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Original Article

The Effect of Social Undermining and Unethical Interactions in the Organization on Employee Procrastination: The Moderating Role of Positive Psychological Capital

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Abstract

Introduction: Social undermining is a crime that is committed by a person to reduce the good reputation of others and prevents the establishment of positive relations with them in the organization. The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of social undermining and unethical interactions in the organization on employee procrastination with regard to the moderating role of positive psychological capital in North Kerman Electric Power Company (NKEPC).

Material & Methods: This research is applied in terms of purpose, and in terms of the nature and form of implementation, it is descriptive of the correlation type. The statistical population of this research is 1384 employees of NKEPC in 2022, out of which a sample of 300 people was selected using Cochran's formula. The main data collection tool consisted of four questionnaires, including social impairment questionnaire, emotional fatigue questionnaire, work procrastination questionnaire and psychological capital questionnaire. Also, the analysis has been done using structural equation analysis, Sobel test, SPSS and AMOS software.

Results: The results showed that social undermining has a positive and significant effect on emotional exhaustion and procrastination. Emotional exhaustion has a positive and significant effect on procrastination. Also, the moderation of psychological capital was confirmed in the relationship between social undermining and emotional exhaustion, and social undermining and work procrastination. Also, the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between social impairment and procrastination was confirmed.

Conclusion: It is clear that social undermining both directly and indirectly contributes to the increase of employees' procrastinating behaviors. The findings of this study shed light on the organic mechanism that may encourage employees' procrastination behaviors, as perceived social undermining during the socialization process increases employees' emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: *Organizational ethics, Social undermining, Emotional exhaustion, Procrastination behavior, Positive psychological capital.*

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INTRODUCTION

In this century, individual and organizational productivity is one of the main concerns of managers. Responsible and efficient human power is considered as the most important capital of an organization. In this regard, knowing the characteristics of human resources and the factors affecting their efficiency is one of the preoccupations of managers of organizations. Healthy and supportive relationships of people

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with the people they encounter in an organization is a very important source of their happiness and performance [1]. From an organizational point of view, interpersonal relationships based on ethics are necessary for its efficient and effective functioning [2]. Individuals' failure to develop positive and ethical relationships with others in a social group, such as an organization, leads to a decrease in their organizational performance. In the meantime, organizational researchers have paid special attention to the dark corners of organizational life, i.e. the negative dimensions of social interactions (supervisor and co-worker) and the details of close interpersonal relationships in studies related to human resource productivity. One of the negative achievements of social life is social undermining. Social undermining is a crime committed by a person to reduce the good reputation of others and prevent positive relations with them in the organization. The concept of social undermining (observer attrition and partner attrition) was proposed for the first time by Vinokur and Van Ryn in 1993 [3]. Social attrition brings various consequences in the organization and will result in high social costs [4]. The damage caused by social undermining by an individual is minor at first. But when an employee loses his position through actions such as constant belittling, slander, non-disclosure, ignorance and deliberate silence, it can become a serious problem and lead to issues such as emotional exhaustion [5, 6] dodging employees [7, 8] and many emotional and functional issues.

Undoubtedly, social undermining and unethical interactions among employees play an important role in reducing the sense of responsibility, emotional exhaustion, and increasing employee procrastination, and as a result, reducing the productivity of the organization.

