascends from the perception of the lack of qualitative interpersonal connections. They developed Loneliness at Work Scale (LWS) to measure employee's loneliness at work in two distinctive dimensions including emotional deprivation and social companionship. Emotional

deprivation refers to the quality of social interaction in the workplace whereas social companionship alludes to the scope of the sufficiency of interpersonal relationships at work. Based on the literature reviews, the research surrounding workplace loneliness tends to heavily focus on the effects of loneliness on organizational commitment, job performance, and job satisfaction (Ertosun & Erdil, 2012; Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014; Aytac, 2015; Tabancali, 2016; Akçit & Barutçu, 2017) and largely overlooked other dependent variables that can be directly influenced by workplace loneliness.

Deviant work behavior is one of remarkable factors being influenced by organizational commitment, organizational climate, organizational justice, and job satisfaction (Omar et al., 2011; Promsri, 2013; Kanten & Ülker, 2013). Deviant work behavior refers to employee's intentional behavior that violates essential norms of organizations and threatens individual and organizational well-being. Greenberg (2011) noted that organizational deviance is a sophisticated issue, which can produce either positive or negative impact on an organization depending on the perspectives of the organization and the society. From this viewpoint, organizational deviance can be divided into two distinguished types, which are destructive organizational deviance and constructive organizational deviance. This is comparable to Robinson and Bennett's typology of deviant workplace behavior, which proposes four distinctive types of deviance based on the mixture of two dimensions - the degree of impact and the level of work deviance – including production deviance, property deviance, political deviance, and personal aggression.

Despite these two factors have the joint variables used as independent, dependent, or intervene variables, no attention has been paid on the investigation on correlations between loneliness at work and deviant workplace behaviors. In the light of this, this study tends to enhance a body of knowledge in this area by focusing on the relationship between loneliness at work and deviant workplace behaviors (Figure 1). Therefore, based on the gap of literature, the research hypothesis of this present study was proposed as

“there is a significant relationship between loneliness at work and deviant workplace behaviors.”

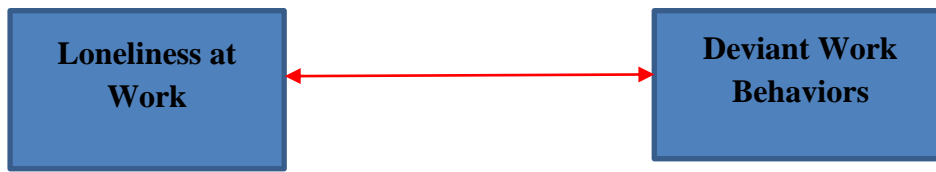


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study was exploratory study in which the questionnaire was used for data collection. Four-hundred questionnaires were distributed to employees in all departments of the government bank headquarters by using proportional stratified sampling technique. Of which 143 were returned as useable ones. The questionnaire consisted of three parts including socio-demographics part, loneliness in the workplace, and deviant workplace behaviors. Loneliness in the workplace was measured by a 16-item of Loneliness at Work Scale (LWS) originally developed by Wright et al. (2006). This scale was a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Deviant workplace behaviors was measured through a 12-item of a

modified version of deviant workplace behavior scale based on Robinson and Bennett’s workplace deviance typology (1995). This scale was a 4-point rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (always). Content validity with index-objective congruence (IOC) method and reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha test were conducted to ensure the quality of these scale measurements. The IOC score of each item was greater than 0.5, which exhibited the satisfactory validity of this scale. Also, these instruments demonstrated the satisfactory internal consistencies in which alpha scores of these two scales were greater than 0.7, as shown in Table 1. To test research hypothesis, Pearson correlation coefficient and simple linear regression were used for statistical analyses.

Table 1 Reliability Coefficients of Loneliness at Work and Deviant Work Behaviors

| Scale Measurement | No. of Items | Alpha Score |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Loneliness at Work | 16 | 0.77 |
| Deviant Work Behaviors | 12 | 0.88 |

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics were analyzed by frequency distribution. Results showed that the majority of respondents in this present study were female (69.2%). Participants in this study mostly aged between 31-40 years (56.6%). Regarding their educational level, 58.7% of them obtained a bachelor’s degree and the rest of them earned a graduate degree. For hierarchical level, 52.4% of participants who contributed in this present study were employers. For their work experience of employees in this government bank, 45.5% of them

reported that they had work experience with this bank more than 15 years.

Pearson correlation coefficient was conducted to explore the relationship between loneliness at work and deviant work behaviors of Thai government bank headquarters’ employees. Table 2 demonstrated the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. The results found an intermediate positive correlation between loneliness at work and deviant work behavior ($r = .495, p < .01$).

