3 Emotions, Violence, and Counterproductive Work Behavior

Paul E. Spector
Suzy Fox
Theresa Domagalski

Emotion has long played a central role in research and theory concerning human aggression and violence. Thinking in experimental and social psychology has evolved from an initial focus on frustration mainly as a situational condition (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939) to more modern theories that incorporate a variety of negative emotional states in response to situational frustration and other environmental conditions and events (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1998). Parallel to the social psychology work on human aggression, emotion has also been central in much organizational work on workplace aggression and the broader concept of counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Injustice and stressful conditions have been specifically linked to negative emotions and both aggression and CWB (e.g., Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001).

It has been recognized that aggressive acts can occur for a variety of reasons, and a distinction has been made between affective aggression that is associated with negative emotion and instrumental aggression that is not (Neuman & Baron, 1997). Affective, or "hot," aggression has as its primary goal the injury of a target, whether physical or psychological, at times impulsively and immediately during the experience of negative emotion in response to provocation. With instrumental, or "cold," aggression, harm of another may be a means to desired ends. In work organizations, instrumental aggression may be the chosen path toward status, power, perks, assignments, bonuses, promotions, and reputation, that is, "getting ahead" (Neuman & Baron, 2005). Our focus in this chapter will be on affective aggression and CWB, in which harm of another person or an organization is the primary goal.

Merchant and Lundell (2001) distinguished four types of workplace violence, depending on the relationship between actor and recipient. Type 1 is *criminal intent* that consists mainly of instrumental acts of violence in the commission of a crime such as robbery, which is not the focus of this chapter. Type 2 is *customer or client violence,* which is most likely affective in nature. LeBlanc and Barling (2005) discuss the greater risk faced by employees who deal directly with customers, clients, or patients experiencing frustration and anger. This might occur when the employee is in a position to deny requests or services, for example. The underlying psychological process in this sort of violence is very similar to coworker violence, although the acts are more immediate and impulsive and may be more likely to be physical. Type 3 is *coworker violence,* which also can be affective in nature. A variety of models have been provided in the literature to explain this sort of violence, and a number of both individual and situational variables have been linked to it. Most of the research on workplace violence has involved this type, which will be the major focus of this chapter. Type 4 is *relationship violence* that falls mainly outside of the models and research in the organizational realm.

Counterproductive Work Behavior and Violence

Counterproductive work behavior consists of intentional acts by employees that harm organizations or their stakeholders. Included under CWB are acts of physical violence against people (Type 3 violence), as well as milder forms of aggressive behavior such as verbal aggression and other forms of mistreatment directed toward people. CWB also includes acts directed toward organizations rather than people (although people are often indirect targets). This includes destruction and misuse of organizational property, doing work incorrectly, or failing to notify superiors about mistakes and work problems (e.g., a machine malfunction), and withdrawal (e.g., calling in sick when not ill). CWB has been studied from a variety of perspectives, using different terms to refer to a partially overlapping set of harmful acts. This includes *aggression* (Neuman & Baron, 1997; Spector, 1978), *deviance* (Hollinger, 1986; Robinson & Bennett, 1995), *retaliation* (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), and *revenge* (Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997). Acts directed specifically at people have been studied as *bullying* (Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999), *emotional abuse* (Keashly, 1998), and *mobbing* (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996).

Researchers who have studied these various related phenomena have taken a variety of theoretical positions that give different emphasis to emotions. Neuman and Baron's (1997, 1998, 2005) work, based on the human aggression literature, considers the role of negative emotions in affective aggression. They provided an integrated model of aggression (Neuman & Baron, 2005) in which negative emotion (hostility, anger, and shame) plays a central role. According to this model, aggression is triggered by environmental conditions and stressors, including situational frustration, injustice, insults, and presence

of things associated with aggression. These lead to negative emotions and aggressive cognitions that together lead to appraisal of the situation and decisions about whether or not to respond aggressively. Their model draws upon a cognitive-neoassociationistic analysis of aggression (Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1996; Anderson, Deuser, & DeNeve, 1995; Berkowitz, 1990). Situational variables (such as perceived threat, mistreatment, or frustration resulting from thwarted goals) may lead to primary and secondary appraisal and on to aggressive behavioral choices by one or more of three paths: *cognition* (excitation of hostile thoughts, memories, or aggression scripts), *affect* (priming hostile or angry feelings), and/or *arousal* (excitation transfer). Through accessible hostile schemata, these paths may lead to more hostile interpretation of ambiguous events and ambiguous affective states. It is noteworthy that anger can play several causal roles in this process (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Anger may reduce inhibitions against aggression by providing a justification when aggressive retaliation is part of the decision rule in the aggression script. Anger may interfere with higher-level cognitive processes in the appraisal stages, such as moral reasoning. Anger may prime memory of and processing of the provoking events, enabling a person to maintain aggressive intentions over time; may be used as an information cue in the interpretation of ambiguous events; and may prime aggressive scripts and associated behaviors. Finally, anger may energize behavior by increasing arousal levels. Thus, anger plays a role in all three paths to aggressive behavior: cognition, affect, and arousal. Negative emotions besides anger, such as sadness, grief, or depression, may lead into the process as well.

O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996) note that aggression in organizations may be triggered by negative affect, even when the adverse environment or outcomes cannot be blamed on a specific person. In that case, emotional arousal may be general, and aggression may target any object that is available and perceived to be appropriate.