Emotional fatigue is one of the results of social attrition, which can be one of the important factors influencing procrastination; This variable is one of the important dimensions of job burnout, which leads to the loss of personal feelings of employees [9]. Emotional exhaustion manifests in humans with signs such as chronic fatigue, sleep problems, and numerous physical symptoms. Whenever people talk about their exhaustion, they mean experiencing emotional exhaustion [10]. Emotional exhaustion represents a psychological response along with providing an impersonal response to service recipients and reducing the sense of competence and success. This concept has been defined as a condition that is accompanied by poor job performance, mental health, and deteriorating relationships with family and friends. The importance of emotional exhaustion is due to the fact that it has a direct impact on work outcomes such as job performance, voluntary resignation, and organizational citizenship behavior [11]. On the other hand, one of the categories that has an important role in the productivity and physical and mental health of employees, but not enough attention has been paid to it in organizations, especially Iranian organizations, is the category of work procrastination. The organizational view of procrastination is the enemy of the organization and hinders the growth of productivity and creativity. Work procrastination is considered as one of the biggest pests in human power efficiency. The word procrastination is equivalent to procrastination, negligence and procrastination. In the Cambridge culture, procrastination is defined as delaying something because it is unpleasant or boring. Work procrastination is a behavioral phenomenon that causes stress, guilt and a severe decrease in personal productivity [12]. Organizational procrastination is purposefully delaying the start or completion of various job tasks by employees. People who are procrastinating take little time to do big activities, this factor causes the work to be done in a hurry and incompletely, and as a result, the quality of their work will always be low [13].

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Some psychologists consider procrastination as a habit, and others consider it as a disorder in character building, such as laziness, indolence, neglect, and lack of attention. According to observers, when a person's salary is low or at the highest possible level, procrastination is more [14].

Researchers are looking for a factor to reduce the negative consequences of wear and tear, emotional exhaustion and procrastination. This factor can be positive psychological capital. Positive psychological capital is a new concept introduced by Luthans and derived from positive organizational behavior that focuses on the healthy aspects of a person instead of focusing on illness. Psychological components such as hope, optimism, resilience and self-efficacy together are known as psychological capital [15, 16]. Psychological capital is known as one of the positive aspects of human life. Psychological capital is defined by terms such as "self-understanding, having a goal to achieve success, and persistence in the face of adversity." People who have high psychological capital, in addition to coping better with stressful situations, will experience less tension and have high strength in the face of problems and reach a clear view about themselves; They are also less affected by daily events. Low psychological capital causes disruption in people's relationships with each other and disruption of activities [17, 18]. According to the mentioned materials, the present thesis was formed with the aim of investigating the effect of social undermining and unethical interactions in the organization on employee procrastination with regard to the moderating role of positive psychological capital in North Kerman Electric Power Company. In this study, the researchers want to use these variables to investigate the effects of social undermining and unethical interactions in the organization on emotional exhaustion and procrastination behavior and to investigate the moderating role of positive psychological characteristics (Figure 1).

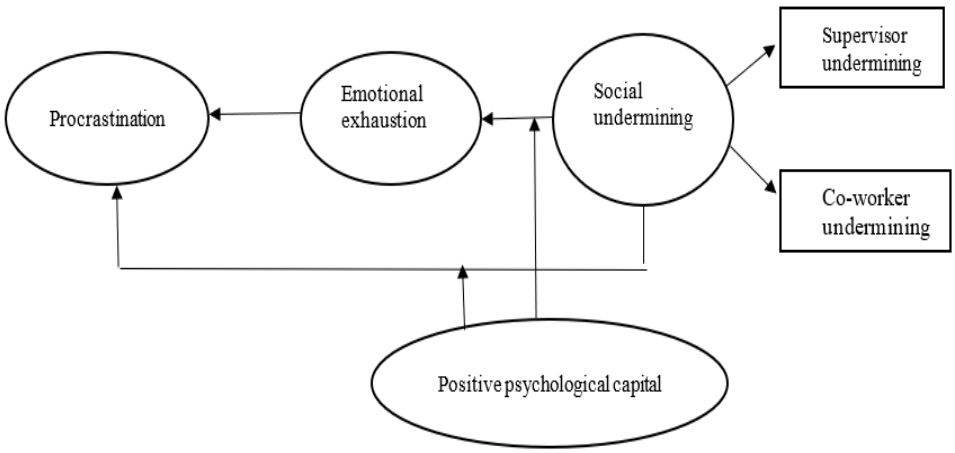

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the research

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is "applicative" in terms of its purpose and "descriptive-survey of correlation type" in terms of data collection. The research community of employees of North Kerman Electric Power Company consisted of 2005 employees, 300 of whom were randomly selected as a sample using Cochran's formula. The findings of descriptive statistics indicate that in terms of gender; 116 of the sample people

