

# Strategy to Combat Incivility in the Work Place

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**Abstract:** A growing body of research explores workplace incivility, defined as low-intensity deviant workplace behaviour with an ambiguous intent to harm. In the 15 years since the theoretical introduction of the workplace incivility construct, research in this domain has taken off, albeit in a variety of directions. We review the extant body of research on workplace incivility and note the multitude of samples, sources, methodologies, and instrumentation used. In this review article, we provide an organized review of the extant body of work that encompasses three distinct types of incivility: experienced, witnessed, and instigated incivility. These three types of incivility serve as the foundation for a series of comprehensive models in which we integrate extant empirical research. In the last part of this review article, we suggest directions for future research that may contribute to this growing body of work. This article discusses the role of several constructs, such as workplace relational civility (WRC), positive relational management (PRM), and emotional intelligence (EI), as possible primary preventive resources to effectively deal with interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace (i.e., incivility). Since women endure workplace incivility more frequently than men, their well-being is particularly at risk. Thus, the possibilities for further research and primary prevention interventions in line with the achievement of the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) are discussed.

**Keywords:** Incivility, Employee relations, primary prevention, positive relational management, emotional intelligence

## 1. Introduction

Uncivil behaviours are becoming more frequent in our post-modern society. In a 2002 survey of 2,000 American respondents, roughly four out of five considered disrespect, a lack of consideration, and rudeness serious issues, and three out of five believed that the situation was getting worse (Farkas and Johnson, 2002). The workplace is no exception. Due to globalization, rapid economic changes, and technological advancements, workers' experience of the 21st century labor market could be stressful (Blustein et al., 2018), since coping with continuous change is often very demanding (Wanberg and Banas, 2000). This new work environment, characterized by the great number, complexity, and fragmentation of workplace relationships, may increase incivility (Pearson et al., 2000). Moreover, a work and information overload can lead to an increased perception of time pressures and thus induce workers to be less polite in their interpersonal behaviour (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson and Porath, 2005). Between 10 and 20% of workers reported witnessing incivility daily, while 20–50% affirmed that they had been the direct target of mistreatment in their workplace (Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly, 2004; Pearson and Porath, 2005). Notably, women endure workplace incivility more frequently than men (Cortina et al., 2001). In order to achieve gender equity, as defined by the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations, 2018) and promote well-being among women in the workplace, new theoretical and intervention approaches, such as intervention in the primary prevention framework (Hage et al., 2007; Kenny and Hage, 2009; Di Fabio 2017a), should be considered. This would help to confront incivility and create more civil workplace environments, from which all employees would likely benefit. The article discusses several constructs related to the primary prevention approach, based on advanced relational competencies, which would like to reduce the frequency of incivility (i.e., reducing risk), also as a mean to face gender inequality (Kalev and Deutsch, 2018) and shape

healthier relational cultures (building strengths) advantageous for both women and men (Saxena et al., 2019).

### Workplace incivility in India:

Regional and cultural differences contribute significantly toward how individuals perceive and respond to acts of workplace incivility (Rousseau et al., 2008). Studies of the USA, the UK and Canada constitute the majority of available empirical research 235 Job satisfaction and turnover intentions Downloaded by Gurukula Kangri Vishwavidyalaya At 23:59 29 May 2016 (PT) on workplace incivility today (Schilpzand et al., 2014). A little relevant research on workplace incivility has been undertaken in other countries such as Korea (Kim and Shapiro, 2008), Australia (Kirk et al., 2011), New Zealand (Griffin, 2010) and in some Asian countries, such as China (Chen et al., 2013), Singapore (Lim and Lee, 2011), India (Yeung and Griffin, 2008) and the Philippines (Scott et al., 2013). Prior studies have emphasized that more research on workplace incivility in more countries may establish the global relevance of the subject by explaining how diverse workforces from different cultures perceive and respond to workplace incivility (Schilpzand et al., 2014; Kim and Shapiro, 2008). Further research is required to determine whether uncivil behaviour is culture specific or generic (Yeung and Griffin, 2008). As India is a land of diverse cultures and beliefs, it is important to observe to what extent sensitive issues like workplace incivility are prevalent. Research on workplace incivility in India is currently limited to basic issues and it does not provide details of the consequences of workplace incivility. Keeping this foregoing discussion in mind, the present study has explored the linkage of workplace incivility with job satisfaction and employees' turnover intentions by using survey data collected from those working in the restaurant industries of north and northwest India. Very few studies about workplace incivility and turnover intentions have been conducted in Asian countries. Hence, by testing the