Bies and Tripp (2005; see also Bies et al., 1997) posit a clear role for emotions in their concept of revenge. They suggest that an act of revenge is a response to certain situations in organizations that involve goal obstruction; violations of rules, norms, and promises; or attacks on power and status. *Goal obstruction* is similar to situational frustration that has been a central feature of human aggression work (e.g., Dollard et al., 1939). *Violations* can involve injustice but can consist of other acts, such as poor etiquette (e.g., betraying a confidence). *Attacks on power and status* are often harsh criticisms that hold a person up to ridicule. All these situations can trigger anger, a sense of violation, and feelings of helplessness, as well as revenge cognitions and thoughts. Both emotions and cognitions can endure over time, perhaps building in intensity until an act of revenge occurs. At other times they may dissipate. This suggests that revenge is not always an immediate and impulsive reaction to a situation but rather involves a complex interplay of cognition and emotion over time. Furthermore, intervening situations may either increase or decrease the likelihood that an act of revenge will occur.

Retaliation theory, like revenge theory, also considers harmful acts conducted in response to feelings of having been wrongly treated, but in this case the focus is specifically on injustice. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) noted how anger and outrage are emotions experienced in response to injustice. Although their initial work focused on the reactions of those affected by injustice, more recent work has explored vicarious reactions to the injustice experienced by others (Folger & Skarlicki, 2005). According to this view, *deontic anger* occurs when one witnesses injustice against others, and this can be associated with overt or covert retaliation against the perceived cause of the injustice.

The specific negative emotion experienced in response to negative events or outcomes may depend upon the individual's causal attributions for the precipitating event. Martinko, Gundlach, and Douglas (2002) suggest that although internal attributions for negative events (my fault) are likely to lead to negative emotions (e.g., self-deprecation or helplessness) and behaviors (e.g., learned helplessness or substance abuse) directed toward self, external attributions, coupled with perceived intentionality, are likely to lead to negative emotions (such as anger) and behaviors (such as aggression, revenge, or sabotage) directed toward others.

Spector and Fox (2002, 2005) developed a model of CWB that gives central importance to emotions as a response to workplace stressors. Conditions and events at work are perceived and appraised by employees. Those perceived to be stressors induce negative emotions, including anger, anxiety, and depression. Such emotions contribute to CWB that can occur immediately and impulsively or at a later time. In many cases, emotions help motivate intentions to engage in later CWB. This model includes an important role for perceived control that affects both the appraisal of situations and the decision to engage in CWB or some alternative constructive act. Those who perceive control in a situation will be less likely to perceive a stressor, experience negative emotion, and engage in CWB. Personality (particularly affective dispositions that will be discussed later) is also an important element that can affect both appraisal and the decision to act. Individuals who have a tendency to experience negative emotions will be more sensitive to stressors and will be more likely to exhibit emotional reactions to the environment, as well as CWB.

Emotional Experience Versus Affective Dispositions _____

It is important to distinguish emotional states from affective dispositions and the impact of momentary states from more chronic and long-term emotional experiences. An emotional state refers to a moment in time during which an individual experiences an emotion. Although emotional states certainly last for some period of time, the assessment is generally of a particular instance, and states are relatively short-lived. Thus an event occurs at work (a coworker makes a sarcastic comment), and the employee becomes angry.

That anger may dissipate in a few minutes or hours. Of course, a particular pattern of events that elicit emotional responses might occur; for example, a coworker might periodically make nasty comments, which elicit angry reactions repeatedly over time.

Models of CWB do not explicitly deal with this time distinction, although much of the writing about these models seems to describe particular events. Tests of models, however, tend to assess conditions and emotions more on a chronic or periodic level. The typical questionnaire study asks employees to indicate how often certain events occur (e.g., arguments with coworkers) and how often they experience negative emotions such as anger. Inferences are drawn from relations among frequencies of conditions and emotions to processes suggesting emotions are a response to particular conditions.

Emotion can also be assessed at the trait level as affective dispositions. Such traits reflect that certain individuals are more likely to experience negative emotions than others. Distinctions have been made among different discrete emotions, such as *trait anger* (tendency to experience anger) and *trait anxiety* (tendency to experience anxiety). It is assumed that affective dispositions are personality variables that arise at least partially from genetic predispositions, and although it is beyond our scope here, there are data suggesting that these dispositions are clearly different from emotional states or even the frequency of states over time within a particular setting (Spector, Chen, & O'Connell, 2000).

Empirical Evidence of Linkages Between Emotional States and CWB

Given the central role of experienced emotions in theories of aggression, it is surprising how few empirical studies have been published linking emotional states to both organizational stressors and counterproductive behavioral responses. Much of the empirical work consists of laboratory studies in the domain of general discomfort-anger-aggression processes (e.g., Anderson et al., 1995; Anderson et al., 1996; Asmus & Bell, 1999; Bell & Baron, 1976; Berkowitz, 1990).

Among the exceptions, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) summarize research linking employees' perceptions of unfair treatment with negative emotions such as anger, outrage, and resentment and in turn to behavioral responses that we would call CWB and they call ORB (organizational retaliatory behavior). Cropanzano and Baron (1991) also link injustice to emotions and workplace conflict, and Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (1997) relate CWB to high levels of job tension, somatic tension, fatigue, and burnout.

