

The Determinants of Organizational Withdrawal Behaviors

Wassila Merkouche, Alain Marchand and Stéphane Renaud

École des Relations Industrielles, Université de Montréal
Wassila.merkouche@umontreal.ca

We study the determinants of withdrawal behavior in organizational environment (Hanisch, 1995). These behaviors are more and more present in organizations following several changes and have negative effects at both the individual and organizational levels. Organizational withdrawal is a set of voluntary counterproductive behaviors, active or passive, aiming to reduce participation in the achievement of organizational goals. We first distinguish between two components of this concept, first, work withdrawal through which employee maintains employment relationship with the organization while reducing the achievement of its work tasks by delays, absences or other adverse behaviors. Then, job withdrawal through which the employee terminates his employment relationship with the organization as part of a voluntary dysfunctional turnover. We propose an original classification of work withdrawal behaviors that, apart from the delays and absences, emphasizes three components of other adverse behaviors which are: theft of time, intentional decrease of performance in tasks and lack of manifestation of organizational citizenship behaviors.

We also offer an original integrative theoretical model of organizational withdrawal including a new explanatory theoretical approach of this behavior which includes cynicism and turnover. Through a multi-level sociological approach, we design the individual at the heart of a three levels system: the macrosocial, méso-social and micro-social (Marchand et al, 2006). We use the perspective of psychological contract of Rousseau (1995) as well as that of the job embeddedness of Mitchell et al (2001) to better understand the choice of organizational withdrawal behaviors. We assume that the employee will conduct two types of assessments to adapt his behavior to the situation experienced. The employee will first assess the degree of compliance with its psychological contract from the organization, specifically how he saw his work experience in the tasks design, use of skills, decision-making authority, gratuities, recognition, career development and job security. Then the employee will assess its job embeddedness with regard to social relations, supervisor support and co-workers support. Personal characteristics such as age, gender, and psychological trait (locus of control) become decisive in the sense that they can moderate the relationship between these two factors and organizational withdrawal.

In case where the employee perceives that his psychological contract was not respected by the organization, and that the employee is not well anchored in his job, it is likely to adopt the job withdrawal, that is to say, he ends his employment relationship with voluntary dysfunctional

turnover. In case where the employee perceives that his psychological contract was not respected by the organization, but that employee is well deep-rooted in his work (links, fit, sacrifice) it is likely to adopt the work withdrawal, that is to say, he keeps his employment relationship while expressing his dissatisfaction with the work withdrawal behavior. We assume that even in the case of perception by the individual of his psychological contract breach by the organization, the presence of the anchoring of the employee in employment encourages him not to leave his job (job withdrawal) but to keep his employment relationship with showing negative attitudes by the adoption of work withdrawal behaviors such as cynicism.

Cynicism would be a conduct that falls into the category of intentional decline of performance in the tasks resulting in retention of complete and required efforts to perform the work tasks (Carpenter and Berry, 2014). This performance decline implies a lower level of productivity and decreasing work involvement (Probst, 2005). This would be consistent with the definition of one dimension of burnout, cynicism. Cynicism is manifested by the development of negative attitudes and feelings towards work and a by distancing between the individual and the work environment (Bakker et al., 2000). This unfavorable behavior includes rigid, disinterested and apathetic attitudes and behaviors towards work and people benefiting from the service rendered by the work. To ease the emotional baggage that weighs on them, the cynic employees minimize their relationships with the people they encounter in the work, see them as objects and use rigid rules when serving them (Arabaci, 2010. Maslach et al, 2001). Employees who suffer from cynicism ignore requests from others, can be condescending or rude, and fail to offer assistance. Characterized by a distancing, lack of interest, hostile behaviors and negative reactions, cynicism is considered a problematic dimension of burnout (Maslach and Leiter Schaufeli, 2001; Kim, Shin and Umbreit 2007). Specifically, organizational cynicism is a negative attitude towards the organization where one works, which has cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Dean, and Dharwadkar Brandes, 1998). These authors define organizational cynicism as a three-dimensional negative attitude towards the organization: (1) the belief that the organization lacks integrity, (2) a negative feeling towards the organization, (3) trends to humiliating, disparaging and critical behaviors towards the organization (Tokgöz and Yılmaz, 2008 Dean, and Dharwadkar Brandes, 1998).

We have chosen to study cynicism because delays and absences have been widely studied. In addition, this choice of study results in enriching the list of this class of work withdrawal behavior that intentionally remains open to changes occurring in organizations. Finally this behavior, most often studied as a manifestation of burnout within the context of mental health, will be approached in the context of our study from the perspective of counterproductive behaviors that include organizational withdrawal having both negative consequences for the individual (decreased motivation and loss of income) and the organization (decreased productivity).

As far as turnover as the sole expression of job withdrawal is concerned, this behavior constitutes a voluntary departure outside the organization which could either be functional or dysfunctional for it (Guthrie, 2000; Renaud & Morin, 2009). The functional turnover is one that is beneficial to the organization as the departure of an employee with a bad performance, while the

dysfunctional turnover is that which is harmful to the organization as the departure of a very successful employee or occupant a key position, which is generally considered disadvantageous and costly for the organization (Guthrie, 2001; Renaud & Morin, 2009). Voluntary dysfunctional turnover is designed as the main organizational withdrawal behavior, but often studied solely and not linked to the broader theoretical framework of organizational withdrawal or that of counterproductive behaviors. Hence the importance of understanding turnover in the context of this family of negative behaviors oriented to organization (Carpenter and Berry, 2014).

We suggest the outlines of two empirical study one about cynicism and the other about turnover as two different dependent variables.

We emphasize some determinants rarely studied in the literature on organizational withdrawal: human resources management practices (psychological contract) and items related to attachment to the work environment (job embeddedness) and individual characteristics that may moderate the relationship between these determinants and each of our two dependent variables. The first hypothesis relates to the fact that all the individual, work (job design, job demands and gratuities), group (social relations) variables contribute directly and jointly in explaining cynicism behavior as work withdrawal and turnover as job withdrawal. The second hypothesis is to the effect that personal characteristics (gender, age and control center) moderates these relationships.

In addition to its theoretical contributions such as the integrative model of organizational withdrawal, we use a new explanatory theoretical approach for organizational withdrawal including its two components. Our study try to extend the concept of adverse behaviors by including cynicism in this category and contributes to the advancement of organizational health knowledge by having a different theoretical perspective on cynicism, commonly considered as a dimension of burnout, and this by relating it to the broader theoretical framework of organizational counterproductive withdrawal behaviors according on the model Hanisch (1995). Our study contributes also to the advancement of knowledge on turnover by using a combination of several theoretical approaches. In addition, we study turnover not as an isolated organizational behavior but by linking it to the broader theoretical framework of organizational counterproductive behaviors of organisational withdrawal according on the model Hanisch (1995). The empirical contribution of our study is that of jointly studying the effect of determinants of both the work, relationships with colleagues and fit with the organization of cynicism and turnover. Finally, our study will help to inform practitioners on best practices and environments to prevent counterproductive work behaviors such as cynicism and turnover.