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(38.67%) are women and 184 of the sample people (61.33%) are men. in terms of education; 34 of the sample (11.3%) have a diploma or lower degree, 124 of them (41.3%) have a post-diploma degree with the highest frequency, 84 of them (28.0%) also Bachelor's degree and 55 of them (18.3%) also had postgraduate degree with the lowest frequency, and finally 3 of the sample (0.1%) also had doctorate degree. In terms of work history; 43 of the sample people (14.3%) have less than or equal to 5 years of work experience, 107 of them (35.7%) have work experience between 6-10 years, 111 of them (37.0%) also have working between 11-15 with the highest frequency, 39 of them (0.13%) had more than 15 years of work experience with the lowest frequency. The research data collection tool is a closed answer questionnaire taken from the questionnaires in Table 1, whose validity and reliability were examined through content validity from the point of view of the professors.

Table 1: Distribution of questions and items for measuring research constructs and variables

Variables	Abr.	Questionnaire
Supervisor Social Undermining	SSU	Duffy's Social Undermining questionnaire (2002)
Co-workers Social Undermining	CSU	Duffy's Social Undermining questionnaire (2002)
Positive Psychological Capital	PPC	Luthans' Positive Psychological Capital Questionnaire (2007)
Emotional Exhaustion	EE	Emotional exhaustion Questionnaire (1994)
Procrastination Behavior	PB	Tuckman Procrastination Behavior (2001)

Construct validity (confirmatory factor validation) and convergent validity as well as reliability were confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha values and convergent validity

Variables	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
Supervisor Social Undermining	0.521	0.745
Co-workers Social Undermining	0.799	0.641
Positive Psychological Capital	0.508	0.871
Emotional Exhaustion	0.593	0.630
Procrastination Behavior	0.540	0.720

Table 3: Summary of confirmatory factor analysis results

Variables	Question	Load factor	t-value
Supervisor Social Undermining	1	0.78	2.31
	2	0.34	6.77
	3	0.55	3.51
	4	0.77	3.97
	5	0.74	6.03
	6	0.70	4.52
	7	0.34	4.23
	8	0.87	6.51
	9	0.59	8.51
	10	0.61	4.92
	11	0.51	6.79
	12	0.39	4.76
	13	0.62	2.02
Co-workers Social Undermining	14	0.73	3.90
	15	0.51	4.42
	16	0.49	6.43
	17	0.60	2.99
	18	0.82	8.02
	19	0.42	2.11

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	20	0.37	2.09
	21	0.30	6.39
	22	0.53	3.44
	23	0.39	7.04
	24	0.66	5.10
	25	0.45	4.12
	26	0.58	3.92
Emotional Exhaustion	1	0.36	2.91
	2	0.69	7.03
	3	0.43	4.43
	4	0.48	4.31
	5	0.55	4.04
	6	0.73	3.45
	7	0.71	3.71
	8	0.38	2.55
Procrastination Behavior	1	0.65	5.07
	2	0.33	3.44
	3	0.76	3.02
	4	0.36	2.96
	5	0.39	6.30
	6	0.82	4.09
	7	0.75	1.99
	8	0.38	4.12
	9	0.56	4.33
	10	0.32	3.77
	11	0.44	3.62
	12	0.66	6.02
	13	0.37	3.90
	14	0.87	5.43
	15	0.54	7.21
	16	0.76	2.08

The analysis of the obtained data has been done using structural equation analysis and Sobel test and SPSS and AMOS statistical software.

RESULTS

In this research, for the normality of the research data, the skewness and kurtosis of the data as well as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were used. Also, the significant value of KS statistic is greater than 0.05 in all cases (Table 4); Therefore, the data distribution is normal and parametric tests can be used.