Spector (1997) presents a meta-analysis of 12 early studies reporting correlations between experienced frustration (defined as state emotion) and other work variables. Antecedents were defined as *frustrators,* or what the current stressor-emotion model of CWB calls stressors. Frustrators that

related to experienced frustration included lack of autonomy, interpersonal conflict, organizational constraints, role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload. Behavioral and other outcomes that were correlated with experienced frustration included job satisfaction, work anxiety, physical health symptoms, employee withdrawal behavior (e.g., intention to quit, but not absence), aggression, hostility, and sabotage. Chen and Spector (1992) found a measure of anger but not experienced frustration correlated with theft, and anger correlated more strongly than experienced frustration with aggression, hostility, and sabotage. It is noteworthy that most of the studies reported in this meta-analysis were self-report, except for Spector, Dwyer, and Jex (1988) in which incumbent-reported experienced frustration was correlated with supervisor-reported constraints, conflict, role ambiguity, and workload.

In a meta-analysis, Spector and Goh (2001) found anger and anxiety to be related to a variety of stressors, with mean correlations ranging from .29 (anxiety and role conflict) to .49 (anger and organizational constraints). Similarly, linkages between negative emotion (measured by the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale, or JAWS; Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000) and CWB were reported in a number of studies (Fox et al., 2001; Goh, Bruursema, Fox, & Spector, 2003; Miles, Borman, Spector, & Fox, 2002). Correlations were significant for all cases of negative emotions and CWB, with correlations as high as .45. Fox et al. (2001) found negative emotions, as measured by the JAWS, to be related to both organizational stressors (conflict, $r = .49$; organizational constraints, $r = .47$; distributive justice, $r = .38$; and procedural justice, $r = .44$) and to CWB (targeting organizations, $r = .45$; targeting people in organizations, $r = .30$). Furthermore, everysignificant relationship between stressors and CWB was mediated by negative emotion. Fox and Spector (1999) also found that both experienced frustration and job satisfaction mediated the positive relation between employees' experience of situational constraints (events frustrating their achievement of organizational and personal goals) and CWB (both personal and organizational).

Lee and Allen (2002) examined the relative contributions of cognition and affect on different types of "workplace deviance behavior" (WDB). They proposed that some behaviors (such as voluntary turnover) would best be explained by instrumental motives and would be primarily influenced by cognitive evaluations of work, whereas other behaviors (such as unexcused absence) were derived from expressive motives, primarily influenced by affective experiences at work. They thus predicted that job cognitions would have a stronger impact on WDBO (behaviors targeting the organization), whereas job affect would more strongly affect WDBI (behaviors targeting individuals in the organization). In addition, they pointed out that discrete emotions may exert different effects on peoples' behavior: guilt may reduce WDB while anger may increase it. Unfortunately, they were not able to test the distinct antecedents of WDBO versus WDBI, as they were unable to obtain a factor structure justifying the distinction. The higher-order negative affect variable only marginally

predicted WDB, but the discrete emotion of hostility significantly increased predictability beyond negative affect. Similarly, when comparing cognition with higher-order negative affect, cognition was a stronger predictor of WDB, but when the discrete emotion of hostility replaced negative affect, it was as important a predictor of WDB as cognition. This strongly reinforces the need to investigate the effects of discrete emotions in the stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behavior.

Finally, Glomb (2002) collected in-depth data about specific incidents of workplace aggression, demonstrating linkages among various antecedent, individual difference, and behavioral variables; however, she incorporated the experience of anger in her definition of aggression itself rather than demonstrating exogenous linkages between emotional state and aggression. Her results suggest an escalatory pattern, in which less severe incidents often lead to more severe incidents, with both parties experiencing anger as outcome as well as antecedent of the incident.

The results of existing workplace research clearly support the central role of emotional experience in violence and CWB. Most of these studies assessed more chronic exposure to stressors and negative emotional states rather than investigating specific incidents. Clearly more needs to be done to link emotion to cognition in CWB, particularly at the level of specific stressful antecedents, discrete emotional reactions, and specific behavioral incidents. Innovative research designs are needed to tap into the dynamic, reciprocal, and iterative stressor-emotion-CWB processes.

Affective Traits and CWB

Together, the organizational and social psychology literatures demonstrate that individual differences constitute an important explanation for workplace aggression, violence, and other CWB. Numerous personality traits have been examined for their association with CWB and include trait anger (Domagalski & Steelman, 2004; Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Fox & Spector, 1999; Hepworth & Towler, 2004), negative affectivity (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Hepworth & Towler, 2004; Skarlicki, Folger, & Tesluk, 1999), self-control (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Hepworth & Towler, 2004; Marcus & Schuler, 2004), emotional stability (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Salgado, 2002), narcissism (Penney & Spector, 2002), agreeableness (Skarlicki et al., 1999), self-esteem (Harvey & Keashley, 2003), and trait anxiety (Fox & Spector, 1999). Those that have demonstrated the greatest explanatory power in our understanding of CWB are trait anger and self-control.