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incivility-job-satisfaction and incivility-turnover-intentions relationships in the Indian context, this study also provides an opportunity for academicians and researchers to conduct replication studies from cross-cultural perspectives.

### Consequences of Incivility:

Workplace incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Uncivil behaviours are stressors that can lead to negative health consequences (e.g., depression, physical symptoms; Jex et al., 1992; Spector and Jex, 1998). On a psychological level, experiencing interpersonal mistreatment could harm one's self-image (i.e., offense to self; Cornish-Bowden, 2004). Experiencing incivility can decrease an individual's self-esteem (Frone, 2000), self-efficacy (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002), self-confidence (Vartia, 2001), and well-being (Lapierre et al., 2005). Empirical evidence suggests that incivility is negatively associated with job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Moreover, its occurrence is connected with higher levels of job stress, job withdrawal, and psychological distress (Lim and Cortina, 2005). Interestingly, for women, the negative relationship between incivility and overall job satisfaction is stronger than the relationship between sexual aggression and overall job satisfaction (Lapierre et al., 2005). Thus, the occurrence of workplace incivility could be sufficient to determine a decrease in women's occupational, psychological, and physical health (Lapierre et al., 2005; Lim and Cortina, 2005).

### Workplace incivility is negatively related to job satisfaction:

Similarly, we have assumed workplace incivility acts as a significant predictor of turnover intentions among employees of Indian restaurants. Mobley (1977) described an employee's "intention to leave" as the voluntary giving-up of a role as a member of an organization in order to move on outside that organization. Cortina et al. (2001) in their research revealed that exposure to workplace incivility sparks physical or psychological withdrawal by employees from work environments. This withdrawal can be observed in the form of absenteeism during periods of mild displeasure, or in acts of quitting altogether during the worst peaks of suffering (Adams, 1965; Donovan et al., 1998; Shore et al., 2006). Studies have established that workplace incivility may lead employees to quit as it is a significant source of stress to individuals (Penney and Spector, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007). Research by Sharma et al. (2013) cited stress as an engine of employee absenteeism in Indian service industries. Other research has also found a direct relationship between workplace incivility and turnover intentions (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Lim et al., 2008). Studies conducted in western countries have supported the linkage between workplace incivility (along with some other types of workplace mistreatment) and employees' turnover intentions (Keashly et al., 1994; Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson et al., 2005; Harvey et al., 2007). Past research further established that sustained incivility 237 Job satisfaction and turnover intentions Downloaded by Gurukula Kangri Vishwavidyalaya At 23:59 29 May 2016 (PT) leads employees to develop turnover intentions (Miner-Rubino and Reed, 2010; Wilson and Holmval, 2013) and ultimately

to organizational exit (Porath and Pearson, 2012). Lim and Teo (2009) have voiced concerns about cyber incivility in workplaces and examined how it induced turnover intentions in employees. Cortina et al. (2013) also linked workplace incivility with the triggering of turnover intentions among employees.