Table 2 Correlation between Loneliness at Work and Deviant Work Behaviors (n=143)

| | Production Deviance | Political Deviance | Property Deviance | Personal Aggression | Deviant Work Behaviors |
|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Emotional Deprivation | .529** | .425** | .479** | .399** | .543** |
| Social Companionship | .202* | .226** | .150 | .141 | .214* |
| Loneliness at Work | .479** | .424** | .413** | .354** | .495** |

*Significant Level at .05, **Significant Level at .01

Simple linear regression was carried out to explore the relationship between loneliness at work and deviant work behaviors (Table 3). A normal P-P plot was created to check on normality. The plot demonstrated no serious departures of dependent variable, which suggested that normality assumption was met. Also, the scatterplot showed that there was an intermediate positive linear relationship between the two variables, which was confirmed with Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.495. The Durbin-Watson was also computed to evaluate independence of errors. The value of 1.611 was considered acceptable and suggested that the assumption of independent errors was met. The results indicated that loneliness at work could explain 25% of variance to deviant work behavior

($R^2 = .245$, $F(1, 143) = 45.839$, $p < .01$). This suggested that there were other factors that could explain deviant work behaviors of government bank's employees that had not been included in this study. It was found that loneliness at work significantly predicted deviant work behavior of government bank's employees ($\beta = .495$, $p < .01$). The regression equation was:

$$DWB = -.417 + .355(LWS)$$

In summary, the more government bank's employees felt loneliness at work, the more likely they engaged in deviant work behaviors. As a result, research hypothesis of this present study was confirmed.

Table 3 Simple Linear Regression of Loneliness at Work on Deviant Work Behaviors

| Model | Unstandardized | | Standardized | t | Sig. |
|---|----------------|------|--------------|--------|---------|
| | B | S.E. | Beta | | |
| 1 | | | | | |
| (Constant) | -.417 | .133 | | -3.131 | .002** |
| LWS | .335 | .050 | .495 | 5.770 | .0001** |
| n=143 df=1 F = 45.839 Sig. =.000 Durbin-Watson = 1.611 R² = .245 Adjusted R² = .240 | | | | | |

*Significant Level at .05, **Significant Level at .01, LWS = Loneliness at Work

Conclusion, Discussions, and Recommendations

This present study aimed at exploring the relationship between loneliness at work and deviant work behaviors of employees at Thai government bank headquarters. The results found an intermediate positive correlation between loneliness

at work and deviant work behavior. Simple regression analysis was computed to examine the effect of loneliness in the workplace on deviant work behaviors. The findings revealed that loneliness at work significantly predicted deviant work behaviors of government bank's employees.

In short, the more government bank's employees experienced loneliness at work, the more likely they engaged in deviant work behaviors. These findings were a new knowledge in management and organizational behavior fields as this study was the first study in these fields that attempted to ascertain the relationship between these two variables. Results of this present study can be described and confirmed by the related studies in which the relationships between loneliness at work and job satisfaction, and job satisfaction and workplace deviance were found separately (Omar et al., 2011; Tabancali, 2016). This can be implied that loneliness in the workplace and deviant work behaviors have a significant relationship when used job satisfaction as the mediating variable to explain the correlation between these two variables.

The results of this present study imply that when employees felt an inadequate social interaction with their colleagues, they tended to demonstrate the action that harmfully violated a government bank's norms and threatens bank's health and members' wellbeing. Based on these findings, this suggests that government bank's management needs to ensure that all employees will be given the opportunity to have an interaction with their co-workers. Soft skills training such as interpersonal skills and communication skills should be provided to enhance an ability of employees to establish relationships with others and reduce the likelihood of workplace deviance. Moreover, this government bank also needs to create social interaction atmosphere in order to lessen workplace loneliness of employees. As workplace loneliness found to be an antecedent variable that has an influence on deviant workplace behaviors, the establishment of employee assistance program (EAP) in this government bank is recommended as this approach can help prevent and mitigate a feeling of loneliness at work in employees.

Like other studies, this present study has some limitations. Sample size was considered as the weakness of this study, which should be extended in the future study. In addition, as the setting of this current study was only confined to this specific government bank headquarters, the further study should expand data collection to other branches of this government bank. Also, as this study primarily focused on the relationship between workplace loneliness and workplace deviance, future studies should place more emphasis on other predicting

variables since loneliness at work could predict only one-fourth of tendency to demonstrate deviant work behaviors in employees at this government bank.

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