In separate studies by Douglas and Martinko (2001) and Hepworth and Towler (2004), trait anger emerged as a prominent predictor of workplace aggression. *Trait anger,* as noted earlier, is described as an individual affective disposition to experience chronic feelings of anger over time and across

situations (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983). Individuals high in trait anger are prone to experience anger more intensely across situations because of an angry temperament and also, more frequently, as a result of negative appraisals across various situations (Fox & Spector, 1999; Spielberger et al., 1983). *State anger,* by contrast, describes the experience of negative emotions that vary in intensity ranging from mild irritation to outrage, which are generally of limited duration in response to specific events (Spielberger, Ritterband, Sydeman, Reheiser, & Unger, 1995). The time distinction between anger as a momentary state and anger as an affective trait is important to an understanding of aggressive and violent behaviors at work. Individuals with high trait anger have the tendency to perceive a broad range of situations negatively and to react with intense anger (Spielberger et al., 1983; Gibson & Barsade, 1999). Those with higher levels of trait anger have reported engaging in a greater incidence of aggressive and antisocial behaviors such as doing or saying things to purposely harm others (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Hepworth & Towler, 2004), striking out at the source of their anger, slamming doors, and using sarcasm (Domagalski & Steelman, 2004).

Although employees who possess angry dispositions are inclined to display CWB more so than those who are low in trait anger, the observed relationship becomes more complex when self-control is introduced. *Self-control* is the individual tendency to assess the long-term consequences of one's behavior (Marcus & Schuler, 2004). When self-control is low, individuals lack the ability to effectively manage their frustrations. Instead, they lose their inhibitions by reacting impulsively or aggressively to provocations (Douglas & Martinko, 2001).

Megargee and colleagues (Megargee, 1966; Megargee, Cook, & Mendelsohn, 1967) developed a typology of control to theorize the relationship between aggression and personality. Their classification posits the existence of three control-related personality types: chronically overcontrolled, undercontrolled, and appropriately controlled. Chronically *overcontrolled* individuals are prone to rigidly inhibit their reactions to provocations, whereas *appropriately controlled* types are generally restrained, except when assertiveness is perceived to be justifiable. *Undercontrolled* individuals lack the ability to inhibit aggressive and antisocial impulses. According to their framework, undercontrolled personalities will engage in frequent acts of aggressive and counterproductive behavior; however, more extreme acts of violence may be exhibited instead by those classified as chronically overcontrolled when their emotionless demeanor and rigid inhibitions break down. Thus, brutality and violence are not enacted as a culmination of frequent mild displays of aggression by undercontrolled personality types but rather by otherwise mild-mannered, highly controlled individuals.

The Megargee classification theorizes the relationship between an individual disposition and aggression but does not consider situational influences. Yet, as we have earlier stated, the literature demonstrates that violent,

aggressive, and counterproductive behaviors are best explained when both individual differences and situational factors are examined. Although our focus in this chapter precludes discussion of environmental antecedents and correlates of CWB, it is important to consider the context in which these behaviors are examined, such as criminal behavior or work environments, because explanatory models may vary.

An affective disposition characterized by low self-control—what the Megargee typology refers to as undercontrolled types—has been identified as a strong predictor of counterproductive behavior among employees (Hepworth & Towler, 2004; Marcus & Schuler, 2004). The impulsive and uninhibited tendencies of individuals who lack self-control in the face of potentially detrimental consequences figure prominently in the display of CWB such as theft, fraud, sabotage, and aggression. In addition, aggressive and counterproductive workplace behaviors occur more readily when individuals with low self-control also possess high levels of trait anger (Douglas & Martinko, 2001). Thus, the combined effects of two distinct dispositional tendencies, trait anger and self-control, have been found to jointly influence negative work behavior; however, the distinction between low self-control and overcontrol has not been examined in the organizational literature and thus limits the ability to establish whether workplace violence and highly aggressive acts are performed by overcontrolled personalities rather than individuals with low self-control. It is possible that external constraints imposed by organizations will mitigate the dispositional effects of low self-control (Marcus & Schuler, 2004). Company policies that communicate negative sanctions associated with rule violations or inform employees of surveillance measures may induce employees with low self-control to otherwise restrain themselves. It is unclear, however, whether such measures would be effective in preventing highly aggressive and violent acts by employees with overcontrolled personalities who reach a breaking point.

The important role of trait anger in combination with other affective dispositions is further reinforced by an investigation of narcissistic personalities (Penney & Spector, 2002). *Narcissism* may be described as an individual desire to perceive oneself as superior to others. Narcissistic individuals possess a tenuous sense of self-esteem in which they are highly vigilant and emotionally sensitive to information that might threaten their desired superior self-appraisals. Penney and Spector (2002) found evidence of an indirect relationship between narcissism and CWB that was mediated by trait anger. They concluded that employees who are narcissistic experience more anger than others because of the tendency to maintain constant vigilance to ego threats, and when threats to their egos surface, they are likely to respond by engaging in CWB.

Other personality traits have been empirically tested in relationship to counterproductive workplace behaviors, among them the Big Five personality factors of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability. All three share the common feature of being stable, enduring, individual level characteristics, although Emotional Stability is arguably the sole trait among these

with an affective orientation. Nonetheless, the importance of dispositional characteristics as predictors of CWB is supported by several studies. Colbert and her colleagues (2004) found that Agreeableness moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and interpersonal deviance, whereas Conscientiousness moderates the relationship between perceptions of an organization's developmental environment and the behavioral outcome of withholding effort. Furthermore, individuals who lack Emotional Stability, meaning those with a tendency to experience stable feelings of insecurity, depression, despair, and fearfulness, are significantly more likely to withhold work effort when they perceive an organizational environment lacking in encouragement, feedback, and support needed for employee development.