### Workplace incivility and the organizational commitments:

Organizational commitment is an attitudinal variable that signifies a level of affection an employee has toward the organization. Research supports the existence of three types of Organizational Commitment (OC), Affective Commitment (AC), Normative Commitment (NC) and Continuance Commitment (CC). Affective refers to an incumbent's emotional affection towards the organization. In other words, individual's expectations are met and their wishes to be part of the organization; whereas normative commitment is based on the individual's values (it is where individual assumes that he /she has to stay because it is the ultimate thing to do). On the other hand, continuance commitment directly relates an employee's perceived benefits of doing something. Social identification is an employee's affection towards the social group and the aspiration to continue being a member in that particular group. According to Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974), commitment is "acceptance of goals and values of an organization, willingness to apply ample effort on behalf of the organization, and a positive aspiration to maintain organizational membership." According to Meyer (1993), "workers with a tenacious affective commitment endure with the organization and want to have a strong continuance commitment with organization. Employees that had a good relationship with their work unit had higher levels of organizational commitment. According to Jaros (1995) stated that affective commitment is the extremely vital out of three components of organizational commitment in anticipating organizational commitments. Affective commitment is positively correlated with work attitudes (Allen and Meyer, 1996) and having greater organizational commitments (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Incivility indirectly stimulates organizational commitments through effect on perceptions and fairness also distrust has been identified as the result of abuse and antecedent of organizational commitments (Taylor, 2010).

### From Workplace Incivility to Workplace Relational Civility:

The contemporary prevention approach (Hage et al., 2007; Kenny and Hage, 2009) is focused on both reducing risks and building strengths among individuals (e.g., promoting individual resources; Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014) and within organizations (Tetrick and Peiró, 2012; Di Fabio, 2017b). Traditionally, the work and organizational literature has focused on workplace incivility rather than civility in the workplace (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Nevertheless, to establish the optimal conditions for developing adaptive relationships among co-workers and thus promote well-being in the workplace, civility is mandatory (Blustein, 2011). Civility implies respect, courtesy, and awareness of the rights of others

(Carter, 1998; Maree, 2012), and it is intrinsically relational (Di Fabio and Gori, 2016).

Workplace relational civility (WRC) has been defined as a relational style characterized by respect and concern for both the self and others, interpersonal sensitivity, personal education, and kindness toward others (Di Fabio and Gori, 2016), and it is described by three dimensions: (1) *relational decency*, (2) *relational culture*, and (3) *relational readiness*. Relational decency implies the ability to understand the relational dynamics of a given situation and constructively contribute to the relationships within the workplace. Relational culture refers to the culture's influence in shaping kind and polite relationships among people. Relational readiness concerns the ability to quickly understand others' feelings and show proactive sensibility. The relationships between WRC and the outcomes of workplace incivility have been empirically tested (Di Fabio et al., 2016; Di Fabio and Gori, 2016). The WRC was showed to be associated with higher levels of self-esteem and perceived social support. Perceived social support refers to the degree with which family, friends, and significant others are experienced as supportive and available. The association with perceived social support is particularly interesting for secondary (i.e., when the first symptoms are emerging) and tertiary prevention interventions (i.e., reducing the impact of an already-established problem; Caplan, 1964), since social support can buffer the detrimental effects of an unsafe workplace climate (van Emmerik et al., 2007). WRC is also related to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Di Fabio et al., 2016; Di Fabio and Gori, 2016). Hedonic well-being consists of a cognitive evaluation component (i.e., satisfaction with life; Diener et al., 1985) and an affective evaluation component (i.e., the prevalence of positive emotions over negative emotions; Watson et al., 1988). By contrast, eudaimonic well-being is described as an individual's optimal functioning and self-realization (i.e., meaning in life; Vázquez et al., 2006; Ryff and Singer, 2008).

### Positive Relational Management:

Relationships are fundamental for people's well-being (Rigby, 2000; Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick, 2008; Suldo et al., 2009; Ferguson and Goodwin, 2010) and within organizations (Tetrick and Peiró, 2012). The ability to dialectically integrate work and relationships, strengthening the aspects of the self in a relational environment, is a central aspect of the Positive Self and Relational Management model (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2016). Positive relational management (PRM) refers to an individual's resources that are useful for relational adaptation within the workplace and beyond, and it is described by three dimensions (Di Fabio, 2016), namely, (1) *respect* (i.e., my respect for others, the respect of others for me, and my respect for myself), (2) *caring* (i.e., my care for others, the care of others for me, and my care for myself), and (3) *connectedness* (i.e., my connectedness with family members, friends, significant others, and reciprocity). PRM is associated with perceived social support (Pearson's  $r$  ranging between 0.41 and 0.46; (Di Fabio, 2016). Thus, PRM resources appear useful for building positive and supportive relationships within the workplace. PRM also showed a strong connection with hedonic well-