Table 4: Data normality test

Variables	No	Skewness	Kurtosis	KS value	Sig.
Supervisor social undermining	300	-0.103	-0.388	0.993	0.183
Co-worker social undermining	300	0.124	0.150	0.992	0.200
Emotional exhaustion	300	0.558	0.212	0.133	0.083
Procrastination	300	-0.388	1.438	0.660	0.051
Positive psychological capital	300	-0.008	-0.361	0.995	0.486

In the inferential statistics section, Figure 2 shows the final research model obtained after final fitting. Also, the numbers in Table 5 show that the model has a high fit; This means that the data obtained from the research supports and confirms the theoretical model of the research. Therefore, research hypotheses were tested using path analysis.

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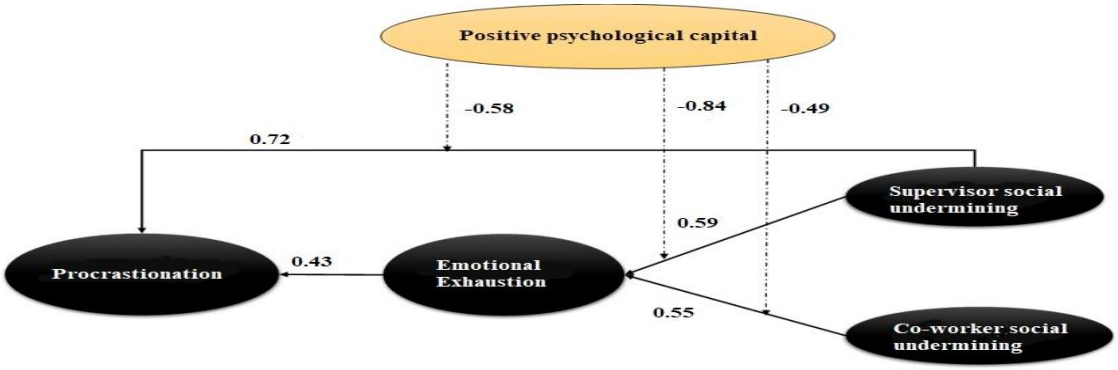

Figure 2: The final research model

Of course, to measure moderation in the fourth and fifth hypotheses, Cohen et al.'s test was used; Also, Sobel's test was used to measure the mediator role in the sixth hypothesis. The summary of the hypothesis test results is shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 5: Summary of the range of acceptance and the obtained level of model fitness indicators

Fitness index	χ^2 - df	p-value	CFI	RMSEA	NFI	NNFI	IFI	PCLOSE
Range of acceptance	1-5	> 0.05	>0.9	<0.05	>0.9	>0.9	0 - 1	> 0.05
Obtained value	3.085	0.067	0.924	0.038	0.911	0.976	0.755	0.078

Table 6: Summary of the results of the research sub-hypotheses test

Hypothesis	Independent	Mediator	Dependent	Load factor	t-value	Result
1	SSU	-	EE	0.59	6.14	Approved
	CSU	-	EE	0.55	7.38	Approved
2	SSU	-	PB	0.72	6.49	Approved
	CSU	-	PB	0.24	1.98	Approved
3	EE	-	PB	0.43	2.31	Approved
4	SSU	PC	EE	-0.84	-4.43	Approved
	CSU	PC	EE	-0.49	-2.47	Approved
5	SSU	PC	PB	-0.58	-3.16	Approved
	CSU	PC	PB	-	-	Approved
6	SSU	EE	PB	-	6.56	Approved
	CSU	EE	PB	-	7.73	Approved

Table 7: Direct and indirect effects of the whole model of the current research

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Standard Estimation		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
EE (r2= 0.370)	SSU	0.59	-	.59
	CSU	0.55	-	0.55
PB (r2= 0.463)	SSU	0.72	0.25	0.97
	CSU	0.24	0.22	0.46
	EE	0.43	-	0.43