In a meta-analysis conducted by Salgado (2002), the association between the Big Five personality factors and CWB—defined as absenteeism, accident rate, deviant behavior, and turnover—also supported the influence of personality characteristics as predictors of CWB. Conscientiousness and Agreeableness both predicted deviant behavior such as theft and substance use, whereas employee turnover was explained by all five personality traits, with Emotional Stability showing the strongest negative relationship to turnover.

The value of specifying theoretical models that explore the interactive relationship between situational and dispositional variables has been addressed in a study by Skarlicki et al. (1999). They found that for individuals with antagonistic personalities (those who are low in agreeableness), there was an interaction between interactional and distributive justice in predicting *organizational retaliatory behavior* (ORB). ORB was operationalized as behavior that includes purposely damaging company equipment and taking company supplies home without permission.

Negative affectivity was also examined as a possible predictor of retaliation (Skarlicki et al., 1999). A similar three-way interaction was found which demonstrated that individuals who may be characterized by the trait of *negative affectivity* (feelings of discomfort, dissatisfaction, and distress, with a generally negative orientation toward life) are more likely to retaliate when both distributive and interactional justice are low. Interestingly, those with a negative affect have not been shown to directly engage in workplace aggression (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Hepworth & Towler, 2004). These seemingly contradictory empirical findings suggest that individual differences do not necessarily independently explain acts of workplace violence or aggression but instead require theoretical frameworks to model the joint effects of situational factors and individual differences in order to understand CWB.

One final affective disposition that has been examined in relation to workplace aggression is trait anxiety (Fox & Spector, 1999). Individuals prone to trait anxiety are those with a stable tendency to experience elevated feelings of tension and apprehension across a multitude of situations. Highly anxious employees respond to work events with heightened feelings of frustration and job dissatisfaction, and these negative emotional responses lead to counterproductive behavioral responses such as CWB directed at the

organization and CWB directed toward others. Although trait anxiety indirectly predicts CWB through its association with experienced negative emotional states, these findings attest to the complex interrelationships among experienced emotional states and affective personality traits in influencing CWB. Moreover, as the foregoing discussion suggests, theoretical models of workplace violence and other undesirable behaviors such as aggression, deviance, and retaliation would be incomplete without the inclusion of individual personality differences, particularly trait anger and self-control. In light of the potentially detrimental implications of counterproductive work behavior to organizations and those employed by them, continued research that integrates environmental and individual level variables is warranted.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Intervention

The centrality of emotion's role in CWB and violence in the workplace should inform how this important social issue is addressed. This means considering both the precipitating individual and organizational factors that lead to negative emotions at work and factors that trigger aggressive and violent responses to emotional experiences. A dual focus on reducing unnecessary emotional provocation and providing productive outlets for emotional experience that is inevitable would prove most effective. These goals can be accomplished using a variety of strategies.

Dispositional Approach

As summarized in this chapter, clear evidence shows that some people are more dispositionally inclined to engage in CWB and violence than others. Trait anger and self-control in particular have been linked to these behaviors. Thus, one approach to addressing CWB would be through selection by screening out from hiring those individuals who are high on these personality traits. Although this approach may well identify some individuals with aggressive tendencies who would have engaged in these behaviors, there are limitations that make it insufficient as a complete strategy to control CWB. First, although research has linked these traits to CWB, studies combine a large variety of discrete acts into behavioral indexes, and it is unclear to what extent personality predicts the more serious aggressive and violent acts that are rarely reported. Thus personality may predict milder acts, such as spreading rumors or CWBs that are not really aggressive, such as taking a longer break than entitled. Furthermore, behavior is a complex interplay of both personality and environment so that in many organizations where provocation is rare, CWB may not often occur, and therefore, screening out those so inclined may not accomplish much.

Second, the mechanisms by which personality relates to CWB are not well understood. It might be tempting to assume that these individuals are merely aggressive by their nature and thus likely to by hyperreactive. As we discuss in this chapter, emotional states are precursors to aggression and CWB and likely mediate the relationship between personality traits, especially affective dispositions, and CWB. Thus, for example, the high trait anger individuals are more likely to respond to environmental conditions with anger and thereby engage in CWB. On the other hand, it is possible that the relation between personality and CWB is mediated by the environment. For example, those high in affective traits might find themselves in worse jobs that may be more stressful. Spector, Zapf, Chen, and Frese (2000) discussed evidence for mechanisms whereby those high in negative affectivity (NA) tended to be selected into higher-stress jobs and tended to create more stressful conditions for themselves. The selection mechanism is particularly troublesome for the efficacy of affective traits as a selection device, as it implies that the reason high-NA individuals are aggressive is that they are in jobs that are more provoking and not just because they have a tendency to engage in such behavior.

Finally, personality measures can be subject to applicant faking, and measures of affective dispositions in particular can be influenced by social desirability (Chen, Dai, Spector, & Jex, 1997). Thus, these measures might be particularly prone to bias in a situation in which applicants are highly motivated to appear in a desirable way on the test, and thus they will score low on these dispositions. The reduced accuracy of measurement would reduce the predictive validity of these tests as selection devices.