being (Pearson's  $r$  ranging between 0.49 and 0.52; Di Fabio, 2016). Those who were more able in PRM also experienced higher satisfaction with their own life. Finally, PRM was empirically studied in reference to aspects of eudaimonic well-being (Di Fabio, 2016). The PRM scores were positively correlated with individuals perceiving their life as meaningful (Pearson's  $r$  ranging between 0.39 and 0.57) and flourishing (Pearson's  $r$  ranging between 0.41 and 0.68; Di Fabio, 2016; Di Fabio and Kenny, 2019). "Flourishing" encompasses purpose in life, positive relationships, engagement, competence, self-esteem, optimism, and contribution toward the well-being of others (Diener et al., 2010; Seligman, 2012; Huppert and So, 2013). Thus, PRM resources could not only increase well-being on an individual level but also potentially contribute to general workplace well-being.

### Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence Competencies:

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been defined as the ability to discriminate and express emotions, assimilate emotions in thoughts, and regulate emotions in the self and others (Mayer et al., 2000b). EI is described by three categories of abilities: (1) appraisal and expression of emotions, (2) regulation of emotions, and (3) using emotions for solving problems (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Although the literature agrees on the definition of EI, several different models have been proposed (Boyatzis, 2009; Cherniss, 2010). Historically, a first distinction has been made between ability-based EI, which refers strictly to the cognitive abilities required in the processing and use of emotional information, and mixed models which instead incorporate a wide range of personality variables (Petrides and Furnham, 2000; Mayer et al., 2000a). Subsequently, several scholars (Saklofske et al., 2003; Ashkanasy and Daus, 2005; Stough et al., 2009) have distinguished two principal EI models: ability-based models (Mayer et al., 2000a) and trait EI models, which encompass self-reported EI (Bar-On, 2004) and trait emotional self-efficacy measures (Petrides and Furnham, 2000, 2001, 2003). Another possible distinction around EI has emerged (Cherniss, 2010). Models that refer to the basic abilities of emotion recognition, reasoning, and regulation are categorized as EI models (Mayer et al., 2000a), whereas models that imply personal qualities that contribute to positive work-related performance (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Petrides and Furnham, 2000; Mayer et al., 2000a) are considered models of emotional intelligence competencies (EIC). Recently a holistic view of EI, which include multiple levels, has been proposed (Boyatzis, 2018). According to the multi-level theory framework, EI is articulated on three levels: basic ability/trait, self-perceived level, and behavioural level.

Despite the fragmented framework around EI and EIC, the empirical evidence and implication of these constructs on well-being appear to be clear. The higher scores on the self-reported measures of EI (i.e., EQ-i, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire) were associated with greater resilience and a greater sense of life satisfaction (Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014). This result suggested that intervene on people's perceptions of their emotional abilities can contribute potentially to their hedonic well-being. On the basis of this study, eudaimonic well-being has also been



addressed in terms of its relationship with EI (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2019.). The trait EI scores appeared to be strongly related to the individual's perception of a meaningful life (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2019) and flourishing (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2019). By contrast, ability-based EI appeared to poorly contribute to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Bhullar et al., 2013). Nevertheless, ability-based EI (Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, MSCEIT; Mayer et al., 2002) is associated with an increased perceived social support. In other words, people who reported a greater ability in perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions and using them to facilitate thought also perceived more social support (Di Fabio, 2015).

In terms of contributing to problem-solving, social responsibility, and impulse control, EI is showed to be connected to how people manage conflict in the workplace (Hopkins and Yonker, 2015). A recent study explored the connection between a wide pool of EI instruments (i.e., MSCEIT, EQ-i, Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire) and individuals' resilience and hedonic well-being (i.e., satisfaction with life; Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014).