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of social wear and unethical interactions in the organization on emotional exhaustion and procrastination behavior of employees of North Kerman Electric Power Company and to clarify

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the moderating role of positive psychological capital in this regard. This is due to the increasing importance of social attrition that employees experience during the socialization process in their organization. The results of the study showed that the social undermining perceived by the employees of the electric power company positively affects their emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with previous studies that showed that emotional exhaustion of employees is intensified when they experience social wear in a job situation [19-21]. In addition, when emotional exhaustion increases, the procrastination behavior of employees that was harmful to their organization also increases. This suggests that the emotional exhaustion experienced is likely to lead to a high level of procrastination behavior [22-25]. Therefore, in order to prevent the creation of debilitating behaviors by employees and to face it in the form of deviant behaviors in the organization, the executive trustees should create a work environment based on trust, networking and social cooperation with the aim of preserving social capital. Social participation through networks can bring employee cooperation and organizational efficiency [19].

Also, the mediation effect shows that employees' procrastination behaviors may increase when they experience emotional exhaustion caused by social undermining [26]. Emotional exhaustion causes people to lose the good feeling towards work and to experience exhaustion and frustration from work, and as a result, they delay their work or look for an excuse to leave work; Therefore, instead of hitting the employees' feelings and questioning them, managers should look for a way to create satisfaction and a good feeling in them, and as mentioned before, one of the practical solutions to achieve this goal is constructive and wise conversations. Reasonable dialogue transforms the raw will of individuals into a collective will and provides the possibility of understanding and mutual recognition between people.

Another finding of this research was that employees who have a high level of positive psychological capital have relatively less procrastination behaviors due to social undermining and emotional exhaustion than those who have a low level of this capital. It also means that when employees do their work with a positive attitude in the work situation, the negative effect of social undermining and emotional exhaustion may be compensated to some extent [26]. Therefore, in this study, by highlighting the negative effect of social undermining on organizational performance, we tried to draw the attention of the managers of North Kerman Electric Power Company to the importance of social damage of this issue.

According to the findings of the research, it can be suggested that organizations can encourage members to gradually react to unfavorable social undermining. Also, specific measures are needed to equip employees with a high level of positive psychological capital to weaken the effect of social undermining. Among other things, it is necessary to create a supportive organizational culture and atmosphere by providing diverse learning opportunities and psychological counseling to understand the psychological conditions of the organization's members. In addition, it is necessary to support activities outside of work tasks, such as after-work leisure programs or small group meetings in the company, so that employees can share positive feelings with their colleagues and superiors. Another consequence of this study is that the importance of social undermining should be recognized and paid attention to. Agents of social undermining that occur in an organization may be unaware of harming others; Therefore, trainings should be provided using visual data or videos, which will make people aware of social undermining behaviors and give the necessary awareness to

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prevent such behaviors. Here, the role of managers is very important; They should focus on creating an ethical atmosphere in the organization. Management should be aware of the ripple effect of social undermining and should be aware that this is a negative and harmful behavior that employees should avoid.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that social undermining both directly and indirectly contributes to the increase of employee procrastination behaviors. The findings of this study shed light on the organic mechanism that may encourage employees' procrastination behaviors, as the perceived social undermining experienced by them during the socialization process increases employees' emotional exhaustion. In addition, this study confirmed that the negative impact of social undermining may be reduced by a high level of positive psychological capital, which is an intangible resource and not a fixed characteristic that may be changed by employees, colleagues and supervisors. From a long-term perspective, a systematic means of preventing social destruction must be developed. For this purpose, a cultural atmosphere should be created in which organizational ethics are enhanced and members do not undermine others during the socialization process. In particular, it should be emphasized that such behaviors may affect the performance of individual employees and the morale of their organization and disrupt the goals of the organization. Organizational culture in which social undermining is prevalent is directly related to the moral image of the organization and the resulting ripple effect is significant. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the communication system at the organizational level or to form an independent organizational atmosphere.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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