Clearly, before these tests could be used for selection, validation studies would have to be conducted with the specific target behaviors as criteria. Whereas the research studies done to date are suggestive that measures of affective dispositions can predict CWB, this needs to be verified. Furthermore, although most of the research done to date has looked at individual personality traits, interactions among some traits might be important. As noted earlier, undercontrolled individuals respond impulsively. Such individuals, if also high in affective traits, will likely be hyperreactive to the environment, frequently experiencing negative emotion without effective control mechanisms to inhibit aggressive responses. Interactions among personality variables should be explored to see if they enhance prediction of aggression and CWB.

Environmental Approach

The research on CWB clearly shows that these acts are precipitated by conditions and situations in the work environment. Although some individuals are more inclined to experience negative emotion and engage in CWB, there is some provocation that triggers a reaction. Efforts to manage such provocations can short-circuit the processes that lead to CWB. Of course, one cannot eliminate all such conditions from the workplace, so efforts to do

so would certainly be counterproductive and wasteful. Furthermore, it is likely that some individuals are hypersensitive to either anger- or anxiety-provoking situations, and one cannot design the work environment to the lowest common denominator in terms of assuring that no action ever distresses anyone.

On the other hand, the emotions and reactions of employees should be considered in the design and administration of organizations and their policies. Quite often this means just adopting sound management practices that promote organizational effectiveness through employee performance and well-being, creating a healthy work organization (Sauter, Lim, & Murphy, 1996). Joint facilitation of employee performance and well-being can be accomplished by reducing impediments and unnecessary stress. First, proper selection and training should be used to achieve a good match between employee skills and job requirements. Second, organizational constraints that interfere with performance (Peters & O'Connor, 1980) should be reduced when possible by providing needed resources and removing impediments. Third, fairness can be accomplished by adopting, communicating, and following reasonable policies for salaries, rewards, promotions, and organizational actions. Fourth, workloads should be kept within reason so as not to produce excessive fatigue and require working hours that allow little time for nonwork and family activities. Finally, organization leaders should develop organizational cultures in which employees are treated with respect by managers, and managers should require employees to treat one another with respect.

Of course, even with the best run organizations, problems arise that are stressful for employees, and employees may get into conflicts with one another and supervisors that result in aggression and violence. Supervisors should be trained to recognize and deal with negative emotional reactions by subordinates, if for no other reason than that such reactions are detrimental to job performance and can interfere with employees' ability to cooperate and collaborate with one another. The idea is not to turn managers into clinicians who can deal with personal problems but to have managers help their subordinates cope with workplace issues relevant to their jobs. This might mean helping employees devise strategies to improve task efficiency, more effectively manage time, or serve as mediators in disputes between subordinates. Ignoring such issues will likely have detrimental effects, not only by increasing the likelihood of CWB and violence but also by reducing performance and job satisfaction.

Finally, organizations need clear policies to deal with cases in which employees are caught engaging in CWBs. Such policies are likely to be complex because there are a wide variety of behaviors that might occur, and certainly punching a coworker is quite different from making a nasty comment. Management action is needed for many such behaviors because lack of action may be interpreted as encouragement, which might lead to escalation, with even fairly minor acts of rudeness spiraling into overt aggression (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005). In the long run, this can produce a negative

climate in which escalating nastiness produces frequent negative emotion and detrimental effects on organizations and people. Actions can range from supervisor requests that certain behaviors be stopped to disciplinary actions and even termination. Extreme cases, such as physical assault, might result in legal action and calling the police. A clearly articulated and enforced set of policies can go a long way toward minimizing CWB, particularly in combination with the other actions we have discussed.

So far we have discussed actions taken to handle Type 3 violence and CWB. Many of these approaches would be appropriate for Type 2 violence as well, given that client or customer violence can occur for similar reasons. Organizations should evaluate their approach to dealing with clients or customers and reduce situations that might be unnecessarily stressful. This means, for example, reducing waiting times through efficient appointment scheduling and assuring that employees who engage clients or customers are competent, courteous, and well trained. In hospitals and other medical settings where violence is relatively frequent, direct-care employees should be trained to recognize and deal appropriately with patient and family anger and anxiety. Employees who deal with the public should receive training in handling angry clients or customers so they can defuse a potentially violent situation. Supervisors should serve as backup to employees who are unable to manage an escalating situation and might serve to mediate a disagreement between a client or customer and employee. Finally, organizations need clear policies that empower employees to deal with clients or customers who engage in certain behaviors. Although clients or customers should be given some latitude, there comes a point when the behavior has become harmful and potentially violent and employees might have to ask the person to leave or call security or even the police.

Summary and Conclusions

Negative emotion plays an important role in much CWB and violence at work, particularly acts committed by clients, customers, and employees. As we have shown, work stressors can trigger anger, anxiety, and other emotions that under some circumstances might lead to CWB and violence. Personality serves an important function as well, as the interplay of individual differences and the work environment combine to induce emotion and produce behavior. We have suggested several actions that organizations can take to minimize negative emotion and CWB, including selection, minimizing stressors, training supervisors to recognize and handle emotional reactions of subordinates, developing a civil organizational culture, and enforcing policies to deal with employee CWB. These approaches can be modified to deal with client or customer CWB and violence, as well.