## 2. Conclusion

Incivility is a serious threat to people's well-being (Lapierre et al., 2005; Lim and Cortina, 2005). Women are particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of workplace aggression, since they experience it more frequently (Cortina et al., 2001). Thus, promoting well-being in the workplace and preventing certain unsafe dynamics from establishing themselves could be considered a promising strategy to reach gender equity (United Nations, 2018) as well as to advance women's careers within organizations (Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008; O'Neil et al., 2008).

Identical working conditions can generate a gap between women and men in terms of well-being and job opportunities since unhealthy relational work environments particularly penalize women. For instance, women are more likely to experience psychological distress due to incivility (Abubakar, 2018) and this could hinder an equal career development across gender (e.g., women have a higher risk for long-term sickness absence than men; Lidwall and Marklund, 2006). Moreover, incivility could be used as a way to demonstrate power and thus prescribe the "appropriate" gender behaviour among non-conforming women and men, which usually underpins gender inequality (Kalev and Deutsch, 2018).

The primary prevention approach (Kenny and Hage, 2009; Di Fabio, 2017a) and the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017b; Di Fabio and Rosen, 2018) focus on constructs that are potentially affected by interventions. In this sense, WRC, PRM, EI, and EIC, as with every resource that is conceived as trainable interpersonal and emotional abilities and skills, are worth taking into consideration (Slaski and Cartwright, 2003; Leiter et al., 2011; Cherry et al., 2012). All the aforementioned constructs appeared to be related to social support, indicating that being able to build positive and supportive relationships in the workplace could hinder the occurrence of interpersonal mistreatment. Social support

could be also able to buffer the detrimental outcomes related to incivility (Schilpzand et al., 2016) and stress in general (Väänänen et al., 2003; González-Morales et al., 2006; Peiró, 2008). Indeed, social support from supervisors and co-workers appeared to favour people's job satisfaction (Acker, 2004). Nevertheless, social support did not automatically imply advanced relational competencies, which may contribute to shape and support a preventive, advanced, and competent relational culture of an organization. Promoting relational awareness, strengths, and resources in a primary prevention perspective could play a crucial role in avoiding the establishment of dangerous relational dynamics. Interestingly, EIC could influence the way people manage conflict in the workplace (Hopkins and Yonker, 2015) and thus prevent the emergence of unsafe interpersonal conditions. PRM also could enhance individuals' relational strengths and improve workers' quality of life. Overall, building early and preventively people's advanced awareness and relational competencies can contribute to shaping an adaptive relational culture within organizations, which is important for fostering women's meaning of work (Grossman and Chester, 1989; Thory, 2016) and wellbeing (Zurbrügg and Miner, 2016). Interestingly, acting on these constructs may be relevant for women since women are more likely to be victimized, but may benefit all the workers. Indeed, a healthy relational environment affects all workers (Nielsen et al., 2017).

In general, both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being appear to be affected by WRC, PRM, EI, and EIC. However, some conflicting evidence has emerged from the literature analysis in relation to ability-based EI and hedonic well-being (Bhullar et al., 2013; Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014). Overall, the contribution of ability-based EI to individuals' satisfaction with life appeared modest, if not absent. Instead, the evidence regarding the relationship between WRC, PRM, EIC, and well-being seems more robust (Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014; Di Fabio, 2016; Di Fabio et al., 2016; Di Fabio and Gori, 2016). Nevertheless, WRC and PRM are very novel constructs (Di Fabio, 2016; Di Fabio and Gori, 2016). Thus, further research should look to assess how they change over time by means of longitudinal studies. Moreover, the degree of WRC and PRM interventions' effectiveness regarding well-being and workplace incivility should be assessed to offer evidence of causality and indication about the optimal and most efficient intervention duration. Cultural and ethnic background effects should be assessed as well. The Psychology of Harmony and Harmonization (Di Fabio and Tsuda, 2018) highlighted that the value of balancing process related to individuals' relationality aspects (inner relationality, relationality with others, relationality with contexts in a temporal and geographical perspective) might be similar across cultures. However, the optimal level of balance between those aspects could be different between cultures (Sharma, 2012). In such sense, more research should be carried on to define which aspects encompassed by the primary prevention constructs presented in this study are more suitable for intervention in different regions of the world.