Violence at work and milder forms of CWB are a major problem for employees and their employers. Both reduce employee effectiveness, which

has detrimental effects on organizational functioning. They also have adverse effects on employee health and well-being (LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002), particularly when employees have to endure both physical and verbal abuse. Policies and practices that can reduce CWB and violence will go a long way toward enhancing the well-being of both employees and organizations.

References

Anderson, C. A., Anderson, K. B., & Deuser, W. E. (1996). Examining an affective aggression framework: Weapon and temperature effects on aggressive thoughts, affect, and attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22,* 366–376.

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2002). Human aggression. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53,* 27–51.

Anderson, C. A., Deuser, W. E., & DeNeve, K. M. (1995). Hot temperatures, hostile affect, hostile cognition, and arousal: Tests of a general model of affective aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21,* 434–448.

Asmus, C. L., & Bell, P. A. (1999). Effects of environmental odor and coping style on negative affect, anger, and arousal. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 29,* 245–260.

Bell, P. A., & Baron, R. A. (1976). Aggression and heat: The mediating role of negative affect. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 6,* 18–30.

Berkowitz, L. (1990). On the formulation and regulation of anger and aggression: A cognitive neo-associationistic approach. *American Psychologist, 45,* 494–503.

Berkowitz, L. (1998). Affective aggression: The role of stress, pain, and negative affect. In R. G. Geen & E. Donnerstein (Eds.), *Human aggression: Theories, research and implications for social policy* (pp. 49–72). San Diego, CA: Academic.

Bies, R. J., & Tripp, T. M. (2005). The study of revenge in the workplace: Conceptual, ideological, and empirical issues. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (pp. 65–81). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Bies, R. J., Tripp, T. M., & Kramer, R. M. (1997). At the breaking point: Cognitive and social dynamics of revenge in organizations. In R. A. Giacalone & J. Greenberg (Eds.), *Antisocial behavior in organizations* (p. 43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chen, P. Y., Dai, T., Spector, P. E., & Jex, S. M. (1997). Relationship between negative affectivity and positive affectivity: Effects of judged desirability of scale items and respondent's social desirability. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 69,* 183–198.

Chen, P. Y., & Spector, P. E. (1992). Relationships of work stressors with aggression, withdrawal, theft and substance use: An exploratory study. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 65,* 177–184.

Colbert, A. E., Mount, M. K., Harter, J. K., Witt, L. A., & Barrick, M. R. (2004). Interactive effects of personality and perception of the work situation on workplace deviance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89,* 599–609.

Cropanzano, R., & Baron, R. (1991). Injustice and organizational conflict: The moderating role of power restoration. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 2,* 5–26.

Cropanzano, R., Howes, J. C., Grandey, A. A., & Toth, P. (1997). The relationship of organizational politics and support to work behaviors, attitudes, and stress. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 18,* 159–180.

Dollard, D., Doob, L., Miller, N., Mowrer, O., & Sears, R. (1939). *Frustration and aggression.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Domagalski, T., & Steelman, L. (2004. August). *The impact of work events and disposition on the experience and expression of employee anger.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management Conference, New Orleans.

Douglas, S. C., & Martinko, M. J. (2001). Exploring the role of individual differences in the prediction of workplace aggression. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86,* 547–559.

Folger, R., & Skarlicki, D. P. (2005). Beyond counterproductive work behavior: Moral emotions and deontic retaliation vs. reconciliation. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (p. 44). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Fox, S., & Spector, P. E. (1999). A model of work frustration-aggression. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 20,* 915–931.

Fox, S., Spector, P. E., & Miles, D. (2001). Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) in response to job stressors and organizational justice: Some mediator and moderator tests for autonomy and emotions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 59,* 291–309.

Gibson, D. E., & Barsade, S. G. (1999, August). The experience of anger at work: Lessons from the chronically angry. In R. R. Callister (Chair), *Anger in organizations: Its causes and consequences.* Symposium presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management Conference, Chicago.

Glomb, T. (2002). Workplace anger and aggression: Informing conceptual models with data from specific encounters. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 7,* 20–36.

Goh, A., Bruursema, K., Fox, S., & Spector, P. E. (2003, April). *Comparisons of self and co-worker reports of counterproductive work behavior.* Paper presented at the Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology Conference, Orlando, FL.

Harvey, S., & Keashly, L. (2003). Predicting the risk for aggression in the workplace: Risk factors, self-esteem and time at work. *Social Behavior and Personality, 31,* 807–814.

Hepworth, W., & Towler, A. (2004). The effects of individual differences and charismatic leadership on workplace aggression. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 9,* 176–185.

Hoel, H., Rayner, C., & Cooper, C. L. (1999). Workplace bullying. In C. L. Cooper & I. T. Robertson (Eds.), *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology 1999* (pp. 195–230). Chichester, UK: John Wiley.

Hollinger, R. C. (1986). Acts against the workplace: Social bonding and employee deviance. *Deviant Behavior, 7,* 53–75.

Keashly, L. (1998). Emotional abuse in the workplace: Conceptual and empirical issues. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 1,* 85–117.

LeBlanc, M. M., & Barling, J. (2005). Understanding the many faces of workplace violence. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (p. 44). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

LeBlanc, M. M., & Kelloway, E. K. (2002). Predictors and outcomes of workplace violence and aggression. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87,* 444–453.

Lee, K., & Allen, N. J. (2002). Organizational citizenship behavior and workplace deviance: The role of affect and cognition. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87,* 131–142.

Marcus, B., & Schuler, H. (2004). Antecedents of counterproductive behavior at work: A general perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89,* 647–660.

Martinko, M. J., Gundlach, M. J., & Douglas, S. C. (2002). Toward an integrative theory of counterproductive workplace behavior: A causal reasoning perspective. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 10,* 36–50.

Megargee, E. I. (1966). Undercontrolled and overcontrolled personality types in extreme antisocial aggression. *Psychological Monographs, 80,* 1–29.

Megargee, E. I., Cook P. E., & Mendelsohn, G. A. (1967). Development and validation of an MMPI scale of assaultiveness in overcontrolled individuals. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 72,* 519–528.

Merchant, J. A., & Lundell, J. A. (2001). *Workplace violence: A report to the nation.* Iowa City: University of Iowa.

Miles, D. E., Borman, W. E., Spector, P. E., & Fox, S. (2002). Building an integrative model of extra role work behaviors: A comparison of counterproductive work behavior with organizational citizenship behavior. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 10,* 51–57.

Neuman, J. H., & Baron, R. A. (1997). Aggression in the workplace. In R. A. Giacalone & J. Greenberg (Eds.), *Antisocial behavior in organizations* (pp. 37–67). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Neuman, J. H., & Baron, R. A. (1998). Workplace violence and workplace aggression: Evidence concerning specific forms, potential causes, and preferred targets. *Journal of Management, 24,* 391–419.

Neuman, J. H., & Baron, R. A. (2005). Aggression in the workplace: A social-psychological perspective. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (p. 45). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

O'Leary-Kelly, A. M., Griffin, R. W., & Glew, D. J. (1996) Organization-motivated aggression: A research framework. *Academy of Management Review, 21,* 225–253.

Pearson, C. M., Andersson, L. M., & Porath, C. L. (2005). Workplace incivility. In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (p. 45). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Penney, L. M., & Spector, P. E. (2002). Narcissism and counterproductive work behavior: Do bigger egos mean bigger problems? *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 10,* 126–134.

Peters, L. H., & O'Connor, E. J. (1980). Situational constraints and work outcomes: The influences of a frequently overlooked construct. *Academy of Management Review, 5,* 391–397.

Robinson, S. L., & Bennett, R. J. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: A multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal, 38,* 555–572.

Salgado, J. F. (2002). The Big Five personality dimensions and counterproductive behaviors. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 10,* 117–125.

Sauter, S. L., Lim, S. Y., & Murphy, L. R. (1996). Organizational health: A new paradigm for occupational stress research at NIOSH. *Japanese Journal of Occupational Mental Health, 4,* 248–254.

Skarlicki, D. P., & Folger, R. (1997). Retaliation in the workplace: The roles of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82,* 434–443.

Skarlicki, D. P., Folger, R., & Tesluk, P. (1999). Personality as a moderator in the relationship between fairness and retaliation. *Academy of Management Journal, 42,* 100–108.

Spector, P. E. (1978). Organizational frustration: A model and review of the literature. *Personnel Psychology, 31,* 815–829.

Spector, P. E. (1997). The role of frustration in antisocial behavior at work. In R. A. Giacalone & J. Greenberg (Eds.), *Antisocial behavior in organizations* (pp. 1–17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Spector, P. E., Chen, P. Y., & O'Connell, B. J. (2000). A longitudinal study of relations between job stressors and job strains while controlling for prior negative affectivity and strains. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85,* 211–218.

Spector, P. E., Dwyer, D. J., & Jex, S. M. (1988). The relationship of job stressors to affective, health, and performance outcomes: A comparison of multiple data sources. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 73,* 11–19.

Spector, P. E., & Fox, S. (2002). An emotion-centered model of voluntary work behavior: Some parallels between counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). *Human Resource Management Review, 12,* 269–292.

Spector, P. E., & Fox, S. (2005). The stressor-emotion model of counterproductive work behavior (CWB). In S. Fox & P. E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behavior: Investigations of actors and targets* (p. 46). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Spector, P. E., & Goh, A. (2001). The role of emotions in the occupational stress process. In P. L. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Research in occupational stress and well-being* (Vol. 1, pp. 195–232). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Spector, P. E., Zapf, D., Chen, P. Y., & Frese, M. (2000). Why negative affectivity should not be controlled in job stress research: Don't throw out the baby with the bath water. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 21,* 79–95.

Spielberger, C. D., Jacobs, G., Russell, S., & Crane, R. S. (1983). Assessment of anger: The state-trait anger scale. In J. N. Butcher & C. D. Spielberger (Eds.), *Advances in personality assessment* (Vol. 2, pp. 161–189). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Spielberger, C. D., Ritterband, L. M., Sydeman, S. J., Reheiser, E. C., & Unger, K. K. (1995). Assessment of emotional states and personality traits: Measuring psychological vital signs. In J. N. Butcher (Ed.), *Clinical personality assessment: Practical approaches.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Van Katwyk, P. T., Fox, S., Spector, P. E., & Kelloway, E. K. (2000). Using the Job-Related Affective Well-Being Scale (JAWS) to investigate affective responses to work stressors. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 5,* 219–230.

Zapf, D., Knorz, C., & Kulla, M. (1996). On the relationship between mobbing factors, and job content, social work environment, and health outcomes. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 5,* 215–237.