Future research has to take in consideration also other contextual and temporal aspects of this perspective, as, for

example, type of organization and setting, gender and age mix of people, and how long must these relational competencies be practiced in the organization to see any type of measurable result.

Finally, in terms of limitations, since the literature showed improvement mainly on the experience of individuals, group level measures are needed to investigate on multiple levels (e.g., group, organization) the outcomes of primary prevention interventions based on the enhancement of relational competencies.

In conclusion, it seems that the primary prevention approach (Hage et al., 2007; Kenny and Hage, 2009; Di Fabio, 2017a) could effectively contribute to gender equity by promoting well-being in an environment in which the recent changes due to globalization and technological advancements (Savickas, 2011; Blustein et al., 2018) are making incivility more frequent (Farkas and Johnson, 2002), especially toward women (Cortina et al., 2001).

### 3. Practical Implications

It has been suggested that such complex workplace environments give rise to uncivil behaviour because employees are too caught up in their demanding job roles to be courteous to their co-workers (Pearson and Porath, 2005). The implication that part of the workforce experiencing workplace incivility can be devastating to an organization's productivity as workplace incivility has been found to be associated with various organizational outcomes such as organizational commitments, job involvement, job satisfaction etc. Importantly, Andersson and Pearson (1999) make reference to the "incivility spiral" (p. 458) which suggests a circular pattern of uncivil behaviour, when one employee behaves uncivilly, the victim retaliates with uncivil behaviour, and bystanders model the observed behaviours. This highlights that uncivil behaviour could quickly assimilate into an undesirable organizational culture. Consequently, preventing or reducing uncivil behaviour at work is important. Moreover, it is particularly important for organizations to work towards reducing the occurrence of uncivil behaviour because it is predominantly those high in PsyCap that are likely to leave the organization or perceived workplace incivility can adversely affect the organizational outcome and deteriorate the working environment. Thus it becomes a prerogative for the organization to retain employees with high in PsyCap as these employees greatly beneficial to the organization. In monitoring uncivil conduct and limiting its effects, organizations should not rely only on avenues of redress by taking action once reported incidences have come to light. Instead, a proactive approach to conducting interventions should be adopted as a preventative strategy which would limit the onset of an uncivil work environment which gives rise to negative individual and organizational outcomes. Additionally, organizations should endeavor to foster a work environment and climate where rude and discourteous behaviour is not tolerated as this might signal to employees that the organization is supportive of those who might experience incivility and as a result increase employee's levels of psychological safety. According to Leiter (2011), proposed a risk management model of workplace civility where organizations attempt to

reflect that incivility at work enables a harmful environment and that such an environment in social the workplace weakens an employee's sense of psychological safety. In summation, by promoting civility at work, organizations can improve organizational outcomes, the quality of workplace relationships and individual wellness.

### 4. Recommendations

A positive relationship was found between psychological capital organizational commitment, job satisfaction and job involvement. This indicates that high levels of psychological capital are associated with high levels of organizational outcomes, suggesting that organizations should invest in training which is aimed at improving the psychological capital of employees in order to increase their level of organizational outcomes. The PsyCap subscale of self-efficacy, hope, Optimism and resilience was determined to have very strong predictive value for organizational outcomes, this further confirms the benefits of organizations investing in interventions aimed at improving the psychological capital of employees, but more importantly, improving their self-efficacy as way of enhancing their organizational outcomes. Future research endeavours in this area of study should consider controlling for the specific limitations of the study mentioned above. This can be achieved through providing desirable incentives for individuals to willingly participate in the study, rather than relying on individual's sense of duty towards the organization to provide adequate incentive to participate. This may achieve a higher response rate and, possibly, more honest responses which would ensure more reliable findings. In spite of the various limitations of the study, future research can further examine the relationship between workplace incivility psychological capital and the organizational outcomes.

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